



A Letter from the Abbey

Cistercian Abbey • Our Lady of Dallas

Briefly

Br. Stephen's Holy Week to remember

The silver-throated monk sang at Vatican services on Holy Thursday and Good Friday. See p. 4.

Fr. Thomas assists UD chaplain in Rome

Fr. Thomas, a UD alumnus, is ministering to the UD students studying in Rome. See p. 4.

Abbot Emeritus Denis on retirement

Fr. Denis shares how he will fill his new-found free time. See p. 5.

Easter revisited

Fr. Gregory's message to priests in Houston. See p. 6.

Prayer for vocations

Jesus said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."

Almighty God, you call certain men and women to follow the example of your Son's earthly life more closely by renouncing marriage and being a prophetic sign of the kingdom of God.

Grant to young men and young women the courage and grace of responding promptly to Your voice. Sustain those who have accepted your invitation to consecrated life, that they may persevere faithfully in their work in the vineyard of the Lord. Amen.

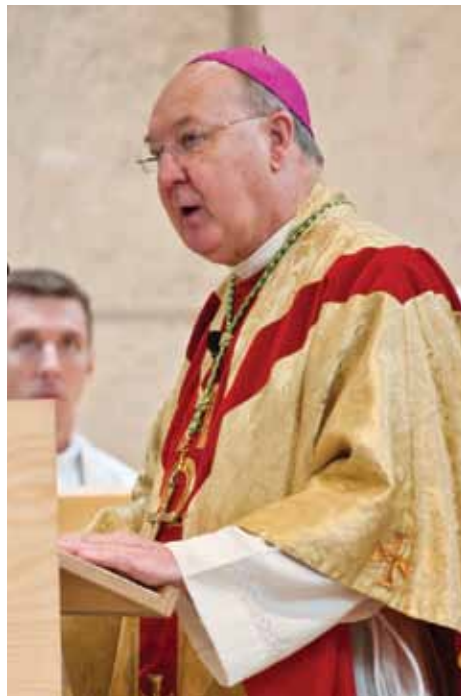
— Fr. Ignatius Peacher,
Director of Vocations



Photos by Jim Reich

Abbot Peter is blessed

A new era begins as American rises to the role of "father"



Top: Abbot Peter after the benediction by Abbot General Mauro (behind him). Above: In his homily, Bishop Kevin Farrell reflected on the significance of the event.

On Thursday, April 13, Fr. Abbot Peter Verhalen was blessed as the third abbot of Our Lady of Dallas.

The benediction service, held in the Abbey Church, was presided over by Bishop Kevin Farrell and attended by over 500 people, including three other bishops and Cistercian abbots from around the world.

In order to make room for everyone, a tent was erected on the front lawn and the service was broadcast on large televisions.

During his homily, Bishop Kevin Farrell reflected on the historic nature of Fr. Abbot Peter's election — as the first American Cistercian Abbot of Our Lady of Dallas (in truth, Fr. Peter is the first American-born Cistercian abbot in the history of the Order).

His election reflects the culmination of a long process in which the Hungarian foundations of the abbey became more and more a permanent fixture in the religious landscape of the Diocese of Dallas.

Commenting on those first Hungarians who fled persecution 60 years ago, Bishop Farrell called to mind the promise made to Abraham in the book of Genesis: "Go forth from your land, your relatives, and from your father's house to a land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless

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Like a father in faith

The big news in the Abbey is obviously the election of a new abbot. Aside from all the day-to-day chores of keeping the monastery running, the abbot's main task is to serve as a "father" for the monks of his community.



THE ABBOT'S VIEW

Fr. Peter Verhalen

I ask you to keep all of us in your prayers. To help you pray more concretely, let me sketch the demographics of our monastery. We are 28 monks; the median age is 57. The eleven "Brothers" are all under 36. The six "Middle Monks," those between the Brothers and the "Seniors," range in age between 40 and 69. Our eleven Seniors range in age from 70 to our most veteran monk, Fr. Benedict, who is 93. We are 23 priests, two deacons, and three brothers preparing for ordination.

The name "abbot" is related to "Abba," the word Jesus used to address his heavenly Father. In Chapter 2 "The Kind of Man the Abbot Ought to Be," St. Benedict reminds us that in faith, the monks in a monastery should be able to look upon their abbot as a father, as one who represents Christ for them. A daunting charge, made possible only by faith and prayer.

I ask you to keep all of us in your prayers. To help you pray more concretely, let me sketch the demographics of our monastery.

Eleven of us are Hungarians; nine were born in Texas. Five monks have graduated from the Prep School, and ten are alumni of The University of Dallas.

Fr. Robert and Fr. James teach full time at the University of Dallas, where Fr. Roch and Fr. Abbot Denis also teach part-time. This year 13 monks are active in the Prep School. Fr. Thomas, Br. Stephen, and Br. Anthony are all studying in Rome, and Br. John and Br. Justin are studying at The University of Dallas.

Although our primary apostolate is teaching in the Prep School and at The University of Dallas, we also assist in several parishes.

St. Athanasius says that early in his life as a monk St. Anthony visited each of the holy men in his village, lived with him for a while, and strove to acquire for himself that holy man's particular virtue.

Please pray for us each day that like St. Anthony we strive to recognize and acquire our confreres' virtues.

And pray for vocations.

Abbot Peter is blessed

April 13, 2012





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you; I will make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.”

The abbot general of the Cistercian Order, Abbot General Mauro-Giuseppe Lepori, flew in from Rome to perform the blessing of the new abbot. In addition to praying over the new abbot, the abbot general presented Fr. Peter with the traditional signs of the abbatial office: the mitre and crozier as well as an abbatial ring.

The benediction service came two months after the community met to hold the election. In mid-February of this year Fr. Peter was elected to serve as abbot by the solemnly professed members of the community. The election was presided over by Abbot Sixtus, the abbot of Zirc, who flew in from Hungary for both the election and the benediction service. Many of the monks would later comment on how smooth the election process was.

According to Constitutions of the Congregation of Zirc, in order to be elected abbot, one needs to be a solemnly professed monk for at least seven years, and a priest. The abbot is elected for a specific amount of time, six years, but can always be reelected.

Fr. Peter’s election follows the retirement of Fr. Abbot Denis, who served for 24 years in that position. According to the Constitutions of the Congregation of Zirc — the Cistercian congregation to which Our Lady of Dallas belongs — an abbot is to retire at the age of 75. (See article on p. 5 for Fr. Denis’ reflections on his time as abbot.)



Top row: (Left) The procession of celebrants enters the church. (Inset) The overflow crowd attends communion in the tent outside the church. (Right) Abbot Peter passes by his family. Middle row: (Left) Bishop Farrell delivers his homily. (Right) Abbot Peter receives the mitre and crozier from Abbot General Mauro. Bottom row: (Far left) Marilyn Weber conducts UD’s Collegium Cantorum. (Left) With his Cistercian classmates at his back, Abbot Peter listens to Bishop Farrell’s remarks. (Right) At the conclusion of the ceremonies, the crowd poured into the courtyard for a reception.



Br. Stephen plays major role during Holy Week at Vatican

For two days during the Holy Triduum this year, the eyes of many of the Catholic faithful in St. Peter's Basilica were on Br. Stephen Gregg '01.

At both the Holy Thursday celebration of the Mass of the Lord's Supper and during the Good Friday service, Br. Stephen sang the gospel.

On Holy Thursday, at St. John Lateran in Rome, Br. Stephen processed in with Pope Benedict XVI, sang the Gospel passage in Latin, and led the prayers of the faithful. On Good Friday, in addition to being the "narrator" during the Passion Narrative (also in Latin), Br.

Stephen once again sang the prayers of the faithful — this time in a duet of sorts with

the Holy Father.

"The most notable moment," said Br. Stephen, "was leading the Universal Intercessions we pray on Good Friday, while everyone else was kneeling, including the Pope, I was standing in the middle of the Basilica over Peter's tomb, offering to the Crucified Lord the Church's prayers for everyone in the world."

Br. Anthony, who is spending the semester in Rome finishing his theology studies, was able to attend both services. "I was so proud of him. He looked so confident up there. Plus, he sounded incredible."



(l-r) At Tre Fontane in Rome, Br. Anthony and Fr. Thomas celebrate Br. Stephen's successful role in the Vatican's Holy Week ceremonies.

UD-ex Fr. Thomas guides "Romers" as chaplain

Experience offers young priest a chance to minister to and inspire UD students in Rome

Since his ordination in August 2012, Fr. Thomas Esposito has been working closely with the University of Dallas, which operates a Study Abroad program in Rome.

As many of the monks who attended the University of Dallas can attest, the UD Rome program is central to their identity as alumni of the university.

The students live and study in a small town outside Rome, tour the city, have an audience with the Pope and have the opportunity to see many of the important sights in Italy, as well as a long 10 day trip in Greece.

For the past year Fr. Thomas was asked to join Msgr. Fucinaro in a number of tasks, primarily as the traveling chaplain.

"Last fall I joined the students on the Northern Italy tour to Florence & Venice ... I have had much more contact with the Spring group. I went with them to Orvieto and Assisi, Greece, and plan to join them again in Northern Italy," noted Fr. Thomas.

"My chaplain work gets me out of the library and reminds me that I am a priest called to minister, and not simply a slave to books."

While in Rome with the students, he said mass, heard confessions, and gave theological and biblical lectures. In Athens, Fr.

Thomas discussed St. Paul's speech to the Athenians at the same spot St. Paul delivered the remarks 2,000 years ago.

While in Assisi, in February of this year, Fr. Thomas was seen getting into an epic snowball fight with Sister Catherine Joseph Droste, a Dominican from Nashville who lives and works in Rome.

"More than a foot of snow fell on Assisi that weekend, and our march up to St. Francis' Hermitage took us into the teeth of a driving blizzard. Mass up at the Hermitage, nestled in a quiet and beautiful forest blanketed by snow, was unforgettable.

"So was pegging Sister with snowballs on the walk down."

In addition to the work on these trips, Fr. Thomas also assisted with a few of the spiritual retreats offered to the students, and assisted in the Confirmation of two members of the Fall '11 Rome class — a celebration which took place in St. Pe-



As the traveling chaplain for UD students in Rome, Fr. Thomas says mass, hears confessions, and helps the students put passages from the Bible in context. Above, he discusses St. Paul's speech to the Athenians.

ter's Basilica.

"As a UD Romer," Fr. Thomas recalls, "I also remember how transformative my semester was.

"I consider it a great privilege," he added, "to switch roles now and guide the students today."

Abbot Denis' work with the pope's "Bible study"

Abbot Emeritus Denis once again attended the week-long meeting of the Pontifical Biblical Commission (PBC) in Rome this spring.

The PBC, in some ways, is the pope's "Bible study" and consists of only a few of

the top academic biblical scholars from around the world.

The Commission, which was founded in 1901 by Leo XIII, serves as a watchdog over preaching and teaching in matters of biblical scholarship. As head of the Congre-

gation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger (now Pope Benedict XVI) presided over the meetings of the PBC for years before being elected Pope.

Fr. Denis's election to the commission in 2002 by Bl. John Paul II caught the abbot off guard.

"I was totally surprised," laughed Fr. Denis, "because I did not think that anybody in the Roman Curia knew about my existence."

He asked Cardinal Ratzinger several times who recommended him for the commission, but Ratzinger would just smile, and change the subject.

Even before he became pope, Ratzinger left quite an impression on Abbot Denis.

"He was the most tactful, pleasant and courteous president the Commission ever had.

"When he spoke, he would summarize hours of convoluted discussions in 10-15 minutes in impeccable complete sentences in the language the last speaker spoke (English, French or Italian, rarely in German) with such brilliance that even our poorly expressed thoughts obtained some shine and elegance when he would express them."

The two had a few personal conversations together, including once when they sat next to each other for lunch.

He remembers one time, though, which occurred after Ratzinger was raised to the papacy.

"My proudest moment as a theologian," said Fr. Denis, "took place when Pope Benedict recognized me at a papal audience and said a few appreciative words about one of my publications on Saint Bernard which he 'happened to be reading' in those days."

Each year, when Fr. Denis goes to Rome for the PBC, he takes time out of his busy schedule to give private tours of the Vatican.

"This time, as always, I met the brothers of the abbey studying in Rome and took them, together with my friends from among the UD students who are presently doing their Rome semester, for a walk into the Vatican."

This tradition started in 2003, when Fr. Thomas and Fr. Ambrose were studying in Rome with the UD program. Since then, nearly every priest and brother in the monastery has been given such a tour.

"We ended, as always, at some pizza



Abbot Denis greets Pope John Paul II and Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, circa. 2003.

Q&A with the *abbas emeritus*

Fr. Abbot Denis, now that you're "retired" from being abbot, do you find you have more free time, and how do you spend it? Oh yes. So far, besides helping the new abbot, I read more and write more. I accepted four invitations, so far, to speak on theological topics, which I would not otherwise have had time for.

What is the role of the "abbot emeritus"? The role of an *abbas emeritus* depends on others: he could be thought of as an ancient relic, or a dignitary without any real job to do, or a man who can remind you of the past (a function at times annoying, at times appreciated) a story teller, in case you are interested in the past. It is a phase rich in spiritual challenges: you get a great chance to grow in the practice of obedience.

Are you working on writing any theological works? I have re-written three essays and sent them off to the Pontifical Biblical Commission. These were "homework assignments" due for Easter. I need to write a guest lecture for the Hungarian "St. Jerome Society" (Hungarian National Biblical Association). I resumed working on my Commentary of the Gospel of Saint Matthew and the history of the Muratorian Fragment, the earliest New Testament canon whose provenance and dating is under dispute.

What books are you reading? I just finished a book on the History of the Crusades, I began to read a book on the Life of Caravaggio and began to read Commentaries of Saint Matthew — also a volume of short stories in Hungarian.

What aspect of the past 20+ years as Abbot are you most proud of? Without any doubt, besides the building of the Abbey Church and leading 13 monks through their formation (starting with Fr. Mark and ending with Br. Justin), my most unique accomplishment was what American Presidents call the "exit strategy" — except that, in general, they exit disastrously. I exited from the office of abbot both happily and leaving behind a successor who is a better man for the job than I was.

Abbey Church Services

UPCOMING EVENTS

Solemn Professions (*Brs. Anthony & John*)
August 19 10:30 am

Ordinations to the diaconate
August 20 10:30 am
(Br. Anthony and Br. John)

Ordinations to the priesthood
September 8 10:30 am
(Br. Stephen and Br. Lawrence)

Br. Lawrence's First Mass
September 9 9 am

Br. Stephen's First Mass
September 16 9 am

DAILY SCHEDULE

Office of Readings and
Morning Prayer 6 am
Evening Prayer 6 pm

Daily Mass (Mon - Sat.) 6:30 am
Mass on Sunday 9 am
First Friday Mass 7:30 pm



Abbot Peter shares a moment with his father and mother.

Cistercian Abbey Our Lady of Dallas
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The lasting bloom of an Easter reflection

Fr. Gregory ponders the path of disciples who seek the presence and power of Jesus

By Fr. Gregory Schweers

While we still remain in that glorious 'afterglow' which is Christ triumphant from the tomb, it may be of benefit to ask ourselves a simple yet obvious question: What should I do now? Where should I, like the Beloved Disciple, seek Him Who has conquered both sin and death?

Blessed John-Paul II helps us find at least a partial answer here when he reminds us in his letter *Mane Nobiscum Domine* (Remain, with us, O Lord) that "the presence of Jesus in the tabernacle must be a kind of magnetic pole attracting an ever greater number of souls in love with him, ready to wait patiently to hear his voice and, as it were, to sense the beating of his heart."

This "magnetic pole" that JPII speaks about reminds me of an article I read some time ago about a priest who called his daily hour before the Eucharist his "radiation therapy" — and really, that is what we need: the presence and curative rays of Christ's grace which can only come to us when we come to Him — daily — and permit him to

fill the void which is in our lives.

Many years ago, Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen directly addressed the importance of Eucharistic Devotion when he wrote that, "We become like that which we gaze upon. Looking into a sunset, the face takes on a

"Sense the beating of his heart."

— Bl. John Paul II

golden glow. Looking at the Eucharistic Lord for an hour, transforms the heart in a mysterious way."

In this sense, then, as we approach the Eucharist as a place for worship and contemplation, we also discover it as the place that "hides me" and keeps me in a safe place. In this second, important aspect of the Eucharist, we begin to discover the Eucharist as our true Solitude.

As I see it, Solitude is that state of heart

and spirit where, while knowing I am at a certain distance from "the world" — still my gaze is fixed solely upon the One Who can totally occupy the empty spaces of my life and transform them.

During the season of Eastertide, surely we must remember that we are not called to a life of Loneliness but Love; yet, as the Good Friday liturgy shows us, the pathway to Love may, indeed, pass through the Garden of Gethsemane. If our lives, like Christ's, must pass through that Blessed Garden, should we not also hear and heed the one and only request that Jesus in His pain and sorrow made to His Disciples on that night: "Could you not watch with me but one bare hour?"

In closing, might I ask what you would say to this last request of Christ before He is dragged away and forced to carry the Cross which gives us our salvation? Can you not watch in Solitude with Christ, Our Eucharist and Our Love, for one bare hour each day?

Based on remarks to priests in the Arch-Diocese of Houston-Galveston in April 2012.