



2023 History Essay Contest

Homeschool 5th Grade Winner

The Legendary Story of Fr. Patrick Ryan

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What does it look like when a priest gives his life entirely to his flock? Servant of God, Fr. Patrick Ryan, did exactly this. He was born in Ireland on September 29, 1844. Sadly, when he was young, his family was evicted by a furious landlord and had no other choice than to emigrate to New York. He was later ordained a priest, served as pastor of Sts. Peter and Paul Parish in Chattanooga, and eventually died of yellow fever while serving his people.

Fr. Patrick Ryan was faithful in all the small things just as God asks. Unsurprisingly, he was a good seminary student at St. Vincent's College in Missouri. In the summer of 1864, Fr. Ryan was happily ordained by Bishop P.A. Feehan. The Ryan and Feehan families had been close neighbors in Ireland, so this may have been the reason Fr. Ryan chose the Diocese of Nashville, Tennessee. For the next three years, he served Clarksville and the missions in the area. Because the bishop had learned that Fr. Ryan could be trusted with much responsibility, in 1872 he was transferred to the growing Chattanooga parish. In Chattanooga, Fr. Ryan and his people faced cholera, floods, and Civil War repairs. But he handled it all. One of the things Fr.

Ryan is most known for building Notre Dame de Lourdes Academy, now known as Notre Dame High School, with Dominican sisters as teachers. He also expanded the little church and blessed a new bell. When he is canonized, this bell will become a second-class relic, and the sound waves coming from it when it rings will be third-class relics. So anyone listening will have third-class relics going through them every time they hear the bell ring! Throughout his life as a priest, Fr. Ryan served his flock faithfully and showed that he could be trusted in the small things as God prepared him for great responsibilities.

Fr. Ryan continued to become more and more like Christ. In 1878, he faced the most difficult struggle yet. Chattanooga had yellow fever. Four-fifths of the population left town, and 366 people eventually lost their lives. After only two years as a school, Notre Dame Academy had to be converted into a hospital. Lovingly Fr. Ryan went from house to house to tend the sick and dying. However, at this time, helping the sick was risky, not just because the disease was highly contagious but also because it was illegal to help. People were afraid of the disease spreading, and the police were offering rewards to anyone who had information about people helping the sick. Burning with God's love, Fr. Ryan ignored this and continued to work until within 48 hours of his own death. On September 26, Fr. Ryan finally caught the disease. Even though the doctor thought he would recover, he did not. He died on September 28 after receiving last rites from his younger brother, Fr. Michael Ryan. Jesus loved him so much that he was called into heaven on the day before his 34th birthday, meaning he died at the same age as Jesus. Fr. Ryan's last request was to be buried among his people, so his body was placed in the church graveyard until it was moved years later. Like Christ, Fr. Ryan laid down his life for his sheep.

Fr. Ryan faithfully served as a loving priest, becoming more like Christ every day, eventually dying a martyr's death. He was a role model to all U.S. citizens and to all faithful Catholics. Because of his burning love for his flock, he should be recognized as a saint. U.S. Representative Chuck Fleischmann from the third district of Tennessee, Bishop Stika of the Diocese of Knoxville, and Deacon Gaspar, the Diocesan Postulator for the Fr. Patrick Ryan canonization cause, all agree that the legendary Fr. Patrick Ryan deserves a better title than any one of us can give him. That title is Saint. Saint Patrick Ryan.

Bibliography

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