

FATHER CAPADANNO...NOT JUST A BOULEVARD... Recently I saw a cartoon by Gary Varvel in the New York Post. The cartoon was entitled, "Sitting for the National Anthem." On one side is pictured the football player Colin Kaepernick sitting in his San Francisco 49er's uniform. The other frame shows a decorated Marine sitting in a wheel chair. The Marine is missing a leg. The cartoon made me think. Now certainly as the president has reminded us, Colin Kaepernick has a constitutional right to make a protest. But his behavior is absolutely wrong. He exhibits no appreciation and gratitude for his country, it's Anthem and for the flag which that Anthem extols. All of us, especially those of the younger generation, need to be reminded that "Freedom isn't free." In fact, it comes at quite a cost. In line with that, just last Sunday I saw a TV program on the life of Father Vincent R. Capadanno-a man of extraordinary valor and courage who won the Purple Heart and the Bronze Star. Now some people might say, "Father Capadanno? Isn't that a boulevard down near South Beach?" Perhaps not many Staten Islanders even know about this Catholic priest's extraordinary life. Vincent Robert Capadanno was born here on Staten Island on February 13, 1929, the last of the ten children. He was baptized at St. Michael's Church in Mariner's Harbor, attended P.S. 44 and then later on graduated from Curtis High School. He came from a very religious family and young Vincent attended daily mass at Our Lady of Victory Church. After a short stint as an Underwriter Clerk for an Insurance Company down on Maiden Lane in Manhattan, Vincent decided to enter the Maryknoll Seminary in Ossining, New York. Maryknoll is an order founded to train missionaries to go overseas and preach the Catholic faith. He was attracted to the missionary zeal of the Maryknoll order and after his studies, he was ordained a priest on June 14, 1958. Father Capadanno's life might have been a quiet, peaceful one as a missionary. He was first assigned to Taiwan and then later on to Hong Kong. However, his life abruptly changed when he volunteered to serve as Naval/Marine Corps Chaplain in Vietnam in 1966. In this very tough assignment, Father found his true parish and his vocation. He ministered to the "Grunts," those Marines who were especially exposed to death, suffering and sacrifice. For his extraordinary dedication to these men, Father Capadanno was nicknamed the "Grunt Padre." On September 4, 1967, during fierce fighting, the priest spotted a wounded corpsman who had been hit by a burst of automatic fire and unable to move. Father ran to his assistance and began to minister to his needs, At this point, the Vietcong opened fire. Capadanno was hit by 27 bullets in his spine, neck and head and was killed instantly. To quote the words of Saint John's Gospel, "Greater love than this no man has, than he lay down his life for a friend." On May 21, 2006, this heroic priest was named, "Servant of God" the first step on the road to sainthood. During this month of September, the month in which he gave his life, let us remember in a special way his great courage and bravery in the line of duty. We thank Father Capadanno and all those like him who "Stood Tall" on behalf of their flag and country and made tremendous sacrifices so that all of us might be free!

Sincerely in Christ,

Father Jerome