

## **BROTHER CYRIL NEFF, O. CARM.**

1907-1937

By BROTHER PHILIP PRICE, O. Carm.

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Brother Cyril, the son of Bernard John Neff and Mary Froeling, was born in Chicago, Illinois, on October 1, 1907. He was baptized Raymond in St. Hedwig's Church on October 3, 1907. He received his First Holy Communion and was confirmed in Annunciation Church May 5, 1920, and later graduated from the Annunciation parish school. He attended the Quigley Preparatory School for eight months but was unable to continue because of family financial difficulties. He worked as a switch-board operator at Loyola University for two years. He decided to enter a religious Order as a lay-brother. Since he had many friends among the Jesuits, they were reluctant to let him go. He indeed had about decided to become a Jesuit Brother when God took a hand in his final decision. Devotions to the Little Flower at St. Clara's Church were drawing immense crowds. Brother Cyril made the trip to the National Shrine from the far North Side to attend the devotions one day. He saw the long rows of silent worshippers waiting their turn to venerate the relics of the Little Flower and was attracted by the brown and white Habits of the Carmelite priests and brothers, and possibly through the guidance of the Little Flower, decided to enter the Order.

His entrance into the Order was not easy. His pious Aunt Martha, who was taking the place of his own mother, now dead, rejoiced, as did his sister Therese, when he told them the news of his vocation. His father, however, objected strenuously and was never fully reconciled to Cyril's entrance into the religious life. He became a postulant on January 19, 1928, and after a short probation was given the Third Order Habit and the name Cyril.

After a few months spent as a postulant in Chicago, he began his novitiate at Niagara Falls, being invested with the Habit on August 14, 1929, and making his simple vows on August 15, 1930. While in the novitiate at Niagara he was assigned to work in the kitchen acting as butcher and also helping in the pantry. Here it was that he not only showed his business ability for making purchases but he also managed to do excellent spiritual work also. It is said that his kindness and piety in dealing with tradesmen was responsible in making a convert of one of them, who later brought along a companion that he, too, might become a Catholic. After his novitiate he was stationed at Mount Carmel High School, Chicago, for several years. From Chicago he was transferred to St. Cecilia's, Englewood, N. J. He and Brother Angelus went to Niagara from Englewood to make their solemn vows on August 15, 1933. Brother Cyril was later moved from Englewood to Mount Carmel, Niagara Falls.

A serious heart condition developed in spite of which he never spared himself; consequently, in 1937, it became necessary for him to enter St. Mary's Hospital, Niagara Falls, New York. Here he suffered most patiently and without complaint until on July 5th our Lord called him. After funeral services at Niagara Falls his body was brought to St. Cyril's, Chicago, where he lay in state. Many came to pay their respects to the "Little Brother," as they fondly called him. After a Mass of Solemn Requiem his body was placed in a vault in Mount Olivet until such time as the recently purchased Carmelite plot in Mount Olivet cemetery could be prepared.

At the time of his death Brother Cyril was not quite thirty years old and had served but ten years in religious life. However, these were ten splendid years. He had shown himself to be a tireless worker, and his piety and devotion won the attention and imitation of all; he had reached his goal.

As a postulant he read the story of Father Cyrillus and the Infant of Prague, and he was immediately attracted to the Holy Infant of Prague. He promoted devotion to the Infant of Prague among his fellow-brothers. Each evening they were accustomed to visit the Infant of Prague altar and recite prayers in honor of the Holy Infant. Occasionally some parishioners

joined with them. He also spoke to his family about devotion to the Infant of Prague and his aunt supplied vestments of various colors for the community chapel statue.

He was a tireless worker but his favorite duty was the care of the chapel. He delighted in preparing for the great feasts and always saw to it that the altar was suitably decorated. He loved to read the lives of Carmelite saints and, whenever possible, spent much time in searching the religious stores for Carmelite pictures and sketches. He was especially interested in giving away Carmelite holy cards, particularly to those who knew nothing about Carmelites. Anyone who was acquainted with Brother Cyril would readily state that cheerfulness was one of his outstanding virtues; and, as close second, if not as equal, his kindly attention to the needs of the sick. His wonderful care of Father Jerome when he was old and disabled is known to all. Father Jerome himself because of Cyril's unselfish help, promised that he would not leave Cyril long upon earth. Father Jerome undoubtedly spoke those words half in jest, but they do manifest his gratefulness, and Brother Cyril did follow him within the year.

His memory still lingers in St. Cecilia's, Englewood, N. J., in which house he was stationed for the greater part of his religious life. The golden plaque to his memory fixed on the wall of the Shrine of the Little Flower reads: "In Memory of Brother Cyril by his many friends in Bergen County."

Brother Cyril accomplished nothing unusual; he struck no star and sought no glory. He was even unknown to some of the older men of the Province. He was meticulous in performing all his duties, even the meanest, in the best possible manner. But, indeed, like the Little Flower, who drew him into Carmel and whose own life was so pitifully short, he always prayed for the gift of doing little things well. He was a true and an exact Carmelite; and, if there was a regret on his part when he was called so early from this life, it was only because he had wished to work longer in the Lord's field. His death was regretted by Brothers and Fathers alike.