

## What I Believe

# 'God Offers Love, This I Believe:' Father Romani

By JOE MACK

For 28 years the Rev. Joseph C. Romani has served the parishioners of St. Peter's Roman Catholic Church on Federal St., Portland. The last six he has been pastor, succeeding Msgr. Teresio DiMingo, retired.

Father Romani has complete rapport — or should we say he has buone relazioni — with his largely Italian descent parishioners. He was born in Torino, Italy, came to this country as a boy. The priest whose well-cadenced sermons are a delight to hear, studied in the Salesian Order, came to Portland after resigning his teaching post in Don Bosco College, Newton, N.J.

**FATHER ROMANI'S PREFERENCE** for St. Peter's parish is due to his previous acquaintance with Msgr. DiMingo who had been one of his teachers in 1925. His is a parish with the character of a so-called ethnic background, distinct from the "all American parish."

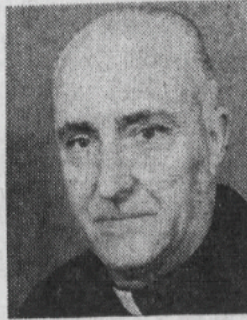
"Our people still love to speak their native dialects much as other ethnic groups in this country," Father Romani said. "Not only does it satisfy their natural self-expression, but it still resounds with the vibrant echoes of a faith deeply ingrained in their culture."

"Even the native generation, though English speaking and public school educated, retains the flavor of living Christianity. The older generation still yearns to hear the Word of God spoken in Italian. It sounds so much like the Word of father and mother and parish priest imparting the words of life and hope to their tender youth. They still love to sing the traditional hymns that filled their hearts with joy in their growing years."

"Personally, I delight living in their midst and would never leave them. They make me feel like a member of every family. Their children, most of whom I baptized, hold me as their grandpa and lavish their warm affection on me for my birthday, or on other occasions."

"I understand my people. These folks are deeply attached to the Blessed Mother of Jesus. The mention of Her name, intoning a hymn to her or merely handing a holy card to any one of them lights up their eyes with the unmistakable gleam of true devotion. 'Gesù-Maria' is a familiar aspiration heard countless times in the homes of my people. 'Jesus-Mary' seems to live in every home. Debate on religious matters is not one of their habits."

**"THE PRESENCE OF GOD** is taken for granted. The protection of Mary is part of their heritage. Our growing children, including our teen-agers, are



Rev. Joseph C. Romani

accustomed to hear: 'Jesus Christ wants it so . . .' or 'Your Blessed Mother will obtain it for you. Just pray.'"

What about their use of statues? "Why, it's like our use of photographs all over the world," said Father Romani with that familiar shrug of the shoulders, as though you asked him, "Why is it raining?"

"Audiovisual education has been vital in creating the atmosphere of faith in which most genuine Italians have grown. The sight of a statue has always been the shortest reminder of the presence of God and His saints, those models of Christian living. This has rendered the din of modern verbosity unnecessary and has served the deeper psychological influence of the human image."

"In this friendly atmosphere I feel comfortable," said Father Romani, tall, slim, standing like a Roman consul out of our high school Latin textbooks, though in modern dress.

"I breathe freely and enjoy walking the streets of Portland, where I am usually greeted by young and adult alike with a smile, a 'Hello, Father,' or just a plain 'Hi' even from babies who do not know yet that I am their spiritual daddy by baptism."

"Sometimes the little ones ask: 'Are you God?' 'Well, not exactly', I hasten to answer, 'just a friend of God.' 'Do you live in church?' 'That I do.' 'I like to go to church, too.' How I wish all my children felt that way."

"I used to raise birds as a hobby, but I gave that up so I would have time to write for the Church World (he contributes a bi-weekly column to the Maine Roman Catholic diocesan paper) to attend meetings of the Knights of Columbus (he is their chaplain), of the Holy Name Society, of the Sodality of the Sacred Heart and to visit this wonderful family of God that is my parish."

**"IN THE AGITATIONS** that rock the spiritual life of the American people, I look not for legal solutions, but spiritual ones. I believe in the education of the individual conscience. Morality, like love, as Jesus taught us, is not for legislation. It is for education through persuasion. The free spirit then has its choice. Happiness depends on that choice. God offers love. This I believe."

### Comic Writer

WARWICK, R.I. (AP). — At 18, Greg Potter is already a professional comic book writer with several published stories in a comic magazine.

He has a collection of over 2,000 comic books, including rare copies of Batman. Potter, a college freshman, once published his own comic book fan magazine for some time.