

20<sup>th</sup> Anniv. of Fr. Peter Reilly, 1912-94, by M Sloboda, Sat, June 14, 2014

Fr. Geitner, Fr. Peyton, principals, teachers, alumni and parents:

This afternoon we are praying for Fr. Peter Reilly. Why? Because we are not yet officially allowed to pray to him. There are two types of Masses for the deceased: for a saint, and for everyone else. There's a slow process of investigating the life, work and writings of a servant of God. Maybe he or she will be proclaimed blessed. The Vatican publicly says "We are sure beyond any doubt that this person lived a good life of earth, cooperated with God, and is now in heaven." Fr. Peter Reilly has not reached that step yet; he has not been beatified. The next step would be to canonize him, to declare him a saint. Maybe he will never receive any special public recognition from the Pope. No problem! We also have a special feast day, Nov 1, for All Saints, when we thank God for perhaps billions and billions of people who have fought the good fight, run the good race, and are now eternally in a place of light, happiness and peace. By the way, you do not have to be Catholic or be any kind of Christian to enter heaven, but it helps. St. Augustine said, "Many people belong to the church who do not belong to God, and many people belong to God who do not belong to the church."

The problem arises when we want to remember Fr. Reilly at Mass. There are a few options for praying for someone who has recently died, and also an anniversary Mass in the big book, the sacramentary. The paper anniversary Mass booklet, as printed, does not say how many years he has been gone. That can confuse or even frighten people. For example, Mateo Ricci, Li Madou, was the pioneer Jesuit missionary in China. Some years before 1949, a Jesuit seminarian attended a memorial Mass for Fr. Ricci in Shanghai. He kept his thoughts to himself at the time, but that Mass was scary. He thought, "Fr. Ricci has been gone 333 years now, that's 1/3 of 1000 years, and we are still praying for the repose of his soul, still asking God to be merciful to him. Uh-oh! If Mateo Ricci is still in purgatory, doing time for his sins, how long will I spend there?" Later someone explained to him that if we pray for someone who is already in heaven, someone who no longer needs our prayers, God redirects that grace to someone else in need. Today we are still praying the prayers from this memorial booklet. Fr. Geitner and I would get into trouble with the Cardinal if we said publicly, "St. Peter Reilly, pray for us." We cannot jump the gun, we have to say the official prayers for the deceased, but we pray without being paralyzed by the literal meaning of the text. We trust in the mercy of God, and we pray for the living and the dead.

It's been 20 years. Maybe you've heard of Rip van Winkle. That's a Dutch name. The Dutch founded New Amsterdam in 1624. Later the British occupied Manhattan Island the way they occupied Hong Kong Island. Not far from Maryknoll headquarters there is an old Dutch cemetery. Mr. Van Winkle was outside one day. He noticed a cave, went inside, and fell asleep. When he woke up, he had a long white beard. Stepping outside into the sunshine, he saw new houses which had not been there before. He knew everyone in the old, small village, but he met new faces. They started a conversation. After a while he asked, "What year is it?" and they told him. No one could believe that he had slept for 20 years. He slept through July 4, 1776 and the American Revolution. He said, "God save the king!" and everyone yelled at him, "We are no longer a British colony. We are proud to be citizens of the United States of America." Poor Rip van Winkle was confused and disoriented. [Story by Washington Irving, 1819]

Suppose Fr. Peter Reilly woke up now and took a walk around the neighborhood. Was the Kowloon Tong shopping mall here 20 years ago? People would still be dressed about the same, but many young adults now have tattoos. Are they all triad members? Why is everyone walking slowly while looking at a flat object in their left hand and tapping it with their right fingers? Why is the flag of the PRC on public display? Where is the British colonial flag? God save the Queen! A week ago, I saw a woman on the street wearing a tee shirt that said in big letters, God save the Queen. I suspect she prefers to speak Cantonese, not Mandarin.

If Fr. Reilly walked onto our campus on a weekday, his first question would be, "Where are all the primary students?" He would appreciate inspecting the new, beautiful primary campus. He would be happy to see the motto Truth and Loyalty still on the wall, and gratified to see notice the high morale of the students, teachers and principals. Later he would understand the heavier work load on the students, more documents which the teachers have to submit to the EDB, a heightened sense of competitiveness in school and in the job market also, and widespread worry about the future of HK.

Fr. Reilly and Mrs. Tong started MFS in a poor neighborhood when families had several children and access to education was limited. He and the original teachers worked hard to lay a good foundation for the years and decades to come. Some aspects of our school and our city in 2014 would delight him, while other items would disturb him.

Today we cannot predict the global situation in 2034, or how China, HK and our MFS will change. The future will bring us some pleasant surprises and some dismaying ones. Fr. Peter Reilly, even though you are yet not officially a saint, please say a prayer for us.