Saint Hugbert was a monk and priest in the diocese of Soissons, having entered the monastery when he was twelve years old. Three bishops were present at his first Holy Mass. He was given to fasting and prayer throughout his life, particularly on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. He died in 735, and his feast is on May 30. If he is not, he should be patron of particularly cute and huggable babies.

Saints Peter, Walabonsus, Sabinian, Wistremund, Habentius and Jeremias were monks in Cordova Spain who—following the example of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego—boldly defied a Mohammedan judge and were executed for their faith. On their way to the place of execution they encouraged each other and were cheerful “as if they were going to a feast” (quoted from A Benedictine Martyrology by Alexius Hoffmann, OSB). Jeremias was whipped to death. The others were strangled. Their bodies were bound to stakes and exposed to public view. Afterwards, they were burned and their ashes thrown into the river in 851. Their feast day is June 7.

Benedictine Saints

Blessed Itala Mela—born in 1904—was a lapsed Catholic until she experienced a sudden conversion in the 1920s and became a Benedictine oblate. She was a mystic and wrote about the Trinity. Pope Francis approved a miracle attributed to her in 2015 and she was beatified two years later. The miracle concerned the revival of a newborn whose body was in a state of clinical death. Itala’s parents were non-believers. Her grandparents prepared her for first communion and confirmation, but she slipped into atheism after the death of her brother at age nine. She had a reawakening of faith in adulthood on the feast of the Immaculate Conception. Her motto became “Lord, I will follow you unto the darkness, unto death.” While studying classics at the University of Genoa, she came under the spiritual guidance of Alfredo Ildefonso Schuster, a Benedictine abbot and cardinal. She experienced a vision in 1928: a beam of holy light at the tabernacle in a church in Pontremoli. She continued to receive visions throughout the 1930s. Itala composed a series of spiritual exercises for the faithful which were well received. Her writings are popular in Italy. She died a holy death on April 29, 1957. All of her writings have been approved in the evaluation of her cause.
creating a many-layered flaky pastry. German-Hungarians brought this recipe with them to the wilds of North America where humble pie was et, a lot.

January 2: The men in formation hurry to take down the Christmas tree and decorations in the dining room because word has been received that the flooring installers are coming back. They will also lay tile and carpet in the walkway. A generous crew of monks tears out the old carpet, along with the scuff board, and throws it into the bed of the old International truck from the farm, which Br. Placid has great difficulty in starting.

January 14: A strong wind lasting all night pulls a great many shingles from the abbey roof and leaves them scattered over the lawn and street. Peak gusts of 67 miles per hour were recorded. Light fixtures to the south of the church were shaken loose and damaged.

January 15: The flooring installers have finished the cafeteria and walkway. They did a marvelous job. Both places look very neat and clean.

For the student of history, the role of Catholic culture in 18th and 19th century Enlightenment Europe is a perennially interesting question. In his wide-ranging study *Rethinking the Enlightenment: Faith in the Age of Reason* (Sophia Institute Press, 2020) University of Mary professor Joseph T. Stuart (JS) offers an accessible and absorbing contribution to Enlightenment studies, viewing the era through three lenses: Conflict, Engagement, and Retreat.

The first section walks the well-trod path of Enlightenment Conflict in France (where cultural clash was strongest) in an interesting way. JS places rationalist thought leaders Rousseau and Voltaire in profile alongside the profoundly moving account of the Carmelite nuns of Compiègne, persecuted and eventually executed by guillotine in July 1794 for refusing to adapt. In a very strong opening, JS juxtaposes these two stories into one captivating narrative.

The second section follows a less conventional Enlightenment story that developed in Italy. Rather than conflict, we here find an opening of fruitful Engagement between Catholic culture and scientific exploration. JS highlights contributions of brilliant Catholic women such as mathematician Maria Agnesi and anatomist Anna Morandi, who found social space in the world of science and staunch support from the pontificate of Benedict XIV, the “Enlightenment Pope”. We also learn how the forward thinking pontiff himself integrated groundbreaking science into Catholic culture, contributing a 4-volume study about the use of scientific principles in determining whether a healing is natural or miraculous. These principles are still in use today by the congregation for causes of beatification. Happily, the role of “enlightened” Benedictine monasteries provides a substantial closure for the section.

The third section tells a tale of parallel coexistence, or Retreat. Here JS centers the narrative in the English-speaking world of the British Isles and American Colonies. The Enlightenment story is shown through two cultures, running in tandem: the scientific rational (typified by Benjamin Franklin) moving alongside the “Great Awakening” culture of Christian household retreat and religious revival (using a main paradigm of the Wesleys and Methodism). These two cultures were not in conflict, nor real exchange, but coexisted to societal fruition.

Because of numerous primary anecdotes and an engaging style, both specialists and the casually interested will find the work enjoyable. Kudos to Joseph T. Stuart for delivering a work of scholarship to anyone interested in the role of Catholic culture during the 18th and 19th century Enlightenment.
We can’t thank you enough for your generous contributions that made this year’s Giving Hearts Day a success. On February 11, 2021, nearly twenty one million dollars was raised from 41,955 donors, all of it going to excellent causes. How heart-warming it is to know of you kind people, ready and willing to support good causes! The money that has come to Assumption Abbey will go directly to Colegio San Benito de Tibatí in Colombia, a school that was founded by our own Fr. Valerian Odermann, OSB, and the monks of the Tibatí monastery in Bogotá. In 1960, four Benedictine monks from Assumption Abbey founded a Catholic school, through the invitation of the archbishop of Bogotá, Luis Concha Códoba, and eventually the mission of Colegio San Carlos was extended to the less privileged. These days, the world-wide pandemic has affected everyone. Colegio San Benito de Tibatí serves students whose parents can’t always find enough for tuition payments. To ensure a solid Catholic education for these young people, your money is being used for teacher salaries, maintenance, supplies and scholarships. You are a godsend for these young Colombian men and women and we thank you.

November 13: A monk-crew hauls tables and chairs out of the cafeteria so that new flooring can be put down. Most of these solid-oak tables and chairs were built and carved by Fr. Raphael Knapp nearly ninety years ago; they are beautiful but heavy as marble.

November 16: A monk-crew scrapes up the old tiles from the dining room, glued down when the cafeteria was built back in the 1960s. Br. John-Pat stumbled with a wheel barrow full of tiles and fell, leaving a big gash in his forehead. He had to be taken to the ER for a CT scan, and received stitches that go right through his left eyebrow. He has a nice battle wound now, to show for his valiant service!

December 16: Fr. Thomas must say Mass standing outside the double doors of the Richardton Health Center, for the residents who sit in the lobby. They are pleased that Fr. Denis is there, inside with them, and able to distribute communion.

December 17: Monks have been wondering when the floor of the dining room and walkway will be completed. This is the story: the floor guys went home for Thanksgiving and caught covid-19. Thank goodness none of them became seriously ill. They will be back as soon as they are well again.

December 25: A blessed Christmas we are having, thanks in large part to Br. Alban who put together a wonderful Christmas dinner, his 25th to date.

January 7: Our cooks Jane and Cathy are helping Br. Alban make strudel. The project really truly requires three cooks. Dough is stretched thin enough to read a newspaper through, then a sweet apple or pumpkin filling is rolled up inside and the strudel is baked.

Continued on page 7
equipment back to good use. With plenty of prayer and hard work, the project will bear fruit.

An afterthought: the image of a monk is often associated with candles, and indeed, monks spend a good deal of time in church where candles are lit for liturgical celebration. By church law, these candles are required to be made of beeswax, a byproduct of honey production. Wax is secreted from glands of worker bees and is used to build honeycomb where pollen, honey and brood is stored in a miraculous geometric construction. Who would guess that bees are so architectural! Honeycomb cells are extremely efficient, sections of rhombic dodecahedra with dihedral angles of all adjacent surfaces measuring exactly 120 degrees, an angle that minimizes surface area. And the shape of the cells is such that honeycomb layers nest into each other. Beeswax is used by humans for waterproofing, as a lubricant, for casting metals and glass, and as a polish for wood and leather, besides being burned as candles. It is edible and approved for food use in most countries. Honeycomb is consumed everywhere. Nevertheless, beeswax is far more lucrative to sell than honey; it is estimated that 53 to 66 lbs. of honey is needed to produce 2.2 lbs. of wax.

And so it goes with busy bees! May God bless all bees and beekeepers, and may they flourish!

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REQUIESCAT IN PACE

Our Father Denis Richard Fournier died in the early morning hours of January 12, 2021 at the Richardton Health Center, just down the street from the Abbey.

Fr. Denis was from Red Lake Falls, MN. He was born prematurely, and it was his luck that an aunt, a nun from Mount Saint Benedict in Crookston, was a nurse-specialist in premature baby care. Later, when he was five, she made a Benedictine habit for him, and he paraded down the street with the pastor, Fr. Paul Cardin, pretending to say the Breviary as he did.

He came to Assumption Abbey as a junior in high school and entered the novitiate after high school and two years of college. He received the name Denis because Abbot Cuthbert wanted to honor Archabbot Denis Strittmatter, the President of the Congregation at the time. As a junior, Frater Denis completed college at St. John’s, MN, and after solemn vows began work on an MA in English at Marquette. He was ordained “simplex” after studying theology at Assumption Abbey, then finished seminary at Conception Abbey.

After receiving an MA, he put in a short time as an assistant pastor, but returned to teaching, and worked as a registrar until the Abbey College closed in 1971. He was sent out to teach in Great Falls, MT, like so many of our monk-professors, in order to pay off the Abbey’s $160,000+ debt. After two years there, he moved to the University of Mary in Bismarck.

Abbot Robert West brought him home to write a history of Assumption Abbey. Fr. Denis immersed himself in archival study and made good progress on the book until Abbot Robert also appointed him prior, and time for research and writing became limited. Although he was popular as a prior, Fr. Denis did not enjoy a position of authority. When Lawrence Wagner became the abbot, Fr. Denis asked for an assignment in Bogotá, Colombia, just to slip out of the burden of priorship. In South America he became director of the primary school of Colegio San Carlos, the private, bilingual school run by the monks of Tibatí. In 1983 he returned to North Dakota.

In 1989 he earned a Ph.D. in English from the University of Nebraska, Lincoln, and continued to teach in Bismarck until 2003 when, for health reasons, he had to retire to limited pastoral work. He greatly enjoyed helping out in Wibaux and Glendive, MT, and at New Town on the Fort Berthold Reservation. In 2014 he had an aortic heart valve replacement. In his last years he enjoyed playing cards, shucking corn, shelling peas, snapping beans, and working in the Abbey archives. Fr. Denis was very proud of being related to Blessed Marie Anne Blondin, the Quebec foundress of the Sisters of St. Anne.

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ii. Father Edward was in charge of St. Meinrad Abbey Press, and modified a new press building, including added footage, without the permission of the abbot.
But by then beekeeping had changed. Bee yards were no longer three miles apart, and each year a new disease was brought in with commercial hives from California. To begin with, there was American and European foulbrood, and also noosema, chalkbrood and stonebrood. These are bacterial and fungal diseases that are treated with expensive antibiotics. Tracheal mites showed up in the early 1980s, which required vaporizing menthol crystals and/or chemical miticides to keep them in check. Varroa mites arrived in the late 80s, a parasite that could be eradicated only with medicated strips. In the 1990s, small hive beetles arrived from South Africa. Chronic bee paralysis showed up in 2000 and its prevalence has more than doubled annually since 2010. Kashmir bee virus was also found in the USA in 2000 and was reported widely by 2007. The largest killer, however, is a phenomenon called Colony Collapse Disorder (CCD) that emerged in 2006. Today, the exact cause of CCD is still unknown. A hive can be strong and thriving one week, and by the next empty of bees altogether.

The records in the Abbey apiary reflect this stress. In 2000, from twenty-seven hives 2,992 lbs. of honey was harvested. In 2002, it was 1,868 lbs. from twenty hives. In 2005 it was 218 lbs. from twelve hives. In 2006 it was 183 lbs. from six hives. In 2007, nothing was harvested.

The way hay is harvested may have been a factor, too. In Brother Gordon’s day, small square bales were made and haying took weeks, giving the bees a chance to work the fields. Today, farmers are able to cut everything in the hayfield’s prime, creating huge 900 lb. bales, and at the same time allowing cattle to graze and flatten pastures so that the bees have no place to forage.

Also—and reflecting this stress on bees—the cost of packages has soared over the years. A bee package is a wooden frame box containing a queen and bees sold by the pound. A three-pound package contains about ten thousand bees. In 1956, Brother Gordon bought a three-pound package for $4.20, and had it shipped to Richardson for $1.06. Today, such a package costs anywhere from $130 to $180 and more, and will cost $36 to ship.

Because of the cost of packages and the prevalence of CCD, and because all profit from honey went toward medication for diseases, Brother Bertrand and Abbot Brian decided not to replace bees, and the last hive emptied out because of CCD in 2011.

So, what’s next? The Abbey has been without bees for nine years going on ten, although commercial hives have been on Abbey land for every one of those years, and those beekeepers have been generous in sharing honey with us. The reason monks keep bees is not really to support an abbey: a veritable honey industry would be required in order to do that. But for centuries bees have been associated with abbeys just as vineyards and orchards have, with a vision of monks occupied in work requiring patience and calm in a bucolic setting. It’s important for monks and nuns to stay connected with the natural element around them. To care for bees, seeing to their comfort and provisions: this puts in mind all of God’s creatures, especially insects and their plight in this modern world, endangered species such as monarch butterflies, bush crickets, palm grasshoppers, and so many others. Bees themselves have been in a difficult way in recent years; bumblebees are becoming uncommon. Because of the threats to our world perhaps it is necessary for monks to keep bees. Or perhaps it is necessary to keep bees for our spiritual benefit, “so that you may live long in the land the Lord swore to your ancestors to give to them and their descendants, a land flowing with milk and honey” (Deut. 11:9).

The Abbey will start up with bees again this spring on a very modest scale. One of the junior monks is interested, and it will be good to put the boxes and
a crop. Incidentally, beekeepers don’t like sunflowers because farmers employ airplane pilots to dust their fields in broad daylight, just at the time when bees are working the flowers, and entire apiaries have been killed off that way.

Keeping bees in Brother Gordon’s day was much different than it is today. Back in the 1940s and 50s North Dakota had legislation that kept bee yards at least three miles apart—the absolute distance that any bee was likely to travel—so as to keep diseases from spreading. If any new disease were to be found, it could be more easily contained and dealt with. Today, unfortunately, such legislation no longer exists, mainly because beekeepers themselves lobbied against it, so that they could conveniently dump boxes wherever a landowner might grant them access. As a result, disease spreads rapidly now, and expensive medication is the only recourse in dealing with the problem. Back in Brother Gordon’s day, beekeepers in North Dakota were also likely to winter their bees here. They lost colonies doing so, but the colonies that survived were strong and ready to bring in nectar in the spring. Today, wintering bees in North Dakota is almost unknown, primarily because a beekeeper, in order to make ends meet, needs to pick up his hives and transport them south where they are paid to pollinate almond groves in California, then to pollinate apple and cherry orchards in Washington. And finally, completing a yearly circuit, they transport them to North Dakota for the June-July honeyflow. Honey is only one side of making a living with bees these days, and only hobbyists keep them here all year round just for honey. Another way in which beekeeping has changed since Brother Gordon’s day is the size of an apiary. As with anything agricultural, it has to be very big, or very small. Anything in-between consumes too much time and energy for what it’s worth. Brother Gordon kept about thirty-five hives, which is in that in-between area, though he loved caring for bees and he loved being outdoors. He also loved harvesting lots of honey in the fall. His notebooks show that even he, a superlative beekeeper, was not making enough money to pay for his efforts. Nowadays, a beekeeper needs to have several thousand hives in order to make a living. Either that, or he is a hobbyist with three or four hives.

Brother Gordon’s rheumatoid arthritis became more and more of a problem for him as the years went by. A beekeeper needs a strong back and big arms to lift heavy boxes. He reduced the number of hives to a dozen. In 1989 Abbot Patrick turned the apiary over to Brother Bertrand who was trained by Gordon.
translating honey into money was never an easy task. Beekeeping can be back-breaking work, lugging heavy bee boxes full of honey from one place to another, some of them 90 lbs. or more. In one of Brother Gordon’s early notebooks he writes that in the year 1956 he harvested 1,600 lbs. of honey but cleared only $60.04. One might ask how such a thing happened? He started brand-new that year with thirty-five packages of bees costing $147.00, plus $37.27 shipping. He fed them $9.90 worth of sugar in early spring until they could manage by themselves on blooming flowers. The rest of the expenses went almost entirely to gasoline: traveling to and from the bee yard for inspections, and mowing the grass around the hives, which he considered essential. All this work produced $272.98 in honey against $212.94 in expenses, yielding a measly $60.04 profit. Things were ever thus. Beekeepers might develop big muscles but they sure don’t get rich.

Brother Gordon’s biggest year was in 1963 when he harvested 12,783 lbs., 365 lbs. per hive. Astonishing by any standards! But honey production ebbed and flowed over the years: in 1974 he took in only 350 pounds altogether.

Part of that ebb and flow is true for every agricultural business with the mercurial temperament of Mother Nature at work. In the fancy business of beekeeping—at least in North Dakota—for there to be an abundant honey harvest 1) each hive must be healthy and at the peak of production as the honeyflow begins, 2) there must be an abundance of clover in the fields, 3) there must be a suitable amount of rain, 4) and after the clover blooms, the days must get hot enough for the nectar to be drawn up into the flowers. If just one of these four ingredients is not in place, the harvest will be poor, which is particularly discouraging when a beekeeper sees clover blooming everywhere but no honey filling out the hives. In dry years, the bloom is dry. In wet but very cool years, the nectar does not flow.

In western North Dakota, bees depend almost exclusively upon clover for honey. There is a small honeyflow at the beginning of the season, in the early spring, from wild and domestic fruit trees, but the bees bring in only enough honey then for hives to increase their number, beefing them up for the real honeyflow when the clover begins to bloom. If there is no clover, the bees must resort to the blooming alfalfa which they don’t like because the flower—just like a snapdragon—splashes them with pollen whenever they alight, and this irritates them. The hives become testy.

North Dakota clover honey is what is called “water white” as opposed to amber: it is very light yellow, clear, and extremely sweet. Canola honey is also yellow but crystalizes easily, even in the comb, and the only way it can be sold is by taking the trouble to “cream” it. Alfalfa honey is medium-light amber and somewhat more flavorful. Sunflower honey is amber with a robust flavor of sunflower seeds. Buckwheat honey is as dark as molasses. Relatively few farmers in North Dakota produce buckwheat as...
Beekeeping at Assumption Abbey

The archives at Assumption Abbey do not tell us exactly when bees were first kept by the monks. There is, however, a story about molasses. In the early years, when food was scarce and the monks were feeling pangs of hunger, they wanted to butcher the chickens. “Blöd! Wass dann?” Brother Benedict Fitz said. “I will tell you what then. No more eggs!” At the thought of it, they tightened their belts and stuck to their bland diet of schmarren—a sort of scrambled pancake—soaking it in cheap molasses to make it go down. One supposes that if the monks had been keeping bees back in the 1890s they would have used honey instead of molasses.

Not until Father Edward Berheide’s arrival in 1941 is there any mention of bees. He was a monk of St. Meinrad who transferred to Assumption Abbey due to unfortunate circumstances at home. In other words, he was on the run. But in the midst of his troubles he loved bees, establishing hives at Assumption Abbey as soon as he settled in. The Abbey still owns bee boxes that Edward built from scratch; they are burned with his initials. However, they are not made in standard dimensions, perhaps because there were no standard dimensions for bee boxes in those days.

Father Edward’s interests were not confined to beekeeping. He was also involved with the Indian missions at Fort Berthold and Fort Yates. In fact, the missions were his first love. And because of that, Brother Gordon Barnard was pressed into service with the Abbey bees even before he became a monk, while he was still a student in the Abbey high school. Abbot Cuthbert asked him to harvest honey because Father Edward was away; after setting up the apiary, Edward had gone off to the Indians. Cuthbert knew that Gordon’s father was a beekeeper. But just how honey was extracted in the late 40s is not known. By 1951 Brother Gordon, a novice lay brother, was extracting honey with equipment that his father cobbled together from scrap metal and parts. This equipment is still usable and remains in the Bee Room at the Abbey, some of it set into concrete so that it can’t be moved. All of the equipment is delicate and requires “just the right touch” at honey harvest.

Brother Gordon continued on as beekeeper at Assumption Abbey for thirty-eight years.