

Father Benedict Brunet

May 4th is the anniversary of the death of Father Benedict Brunet. Albert Brunet was born on April 1, 1838, in Faubourg Saint-Denis, near Paris, France. He grew up in the shadow of a once famous Benedictine monastery. He began his classical studies in France before coming to the United States and to St. Meinrad in 1858, shortly after its founding. At St. Meinrad he studied philosophy and theology.

The few priests who were serving in the school at St. Meinrad were needed by the bishop to serve in the parishes so candidate Albert Brunet, a theology student, helped in the school. This was the era of the Civil War in the United States.

On December 8, 1862, Albert Brunet professed his vows as a monk of St. Meinrad monastery, receiving the name Benedict. On January 26, 1863, his class of three members were the first priests ordained at St. Meinrad.

Father Benedict was appointed prefect of students at St. Meinrad for the scholastic year 1863-1864. He was also a teacher of French, English, music, and calligraphy. In the abbey, he served for a short time as subprior and novice master. Most of his years were spent in mission work; there is hardly a place in the mission territory of St. Meinrad where Father Benedict did not spend some period of time.

This first novice, and now senior priest of St. Meinrad, was assigned to St. Benedict's monastery in Arkansas, two years after its founding. He and Father Felix Rumpf arrived on August 23, 1880, to take the place of Father Stephen Stenger and Father Philip Doyle who recently returned to Indiana, leaving Father Wolfgang Schlumpf empty-handed in Arkansas. St. Meinrad lacked the men to supply our monastery so they looked more and more to Einsiedeln for needed man power.

During the next three years, Father Benedict ministered to the Arkansas missions of Sts. Peter and Paul in Morrison Bluff, St. Scholastica in Shoal Creek, and St. Joseph's in Paris. He was the first pastor to serve St. Joseph's after the church was moved from the countryside into the township of Paris.

Father Benedict was the third prior of our monastery from December 1883 until early 1885, replacing Father Bonaventure Binzegger. After serving rural missions, Father Benedict was appointed to the city parish of St. Edward's in Little Rock as its second pastor. While stationed in Little Rock, Father Benedict was also consultant to Bishop Edward M. Fitzgerald.

From 1890 to 1893, Father Benedict was assistant pastor of St. Mary's Church in Altus which also included the large mission territory of Clarksville in Johnson County, Dixie and Oppello in Perry County, Dardanelle in Yell County, and St. Patrick's in Pulaski County. For a while, Father Benedict also taught in the parochial school in Altus.

From his artistic talent we have the first sketch of the monastery as it appeared in his time.

After St. Meinrad Abbey founded St. Joseph monastery in Louisiana in 1890, Father Benedict was assigned as a pioneer member of this Louisiana community for a short period of time. He then returned to Arkansas where he was assigned to his final pioneer work as a monk at Subiaco's new foundation in Nevada, Missouri.

By the end of the 19th century, Father Benedict's health had deteriorated after years of missionary work, and he returned to St. Meinrad suffering the final stages of tuberculosis. Yet, until the final weeks of his life, he was able to say Mass and he occasionally attended choir at St. Meinrad. Surrounded by his confreres, Father Benedict died at St. Meinrad Abbey on Friday, May 4, 1900.

At the time of his death, Father Benedict was 62 years old and in the 37th year of his monastic profession and priesthood. He served our community for almost 20 years during its pioneer days. A marker honors Father Benedict here in our abbey cemetery. He is buried in the cemetery of St. Meinrad Archabbey in Indiana.

No picture is
available
of
Father
Benedict Brunet