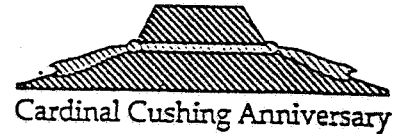


Memories Of My Uncle



By Rev. William Francis

"For I was hungry and you gave me to eat, thirsty and you gave me to drink, I was naked and you clothed me...." These words from the 25th chapter of Matthew's Gospel, the Gospel read at



Cardinal Cushing's funeral Mass, never fail to remind me of the uniqueness of the man who was my uncle.

Growing up on the streets of South Boston in the '30s and '40s, my brother and I lived, like so many of our contemporaries who had a priest in the family, knowing that we had to be good in school as well as on the streets because, "Your uncle is a priest, so don't do anything that would bring disgrace upon the family name." How often we heard that! At times, I think it was the fear of bringing disgrace upon the family name, rather than the fear of eternal punishment, that kept us in line.

Meanwhile, the days of our youth passed while we silently endured the good nuns at Nazareth School and the venerable Jesuits at Boston College High School who went out of their way to demonstrate that they were not going to show favoritism to "Cushing's nephews."

As youngsters, both of us wondered about this priest, this man. We knew that our uncle was a priest, but then we also saw that he was quite different from the priests we knew in our home parish. We never knew him to be involved in youth work or sodalities or the Holy Name Society or in schools, like the priests we knew at home. All we ever heard was of his work with the foreign missions and his love for the poor. We knew that he only came home for a rare visit to his mother, that he was always too busy to have dinner with the family.

When my mother would take us to downtown Boston for our yearly shopping trip before school, we would always stop at 49 Franklin Street for a quick visit to say hello, and usually, we

met some priest or bishop from a foreign land who came to visit the Office of the Propagation of the Faith in Boston. We always wanted to know more about him, but he always seemed too busy and was always deeply involved with his love for the missions.

I am sure that many people may feel that we were cheated or short changed, but as we matured and grew to know "our uncle" we came to the realization that he was more than just a special priest. He was indeed an extraordinary priest, who in a very real sense belonged not to just one family but to the world and especially to the poor of this world. Looking back, we both know that it would have been unfair — and even impossible — to try to contain him in just one family.

Everyone has a "Cushing story" and everyone has that "special letter." And there are so many who have the "inside story" that one begins to question what was fact and what was not. But as with the lives of all great men, the myths continue to claim their own existence.

Aside from his personal physician, the late and venerable Doctor Richard Wright, who was loyalty personified to Cardinal Cushing, and of course, His Excellency, Bishop Lawrence J. Riley, the Cardinal's staunch secretary, as well as Msgr. Thomas J. Finnegan, his Chancellor, I honestly believe there are few who knew the real Richard Cushing.

I was fortunate to get to know "The Cardinal" in his later years, when he would visit the priests of the Society of St. James in Latin America. It was there that we got to see the man I felt was the "real Cushing." While visiting us, he could relax from the daily pressures and scrutinies that a Church leader must endure in his own diocese. He loved to be



Ordination Day, May 26, 1921

with a group of priests. He loved to tell stories — after all, he was Irish! And there was nothing he liked to do more than to talk about the Church and his vision of Church. He had an intense love for the Church; he beheld the Church as the only agent capable of bringing about true peace and justice in the world.

Peace and justice were important to him because of his own background. He came from an immi-

grant family who arrived in this country in search of those most basic of human values, peace and justice. He believed that the Church had to bring these rights to the poor because this is the Church's mission, the mission given to her by Jesus. Richard Cushing wanted to be able to share his priests and his resources with the whole world so that the message of Jesus could be heard by all.

When I got to know Cardinal Cushing on his visits to Latin America, I also met a man who in many ways appeared to be imprisoned by his lofty position in the Church. He was Cardinal Archbishop of one of the largest archdioceses in the United States. He lived on the same grounds as one of the largest seminaries in the country. He had priests to spare.

Yet in many ways, he was alone. He chose this way because he felt his life was to be one of complete dedication to the Church, even to the point of sacrificing his own family and those who would have been his friends. I am sure, though, that he felt that he was doing no more than any foreign missionary would do. He came from an era when foreign missionaries would go to far off lands and not return home for ten years or more and in some cases never to

return home again. It was an era in which complete and unqualified service to the Church was demanded of all who were called to carry Christ's message to the ends of the earth. These men and women gave Cardinal Cushing his impetus to go out and do great things. The support from the priests and people of the Archdiocese of Boston made his dreams possible. And for this reason, he was always available to them.

In his last years before retirement, he did make a point of visiting my mother, uncle and aunt for dinner on Thanksgiving and Christmas. We would have to pick him up at the Little Sisters of the Poor on Dudley Street and as soon as dinner was over he wanted to be taken over to visit "Father Paul Shanley's street kids" or "my pals at Pine Street." He had his priorities and they began with the poor and marginalized members of his flock.

This was the Richard Cushing that I always knew, a man who loved the Church more than he loved himself, a man whose values were grounded in constructing a world based on helping to bring peace and justice to the poor, a man who managed to instill in his priests and people a vision of a global Church, a "catholic church," in need.

I consider myself to be extremely fortunate in sharing the same "roots" as Richard Cardinal Cushing. I will always cherish the memory of an extraordinary man who had a phenomenal love of Church, of the poor, of all marginalized peoples of society, and of the priesthood.

Did my brother or I miss anything? Maybe. Do we feel cheated? No way. For we were among the most fortunate to have known just a bit of one of the most extraordinary Churchmen of the 20th century, who, when his mission on earth was accomplished, was welcomed home with the words from Matthew's Gospel: "Come you blessed of my Father...."

FATHER FRANCIS IS PASTOR OF HOLY FAMILY PARISH, DORCHESTER.

Cushing Anniversary Event

RCAB 00555