

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)

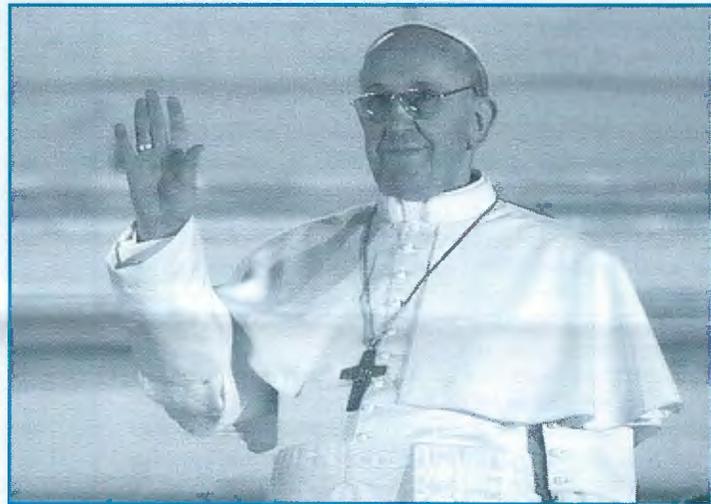
Most loving God, accept our gratitude for hearing this prayer. May the knowledge of the virtues and holiness of Father Walter be recognized and known to provide a lasting example to draw sinners to reconciliation and to lead souls to sanctity.

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.

FRANCISCUS

13 March 2013



Annuntio vobis gaudium magnum; habemus Papam:

Eminentissimum ac Reverendissimum Dominum, Dominum Georgium Marium Sanctae Romanae Ecclesiae Cardinalem Bergoglio qui sibi nomen imposuit Franciscum

We have a Pope:

Francis
Jorge Mario Bergoglio
elected on 13.III.2013

REPORT FROM THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING

The meeting began with Prayer for the Cause of Canonization of Fr. Ciszek.

Monsignor Bocian presented the minutes of the August 22 meeting for review. Sister Mary Ann Spaetti motioned to accept the minutes and Elaine Cusat seconded the motion. After all reviewed the Report from the Board, Mary Luscavage motioned to accept it, and Kathie Palubinsky seconded that motion. All present gave their "aye" for both.

Elaine Cusat reported that copies of "Spirituality of Fr. Ciszek" were ordered and received.

Msgr. Bocian thanked everyone for their role in preparing for and serving on Fr. Ciszek Day. Members then looked at pictures taken on that day by Kevin Rockensies with the new camera purchased by the Prayer League.

Msgr. Bocian relayed appreciation of the pilgrim group from Erie, Pennsylvania for being able to participate at Mass in St. Casimir Church on October 9, and to visit at the Center.

Sr. Doris shared an e-mail from Fr. Marc Lindeijer concerning permissions to use depositions in gathering material for a planned book on Fr. Ciszek by John Dejak. Fr. Lindeijer was very happy to hear about the success of Fr. Ciszek Day, and was thrilled that Bishop Barres proclaimed Fr. Ciszek to be patron of the Allentown Diocese during the Year of Faith. Fr. Marc sent greetings to the Board and said he is working hard for the cause in preparing summaries of the depositions toward the "position" that must be filed. Fr. Marc is excited about collaborating on a book "With God in America" together with John Dejak.

Elaine Cusat gave a financial statement on expenses and income for Fr. Ciszek Day.

Sr. Mary Ann mentioned that one of her teachers suggested having junior membership in the League. Sr. Doris wondered if that would be a separate kind of membership. Elaine suggested giving them membership cards. Mary Luscavage motioned to have Sr. Mary Ann look into establishing a junior league, and Kathie Palubinsky seconded the motion. Sr. Doris suggested that Sr. Mary Ann draw up a plan and send it to all Board members via-mail.

Sr. Doris thought that it might be a good idea to order pins displaying Fr. Ciszek's picture, from Mother Marija for Fr. Ciszek Day in 2013.

The meeting dates selected for 2013 will be March 13, June 19, August 21, and November 13.

Sr. Doris motioned to adjourn the meeting, and Sr. Mary Ann seconded the motion.

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

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

Lenten Practice

Father Ciszek in his early years wanted to be tough guy. He wrote about his seminary days at Orchard Lake, Michigan: "I had to be different. Even though I was in a seminary, I took great pains not to be thought pious. I was openly scornful, in fact, of those who were. At night, when there was no one around, I used to sneak down to the chapel to pray — but nothing nor anyone could have forced me to admit it."

"And I had to be tough. I'd get up at 4:30 in the morning to run five miles around the lake on the seminary grounds, or go swimming in the lake in November when the lake was little better than frozen. I still couldn't stand to think that anyone could do something I couldn't do, so one year during Lent I ate nothing but bread and water for the full forty days — another year I ate no meat at all for the whole year — just to see if I could do it." (With God in Russia, p. 3)

Even though this combination of scorn for piety with a quest for inner and outer toughness might seem strange to us, this combination is found in the origins of Christian asceticism. The word asceticism comes from the Greek word *askesis* which means practice, bodily exercise, and more especially, athletic training, all of which Father Ciszek was familiar with. The early Christians adopted it to signify the practice of the spiritual things, or spiritual exercises performed for the purpose of acquiring the habits of virtue. Although the flesh is continuously lusting against the spirit, and repression and self-denial are necessary to control the animal passions, it would be an error to measure virtue by the extent and character of bodily penances. External penances even in the saints, are regarded with suspicion. St. Jerome, whose proneness to austerity makes him an especially valuable authority on this point, thus writes to Celantia:

"Be on your guard when you begin to mortify your body by abstinence and fasting, lest you imagine yourself to be perfect and a saint; for perfection does not consist in this virtue. It is only a help; a disposition; a means, though a fitting one, for the attainment of true perfection."

So the season Lent should be a contest, a struggle against one's self, but not a contest against others. The communal component of Lent is that we struggle to attain a better relationship with others, to give to others what we have given up. The Catechism of the Catholic Church mentions this as a kind of brotherly love, a kind of fraternal sharing:

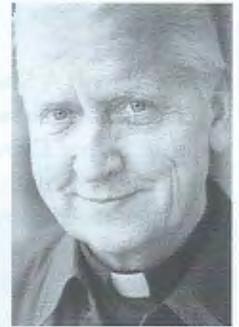
"The seasons and days of penance in the course of the liturgical year (Lent, and each Friday in memory of the death of the Lord) are intense moments of the Church's penitential practice. These times are particularly appropriate for spiritual exercises, penitential liturgies, pilgrimages as signs of penance, voluntary self-denial such as fasting and almsgiving, and fraternal sharing (charitable and missionary works)." Catechism of the Catholic Church (1997), no. 1438

Lent precedes and prepares us for Easter. It is a time to hear the Word of God, to convert, to prepare for and remember Baptism, to be reconciled with God and one's neighbor, and of more frequent recourse to the practices of Christian penance-- prayer, fasting, and good works. Have a happy and grace-filled Lent.

Chained, but Free

How Walter Ciszek gained spiritual liberation in Lubyanka prison

By: John Levko, S.J.



The spiritual journey of every Christian is a journey of conversion that involves inward maturing, openness to the spirit and a developed prayer life. For Walter Ciszek, S.J., a small, stocky Polish-American, this spiritual journey was tested in the fire of Moscow's dreaded Lubyanka prison, where he spent five years in solitary confinement. "Lubyanka, in many ways, was a school of prayer for me," he later wrote.

In October 1963 Father Ciszek returned to the United States from 23 years in Soviet confinement. Having returned home, he was amazed at the wastefulness he found, and he quickly noticed that people's spiritual lives focused on personal needs rather than gratitude. It had taken him 59 years of life experience to realize that progress in the spiritual life correlates with risk and challenge. A person has to be willing to let go, to invoke an inner freedom. Father Ciszek's two books, *With God in Russia* and *He Leadeth Me*, give witness to the victory of his spiritual life over the powers of evil by demonstrating his inner transformation into Christ's likeness and through Christ's cross.

From Darkness to Light

In any spiritual journey concerned with growth in prayer, there is always a purification process. In *He Leadeth Me*, Father Ciszek described the "sinking feeling of helplessness and powerlessness" that overcame him after his arrest in Russia in 1941. He had lost total control of his life and felt "completely cut off from everything and everyone who might conceivably help" him. The Soviets accused him of being a Vatican spy and transferred him to Lubyanka prison, where men were reportedly broken in body and spirit. As he had done in every crisis in the past when there was no person to turn to, he turned to God in prayer.

While an interior voice helped focus his faith, Father Ciszek's faith in prayer sustained him, served as his principle of life and always made him God-conscious. This same faith also made him conscious of his readiness and natural competency to handle whatever came along. "I was naturally stubborn and strong-willed," he wrote, crediting these characteristics to many years of "developing willpower and training the will." The tension between persistence and stubbornness, developed early in his life, gradually helped him become aware of God's patience and his own need to become a patient pupil. Because he realized early that self-control was not itself sufficient in his struggle against depression, fear and insecurity, spiritual growth was contingent on the depth of his personal relationship with God. The quality of his prayer life, finely honed from an early age by ascetical practices, revealed the depth of his relationship with God.

His asceticism in Lubyanka became a life of prayer and humble faith in God. In prayer he began a self-conversion that continued throughout his life. The absolute silence of God during solitary confinement tempted him to give in to

his interrogators. Instead, he turned to prayer and persevered in it until the temptation vanished. His perseverance in prayer countered loneliness, confusion and worthlessness. Patient suffering in prayer helped Father Ciszek to receive loneliness as a grace in that moment. He deeply sensed the frustrating pains of loneliness, confusion and worthlessness, but he also accepted these in the spirit of faith and continued to serve God without change or compromise. He learned, by the light of grace, the need for personal purification—an interior process manifest in humbly begging God's mercy, trustful fear of the Lord and a readiness to do whatever the divine will proposed at any time. And in prison there was a great deal of time.

For some in Lubyanka the time passed quickly. For others the seconds passed like minutes and even hours. The one constant in Lubyanka, Father Ciszek wrote, was the "total and all-pervading silence that seemed to close in around you and threaten you constantly." After each session of interrogation, "agonizing afterthoughts that filled the hours in my silent cell...began to have their effect and eat away at my morale." The interrogators drugged him and shocked him with an electrode — and Father Ciszek finally broke.

The experience in Lubyanka tempered and purified his soul. In one year of interrogations, Father Ciszek "underwent a purging" of self that left him "cleansed to the bone." The mental blackness in which he found himself allowed him no options but fear of self. In this inner darkness he experienced despair, lost hope and sight of God, and even for a moment lost the last shreds of his faith in God. Nevertheless, he instinctively turned to prayer and almost immediately felt consoled by our Lord's agony in the garden. He had gone from "total blackness" to "an experience of blinding light," a conversion experience that changed his life. From that moment he completely abandoned himself into God's hands with a readiness to let Christ fully transform him.

While the shock of Lubyanka left him horrified, he instinctively turned to God—after he failed to manage alone—and began to live the psalmist's words: "My days are in thy hands" (31:16). There was never too little time because it was God alone who had given him the exact time needed to work out his salvation. "Even in moments of human discouragement," Father Ciszek wrote, "the consciousness that I was fulfilling God's will in all that happened to me would serve to dispel all doubt and desolation." In the silence of his cell, he began to realize that it was not self-will or willpower that mattered in the spiritual realm. Rather it was the consciousness of God's grace working within oneself, demanding full conformity of one's natural powers in whatever way grace was given in concrete circumstances. The interrogations convinced him of this.

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Discernment: A Seeing Soul

The interrogators of Lubyanka could be both kind and deceptive. Father Cizek knew that the devil often took on the appearance of an angel of light while sowing deceit and confusion, especially in the inner struggle during the journey in prayer. Interior moods, feelings and movements had to be sifted out and discerned so that he could recognize the Lord's call at the intimate core of his being. He knew that if he failed to recollect God, temptation would soon follow. So for him, his eye of discernment became "the lamp of the body" (Mt 6:22).

The final four years in Lubyanka allowed our Lord to continue fine-tuning Father Cizek's soul. If anything, Lubyanka gave him the spirit of prayer, courage, trust in God and a deep appreciation of grace, even when he seemed worthless. He realized he needed to order his life according to the truths found in the Lord's Prayer and especially the principal truth of doing the will of God the Father. Like earlier spiritual writers, Father Cizek believed that this prayer, given to us by Christ, contained the fullness of prayer—an invitation to lift the mind and heart to God the Father with a concern not only for the words of the prayer but also for an appreciation of the mode of silence in which our Lord prayed, which he had now experienced. As the result of direct grace and enlightened discretion, he immediately realized the full effect of his Lubyanka conversion. He now had a single vision of Christ in all things and the desire to discern his will in every situation.

Father Cizek felt he had to rise "from the tomb of Lubyanka" before our Lord could use him, and before he could really appreciate the Lord's words, "Behold, I send you as sheep in the midst of wolves" (Mt 10:16). As in his Jesuit novitiate experience, in Lubyanka he had been "alone with God, as it were on the mountaintop" and able to develop the habit of recollection. But the prison experience did not prepare him for life after the period of forced silence. Although from early childhood Father Cizek had a propensity to a life of prayer, his habit of recollection immediately broke down after his release from Lubyanka. He was "continuously distracted," he wrote, by the "rough and ready realities of life." He describes traveling to labor camps on prison trains with hardcore criminals who thought nothing of killing at the slightest provocation. The first thing Father Cizek discovered after release from Lubyanka was the presence of evil. He came face-to-face with the criminal world. "For the first time," he wrote, "I palpably experienced the power of evil and how completely it could overshadow the power of good."

Motivation to restrain himself from doing evil or to abandon evil practices already acquired during early years came not from reason but from his conscience. This interior and mysterious voice demanded correction, and yet his struggle with conscience lasted for years. In time, Father Cizek grew in spiritual freedom, a process that requires "an attitude of acceptance and openness to the will of God," he explained, "rather than some planned approach or calculated method." After his

release from Lubyanka, he wrote, "I was still a prisoner, but I felt free and liberated." There was no anger or bitterness, but peace and a deep sense of internal freedom. The forced silence in Lubyanka was gone, and with it, the easy prayerful recollection. Now, to enter into a relationship with the living Lord, he needed to listen intently for the interior voice of conscience and discern God's will in every situation. The concentration and attention required in prayer did not deprive him of true freedom, but gradually led him to a fuller freedom in God. "I could testify from my own experiences, especially from my darkest hours in Lubyanka," he wrote, "that the greatest sense of freedom, along with peace of soul and an abiding sense of security, comes when a man totally abandons his own will in order to follow the will of God."

In completely trusting in God, Father Cizek learned, "the soul must learn to act not on its own initiative, but in response to whatever demands were imposed by God in the concrete instances of each day." He experienced the need to sift the inner movements of his soul and respond to the constant question: Is the Lord revealing himself, and if so, what is he saying? The basic discernment between good and evil required that he grow in inner awareness and the ability to see clearly into himself. He knew the goal of discernment: to discover who Jesus is and where his reign is found. As he tested every spirit to see if it came from God, he began to develop a "seeing soul." His spiritual growth became intimately connected with the examination of anything that entered his heart to see if and how he should respond. With St. Paul he could say, "Every thought is our prisoner, captured to be brought into obedience to Christ" (2 Cor 10:5).

The Catholic Church is now taking an exhaustive look at the details of Father Cizek's spiritual journey—in connection with a cause for his canonization. Few of us will ever merit such close scrutiny of our lives. Many of us do not understand our own spiritual journey, let alone that of someone else. But most of us can identify with at least a modified form of the feelings of helplessness, powerlessness and despair Father Cizek experienced in the silence of Lubyanka. By abandoning himself to God's will, his journey in prayer echoed the spiritual journeys of many saints in the past. It was in the silence of his heart that he came to realize that the peak of human freedom is unselfish love, as Jesus taught: "You must love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind" (Mt 22:37).

And yet there was uniqueness in Father Cizek's journey, and certainly in his cross, that makes him a model for many Christians today, especially in these troubled times. His conversion experience in a silent cell left him with an unconditional readiness to change his life and place everything in God's hands. Lubyanka provided the nails for his cross and the necessary purification for a saintly life of priestly service grounded in discernment and prayer.

Western Massachusetts Legatus Chapter focusing on Life of Father Walter Ciszek

by Joanne Wright

The air was crisp and cold on Thursday, January 24, in Springfield, Massachusetts but the atmosphere inside at the Western Massachusetts Legatus Chapter for the monthly meeting was one of warmth and hospitality accompanied by a prayerful spirit and amazing testimonies.

The event began with Holy Mass celebrated by Monsignor Chris Connelly who gave us a blessing as he left to be with the youth departing for Washington, D.C. March for Life. After Mass (Feast of St. Francis de Sales) the group moved to the Colony Club at the Marriott Hotel. The members were welcomed by David Southworth, President of the Western Massachusetts Legatus Chapter. The evening was dedicated to informing the members about the cause for canonization of Father Walter Ciszek, and had in attendance Barbara Ciszek, a cousin of Fr. Walter, with her husband Stephen Jendrysik. Also present was Bishop Timothy McDonnell of the Springfield Diocese, who had actually lived with Fr. Ciszek for several months shortly after his release from Russia.

Bishop McDonnell's memories were many as he spoke of Fr. Ciszek's amazing accomplishments in saying Mass in the clandestine and torturous situations of the Siberian prison camps, and what he had related to Bishop McDonnell about them, such as how he would consecrate several raisins with water, and the extreme circumstances surrounding him. Bishop remembered him leaving a little bread after a meal to save, as he had been done in the days of the prison camps. The Bishop explained how the Jesuit superiors had felt that living at a parish would help



Joanne Wright, Father Cymer of Wilbraham, MA who also went to Orchard Lake Seminary in Michigan where Father Ciszek went and Claudette Vogel, Legatus.

reorient Fr. Ciszek and familiarize him with ordinary parish life. He also recalled how Fr. Ciszek felt reluctant to say much about Russia in fear of possible retribution from the KGB on others. Father Ciszek's English was a challenge—he had to be slowly reintroduced to speaking English since Russian was his chief language for so many years, although he had spoken some other European languages as well, with other prisoners.

There were other touching memories shared by Stephen Jendrysik who authored a book on Polish heritage in Chicopee, Massachusetts, where Fr. Ciszek's uncle Leon Ciszek had lived. He spoke of how he and Barbara were at the Ciszek home in Chicopee making last minute wedding preparations when they heard that Fr. Ciszek had arrived at the Idlewild Airport in New York—their fiftieth wedding anniversary coincides with Father's fiftieth anniversary of release from Russia, and will be celebrated next October. Stephen remarked about Fr. Ciszek's interest in sports—he shared how Father while in the seminary had played shortstop at Orchard Lake Park, and how he also had an interest in the New York Giants, attending some of their games.

As a former history teacher and writer of a newspaper column, Stephen shared details that he remembered, making Father come alive in his descriptions.

Joanne Wright, representing the Prayer League, gave an update on the process currently underway in working



Bishop Timothy McDonnell of Springfield Diocese, Joanne Wright, Barbara and Stephen Jendrysik (Father Ciszek's first cousin)

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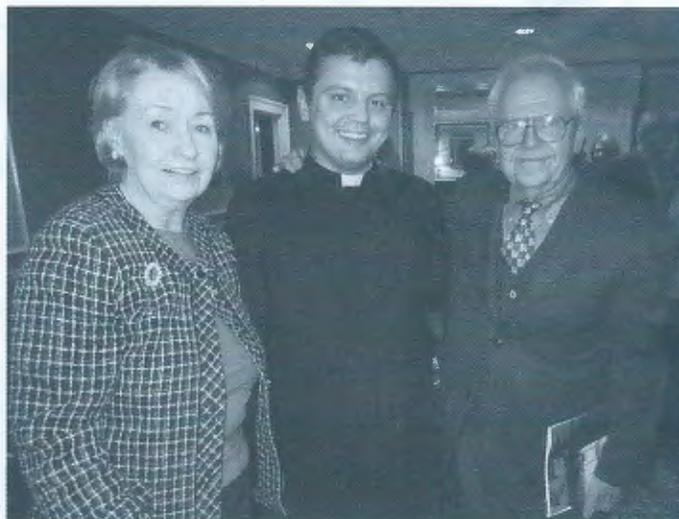
toward the canonization of Fr. Cizek. She mentioned that Fr. Marc Lindeijer is responsible for writing the “position”, an eclipse of the heroic virtuous life of Fr. Cizek. This would be studied by nine theologians who draw the conclusion that indeed Fr. Cizek led a life of heroic virtue, and then reviewed by a committee of Cardinals to concur with this decision.

Joanne shared the news that Fr. Cizek was chosen as Vocations Month Patron by the Jesuits for November of 2012, calling attention to new material from America magazine, and including a video on the website documenting Father Cizek’s life. She likewise presented copies of Columbia magazine, put out by the Knights of Columbus, including an article citing Father Cizek as patron for the month. She quoted the statement of Bishop John Barres of Allentown Diocese in Pennsylvania saying that they adopted Fr. Cizek as Patron of the Allentown Diocese for the Year of Faith: “As we stand up for our First Amendment rights as Americans and Catholics, we stand for our religious liberties, following in the footsteps of Fr. Cizek...allowing the Holy Spirit to expand our minds, hearts, and souls in the virtue of faith.”

Joanne touched on all these happenings and honors for Fr. Cizek, adding momentum for the 50th anniversary celebration Mass being planned for October 13, 2013 at St. Casimir Church in Shenandoah to remember his release from Russia. She stated that it was a privilege to help with interviews of priests and spiritual directees from 1964 to 1984, a project conducted under the direction of Fr. Marc Lindeijer of Rome in preparation for books to be published within a few years.

In attendance as well at the meeting were a Polish priest from St. Cecelia Parish in Massachusetts who had attended Orchard Lake Seminary, and Mr. George Krol who at age 5 was actually forced to leave Poland for Siberia with his mother—both now present and greatly interested in Fr. Cizek.

Previous to the meeting, members of Legatus had each been provided by the chapter with a copy of one of the two books Fr. Cizek had written. At the close of the meeting they were overjoyed to receive copies of the newsletters and article reprints. Some of the participants said they hoped to be able to attend the 50th anniversary Mass at the church where hopefully the beatification of Fr. Cizek will be held on a date not too far off. All present recited the Prayer for the Cause of Canonization of Fr. Cizek at the close of the evening.



Joanne Wright, Father Cymer, George Kroh(a survivor of Siberia deported there as a child for one year)

Save the Date

50TH
ANNIVERSARY
OF FATHER
CISZEK'S
RETURN FROM
RUSSIAN
CELEBRATION
October 13, 2013



Father Cizek Notepads Available!

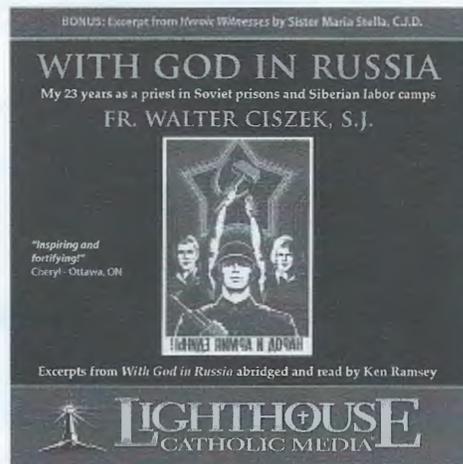
Ordering Information on back cover

*Sister Rosemary's
Spring commitments for
presentation on Father Cizek:*

April 19 – 2:00 p.m.
Immaculata University, Immaculata PA

Spreading the Word of Father Ciszek

This is a short synopsis of my trip to Indiana to spread the word about Father Ciszek and the cause. I spoke at Our Lady of Mt. Carmel parish in Carmel, Indiana which is just outside Indianapolis. There were approximately 25 people in attendance. They were all young adults in their mid-twenties to early thirties. Most had already read both of Father's books and were quite excited. I introduced the audio book which I have just finished through Lighthouse Catholic Media. I offered the audio book and the printed book for sale after my talk. The audience was respectful, excited, and very interested in Father Ciszek and his life. I hope I was able to bring him to life for them a little more than he had been. I gave them a brief synopsis of the life Father led prior to the seminary, during the seminary, and post seminary in Russia as well as a little on his life back in America. I touched on the canonization process as well as the process of turning a printed book into a one hour CD. All in all I feel the talk was well received and more individuals are praying for Father Ciszek.



Available at the Prayer League

Blessings
Ken Ramsey Sr.

We ask the members of the Prayer League and/or the readers of this newsletter to pray for the success of a film project about the life of Father Walter Ciszek, that all the financial, legal, and technical difficulties may be overcome for the production of a successful and useful film.

DECEASED – Lucy Cusat, Carol Cusat

HEALTH – Anna Marie Borgatti, Fredine Vinci, Cecilia Cortes-Peck, Briana Gilligan, Sheila Clarke, Brian Clarke, Timothy DeBartelo

SPECIAL INTENTIONS – Bishop John Barres, Msgr. Ronald Bocian, Thaddeus and Josephine Zmuda, Kaleb Clarke

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 Wanda (Cichucki) Ryback req. by Anczarski Family.
In memory of Edith and Thomas Shadel req. by Tim Shirey.
In memory of Mildred and Irvin Shirey req. by Tim Shirey.
In memory of John Kruczek req. by Gloria and James Maley.
In memory of John Kruczek req. by Loretta Gressens.
In memory of Theodore J. Palkon, Sr. req. by Eleanor V. Palkon.
In memory of Dorothy Yezulinas req. by Veronica Green.

prayer hotline