



A Letter from the Abbey

Cistercian Abbey • Our Lady of Dallas



Briefly

Abbey group climbs to the summit of Mt. Elbert

The view from the top of the world is pretty incredible, and six brothers, Fr. Roch and Fr. Peter would know after spending a week in Leadville, Colorado.

With an elevation of 10,152 ft., Leadville is located in the heart of the Rocky Mountains and made the perfect location for our summer vacation.

Looking for a good mixture of adventure and tranquility, the secluded lodge we rented provided nearby trails for hiking, streams for fishing and a nice wrap-around porch for coffee drinking, book reading and good conversation.

The high point (pun intended) of the trip was the climb to the summit of Mt. Elbert, the highest peak in Colorado. Starting at 6:30 in the morning, the brothers climbed over 4,000 ft. in elevation, reaching the crest shortly before noon.

While on top of the Rocky Mountains the brothers ran into the parent of a CPS alumni chaperoning a group of high school students from Irving.

After a day of recovery, we got ourselves ready to make the long journey back to Irving, which proved to be quite an adventure in its own right.

— Br. Anthony Bigney

(See page 4 for more vacation news.)



ROCKY MOUNTAIN CLIMBERS (l-r) Br. Stephen, Fr. Peter, Fr. Roch, Br. Ambrose, Br. Lawrence, Br. Augustine, Br. Philip, and Br. Anthony near Leadville.



SOLEMN PERPETUAL VOWS Abbot Denis accepts Br. Joseph's solemn perpetual vows at the Cistercian Abbey Church on August 20. He is the first of the "new crop" of monks to take this important step.

Monks at various levels profess their vows in a portentous August ceremony

The Mass on August 20 was an unprecedented event in our Abbey's history: we celebrated every level of religious vows—first vows, renewal vows and solemn perpetual vows—as five Cistercians each made their profession.

In this context, the word "vows" receives a special meaning. Rather than signifying an isolated good deed promised for the future, it means a commitment to continue in a way of life voluntarily begun at an earlier time.

So, we have "first vows" which are the vows that novices take after a year of novitiate.

In our Abbey, this first commitment is made for three years. Brs. Anthony Bigney and John Bayer made such a commitment.

After the three years run out, the monk who perseveres in his intention renews his vows for another three-year period.

This is what Brs. Augustus
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Br. Joseph promoted to diaconate

The Mass on Sunday afternoon, September 7, was a significant event in the life of the Abbey; but not only because it was presided over by the Bishop of Dallas.

All who came could sense that something special was taking place.

For although only Br. Joseph was promoted to the rank of the diaconate, ten other Cistercian brothers were seen participating in the ceremony with a sense of anticipation.

Certainly, more than one must have been pondering if and how, in a couple of years, they would stand at the same place and commence the last part of their journey to the priesthood (see Br. John Bayer's story on page 3).

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Multiple vows professed in August

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tine Hoelke and Philip Lastimososa have done.

At any time during this second period our monks can be admitted to solemn perpetual vows, as Br. Joseph Van House was.

The meaning of the first vows

By anybody's account, first vows are a major step on the monastic journey. Not only because three years is a considerable portion of a young life, but also because a novice, after spending a year in the Ab-

bey, is able to make a much more informed life-decision than he did when he first entered.

He knows, at the very least, that he can live in the monastery and that the Abbot and community have watched him progress on his way to God and that they accept him. When a novice takes vows, the community feels that a small miracle has, indeed, happened in their ranks: by all probability, God has touched and claimed a young life for his own service.

Through his vows the monk accepts the call to celibate chastity, shared possession of all goods and obedience. These are the "evangelical counsels" that Jesus gave to the disciples when calling them to share in his own life. Sometimes he expressed this call in a very brief form such as: "Follow me!" Other times he was more elaborate: "Sell what you have and give it to the poor then come and follow me" (Mt 19:21).

At some occasions he listed what such a disciple was asked to leave behind: "I say to you, there is no one who has given up house or wife or brothers or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God who will not receive back an overabundant return in this present age and eternal life in the age to come." (Lk 18:29).

In the Gospels, Jesus addresses this call to those "at whom he is looking with special love" (Mk 10:21). We identify today, following the language formed over many centuries, "a call to religious life" as a call to chaste celibacy, lived out in a community, without personal assets or a private career, relying only on shared resources, and remaining wholly available for service through a life of obedience.

In Cistercian life, we include into our vows the commitment to live permanently with a particular community as a life-long member. This vow is called a "vow of stability."

A FLOOD OF VOWS *Professing their vows on August 20 were (l-r) Br. John Bayer - first vows, Br. Augustine Hoelke - renewal vows, Br. Joseph Van House - solemn perpetual vows, Br. Philip Lastimososa - renewal vows, and Br. Anthony Bigney - first vows.*

Br. Joseph promoted to diaconate

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There was solemnity and dignity in the celebration, as students of the University of Dallas, under the direction of Mrs. Marilyn Walker and Fr. Ralph March, O. Cist., provided an almost ethereal music of classical polyphony and Gregorian chant.

And, though some with canes or walkers, all 29 members of the monastery, old and young, lined up in the choir stalls as if standing at or rather stepping over the threshold of hope into the continued life of the Abbey.

As Br. Joseph lay prostrate on the floor and Brs. Augustine and Stephen intoned the Litany of All Saints, many of us recalled the great days of our first home's church in Zirc, where each year half a dozen men or more received holy orders.

But the mood was, for everyone, a mixture of humble beginnings and a joyous arrival, as the Church filled with students, friends and supporters, all united in prayer for the community as it further entrenched its roots deeper into the soil of our 50-year-old Texas monastery.



PROUD PARENTS *Br. Joseph Van House with his parents after he was promoted to the rank of the diaconate.*

What keeps all these vows from going stale is the vow of continuous conversion, wherein one promises to leave behind the old self in order to clothe oneself in Christ, ever seeking new opportunities for renewal in an extended search for God as a continuous effort for self-improvement.

Temporary vows

In medieval times, after a year of novitiate, a monk usually committed himself by vows for the rest of his life. In modern times — this is something Church leadership quietly learned — perpetual vows are not permitted until after at least three years of temporary vows.

In our monastery, 4-6 years in temporary vows precede perpetual vows. This period usually coincides with the time needed to study for the priesthood.

On August 20, Brs. Philip and Augustine renewed their vows with the intention of making perpetual vows in a year. Br. Joseph, however, who had renewed his vows a year ago, was allowed to make his perpetual vows so that he could be promoted to the diaconate and then, in one more year, be ordained a priest.

Perpetual vows

Solemn perpetual vows are comparable only to marriage or priestly vows. Since religious profession is not a sacrament, it is not of the

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same dignity as marriage or ordination, but nevertheless it is intended to be an unbroken commitment, and only in very special cases of irregularity or personal tragedy can religious vows be suspended or annulled, and only with the intervention of the Holy See.

Such vows seal a person’s status in the Church; they define his position, outlook, way of life and future. They are embraced with joy and with full trust in God’s Spirit, who alone inspires the desire and provides

the strength for such a commitment.

The format

The vows are made in a ceremony with two parts: a vocal profession and a written declaration. The candidate answers the abbot’s questions to make clear his intention, he professes his commitment for those in attendance by reading a prepared document, and, finally, he signs that document on the altar. Afterwards, the document is deposited in the archives of the Monastery.

Especially powerful in this event is the symbolism of “signing away” one’s life on the altar, which expresses the intimate connection between vows and the Eucharistic sacrifice.

Through his signature the monk puts himself on the altar, and through the sacrifice of his life he unites with that of Christ. From now on both are being daily offered on the altar of the monastery.

From white to black

A perspective on taking the first vows and “putting on the black”

A man in black—that’s me, now. But besides being able to hide last night’s spaghetti stain in that abyss that is the color black, what does my new scapular mean?

To be honest, at a certain level of self-awareness I hardly notice it’s happened. I’ve made my first vows and can begin those things that, by God’s kindness, I have been *looking forward* to for several months. I’ll learn more about my faith, taking classes at UD; and I’ll serve that blessed Cistercian community, teaching at the Prep School.

Having desired these things for a while now, in some measure I take the transition for granted, and step into my new role without much thought beyond buying books and preparing to teach English Lab.

But that’s certainly not the whole story.

The truth is that, at a deeper level, I have been very much impressed by the events of August 20. Making my profession alongside four others and watching Br. Joseph give away his entire life have revealed to me a most wonderful gift given to those who so offer their lives to Christ — to those who “put on the black.”

It must be similar to what is shared between brave men resolved to stay together for a battle in which death is certain.

What kind of solidarity do such heroes know? What rhythms of the Heavenly Community does such a fraternity give to men and women? How did the Spartans feel when, while all others

were breaking camp, they saw the Thespians remain to die with them at Thermopylae, hundreds against millions? How did they look at each other, those men at the barricades of Paris, as they offered their lives for the glorious ideal, tens against thousands?

I cannot describe the joy a man feels when, after determining that it is right for him to stay behind and lose his life, he raises his eyes from the depths of his conscience and sees that others have also chosen to stay. Nevertheless, I do believe I have felt similar emotions.

The end of the novitiate prostrates the novice before the altar, face down and eyes closed. And from the solitude of this position of soul, he accepts his life — to seek “the mercy of God and that of the Order.” Certain only of the call given to him — that *he* is to remain at the barricade and lose his life to poverty, chastity and obedience — the newly professed stands and sees that in losing his life he has indeed found it, for Providence has given brethren to this new brother. Giving his one life away, he finds he has received twenty-eight others in return.

And standing together with Christ (who is Leonidas for the monk) they all follow Him into battle, smiling at each other as the blood trickles down from their common wounds.

In taking first vows I have renounced the opportunity for retreat, at least for three years. With the graces that such an act bestows, I feel an unparalleled brotherhood — with the men around me and with the Man we all desire to follow so closely.

I barely notice that I am doing different things. But that I am changed and that there are new bonds that lock my destiny to Christ’s and the community’s are not so easily missed.

I am immensely grateful for this vocation; and I pray that God continues to give clarity to my conscience, and the perseverance to follow it.

— Br. John Bayer

Abbey Church Services

All Souls' Mass, Nov. 2 Fauré's Requiem	4 pm
Office of Readings and Morning Prayer	6 am
Daily Mass Monday through Saturday	6:30 am
Mass on Sunday	9 am
Evening Prayer	6 pm
First Friday Mass	7:30 pm

The Collegium Cantorum of the University of Dallas will join us for Mass on the First Friday of every month, September through December.

Cistercian Abbey Our Lady of Dallas
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Group takes winding western 4,300-mile trek

We, the first group to go on vacation, went to... (*deep breath*) Albuquerque, Petrified Forest, Meteor Crater, Grand Canyon, Phantom Ranch, Hoover Dam, Zion National Park, Bryce Canyon, Roswell (New Mexico), and Carlsbad Caverns.

Thanks to the expert organization and leadership of Fr. Mark and Br. Thomas, it is safe to say that we all (Frs. Mark and Paul and Brs. Joseph, Ignatius, Thomas, Nathanael and John) had a wonderful time in almost every place we traveled (Fr. Paul's abduction in Roswell was the one troublesome moment of the trip).

Together we covered almost 4,300 miles and counted 45 of 50 state license plates (Rhode Island, North Dakota, South Dakota, Delaware and New Hampshire were the only 5 missing—yes, we saw Alaska and Hawaii license plates!)

On the third day the brothers made the six-hour trek down the South Kaibab trail from the top of the Grand Canyon (7,200 feet) to its bottom (2,480 feet).

We stayed two nights at Phantom Ranch, much of the time cooling off in a creek that shot off the Colorado River. Everyone was very happy to take it easy after such an exhausting hike.

Only poor Br. Nathanael could not relax in the water, since he was rammed in the back by a tree that had sailed downstream.

The food was enjoyable throughout the



GRAND HIKE (l-r) Br. Nathanael, Br. John, Br. Joseph, Br. Thomas, and Br. Ignatius deep in the Grand Canyon.

trip. In terms of taste, the high-point was undoubtedly the BBQ joint in Roswell, while the low-point was, fittingly, the MRE's eaten at the very bottom of the Grand Canyon.

But, to be honest, nobody complained (or probably even noticed) of anything eaten around the hike.

Everything is delicious when you're that hungry — even that Shrimp Jambalaya which is said, very suspiciously, "to keep for 10 years." And whether choir was prayed in the car or on the trail, we all had ample opportunity to reflect on the beauty of creation and wonder at its Creator.

In fact, at Zion we were blessed to be

able identify quite closely with King David and the words of Psalm 18: "the earth reeled and rocked; the foundations also of the mountains trembled and quaked."

For, walking along the trails that run so close to those tall, rocky mountains, we looked up to witness an avalanche fall on the area where we were not five minutes before! (Nobody in the park was hurt.)

Shortly after that experience, which gave even more incentive to be grateful, we finished our week of vacation, happy to return home and resume the normalcy of monastic life.

— Br. John Bayer