

**July 28**

## **Br. Polycarp Christiaens**

Br. Polycarp was born on March 20<sup>th</sup> 1879 in Terafene, Belgium. He received the habit on September 17, 1898, did his first profession on September 18, 1899 and final profession September 19, 1902. He was ordained a priest on May 28<sup>th</sup> 1904. Br. Polycarp went from the Capuchin Seminary in Izegem to a monastery in the Rhein-Westfalia province with the purpose of mastering the German language. After a few months, he was recalled to Brugge to teach the German language and other subjects. He held that position from 1911-1914 until the II World War temporarily closed the Seminary. In the following years he was either Vicar or Guardian at Brugge, Brussel and Izegem.

In 1927, His Excellency Msgr. Fallon, Bishop in London, Ontario made a request to the General of the Order for Flemish speaking priests to minister to the Flemish and Dutch immigrants in his diocese. Br. Polycarp immediately requested by writing volunteering to go to Canada. He always wanted to be a missionary and had volunteered several times before but was turned down because he was not able to get a medical certificate. Although Canada was not a mission in the true sense of the word, yet the life he would lead resembled that of a missionary. Canada was for him the realization of his life's dream.

He left on November 2<sup>nd</sup> 1927 with his confreres Br. Willibrord and Br. Ladislaus, the second group of Belgian friars sent to Canada. Br. Polycarp was made superior in Blenheim and the friars were so devoted to their work that soon they had to enlarge the Church to twice its size. It has been said that at that time the average number of regular church attendance went from 40 per month to 500 per week. Obviously Msgr. Fallon was pleased with the results. And yet Br. Polycarp had a hard time in getting the Bishop's permission to establish a cloistered friary which was finally given in 1932. Br. Polycarp served the Church in Blenheim for ten years when he was called to St. Boniface to take over the leadership of the friary and the direction of the Third Order.

In 1937, the foundations in Canada were united as one Provincial Custody of the Belgian Province. The Belgian Definitory appointed Br. Polycarp as the first Custos and Most Reverend Father General confirmed this nomination on December 28<sup>th</sup> 1937. After the course of his term as Custos, he stayed on as 2<sup>nd</sup> assistant to the new Custos.



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In the meantime his health started to deteriorate suffering from a serious heart ailment and a heavy stroke which brought him close to death. Contrary to his own expectation, he recuperated and was able to take the risk of journeying to the “fatherland” in 1947. This was to be his last trip. He arrived in Antwerp on July 4<sup>th</sup> 1947, and on July 6<sup>th</sup> he went to Izegem to convey news and greetings to families from immigrant relatives and then to Hekelgem to visit his own brother. Eight days later another stroke struck him down, paralyzed him on his right side and took away his power of speech. Finally on the 28<sup>th</sup> of July in 1947, at the age of 68, after 48<sup>th</sup> years of religious life he undertook the great journey to the eternal fatherland. His body was then transferred to Aalst and he was buried on July 30<sup>th</sup> with a solemn funeral service.

