

BIOGRAPHY OF FATHER MYCHAL JUDGE, O.F.M.



Father Mychal F. Judge, O.F.M., chaplain to the New York City Fire Department, died Tuesday, September 11, 2001, in a hail of falling debris near the World Trade Center. He became the first officially recorded fatality following the attack. Father Mychal was 68.

Born in Brooklyn, N.Y., on May 11, 1933, Robert Emmett Judge was the son of two Irish immigrants from County Leitrim. As a young boy, he watched his father die after a long illness. To help his mother and two sisters make ends meet, he shined shoes in Manhattan, ran errands and did odd jobs, before being called to his Franciscan vocation at age 16. He then entered St. Joseph's Seraphic Seminary, Callicoon, N.Y., and graduated in 1954 after completing the first two years of college.

He was received into the Franciscan Order on August 12, 1954, and the following year, on August 13, professed his first vows of poverty, chastity and obedience as stated in the Rule of Life of St. Francis of Assisi. He professed final vows on August 20, 1958. He was ordained to the priesthood on February 25, 1961, at the Franciscan Monastery – Mt. St. Sepulchre, Washington, D.C. Following a series of pastoral and administrative appointments in New York and New Jersey, and a one-year theological sabbatical at the Franciscan house of studies in Canterbury, England, he returned to New York in 1986 when he was appointed an associate pastor of St. Francis of Assisi Church, New York City. Only a few days after arriving at St. Francis, he responded to a call to celebrate Mass in the hospital room of New York police officer Steven McDonald, who had been critically wounded during an investigation of a youth in Central Park. Father Mychal and the McDonald family soon became devoted friends. Among their good-will travels, Father Mychal accompanied Detective McDonald on visits to Northern Ireland in 1998, 1999 and 2000 to encourage reconciliation.

In 1992, upon the death of Fr. Julian Deeken, O.F.M., a Franciscan friar who had served as one of the Catholic chaplains for the New York Fire Department, Father Mychal accepted an invitation to serve temporarily in his place. Fr. Mychal was named chaplain officially in 1994 to serve the boroughs of Manhattan, the Bronx, and Staten Island.

Over the years, Father Mychal won the hearts of the firefighters and their families by his charismatic Irish personality and warm Franciscan outreach to them in all their needs – baptisms, weddings, funerals, hospital visits – wherever and whenever he was sought. He was active in a diverse ministry to various groups throughout the metropolitan area and had particular concern for those suffering from alcoholism and HIV/AIDS.

More than 2,800 people attended the Mass of Christian Burial for Father Mychal on Saturday, September 15, 2001, at St. Francis of Assisi Church in Manhattan. Father Mychal was buried at Holy Sepulchre Cemetery in Totowa, N.J. He was survived by two sisters, Erin McTernan, who died in 2008, and Dympna Jessich of Maryland.

Copyright 2002

Reprinted with Permission, The Franciscan Communications Office, Holy Name Province, New York, NY

