

Father Leo Gerschwyler

March 30th is the anniversary of the death of Father Leo Gerschwyler. Aloys Gerschwyler was born in the town of Andwil, Canton St. Gall, Switzerland, on January 8, 1871. He came to the United States and to Subiaco with the "Expedition" of 1891 from the abbey of Einsiedeln led by Father Gall D'Aujourd'hui.

In this "Expedition" there were four candidates for the priesthood and eight candidates for the brotherhood. Three in each group persevered, one being Aloys Gerschwyler. He professed his vows as a monk of our monastery on Christmas Day, 1892, receiving the name Leo. He was ordained to the priesthood by Bishop Edward M. Fitzgerald at St. Andrew's Cathedral in Little Rock on May 3, 1896.

Father Leo served our community for almost three decades in the classroom. As head of the commercial department, Father Leo was noted for his remarkably beautiful handwriting, having studied at the Spencerian School of Business in Louisville, Kentucky.

Through the years he also served as prefect of the academy, secretary-treasurer of the school, and procurator of the monastery. He also spent a brief 10-month interim as prior.

In 1923, Father Leo left the classroom for pastoral work in our Texas parishes. Seven months after his appointment as pastor of St. Mary's Church, Windthorst, Texas, fire ravaged the church there presenting Father Leo with the responsibility of building a new church for his flock.

In less than two years from the date of the fire, a new church was built, with Bishop Joseph Patrick Lynch of Dallas officiating at the solemn blessing of the church.

Another monumental achievement of Father Leo was his desire to see that the people of his parish would neither be isolated nor taxed unjustly by the proposed county road districts of 1923. This three-year long litigation through the courts of Texas up to the United States Supreme Court drew national attention when in 1926 "the highest court in the land listened with interest to the plea in behalf of the people of Windthorst and Scotland," ruling in their favor, thus saving these two communities from isolation and possible extinction.

During the next 10 years of his pastorate, Father Leo and parishioners continued to reduce the church debt even during the years of the Great Depression. In April 1936, Father Leo was hospitalized with double pneumonia. Following his recovery, he was appointed pastor of St. Joseph's Church in Rhineland, Texas, on August 1, 1936.

Shortly after his arrival in Rhineland, it became apparent that his health was not up to par. Father Leo entered the hospital for exploratory surgery which revealed advanced cancer of the liver. Father Leo died on Tuesday, March 30, 1937, at Bethania Hospital in Wichita Falls, Texas.

A Mass was celebrated at St. Mary's Church, Windthorst, Texas—the church that Father Leo built during his pastorate there.

At the time of his death, Father Leo was 66 years old and in the 45th year of his monastic profession, the 41st of his priesthood. He is buried in our cemetery.

