

Father Bonaventure Maechler

August 1st is the anniversary of the death of Father Bonaventure Maechler. Leo Maechler was born in Basel, Canton Basel-Stadt, Switzerland, on February 3, 1894. He made his first Holy Communion and received the sacrament of Confirmation at the abbey of Einsiedeln. Before coming to the United States, Leo Maechler studied in Switzerland and France.

At the age of 20, Leo Maechler traveled to the United States and to Subiaco in the company of Father Leo Gerschwyler who was returning to Subiaco after a visit in Europe. The two set sail from the port of Genoa, Italy, arriving in New York on November 10, 1914, and reaching their destination at Subiaco on November 21.

Leo Maechler professed his vows as a monk of our monastery on September 8, 1918, receiving the name Bonaventure. He was ordained to the priesthood by Bishop John B. Morris here at Subiaco on April 29, 1923.

An accomplished linguist and scholar, Father Bonaventure taught Latin, French, and history in the academy for 20 years. In the abbey seminary he taught Greek, theology, and Scripture. It was well known about this monk who was short of stature but big of heart, that no one could fail his course because he did not have the heart to give less-than-perfect grades.

While teaching, Father Bonaventure was also involved in weekend pastoral ministry, serving the missions in the Subiaco area. In fact, during and after his years in the classroom, Father Bonaventure served in practically every parish cared for by the monks of the abbey, either as pastor, assistant, or long-term substitute. Also, he fulfilled the same kind of service in countless other parishes in Arkansas and neighboring states.

His was in a special way a ministry of priestly availability at any time, place, and circumstance; and the last 30 years of his life found him always on call to go here or to substitute there. Even after he had passed the age of 75, Father Bonaventure would pack his bag at a moment's notice to be off and filling in for someone for two or three months at a time.

In this going and coming, if he were asked by a confrere where to or where from, he was likely to answer with a simple, "Where the abbot sent me." Once when a monk persisted and asked again, "which way are you headed?" Father Bonaventure replied, "West," and he was off again to a distant horizon.

Such, too, was his final journey; Father Bonaventure walked to the nurses' station in the hospital to announce simply that he was feeling very bad, and in a moment he was gone.

Father Bonaventure died of a heart attack at 3:15 a.m. on Friday, August 1, 1975, at Conway County Hospital in Morrilton, Arkansas, where he was serving as hospital chaplain.

Although his health had been failing, Father Bonaventure's death was unexpected. Just two days before, he had visited the abbey, and on the final day of his life, he had carried out his regular ministry as hospital chaplain.

At the time of his death, Father Bonaventure was 81 years old and in the 56th year of his monastic profession, the 52nd of his priesthood. He is buried in our cemetery.

