PART 18: CHRISTMAS CARD FROM CAMP MINIDOKA

Minidoka: “The location of the Camp is very good, land & water abundant & dust too. We’ll swallow a lot of the latter before this adventure is over.”

Soon, the Legion of Mary and other parish groups were as active as ever—three choirs alternated in providing music for Sunday Masses! Father Tibesar worked hard to build a friendly relationship with the leadership of the Camp. “Officially I do not exist,” he wrote. “I am watching developments and exerting what pressure I can privately to obtain a modicum of that religious freedom we have in such quantities to export to all the nations of the earth.”

On December 2, he wrote: “Wish you could visit us sometime to get a picture of the place yourself. I’ve never been so completely lonely in my life. My room is just off the desert and the coyotes howl a good night just a stone’s throw from me…. Kindly keep me in prayer. I’d love to get away for a bit of rest—haven’t had a let-up since war broke out.”

In spite of everything, the community kept the faith and stuck together. On December 16, 1942, they sent Bishop Shaughnessy a Christmas letter. “We are not too badly off as we see things. We are united in contrast with people from other places. We have our daily Mass and the Blessed Sacrament has been reserved here too since Dec. 8th. What we miss most is our school.”

Father Tibesar remained at Camp Harmony until the end of the war. But the community was changing. Nearly fifty of the young men of Queen of Martyrs joined the Army, and five of them were killed on the European front. Others were scattered to various parts of the country, wherever they could find work.

In 1944, Father Blanchard of St. Edward’s Seminary wrote to thank Father Tibesar for all he had done. Father Tibesar responded that what he had done should be considered “a matter of ordinary duty whose responsibility none of us may shirk,” adding, “our democracy must be universal or it becomes a sad mockery.”

—Corinna Laughlin, Pastoral Assistant for Liturgy

Want to know more? This and many other important moments in the history of the Catholic Church in the Pacific Northwest come to life in Journey of Faith, the illustrated history of the Archdiocese of Seattle, available in the Cathedral Bookstore.

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