

## Priest Is Acquitted

A 40-year-old Catholic priest visiting from the Philippines was acquitted in Manhattan Criminal Court yesterday of misdemeanor charges that he had stolen the wallet of an undercover cop posing as a drunk.

"There's reasonable doubt here, and the defendant is acquitted," Judge John Brickley said after a five-hour trial. The priest, the Rev. Carmelo Baltazar, testified that on Feb. 11 he went to the aid of the supposed derelict leaning against a phone booth at Seventh Ave. and 42d St. and only lifted the man's wallet from his pocket to check for identification.

The "derelict," decoy cop Harold Hard of the anticrime unit of the W. 35th St. station, according to trial testimony, then drew his revolver, identified himself as a police officer and, with the aid of backup cops, arrested the priest.

The Rev. Baltazar, an acting assistant pastor at St. Agnes Catholic Church at 143 E. 43d St., was dressed in civilian clothes. He said after the trial that the experience of his arrest and court appearances would help him in his job as a prison chaplain when he returns to the Philippines.

—D.J. Saunders