

Brother Stanley Hon

January 16th is the anniversary of the death of Brother Stanley Hon. Miloslav (Miles) Hon was born on August 10, 1885, in Nove Benatky, then part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, now in the Czech Republic. As a young man he was an office clerk in Prague, Czechoslovakia, and in Paris, France. On November 5, 1923, he came to the United States and settled in Chicago until he came to Subiaco on April 14, 1932.

As is true of every religious vocation, his decision was no simple matter – he was torn between the desire for religious life and the hope of someday returning to his home and motherland of Czechoslovakia.

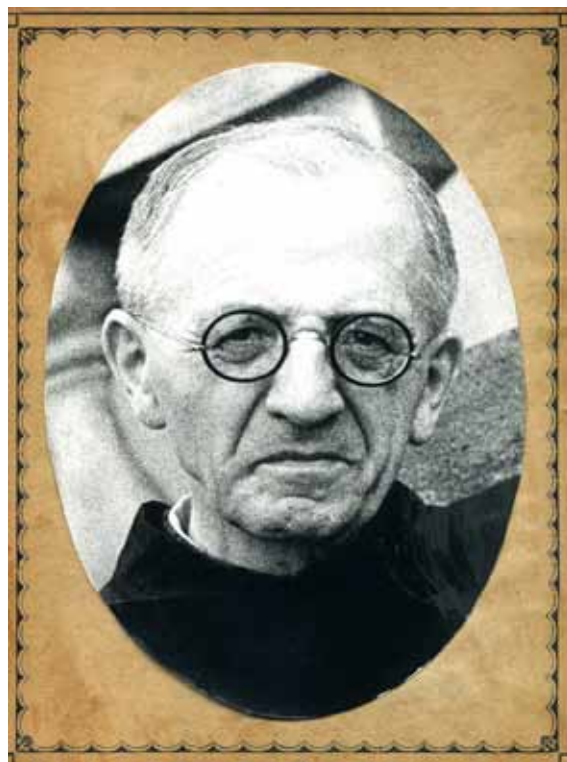
For this reason he chose not to pronounce religious vows, but rather to serve in the monastery as a claustral oblate, making his oblation on November 13, 1933. As a claustral oblate he lived in the monastery, wore the religious habit, followed the observance, but did not take religious vows. Thus, he was free to withdraw at any time from the monastery.

But this reservation in his offering of self did not curtail the fullness of his gift of self in monastic life. Though he was an able linguist and a skilled calligrapher, weak eyesight kept him from duties where these talents might have been more fully used and his general service was in meeting the domestic needs of the community. At times, however, his skill with a pen was put to service in the lettering of important documents.

The rising turmoil in Europe in the late 1930s and the outbreak of World War II indefinitely postponed any thoughts he might have had about returning to Czechoslovakia. But he still had about four-hundred dollars that would have made this return possible. In the aftermath of the war this fund was gradually used for care packages and other aid to stricken relatives. When his funds were gone the abbey continued this charity for him. But the need abated as one after another of the recipients died or was lost in obscurity. It had not been easy to see hopes yield to memories, or to read of the humiliation of his Czechoslovakia or to learn of the fate of dear ones.

With family gone and homeland changed, Brother Stanley felt that homeward duties had been absolved and that he could now fully embrace the monastic life. He took religious vows on November 11, 1951, receiving the name Stanislas (Stanislaus); but nothing in his life changed. He could give no more because he had always given full measure. At length his failing eyesight brought him almost to blindness, and his step slowed, but he continued his chores, moving during the last six months purely on the strength of memory and will. On December 1, 1963, he suffered a stroke and fell.

Brother Stanley died at Crawford County Memorial Hospital in Van Buren, Arkansas, on Thursday, January 16, 1964, seven weeks after having suffered a severe stroke and a bad fall from which he never regained full consciousness. Relatives in Czechoslovakia were informed of Brother Stanley's critical condition, and three of them responded. Brother Stanley's cousin John wrote to the superiors here at the abbey, saying:



"First I wish to apologize for not being more familiar with the German language. For ever since the Nazi occupation I have not had a German conversation. So I have forgotten very much German and hope you will be able to make sense of what I am writing.

"I thank you heartily for your kind information regarding what happened to my good cousin. My dear Stanley! In your whole life you have had very little luck and peace; only near the end of your life have you found your rest and peace and security in the silent monastery over there.

"This same sad news I have transmitted to Stanley's sister, Maria, who lives near Prague. Other relatives are unknown to me. In case cousin Stanley improves, please tell him how deeply I feel obliged to him for all the good he did to us in the hard times of highest need after the fall of Hitler. Tell him that I wish him speedy recovery.

"As I believe, my cousin Stanley is about 82 years old. I am eight years younger. He is the last member of the Hon family which about 30 years ago was widely branched out. All died either unmarried or childless. Will write his sister.

"Thanking you again, respectfully, I am John Durdik."

The second letter received was from Brother Stanley's cousin Ludmila:

"A few days ago I received your message about the death of our dear relative Stanislaus; for which I heartily thank you.

"May God give him eternal rest in the strange country which became his second home. For work well done and for virtuous life his soul will surely be richly rewarded in eternity.

"I am truly glad that the departed Brother was respected by your community and that after his death every honor was shown him.

"The memorial cards you sent were sufficient. I sent one to his sister and one to his sister-in-law. Other relatives he had none except my brother-in-law in Lysa. The others had already died.

"... With repeated thanks and greetings, Ludmila Durdikova."

Brother Stanley's sister wrote expressing her heartfelt gratitude to the community:

"Reverend Father!

"I received your highly appreciated letter of January 3 with the report of my brother's sickness. Meanwhile I have received news from other folks about his death.

"I thank you and all your good confreres for all you have done for my departed brother. I thank you especially for the fine funeral you have given him and for the many Masses you have said for him. In your Abbey my departed brother found the real peace for which he was always longing. The nice picture which you put out in his memory gave me great joy.

"I thank you again for all you did for my brother and I will remember you in my daily prayers. Maria Hon."

Abbot Michael was celebrant of the funeral Mass on Saturday, January 18. At the time of his death, Brother Stanley was 78 years old, having lived 18 years as a claustral oblate in our monastery and then 12 years as a professed member of our community. He is buried in our cemetery.