Father Meinrad Marbaugh

January 5th is the anniversary of the death of Father Meinrad Marbaugh. Joseph Marbaugh was born in Monterey, Indiana, on October 2, 1907, the second youngest of eight children.

His mother died when he was only seven years old and his father died six years later. An aunt raised the three youngest children.

Joseph attended St. Ann elementary school in his hometown followed by two years of secondary education at Monterey High School. Studies were difficult for Joseph, but a faithful friend in school tutored him and he was able to pass the courses of study.

He fervently prayed to the Blessed Mother for guidance in choosing his vocation. In the late 1920s, with the encouragement of his pastor, Joseph began his preliminary studies for the priesthood at the Pontifical Josephinum College in Columbus, Ohio. After three and a half years of study, he left the seminary to work for a brother-in-law for a year. He returned to the seminary in 1931, but found the studies too demanding.

Priests from Subiaco Abbey served as chaplains at the Pontifical seminary during Joseph's years of study, and their example and influence led him to Subiaco Abbey in 1933 to seek God in this Benedictine community. Upon his arrival, the monastic building was still largely in ruins from the disastrous fire of December 20, 1927. Joseph joined his high school and seminary classmates in the gigantic project of clearing rubble, improving the grounds, and helping with minor reconstruction.

Joseph Marbaugh professed his vows as a monk of our monastery on September 16, 1934, receiving the name Meinrad. He was ordained to the priesthood by Bishop John B. Morris at St. Andrew's Cathedral in Little Rock on June 3, 1939, one of seven monks, the largest group ever ordained for our abbey at one time.

After ordination Father Meinrad taught one semester of Greek to three academy students. Of this classroom experience he humorously said: "I tried very hard not to make it seem 'like Greek to them.'"

It was in the care of souls that Father Meinrad would spend most of his priestly ministry. In 1941 he was appointed assistant pastor at Immaculate Conception Church in Tyler, Texas. During his time in Tyler, Father also served as chaplain at Mother Frances Hospital. In 1947 he was assigned to the mission parish of St. Edward's in Athens, Texas, and to St. Anthony's in Longview, Texas.

From 1948-49, Father Meinrad served as assistant pastor of All Saints Church in Fort Worth, Texas, then was assigned to St. Mary's Church in Fort Worth where he remained until 1978. At St. Mary's a robber once stole the collection basket. Father Meinrad chased the man down the street, tackled him, retrieved the collection basket and returned it to the church.

Father Meinrad endeared himself to the people of Fort Worth with his spiritual insight and wisdom. Serving nearly three decades at St. Mary's Church, he was loved for his work among the poor, and for making himself available as "confessor for the city of Fort Worth," imitating the Cure d'Ars in his zeal for the sacrament.

When Father Meinrad retired to the Abbey in 1978, he began 10 years of service as a substitute priest in various parishes where the abbey ministered, including several extended assignments in Texas. He had the distinction of temporary service in more parishes in the Diocese of Fort Worth, Texas, than any other priest of that time.

In his later years at the monastery he undertook the work of recycling newspapers, cardboard, and aluminum cans at the abbey's trash bins. He referred to himself as a "salvager" rather than an environmentalist. The money made from this recycling effort was allocated to the mission fund of the abbey which Father Meinrad administered with great care.

Since 1983, Father Meinrad had been the oldest monk of Subiaco Abbey and was an inspiration to the monks and laity alike with his gentleness, kindness, and sense of humor. In 1988, he became chaplain to the abbey's infirm monks in the Health Center, daily visiting and bringing the Eucharist and his blessing to the residents there.

In the spring of 2000, Father Meinrad fell in his room, breaking his right hip and shoulder. He then became a resident of the monastic Health Center himself where he made a remarkable recovery from his injuries. Although old age was taking its toll on his stamina, Father Meinrad was always interested in community endeavors and remained an enthusiastic sports fan of the Subiaco Trojans and the University of Notre Dame.

Strengthened with the sacraments and the prayers of his brother monks, Father Meinrad died peacefully in his room in the monastic Health Center of congestive heart failure at 9:40 p.m., on Saturday, January 5, 2002.

There was an infectious goodness and joy in Father Meinrad that drew people to him. With his congratulatory words of "good, good, good," Father Meinrad endeared himself to generations during his lifetime.

His goodness was manifest everywhere, most especially in his care for the poor and unfortunate. He chose always to remain an assistant pastor so that administrative ministry, for which he had no taste, would not draw him from personal ministry to the needy.

On Monday, January 7, a Wake service was held at 7:00 p.m. with Father Leonard Wangler, a native of Fort Worth, Texas, presiding. During the service Rev. Andrew J. McDonald, Bishop Emeritus of Little Rock, eulogized Father Meinrad.

On Tuesday, January 8, Abbot Jerome Kodell was celebrant and homilist for the 10:00 a.m. Mass of Christian burial and performed the graveside rites. Bishop J. Peter Sartain was present in the sanctuary and performed the absolution.

A month later, on Thursday evening, February 7, a memorial Mass for Father Meinrad was held at St. Mary Church in Fort Worth, Texas, where Father Meinrad had served for three decades. Bishop Joseph Delaney of the diocese of Fort Worth, was celebrant. He was assisted by several concelebrants and approximately 250 parishioners and friends attended the service.

In the March 27, 2002 edition of the NORTH TEXAS CATHOLIC, a former altar boy of Father Meinrad's, Father Tim Thompson, wrote the following tribute:

"There are moments in our lives when a light turns on and we see things in a new way. Sometimes the light reveals unflattering realities, and sometimes the revelation is incomplete for a very long time.

One of those moments came for me as I served a funeral Mass with Father Meinrad Marbaugh, OSB. Father Meinrad died this past January at the age of 94.

I was probably in the fourth or fifth grade, and my friend and I were vesting for Mass while Father Meinrad somewhat nervously went over a homily he had prepared. He confided that the anticipation of doing this funeral (I remember it was someone young) had unnerved him, and he had risen early—about 3:00 a.m.—to put his thoughts together. I do not remember now if I asked him or just thought to myself 'but haven't you done this a lot already? Why are you so nervous?' I am pretty sure I asked, and I am sure he responded with one of those soundless laughs, his mouth wide open in glee.

Father Meinrad was anxious and unsure of himself, and I was surprised he would feel that way. I guess I thought priests weren't supposed to feel that way.

It was not a great homily. He had risen early to no avail. No one ever said Father Meinrad was a great homilist. Or for that matter that he was great at any priestly abilities—running a parish, celebrating Mass, counseling, etc. All Father Meinrad was, was a great priest. Anyone who knew him would agree.

He was legendary for visiting the sick. He remembered everyone's name and always wanted to know how people were doing. No one feared confessing the worst sins to him, knowing that his only response would be 'good, good, good' –not the sin, of course, but the person. He was the soul of compassion and dedication, a person who comes along once in a lifetime.

So the second revelation I had is that Father Meinrad did not need to be good at preaching, teaching, and leading because he already did all of that with his life. His life was his sermon; his compassion was his Eucharist; his dedication was his instruction. No one can preach better than that."

--Father Tim Thompson

Pastor of St. John the Apostle Parish

North Richland Hills, Texas

At the time of his death, Father Meinrad was 94 years old. He had been a professed monk for 67 years and a priest for 62 years. He is buried in our cemetery.