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Fr. Paul of Graymoor: One Step Closer to Sainthood

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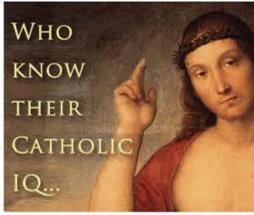
He was a man of introspection, but also a man of action, who started a new Franciscan order, worked tirelessly to build unity in the Church, and spent over five decades of his life serving as a priest. For Fr. Paul of Graymoor, mediocre Christianity just would not do. And as of March 2017, he may be one step closer to canonization. Recently documents and research regarding his life were sent to the Vatican to be reviewed by the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints. At the current stage of the process, Fr. Paul has the distinction of Servant of God.

Life of Fr. Paul of Graymoor

He was born on January 16, 1863, in Maryland. Baptized Lewis Thomas Wattson, he was the third son of Reverend Joseph Newton Wattson and Mary Electa. His father had been released from the General Theological Seminary, following a small scandal that led others to believe he was a "secret Jesuit." Rev. Wattson served in a small, poor congregation and fostered in his son a love for preaching and service.

Wattson followed in his father's footsteps and entered the General Theological Seminary, graduating in 1885. From his earliest years of seminary and ordination, Fr. Wattson had a desire to see Christians unified. He saw the divisions in Christianity as stumbling blocks to spreading the Good News. After seminary he discovered St. Francis of Assisi and was drawn to his commitment to serving the poor.

He felt God calling him to start the Episcopal "Society of the Atonement," and saw another meaning in the name: "At-One-Ment" – it signaled to Fr. Wattson the need for all Christians to be one. Yet at that time he was serving at St. John's parish in New York, where he also felt the responsibility to lead the congregation.



So Fr. Wattson continued in his ministerial duties, waiting on God's timing. It came after two years in the form of Rev. Johnson from the Associate Mission in Nebraska. Fr. Wattson was offered the role of superior for the group and felt it was God's providence. He arrived in September of 1895.

The lifestyle of the Associate Mission was one of scripture study, prayer, and service. During this time, Fr. Wattson began to investigate the Roman Catholic Church. Through prayer and intense study, he felt the Holy Spirit leading him to the truth of the Real Presence in the Eucharist and the authority of The Holy See. Almost three years to the day of arrival, Fr. Wattson would leave the Associate Mission, and head east to live out his calling as a Franciscan Friar.

New Episcopal Order

This would prove a time of trial for Fr. Wattson, as he had no parish and no income. But he had developed a holy friendship from earlier correspondence with Episcopal Sister Lurana White. Both had the burden on their hearts to live in true poverty. After a retreat weekend of prayer and fasting, Fr. Wattson and Sr. Lurana decided to move forward with the Society of the Atonement in the Episcopal Church.

They found an abandoned church in Garrison, N.Y. in an area referred to as "Graymoor." God provided the space for the Sisters of the Society of the Atonement while Fr. Wattson spent two years in Maryland preparing for the great task of leading a monastic order. It was at Graymoor that Fr. Lewis Wattson would receive the name of "Fr. Paul," in honor of the great apostle. But after a few years, Fr. Paul was in trouble with the Episcopal Church for his "heretical" teachings and support for his order had dwindled.

Home to Rome

Still his desire for Christian unity never wavered. In 1908, he initiated the Church Unity Octave, in hopes that a week of prayer and fasting each year would move hearts toward full submission to God and the unification of every Christian group. He believed that the only way for this unity to be fully reached was to be under one authority, that is, the Holy See of the Roman Catholic Church. He and Sr. Lurana had made the decision to join in full communion with Rome and, in 1909, the Society of the Atonement became the first religious community to be received corporately into the Catholic Church since the Reformation.

Fr. Paul of Graymoor was happy to be ordained a Catholic priest in 1910 and spent the next 30 years of his life committed to unifying Christians and reaching the poor, rejected, and disenfranchised with the Gospel.



Fr. Joe Di Mauro, SA, states that "Father Paul was 'A man for all seasons.' When he met a needy person, he attempted to provide for his needs. Father Paul willingly listened to those who were overburdened. He provided help for the homeless and addicted men. He lived the Gospel daily."

After living out the truth of the Gospel, Fr. Paul of Graymoor died of heart failure on February 8, 1940. He was laid to rest on top of Mount Atonement, in the shadow of a bell tower he had built for St. Francis Chapel.

Steps for Sainthood

After the Congregation for the Cause of Sainthood receives the prepared documents and artifacts, they will select a Relator who will prepare a *Positio*, or a position affirming or denying the holy merits of Fr. Paul. Shortly thereafter, the bishops of the Congregation will cast votes to determine if the Cause for Sainthood will move forward. If the vote is affirmative, a Decree of Heroic Virtues is sent to the Holy Father for review, after which Fr. Paul would be called Venerable.

If he receives the title of Venerable, there then must be a miracle attributed to his intercession, independent of another saint. If a miracle is proven, the beatification rite would follow and he would be called Blessed.

With the title of Blessed, the Church looks for a second miracle. If one is found, the Holy Father would canonize Fr. Paul of Graymoor as a saint. Though the process can take decades, it is set forth to ensure that mere popularity does not shape the Cause for canonization, but instead the honorable merits of the person who served the Lord.

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