

Multiple Martyrs: Namesakes

by [Martin E. Marty](#) in the [October 19, 2004](#) issue

On September 19, 1896, Martin Marty (no relation), brother of Martin Marty (no relation), died. His remains were reburied on September 19 of this year. The first burial took place in St. Cloud, Minnesota, and the second both in St. Cloud and in St. Meinrad, Indiana. To explain:

The two 19th-century Marty brothers both entered monastic life. One carried his baptismal name into the monastery. The second had been baptized Joseph Melchoir Alois Marty but took on the name “Martin” when he entered the Order of St. Benedict (O.S.B.) at the great monastery at Einsiedeln, Switzerland. Having two Martin Martyrs in one nuclear family confused many. By the way, another Martin Marty (no relation), a Zurich, made pilgrimages with his wife to a chapel at Einsiedeln to pray for my first wife during her terminal illness. By now you get the plot: Martyrs like to name their sons Martin.

The 19th-century Martin Marty from Einsiedeln came to America, where he became a notable abbot and bishop who acquired a mixed reputation in his order. The Benedictine historian Colman Barry, O.S.B., thought that I, a Protestant, ought to write the abbot’s biography. Think of the interfaith market for a biography on Martin Marty, O.S.B., by Martin Marty, SOB, he said.

Our subject first led the St. Meinrad community in Indiana and then, in 1876, responded to a call to the Dakota Territory, where he led Native American missionary work. Finding monks to join that mission was difficult: Dakota in the 1870s was not a plush posting. So Marty on occasion had to take in fugitive, misfit, sometimes alcoholic and maybe womanizing monks—a policy that offended other abbots, who could do nothing about it. Hence the mixed reputation of this “Angel of the West,” as the encyclopedias refer to him.

Rather than revisit his career, we will hasten to recount his end. He died as bishop of St. Cloud and was buried, against his will—I picture him protesting even posthumously—in Calvary Cemetery. So this year his successor, Bishop John Kinney, presided at a reinterment ceremony at his chosen resting place, Assumption

Cemetery in St. Cloud. Where did that leave St. Meinrad, which also wanted a piece of the action? The congenial Benedictines worked out a share-the-relics plan, and on September 19 the 111-member St. Meinrad community reinterred their part of Marty.

According to the description in St. Cloud's August 26 *Visitor*, "The bishop's skeletal remains and somewhat deteriorated clothing were intact. His gloved hands clasped a carved wooden crucifix and rosary. With Bishop Kinney's approval, Father [Julian of St. Meinrad's] Peters took remains below Bishop Marty's left knee back to St. Meinrad's for reinterment." Why below the left knee? Left, for Marty's occasional displays of radicalism? Below the knee, well worn from kneeling, to indicate that he was a pious sort? For kicking, because he could engage in disciplining outbursts? We wonder.

For years, travelers to St. Cloud who happened upon Marty's grave would send me photos of a tombstone reading, "The Right Reverend Martin Marty." Now from Assumption Cemetery in St. Cloud will I get pictures of a stone reading, "Most of the Right Reverend Martin Marty," *and* from St. Meinrad, "The Left of Reverend Martin Marty"? Or should the tombstones, wherever they be, use the name favored by the Native Americans Marty served—not always wisely but, by his lights, well: "Black Robe Lean Chief"? Under whatever name and in his several occasions, we say, "Rest in peace."