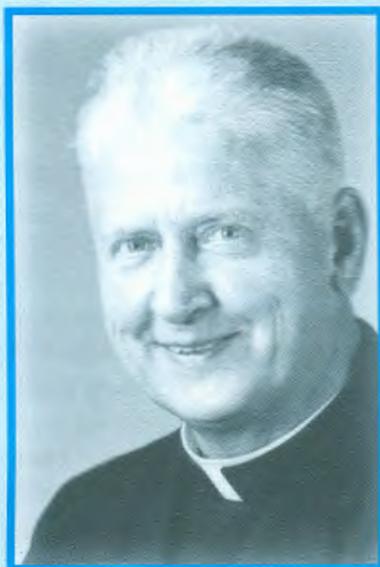




## Historical commission formed to help with Ciszek cause

BY JOHN E. USALIS



Rev. Walter J. Ciszek, S.J.

### PRAYER FOR A FAVOR THROUGH THE INTERCESSION OF FATHER WALTER CISZEK, S.J.

Almighty God, we love, adore and praise You as our Creator and Loving Father. Look with compassion and mercy upon us. Hear our prayer in this time of special need and through the intercession of Father Walter Ciszek, grant the following favor if it is Your Holy Will.

*(Mention the Request)*

Most loving God, accept our gratitude for hearing this prayer. May the knowledge of the virtues and holiness of Father Walter be recognized and known to provide a lasting example to draw sinners to reconciliation and to lead souls to sanctity.

For You are our God and we are Your people and we glorify You, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, now and ever and forever. Amen.

*Please inform the Prayer League of any special favors from Father Walter Ciszek.*

The cause for the canonization of Father Walter J. Ciszek, S.J. is being helped by a recently-formed historical commission headed by a local pastor.

The Rev. J. Michael Beers, Ph.D., S.S.L. has been involved in the cause for canonization of Father Ciszek from the early 1990s when the cause

was transferred from the Ruthenian Byzantine Diocese of Passaic to the Roman Catholic Diocese of Allentown and he was appointed one of the theologians by then-Bishop Thomas J. Welsh to review the materials being prepared that would be submitted to the Congregation for the Causes of Saints in Rome.

The congregation oversees the process in reviewing candidates for sainthood through their writings and the testimonies of people who knew the candidate to see if that person lived a life of "heroic virtue" that can be emulated by Catholics.

Currently, Father Ciszek has the title "Servant of God," since his life and works is being investigated by the Congregation in the process that could lead, but is not guaranteed, to being named "Venerable," then "Blessed," and then "Saint."

"When Bishop Welsh started the commission to study the case of Father Ciszek for possible beatification and canonization, he asked Msgr. Jim Mulligan and me to serve as theologians for the cause," said Father Beers. "I was teaching at Mount St. Mary Seminary (Maryland) at the time. It must have been in the early 1990s when the Diocese of Allentown took over the cause from the Diocese of Passaic, where, ironically, a former student of mine is now the bishop – Bishop William Skurla. I taught him at Mary Immaculate (Seminary) in the mid-80s. He was named bishop first in Van Nuys, California, about 10 years, and in the last few years has come to Passaic. He takes a very great interest in the cause of Father Walter as one of theirs."

After being appointed, Father Beers had a bit of reading to do.

"I had to read all of his (Ciszek) works in English and German. I don't read Russian, so those works were left to another person," he said.



**REPORT FROM THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS  
SEPTEMBER 11, 2010 MEETING**

The meeting began with recitation of "Prayer for the Cause of Canonization of Father Walter Ciszek.

Upon review of the minutes for the July meeting, motions were made and seconded to approve those minutes and the report from the Board.

Because of another commitment Bishop Barres cannot make it to be with us for the annual Father Ciszek Day celebration, nor could others contacted do so, therefore Msgr. Bocian will be the principal celebrant and homilist. The children of Trinity Academy of the Father Ciszek Education Center will sing together with the choir.

For next year's celebration of Father Ciszek Day on October 16, 2011, Msgr. Bocian has already invited someone to be the homilist.

Mass on the anniversary of Father Ciszek's death will be scheduled for 10AM at St. Casimir Church; however, in the case of inclement weather, for the children's sake, Mass will be built into the schedule at Annunciation Church.

Msgr. Bocian reported that, after sending letters to five persons nominated to become Board members, he received only two responses—he will make another contact with the other three persons, and then send the names to the Bishop for final approval.

Sister Doris presented a letter from a gentleman in Ireland who wrote of his interest in Father Ciszek. She also reported that although she has been in touch with the organization's secretary, she has had no response from the Polish-American Priests Organization in regard to materials provided them for their annual meeting in early April of 2010.

Monsignor Bocian felt that perhaps Saturday is not a good day for our Board meetings, and proposed that we try having future meetings on a Wednesday evening. Therefore, our next meeting will be held at 6pm on Wednesday evening, December 1; if something intervenes, that meeting will be rescheduled to the evening of December 15.

Sister Doris presented the Spanish translations of the earlier version brochure and the "Prayer of Surrender", to be approved by the Bishop. She also asked to submit the Spanish translations of "Prayer for the Cause" and "Prayer for a Favor" to be approved by the current bishop of the Allentown diocese.

Sister Doris spoke of a woman suffering with cancer, whose parish is praying for her through the intercession of Father Ciszek for God's will to be done.

The meeting closed with a prayer by Msgr. Bocian.

**"For/From the Friends of Walter Ciszek, S.J."**

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**By Rev. Thomas J. Sable, S.J.**

*In the chapter on faith in He Leadeth Me, Father Ciszek reflects on the people of his parish in Krasnoyarsk. Their trust and belief in Divine Providence was stronger than his own. Faith is a gift that comes from God, even in the midst of an atheistic and hostile land. Their strength of faith gave him courage and a new mission. He sees here the link between charity and faith. "A man of faith is always conscious of God, not only in his own life but in the lives of others. This is the basis of true charity, of that great commandment by which we are instructed to "love God with our whole mind and our whole heart and our whole soul, and our neighbor as ourselves". Faith, then, is the basis for love; it is in the insight of faith that we understand the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of all men. Love, St. John writes repeatedly, is the one thing that fulfills all the commandments and the law. But prior to love, and bolstering it at the core, is faith; we must have faith before we can love, or we will surely end up loving the wrong thing—loving ourselves more than God, or loving creatures for themselves—and this is the meaning of sin. To increase our love, to love properly, we must strive always to increase our faith, and we do this by means of prayer and the sacraments."*

*Faith is not simply a collection of intellectual propositions to which we give assent, but trust in the person of God. God is alive and working and we are attentive to look for the ways that he is working in our lives. No matter how strong our instinct of self-preservation, God pushes us a little bit each day to work for his Kingdom, to die a little each day to self, to learn to be more generous in giving ourselves to others. To be for others is not so much to spend ourselves in projects and crusades, but to see God, as Jesus says in Matthew 25, in the least of my brothers. We can see Jesus in the old people next door who just want to talk about the "good old days." We can see Jesus in the sick people down that street who could use a helping hand. We can see Jesus in the workers who just lost their jobs and who who appreciate some sympathy and help. We can see Jesus in the confused teenagers hanging out on the street corners til all hours of the night. Instead of calling the police, maybe we could just talk to them.*

*Father Ciszek says: "Without faith, our lives are just so many empty and boring routines, hollow at the core, as day succeeds day with little sense of meaning or feeling of accomplishment. " But with a life full of faith that has been strengthened by prayer and love, we can see Christ in the strangers, in the orphans, and in the poor.*

## *Historical commission formed* continued from page 1 . . .

About eight years ago, the materials by and about Father Ciszek were sent to Rome for its study.

“After that was done, I was teaching at Ave Maria University in Florida and I got a call from the diocese to make a formal statement that everything I had written about his (Ciszek) writings were true and that I found nothing that was objectionable for his cause of canonization,” said Father Beers.

Bishop Barres has high regards for Father Beers in his task as commission president.

“Father Michael Beers is an outstanding theologian, pastor and student of Church history and as a result has a refined appreciation and analytical capacity for appreciating the place of Father Ciszek in Church history and in spiritual theology,” said Bishop Barres.

After being appointed pastor of St. Joseph Church in Frackville in 2008, Father Beers began visiting the Father Walter J. Ciszek Center in Shenandoah, which is operated by the Father Walter Ciszek Prayer League, which was formed to promote the cause for canonization at the local level.

Father Beers began his new connection with the cause after a visit to Rome by the Most Rev. John O. Barres, the Allentown Diocese’ current bishop.

“When Bishop Barres went to Rome for one of his early visits, he had met with several people at the Jesuit Generalate and they were saying that the cause had met with a bit of a snag,” said Father Beers. “Most of the materials that we had put together on Father Ciszek came from Father Ciszek from his books and writings. They really felt that they needed something more in the way of getting more testimony from outsiders who knew him.”

The search for people who knew Father Ciszek can range from locally to around the world.

“In the area, we have people like Wally Baran, who had known Father and who has helped gather the material from those who had known Father as a boy through adulthood,” said Father Beers. “That’s where we are right now.”

In order to get the work done, Bishop Barres formed the Historical Commission for the Cause of the Servant of God, Father Walter Ciszek, S.J. in November 2010.

“There are three of us on the commission. I have been appointed as the president of the commission,” said Father Beers. “One of the other two members of the commission is a Dutch Jesuit, the Rev. Marc Lindeijer, S.J., who is at the Jesuit Generalate in Rome. He’ll be representing a lot of our efforts with Rome. The third

member of the commission is a Russian priest whose father was in one of the camps with Father Ciszek. It’s fascinating. His name is Father Victor Bilotas.”

Father Bilotas is from the Diocese of Novosibirsk, but is serving in Rome and working closely with Father Lindeijer. Father Beers keeps in touch on a regular basis to discuss the progress.

“It’s the three of us who are trying to assemble the material that will supplement what had been done already – and done very well – but incomplete with regard to the testimony we need,” said Father Beers.

He continued, “At the time when I had concluded my study about 12 to 15 years ago from the work as theologian for the cause, I had made the observation that I thought his cause at that time where Pope John Paul II would look especially to the heroic virtue of the individual, and given the decades Father Ciszek was in prison, it would be like the heroic virtue of Saint Maximilian Kolbe, who spent maybe a year or two in the concentration camp and, of course, dying a martyr’s death. In the case of Father Ciszek, it was like a living martyrdom. That’s the way I put it. I think that’s a good way to see it.”

Being stationed in Frackville has worked out well for his commission work.

“It does seem providential that when they asked me to take this on that I was in the area. As I wrote to Father Lindeijer, I’m six miles from Shenandoah and about 20 miles from Wernersville where Father Ciszek is buried and where the Jesuits have material in the archives,” he said. “The other archives we still have to study are those in Baltimore at the Jesuit provincial headquarters and in Orchard Lake, Michigan, where he had done his early seminary studies.”

Father Beers said that there may be more materials in Washington at the U.S. Department of State. Additional documentation may also be found in Moscow when Father Ciszek was released from captivity, and research has begun there.

“As I wrote to Father Lindeijer, I would hope to have all my work done in about six months, then we can present everything to the Congregation for the Causes of Saints,” he said.

In addition to his commission work, Father Beers recently took on the pastorates of St. Ann and Annunciation BVM churches in Frackville, in addition to his duties as pastor of St. Joseph Church.

# Understanding what's important

## FOLLOW THE CRUCIFIED CHRIST

ARCHBISHOP ROBERT J. CARLSON

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*"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Matthew 5:10*

Jesuit Father Walter Ciszek was in the Soviet Union between 1939 and 1963. He was captured and sentenced to hard labor in Moscow's infamous Lubyanka prison, where he was tortured and frequently kept in solitary confinement. At every opportunity, he quietly exercised his priestly ministry – offering Mass, hearing confessions, and comforting the sick and the imprisoned. The more he was persecuted by the Soviets, the more he gave testimony to his faith and his love for our Lord Jesus Christ.

When he was finally released and sent home to the United States, Father Ciszek wrote: "God does not ask the impossible of any man. He was not asking more of me, really, than he asks of every man, every Christian, each day of his life....He was asking me to do something as another Christ; to forget about self and feeling sorry for myself, and to act in the situation after the example of Christ Himself." God does not ask the impossible of any of us, but He does ask us to do things that are often difficult and unpopular. He asks us to be Christ for others, to forget about ourselves and our troubles and to act as Christ would in the concrete circumstances in which we find ourselves.

Most of probably won't experience the horrors of a prison camp. We should thank God every day for the freedom we enjoy as Americans. Most of us will not be persecuted by a godless enemy who is intent on destroying our Christian faith. We should be deeply grateful that we can worship God and practice our religion openly without fear of reprisals. Many Christians throughout the world today are persecuted and in danger of death. In one of the great paradoxes of Jesus' teaching we are told that these sisters and brothers of ours, who are persecuted for righteousness sake, are blessed "for theirs is the kingdom of heaven". Christians do not seek persecution, but they accept it as Father Ciszek did "after the example of Christ himself". Our Lord warned His disciples that they would be misunderstood, rejected and persecuted as He was. Why? Because the way of life that Jesus calls us to is countercultural.

Pope Benedict XVI has written that the Christian way of living "is nonconformity with evil; it is a way of resisting models of behavior that the individual is pressured to accept" by society. The world cannot tolerate nonconformity. Whether it is the brutal totalitarianism of the Soviet Union or the pervasive relativism of an affluent materialistic culture like ours, we are placed under enormous pressure to conform to the ways of the world. When we resist, as Jesus tells us to do in the beatitudes, in His preaching and His own example, we are ignored, mocked, rejected and even persecuted –for righteousness' sake.

Every culture and every period of human history reflect the sinful human condition. For this reason, the way of living that Christ calls us to adopt always appears as a sign of contradiction to the world – to the ruling powers of every social order. "For this reason", the pope reminds us, "there will be persecution for the sake of righteousness in every period of history".

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:10). Pope Benedict writes, "The people who are persecuted for righteousness sake are those who live by God's righteousness—by faith. The man of faith is the 'righteous man' who walks in God's ways."

That's what Father Ciszek was trying to do in the old Soviet Union. He was trying to walk with God, to live his faith—without feeling sorry for himself—in the most unwelcome and hostile circumstances possible for a disciple of Jesus Christ. As a result, he was persecuted, but the Lord tells us that paradoxically he was also blessed.

The eighth beatitude is an invitation to follow the crucified Christ. May the Servant of God Walter Ciszek be an example of righteous living for all Christians. May his prayers, and those of all the holy men and women who have suffered persecution for righteousness sake, encourage us to act as Christ in whatever situations we find ourselves.

# Father Walter Ciszek's Spirituality as seen by his sister – *Sister Mary Evangeline* (Third Installment)



## **Humiliations and Humility**

The Lord in His goodness and love of Father Walter put him through a gauntlet of most dire humiliations at the concentration camps in order to temper and purify his soul and to instill in him the virtue of humility where he would show full reliance only on the Almighty. However, the virtue of humility was not given to him at a single miraculous moment. It came gradually through a prolonged and painful process of humiliations such as harassments; assignment to the lowest work or penal brigades; disrespectful treatment by criminal inmates at the camps; denial of deserved privileges; and countless incidents of scorn from those in authority so much so that his very priesthood was regarded as mere ugly scum. He related this fully in his book.

It was a hard school of learning humility, but it brought his inactive virtues into play. It wiped out all his "rosy entertainment of dreams" regarding his missionary vocation to Russia. His own plan of surety of victory fell completely. However, by bartering his pride for humility he now saw his mission as an "eternal vocation," all set in God's plan and not of his own making. As he wrote in *He Leadeth Me*, "...God must sometimes allow us to act on our own so that we can learn humility; so that we can learn the truth that all our actions are sustained by God's grace; and that without Him we can do nothing—not even make our own mistakes." And God "cleansed me to the bone"; with that cleansing came the virtue of humility that served as a support for his strong faith, and his ease in recognizing God's will.

My treatise will now show the effects of humility on his spiritual, physical, and social life, and how its faithful practice begot the virtues of faith and full abandonment to the will of God.

Saint Augustine said "If you ask me which is the most necessary of all virtues, I answer humility. If you put the question to me fifty times, my answer is still humility!" It was this very humility that created unity between Father Walter's exterior and interior life, so that it did bring about fine results for souls he helped on a daily basis.

Convinced now at heart that he was indeed nothing, his inner actions and intentions remained at the same parallel as those without. Anyone who heard his words or witnessed his actions saw at once that his self and his actions were one and the same. This sound humility was the reason that thousands of souls were attracted to him for spiritual and other help. Among those many were renowned theologians, clergymen, nuns, married and single individuals, the mentally disturbed, drug addicts, suicidal persons, as well as sinners and saints—as he had stated in writing. They flocked to him, for each one felt an overflow of God coming from this simple priest whose soul and actions each duplicated the other.



*Sister Evangeline visiting  
Father Ciszek's grave in 1987.*

DECEASED – Martha Darmenio, Donna Lawson, Ed Chaban, Peter Santos, Joseph Burkot, Dr. Stanley Yamulla, Wayne Evans, Helen Sakalosky, Rev. Fr. John Pavlosky, Richard Galowitch, Eleanor Chesakis, Betty Schuck, Margie Norton, Jim Norton, and Elizabeth O'Donnell,

HEALTH – Helen Gruss, Beth Finarelli, John Zackowski, Frances McSpedon, Jennifer W., Nannette Lahn, Sister Joan, Carm., Mike Kazmierczak, Joanne Yamora, Shannon H., Dolores Higgins, Deborah Boltakiewicz, Rosemary, Dominica Dominici, Suzanne Wickersham, Philip Johnson, Rev. Fr. Paul Lalic, Cando Martinez, Marina Bermejo, Eligio Rivera, James Cantwell, and Donna Wahlendorfer.

SPECIAL INTENTIONS – Moira Coogan, Peggy Blashock, Ken Ramsey, Charlene Kalena, Dave and Jill Broderick, Eugene and Stephanie Bartoli, Ruth Noriega, Daniel Loeper, Courtney & Ryan W., and Karen Risorian.

*For all whose names were previously on our list, but who are still in need of our prayers; for all those who have requested prayers of the League; for all prayer league members, for all those who are praying through the intercession of Fr. Walter Ciszek; and for all who need our prayers.*

**MEMORIALS:** In memory of Peter Santos by Agnes Thomas; in memory of Joseph Burkot by Sister Doris Burkot; in memory of Rita McTamney by Thomas McCreesh.

In memory of Martha Darmenio by Pat Payne, and by Enes Greco

## Notes from Sister Doris

There is no doubt in my mind that many of you are glad to see the continuing installments of Sister Evangeline's recollections of her brother's spirituality—and they will continue almost through 2012. That seems to be an incentive for making sure your membership is up-to-date.

We are most delighted that so many of you have already paid dues for 2011. We also feel for those who have been recently dropped from our list; however, I would like to explain to you why it is necessary to keep our list up-to-date: There have been a good number of persons who had not paid for 2010, yet were receiving our newsletter, so all of that cost had to be absorbed by the prayer league. Each time we do a newsletter mailing, we are still receiving newsletters back, for which we have to pay an additional forty-four cents on each returned—a few of those are for persons who were temporarily away (the newsletter is not sent first-class, therefore cannot be forwarded), but most are for persons who were not paid up, and have moved to another address without letting us know.

If there were only a small number not current with membership dues, that would be a small expenditure, but we have at least two hundred persons who have not yet paid for this year. One does not need to have great math skills to see that besides frequent increase of rates, costs can accumulate to make for a considerable unnecessary expenditure for the prayer league.

We hope that each of you will look at the name label on your newsletter to see where you stand with regard to your membership, and guarantee that your name will remain on our mailing list.

We do remember all of our prayer league membership in prayer at our holy hour and on the altar each day of the year.

May your Lenten season be blessed and lead to a solidly reverent climax during the days of Holy Week so that your experience of the commemoration of Our Lord's resurrection will be full of joy.