

Father Placidus Eckart

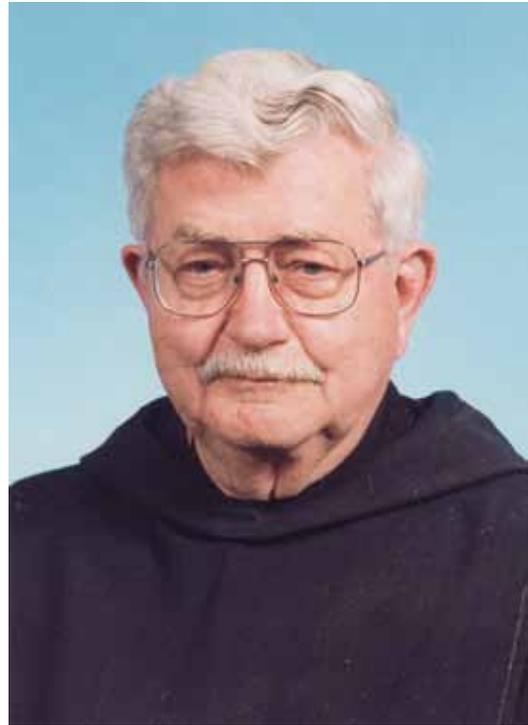
November 20th is the anniversary of the death of Father Placidus Eckart. Anthony Joseph Eckart was born March 3, 1925, in Subiaco, Arkansas. The Eckart family home was located little more than a stone's throw from Subiaco Abbey. He was the seventh of eight children born to Joseph Eckart and Annie Adams Eckart. His four brothers and two of his three sisters preceded him in death. He is survived by Sister Christine Eckart, OSB, of St. Scholastica Monastery, Fort Smith, Arkansas and his sister-in-law, Mrs. Louise Eckart of Subiaco, Arkansas. Anthony received his elementary education at St. Benedict Elementary School in Subiaco. In the fall of 1939, Anthony enrolled at Subiaco Academy, graduating with the Class of 1943.

Feeling drawn to the monastic way of life at Subiaco Abbey, Anthony Eckart entered the monastery as a candidate on October 5, 1943. He was received into the novitiate on October 30, 1943, with a single classmate, who was soon dismissed when he was exposed as a fraud, the Great Imposter of later book and movie fame. Anthony professed his vows as a monk of our monastery on October 31, 1944, receiving the name Placidus. Frater Placidus then entered Subiaco Abbey Seminary to begin studies for the priesthood. During his years in the seminary, Frater Placidus was in charge of the abbey greenhouse, while assisting in landscaping and tending the abbey gardens and parks, services he performed gladly and with great care.

Frater Placidus was ordained to the priesthood on May 24, 1949, at Subiaco Abbey by Bishop Albert L. Fletcher, Diocese of Little Rock, Arkansas. Upon ordination, Father Placidus was assigned to teach in Subiaco Academy, beginning with the 1949-1950 school year. During his sixteen years as a teacher, Father Placidus taught classes in Religion, Mathematics, English, and Social Studies. Also between 1949 and 1965, Father Placidus served in a variety of other ministries in Arkansas. In 1950, he began the first of three missionary pastorates at St. Anthony Church in Ratcliff. Between 1950 and 1954, Father Placidus ministered as chaplain to the State Sanitorium and Catholic Mission in Booneville. In 1957, he began the first of two missionary pastorates at Sacred Heart of Mary Church in Barling. In addition to these duties, Father Placidus served as Academy Treasurer from 1953 to 1965 and Instructor of Brothers in the monastic community from 1954 to 1958.

Father Placidus' first assignment as a resident pastor came in 1965 at Sacred Heart Church in Charleston, Arkansas. In July 1968, Father Placidus began 15 years of ministry in the Abbey's parishes in Texas, first at Sacred Heart Church in Muenster and then at St. Mary Church in Gainesville. Father Placidus was recalled to the Abbey in August 1983 for one year to serve as Retreatmaster of Coury House and Assistant Director of Monastic Formation. He returned to parish ministry in Arkansas, serving at St. Boniface Church in Fort Smith from 1984 to 1995.

In 1995, Father Placidus requested a year's sabbatical in observance of his fiftieth anniversary as a monk in order to spend time in spiritual reflection and local ministry at St. John Center in Little Rock. People of all ages were drawn to Father Placidus because of his warmth, compassion, and depth of understanding of the human condition. He was very dedicated in ministering to the sick and dying and directed numerous healing ministries and retreats and was active in the Charismatic Movement. Father Placidus was often referred to as "the butterfly priest" because of the butterfly emblems he used in vestments and on clothing as a sign of the resurrection, most of them given to him by children and adults in his ministry. Father Placidus enjoyed golfing and fishing, and he always led blueberry picking expeditions at community retreat.



The later years of Father Placidus' active ministry included a second pastorate at St. Boniface Church, Fort Smith from 1996 to 1998. He began serving also as the celebrant of the diocesan sponsored televised Mass for shut-ins. His final parochial assignment was in Scranton and Prairie View, Arkansas, from 1999 to 2002. In 2002, Father Placidus asked permission to exchange his pastoral duties for full-time ministry to the sick, and was appointed Chaplain of St. Edward Mercy Medical Center in Fort Smith, an assignment he held until his retirement to the Abbey Health Center in 2007. During these years he organized some of his meditations for private publication and could hardly keep up with the demand.

Father Placidus' transition from active ministry to retirement was difficult at first. He described candidly his experiences and difficulties in an article entitled "The Aging Process" in *The Abbey Message*, Spring 2009 edition. In his retirement he enjoyed visits from monks and friends, and especially the relatives who came regularly to play cards with him in the Health Center. He was diagnosed with kidney failure in January 2009, and given less than two months to live. However, he seemed to rebound at this news, experiencing a new peacefulness. He continued to live several months more, participating in community Masses and meals as he could, and growing steadily weaker toward the end. His death came peacefully in his room in the Monastic Health Center at 4:45 p.m., December 14, 2009.

At the time of his death, Father Placidus was 84 years old. He had been a professed monk for 65 years and a priest for 60 years. He is buried in our cemetery.