

Parishioner prays for brother's canonization

By George P. Matysek Jr.

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Glancing up at an oil painting of a boy dressed in a black cassock, white collar, wide-brimmed hat and round spectacles, Pietro Canzi struggled to hold back his emotions.

The stoic seminarian in the painting was Mr. Canzi's older brother, Pasqualino, and nothing less than the most holy person the 89-year-old St. Dominic, Hamilton, parishioner has known.

Pasqualino died at age 15 in 1930 when Mr. Canzi was 12.

"He was a good, good boy," said Mr. Canzi, pausing to compose himself as his eyes moistened and his voice cracked. "I know he was a saint. I know his day will come."

The day Mr. Canzi longs for is the one when the Catholic Church will formally recognize Pasqualino's sanctity. Many Catholics in Mr. Canzi's native Italy are also praying for Pasqualino's canonization, and Rome has already proclaimed the boy a "servant of God."

Pasqualino's body was exhumed 10 years ago and entombed in a local church in Abruzzo, Italy - the area he was raised. For Pasqualino's cause to advance, two miracles occurring through the seminarian's intercession will be needed - one for beatification and another for canonization.

What made Pasqualino such a compelling figure was his single-minded devotion to his faith, according to his proud brother.

"He always gave me good advice," said Mr. Canzi, an amateur artist who has painted several images of Pasqualino that adorn the walls of his Parkville home.

"He told me not to go with the bad guys," Mr. Canzi remembered. "He was like an

adult even though he was young. He would give advice to our mother.”

Mr. Canzi remembered that before Pasqualino entered the seminary, he collected holy cards and made a shrine to Jesus and Mary inside a hole in the wall.

Mr. Canzi recalled several incidents in Pasqualino’s life that defy explanation. When Pasqualino was 3, he fell into a tub of boiling water and scalded his face.

“When it healed, there was no trace of the burn,” Mr. Canzi marveled. “He looked better than before.”

Two years later, Pasqualino’s face was burned again when a spark from a blacksmith’s work ignited the gunpowder carried in a friend’s pocket. Although his injuries were so severe that he had to be fed through a straw for several days, the boy again recovered without any evidence of trauma.

Pasqualino knew early on he wanted to become a priest and entered the Diocesan Seminary of Penne, Italy, when he was 12.

In several letters to Jesus and the Blessed Virgin Mary, he wrote fervently of his desire to become a saint. In a letter written just days before he died of cholera, Pasqualino wrote: “Dearest Christ, I want to become a saint. Soon a saint. Great saint.”

Mr. Canzi recalled that his brother was often hard on himself and strictly followed seminary rules. Even though he was in ill health, Pasqualino eschewed gifts from the family because he didn’t want special privileges not given to other seminarians, Mr. Canzi said.

“When he died, they found food under his bed that our mother had brought him,” he said. “He was so strict.”

Mr. Canzi, who came to America in 1941 and worked as a tailor, said he feels his brother’s presence every day.

“I ask him to bless America and my family and victims of the earthquake in Italy,” Mr. Canzi said. “I asked him to bless President Bush and President Obama, too.”

Mr. Canzi is planning to return to Italy this July for a special ceremony in memory of his brother. He firmly believes his brother will eventually be canonized.

"I leave it all to Jesus," he said.

To report favors received through Pasqualino's intercession, write to Our Lady of Pompei, 3600 Claremont St., Baltimore, MD 21224.