

Priest endured Europe's worst

Czech's Nazi, communist imprisonments preceded his flight to freedom in America

BY STEVE SCOTT
Pioneer Press

His struggles paralleled the early life of the late pope. The Rev. Alphonse Kubat survived a Nazi work camp and communist imprisonment in his native Czechoslovakia before finding his way to Minnesota, where he served 36 years as a Catholic priest.



The Rev. Alphonse Kubat

Friends Tuesday called Kubat a genuinely holy man, "an example of someone whose faith was so deep he could have joy in the midst of suffering," said the

Rev. Michael Miller, a priest whom Kubat mentored. "He really was the most joyful person I've ever known. You'd never know he'd been through such terrible things in his life."

Kubat died Monday of recently diagnosed lung cancer at Our Lady of Good Counsel Home in St. Paul. He was 89.

Kubat's strife was known to those close to him, though he seldom volunteered information of the life he endured before immigrating to Minnesota in 1969.

ALPHONSE KUBAT, 88

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Alphonse Kubat

(continued)

"It wasn't that it was such a painful memory for him, but that he didn't want to draw attention to himself that he had suffered or that anyone would feel sorry for him," said Miller of Delano, Minn.

At 22, Kubat was forced into a Nazi labor camp, where two years later he lost three fingers in an accident while making barracks. Upon release, he finished his education and was ordained a priest in 1942.

But following the Soviet communist invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1948, hundreds of priests, including Kubat, eventually were incarcerated in a former monastery turned into a prison.

Seldom could the priests say Mass, and then only secretly.

"They used raisins for wine," said Dr. Ray Bonnabeau, a surgeon at the VA Medical Center at Fort Snelling who befriended Kubat while the priest served there as a chaplain the past several years. At the prison, "Somebody would send a cake with raisins in it to the cook, who

was a Franciscan. The cook would take the raisins out and give it to the fellows, and they put them in water and used that for wine."

Other friends said Kubat recalled using a spoon as the Communion chalice and whispering the words by memory. Small particles of the Communion host were wrapped in cigarette paper to elude the guards.

Released in 1955, Kubat was assigned to construction and steel-factory work. For the next 13 years, any priestly work was done underground.

A Soviet invasion in 1968 convinced Kubat that conditions would only worsen, so he crossed the border to Austria and in 1969 came to Minnesota, where his mother had come to keep house for his uncle, a priest in Veseli, Minn.

"With the death of John Paul II and the coverage of all he had gone through, here was a man — Father Kubat — going through the same thing, just in the next country," said Miller, who began hearing about "the priest with the accent" in his own childhood after Kubat had settled in New Prague, Minn.

Kubat, Father Alphonse M. Age 89 Of St. Paul

Died 1/2/06. Visitation 4-8 PM Friday at Most Holy Trinity Church, Veseli, MN (where he served as pastor for 15 years). Wake will conclude with rosary at 8 PM. Mass of Christian Burial 11 AM Saturday at St. Wenceslaus Church, New Prague, MN. Burial: St. Scholastica Cemetery, Heidelberg, MN. Memorials preferred to donor's choice. Arrangements Bruzek Funeral Home (952-758-4949).

Kubat, a priest of the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis, also served parishes in New Market, Minn., and Veseli, the latter for 15 years until he "retired" in 1989. He remained active, assisting at many area parishes and serving at the VA Medical Center until last September.

Miller and another long-time friend, the Rev. Michael Creagan of Robbinsdale, each spent time with Kubat in recent weeks recording and taking notes of the priest's recollections. Kubat was mentally sharp until the end, friends said.

"We told him we had to hear these things and encouraged him to share the stories," Creagan said. "We can't forget how people suffered. It's part of our world history that's neglected in some ways."

Visitation will be from 4 to 8 p.m. Friday at Most Holy Trinity Catholic Church in Veseli. The funeral will be at 11 a.m. Saturday at St. Wenceslaus Catholic Church in New Prague. Burial will be at St. Scholastica Cemetery in Heidelberg, Minn.

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