

Basques Mourn Father Espelette

MONTEBELLO — Solemn Requiem Mass was offered here Saturday in St. Benedict's Church for Father Charles Espelette, O.S.B., who died Friday at the age of 75.

Born in the Basque lands of the French Pyrenees, Fr. Charles labored here among the French and Basque for the past 25 years. He also served the small Mexican mission of Our Lady of Mount Carmel near here.

The Benedictine monk was buried at St. Gregory's Abbey, Shawnee, Okla., following Pontifical Requiem Mass there Tuesday, celebrated by Abbot Philip Berning, O.S.B. Bishop Victor J. Reed of the Oklahoma City-Tulsa diocese was present in the sanctuary.

Combat Infantryman

The Solemn Requiem here Saturday was offered by Fr. John Bloms, O.S.B., pastor of St. Benedict's.

Fr. Charles Espelette joined the Benedictine community in Shawnee following his expulsion from France in 1903 under the laws restricting religious orders. He was ordained in Oklahoma in 1910.

Conscripted into the French army in 1914 during a visit home, Fr. Charles served as an infantryman, was twice decorated and was wounded in combat.

In 1933 he was assigned here at the request of Basque families living in Southern California. He took charge of Mt. Carmel mission in 1940.

For nearly 20 years Fr. Charles lived alone in old St. Benedict's Monastery on Beverly Blvd. here. He served as chaplain to French War Veterans here, Montebello Council 3429 of the Knights of Columbus and the Eskualdun Club, a Basque social club which he founded in 1946.

He regularly visited the sick and dying at the French Hospital here. Yearly he joined Montebello Boy Scouts for field trips to the mountains where he celebrated Mass for the youngsters.



FR. CHARLES ESPELETTE

Roamed Sheep Country

Each summer Fr. Charles roamed the sheep country of Montana and Wyoming, ministering to Basque shepherders who seldom saw a priest.

Besides these good works, the Benedictine priest was known for his charity among the poor. Any gift given him ultimately was given to some needy person or family.

Early this year the service clubs of Montebello honored the 75-year-old monk as Montebello's Man of the Year.