

August 25

Br. Damas Van Dycke

Pierre Van Dycke was born in Bruges, Belgium July 29th 1885, the son of Johannes and of Rosalie Walgrave. He had six sisters and brothers, one of whom had been a chauffeur to King Albert of Belgium. He did his elementary schooling with the Brothers of Charity in Bruges and Humanities at the Capuchin Seraphic College. On September 17, 1904 he was invested as a Novice and made first profession September 17th 1905 and solemn profession September 18th 1908. He was ordained a priest on June 10, 1911.

He was then assigned to the monastery of St. Claire where he was an active preacher for thirteen years. Toward the end of World War 1, namely May 25th 1918 bombs hit the monastery and Br. Damas was seriously injured on a knee and a hand and one finger was permanently crippled. Br. Damas was the founder of the well known "Choir of St. Francis". On August 10, 1925 he was transferred to Antwerp as preacher and confessor.

The year 1928 was a turning point in his life. On April 19th, he left Antwerp and landed in Quebec City. After a few days with the French Capuchins in Limoilou, he left for Blenheim. His many years in Canada were very fruitful. In Blenheim, in addition to helping in the parish, he had the pastoral care of the Flemish immigrants in Leamington. He also gave missions in the entire diocese of London as well as in Chicago, South-Bend, and Jackson U.S.A.

In 1934, his assignment was the parish of St. Boniface which was well established but in need of more spiritual, material and financial help. On his arrival Br. Polycarp warned him: "Young man, these Belgians are lions, try to tame them!" He repaired the Church, renovated partially the nave and built a new sanctuary. Then he tackled beautifying the cemetery. His most important undertaking was the construction of a Lourdes Grotto along the Seine river with a crypt destined to be the burial ground for Capuchins. In front of the Grotto was a park where in time he intended to erect a Mount Calvary and the Stations of the Cross. More than 5000 people were present for the blessing by Msgr. Yelle, Coadjutor Archbishop of St. Boniface, Manitoba. There was an outdoor Mass every Saturday, an outdoor Benediction every Sunday and every Monday a Candlelight Procession. The Grotto with the Cathedral of St. Boniface became a tourist curiosity well known beyond the country's boundaries.



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In March 1941, he was transferred as pastor to Princeton, Ontario where he again rebuilt the parish with hard work and gifts from personal donors. On August 12, 1946 he was nominated Custos Provincial by Belgium and on September 17 the nomination was ratified by Father General. Under his Custodial Administration the St. Francis Minor Seminary was built in Blenheim in 1949. In his time, he traveled to den Bosch and convinced the Dutch Capuchins to send men to help in the Canadian Mission.

He was then made pastor of the new parish of St. Philip Neri Downsview, Ontario where the first Mass was celebrated in the priest's house on November 16th 1952. From 1956 to 1968 he was a well sought after confessor for Ursuline, and St. Joseph sister's in the Chatham/Windsor areas. After a long illness from pancreatic cancer, and after celebrating his 84th birthday, on August 25th 1969, he expired like a candle.

