

# Assumption

## ABBNEY NEWSLETTER

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Richardton, ND 58652

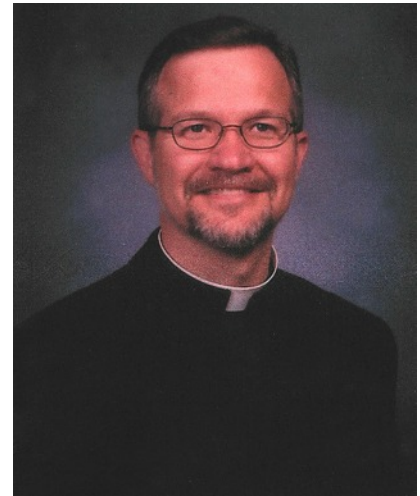
July, 2021

## 2021 Assumption Abbey Jubilarians

Father Basil Atwell, or John as he was known before becoming a monk, was born to John and Genevieve Atwell in Glendive, MT, on June 7, 1958, the fifth of six children. The family belonged to Sacred Heart Parish. As a youth, John worked as a delivery boy after school for a homegrown radio and television station called Kamp-schorr's. When he was sixteen he was diagnosed with an eye disease called Corneal Dystrophy, an incurable affliction from which he was delivered miraculously. After graduating from Dawson County High School in 1976 John worked for a telephone company before entering Assumption Abbey when he was twenty. Given the name Basil, he went through the novitiate, pronounced vows in 1981, and began work in the Abbey Press. In 1982 he was sent to St. John's University for four years of study that culminated in a bachelor's degree in Art in 1986. Basil displayed brilliant talent for graphic art and pottery. What there is of his work that can be seen at the Abbey, in display cases, shows keen artistic judgment and consummate skill. He was especially gifted at working in porcelain, a difficult

medium. Abbot Lawrence Wagner appointed Br. Basil director of the pottery studio in 1988. Along with his artistic work, he dedicated several summers to Camp ReCreation when it was still sponsored and held at the Abbey. As everyone familiar with him knows, Br. Basil is a people person, and in 1994 he moved to Bismarck to become full-time Director of Campus Ministry at the University of Mary. While in the Bismarck-Mandan area, he also volunteered at the Youth Correctional Center. He feels a great deal of compassion for kids who have gotten off to a bad start and have been hurt and rejected in ways most of us cannot imagine.

In 1997, under Fr. Daniel Maloney, who was at the time both chaplain to the Sisters at Annunciation Monastery and a professor of Philosophy at the University of Mary, Brother studied philosophy during his last two summers in Bismarck. At the encouragement of several of his fellow monks and priests, Br. Basil made a request of Abbot Patrick and the Senior Council to study theology at St. John's School of Theology in Collegetown, MN. He was ordained to the diaconate on February 11, 2001 and sent to his own home parish in Glendive



**Father Basil John Atwell, OSB**  
Forty Years Professed

for eleven weeks for his transitional pastoral experience. That summer, under the direction and care of Fr. Joseph Ponessa, Deacon Basil helped to start the Sacred Heart Prison Ministry at the Dawson County Correctional Facility. After finishing his Master's of Divinity degree, he was ordained to the priesthood on June 28, 2002. At the request of Bishop Zipfel and with the permission of Abbot Patrick, Fr. Basil's first assignment was parochial vicar at the Church of St. Wenceslaus in Dickinson, with part-time work as chaplain to Trinity High School nearby. He received his first pastorate in October of 2003 and was sent to St. Mary's Church in New England, ND, with its mission parish of St. Elizabeth's in Lefor. He also continued his part-time work at

Trinity High School. In 2009 he was appointed pastor of the Catholic Indian Mission, with its five parishes of Saint Peter in Chains at Fort Yates, Saint Elizabeth at Cannon Ball, Saint James in Porcupine, Saint Philomena in Selfridge, and Sacred Heart in Solen, now known as the Catholic Faith Communities of Sioux County. Connected to the Mission, and truly its heart, is Saint Bernard Mission School, which was founded in 1910. On July 1, 2016, Father Basil was appointed pastor of Saint Nicholas Church at Garrison with its missions of Immaculate Conception in Max and Sacred Heart in White Shield.

Fr. Basil is a friendly sort, an approachable priest who is compassionate and thoroughly dedicated to the Church's magisterium.



*Photo from Assumption Abbey Archives*

**Basil Atwell in 1981**



*Photo by Jacy*

**Father James Ernest Kilzer, OSB  
Thirty Years Professed**

Ernest Kilzer was born to Werner and Edith (Remington) Kilzer in Jacobson Memorial Hospital in Elgin, ND, the tenth of fourteen children. He was named after a Benedictine uncle, a monk of St. John's Abbey, Collegeville, MN. Ernest grew up on a farm started by his paternal grandparents that was seven miles from Bentley, ND. He attended School #2 in Eagle District, Hettinger County, where most of the enrolled students were siblings or cousins. After that, he went to New England and Mott, ND, for high school. Ernest spent two years at Eastern Montana College in Billings, and three years at Franciscan University in Steubenville OH. Entering Assumption Abbey in 1989, he was given the name James and pronounced vows in 1991. He did his seminary studies at St. John's Abbey and University. He was ordained in 1998. "My upbringing had me well prepared for mindfulness of others, so necessary in a

monastery. From a large family, we learned to make do, make allowances, share and share alike, to think how our behavior impacts upon others."

Fr. James never anticipated that he would share life with monks who knew his uncle, Father Ernest Kilzer, OSB, born in Richardton one week before Christmas in 1903. "To meet monks who knew my uncle as their seminary prof, that was something!" In Richardton, Fr. James is on home turf: it was the landing spot of his German-Hungarian paternal grandparents.

Fr. James is a jack of all trades if there ever was one: name it and he can do it. Which puts him in great demand. That, and his limitless energy, have transformed various areas of the monastery, such as the Gift Shop and the Pottery Studio. "I recently read of a monk refusing to tell a visitor what he did," Fr. James says. "And she got rather irritated at his stubborn answer: 'I live here.' For my part, I live here, but maybe still identify overmuch with doing this and that, what I can contribute of my talents for the upkeep of the whole." Like many of the monks of Assumption Abbey, Fr. James wears too many hats to give any succinct answer to, "What do you do here?"

Fr. James says that he gained conviction about the goodness of God and of God's design and plan when he was just a kid sitting on the roof of a machine shed, watching the sunset. Speaking to any young man about religious life in a Benedictine monastery he says, "What could be better than to discover and fulfill what God has in mind for you? Do you

trust God? Do you want to discover what God made you for, and where he calls you to flourish? Give God permission to prompt you, to guide you. Cultivate a disposition to say yes, whatever that call proves to be."

One of Fr. James' favorite spots on the Abbey campus is where he can see the east-northeast horizon at daybreak in the summertime: "The misty blue of early light, if there is sufficient humidity for mistiness, the freshness of green in the dark side of leaves. I have done some trimming over that way, east of the garage, so that one can see through the near trees to what lies beyond. I guess when one is in a place long enough, one makes parts of it one's own."

We wish Fr. James many more years as a monk of Assumption Abbey.

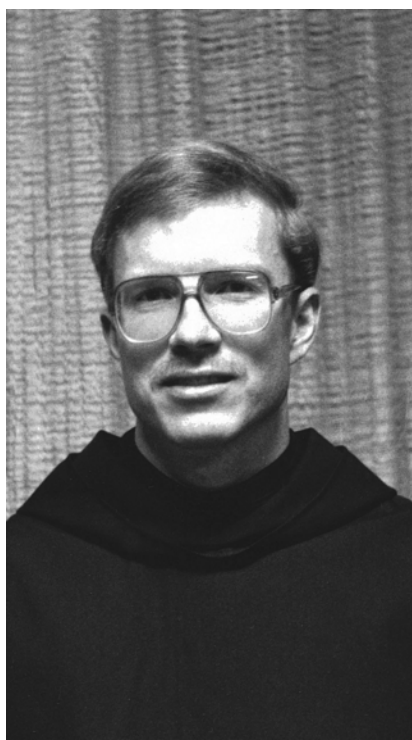


Photo from Assumption Abbey Archives

Father James in 1991

## FEBRUARY CHRONICLE

February 1: Brother Stephen Johnson has been taking organ lessons from Father Odo Muggli, our regular organist, and for never having taken keyboard, Stephen is doing remarkably well, already accompanying the monastic choir for the Noon Prayer hymn. Soon he will be accompanying the choir for the *Benedictus* and the *Magnificat* and after that, the concert stage! ❖

February 2: Each year on the feast of the Presentation of the Lord we begin the Liturgy in Saint Joseph Chapel where the year's candles are blessed. After the blessing, each monk is given a taper. These are lit, and then we process to the church, handing off the tapers to two monks who arrange them before the statue of Our Lady of Einsiedeln where they will burn during the Eucharistic liturgy. In Switzerland, at the Abbey of Einsiedeln, candles are burned before the BVM statue every day, and have been for hundreds of years, which is what has turned that statue black (with soot). ❖

February 3: Father James Kilzer returns from Dickinson with new countertops for the beverage-line cabinets in the dining room. The line has been rearranged, primarily because we can no longer purchase milk in bags (known as milk bladders or pillow pouches) because local schools prefer individual milk cartons, or plastic quart or gallon jugs. The large milk refrigerator on the line will be replaced with a much smaller one that keeps a more modest supply of milk cold. Up until the

mid-1960's Abbey milk was hauled up the hill from the dairy barn in galvanized milk cans. Things have changed so much that it's difficult anymore to remember that milk comes from a cow and not a truck. ❖

February 7: Each Sunday afternoon a small group of monks goes outdoors for some serious prairie stomping in the fresh air, no matter the weather, a Midwest version of the Boston L Street Brownies, that polar bear club that has bathed in Dorchester Bay every day since 1865, no matter the weather. So far, nothing has stopped the prairie stomping, although there have been challenges: fierce winds and blowing snow, and perhaps blistering heat come summer? (The very next day—February the eighth—the temperature dropped to -22 F., -40 wind-chill.) ❖

February 10: On the feast of St. Scholastica, because of the pandemic restrictions, the monks will not celebrate with the Benedictine Sisters. However, thirteen of the oldest monks do celebrate by receiving their second Moderna vaccination at the friendly Glen Ullin Pharmacy. Some sore arms and queasy tummies resulted, but the trip and trouble is worth it. ❖

February 13: After several days of subzero weather, Br. Louie reports that the run-around cars are not starting up, even though they are plugged in: perhaps one sure way of keeping people at home! (Runaround cars are those in the fleet that we dare not take outside of town, but are still good enough to drive down to the post office or the drugstore.

They are not kept in the garage, but in the parking lot on the east side of the Abbey.) ❖

February 16: Word has come that the younger half of the community will be able to get their Covid vaccinations in Dickinson, on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of February. Praise God! ❖

February 17: Ash Wednesday is a “Desert Day” of silence and prayer for us, and Abbot Daniel offers two excellent conferences concerning the nature of the Seven Cardinal Sins. Can you name them? (Without looking them up!) ❖

## MARCH CHRONICLE

March 1: Abbot Daniel has been making the rounds, visiting monks one at a time in their rooms. He is an excellent listener. After hearing us all, he must have an earful! Hopefully it’s not all complaining. After all, God is good, and blesses us every day. There is always something to be thankful about. ❖

March 3: Br. Stephen is tapping Manitoba Maples (Boxelders) again this year. He will have lots of boiling to do. The ratio of sap to syrup is something like eighty to one. ❖

March 4: Br. Elias fell out of bed last night, dreaming of some sort of train wreck. He needs to be wearing a seat belt while sleeping. ❖

March 7: Someone telephoned in an order of fruitcake, which happens on something of a regular basis. We are *not* Assumption Abbey in MO, which earns its living by baking

fruitcakes. Around here, Br. Alban makes fruitcake during Advent and sells a limited number of them. He is quite thankful that he does not have to make them every day of the year. ❖

March 8: The vehicle Fr. Valerian Odermann used for months, on mission in SD, worked well until the day he got back, and now it’s misbehaving. Under the discipline of Br. Louie, the garage monk, it is doing better . . . for now. Sometimes horses are easier to work with. ❖

March 9: Br. Jacob has been repairing windows on 1<sup>st</sup> floor south. The company that made these windows has gone out of business which means that repairs are jury rigged. Such requires an inventive, technically-wise man like Jacob. ❖

March 10: Fr. Benedict has left with Fr. Julian to visit Fr. Joe Ponessa in Circle, MT, who, despite living in the wilds of the American West, has a doctorate in Scripture from the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome. Benedict is at work on his own doctorate in Scripture and is consulting Fr. Ponessa. One of Ponessa’s requirements, however, is to listen to Wagner’s Ring Cycle, because he is an opera enthusiast. The whole thing lasts about 17 hours. But if the average American can binge-watch a whole season of “Game of Thrones” or “Breaking Bad” then lots of Wagner isn’t so unusual. Fr. Benedict, for not being an opera lover, was impressed, especially with Fr. Ponessa’s lavish sound system. ❖

March 12: The ceiling lights in the walkway (or *slype* as the

monks call it) are being cleaned because they make wonderful sarcophagi for bugs. And, just like washing windows, as soon as they are clean they get dirty again. Any mild weather brings the boxelders out—of which there are too many in the world—and they crawl straight for the ceiling lights. ❖

March 13: The garden is being harrowed in preparation for spring planting. It’s “dry as dust” out there, and we are praying to St. Isidore for rain. “Open up your waterspouts and send the blessing of land on our heads, on our crops, and in our reservoirs. Bless us again that we may be energized and praise your name in feeding the hungry. May the rains come quickly and bless us through Jesus Christ by water and the Spirit. Amen!” ❖

March 15: The old floor tiles in the Gift Shop are being removed, relics of former days when that area of the monastery was a dining room. And to boot, some of those tiles are stubborn, refusing to let go of the floor. Thanks to Brs. John Pat, John S., Bertrand, Stephen, Michael and Fr. James, the floor is completely denuded. ❖

March 17: The floor people are here to install a new just-like-wood tile floor. ❖

March 18: Although it is difficult to say which door to the Abbey is the “front” door, the one by the Abbot’s office is a contender, and the handle of it became dysfunctional recently, so that Br. Jacob, the jury-rigger, was sent over to work on it. While doing so, the wicked wind—cold as a breeze from Norway—swept through the corridor and up the stairs,

chilling the bones and making hot soup taste mighty good at lunchtime. ❖

March 21: The prairie crocuses (croci?) have begun to bloom, one of the first spring flowers to appear in these parts, if one bends low enough to notice them. It is a humble plant, very low to the ground so as to stay out of the fierce cold wind. ❖

March 23: There's been a problem in the potato cellar with mice. They don't, of course, eat just one potato and move on to the next. Rather, they chew holes in a great many, damaging them beyond usefulness. Enter the trapper, Br. Stephen, who caught Mickey, Minnie and all their cousins: seven in all. ❖

March 24: The maintenance crew are spending the day in the east tower repairing the big bell Tibatí which has been silent since October 18, 2019. The bell is so big that the mechanism breaks down. It is fixed, and rings again for the first time on Holy Thursday. ❖

March 25: Garden seeds arrive, and the monks, like many others throughout the country, catch spring fever from them: they dream of giant pumpkins and corn as high as an elephant's eye. Even though it is dry as a bone here, hope springs eternal. The seeds are given a bit of earth in planting trays and put under the light in the garage basement. ❖

March 28: It is Palm Sunday, and several monks dust off their palm-weaving skills and try again to make something pretty out of slender green leaflets. Some make crosses, some roses,

## From the Archives:



Assumption Abbey Archives

Father Alban Engel, OSB, and Father Wilfrid Fischer out for a drive across the Liberty Memorial Bridge, the first bridge to cross the Missouri from Bismarck to Mandan, opened 1920. The new automobile, most likely Father Fischer's, was a 1923 enclosed-style Ford, otherwise known as "the Doctor's Coupe" because it was popular among country doctors who found it convenient for carrying their equipment while traveling to their various appointments.

some spirals, and others beehive braids. ❖

March 29: The wind is attempting to blow down the Abbey towers, which have been there for 122 years; it has not succeeded yet, though sometimes it sounds as if it might happen, with peak gusts at 65 mph.) ❖

## APRIL CHRONICLES

April 1: Brs. Alban, John-Pat, Michael, Bertrand and Gregory are setting the tables for the Seder meal that is carefully prepared by our good cooks. Probably not everything at the meal comes up to Kosher standards, such as the purple cabbage with bacon bits. And the raisin cream pie (is *that* Kosher?) is to die for, which Jane Mayer has made for the last twenty years. ❖

April 3: It is Holy Saturday, which is—by tradition—egg-dyeing day here at Assumption Abbey. Br. Nicholas presides at the solemn ceremonies. Eggs can be quite inventive and colorful, sometimes with cryptic writing, decipherable only to the writer, such as "Hwey to Goh." What does that mean? ❖

April 4: Easter Sunday has arrived at last, and Br. Alban once again prepares a fabulous brunch, and then leads a few monk-volunteers in producing a wonderful Easter dinner, served right after Solemn Vespers. The big Tibatí bell in the east tower is ringing out over the countryside! ❖

April 5: Steve Silkey, the gentleman who laid the new oak floor in the east hallway of the monastery, is back to refinish the oak tables in the

cafeteria, which were built by Fr. Raphael Knapp, OSB, in the early 1930s. The finish on the tables, after so many years of use, has worn considerably. Mr. Silkey cordoned off a section of the dining room with a plastic tent and works with a sander that has a vacuum. That plus an air filter. "The air going out of the tent," he explains, "is cleaner than the air coming in." The oak tables are solid, and heavy as iron. ❖

April 6: Leeks have sprouted! Not in the ceiling but in the basement of the garage, under the grow lights, a sure sign of spring. With any luck (and rain) the tiny sprouts will become big vegetables and we will enjoy leek soup, or leek and bacon pizza! ❖

April 7: Peppers, tomatoes and kohlrabi are set under the grow lights in the garage basement: more vegetable pizza to dream about. ❖

April 8: Abbot Daniel is off to the University of Mary to hand out an award in his name, for Distinction in Philosophy, honoring Abbot Daniel's many years of teaching philosophy at that university. ❖

April 9: Enough rain falls to wet the sidewalk and freshen the air, sufficient to make one realize how dusty it really is. ❖

April 10: Potatoes are planted in the field, and some rhubarb is transplanted from the old garden down by the Ranch Barn to the regular garden. ❖

April 11: Wild juneberry bushes are transplanted on the west side of the library building with dreams of juneberry pie and ice cream. Oh mercy! ❖



## Development Office

Br. Michael Taffe, O.S.B.

exclusion of \$100,000 per taxpayer per year).

*Without QCD* you would take the required minimum distribution (RMD) from your IRA account, deposit the RMD funds in a personal bank account, then write personal checks to charities, and these *do not qualify* as QCD distribution. Preparing tax forms, you must report income (Form 1099-R) as taxable IRA distributions, claim charitable donations on Schedule A—the long form—for itemized deductions. The standard deduction probably won't allow you to benefit, using the itemized deduction form.

*Using the QCD distribution*, and knowing you have to take a RMD from your IRA account, simply contact your IRA trustee with instructions to pay your chosen charities, with the amount you have decided, and to withhold no income tax on those distributions. The trustee will send checks for this QCD distribution. Although only a slight change from what was described above, the difference is what happens for taxes. You will receive Form 1099-R showing your distribution. By proving that the RMD funds were sent directly to eligible charities (you made copies of the checks, of course) you are able to exclude these QCDs from tax. You can show X as taxable IRA distribution with a QCD reference to the left of the IRA taxable amount. You will not claim the donations on Schedule A—the long form—

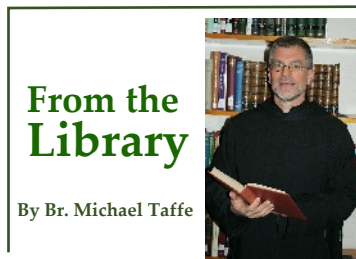
For anyone over 70 ½ years, you can save taxes by using QCD (Qualified Charitable Distribution) arrangement. It is a *win* for the charity, a *win* for you the donor, and a *win* for the reduction of your income taxes. 1) *A win for the charity*: contact your IRA trustee, specify the name of the charity and the amount of the gift. Ask that no income tax be withheld for the distribution. Within a short time you will receive a check made out to the charity. Make a copy for your records and then mail the check. (The IRA trustee will *not* mail the check directly to the charity.) Be sure to make a copy for your income tax records. 2) *A win for the donor*: instead of having to write personal checks or arrange for the transfer of stock to the charity, you simply make a call to your IRA trustee and then mail the check prepared by the trustee to the charity, attaching a personal note on how you wish the funds to be used. 3) *A win for the reduction of the donor's taxes*: The IRA requires minimum distributions (RMD) when an IRA owner reaches a certain age, (currently 72 years old), and for certain inherited IRAs. Whenever there is a distribution from the IRA account, you will receive an annual Form 1099-R reporting the amount of the IRA distributions. QCD will be included in the Form 1099-R amount. Distributions from the IRA are taxed as ordinary income, unless they qualify as QCD (limited to a maximum

but you can still claim the entire standard deduction amount. Thus, you pay no tax on the QCD distribution. So, for those of you who can afford to forego these retirement funds, you avoid paying taxes on the required IRA distributions and can still claim the standard deduction. □

*Chronicle continued . . .*

April 19: It has continued to snow lightly. While most parts of the country have tulips and daffodils, we are nowhere close to a flowery spring. Despite the cold weather, the old redwood ramp on the north side of the building was taken down in preparation for a steel ramp to be installed this summer. The old ramp was built in the early 1980s by one of our employees, Marcel Melchior, who constructed it for wheelchair-bound Frs. Michael and Luke. The ramp suffered some damage when a vehicle hit it recently, which thankfully prevented a collision with the building, but made evident that parts of the ramp were rotten and needed replacement. ❖

April 26: At supper, a porcupine is seen from the window waddling off into the woods near the machine shed, a rare sight because porcupines are nocturnal. Such strange creatures they are! As a warning, they shake their quills which makes them rattle. A family group (a mother and her young) are called a prickle. Though they might chew on bones for the minerals in them, they are herbivores and love to eat bark. Baby porcupines are called porcupettes and at their birth they have soft quills that harden in a few days. A mother porcupine stands upright in order for the baby to nurse. □



The desert monks used to describe themselves as those who are awake. We still strive to attain this level of attention to truth in God, the Church, ourselves, and the world around us . . . as complicated as we and the world may be. A means of exploring and truly seeing our often uncivil history and current situation is to read *Caste: The Origins of our Discontent* by the brilliant author, Isabel Wilkerson.

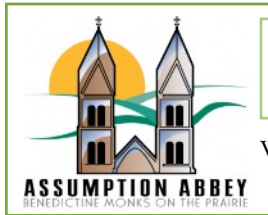
She explores three countries that have implemented systems of caste between different groups of people: India, Nazi Germany, and the United States. Implementing a caste system ensures that those in power stay in power by removing or severely restricting justice, law, rights, and any notion of shared humanity for an identified group of their citizens (or more accurately, non-citizens that live in these places). In the United States, this is targeted toward people of color, primarily African Americans, while in Nazi Germany it was geared toward Jewish people. In one eye-opening section, Wilkerson wrote that when the Nazis first came to power and wanted to enforce a strict hierarchy and ultimately remove Jewish people from society, they used the Jim Crow laws of the United States as their blueprint. However, the Nazis were envious of these laws as they didn't think they could go as far

as we did in enforcing barriers between people. The author also gave some examples in her life where she was targeted as a possible drug dealer (she was a reporter for a well-known newspaper), and was given substandard consideration. Wilkerson also points out that many of our attitudes and behaviors around caste are so ingrained that we are not really aware of them.

This was not always an easy read for me, a white man in the United States, even though Wilkerson is an obviously engaging and skillful scholar and author. I have recommended this book to other people who absolutely were engaged by it. An additional resource for understanding aspects of 'legal' discrimination in this country would be the book, *The Color of Law* by Richard Rothstein. I do believe we all need to be aware of resources such as these books because I truly believe that we are called to be better people in our love of neighbor by Jesus Christ and thus need to examine our biases and behaviors as we interact with all kinds of wonderful folks who were created by God. □



Br. Benet Tvedten on duty at the phone.



# Newsletter

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for friends of Assumption Abbey.

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## Benedictine Saints

June 4 is the feast of Saint Peter de Bono who entered upon the clerical state after the death of his wife. He had been a merchant. But not long after his ordination, he died, then astonished everyone by returning to life during the funeral services. That whole experience made an impression on him. He decided to dedicate the rest of his life to preparation for death. To do this, he became a monk of the famous Abbey of Cluny, one of the largest European monasteries ever to have existed. Peter managed to die a very holy death on the feast of Pentecost 1441.

July 6 is the feast of Sister Mary Rose, servant of God, also

known as Blessed Suzanne-Agathe DeLoye. She was born at Serignan, near Orange, in France, on February 4, 1741. She entered the Benedictine monastery in Caderousse. She professed solemn vows in 1762 and remained in her monastery until it was suppressed during the French Revolution. For a time Sister Mary Rose survived in Serignan, but she was eventually arrested for her faith and carried off to Orange. After living in prison for two months, she was condemned to death by the revolutionaries and guillotined on July 6, 1794. One wonders what happened to the other nuns who were at Caderousse before it was suppressed. Did they renounce

their faith? Who knows? At any rate, Sister Mary Rose was beatified on May 10, 1925 by Pope Pius XI.

August 25 is the feast day of Saint Gregory, abbot of the monastery at Utrecht. When he was only fourteen years old he saw and heard the great Saint Boniface preaching at Pfulzel, sometime around 720, and he was so overcome by missionary zeal that he covered his ears to the protests of his family and followed Boniface, sharing his labors and privations. Boniface appointed him abbot of the monastery at Utrecht in 750. After Boniface's martyrdom, Gregory was appointed administrator of the diocese of Utrecht but he refused to be consecrated bishop. Nevertheless, he sought to train the clergy for preaching, and looked after the poor. In his private life he was "a model of all virtues; he met his calumniators with the weapons of silence and prayer." When he was seventy, he had a stroke which left his left side paralyzed, but he continued with the greater part of his duties. "When death drew nigh, he requested his brethren to carry him into the church, where he received the holy Viaticum and died" on August 25, 776. (*A Benedictine Martyrology* Alexius Hoffman, OSB).



Great Plains Prickly Pear Flower