

May 6, 2020-Wednesday, Fourth Week of Easter

‘Apostle of the Alleghenies’

Demetrius Gallitzin was born December 22, 1770, in the Netherlands, into one of Russia’s oldest and wealthiest families.

His father was a prince who served as Russian ambassador to Holland. His mother was an Austrian baroness who had fallen away from Catholicism as a child. Demetrius was raised in the Russian Orthodox Church, but at age 17 became Catholic to please his mother who had returned to the Church.

After finishing his education, he was named an aide to a military general, but his parents decided Demetrius should first spend a couple of years visiting the United States, the West Indies, and other countries. In 1792, Demetrius landed in Baltimore, Maryland, accompanied by his priest tutor, and with letters of introduction to Bishop John Carroll. To avoid traveling as a Russian prince, Demetrius adopted the name Augustine Smith. Moved by the needs of the people he met, Demetrius decided to enter St. Mary’s Seminary in Baltimore.

During a visit to the Alleghenies, Fr. Gallitzin decided to form a Catholic settlement there. Today, the Allegheny territory where Fr. Gallitzin served constitutes the dioceses of Pittsburgh, Erie, and part of Harrisburg in western Pennsylvania.

At his own expense, he built sawmills, tanneries, and other businesses to employ the people. Because he had converted to Catholicism, Russia had confiscated most of the family fortune, so Fr. Gallitzin accumulated a large personal debt. Among those helping him pay off the debt were Charles Carroll and Cardinal Bartolomeo Cappellari (the future Pope Gregory XVI).

Fr. Gallitzin died May 6, 1840, in Loretto, Pennsylvania.

Today is the halfway point of the 50-day Easter Season

Jesus said: “But the sheep will not follow a stranger; they will run away from him, because they do not recognize the voice of strangers.”
(John 10:5)

We’ve all experienced coming into a group where we didn’t know anyone.

Perhaps we are at a party, or a wedding, or a funeral.

We look for a familiar face, listen for a familiar voice.

Jesus came as someone who would be with us at every step in our lives, even when we feel alone, or lost, or confused.

He wants to be a familiar presence, a voice that I know well.

I need to allow Jesus to get that close to me.

Spend some quiet time with the Lord