



photographs | Algimantas Kezys, S.J.

Text introducing VIII groups of photographs by Bruno Markaitis, s.j. Postscript by Hugh Edwards,
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In this age, when technological advances succeed one another with a rapidity that is almost frightening and our comprehension of the world develops by visual means to which the printed word has become more and more subordinate, it is not surprising to find, in each year's lists of publications, an increasing number of books composed of photographs. You are holding one of them in your hands, and now that you have gone through its pages, no words are necessary to tell you how it differs from the others; any explanation of its contents would be superfluous and useless. It does not bring you messages or solutions or propaganda of any sort, but for many it will awaken a consciousness of having seen the familiar and even the ordinary in new light and dimension. One of the virtues of the photograph is that it need not be expanded on, and since in our civilization sight is the most highly developed of the senses, it is the medium which communicates with you as no use of language could. So, despite our concern for this book and a desire for its acceptance, all we can do here is note a few facts and make a small number of indications.

Algimantas Kezys, S.J., was born in Lithuania in 1928. He came to the United States in 1950 and in that year joined the Society of Jesus, popularly known as the Jesuits. At West Baden College, Indiana, he resumed and completed his studies, later receiving a master's degree in philosophy from Loyola University in Chicago. He was ordained in 1961 and is now a member of the American Lithuanian Jesuit Fathers with headquarters in Chicago. He is the editor of

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Postscript

Zvaigzde (The Star), the *Sacred Heart Messenger*, published in Lithuanian. Apart from engaging in these activities, Father Kezys is an accomplished photographer, guided by the same ethical standards, certainty of purpose, and uncompromising integrity which govern his daily work, illuminate and reinforce all he captures in his photographs and makes permanent in the handsome prints he produces of them. Many have appeared in magazines and other publications, among them a notable book on the Mass in Lithuanian, *The Holy Sacrifice*. Another sequence of photographs, published in *The Critic* to accompany selections from the poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins, remains vividly in one's memory, one of the happier instances of bringing together a photographer and a writer, for Father Kezys and the poet have many affinities.

There have been numerous exhibitions of his work. I remember well the winter evening on which I first saw his photographs at the Lithuanian Youth Center in Chicago. They formed a large exhibition, most of them of European subjects, with only a few taken in America. In a later visit to look at them again, what was most impressive—and has remained so—is the manifestation of an individual and his relationship with the world. They were striking as the revelation of a new kind of realism as true as any other, and they suggested a philosophy which can meet contingencies bravely and honestly, based on fundamentals deeper and more secure than the externals of anguish or despair which attract so many today who seem to have comprehended them only distantly.

A year passed, and another exhibition was held in which each photograph presented some detail or panorama of the New York World's Fair. This contained many surprises and developments. It does not derogate from the earlier pictures to have seen brilliant progress in the choice of subjects and the intensification of a personal viewpoint. The number of photographs made of the New York World's Fair would run into astronomical figures, but even those by famous professionals show us nothing that is memorable or

desirable. Of Father Kezys' approach, his rare objectivity (and with him it is never detachment) was his finest contribution. The photographs were isolated objects in themselves which represented the subject matter as none of us would see or think of it. As a whole, the exhibition encouraged the hope that all the work so far was only the overture to a long series in which Father Kezys would show us more of America from his particular point of view and widen our vision of what is closest to us.

Soon after, in May and June of 1965, an exhibition was held in the gallery of photography of The Art Institute of Chicago which summarized the photographer's work until that time and brought to a larger public his new and refreshing gifts. Then, in December of the same year, still another show was presented at the Lithuanian Youth Center which answered all curiosity as to how this prolific observer would meet the many challenges of the American environment. During the previous summer he had made a trip to the West Coast and in addition to his other duties, was able to produce this large exhibition, photographed, developed, edited, and printed by himself. The result of all this care and unobtrusive planning evidenced the further extension of many talents and presented us with what the best pictorial displays should give: a feast for the eyes.

In the present book you find all this and more for some of the subjects extend into the present year. The selection has been made from Father Kezys' entire work, and the ensemble is adequate testimonial of the photographer's purpose and the naturalness of his skill in carrying it to realization. Perhaps you will be impressed first by his brilliant use of large abstract patterns and his demonstration of near and distant planes of vision brought close together—which, with him, is always a felicitous and light-filled mystification. These characteristics, which bring illumination and adumbration to many of the compositions, are arranged to balance one another and act in harmony. The registration of textures is intensified by novel affinities of surface and pattern, providing a happy field for objects of visual

meditation. This may be situated on the walls of an Indian tepee, in a landscape of bare trees and winter sky, in some inexplicable reflection cast from a worn and harassed city street, in the banners of washing hanging on a line against a background of a lake and mountains. When we look at these pictures the poetry of their realism causes us to feel that they have lain dormant in our consciousness, awaiting resuscitation by this particular insight through the lens, but this awakening of them is something we have never experienced before.

Father Kezys has advanced to such a stage of poetic realism that he uses what might be called the "alphabet of reality" to shape it into statements marked by his personal style and manner. Many of these photographs are consistent entities, like objects with dimension and weight, and when looked at in quiet and alone reward one with all the benefits of contemplation. It is one of the precious gifts of the camera that photographs can do this. In such moments with them one attains that spiritual solitude which is our fullest contentment, when we are released from all things, when reality breaks through all of man's conceits, sciences, pretensions, and we are suspended in the high, clear atmosphere where all that matters is being. That this may be evoked by an expression in terms of our ordinary lives on the narrow areas of sensitive paper covered by these compositions is the finest accomplishment of the conscientious craftsmanship and response to life which realized this collection. The lights of Las Vegas with their Beardsley-like patterns in the night, a group of Boy Scouts, trees in mist and bars of sunlight, a solitary boy walking the seats of a stadium, the uncontrived collage of a torn window screen with a car parked on a little-used road, three figures silhouetted against an empty space of sky—these, and many more, may enlarge your vision so that you find their counterparts anywhere. It is all true and here, and one man shows it to you from a center of large meaning in which he is situated. And it spreads, a perfect endarchy, to reach you.