

Father Robert Lazzari

December 14th is the anniversary of the death of Father Robert Lazzari. Francis Paul Lazzari was born on July 10, 1918, in Tontitown, Arkansas. He received his early education at St. Joseph's School in his hometown.

In July 1934, Francis was at Subiaco to attend the funeral of his older brother Frater Edmund. On this occasion, Prior Ignatius Bodmayr, celebrant of the Mass, invited Francis to join the monastery to take his brother's place. Two months later he entered Subiaco Academy as a sophomore, graduating with the class of 1937.

Francis Lazzari professed his vows as a monk of our monastery on September 16, 1939, receiving the name Robert. Completing his clerical studies while also taking summer courses in math and science at St. Louis University, he was ordained to the priesthood by Bishop Albert L. Fletcher at St. Andrew Cathedral in Little Rock on May 18, 1944.

Father Robert spent the school year 1944-45 at St. Louis University where he was to earn a Master of Science degree the following year. However, to the dismay of his physics instructor who saw in him a budding physicist, Father Robert began a career in secondary school administration, receiving a master of education degree from this university in 1953. He did further graduate work at the University of Texas for seven summers.

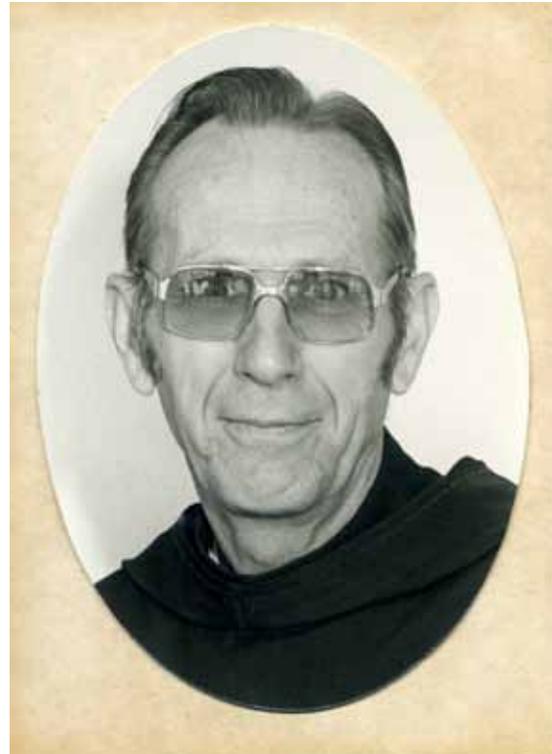
He was rector/principal of Laneri High School in Fort Worth, Texas, from 1945 to 1953; principal of Subiaco Academy from 1953 to 1964, and principal of St. Anne's Academy, Fort Smith, Arkansas, for the school year 1971-72. In spite of being in administration, Father Robert managed to stay close to science by teaching it throughout his career.

From 1964 to 1968 Father Robert was prior of the monastery, superintendent of education, and faculty member in the academy. He was procurator of the abbey and academy from 1968 to 1971. The school year of 1972-73 was devoted to full-time teaching.

Father Robert's talent as an architect/draftsman was put to use in 1973 when he was assigned to Santa Familia Monastery, the abbey's foundation in Belize, Central America, where he spent four years occupied principally in the design and construction of the monastery. In 1977 he returned to the abbey where he served in several capacities in the maintenance department until 1990. For short periods of time during these years, Father Robert traveled to Belize, fulfilling duties at Santa Familia Monastery. In 1982 he was assistant formation director at Subiaco. He celebrated his golden jubilee of monastic profession in 1989.

Father Robert's final appointment abroad came in 1990 when he once again was assigned to our dependent priory in Belize. Following his two-year tenure at Santa Familia Monastery, Father Robert returned to Subiaco in 1992, working in the maintenance department until his one-year assignment in 1994 as chaplain of St. Scholastica Monastery in Fort Smith, Arkansas. This same year he marked his golden sacerdotal jubilee.

During his lifetime Father Robert had bouts with his health, but was generally able to spring back with renewed vigor. A quick grasp of any situation was his trademark in education and mechanics, administration and construction; as retreatmaster and electrician, printer and plumber. He was affectionately called a "master of all trades and jack of none."



Father Robert seemed to have a well-balanced concept of “ora et labora” with the “work of God” taking precedence. His reverence and devotion when celebrant of the Liturgy enhanced the sanctity of the sacred rite.

A logical perspective was given by Father Robert to the many who came to him seeking solutions to difficult matters in their life. Frugal and conservative with his own personal needs, he was kind and understanding to those who needed more.

Officially retired at the abbey by 1995, Father Robert assisted with maintenance and lent a helping hand wherever he saw the need. Just as swiftly as God’s call came to him to come to Subiaco 62 years ago so, too, was the swiftness of the call to take leave. Although health problems hindered some of his activities, his sudden death was a shock to the community when he suffered a fatal heart attack on Saturday, December 14, 1996, while seated at table in the abbey refectory for the evening meal.

In retrospect this seems prophetic. It was mid-Advent, the season when we await the Lord’s coming. The reading at Mass that day spoke of the suddenness with which the prophet Elijah was taken to heaven: “You were taken aloft in a whirlwind” (Sirach 48:9).

In his Rule, St. Benedict places the oratory and refectory on an equal plane: we break bread together at both tables—church and dining hall. Thus, this communal Saturday evening meal was a continuation of the day’s Liturgy for Father Robert and confreres.

A Wake service was held on Tuesday, December 17, at 7:00 p.m. with Father Peter Sharum, OSB, presiding. The Most Reverend Andrew J. McDonald, Bishop of Little Rock, concluded the service.

On Wednesday, December 18, Abbot Jerome Kodell was celebrant and homilist of the 10:00 a.m. Mass of Christian burial and performed the final obsequies.

At the time of his death, Father Robert was 78 years old and in the 57th year of his monastic profession, the 52nd of his priesthood. He is buried in our cemetery.