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## Joe, are you still alive?

Written by Fr. Joseph Henchey, C.S.S., S.T.D.



This is a question I often hear! By the blessing of Divine Providence, I am happy to say, "Yes, I am!" I'm grateful for the chance to remember my years at the Angelicum and tell you about my life today.

I entered the Angelicum as a young Stigmatine professed on October 15, 1952 and left 50 years later at the end of

January, 2002. I was only 22 and the newly minted confrere of the renowned Thomist, Fr. Cornelio Fabro, CSS. In those days, the Faculty at the Angelicum was a veritable Dominican Hall of Fame! It included Frs. Michael Brown, Louis Ciappi, Jerome Hamer and Paul Philippe. All of these illustrious professors eventually became Cardinals!

But the 'star' of the faculty for us young ones was Fr. Garrigou-

Lagrange. Mine was one of the last classes to have him full time and we had his morning Dogma class and his Saturday afternoon classes: "*The Three Ages; Life Everlasting; Mary, the Mother of the Savior; and the Theology of the Priesthood.*" Many years later, St. Pope John Paul II asked me what I was doing in Rome when I met him at his morning Mass. I told him I was teaching at the Angelicum and he said, "Did you know I went there?" "Of course," I said, "Yes!" He quickly began to reminisce about Fr. Garrigou who had been his doctoral thesis moderator on "*St. John of the Cross and the Darkness of Faith.*" The Holy Father said: "How I remember those spring Saturday afternoons when we used to run to get a good seat for Fr. Garrigou's class!" I told him how eagerly we did the same thing ten years later.

I remember so many of Fr. Garrigou's sayings: "I don't pretend to stuff your heads with knowledge; I just hope you will come to love theology and will teach yourselves as long as you live!"

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With me, he was successful and I am using my twilight years to read his recently republished body of work.

He also had a wonderful exam 'prep': "This is a large book! Please go to the library, pick it up and rub it on your head. If the temptation comes to read it, give in!"

For Scripture we had the unforgettable and enthusiastic Fr. Peter Duncker, O.P., also a real whiz at teaching Hebrew, and the brilliant Fr. Francis Ceuppens who taught NT. When he died unexpectedly, his large shoes were filled by the supremely capable Fr. Conlith Kearns.

Wonderful men filled the aule each day and among my revered classmates and dear friends were: Frs. Fabio Giardini, Dalmazio Mongillo and Peter Paul Zerafa, who hailed from Malta.

I received the Doctorate at the Angelicum in January, 1973. As I had recently been elected to the General Council of the Stigmatines and my area of responsibility was the Stigmatine Houses of Formation, I chose the theme, "*Religious Life: A Sacrament of Hope*." I was mercifully directed by another one of the Pope's professors, Fr. Ludovicus Bertrand Gilon, O.P. and was blessed to know Fr. Rosarius Gagnebet.

In the early 1970s, the Angliecum wanted to provide English-speaking professors for every level of the curriculum from S.T.B. to the S.T.D. Thus, at the urging of some of my good Dominican friends, the dear Dean, Fr. Joseph Phan Tan Thanh and Fr. Jose Salguero, O.P. invited me to teach and also gave me much assistance over the years.

My very first class was on the Theology of Hope and my students included Timothy Michael Dolan, Peter Sartain, and Mother Assumpta Long, all of whom have now reached such prominence in the American Church. [I knew then I was in well over my head!] In 2016, I celebrated two important anniversaries: 70 years as a Stigmatine and 60 years as a priest.

I was ordained by His Excellency, Peter VanLierde, OSA in 1956 and never saw him again until Mother Teresa of Calcutta observed her Golden Jubilee at San Gregorio. The Archbishop and I caught the same bus just beyond the Coliseum, so I went up to His Excellency and told him that he had ordained me. He greeted me warmly and then asked, "What year was that?" I responded, "1956." He gasped, "Glory be to God," and blessed himself right there on the bus! Now in my 87th year, I know just how he felt. Where have the years gone? I taught at the Angelicum for over 25 years and once endured a long illness causing me to miss many classes. My good Dominican friend, Fr. Vincent Ryan, helped me by putting up a sign outside of my classroom door: No Theological Hope today! Fr. Henchey is sick!

It is now 15 years since I left Rome and the Angelicum and I have taught 4 or 5 years in each of the following: Pope John 23rd National Seminary, Mundelein Seminary near Chicago and Dunwoodie Seminary in New York. In 2012, I was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer and underwent an extensive surgery by a brilliant doctor. Thanks be to God and to the surgeon's skillful hands, I will have been cancer free for five years in March, 2017!

In 2015 I was invited to return to Mundelein as an "Adjunct Spiritual Director." In this work, I still follow the kind advice of another dear Dominican friend, Fr. Jordan Aumann: "In spiritual direction, keep your door ajar. You will get more business that way!" Celebrating my Golden Jubilee at my home parish in 2006, Cardinal Dolan made an apt remark: "Joe is the iron horse of the seminary – nothing spectacular! He just shows up and is there every day! So, instead of being 'there,' I am now 'here' at Mundelein, still with my door ajar. And while I am 'here' in Chicago, my heart remains 'there,' in Rome, at the Angelicum. Fifty years at the Angelicum! Who could want a more grace-filled Golden Jubilee?"