

# Sainthood cause opened for Russian prince

LORETTO, Pa. – The sainthood cause for the second priest ordained in the United States, a Russian prince who became known as the “apostle of the Alleghenies,” has been initiated by the Diocese of Altoona-Johnstown.

Bishop Joseph V. Adamec of Altoona-Johnstown held the opening session of the diocesan inquiry for the canonization cause of Servant of God Demetrius Augustine Gallitzin March 11 at the Basilica of St. Michael the Archangel in Loretto.

The son of Prince Demetrius Alexeivich Gallitzin, the ambassador of Empress Catherine the Great of Russia to the Netherlands, Prince Demetrius Augustine Gallitzin was born at The Hague on Dec. 22, 1770.

Baptized in the Russian Orthodox Church with Empress Catherine as his godmother, Prince Demetrius became a Catholic at the age of 17 when his German-born mother, Countess Amalia von Schmettau, returned to the practice of the faith of her birth.

Because of his conversion to Catholicism, Demetrius was denied a place at the imperial Russian court. In 1792 he sailed from Rotterdam to the New World, bringing with him letters of introduction to some of the leading citizens of the new United States of America. Within eight days of his arrival in Baltimore, Prince Demetrius entered St. Mary’s Seminary there.

Father Stephen Badin, who came to the United States as a deacon, was the first priest to be ordained in the new nation. Although Demetrius Gallitzin was the second priest ordained in this country, he was the first to complete all his seminary studies and receive all of the minor and major orders in the U.S.

He was ordained in Baltimore on March 18, 1795, by Bishop John Carroll, the first Catholic bishop in the United States and later ministered in Cumberland and Western Maryland.

Choosing to conceal his aristocratic background by assuming the name “Father

Smith," the young priest made his first visit to the Allegheny Mountains of west-central Pennsylvania a few months after his ordination when he made a sick call to McGuire's Settlement, a remote village in Cambria County.

He requested Bishop Carroll's permission to return there as pastor, and in 1799 he returned permanently to the settlement, celebrating midnight Mass at Christmas in the log cabin church he built with his own hands.

Father Gallitzin remained pastor for almost 41 years, until his death on May 6, 1840. He renamed the community Loretto, after the Marian shrine in Italy. Several times he refused offers to become a bishop as new dioceses were formed throughout the country.

When the Diocese of Philadelphia was created, Father Gallitzin was named vicar general for western Pennsylvania. From his base in Loretto he served missions in a territory now comprising the dioceses of Altoona-Johnstown, Erie, Greensburg and Pittsburgh.

"I have been enamored with the history of the reverend prince since I became the diocesan bishop in 1987," Bishop Adamec said at the March 11 ceremony. "It is such a rich history, so uniquely our own, and yet unknown to many outside these Allegheny Mountains."

After appointing a task force in 2003 to investigate the canonization process, Bishop Adamec wrote to the Vatican Congregation for Saints' Causes for permission to initiate the cause.

He received a favorable reply in May 2005, giving Father Gallitzin the title "servant of God." That September, the bishop appointed the officers for the diocesan phase of the cause, who have since been working to gather documents on Father Gallitzin's life and writings.

Because there are no living eyewitnesses to Father Gallitzin's life and ministry, his is a "historic" or "antique cause," which will examine in depth the written records of his life and his own writings. A historical commission and a theological commission will undertake that investigation.

In his homily at a Mass following the formal judicial proceedings initiating the cause, Bishop Adamec challenged the congregation to see the day's event as a spur to living a deeper life of faith.

"It seemed in a worldly sense that God was taking things away from Demetrius Gallitzin," the bishop said. "But God endowed him with many graces and blessings, and he planted him here in what looked to be a barren countryside. This is where God's people were. God told his servant, Demetrius, 'Sow the seeds of faith here. I want to see some fruit.'

"We want to recognize that we are that fruit," Bishop Adamec said. "We want to recognize that Demetrius Augustine Gallitzin was faithful to that call from God. We are God's expectation of fruit from the labors of the Servant of God Demetrius Augustine Gallitzin."