

## *Venerable Patrick Peyton, C.S.C.*



Nestled early in the flow of events in Holy Cross Heritage Month, January 9th marks the birthday of Venerable Patrick Peyton, C.S.C., arguably one of the most well-known and globally beloved of Holy Cross heroes. Patrick Peyton was born on January 9, 1909 in Attymass, County Mayo, a small village in the bucolic northwestern corner of Ireland. The sixth of nine children, Patrick was raised in a household where faith and family reigned supreme, and he was especially transformed by his family's commitment to pray the Rosary together every night.

The young Pat Peyton had dreams of moving to America and riding the wave of prosperous bootstrappers who had made fortunes in the Land of Opportunity. However, upon his arrival to the buzzing mining town of Scranton, Pennsylvania, Patrick took a humble job as sexton of the Scranton cathedral, where the hours spent cleaning the church in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament and spectacular stained glass ignited a vocational fire. Having encountered priests of the Congregation of Holy Cross at a local retreat, Patrick cast his lot with the men of Holy Cross, entering Moreau Seminary in 1932.

A remarkable seminary student, Patrick Peyton's hopes for the priesthood were dashed when he contracted tuberculosis in 1938, wrenching him out of his studies and consigning him instead to the hospital sick bay. As he lay in his sick bed, the hopes of a medical recovery waning rapidly, Peyton received a piece of advice from his trusted friend, Father Cornelius Hagerty, that would change his life and chart the course for his future: *go to the Blessed Mother and pray*. Peyton did exactly this, and in what can only be described as a medical miracle, his tuberculosis cleared.



Finishing his studies and receiving ordination in 1941, Peyton dedicated the rest of his life to promoting family prayer, seeking to win households for Jesus Christ and strengthen the domestic Church with a simple message: "The family that prays together stays together." In 1942, he founded the Family Rosary Crusade, whose sole mission was to bring the Family Rosary back into American homes. In a remarkable campaign, Peyton and his team launched a massively popular advertising push to promote the Family Rosary in dioceses around the country.

Seeking to reach more families, Peyton went west to Hollywood, starting Family Theater Productions in 1947. There he recruited some of the top stars of his day to promote his mission in radio, television, and film; from Gregory Peck and Bing Crosby to Shirley Temple and Lucille Ball, Peyton was able to rally Hollywood around the mission of family prayer in a remarkable and unexpected way.

Patrick Peyton's fire for the Rosary and family prayer ultimately led to over seventy Rosary "crusades" – massive rallies featuring Peyton as the main speaker – in over three dozen countries around the world, earning him the title "The Rosary Priest," a moniker for which he is still known today. Peyton spoke in-person to over 28 million people over the course of his life, the most of any individual in human history (being surpassed by Pope St. John Paul II just over a decade after Peyton's death in 1992).

Patrick Peyton's legacy is one that is quintessentially Holy Cross. He sought, as have all the men and women of the Holy Cross family, to make God known, loved, and served through a characteristic combination of zeal, tenacity, and grit. His message – that "The family that prays together stays together" and "A world at prayer is a world at peace" – betray a man who embraced prayer as an indispensable channel to God, who loved families as "our most prized possession," and who sought to bring the world to Jesus Christ wrapped in the mantle of his Blessed Mother. His message remains a timely and prophetic reminder of the beauty of family and the power of prayer.

So today, on January 9th, be sure to thank God for the gift of Venerable Patrick Peyton's life – and remember that you have a friend in heaven interceding for you and your families.

*This reflection is authored by Meigs Turgeon,  
Holy Cross Heritage Month Steering Committee*