



Matthew G. Kovács
1929-2013

Born on February 19, 1929 in Hercegfalva (now *Mezőfalva*), Hungary as György Kovács, he lost his father as an infant, and was then brought up by his mother and stepfather, Mr. and Mrs. István Virágh. At the age of 11, at the initiative of the local pastor, he was sent to the Cistercian School in Baja, where he discerned and prepared to follow a vocation in the Cistercian Order. After the Communist regime nationalized all Catholic schools, Fr. Matthew was expelled from the school together with other senior students, identified as Catholic “ringleaders,” and was not permitted to graduate from any school. He finished high school privately in the minor seminary of Győr. In August 1949, he entered the novitiate in the Cistercian Abbey of Zirc, experiencing the last ten months of the monastery’s existence before its suppression by the Communists. He took his first vows on June 22, 1950. After the suppression of the monastery, he hoped to continue his formation in the diocesan seminary of Székesfehérvár, but by decree of the Communist State, as a professed monk of Zirc he was rejected and was refused entrance to any institute of higher learning. The following five years he worked in factories, and then was drafted and served for more than two years in the Hungarian People’s Army. All along he persevered in his vocation, studying philosophy and theology in clandestine, private groups under the leadership of Fr. Lawrence ‘Sigmund, hoping that his call would eventually come to fruition.

After the defeat of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, Fr. Lawrence, his acting major superior, suggested that he cross the poorly guarded Western border and emigrate to Austria. Before leaving, on November 30, 1956, Matthew was allowed to take his perpetual vows clandestinely. On December 3, he finally arrived to the Cistercian Abbey of Heiligenkreuz.

Fr. Matthew joined the other recent Cistercian refugees in Rome. In eight months he took exams and became eligible to be ordained a priest. He was ordained together with Fr. Pascal in the Abbey of Zwettl, Austria on July 21, 1957. While

finishing his theological studies, he worked as chaplain in several Hungarian refugee camps in Austria and at the same time studied at the University of Graz.

On July 1, 1959 Fr. Matthew arrived to the newly constructed monastery of Dallas. From September 1959 until the summer of 1962 he lived in Ft. Worth, at the Mother House of the Sisters of Saint Mary of Namur (Our Lady of Victory), obtaining a Master's degree in German Language and Literature at Texas Christian University.

From 1963 to 2006 Fr. Matthew taught German and Latin in Cistercian Preparatory School. He served as assistant treasurer from 1963 to 1980. He regularly assisted in various pastoral assignments, including daily masses and weekly confessions at Holy Family Catholic church in Irving for many years. He often said the monthly Hungarian masses at the Cistercian Abbey.

By his untiring daily participation in the Divine Office, and his faithful and prompt priestly ministry, Fr. Matthew left behind a beautiful example of religious life. At every graduation Cistercian seniors recalled his cheerfulness, which turned the first year of Latin into a happy and memorable experience. He died unexpectedly but peacefully in his sleep on July 12, 2013 at the age of 84.

The Rosary will be held at the Cistercian Abbey in Irving on Monday, July 15, at 7:30 PM. The Funeral Mass will follow on Tuesday, July 16, at the Cistercian Abbey at 10:00 AM. Burial will be at Calvary Hill Cemetery.

In lieu of flowers donations may be made in his honor to the Cistercian Abbey or the Cistercian Preparatory School.