

Father Adelrich Staub OSB

4 October 1943 – 29 April 2022

In a meditation for Easter written during Passion Week just before being hospitalized, Father Adelrich shared with us the following words: “For forty days we have been preparing for the celebration of life, for Easter. We have walked the last way with Jesus, we have heard his prayer to the Father, ‘My God, why have you forsaken me’ (Ps 22) but also his word of trust in the Father, ‘Into your hands I commend my life’ (Ps 31). All the witnesses of his death were convinced that this was the end of their journey with Jesus—until they experienced: He lives! And he commissioned them to bring the message of death and resurrection to the whole world and invite people to follow him, Christ.”

For Father Adelrich these were not only beautiful thoughts for meditation. They were his life. The following lines allow us to share in his journey with Jesus, in his praying, in his being abandoned and yet knowing that he is in his hands, and in his mission.

Alfred Staub was born in Zug on 4 October 1943 to Alfred and Margrit Staub-Hegglin. Together with his two brothers, Hanspeter and Ignaz, the city of Zug and especially the parish of St. Michael left its mark on him. His father taught as a professor of mathematics in the Zug Canton School, a gymnasium that Alfred himself attended as a young lad and from which he graduated. On 30 September 1962, at the age of 19, he entered the Benedictinum in Fribourg and upon being admitted to the novitiate six days later, he received the name Adelrich in remembrance of the late Father Adelrich Mühlebach OSB who had died in Uznach in 1960. The reason for entering the monastery of the Missionary Benedictines was the personal relationship with Mrs. Baselia of Zug, the sister of Father Valerian Herweg OSB (d. 2000) and the participation in the missionary work of the church. Shortly before the transfer of the community from Fribourg to Uznach, on 6 October 1963, Frater Adelrich made his temporary profession. This was followed by years of study in St. Ottilien and Rome, where he finished on 16 December 1977 earning a doctorate in Old Testament with a thesis on the exegetical method of Jerome in his Commentary on the Book of the Twelve Prophets.

Then it really went blow by blow, as Father Adelrich told me a few days before he died. In 1978 he was missioned to Peramiho in Tanzania. After a parish assignment in Mikalanga, he traveled with Abbot Lambert Doerr OSB (d. 2017) to Nairobi to build up the new foundation in the capital of Kenya. Thus began an exciting and at the same time challenging time for Father Adelrich. After being appointed prior, it was necessary to build a community with the new missionaries and to involve those already working in the Kerio Valley. Soon young Kenyans and Ugandas were interested in monasticism. They wanted to be introduced to the monastic life and Father Adelrich was their novice master. In addition, the new monastery on Thika Road in Nairobi had to be planned, financed and realized. There was also a need for personnel in the pastoral work of the parish, not least for Mathare Valley, the largest slum in Nairobi that is in the immediate vicinity. The following excerpt from a letter of September 1982 gives us an insight

into the everyday life: “Those involved with the pastoral ministry to the nomads of Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda just met with us. Fr. Odilo and Sr. Karin had come from Handeni.... I myself got a real insight into their work this way for the first time. For eight days, I was with Abbot Lambert in the Kerio Valley and in Eldoret and, last but not least, in Tororo. There we visited the sisters and Fr. Johannes. The visit to the latter had no effect.”

In 1985 our community here on St. Otmarsberg needed a new prior. The choice fell on the then 41-year-old Father Adelrich. It was for this reason he had to pull up stakes in Nairobi. He came to St. Otmarsberg on 29 August and on 5 October he was officially named prior, a date that would give shape to his monastic life for another 36 years: first under Abbot Ivo, then under Abbot Marian and another eight years as my representative. In my opinion he was made for this office. That he could carry it out under three abbots with very different character traits touchingly reveals his love for his confreres, for God, but also for the Church. It was never about him, but always about the glory of God and respect for the neighbor, whoever this was. But the office of prior also granted him space to share his abilities and charisma with many people: as a priest and teacher far beyond the Linth area; as a lecturer in Old Testament and teacher of biblical languages in Einsiedeln and Chur; as a member of the building commission of our abbey church; as a member of the leadership council of our congregation. —Much more beyond his work bears his personal traces. Given his own unique humaneness, he was able to contribute to solutions and with success. But often enough he was also a supportive companion. His strength did not lie in the brightly lit stage, but the quiet diplomacy nurtured from a relationship with Christ. He was never heard judging or condemning in public. Even in private he was very reserved about this. What was entrusted to Father Adelrich, he kept in his heart and tried to bear with it. There were no leaks of any kind. A true hallmark of his life and, in my opinion, a wise kind of missionary work in our time.

But Father Adelrich was not only a theologian, monk, priest or pastor. His keen intellect also gave him access to the fields of art and culture. Many artistic works in our abbey clearly reveal his handwriting, not least the design of the sanctuary area of our abbey church. Even if from his point of view he certainly had to make compromises, he knew how to give shape to something artistically in the abbey and beyond. But this other kind of knowledge was not merely of a profane nature for him. Rather, he used art to present Christ and his church to people. I think I can say that for Father Adelrich art was one of many ways of bringing the message of the Gospel closer to the people. For Father Adelrich, art was mission, or as he so aptly put it in his meditation for Easter, so that they could “walk the way with Jesus.”

The atmosphere of his parental home also laid the foundation in Father Adelrich of a fundamental willingness and openness to all people, including those of other cultures. The fact that with his vocation as a Missionary Benedictine he lived with this broader emphasis of missionary work, found an echo in our Congregation and in his work as monk and priest. Even then, he was wise enough to live it, to make these concerns his prayer more than to proclaim them.

For many years Father Adelrich enjoyed good health. Even at the age of 75, he felt healthy enough to be at the service of the world fresh every day as a monk and priest. It may be a surprise that his resignation as prior and as the priest serving Maria Bildstein was prepared long beforehand and is not connected with the health problems that arose unexpectedly. Yet it was like the beginning of the last phase of his earthly life. An initially unexplained fatigue in November 2020 led to open-heart surgery last summer after an extensive evaluation and from which he recovered only very slowly and not completely. When he celebrated Mass again in January of this year, it was a clear sign of hope for all of us. However, respiratory problems soon became apparent, which made further diagnosis necessary. It remained inconclusive. Even a surgical procedure during Passion Week at Linth Hospital did not bring clarity. Rather, his condition visibly deteriorated during Holy Week, so that he had to be transferred to the Canton Hospital in St. Gallen on Good Friday. That Father Adelrich also tested positive for Covid-19 in these last days of his life did not make the situation any easier, but probably had only a minor influence on the course of events. Thus, after the Second Sunday of Easter, everyone involved, we as confreres, the relatives, and the doctors with the nursing staff, had to accept that his physical strength was exhausted. In view of his imminent death, I administered the sacrament of the anointing of the sick last Thursday afternoon at the Canton Hospital, after I had been able to experience in a touching way, in conversation with Professor Ehlers, how Father Adelrich was also a missionary in this phase of his life.

In the Easter meditation mentioned at the beginning, Father Adelrich also writes the following words, with which this review of his life will end: “With the one praying Psalm 116 and with Christ, we too may say: ‘I love the Lord, for he heard my loud supplication.... on the day I cried out to him.’ And: ‘In affliction I cried to the Lord, he heard me and set me free.’”

St. Otmarsberg Abbey, Uznach
3 May 2022

Abbot Emmanuel Rutz OSB