

Father Gall D'Aujourd'hui

Tomorrow is the anniversary of the death of Father Gall D'Aujourd'hui. Nicholas D'Aujourd'hui was born in Berg, Canton St. Gall, Switzerland, on December 31, 1855. Early in the 18th century, his family had moved from the Savoy region of France to the estates of the Prince-Abbot of St. Gall, Switzerland, which explains the French family name and ancestry.

Feeling a call to the priesthood, Nicholas enrolled in the diocesan minor seminary. When the seminary was closed by the orders of the anti-clerical Swiss government, young Nicholas continued his studies at the Abbey of Einsiedeln. He professed his vows as a monk of Einsiedeln on September 3, 1876, receiving the name Gall. He was ordained to the priesthood on April 23, 1882.

After ordination, he was assigned as assistant prefect in the house school and professor in the gymnasium. It was at this time that Father Gall began to hear the call for help from St. Benedict's Priory in Arkansas, as Father Luke Hess, abbey historian, writes: "Gradually the resolution to volunteer for that God-forsaken place ripened in his soul." He also induced eight students of his to go with him. With the permission of Abbot Basil Oberholzer, he began the preparations for the journey. Abbot Basil referred to these eight candidates as the "Eight Beatitudes."

Known as the "Great Expedition," the group left Einsiedeln on September 18, 1887, for their port of embarkation at Le Havre, France, and arrived in New York on October 1. Heading westward by train, the group arrived at St. Benedict's Priory on Sunday evening, October 9. So careful had been Father Gall's preparations for the trip to Arkansas that each person arrived with all the necessary materials they would need for several years. Shortly after his arrival, Father Gall was made master of novices.

In 1891, Father Gall went to Switzerland on a vacation, ostensibly for the celebration of his parents' golden wedding anniversary, in the company of Father Ignatius Conrad. Little did he know that his traveling companion would, less than a year later, be his abbot. Father Gall used the occasion to exercise his natural talents for begging, or pious robbery.

Father Luke Hess, abbey historian, reports that Father Gall's "favorite field of action were parochial residences, convents of Sisters and the home of persons of a pious turn of mind. Not, indeed, during the night was his 'work' carried out, nor did he manipulate a pistol to make people part with objects on which he had laid his eye, but his manners were so charming, and his descriptions of the poverty prevailing in Arkansas so doleful, that only hearts of flint could resist. The number of vestments, books, relics, church plate, pictures, etc., which he collected is astonishing." It was during this trip to Europe that the Papal Brief reached St. Benedict's notifying the monks that their monastery was elevated to the status of an abbey and would have the name Subiaco Abbey.

Later on, Father Gall was appointed prior by Abbot Ignatius and, as the abbot was often away from home collecting funds for our building program, it was Father Prior Gall who took care of the house. He fulfilled the offices of prior, pastor of the parish, bookkeeper, treasurer, architect, procurator, guest-master, spiritual director of the religious and the students, teacher of religion, professor of theology, and master of ceremonies.



Father Gall's life came to an abrupt end five months after the great fire of 1901. On Thursday, May 15, 1902, Father Gall, after being urged by members of the community, took the day off after having commemorated the 20th anniversary of his first Mass the day before. In the company of Father Othmar Wehrle, Father Gall traveled to Altus where he visited his cousin, Father Placidus Oechsle, and toured the new parish church which was under construction. On the way home, about 6:00 p.m., the two men were informed by a traveler that Six Mile Creek had become too high for crossing due to a heavy rain that day.

Father Gall decided that, since it was two days before Pentecost, he had to get home at any cost. They drove into the creek, but the horses, feeling the deep water, would not go on. Father Gall whipped them; when they reared up, half overturning the buggy, he became terrified and cried: "Holy Mother of God, Holy Guardian Angel, help!" He was never seen alive again as the raging flood waters carried him downstream.

Father Othmar reached Paris and search parties were formed to look for the body. Father Joseph Huwyler, pastor at Paris, and Mr. Elskin drove to Subiaco and informed the subprior, Father Augustine Stocker, of the accident. He in turn informed the community.

At 5:30 a.m. the next day, Friday, May 16, a requiem Mass was said for Father Gall, without the body present. By 10:00 a.m. the body was found. For the rest of the day the body lie in state first in Paris and later at Subiaco. At 6:00 p.m. the funeral procession was formed, and the burial rites for the prior of the monastery were held.

At the time of his death, Father Gall was 46 years old and in the 25th year of his monastic profession, the 20th of his priesthood. He is buried in our cemetery.