

# Assumption

## ABBNEY NEWSLETTER

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July, 2019

## Thomas Wordekemper Celebrates Twenty-Five Years of Priesthood

Father Thomas Wordekemper was born in West Point, NE, on October 25, 1956, attended Guardian Angels—a coeducational parochial grade school—and Central Catholic, both run by the Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity. He attended Mount Marty College in Yankton, SD, and graduated with a degree in Music Education. After joining the Abbey and pronouncing solemn vows, he was sent to St. Meinrad Seminary, IN. He did his clinical pastoral experience at Deaconess Hospital in Evansville, IN, his internship here at St. Mary's Parish under Father Brian, and graduated with an M.A. in Catholic Thought, and a Master of Divinity degree. He was ordained on June 25, 1994.

**What did you find that you were least prepared for about the priesthood?**

Being a Benedictine monk when I went into the seminary, I never thought I'd be the pastor of a parish. I thought I'd come home to the Abbey and continue living monastic life. And so I didn't pay good

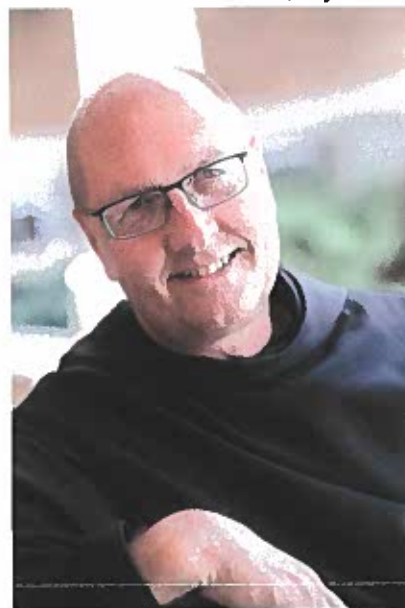
attention in some classes. And now, as a pastor, I feel that I don't know enough about canon law and marriage, hospital medical ethics and things like that.

**What were you best prepared for?**

St. Meinrad Seminary offered excellent training in liturgy and liturgical style. They emphasized that the role of the presider is one of leadership: his bearing and manner ought to edify the faithful, and he should know what is important and what isn't. Our practicums at St. Meinrad were, indeed, practical, and I am grateful to Father Aurelius Bobereck for his fine teaching.

**What was most surprising to you about life as a priest? Something you had no idea about until you became one?**

In being a pastor you must be available 24/7, 365 days of the year. I wasn't quite prepared for that. And I am awed by the genuine respect people have for the priesthood and sacraments, in spite of all the current scandal that has been connected with ministry. Good, active parish-



Photos by Jerry

ioners understand and respect a priest. They don't put me on a pedestal; they just seem to understand the importance of the role of a priest.

**After you were ordained in 1994, you were here at the Abbey until 2009 when you were sent to Mount Marty in Yankton as chaplain to the Benedictine Sisters and to the college. You were brought back to Richardton to be a pastor. When did you reach a "tipping point" when you felt comfortable and at home with the priesthood?**

I spent two summers at Yellowstone Park. Each weekend, I provided four services for people vacationing

there. They came to Mass because they *wanted* to be there, and they attended with energy and enthusiasm. Those two summers changed me. I was so edified by those people. And at Mount Marty I had a ministry of presence on campus. I was always dressed as a Benedictine monk, and in that official role I interacted with everyone I met. Absolutely everyone: students, sisters, professors, service providers, visitors. Everyone. That meant a great deal to people. I loved Yankton. It stretched me and I grew there. The college forced me out of my insular tendencies and I had to deal with real issues. Here at the Abbey we monks have a common goal of seeking God. But on a college campus, wearing my habit, I might well have been the only Christ-like figure the students encountered, and I wanted to be authentic and joyful, making a point of saying "Hello" even if I didn't know their names.

**What aspects of priesthood continues to be the biggest challenge for you, even after many years in the ministry?**

Putting others first. I am an introvert. Being out there and available is not natural to me, and it can be exhausting.

**How do you think the modern Church has affected the lives of Catholic people?**

Few people think about Vatican II anymore, in terms of what it was then and what it is now. I learned to serve Mass in Latin, but the changes came already when I was nine years old. The Church has always



been good about fostering community. Active parishioners work for the good of the parish. The parish couldn't function without the wonderful volunteering that goes on. We are a community.

**Was Assumption Abbey always the community you wanted to join? Or were there other religious orders you considered? The diocesan priesthood perhaps?**

The Benedictine Sisters in Yankton were a very big influence in my life. Their joy and life of prayer were such an example! Sister Matthew Wehri told me that I had a vocation to be a monk at Assumption Abbey. It took eight years for me to schedule a visit, but I did, and I entered when I was twenty-eight.

**What do you think is most distinctive about Assumption Abbey?**

We are very down-to-earth because of our rural setting. The geography is isolating; there are relatively few people out here. And the stark landscape creates warmth and appreciation for other human beings, as well as the details in nature: pasch flowers, meadowlarks etc.

**Do you believe that you have**

**acquired wisdom of some kind over the years in the ministry of the priesthood?**

I hope so. Simple wisdom. I've learned that you can *never* judge a book by its cover. We have no idea what people are dealing with privately, which means that we must always be more compassionate.

**What gives you the most satisfaction as you look back over your years as a priest so far?**

I am so grateful to help someone get closer to God and find comfort in God's presence. That can happen anywhere. Not necessarily in the confessional. People stop after Mass and say a few words, and their eyes and face tell you everything. They are so thankful for a sermon. Their appreciation is very humbling to me.

**What is the longest you've been away from the Abbey in Richardton since you've been ordained? How did this affect you and your connection to the monastic community?**

I was in Yankton on assignment for six and a half years. I was very fortunate because I had the Benedictine Sisters as a strong support in monastic life, but I was distanced from the daily happenings at the Abbey. I came back to be pastor of St. Mary's, without much experience and at a distance of twenty years from seminary training. I'm still trying to catch my breath. It's overwhelming!

**If you spoke to a young man about religious life in a Bene-**

**dictine monastery as one of the best things he could be called to do, how might you explain that?**

I was the Vocation Director at the Abbey for twelve years, and I invited plenty of young men to come and see. And while in Yankton I invited young men to visit the Abbey. I encouraged them to listen to what's in their heart. Where do you find peace? That's the big issue. In some ways, I think the Church has failed in teaching us how to listen to God's voice. And society at large certainly doesn't listen. We need to learn how to be comfortable with silence; how to be open to silence and hear what God is asking of us. I encourage people to arrive early at Mass and just sit in silence, not expecting to fill that quiet space with the rosary or with hymns. Just be quiet and listen. The life of a Benedictine monk is about listening with the heart.

**When you think of Assumption Abbey, what do you visualize?**

The Abbey towers. The beauty and symmetry of the church: proportions, lines, arches, the solid Romanesque architecture, which seems to suit Benedictines. I was very involved, with Father Odo Muggli and Brother John Seiler, in *Renewing God's House Together* in 2000. The church is a wonderful and sacred place.

**What would you like people to know about you?**

Part of me needs to be creative. I miss playing the organ during liturgy. Being

creative at the keyboard and inspiring the monks, helping them to worship, is very satisfying. I love to paint and do repair work in churches. When I do this I am very relaxed. Bringing beauty to these places is deeply satisfying; it's not about me but about helping others. In liturgical service, it's so important to be present and careful. □



## **Brother Symeon Rubbelke Pronounces Solemn Vows**

Brother Symeon Rubbelke was born on April 21, 1988, and baptized with the name Matthew when his family was living in Beulah, ND. They moved to Minot when he was eight years old. Symeon has younger twin sisters and an older brother with a Ph.D. in Systematic Theology.

His first awareness of Assumption Abbey came from a trip to Medora. He and his

family stopped in to look around. When he was in grade school, he also remembers being with his aunt when she stopped in at Sacred Heart Monastery near the Abbey to visit Sister Jill West. Matthew had interest in religion, however he had no interest in being a monk; he wanted to be a drifter and see the world. Throughout high school and into his twenties he was not terribly interested in dating, although his friends told him that he would make a wonderful father because he is naturally caring and patient. Assumption Abbey's Brother Aelred Reid encouraged Matthew to visit for a week to experience monastic life. Instead, Matthew volunteered at the Abbey for a whole summer, and although he enjoyed life at the Abbey he had a long-standing interest in Eastern spirituality.

So he visited a Byzantine Catholic monastery in St. Nazianz, WI. There, Father Maximus said to him, "You seem to have a monastic vocation." Matthew thought he might have to visit many monastic communities to discover exactly which one he ought to join, but Maximus said, "Don't look at more monasteries because you will fall in love with each one of them." He returned to Minot and allowed things to rest a while. At Brother Aelred's funeral he made his decision; he felt at home at Assumption Abbey and applied for candidacy. He has been at the Abbey ever since. Of solemn vows Brother Symeon says,

"This is the most serious commitment I have ever made in my life. Without God's grace I wouldn't think of doing it. And knowing that, I must rely on God. That's why I'm here."

Many people think of monastic life as essentially a life of solitude, yet monks live together and rub shoulders every day. "We have frequent moments of solitude," Br. Symeon explains, "but we are closer than people might suspect. The modern family does not spend a lot of time at home these days, not even for meals. But monks are together 24/7. We see each other all the time: at prayer, meals and recreation. And we are here together to receive guests."

A core part of Benedictine life is work and prayer (*Ora et Labora*). Outside of choir and private prayer, Br. Symeon has been working in the garden and doing housekeeping, assignments that he does not look upon as drudgery. Rather, for him there is an element of joy in such work because he is being of service to his brothers.

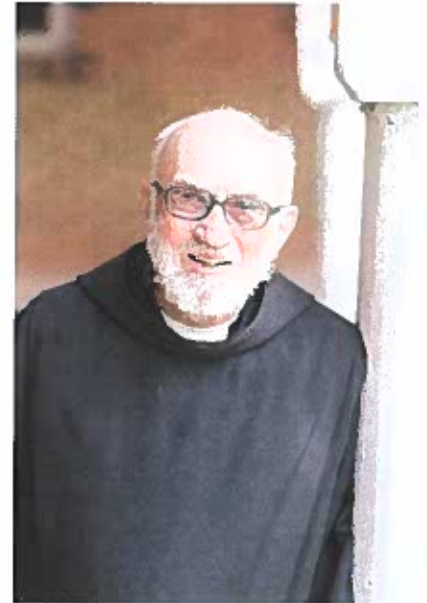
Br. Symeon has also found time for hobbies; this past year he has brewed beer with Brother Louie, and he has boiled boxelder sap to make syrup with Candidate Stephen. "Brother Placid tells me to get outside," Br. Symeon says, and here while walking on the prairie he remembers to reinterpret the world through monastic eyes: mistakes of the past become good lessons for change. Insensitivity is an incentive for one to become more and more God-centered.

"It's a real comfort to me that I will be here at the Abbey for the rest of my life, and be buried in the Abbey graveyard."

Br. Symeon is naturally a spontaneous *Bon vivant* who is always willing and generous. Being a part of the group is important to him, and making friends is easy. Monastic life, however, is not very spontaneous. Yet Br. Symeon is happy with being here with good people. "The inflexible monastic schedule reminds us that nothing ought to get in the way of God." In Br. Symeon's view, the Abbey is a microcosm of the world. "We reflect the world. We are not so different from everyone else. Although many people out there may not understand us and they see us as different, but we are just like them." Monks are not perfect. Each of them has his flaws, his own peculiar ways of irritating others. Br. Symeon remembers a saying of Rabbi Meir Baal HaNes: "The shell is dirty but the nut is good." □



## Requiescat in pace



Photos by Jacy

Father Terrence (Gerald) Kardong, a pillar to this monastic community, died peacefully in his sleep on March 24, 2019.

Gerald was born in Minneapolis, MN, on October 22, 1936, to Ralph and Cecilia (Mundt) Kardong. His family belonged to St. Albert the Great Parish, staffed by the Dominicans, where he received his elementary education. Nevertheless, he traveled all the way out to dumpy little Richardton, ND, for high school and junior college because he had three uncles who were monks at Assumption Abbey: Frederic, Adrian and Jerome Mundt. He entered the novitiate in 1956, receiving the name Terrence, and pronounced vows in 1957.

Terrence attended St. John's University, Collegeville, MN, where he earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in Philosophy, and

after completing seminary studies at Assumption Abbey, he was ordained a priest on May 11, 1963. From 1962 through 1968 he taught in the Abbey prep school and, during the summer months, attended the Catholic University of America in Washington, DC, studying classical languages. He earned a Master of Arts degree in Latin. From 1965 to 1967 he was chaplain to Assumption College in Richardton, and continued to teach Latin and Theology. In 1968 he was appointed Director of Formation at the Abbey. When the junior college closed, Father Terrence taught at Mary College, now the University of Mary in Bismarck, from 1971 to 1975 and again from 1977 to 1982.

Father Terrence was beginning to think that his degree in Latin was all for naught, when Latin was being set aside for the vernacular, but then he was sent to Rome for monastic studies at the Pontifical University of Sant' Anselmo from 1975 to 1977 and earned a Licentiate in Theology which launched his career in scholarly work on the Rule of St. Benedict and other monastic and patristic texts. He published extensively in periodicals, many of them outside the United States, and traveled near and far giving conferences because of those publications. His major work was *Benedict's Rule: A Translation and Commentary* published in 1996. He also published *Commentaries on Benedict's Rule* (1986), *Together Unto Life Everlasting* (1986), *Asking Benedict: A Study Program on the Rule* (1992), *Benedictines*

## From the Archives:



Placid (John) Hoenerbach (1867-1955) was the second abbot of Assumption Abbey (1915-1924). He was a music teacher in St. Gall's College, the first school the monks had in North Dakota, and was sent to various missions and parishes, among them Sacred Heart Convent and hospital in Yankton, SD, when this photo was taken in 1906, given to the Abbey archives by Yankton's Sister Euphrosine Gred. Placid was most famous in our community's memory for taking the blame for the bankruptcy in 1924. When Placid was elected abbot, he had no idea of the financial distress in which Abbot-Bishop Vincent Wehrle had left the community. It was an impossible debt of what today would be \$7,500,000, while the abbey's gross yearly income in today's currency was \$450,000. Placid succeeded in consolidating loans and refinancing them but it was too late. He died in shame in 1955.

(Religious Order Series 1992), *Day By Day with Saint Benedict* (2005), *The Life of St. Benedict by Gregory the Great: Translation and Commentary* (2009), *Pillars of Community: Four Rules of Pre-Benedictine Monastic Life* (2010), *Conversations with Saint Benedict* (2012), *Saint Columban: His Life, Rule, and Legacy* (2017) and *Benedict Backwards: Reading the Rule in the Twenty-First Century* (2017).

In 1984 he spent eight weeks in Australia giving conferences. He spent two months in the Philippines in 1990, three weeks in England in 1992 and two months in Nigeria in 1997 doing the same. In February of 1981 Terrence became the editor of *The American Benedictine Review* and held that position until last year. He translated articles for that publication from French, Italian and German.

In addition to his monastic writing, Father Terrence wrote

the 75<sup>th</sup> jubilee history of the Diocese of Bismarck in 1985, the centennial history of the Diocese of Fargo in 1988, and the history of Catholic life at Fort Berthold Indian Reservation in 1989. He was a faculty member of the Great Plains Institute of Theology from 1971 to 1995. He was also an environmental activist through his participation in the Dakota Resource Council since 1978, frequently a member of the board and secretary for the group. But he was a regular monk, too, helping with chores such as washing pots and pans and weeding the garden. He believed that a monk should also work with his hands.

Some were put off by Terrence's impatience. He often walked away in the middle of a conversation, and certainly did not suffer fools gladly. His gruff exterior, however, often gave way to kindness, and a fond-

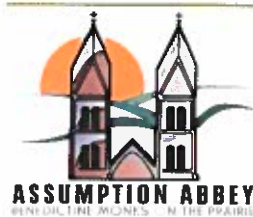
ness for teasing. In certain ways, he could be very generous with his time. His ability to cut through the superfluous will be greatly missed in the monastic chapter.

He was preceded in death by his parents, and is survived by his brother, David Kardong, of Hagerstown, IN, and his sister Judy Foley of Plymouth, MN.

A Vigil Service was held on Thursday evening March 28 at Assumption Abbey. On Friday March 29, the Mass of Christian Burial was celebrated followed by burial in the Abbey cemetery.

## FEBRUARY CHRONICLE

February 1: It's a soup and strudel day at the Abbey. In the kitchen, our cooks Cathy and Jane are making strudel with Br. Alban, and our cook Darla is making the soup. There's nothing better when it comes to German-Hungarian cuisine. The Ottomans, it is thought, brought something like strudel to Austria-Hungary, but the local Danube Swabians, or "Shwoveh" as they called themselves, made strudel their own. Any leftovers rolled up in strudel dough transformed them into an elegant meal. Nowadays, however, making strudel is becoming a lost art. Something that used to be seen on every German-Hungarian table in the mid-west is not common anymore; even the Catholic Daughters in traditional German parishes are losing their veteran strudel makers. There are YouTubes, of



*Partners in Prayer* is a publication of the Abbey offered free of charge, a shortened version of the monastic office prayed here throughout each day by the monks. We offer this prayer book so that our friends may join us, even if they are not physically with us in the monastic choir. *Partners in Prayer* is based on the Liturgy of the Hours, the official public prayer life of the Church, the same prayer that punctuates the daily life of monks, sanctifying our daily life and labor, along with the celebration of the Mass. Hymns, psalms, scripture readings and orations nourish our hearts, and by being in choir together we support one another in our common vocation. There is comfort in knowing that friends are joining us through *Partners in Prayer* as we lift up our hearts to God.

So often, around Christmas-time, we receive letters asking why *Partners in Prayer* is no

course, but Viennese strudel is not exactly the same as our local variety. ❖

February 5: At our request, Bismarck's D&N Cinematics comes out on the coldest day of the year to make a winter video of the Abbey. It's so cold that there are ice crystals in the air and sundogs can be seen. D&N flew their drone outside, as well as inside the church. The

## Development Office

Br. Michael Taffe, O.S.B.

longer mailed "to my address," and it's because each year you must re-subscribe or you are left off the mailing list. We do this to avoid mailing to people who don't want the publication. It is our aim to mail only to those who really want to use this prayer tool.

You can subscribe online by going to our website and clicking "Partners in Prayer" under Publications. Or be sure to fill out the brown card that will be included in the September white letter that will reach you in a month or two.

What is almost as good as having you here in the Abbey church, joining your voices with ours as we sing hymns, psalms, petitions, responses and orations is your participation in our prayer while at home, wherever you live. Together we lift up our minds and hearts to God, carrying with us all of humankind. □



results can be seen by going to YouTube and searching for "The Importance of Silence at Assumption Abbey." ❖

February 10: The monks are invited to the Benedictine sisters next door for what will very possibly be our last celebration of St. Scholastica's feast together. The sisters are moving to Dickinson this summer,

leaving their monastery. A photo was taken of us all: a bitter-sweet event. ❖

February 27: Abbot Daniel arrives back from a gathering of Benedictine superiors in Alabama at what was called the *Quadrennial Meeting of Benedictine Abbots and Prioresses*: 75 monastic superiors representing more than 2,700 Benedictine men and women. (Quadrennial means every four years.) It's important for superiors to hobnob, too! ❖

## MARCH CHRONICLES

March 4: With March here, winter is not over in North Dakota. In fact, March is notorious for its temper. Today the Interstate highway is closed. Schools are closed. And the wind is blowing so hard that it's creating a chorus of whistles in the third floor dormer windows. Even a polar bear would be disgusted with this arctic blowing and cold. ❖

March 6: Ash Wednesday and twenty-five University of Mary students are here on a silent retreat. They are discrete examples for us all, although we are dying to know (but cannot ask) how they managed to get out of classes at the university. Did they have to bribe their teachers? Pay classmates to take notes for them? ❖

March 12: Prior Michael and Subprior Jacob leave at 2:30 a.m. for a flight to Bogotá, Colombia, where they are staying for two weeks. Making connections with our brother monks there is very important, and we are

hoping that the visit will further cement relationships between the Abbey and the *Monasterio Benedictino de Tibatí*. ❖

March 14: At Vespers, Candidate Craig becomes Novice Craig, beginning his canonical year which, for us, lasts exactly a year and a day. He receives a black cassock and in it he creates quite a smart figure. ❖

March 19: The so-called "Oases of Lent" begins with the great stand-alone feasts of St. Joseph (March 19), St. Benedict (March 21), the Annunciation (March 25) and some people would include the feast of St. Patrick (March 17). These always fall within Lent, and therefore provide a little "refreshment" from the rigors of the season. But just how wildly to celebrate can be controversial; around here we dare not pull out all the stops for form's sake. ❖

March 27: Prior Michael and Subprior Jacob return from Bogotá to find snow still on the ground. The spring thaw is very slow, preventing flooding, which is a boon. ❖

## April CHRONICLES

April 1: Abbot Daniel begins his rounds, visiting each monk in his room, which means that some of them are doing their spring cleaning, and—dare one say it—the only cleaning of the year? ❖

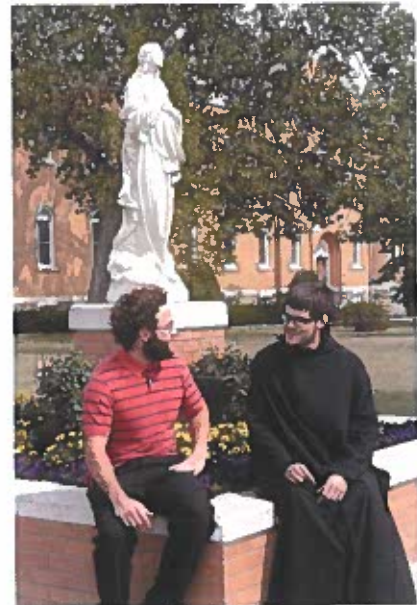
April 4: Four hundred high school students gather at the Abbey for choir and small-

group vocal competition. Schools from southwest North Dakota are participating. Judges always have something good to say. ❖

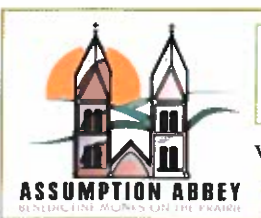
April 6: Brother Symeon and Candidate Stephen boil down twelve gallons of boxelder sap to three cups of syrup that tastes just like butterscotch. ❖

April 13: The Easter Open House is successful, depending upon which side of the floor you're on. The monks thought the day went well because all the Easter bread was gone within forty-five minutes, and the rest of the bread was quickly sold, too. Customers, however, were disappointed that the Easter bread vanished so quickly, and shouldn't there be twice as much of it? (We want to keep Br. Alban alive beyond the Easter bread season, thank you!) ❖

April 21: Easter! One of the monks in the house has an Easter birthday: Br. Symeon. ❖



Br. Symeon with friend Joseph Greer



# Newsletter

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## Benedictine Saints

July 8<sup>th</sup> is the feast of Saint Grimbald, a name not many people would love to have. Born in northeastern France in 825, he became a Benedictine monk of Saint-Bertin in present-day Saint-Omer, France. After ordination he gained a reputation as a scholar. Meanwhile, King Alfred of Wessex asked the archbishop of Reims for monks to be sent to England. The archbishop sent Grimbald, one of his most valued assistants. The king founded the University of Oxford to welcome Grimbald, and offered a bishopric, but Grimbald wanted the life of a court-scholar instead and helped the king translate Latin works into

Anglo-Saxon. With him, he brought manuscripts, including one by Prudentius—now at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge—and the Utrecht Psalter. In 889, when the see of Canterbury became vacant, the king encouraged Grimbald to take it, but Grimbald refused. After Alfred's death, his son, King Edward, persuaded Grimbald not to return to France. During Grimbald's last illness he got out of bed and knelt on the floor to receive the holy viaticum. Thereafter, he asked to be left alone. Four days later the community was called to his room and the saint calmly breathed his last in his 83<sup>rd</sup> year, on July 8, 901.

July 18<sup>th</sup> is the feast of Saint Bruno of Segni, born to a noble family in Piedmont in 1049. After studies in Bologna and Siena, Bruno became a canon of the cathedral in Siena. He was appointed bishop of Segni in 1080. Bruno accompanied Pope Urban II to France in 1095 where the pope launched the First Crusade. He also attended the Council of Tours. Returning to his diocese, he was imprisoned by Count Ainulf on behalf of Emperor Henry IV, and later withdrew, when he was freed, to Monte Cassino where he became a Benedictine monk. When the people of Segni demanded his return, his abbot persuaded the pope to allow Bruno to remain at Monte Cassino, even while remaining bishop of Segni. Bruno became the abbot of Monte Cassino in 1107. He was zealous for reform, writing against such things as simony. He became papal legate to France and then to Sicily. When he rebuked Pope Paschal II for making concessions to the emperor-elect of Germany, Pope Pascal ordered Bruno to resign as abbot and return to his diocese, which he did, remaining there until his death in 1123. Bruno was a leading scriptural commentator of his age. He once made the mistake of claiming that priests who committed sinful acts could not perform the sacraments, but wrongdoing does not impede priestly functions. Bruno was canonized in 1183. He left behind 145 homilies, that are still preserved, as well as other documents. □

