THREE-YEAR CELEBRATION OF ICON BEGINS!

April 26, 2016 will mark the 150th anniversary of an original Icon’s restoration to public devotion in Rome. For three hundred years, the Icon of Our Mother of Perpetual Help was venerated in the Church of Saint Matthew. In 1798, Saint Matthew’s was severely damaged and subsequently demolished due to war and persecution in Rome. The Icon was transferred by the Augustinians to their monastery chapel for safekeeping. Then, on April 26, 1866, the Icon was again restored to public veneration in Saint Alphonsus Church, Rome—on the very site of the former Saint Matthew’s. Pope Pius IX entrusted her to the Redemptorists with these words, “Make her known to the world!” Redemptorist missionaries have taken this mandate of the Holy Father to heart, and Our Mother of Perpetual Help is now one of the best-known and cherished images of Mary worldwide.

The Seelos Healing Mass in New Orleans takes place this year on Sunday, April 26—the official start of the Jubilee Year! The Seelos Mass will include a presentation on the spirituality of the Icon by noted iconographer, Brother Daniel Korn, C.Ss.R.

Year I: 2015
“Strengthening & Nurturing a Love for the Mother of God”
Year I is the preparation year for a renewal of devotion to Mary in our lives.

Year II: 2016
Our Mother of Perpetual Help—“Icon of Love”—Celebration
Year II focuses on the anniversary celebration for the worldwide Redemptorist Congregation and for those who have a special devotion to Mary as Our Mother of Perpetual Help. The highlight of this Jubilee will be a celebration at the Perpetual Help Shrine in Saint Alphonsus Church, Rome, along with local celebrations held around the June 27th feast day.

Year III: 2016—2017
“Make Her Known” Missionary Renewal
Following the events of the exact anniversary date, Redemptorists will renew their commitment to the words of Pius IX to “make her known.” It will be an occasion to renew their explicit proclamation of the Gospel, especially through the Icon as a tool of evangelization.
In May 2009 the Archbishop of Baltimore convoked the official Diocesan Inquiry into the healing of Mary Ellen Heibel of Annapolis. That investigation was completed in September 2010 and the Redemptorist Postulator General in Rome submitted the results to the Vatican Congregation for the Causes of the Saints. Thirteen months later in October 2011, a medical expert to the Congregation advised us not to proceed with this case. Mary Ellen had passed away almost five years after the healing, even though it was due to a completely different cause. The expert noted that a waiting period of at least ten years for cancer cases would have given certitude to a complete, definitive healing.

“I am terribly disappointed that the cure attributed to Bl. Seelos was rejected. Why does he need another miracle? He led an exemplary life always. What happens now?”—A 92-year-old from Crossville, TN, 2/26/2012

Since the October 2011 rejection, we have essentially presented one case a year to our Postulator General for preview. The cases in 2012 and 2013 were not deemed strong enough to proceed. The one submitted in January 2014 is still pending. It is the case of Joey Schwartz from Minnesota, who has been free from a rare, aggressive midline carcinoma for over six years. The number of known survivors today is only six or less. (Also, a recent non-cancer-related cure through Seelos’ intercession may merit further exploration.)

Strictly speaking, of course, only God “makes saints.” In that sense, Seelos will be canonized only if and when God wills it. With that said, it may likely happen as well when the collective “human dimension” in the overall process is fully committed to help see the 115-year-old Seelos Cause through to completion.

As Fr. Ambrose Eszer, O.P., the Relator General for the Seelos Cause candidly observed in 1998: “the history of the Seelos Cause may also be defined as “a history of the Cause’s interruptions.” Officially opened in April of 1900, the Holy See returned the process to the Redemptorists in 1910 with the recommendation that more work should be done, but the Cause was allowed to become inactive—for a half-century! Then, a reactivated phase of the Cause began in 1959, which to date, has culminated in Seelos’ beatification in 2000. Although Seelos’ Cause has been activated, dormant, and reactivated since 1900, the one uninterrupted factor has been Seelos’ remarkable reputation for holiness!

It is to our advantage that the healing power through Seelos’ intercession forms a virtual continuum in the almost 150 years since his death. The Relator General noted that a “very astonishing” 38.8% of the 67 witnesses deposed in the 1900-1903 official Inquiry “speak of graces and cures received after the invocation” of Seelos. “This high percentage in fact has to be considered quite extraordinary, showing the strong reputation of miracles” that Seelos already enjoyed even at the time of that early Inquiry.

In 2017, we celebrate the 150th anniversary of Seelos’ death; in 2019, we celebrate the bicentennial of his birth. Perhaps Seelos will be canonized in conjunction with one of these milestone anniversaries—if God wills it, and if we want it to happen too!
The Very Miraculous Picture

When the Mother of Perpetual Help Icon was restored to public veneration on April 26, 1866, a solemn triduum of thanksgiving attracted a large following at the shrine in Rome. On May 5, Pope Pius IX made a personal visit. “She will not refuse to succor the poor pope,” he said. He procured a copy of the Icon for his private oratory; it was the first reproduction ever made of the image that was simply known in the old days of Rome as “The Very Miraculous Picture.”

Where was Father Seelos on this auspicious occasion? He was in the middle of a three-day retreat in Nazareth, Ohio! On April 24-27, Seelos conducted a retreat to the students at Saint Mary Boarding School, an institution under the direction of the Marianists, where he had given a retreat the previous year, November 7-11, 1865. This institution is now known as the University of Dayton.

Seelos wrote in a letter to his provincial, dated May 13, 1866: “This little retreat gave me very much enjoyment, because the boys are from the best families and really, on the average, are morally good. They are treated there by the brothers in a very simple way, and just this seems to please them. With these brothers all ‘show making’ falls by the wayside and yet, in genuine learning, their students are not inferior to any other institute.” He prepared the children for First Communion and added that he gave “daily four half-hour instructions, and heard the confessions of the brothers and the boys. The latter had their time for play and recreation during the retreat, and after it the praying and paying attention went all the better.” Seelos also mentioned, “This was the first retreat that I gave to boys; consequently, I had prepared myself for it with some anxiety, but thanks be to God, everything succeeded with great satisfaction.”

18th Century Violin from Seelos Hometown Donated to SWC!

Seelos was fond of joking about his youthful desire to become a great violinist. He was known for his love of sacred music and for singing loudly. He especially enjoyed the works of the composer Franz Schubert.

Seelos' native Bavarian town of Füssen was a cradle of violin and lute-making in Europe. It was in proximity to such natural resources as fir, maple and yew trees, and its strategic location connected it to important cities like Augsburg and Venice. Moreover, the bordering Lech River enabled the transport of wood to places like Vienna and Budapest. Violins were in great demand from Füssen throughout the 17th and 18th centuries, followed by a period of decline in the 19th century when Seelos was born.

Füssen has one of the best violin exhibits in Europe. It has an annual violin festival and is in a cultural partnership with Cremona, the Italian center of violin-making and home of Stradivari.

A violin from Füssen, crafted by Simpert Niggel (1710-1785), was recently donated to the Seelos Center by a longtime friend, Ute Hein of Augsburg.
LAKE CHARLES, LA

[“From a Conversation with Jamie Barlow,” by the Editor of Medjugorje Magazine Spring 2014:]  Bishop Paul Lee Bear Rondonanski “sent me holy cards and a note asking how far I was from Blessed Father Seelos’ Shrine in New Orleans. I live in Louisiana, and he asked me if I could get a first class relic of Blessed Father Seelos and send it to him. I had gotten my own first class relic about ten years ago because my husband and I love Blessed Seelos and his shrine. So I had a relic sent to him. . . .”  [Medjugorje Magazine Editor’s Note:]  When Jamie said she had sent Bishop Rondonanski a Bl. Seelos first class relic, “my heart leaped in my chest. . . . You see, incredibly, he sent that relic to us! The child of an employee was very ill and I asked Father Bishop for prayers. He said the Lord told him to send the relic. They put it around the child’s neck and recovery began almost immediately. When I said I’d send it back, he told me to keep it, but to tell my children to send it back to him when I died. He was so much younger than I, who would have thought he would go first?”

NEW ORLEANS, LA

I’m writing to let you know about my experience the day I visited the Blessed Seelos shrine. I spent six months waiting for a liver transplant. On April 18, 2012, I received a call from the hospital that On the day I prayed to Francis Seelos at the Seelos shrine. I spent six months waiting for many months now and leading an active life. Thank you, God, for your plans to return to the Church. Her surgery went well and she reported no cancer anywhere in her body. What a powerful intercessor we have in Father Seelos!

LAFAYETTE, LA

I recently visited a friend who was in the hospital for thoracic surgery. She is a fallen away Catholic. When I stepped out of her room I found myself called to prayer and I asked Father Seelos to minister to her. Once I returned, a priest walked into her room with the Eucharist and the Holy Oils. My heart overflowed with joy and peace, as my prayer was that my friend would be open to Jesus. She later communicated to me that she received the sacraments and plans to return to the Church. Her surgery went well and she reported no cancer anywhere in her body. What a powerful intercessor we have in Father Seelos!

VALENCIA, PA

Mom and Dad gave me the Bl. Seelos prayer card in 2007. Since then I have received many blessings through his intercession. The most recent: my mother had pneumonia and bronchitis with a long recovery, and then a second bout within a month. Throughout her illness, I prayed for Bl. Seelos’ intercession. She’s been doing well for many months now and leading an active life. Thank you, God, for your graces. Thank you, Bl. Seelos. May you become a saint soon.

NEW IBERIA, LA

After my mother had heart surgery in May 2014, her kidneys failed. She could not get dialysis because of her age (91 years old). After three months in the hospital, doctors sent her home and suggested that we call hospice. They said she would live only two to four weeks. Over the next six months her condition mysteriously improved. At her recent doctor’s visit, he was astonished that her kidney problem resolved itself and said that it cannot be attributed to anything the doctors did. He said all the doctors were certain she would die within four weeks. My sister and I prayed to Bl. Seelos the entire time and we feel his intercession was responsible for her recovery.

In 2014, I underwent extensive surgery (the Whipple) for pancreatic cancer. The doctor thought I had a good chance—I am 85-years-old—and I was told it would take three to six months to recover. I pinned the Bl. Seelos relic to my clothing and I have deep faith in his intercession. After surgery, I didn’t think it was possible for me to walk, but I held the relic tight and I was never in pain. I was in the hospital for two weeks and spoke to Bl. Seelos all day long. It’s been two months and I still have no pain. The doctors are very pleased with my recovery and I’ll always be grateful to Father Seelos.

COVINGTON, LA

After my mother had heart surgery in May 2014, her kidneys failed. She could not get dialysis because of her age (91 years old). After three months in the hospital, doctors sent her home and suggested that we call hospice. They said she would live only two to four weeks. Over the next six months her condition mysteriously improved. At her recent doctor’s visit, he was astonished that her kidney problem resolved itself and said that it cannot be attributed to anything the doctors did. He said all the doctors were certain she would die within four weeks. My sister and I prayed to Bl. Seelos the entire time and we feel his intercession was responsible for her recovery.

Dear Father Byron: In my own way, I want to support the cause of Blessed Francis Seelos in gratitude for Graces Received & Prayers Answered. ________ to be used for:

- the ministry & maintenance at the National Seelos Shrine.
- my 1-year newsletter subscription renewal ($12)
- other item(s) designated below:

NAME
ADDRESS
CITY
STATE
ZIP

Make a Self-Guided Retreat with Bl. Seelos: All 6 for $15, incl. p/h

Please make donations payable to “National Shrine of Blessed Francis Seelos”. Contributions to the Seelos Shrine are income tax deductible, less items purchased.