

Our Faith: Witnesses to Glory through the eyes of Tradition

by Kevin Knight



A few years ago I was talking with a local priest, Fr. John Anderson, about his new parish assignment. He had just been moved to St. Elizabeth's, which is one of Denver's oldest churches -- and the site of a notorious murder. It was there on February 23, 1908, that a priest was shot to death as he distributed Holy Communion.

I mentioned this incident to Fr. Anderson and repeated some of the details of the crime. I must have thought that I was telling him something new, because I even suggested a book in case he was interested in learning more.

I'll never forget Fr. Anderson's answer. After a long silence, he quietly said, "I know all about it. The priest's name was Fr. Leo Heinrichs. My uncle was the altar boy that day."

Fr. Anderson repeated the story more vividly than I had ever heard it before. He described the appearance of the church, pinpointed the precise spot at the altar rail where Fr. Heinrichs was standing, and described how the assassin had received Holy Communion immediately before opening fire. He provided the little details that could only have come from an eyewitness. "As Fr. Heinrichs was dying," he told me, "he stretched out his hand to replace the hosts that he had spilled from the ciborium. He died as he picked up the last host. My uncle never forgot that."

"And I'll tell you one more thing," said Fr. Anderson. "A few years ago, I was going through some boxes at the church and found an antique chasuble. It was full of bullet holes and bloodstains. I still have it."

The Essence of Tradition

Fr. Anderson was not an eyewitness, but he had preserved an eyewitness account so vividly that I started to feel like an eyewitness myself that day.

That's exactly what Catholics mean when we talk about Tradition. Just as Fr. Anderson preserved perfectly the story (and even a relic) of Fr. Heinrichs, so has the Catholic Church preserved perfectly the Gospel of Christ. The teachings and sacraments of the

Catholic Church can be traced in an unbroken line to Christ Himself. No other religion can say that.

If you don't believe it, see for yourself. Read the books, letters and sermons of the earliest Christian. Enough of their writings have been preserved to fill several volumes. Abortion, contraception, the Mass, the papacy -- it's all there, and the battle lines were drawn in all the familiar places. If you're looking for a place to start, read the Didache. Or read the description of the Mass that St. Justin Martyr wrote. He wrote it in the year 155, but it will sound very familiar to any Catholic living in 2005.

Or listen to the words of another second-century martyr, St. Irenaeus of Lyons. Irenaeus was the disciple of St. Polycarp, who was the disciple of the Apostle John, who was the beloved disciple of Christ. When it comes to preserving a memory, St. Irenaeus sounds a lot like Fr. Anderson. He writes: "I distinctly remember the incidents of (my youth) better than events of recent occurrence. I can describe the very place in which the Blessed Polycarp used to sit when he discoursed ... his personal appearance ... and how he would describe his intercourse with John and with the rest who had seen the Lord, and how he would relate their words."

Debunking the Constantine Myth

The enemies of the Church will tell you something different. They'll tell you that the Catholic Church is a manmade religion, invented long after the death and resurrection of our Lord. As Dan Brown claimed in *The Da Vinci Code*, "Constantine practically created the Church, fusing it from pagan mystery religions". Don't believe it. The truth is, Christ personally founded the Catholic Church, and the Holy Spirit has guaranteed its Tradition from the beginning.

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