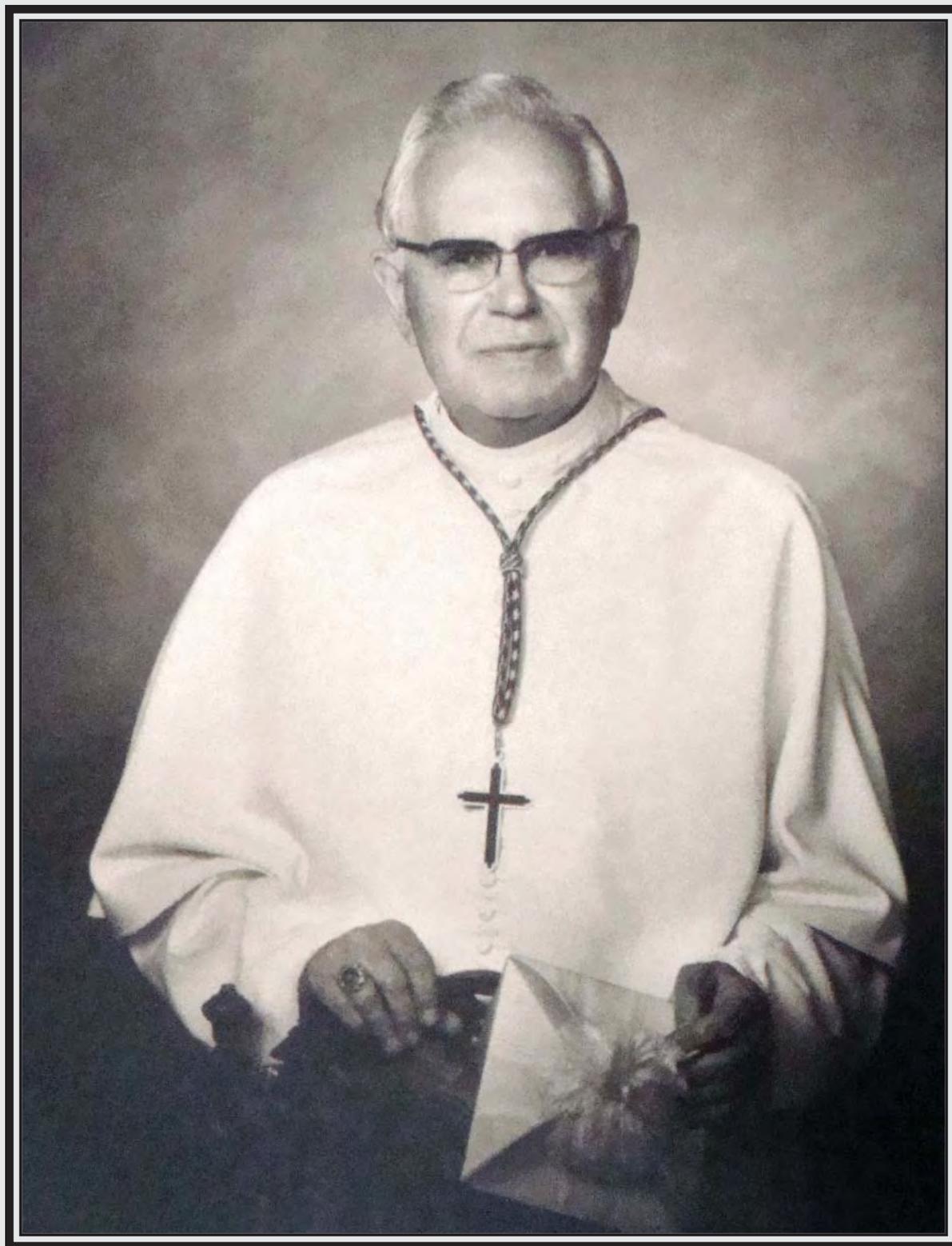


The  
*St. Michael Messenger*

Special Commemorative Edition



Rt. Rev. Ladislav K. Parker, O.Praem.  
1915-2010

Thursday, January 7, 2010:

*That Thursday afternoon at 4:30, a single bell tolling slowly sounded Abbot Parker's final entry into the church he built. Two lines of confreres waited as the casket was brought to the doors where Abbot Eugene waited for the reception of the body, and the great liturgies surrounding the wake, funeral Mass and burial, liturgies that would last for 3 days, began. In these, a man who had been born in another era, on the other side of the world, in the final days of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, would be laid to rest in a place he had often referred to as "The Southland" – and the events of these next days would warp time and make a different time and place manifest. Suddenly we were in Rome – for there was something very Roman about Abbot Parker. And yet perhaps it was not so much a transformation of Austro-Hungarian or Mediterranean quality but a spirit of sublime charity that descended upon us. Those of us privileged to be present for the next few days witnessed a transformation, in love, of the entire surroundings and the experience will never be forgotten.*

*The great offices of the dead were sung in the abbey choir while the body lay in state in the sanctuary before the altar, offices which included the midnight Office of Readings or Matins. Large crowds came to the abbey church, even at midnight, to bid farewell to a friend, a spiritual director, a teacher, a priest. We had to say goodbye here, because on Friday, the ceremonies became more public and the body was taken to the basilica at Mission San Juan Capistrano. Many of us felt a sense of loss most keenly when Fr. Abbot was taken from the church for the last time. Even in his last illness, when Parkinson's disease had ravaged his body, he was a model of fidelity in his presence at the hours of office and Mass, and this was the last prayer time he would be with us.*

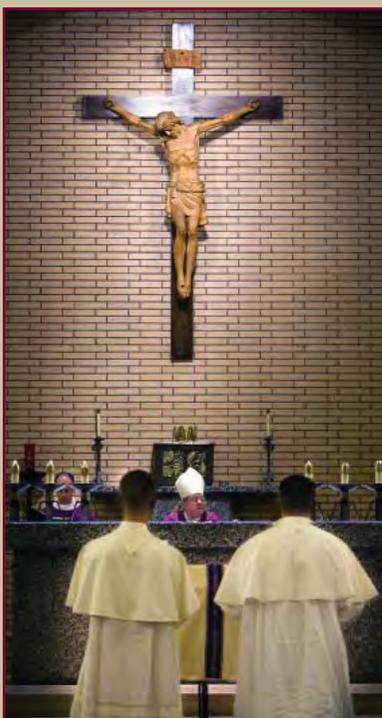


Photo: R. Belcher



Abbot Ladislav Parker had been ailing for a long time when he died peacefully, just after midnight on January 3, 2010 at the age of 94. He had been suffering with Parkinson's disease in the past years, though his mind stayed keen until the end. He is keenly missed by the confreres he left behind and many other friends throughout the world.

Franz Purker was born on December 19, 1915, in the village of Vaskereszt in Hungary. His father, Gabriel, who was a wine maker, fought in WWI and was killed in battle, so his only son never met his father. His mother Anna never remarried. So Franz had to labor on the family farm from an early age, and became accustomed to working hard, a habit which would characterize the rest of his life. It was on this farm that he also developed his life-long love of working the soil and gardening. He also became attracted both by the silence of the village church and its liturgy. He served Mass early every morning and developed a habit of prayer.

When he was 11 years old, it became obvious to him that the priesthood would be his vocational choice. Supported by a scholarship for war orphans and the aid of the village physician, Dr. Mesic, Franz studied in Szombathely, first at the bishop's grade school, then at St. Norbert's High School of the Norbertine Order, where he perfected his knowledge of Hungarian and Latin. Even in his last years, Parker remained grateful to this doctor, who helped pay for his education and he would reproach himself for an incident where he had been embarrassed to acknowledge the man as a lad.

Photos: R. Belcher



Photo: R. Belcher

Franz did exceptionally well in school, and even helped tutor older fellow students of the local nobility and landed gentry. He also became involved in scouting, and in later life delighted to recall participating in the Fourth World-Wide Scouting Jamboree in 1933, where he saw Lord Baden-Powell himself. In scouting he developed a sense of leadership which would serve him later in life. Following his vocation, Franz asked to enter the Abbey of St. Michael's at Csorna, and he received the Norbertine habit on August 9, 1935, receiving the religious name of Ladislav.

The Norbertine order in the Austro-Hungarian monarchy had been greatly influenced by the meddling policies of Joseph II and his restructuring of the monastic orders. Because of government policies that required abbeys and monasteries to either close or take up "useful" tasks, such as schools, Csorna had become involved in education and had two schools at Kestely and Szombathely: education was the main apostolic work of the abbey.

Frater Ladislav was inspired in the novitiate by his novice master, Fr. Albin Szalay, who was a leaven for reform in the abbey. His charismatic personality drew young fr. Ladislav and inspired him with high ideals. Ordained a priest in 1940, Fr. Ladislav continued studies at the Gregorian University in Rome. He had started study there in 1938, and he finished his doctorate in 1943. He wrote and defended his thesis in Latin. It was on St. Augustine's doctrine of Christian Hope. He returned to the abbey and taught Moral Theology, Metaphysics and Ethics to the clerics for the next years, as well as serving the community as novice master, through times that were very difficult for the abbey and the world, as WWII was raging.

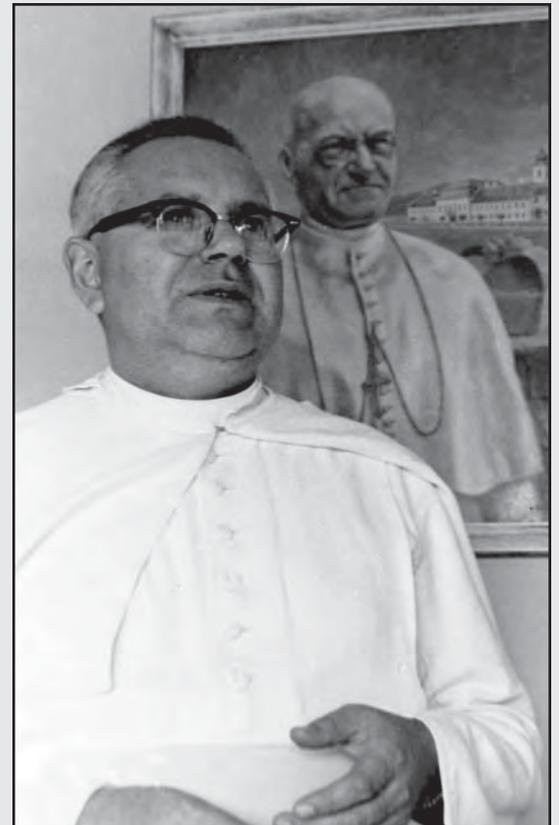
During the war, he was commissioned by the bishop of the diocese of Győr, where the abbey of Csorna was located, to register the protest with the occupying

German authorities about the confiscation of Jewish property and the planned deportation of the Jews. This was risky for Father, because he was himself an ethnic German, although a subject of the Hungarian Regency. This same bishop, Vilmos (William) Arpor, a great friend of the Norbertines, was later martyred by the Russians and declared Blessed by Pope John Paul II.

After the war, the communists added stricture after stricture to the abbey, effectively shackling them by taking away their lands – lands which sustained the abbey – and the schools. The officials wanted to wrest education from the Church, so that the youth would be under their control. By 1950, the situation had become so bad that Fr. Ladislav and several of his confreres determined to escape to the free West. They planned on forming a school in an English speaking country and then returning home

after the Communist threat had disappeared in 5 or 6 years to open an English speaking gymnasium. A very interesting plan, since

at that point, the fathers did not have any idea of how long what Churchill in 1946 had called the Iron Curtain would endure. Fr. Ladislav told the Abbot of Csorna, Eugene Simonffy, of his plan, and the Abbot gave it his blessing, while noting its dangers. Several priests secretly crossed the border in July of that year and got through Soviet occupied eastern Austria to Innsbruck and the Norbertine Abbey of Wilten, and thence to Rome. Fr. Clement Rudnay was the first to cross the barbed wire, in an effort to draw away any of the guards' attention from the others in case of detection. Such a deed was typical of Fr. Clement.





Fr. Ladislav lived at the Generalate house in the city and gave tours to Catholic groups of German pilgrims for the Holy Year of 1950. He was present at the proclamation of the dogma of the Assumption of our Lady on November 1st of that year. The reigning Abbot General, Hubert Noots, was supportive of him and gave him encouragement while he was there. Eventually the young priest went to St. Norbert's Abbey in DePere, Wisconsin, and helped them out – even serving for a time in a parish staffed by the abbey in Montana. While in this rural place he had time to think about what to do and where to proceed. Without the help of the abbey at DePere, the exiles would not have survived, and Fr. Parker was grateful for the patronage and help of Abbot Sylvester Killeen. It was in Montana that he worked on learning English better. He would attend two matinee movies every Saturday to become more familiar with the American idioms, and this was to mark his English usage forever – American idioms combining with his unforgettable accent and personal syntax.

The thought of reuniting his fellow priests from Csorna was uppermost in his mind in the next years. They were dispersed far-and-wide. Two were in Austria, Fr. Hubert pursuing doctoral studies at the University of Innsbruck and Fr. Paul in a parish in the Tyrolean Alps; Frs. Benedict and Gerlac were in Rabat, Morocco, doing parish work with the Francophone community, and two were already in the States working in formation – Fr. Clement and Fr. Siard were teaching History and Physics at St. Norbert's College in DePere.



In 1957, Cardinal McIntyre invited the Hungarian priests to teach in the high school, Mater Dei in Santa Ana, that he had opened in 1950. Fr. Ladislav gathered all the confreres who would be known as the original founders of St. Michael's and they moved to a house at the intersection of Bishop and Bristol in Santa Ana, a house that came to be known affectionately as "Fort Santa Ana". They taught during the day at Mater Dei, and



did parish work on Sundays, helping out in parishes all over the diocese, which was then part of the vast archdiocese of Los Angeles: it was not until 1976 that the diocese of Orange was created.

Fr. Parker had in mind founding a school and novitiate in the diocese for Csorna. While the priests helped out in parishes, they pooled their stipends in order to buy a piece of land on which to open a school and novitiate.



They looked at different parcels of land from Laguna Beach and San Juan Capistrano to areas near the present day Rancho Santa Margarita. Eventually, they purchased a 34 acre parcel from the owner of the bikers' bar, Cook's Corner, which is next door to the abbey. At that time the property was in an extremely rural area, and only the 2-lane El Toro Road went past the land.

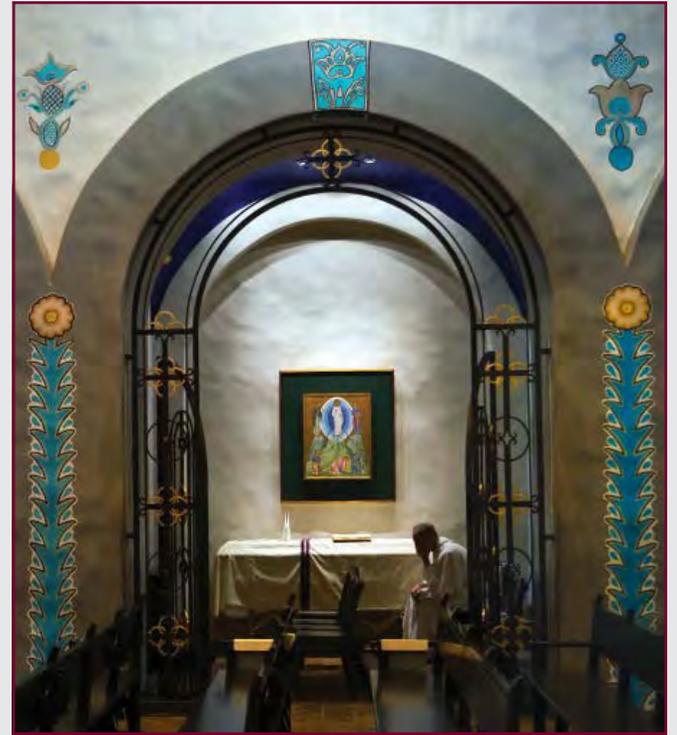




In January of 1961, a handful of men, priests, workers and students, were present for the groundbreaking of the new St. Michael's Novitiate, Seminary and Prep School. Fr. Parker moved from the Santa Ana house to oversee the site and was joined by the school's first headmaster, Fr. Hubert Szanto. The remaining fathers stayed at the Bishop Street house and taught at Mater Dei.

*Friday evening, Abbot Parker lay in state at the basilica at Mission San Juan Capistrano, where Vespers of the dead were to be sung. The reason for the move was to accommodate the number of faithful who wanted to be present. It was a stroke of Providence as well, because Abbot Parker's link with the Mission went back to the days when Msgr. Russell was pastor and the Hungarians were trying to find a place to survive in the county. The basilica church was completed 2 years after Abbot Parker had been blessed as the first abbot of St. Michael's in Orange, in 1986. The basilica's acoustics are perfect for Gregorian chant, and those who were blessed to be present at Vespers and the funeral Mass the following day will never forget the sound of the plainchant arching through the transept and nave of the great church.*

*The Abbot General, Thomas Handgrättinger, came from Rome in order to be present at the funeral Mass on Saturday, which he celebrated. Abbot Eugene preached, and his homily evoked Abbot Parker's legacy well in the way he was able to navigate the difficult years following Vatican II.*



*Photo: R. Belcher*



*Photo: R. Belcher*



The first phase of buildings went up – what was eventually to be the first storey of the present day abbey buildings and prep school on the hillside of 19292 El Toro Road. Fr. Parker's love of plants was put to the test as he turned a bare rocky hillside into a beautiful area by carting buckets of water by hand to keep trees, bushes and roses alive before any permanent irrigation was installed. The prep school and minor seminary opened its doors to the first class of students in September 1961. During this era, there were many vocations in the church in the United States, and St. Michael's minor seminary was one of several in the Los Angeles archdiocese.

Fr. Parker accomplished a super-human amount of work in these years of the 60s and 70s. He was involved in speaking for the Mindszenty Conference, he worked to maintain the physical plant of the abbey, he gave spiritual direction for many of the faithful, took speaking engagements to let people know of the community, he animated (sometimes single-handedly) a summer camp program for boys 6-13, that started in the early 60s. That program started as 8 weeks during the summers, and Fr. Parker stayed involved in it into his late 70s, leading the boys in their morning "calisthenics" with his clarion voice ringing out before breakfast.



Photo: R. Belcher

In the prep school, Fr. Parker mobilized forces and started landscaping shortly after the original plant was built. One student of the era characterized these efforts as “four lawns, 40 eucalyptus trees...Monterey pines, palms, olive trees and shrubbery.” In those first years, there was a mudslide on the property in April of 1962...a premonition of what was to happen 36 years later on a far worse scale.

By the late 1970s, enough seminarians had persevered in their formation that a class of 5 was ordained to the priesthood in 1981, and Fr. Parker, who was the prior of St. Michael’s, knew that his work would endure. He had replaced the 7 original Hungarians with American priests, and

gone beyond. The vocations continued to pour in to the point that the community was elevated to the status of an abbey in 1984. Ladislav Parker was elected first Abbot of St. Michael’s Abbey in Orange.

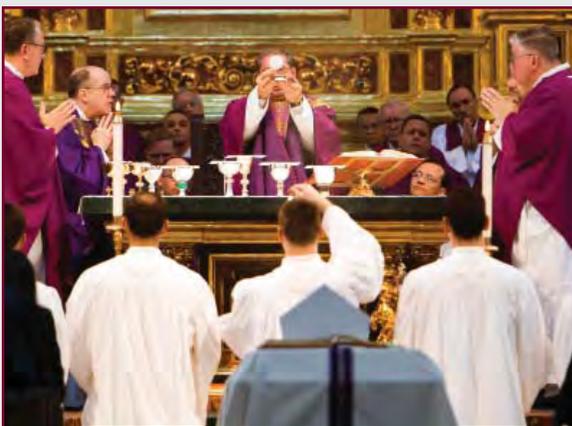
Abbot Parker needed to build a church for his newly erected abbey, and it went up (a simple A-frame) in the center of the abbey platform, Abbot Parker could often be seen in the midst of it all, hardhat on, making sure all went well and was finished on time. At the time of the church’s consecration –September 20, 1984 – abbots and prelates of the Norbertine order from all over the world were present in a show of support for the fledgling abbey. Abbot Parker was solicitous for his priests’ education and sought far and wide in the early years of the community to find a good school for Philosophy and Theology. He eventually decided on the Angelicum University in Rome – staffed by the Dominicans. The abbey’s dedication to the teachings of St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas was fostered by Abbot Parker starting early on in the community’s existence, because he saw the upheavals of the 1960s and the confusion in some circles of the Church in the face of wide-scale disobedience and calling into question even basic tenets of the Faith all in the name of a misinterpretation of the Second Vatican Council.



In the midst of a growing community that had become an independent priory in 1975 and was now an abbey (an abbey that he had no idea he was founding back in 1961) Abbot Parker hit the full stride of his later years. Blessed as first abbot of St. Michael’s on August 15,

1984, he continued his work with the serenity of one who knows that his foundation is going to survive. Often during this period, he would not go out to the parishes on Sundays but say the conventual Mass at 11 o’clock, and his Sunday sermons were always memorable, and followed a format that charmed as it instructed. The formula was:

clearing of the throat; brief Latin quote from the liturgical chants; and then an immediate launch into some subject that was very visible in the news of the day – an event that seemed incongruous but would be used to instruct and apply the Gospel to daily life. He had a love for the archangel Michael that roused him to his most eloquent homilies, and he had a love for the liturgy of the Church and the liturgical formation he had received as a boy and young man – a formation in the liturgical movement and the writings of Pius Parsch and Romano Guardini.



Photos: R. Belcher

*The basilica was packed – and the ceremonies took on splendor and serenity that comes when many people are gathered in respect and gratitude for an individual, Gregorian chant mingled with polyphonic splendor of the Victoria Requiem, Palestrina’s “Sicut Cervus”, and many of those present thought how appropriate such music was for Abbot Parker’s funeral. A casket stood in the sanctuary with a mitre atop; this surrounded by Gregorian chant and Victoria, all the crowd present and Abbot Eugene’s eloquent recollection of some of what this man had accomplished in his long life.*



Photo: R. Belcher



Abbot Parker never liked to be flattered, especially when he did not think he deserved it. At one of the routine community visitations to prepare for a General Chapter, the visitators commented in their read report that the then-reigning Abbot Parker was “a prince among abbots” – and one of the young clerics after this comment was read greeted him in the garden, “Ave princeps abbatum!” (Hail prince of abbots!) Abbot Parker was not amused...and the cleric moved on to his next chore – quickly.

When the confreres elected Eugene J. Hayes as second Abbot of St. Michael’s in June of 1995, Abbot Parker did several things simultaneously – as was his wont. He moved into retirement with a stunning grace, never trying to take the reins, yet always willing to be consulted or lend a hand. He increased his correspondence with friends and traveled more to Hungary to visit with family and friends; while his health permitted, he spent more time amongst

the roses he loved so well, and he fought against the infirmity of Parkinson’s disease with disciplined exercise well into his 80s. His role as elder-statesman in the abbey suited him, and his affection for the confreres – an affection that had been a constant throughout his years in community – came to the fore in a more transparent way. So often – when approaching Abbot Parker, a confrere would see his brown eyes light up, and his characteristic, “Heeeey! Come here! Come here...” and then he would want to hear your latest news. This would brighten even the gloomiest of days. You sensed Abbot Parker was genuinely glad to see you, and as the years went by, he more and more radiated joy.

Abbot Parker’s mind and wit stayed sharp until he died, but the ravages of Parkinson’s rendered movement, even eating, very difficult. A few weeks into December – it became clear that he was rapidly declining, and it was not known if he would even survive to his 94th birthday on December 19. He progressively became weaker and less able to fight off fevers and congestion and finally and peacefully breathed his last after midnight on January 3<sup>rd</sup>.

*As the Mass ended, a massive crowd joined the funeral cortège to Ascension cemetery to be on-hand for the burial. A procession formed when the casket was by the graveside, and the confreres sang the Gregorian antiphons and psalms in Latin following the custom of our community at the graveside of a confrere.*

*The sound of earth falling rhythmically onto the sepulcher marked the end of the burial as each confrere took a shovelful of dirt from the graveside mound and put it over the casket in the ground. Members of the faithful threw roses on the grave of a man who had grown them well and worked hard his whole life, but more than that, a man who had been kind, a good friend and had founded our community.*





## ST. MICHAEL'S ABBEY & PREPARATORY SCHOOL

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If you receive duplicates, please send us both mailing addresses, and tell us which one is correct.

### Calendar of Events

April	
1	Holy Thursday – Sacred Triduum Mass of the Lord's Supper with procession to the Altar of Repose 5:30 p.m.
2	Solemn Liturgy of Good Friday - 2:00 p.m. Stations of the Cross - 7:00 p.m.
3	Holy Saturday Easter Vigil - 10:00 p.m. Mass
4	Easter Sunday - 11:00 a.m. Mass, 3:30 p.m. Paschal Vespers
5	Easter Monday - 11:00 a.m. Mass 5:00 p.m. Paschal Vespers
12	Classes Resumes (Prep School)
May	
1	Entrance Exam * - 9:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.
9	Mother's Day
13	Ascension of Our Lord – 11:00 a.m.
16	Spring Concert - 7:00 p.m.
21	Baccalaureate
23	High School Graduation
June	
2	Corpus Christi & Procession at the Abbey 11:00 a.m. Mass, 5:00 p.m. Vespers, followed by Procession
19	New Student Orientation
20	Father's Day Picnic 11:00 a.m. Mass, followed by a Picnic & Potluck
26	Ordinations to the Priesthood & Diaconate Mission Basilica San Juan Capistrano - 10:00 a.m. Mass
July	
4	Independence Day
11	Summer Camp begins & runs through August 14

\*Registration for Entrance Exam is required. Testing fee is \$60. Please contact: Admissions@StMichaelsPrep.org.

Mass is celebrated each day at 7:00 a.m. and on Sunday at 11:00 a.m.

Updated Mass Request information and forms are available online at [www.StMichaelsAbbey.com/massrequests](http://www.StMichaelsAbbey.com/massrequests).

For further information on calendar of Liturgies and events, please visit [www.StMichaelsAbbey.com](http://www.StMichaelsAbbey.com).



### The Abbot Ladislav K. Parker Scholarship

Upon his retirement in 1995 at 80, Abbot Ladislav Parker said that any success he may have had in the challenges and adventures of his life was attributable to God's grace working through the Norbertine boarding high school education he had received.

Confident that God will raise more men like Abbot Parker in future generations of our students, St. Michael's Preparatory School invites you to make memorial gifts to the Abbot Ladislav K. Parker Scholarship for young men.

Gifts may be made online: [StMichaelsPrep.org/Giving](http://StMichaelsPrep.org/Giving) or please make checks payable to 'St. Michael's' with note 'Abbot Parker Scholarship' on the Memo.