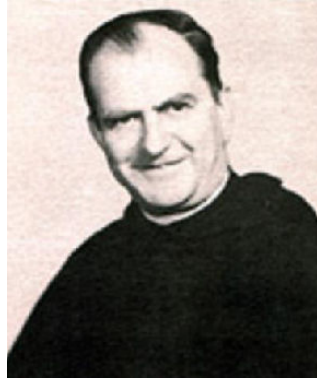


Fr. ALFRED (ROLAND) BERTHIAUME, A.A. (1909-1981)



Roland was born on March 8, 1909 in Woonsocket (Rhode Island) and went to grammar school at the St. Louis parish school. Following in the footsteps of his older brother, Emile, he went to the Eymard minor seminary at Suffern (New York) in 1921.

The following year, a bone disease was discovered in his leg and he had to be operated several times. Because of this infirmity, he was not able to enter the novitiate of the Blessed Sacrament Fathers as his brother had done. However, he remained quite attached to this religious community during his whole life. After his studies at Assumption College in Worcester (Massachusetts) he was granted permission to enter the Assumptionist novitiate of Bergerville (Sillery, near Quebec City, in Canada) on September 29, 1932. A medical evaluation indicated that the wound of his knee was not an impediment to a religious vocation.

Father Léocade Bauer was his master of novices. It was with the name of Brother Alfred that Roland pronounced his first vows on September 30, 1933. He was sent to pursue his philosophy and theology in Europe: 1933-1937. His perpetual vows were made on October 26, 1936 at Lormoy (Essonne) and he was ordained to the priesthood on February 21, 1937 by Bishop Rolland Gosselin.

An apostolic life that was filled

In the fall of 1937, Fr. Alfred was called back to the United States to teach Latin at Assumption Preparatory School until the school was definitely closed in 1970. He was named chaplain of St. Anne's Orphanage (Worcester) in 1940. Thus his long career dealing with orphans was to start. During 40 years, Fr. Alfred went to the orphanage almost on a daily basis to hear confessions and celebrate the Eucharist. He shared the activities of the orphans on weekends. Some recall with emotion his tenderness, his

devotion, and his smile filled with goodness while the children surrounded him with cries, tears, or laughter. He never showed any impatience even though his painful leg made him suffer greatly.

A period of active retirement

In 1970, because of his age, Fr. Alfred had to retire professionally, yet he continued being present to the orphans as well as the students of the College. His was a smiling presence, full of patience and simplicity agreeing with the image of his life as gift and acceptance. The handicapped students of the Rehabilitation Center actively solicited his warm presence since his own physical suffering helped him understand this milieu. Fr. Alfred got interested in mystical authors and read them for hours and wrote down certain passages to distribute and share with brothers or friends. His contemplative bent did not cut him off from his brothers, but he managed to give to his last years a depth and a very strong spiritual tint. For his brother Assumptionists, "Freddy" was the cherished father, the faithful friend, the teasing brother, the experienced counselor, and a companion full of sympathy.

'At the hour of dusk'

Fr. Alfred was hospitalized in September 1981. The doctors discovered a malignant tumor, but the decision was made not to operate. He had a heart attack in the morning of October 21 and was comatose in the afternoon. He died a bit before midnight. The funeral was celebrated in the chapel of Assumption College in Worcester. A wheel-chair student placed a single rose on the coffin, a symbol that evoked the adoption of Fr. Alfred by the handicapped student milieu, and also a symbol of a life accepted and lived totally with courage and faithfulness when faced with the trial of his own handicap.

Addenda

Fr. Alfred often spent summers recruiting for the Prep School. He was one of Assumption's most ardent sports fan and booster. 'Freddie' was a real billiard and pool shark. He had a leg amputated because of his medical condition. In the summer of 1970, he transferred to Assumption House.

"After I learned that Freddy had died, I started to think of what I might say this morning, and I realized that I wouldn't be able to say everything that needed to be said. Let me start by making some simple statements without commentary, simple statements, but food for thought.

-Freddy was a beautiful person.

-Everybody loved him... you couldn't help it.

-Age was never an issue with him. He loved people of all ages.

-The generation gap didn't seem to pose much of a problem for Freddy. When he died, it could be said in all truth that he was 72 years young.

-Freddy never lived or worked on this campus (Assumption College); yet, somehow, he was really a part of it.

-He was a humble and modest man.

-He was not demanding but enjoyed and appreciated -very candidly- any attention that he received.

-He was, to the core, an Assumptionist, enthusiastic and proud of being an Assumptionist.

-He was a very good brother to be with. We miss him already.

-"Unless you become like little children, you will not enter the Kingdom of Heaven." The fact that I chose this text from the Gospel of Matthew is a statement in itself, a statement that I would like to develop.

Freddy was like a little child, one of those children who enter the Kingdom of Heaven. He was like a little child in his simplicity, in his joy of living and, as we all well know, in his spontaneous affection and love. Let us be sure that we understand this and that we do not underestimate it.

Freddy was child-like in his simplicity. He led a simple life... no titles, no honors; and he didn't seem to miss them. His vocation was a simple one. Osteomyelitis prevented him from remaining with the Blessed Sacrament Fathers. He thought of becoming a secular priest but was then attracted to the Assumptionists. He became an Assumptionist and remained an Assumptionist in his heart until the day he died. He loved his Congregation, never looked back and lived in unquestioned faithfulness. His mission was simple too. He taught at the Prep School and was chaplain at Saint Anne's Orphanage and with a few exceptions that's about the size of it... except that we can't measure the influence he had."

(Fr. Joseph Loiselle's funeral homily)

On Saturday, October 24, 1981 the funeral was held after the celebration of the Office of the Dead in the Chapel of the Holy Spirit at Assumption College presided by Fr. Joseph Loiselle, provincial. Bishop Bernard Flanagan assisted and gave the final commendation. Burial was at Saint Anne's cemetery in Fiskdale with Fr. Donat Durand leading the prayers at the grave.

I have just returned from Cleveland where I went with my sister to celebrate the priestly jubilee of my brother, Emile. This visit was indeed a joy and brought back to mind many souvenirs of the time that I spent with the Blessed Sacrament Fathers. On my return, I found your message of congratulations with the photo of the Holy Father celebrating mass... Today, 25 years ago, is the very day that I celebrated my first mass at the orphanage of the Oblates in Châtenay...

When I was with the Blessed Sacrament Fathers in my youth, I remember having said, "I could never be happier anywhere else." Time has passed and with all that I have received, these words have been proven untrue. I am very happy at the Assumption. (Fr. Alfred to Fr. Wilfrid Dufault, 1962-23-02)