

**Dedication of the Stained-Glass Window  
in Honour of  
+Father Ignatius Maternowski, OFM Conv.  
Cauquigny, Normandy, France  
2<sup>nd</sup> June 2022**

**Reflection delivered by Fr. James McCurry, OFM Conv.**

The first Franciscan friars came to Normandy by foot in the thirteenth century, during the lifetime of their founder, St. Francis of Assisi. Over seven hundred and fifty years later, another Franciscan Friar arrived in Normandy, not by foot but by parachute. His name was Father Ignatius Maternowski. Not only was he a Franciscan Priest. He was an officer in the United States Army – a military Chaplain and Captain in the 508<sup>th</sup> Parachute Infantry Regiment of the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division.

In the pre-dawn hours of D-Day (the 6<sup>th</sup> of June 1944), Fr. Ignatius accompanied the brave young men of his regiment as they parachuted into the Norman villages of Amfreville, Picauville, Gueutteville and Cauquigny. These American parachutists were men on a mission – to liberate France. The local people had suffered unspeakable hardship and oppression during the German occupation of these Norman villages. The parachutes of Fr. Ignatius and the heroic troopers of the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division were symbols of hope and freedom – an answer to the people’s prayers.

Father Ignatius shed his blood here on the soil of Normandy a few hours after he arrived. He was the only American chaplain who died on D-Day. He offered his life, at the age of thirty-two years, as a martyr for the cause of human rights. His death gave testimony to the Gospel passage: *“No greater love has a man than this: to lay down his life for his friends”* (John 15:13). Perhaps someday Father Ignatius will be declared a “saint.” Now already, for you and me, Father Ignatius is regarded as a “holy” man of God, whose memory we invoke with honor, devotion, and gratitude. His mission in Normandy was liberation; his motivation was a “love without limits” – a self-sacrificing love of neighbour – his brothers of the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division; and the strangers-become-friends of the Norman villages which surround us today. These brothers and strangers were his flock, and he was their “Good Shepherd” – ever ready to lay down his life for his beloved sheep.

This beautiful new stained-glass window in the Chapel of Cauquigny will forever remind us that heroic love is possible – love of country, love of humanity, love of God. The artist of the window, Mr. Joseph Beyer of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in the United States – who, with his wife, is present with us at today’s dedication – has depicted Father Ignatius as a hero of love - wearing the grey habit of the Franciscan Order, and displaying the uniform of the 82nd Airborne Division. He died wearing the uniform of a military chaplain. Both garments signified one common message: Father Ignatius’s Christian love for all people, and his commitment to defend the dignity of every human person.

When Father Ignatius was shot to death in Gueutteville, he wore a red cross armband to signify the Geneva conventions which were in effect since 1929, provisions designed to protect in wartime all the wounded, the dying, and the non-combatants. Eyewitness testimony made it clear that Father Ignatius risked his life to persuade the enemy about those principles of human rights, and to keep safe the local people of this region. Father Ignatius died to protect, not only his wounded fellow soldiers, but to safeguard all the innocent non-combatants of the area from the German reprisals. He died in defense of those principles – a martyr of love.

Even now, in a secular and pluralistic age, this Christian, Franciscan, Army captain – a simple boy from the small town of Holyoke, Massachusetts – embodies the very highest aspirations of humanity. He embodies the noble values which his 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division holds sacred. His commitment to the dignity of the human person was absolute. Now, because of this new stained-glass window, every person walking into Cauquigny Chapel can contemplate these truths. Every visitor can leave this chapel inspired by the conviction that love for humanity must know no limits, as evidenced by the life and death of Father Ignatius, the pride of the 82<sup>nd</sup>!

Permit me to conclude these remarks, speaking on behalf of the official delegation representing Fr. Ignatius’s Franciscan family, Father Martin and Brother Michael, and Joseph, Luke, and Ethan, three young graduates of Fr. Ignatius’s *Alma Mater*, St. Francis High School in Hamburg, New York. We express thanks to all of you who are here today – the people of Normandy, the mayors and local civic officials, representatives of the governments of France and the United States. In a particular way, we Franciscans wish to thank the “L’Association US-Normandie: Memoire et Gratitude,” which has labored tirelessly to preserve the memory of Fr. Ignatius. Lastly, let me pay grateful tribute to the positively brilliant men and women of the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division – We are deeply honored by your presence here today. Thank you for cherishing the memory of our Franciscan brother, your heroic chaplain-martyr Fr. Ignatius. The presence of your inspiring choir from Fort Bragg has poignantly reminded us that those who give “the last full measure of devotion...

shall not have died in vain.” For, their names “shine like beacons in the night / the Patriots whose vision gave us meaning / Who kept the lamp of freedom burning bright.”

May God bless you all!