



— Herald Examiner Photo by JOE RUSTAN

I'M SO HAPPY TO BREATHE FREE AIR AGAIN!  
54 years of tragedy and war for Father Irenaeus

## He Lives--and He's Free Miracle of the 'Dead' Priest

By KAY WAYMIRE

At 6:30 a.m. yesterday, as he does every day, a bearded priest slipped into the Ukrainian Catholic Church of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Hollywood.

There he said mass, a simple, unadorned, waiting, more so, everyday ritual for a prayers.

But to Father Irenaeus, nine days ago on Friday, Nov. 73, it is one of heaven's the 13th Father Irenaeus' miracles.

The Father Irenaeus — stepped from a plane at International Airport into the arms of his family: Mrs. Yemelya and brother, Mitchell, a super market owner in Huntington Park, and two he'd never seen — a sister, Helen Kova, a city library employe, and a brother, a Sheriff's detective sergeant.

Of those years, he will say nothing. There are others still behind the Iron Curtain

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### CAREFUL

Even Mrs. Marie Yemetz, one of his four brothers and sisters in this area, speaks carefully even though she has spent most of her life in this country.

Irenaeus (then Iwan) and a brother, Vassyl, were left behind in the Ukraine when their parents and a younger brother and sister immigrated to the United States in 1909.

During World War I, Vassyl died; Irenaeus, a brother in the Ukrainian Byzantine Catholic Rite, was interned. Freed, he was ordained a priest and his family, thousands of miles away, rejoiced as letters kept family bonds close.

"In the early days of World War II, his letters became more guarded," recalled Mrs. Yemetz. "In 1943 we received a note through the Red Cross sending his love and asking us to pray . . . Then, nothing for two years."

The silence was broken with a letter from Vassyl's daughter in Poland reporting Irenaeus' murder.

### PRAYED, WAITED

"Deep in my heart I never accepted that — somehow I knew he was alive," said Mrs. Yemetz. "I prayed and waited . . ."

One spring Monday in 1954, Mrs. Yemetz sat down to write a list of 10 prayer requests.

"I had heard of this remarkable woman who devoted all her time to prayers and she would pray for me," she said simply. "On my list I put: news of my brother."

"Three days later I had it — in a Ukrainian language newspaper, telling of the release from the Soviet Union of an Italian priest. He had been imprisoned with my brother in Siberia . . ."

Correspondence with the Italian, the Rev. Armando Zavatta, followed. Mrs. Yemetz will not elaborate beyond this, but in 1955 Father Irenaeus was released—three years before his 10-year sentence was to expire.

"He was very, very ill; he was sent to West Ukraine to die," his sister remembered. "But we didn't know this until the following year."

Careful letters followed and, in 1960, the priest was permitted to go to Poland. Then

papers and personal effects in a brief case and one small suitcase; a bandura (traditional Ukrainian harp) and a blanket (because "it might get cold").

At the Yemetz' home, high in the Hollywood Hills, the black-robed priest stood looking down on the city.

"This is the first time in many, many years I breathe the free air," he said simply. "I am so happy . . ."

