

Brother Thomas More Martin

January 12th is the anniversary of the death of Brother Thomas More Martin. Michael Patrick Martin was born at Castle Caldwell, County Farmanagh, Ireland, on March 11, 1885. He came to the United States in 1904. He settled in Arkansas and did business in Little Rock and Pine Bluff. Michael Martin came to Subiaco in the spring of 1936, and professed his vows as a monk of our monastery on January 6, 1938, receiving the name Thomas More.

Brother Thomas was a great lover of the English classics and especially of Irish poetry. He could quote by memory long passages from the great authors and his greatest delight was to recount Irish history and folklore. Jokingly he laid claim to two patron saints: St. Thomas More and the Irish poet, Thomas Moore, whom he regarded as a poet second to none, "save, perhaps, Shakespeare."

Brother Thomas served our community as guestmaster. He knew how to understand; that was the secret of his life. It enabled him to infuse a warmth of friendliness and kindness into the greeting he extended to everyone at the monastery door.

If Brother Thomas understood with a deep, human sympathy the hundreds who came to the abbey during his years as guestmaster, he made the understanding of his fellow-monks the most serious study and task of his monastic life. Their joys and sorrows were his joys and sorrows. He went out of his way to share their burdens and with his cheery, Irish optimism dissipated their weight and gripping power on the human spirit. He never forgot the little things that throw such sunshine and warmth into the lives of a community of men.

Two nights before Brother Thomas's death in 1944, Father Michael Lensing (who would later become Abbot Michael) visited him. While the two monks talked about common interests, the conversation shifted to the topic of death. "People in Ireland," said Brother Thomas, "knew death as a friend. When the news came that tragedy had struck and that someone dear had gone, the first comment was 'Thanks be to God.'"

"You know," went on Brother Thomas, "when I grew older I wondered a bit at that unusual attitude. But thinking it over, it is the only answer for people whose Faith has become second nature. Doesn't God's providential hand rule the world? Well then, 'Thanks be to God' that His Will is done."

Brother Thomas More died on Wednesday morning, January 12, 1944, at Smith Hospital in Paris, Arkansas. Earlier he fell on the ice and had undergone an operation for a ruptured hernia, an ailment from which he had suffered for several years.

An hour after the operation, his pulse weakened. Father Edward Chrisman, pastor at Paris, heard his confession and brought him Viaticum. Brother Thomas More insisted that there was no real danger. Quietly and peacefully he died four hours later.

Father Prior Ignatius Bodmayr was celebrant of the funeral Mass for Brother Thomas More on Friday, January 14.

At the time of his death, Brother Thomas More was 58 years old and in the sixth year of his monastic profession. He is buried in our cemetery.

