



## A Sports Parson To Remember

A grand old man of South Jersey was buried today.

The Rt. Rev. Monsignor **Francis A. McCloskey**, Pastor Emeritus of St. Rose of Lima Church, Haddon Heights, died last Sunday. He would have been 85 years old next week.

"Big Mac," as so many called him, combined many talents. Each was a big talent, befitting the six-foot plus, 200 pounder he was.

As a newly-ordained chaplain, he served overseas with the American Expeditionary Forces in 1917 and 1918, catering to the spiritual needs of men in the 83rd, 79th and 4th Infantry Divisions. He didn't overlook their athletic needs either leading them in hotly contested games of baseball and basketball, his great loves next to his first love of being a priest.

Big Mac fought in World War I, he'd brag. He never fired a shot at the Jerries but he threw a couple of stiff lefts and a creditable right cross at the likes of Jack Sharkey and Gene Tunney in their training camps in France.

At Niagara University in New York, he played on the baseball team with Roy Mack, son of the Philadelphia A's manager and owner, Connie Mack. He might have launched a career in organized baseball had it not been for basketball which he preferred. He was big and fast enough to play with the best in those days, but he turned away from that sport, too, to become a priest. He was ordained in 1915.

MSGR. **McCLOSKEY** served in several parishes in South Jersey and in each one "he did so many little things behind the scenes," as a former parishioner recalled. They were not publicized and they were not little. Not to the recipients, anyway. Would you call getting an empty coal bin filled during the depression little? Would you call receiving a few large bags of groceries little when there was nothing to eat?

He did those things with his own money. A pastor in the Catholic Church has almost total control of his parish's money, and cigar box financing was the name of the game for a long time. But Msgr. **McCloskey** always treated his curates well and he never squandered his parishioners' money. He was independently wealthy with large real estate holdings in several Jersey shore resorts and at Riverview Beach. That was the source of the many "little things" he did for so many.

He didn't smoke or drink but he did have a big indulgence — big Cadillacs. His car was hardly ever empty. Usually it was loaded with kids and after making a couple of stops for custard or milkshakes and hot dogs along the way, they'd finally arrive in Wildwood or Seaside Heights where he'd turn them loose with plenty of pocket money for more treats.

Basketball continued to be his favorite pastime next to churchly duties. He was a charter member of the South Jersey Association of Basketball Officials and scouted many local boys into high schools and colleges. A few of the grammar school kids who "learned under Big Mac" were Lee Harvey, now head basketball coach at Gateway Regional High School; Ralph Bantivoglio, an All Big 5 player at La Salle; Jim Hurst, a stellar performer at Lafayette, and Ed Gramigna, one of Penn's brightest stars.

Msgr. McCloskey was never a "visiting priest." He didn't approve of getting too close to the parishioners. But he couldn't keep away from St. Rose School which is about 20 steps away from the church and the rectory. The Sisters of St. Dominic who taught there would view his appearance in the recess yard as an intrusion. Their control went by the board as the big priest walked among the kids, with coins jingling in his pockets for anybody who dared reach in and take them while the priest "looked the other way." And they would ask if his birthday was coming soon because that was a guaranteed day off for everybody.

He was most vulnerable when he distributed First Communion to the 6-and 7-year-olds. Tears streamed down his cheeks as he bent over them and as soon as he placed the white host on their tongues he quickly closed their mouths with gentle taps under the chin. The little sermon that followed was punctuated with loud honks into an oversized handkerchief.

Big Mac's message was uncluttered with controversial theology. "We're on this earth to save our souls," he preached in uncomplicated sermons for almost 60 years. Anything else was unimportant to Msgr. McCloskey.

May he rest in peace.