



Father Salvatore Milo Matarazzo

April 13, 1932 - October 22, 2022

The Rev. Salvatore Milo Matarazzo, 90, former pastor of St. Vincent Ferrer Roman Catholic Church, 869 Lexington Avenue, died Saturday in Louisville, Ky. He was best known to generations of parishoners and friends as “Father Sam.”

He was born April 13, 1932, in Syracuse, N.Y., the eighth and youngest child of Anthony Matarazzo Jr. and Anna Martucci Matarazzo, immigrants from Italy.

In an interview several years before his death, Father Sam recalled his parents. “They had a very novel arrangement. They were married four weeks after they were introduced to one another. It was an arranged marriage, which was very common at that time. Her husband-to-be, Anthony, was in New York City, and through a marriage broker, Anna came to this country, and after a four-week courtship they were married in Syracuse, N.Y.”

The family’s prosperity – the elder Matarazzo was an expert shoemaker – was

interrupted by the Great Depression. Like many young men in that era, Father Sam decided early on to become a priest. "I made a decision to be ordained in the Catholic Church when I was seven years old, but that was not uncommon." Unlike most young men, however, young Sam did not enter a seminary until after high school, when he enrolled at Providence College in Rhode Island, where he was trained by Dominican Fathers. He graduated in 1950 and was ordained as a priest on June 16, 1960.

His first visit to Kentucky was a notable one in 1950, when he and three other young men traveled by train through Louisville and on to the Abbey of Gethsemani in Trappist, Ky. "There we met Father [Thomas] Merton for the first time. And through the years and by living in Kentucky, I had conversations with Father Merton, a very great priest and a very great man."

Father Sam was assigned to be chaplain to the Dominican sisters in St. Catherine, Ky., not far from the abbey. That enabled him to renew his acquaintance with Merton on numerous occasions. He then was assigned to Holy Innocents Parish in Pleasantville, N.Y., not far from New York City. It was during that assignment that, in August 1969, he journeyed upstate to the Woodstock Folk Festival. "I didn't go there

to hear the music. I went there because some of our young people had gotten into trouble. ... My main concern was to help them get back to Pleasantville after four chaotic days at Woodstock.”

His devotion to the spiritual journeys of young people extended to his days as a priest in Manhattan, where he became acquainted with boys who had pursued boxing as a sport. Boxing, he said, “was a great avenue for meeting young people who ... had many personal problems of all kinds, and I tried to be a source of turning their lives around, if I could, from addiction and losing their way.” In his final years he kept framed photos of some of those young pugilists on the wall of his quarters at the Nazareth Home.

Father Sam came back to Kentucky in 1981 to serve as associate pastor of St. Louis Bertrand Church in Louisville. In the years he served there, he met many families in Louisville, including that of Owsley and Christy Brown and their three children, Owsley III, Brooke (Barzun) and Augusta (Holland), for whom he expressed great devotion his final interview. Mr. Brown, who died in 2011, was the retired CEO of Brown-Forman Corp.

In 1984 he assumed the priesthood at St. Vincent Ferrer, where he became known for his memorable sermons. After he retired to Louisville in 2013, he frequently delivered holiday homilies on WHAS-11 television, some of which can be accessed on the station's website, www.WHAS11.com.

Of his homilies, Father Sam recalled, "I resolved that I would never preach for more than four to five minutes, because I don't think we can hold the attention span of many people beyond four to five minutes. I have an acquired way of speaking, and that is I speak very slowly because I believe if you speak quickly, you will be neither heard nor remembered."

Over the years, Father Sam also would spend time in both Palm Springs, Fla., and in Bel Air, Calif., where he was an interim pastor at local parishes. In Florida he became acquainted with the Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy, the late president's mother. And in California his acquaintances included Loretta Young, Mrs. Bob Hope, Gregory Peck and Milton Berle. While Berle, the famous 1950s television star, was Jewish, he frequently sat with Father Sam at interfaith prayer lunches "because," Father Sam recalled, "he was a very gracious man and we became dear friends."

In New York his acquaintances included the Ambassador to the United Nations, Adlai E. Stevenson, and Mrs. John F. Kennedy. Though he mingled with the rich and famous, he was evermindful of his service to people in all walks of life. In his final interview, he offered his own epitaph, the way he would like to be remembered:

“I believe in all that the New Testament teaches and promises. I believe every word in The New Testament. I believe in everything that Jesus promised us. I believe in everything He said. I believe in His promise to be able to be with us, forgive us and move us and change us. I believe in every word of the New Testament.”
He is survived by his sister, Margaret Hennen, of Syracuse, and many nieces and nephews.

Evening Prayer Service: 5pm Monday, October 24, 2022 at St. Louis Bertrand Catholic Church, 1104 South 6th St. Funeral Mass: 9:30am Tuesday, October 25, 2022 at the church. Burial in Calvary Cemetery.

Arrangements entrusted to A.D. Porter & Sons Funeral Home, 1300 W. Chestnut Street.

Expressions of sympathy may take the form of contributions to the Center for Interfaith Relations, P.O. Box 70488, Louisville, KY 40202.

Cemetery Details

Calvary Cemetery

1600 Newburg Rd
Louisville, KY 40204

Previous Events

Prayer Service

OCT **24**. 5:00 PM (ET)

St Louis Bertrand Catholic Church
1104 South 6th St.
Louisville, KY 40203

Service

OCT **25**. 9:30 AM (ET)

St Louis Bertrand Catholic Church
1104 South 6th St.
Louisville, KY 40203