



Glory to God – Peace to Humankind

Abbot Ivo (Josef) Auf der Maur

b. 14 August 1924

d. 15 January 2021

Abbot Ivo (Josef) Auf der Maur, OSB

Anyone who knew Abbot Ivo is probably not so surprised that he gave back his life to God, the Creator, around midday on the memorial of Saints Maurus and Placid, the two disciples of Saint Benedict Pope Gregory the Great noted in the *Dialogues* for their obedience, faithfulness and love of Christ and his Church. This would sum up in brief the life of our deceased. Let us linger in a little more detail in the following lines, for it is not merely his life of 96 years, his 75 years as a monk and his over 70 years of priestly ministry that are record breaking.

Abbot Ivo was born on 14 August 1924 in Steinen, Canton Schwyz, and baptized in the parish church on 17 August with the name Josef Maria. With his parents, Josef and Rosa Auf der Maur-Sutter, and along with his five siblings, he grew up in the environment of his parents' carpentry business. After primary school and having been taught Latin by the village pastor, he went on in 1937 to the monastery gymnasium of Einsiedeln from which he graduated in 1944. From the monastic-like environment of the gymnasium he went directly into the military. He carried out his military training with the mountain infantry in Bellizona from July to October. This cleared the way for the long awaited step of entering the monastery of the Benedictine Missionaries of St. Otilien in Fribourg. In the document for admission to the monastery, his motivation was bluntly stated: "To save souls." In 2021 this answer may make us sit up and take notice and at the same time direct a challenging question to us: For what or for whom do I commit my life?

For young Frater Ivo temporary profession on 11 November 1945 was followed by theology studies at the University of Fribourg, which he completed in 1950 with the licentiate. He had already been ordained a priest on 10 July 1949 by Bishop François Charrière in Saint Michel church in Fribourg.

A great wish is fulfilled

The year 1951 brought the 27-year-old Missionary Benedictine, Father Ivo Auf der Maur, not only the long desired mission work but at the same time opened up for him the door to the wide world. It was on 11 May that he set out via Rome for present-day Tanzania. Father Ivo taught philosophy along with religion, history and world events in the Kigonsera Minor Seminary near Peramiho. He was a teacher for the young students for 32 hours a week, teaching in Latin, English and Swahili. Besides that, one day a week was devoted to working in the field and he had to look after the kitchen, the purchase of food and the tailor shop. For the first time the incredible creative energy of our Abbot Ivo shines forth. In this connection, he rightly refers in his notes to students like the later Bishops Raymund Mwanyika of Njombe, Maurus Libaba of Lindi and Emmanuel Mapunda of Mbinga. The later president of Tanzania Benjamin Mkapa was also among his students in Kigonsera. It hardly needs mentioning that the initially agreed upon five years were soon over and in 1956 the return trip followed.

Doctorate in Rome

A no less exciting time succeeded the years in the missions. Prior Notker Mannhart (d. 1981) assigned Father Ivo to doctoral studies in patristics in Rome. Together with Father Benno Hegglin he spent the years 1956–58 in Rome. He completed his studies on 19 November 1958 with the thesis "Monasticism and the Proclamation of the Faith in the Writings of Saint John Chrysostom." The doctoral advisor was Father Kassius Hallinger

OSB of Münsterschwarzach Abbey. After the years in the missions, these years in Rome gave Father Ivo a further insight into the universal church.

As a missionary in Switzerland

With a solid education and mission experience, our community had in its midst a young monk who could and wanted to support the years of building up the community and the construction of the new monastery in Uznach. He loved his work and did it not only with precision but also quickly. His work concerned not only the community (as editor of the magazine, as librarian and archivist and much more) but he also put his energy and knowledge at the service of the Church of Switzerland and the Congregation of St. Ottilien. In the early 1960s Father Ivo was a founding member of the Mission Council, served as a presenter for the Catechetical Institute and was on the theology faculty in Lucerne. His scholarly activity found expression in collaborating on journals and other publications. Thus he was an associate editor and collaborator for the *Neuen Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaften* and the *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft*. Over the years he also aided publications such as *Archiv für Liturgiewissenschaft*, *Bulletin d'Histoire Bénédictine*, *Historisches Lexikon der Schweiz* and others. An expression of his love of knowledge is our library, for which he was responsible until a year ago, and the exemplarily organized archives of our abbey.

All these activities took place within a worldwide view of the Church. This was realized for Abbot Ivo especially in working with the Mission Congregation of St. Ottilien found on four continents. He brought his ideas and knowledge to various commissions, as a member of the Congregation leadership and for two years as the first assistant abbot. Naturally, this involved visitations on the various continents. In all these activities, however, Abbot Ivo remained the humble monk; externally there was simply no danger of placing his person unduly at the center. Rather he remained true to his quiet, withdrawn character. However, if he did speak up, his thoughts oftentimes convinced those involved and contributed to a sustainable outcome. At least I experienced Abbot Ivo thus into old age as a member of our community and its chapter.

Lourdes – My Joy

For thirty years, from 1974 to 2004, Abbot Ivo accompanied the annual inter-diocesan Lourdes pilgrimage of German and Romansch Switzerland. His commitment to the message of Lourdes was clearly based on the healing of Brother Leo Schwager (d. 2004) on 30 April 1952 and on the fact that our monastery headed the pilgrimage office for over 40 years. Abbot Ivo was not just a popular spiritual guide on the pilgrim train. The pilgrims appreciated the many years of preaching, there were over 90 sermons, which he did in Lourdes. In addition, he shared his experiences as a member of the board of the pilgrimage and until 2008 was the editor of the magazine *AVE*. In addition to this involvement, Abbot Ivo also experienced a liberating inner joy with Lourdes and in Lourdes. The confreres were in agreement about this: When Abbot Ivo stays in Lourdes, he is carried along by great joy and a lightness that gives a special touch to his rather austere and withdrawn daily life. Perhaps a further touching sign of Lourdes.

Abbot of the youngest abbey in Switzerland

When Father Ivo was elected the prior of our monastery on 26 January 1981, he could hardly have suspected that just a year later the office of abbot was waiting for him. It was 6 January 1982 when St. Otmarsberg was raised to an abbey by Archabbot Notker Wolf and Father Ivo was elected the first abbot. As a rather shy person and faithful to the ideal of the monk, this office may have lain heavy on his shoulders now and then. Yet he exercised it faithfully till his 75th birthday and was forward looking. That the building of the church was connected with it was, so to speak, the basis for the elevation to an abbey, as noted in the statement: "Let us first elect an abbot. That is much simpler than building a church." In the planning and execution of this important project of our abbey, he saw himself more in the background. His wishes and his ideas did not have to be in the foreground. The only important thing for him was maintaining unity in the community. When it came to acquiring the Stations of the Cross for the abbey church, he let the artist Val Rixen know in a letter, "The discussion and the choice is not about what the abbot likes but what the community chooses in unity." With this principle, projects beyond the construction of the church could be planned and carried out in which space was given for the input and the wealth of ideas of the confreres that would lead into the future. Since the abbot was closely connected to the missions and to the missionary work associated with it, he was very pleased that during the construction of the church the donations for the missions did not decrease but the building of the church could still be financed.

A faithful servant

This view of Abbot Ivo intentionally needs to end with a look at his monastic life. Much more about the varied and long work could be listed and will perhaps be missed by some. In my opinion, however, the life of Abbot Ivo can only be truly grasped in terms of his love for monasticism. Once Abbot Ivo said to me one evening while playing canasta, "I wanted to become a monk and missionary and I was fully able to achieve that with the Missionary Benedictines." All the external work of Abbot Ivo was grounded in monasticism and he lived it authentically, yes, in an exemplary manner. Rightly, and that is why it is mentioned here again, I wrote in the last newsletter addressed to the confreres of our Congregation: "The 75th anniversary of the profession of Abbot Emeritus Ivo that we celebrated on 11 November in the context of our community and without any fanfare was certainly not simply something ordinary. Yet Abbot Ivo probably thanked God more in the quiet of his cell and there reflected on these moving decades. It may be accepted as a great gift that he followed the course of this day in all fidelity. As a matter of course, he began this rare jubilee with Vigils at 5:30 a.m. in the abbey church and concluded it there also with Compline at 8:00 p.m. This small detail reveals the deeply monastic character of Abbot Ivo and the interior attitude connected with it." Yes, Abbot Ivo was a faithful disciple of Saint Benedict and an example of it into old age. A few weeks ago he said to me, and with this I would like to end this review of his life: "Abbot Emmanuel, would you please dispense me from The Liturgy of the Hours. I have no more strength for it."

St. Otmarsberg Abbey, 18 January 2020

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