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Ask the Abbot

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March 2018 Question: Dear Abbot Pennings, How is Father Gene Gries doing these days?

Catherine (Schmitz) Jacobs '56

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March 2017

Question:

Dear Abbot Pennings,

“My classmate Kathleen Fayard ’06 and I went to the Marytown Shrine in Libertyville, Ill., and saw a small bone relic of St. Norbert there. How many relics of our college patron, around the world, are venerated in such a fashion?”

Casey Golomski ’06

Answer:

My dearest Casey,

What pleasure it gives me to hear from you, and to learn that you and dear Kathleen recently visited the **Marytown Shrine**. Your question is a most interesting one, indeed, and it would be remiss of me to attempt to answer it without offering some historical context.

When he died in 1134, our beloved St. Norbert was laid to rest in his own cathedral in Magdeburg, Germany. By the 17th century, though, the region had become a Protestant stronghold and the Norbertine community of Magdeburg was diminished. Meanwhile, there was interest, at our abbey in Prague in securing the saint’s remains as a focus for veneration and pilgrimage. (Prague was then in Bohemia – and is now the capital of the Czech Republic, I believe.) In 1627, the remains were ceremoniously conveyed to Prague, and St. Norbert was proclaimed the patron saint of Bohemia. To this day, the saint rests in a place of honor within the abbey church. This event is remembered under the churchly term, the Translation of Norbert, a feast commemorated each May 2.



Ask The Abbot

As the founder of St. Norbert College, and having a prime seat in the center of campus throughout the years, I, Abbot Bernard Pennings, hold the answers to many of your burning questions about the college.

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At certain periods of history, a passion for relics has so possessed the faithful that the proliferation of bone relics associated with certain saints has raised questions of their legitimacy. But careful consultation with my dear confrère Father Andrew Ciferni reassures me on this point with regard to our own beloved founding saint. (Ciferni is, himself, a member of the Class of 1964 at our esteemed institution and, dear me, is now director of our Center for Norbertine Studies.)

Ciferni tells me that when the then Abbot of Strahov, Gaspar von Questenberg, received permission to move the body of St. Norbert, he secured a decree from the pope to prevent others from taking large relics to other abbeys. That said, there do exist many small relics of Norbert of Xanten throughout the world. In the estimation of my own confrère, all such tiny fragments of saintly bone when put together would amount to no more in number than might constitute one finger of the blessed skeletal remains.

Responses to “Ask the Abbot” questions are penned by St. Norbert College staff in the name of Abbot Bernard Pennings, O.Praem., who founded St. Norbert College in 1898.

St. Norbert College

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