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Days Of 1952

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His status in our parish was that of a visitor who didn't have anywhere to go, we heard, and the pastor took him in. A refugee. But he was always smiling. Always. We preferred him for Confession to even young Father Albert, the regular assistant (who drove a very clean prewar Studebaker), because we thought he didn't really understand us and therefore never gave more than five Hail Marys or five Our Fathers as a penance. He was German and bald and stooped over, and his crooked fingers looked like roots. For recreation he grew tomatoes behind the rectory garage. He never wore street clothes, just the black soutane. Never drove a car or had little jokes for the altar boys before Mass, or ever really talked with us. It was the English, we said. Yet he seemed delighted with everything, even with saying, week after week, the five o'clock Sunday morning Mass that mainly old women and the drinkers attended. He always had the longest line waiting for him at Saturday Confessions and got through it fast. We laughed about that. We went to him with our worst sins. We figured everybody did.