

Fr. Peter Baptist Fritz, O.F.M.
June 26, 1924 – September 10, 2019

In the year 2018, the Sacred Heart Province experienced the deaths of twelve of our brothers. Nine months into 2019, Sister Death has come for only two friars, both of them dying at St. Mary's Nursing Home in Manitowoc, WI. Fr. Jonathan Foster, O.F.M., died in February and Fr. Peter Fritz, O.F.M., went home to God on September 10, 2019, at the age of 95.

Bernard Fritz was born on June 26, 1924, in Chaska, MN, to Bernard Fritz and Margaret (Huber) Fritz. He was the second in line of eight children: Mary, Bernard, Philip, Judy, Philomena, Rita, David and Kay. He was baptized and confirmed at Guardian Angels Parish in Chaska.

Bernard was received into the Franciscan community as a novice during the Second World War on July 2, 1943. He was given the name Peter Baptist. As a novice, he kept a journal and continued to make entries until September, 2012. He noted that his "real novitiate" began by getting a "tunic and fems and corona haircuts." In the early days of his formation, Peter wrote about two important events in his journal: November 4, 1944, "Roosevelt re-elected to 4th term over Thomas Dewey" and August 14, 1945, "War is over. Japan surrenders. Much rejoicing, horns blowing, bells ringing." Two years later, Peter professed solemn vows on July 3, 1947, and was ordained a priest on June 25, 1950, in Teutopolis, IL, by Bishop William O'Connor.

Fr. Peter began his priestly ministry in Petoskey, MI, serving as a chaplain to the Sacramentine cloistered sisters and part-time assistant at St. Francis Xavier parish. His parochial ministry continued at St. Christopher in Midlothian, IL; St. Francis of Assisi in Oakville, MO; St. Joseph in Cleveland, OH; and back to St. Louis where he resided for the next 27 years. There, Fr. Peter began a long career as the chaplain of Veterans' Administration Hospital. In a July 25, 1970, entry in his journal, he wrote: "I applied for, and received the appointment as full-time Catholic Chaplain at Jefferson Barracks VA Hospital. Will be a 21-year ministry." Not only did Fr. Peter find great joy in his ministry at the hospital, but he also spoke fondly of his time living with the friars at St. Francis in Oakville. Concluding his ministry at the hospital, Fr. Peter traveled to Santa Barbara, CA, for a nine-week program at the Franciscan Institute, a mini-sabbatical.

He then accepted two pastorates in Louisiana, at Ruston and Calhoun. Four years later, Fr. Peter moved to Crowley, TX, and resided at Franciscan Village. For 13 years, he helped out in various parishes as a supply minister. He was also guardian for three years. He retired in 2009, and moved to Our Lady of Angels Friary in Sherman, IL. In 2012, along with seven other retired friars, he made the journey to Manitowoc, WI, to the new Blessed Giles Friary. He lived there, quietly and prayerfully, with his brothers. Due to failing health, he moved to St. Mary's Nursing Home at the Felician Village in 2018 and died there on September 10, 2019.

Fr. Peter was a humble and holy friar. When people visited him at St. Mary's, he was either at his computer playing solitaire, watching his beloved Cardinals on TV, or praying his rosary. The last few weeks of his life he was in bed, wondering when the Lord would come for him and take

him home to heaven. He would always let visiting friars know that he was praying for the friars at Blessed Giles and he would say, “tell the friars I love them.”

Gathering to celebrate his life on Saturday morning, September 14, 2019, were Bernard and David Hesse and Jeff Kerber, Fr. Peter’s nephews. Fr. Tom Nairn, O.F.M., provincial minister, celebrated the funeral Mass. The friar community, guests Pat Goldsmith and Dennis Koopman, O.F.M., and several care givers were in attendance.

The readings chosen for the Mass of Resurrection highlighted Fr. Peter’s life. The prophet Micah invites us to “walk humbly with our God.” Paul’s Letter to Timothy speaks about those who look for the Lord with “eager longing.” And the words of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew are words of hope – “come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest.” Fr. Peter was a humble man who waited for the Lord with “eager longing.”

Fr. Tom began his homily by sharing his last visit with Fr. Peter: Fr. Peter asked him why God wasn’t taking him home yet. When he answered that he didn’t know, Peter said, “Thank you; you can go now.” Many of us know that Fr. Peter was a man who spoke few words. Fr. Tom asked the question – “Why was Pete so anxious to die after he had lived a good and fruitful life?” Tom suggested that Pete knew that our own life was a preparation for something greater. He explained the Franciscan idea of “Transitus” – the passing over from this life to the next, from the transitoriness of this life to the glory of life with God, from temporal things to eternal life. Fr. Tom said: “Who would not want that?”

Fr. Peter experienced the “Transitus” in the late afternoon of Tuesday, September 10th. His longing to go home to the Lord was his final gift from God.

As a friar, Fr. Peter consecrated his life to walking in the footsteps of Francis and Clare. As a priest, he served the people of God faithfully. May the Lord now welcome him to the heavenly banquet table, and may he inherit the promise of eternal life.

Fr. Peter is survived by siblings Philip (and the late Betty) Fritz of Alexandria, VA; Dr. David and Lilli Fritz of Lakewood, CO; Philomena (and the late Bernard) Hesse of Hopkins, MN; and Kay Fritz-Copper of Cantonment, FL. He is also survived by 28 nephews and nieces and numerous grand-nephews and grand-nieces. We express our deepest sympathy to his family and to all who knew and loved him.

Fr. Peter was laid to rest alongside his Franciscan brothers at Calvary Cemetery in Manitowoc, WI. May our brother, Fr. Peter, who spent his life “loving and longing for God”, rest in peace.

In your kindness, please consider making a donation in memory of Fr. Peter Fritz, O.F.M., to the Development Office of the Franciscan Province of the Sacred Heart. Please send your charitable contribution to: St. Anthony Friary – 3140 Meramec Street – St. Louis, MO – 63118-4399.