

Brother Andrew Zwysig

June 12th is the anniversary of the death of Brother Andrew Zwysig. John Zwysig was born in the town of Isenthal, Canton Uri, Switzerland, on February 18, 1867. He lived on the family farm along with his four brothers and six sisters.

His father sold hay, potatoes, and cheese made from goats' milk. It was John's duty to shepherd the goats as they grazed in the Alps. He and his brother Michael loved to yodel in the mountains, and Michael became an accomplished yodeler in his native country.

John also attended the Catholic school in his native village until he was 16 years old. Following the completion of school, most Swiss lads had their first job ready-made; they went to the army. Five-foot in stature, John was not tall enough to meet the army's physical requirement.

He then decided to visit the Benedictine abbey of Einsiedeln, which was located 15 miles from his village, to seek a life of dedicated service to God as a monk in that monastery. John had to return home, however, because the quota of farm brothers was presently filled at Einsiedeln.

In 1889, a distant relative of John's had gone to the United States to work as a missionary in Arkansas. This cousin, Father Pius Zwysig, returned to Switzerland in 1897 on business and to visit relatives. John met his cousin and learned from him of the need for vocations at the monastery in Arkansas.

Thus, John came to the United States and to Subiaco with his cousin Father Pius in 1897. He professed his vows as a monk of our monastery on December 8, 1899, receiving the name Andrew.

Brother Andrew began his work at Subiaco by shepherding pigs on the hill where the abbey now stands. He was next assigned to the abbey kitchen as assistant to the cook. His speciality was corn bread. Later, his knowledge of farming was needed to help stock the abbey's food bins. His speciality here was animals.

He took care of the cows and he had a name for each one of them. When the farm superintendent gave the cows numbers instead, and decided to feed them on the principal of efficiency--input to output--Brother Andrew did not approve of such inhumane treatment.

In 1902, he was put in charge of the calves, a position he dependably served for more than four decades. After completing his work each day with the calves, he would climb the ridges and cut firewood for the abbey's needs.

Brother Andrew was short in stature, and on the First Ridge, beside the trunk of a large tree, he built for himself a small hut, similar to a herdsman's hut in the Swiss mountains. Here he had a table, chair, and a built-in bunk-bed. When he was working for long periods in the woods, he would have his lunch and afternoon siesta in his little Swiss chalet.

Brother Andrew spoke with a distinct Swiss-dialect accent and could yodel in the best traditions of the Swiss mountaineers of his native canton. He was a quiet man, always cheerful with a keen interest in all that pertained to the abbey.



Years before his death, his doctor warned him that his heart condition made heavy manual labor dangerous for him; however, Brother Andrew lived to a ripe old age, enjoying a life of work and prayer.

When his health no longer permitted him to lead an active life, Brother Andrew realized that God was calling him. Far from being sad and fearful at the approach of death, he seemed to anticipate it with joy and longing as he spent his final weeks in the infirmary. During his last days of consciousness, he was constantly absorbed in prayer.

He died at St. Anthony's Hospital in Morrilton, Arkansas, on Thursday, June 12, 1952, as a result of old age and impaired circulation.

At the time of his death, Brother Andrew was 85 years old and in the 52nd year of his monastic profession. He is buried in our cemetery.