

# In Memory of Abbot Aidan Shea

December 2, 2018



On the morning of Sunday, December 2, 2018, the First Sunday of Advent, Abbot Aidan Shea, O.S.B., entered eternal life after several years of declining health. A Mass of Christian Burial will be offered in the St. Anselm's Abbey School gymnasium at 10 a.m. on Saturday, December 15, with burial in the abbey cemetery.

Born in Boston, Massachusetts on August 7, 1930, he was given the baptismal name Paul by his parents, John and Helen Shea. Having received all of his elementary, high school, and collegiate education in the Boston area, he then entered the army and was assigned to the 101st Airborne at Fort Jackson, South Carolina. He was never bashful of how ill-prepared he was for military life and loved to give an hilarious account of his inability to take apart and then try to reassemble his rifle, only to have it fall to pieces at his feet in front of the commanding officer. Recounting this part of his life in a later interview, he said: "For someone as hopelessly non-mechanical as I am, the army had to find something else for me to do. I was always interested in language and literature, so they sent me to study oriental languages—Vietnamese and Chinese."

His years in the army also gave him time to assess the scope of his life. On being honorably discharged in 1956, he visited the Trappist monastery in Berryville, Virginia, later recalling: "Before entering the army, I had no thought of becoming a monk, but now it seemed important to try monastic life and to learn as much about the gospel as I could. The spiritual life at Berryville convinced me to become a monk."

Not feeling called to that particular form of monastic life, he applied instead to St. Anselm's, where he was clothed as a novice on December 6, 1957, eventually making final vows almost exactly four years later. During these early years at St. Anselm's, he took courses in philosophy, Latin, and French at the nearby Catholic University of America while taking theology classes from older monks right at the monastery. When he was ready for priestly ordination in 1965, his elderly mother was too frail to travel to Washington, so he received permission to be ordained by Cardinal Cushing in Boston on February 14, 1965, with his mother and some of his longtime friends in attendance.

By then known as Fr. Aidan, his lifelong love of language and literature proved to be a boon for the abbey school, for over the ensuing decades he became one of its most beloved and esteemed teachers of courses in English, Latin, Greek, French, and occasionally Spanish. Among the numerous students whom he influenced was one who wrote last year: "The person who has had the most influence on my life is Fr. Aidan, who taught me Latin and French and served as my guidance counselor in high school. He officiated at my Confirmation and also at my wedding and baptized both of my sons. He has been a friend and spiritual mentor for most of my adult life."

In addition to his work in our school as a teacher, college counselor, and master of studies, he also held various positions in the monastery, most notably serving two eight-year terms as abbot (1990-2006). Both during those years and after retirement, Abbot Aidan was in much demand as a retreat master for various communities, and he also served as the spiritual director for numerous persons who came to see him regularly at the abbey. One of them recently wrote: "I can only imagine how pleased the good Lord will be to welcome the Abbot, whose life's work has been beyond what any words could adequately eulogize. He has been to many the very best of men and of spiritual leaders."

As we commend this good man to his Lord and Creator, we ask that you keep him and all of his brother monks at St. Anselm's in your own prayers.