



April 2014

# A LETTER FROM THE ABBEY



## Briefly

### From the Abbot

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### Fr. Greg's Art Lesson

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## SOLEMNLY PROFESSED

### *Br. Justin is ordained to the Diaconate*

At Sunday mass on March 2nd Br. Justin McNamara professed his solemn and perpetual vows. Recalling that morning, Br. Justin said, "I vividly recall the blessing that our most senior member, Fr. Benedict (age 94), conveyed to me. His face was suffused with a peace, joy and enthusiasm that showed a profound fraternal love and commitment to our Cistercian community."

Less than a week later, on Saturday March 8th, Br. Justin was ordained to the diaconate by Bishop Kevin Farrell. During his homily for the occasion Bishop Farrell took the opportunity to remind all of us of our Christian call to faithfully spread the word of God - something especially true for the Abbey's newest deacon. "The bishop's homily was very moving and imparted to me both a great sense of the abiding joy he possessed while preaching God's Word, which I, too, must have as a minister of the Church, as well as the great responsibility and service I now have before me to fulfill."

Bishop Farrell reminded all present that his brother was also an ordained minister, something fitting for Br. Justin's family - his brother is also studying for the priesthood.

**I'm a Mac** Br. Justin McNamara joins his sister and family for a "selfie" after the ceremony



## St. Bernard on Lent

### TURN AND BECOME A CHILD!

It seems that at the beginning of Lent Saint Bernard always gave a short homily to his monks. Of these six have survived. Each is a gem about foundational truths about spirituality.

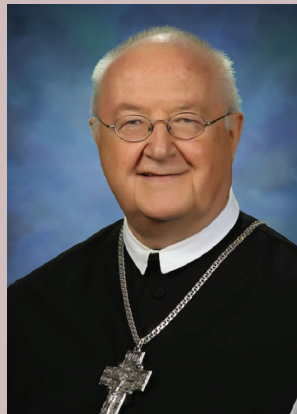
My favorite is his second sermon “at the beginning of Lent.” He quotes a liturgical text taken from the Old Testament: “Turn around in your whole heart” (Joel 2:12). He then asks, “In what manner and in what direction should we turn our life around?”

The answer comes from a key quotation of Bernard’s spirituality: “Unless you convert and become like a child, you will not enter the Kingdom of Heaven” (Mt 13:20).

What God is asking of us is apparently simple: be like a child. If he had asked for some heroic accomplishment, people would probably be competing to carry it out. What he actually asks is, Be humble. And as an example St. Bernard gave the story of Christ, who became a child when he was born, a poor man when he was growing up, a prisoner when he was arrested, and a criminal when he was executed. While the Son of God was none of these, he accepted to be humbled, humiliated, for our sake. St. Bernard does not ask us to become something we are not, to descend to an inferior status, but to embrace the truth: to recognize before God that we are sinners and his creatures, recognize before our fellow creatures that we are their brothers and sisters; and recognize before ourselves that we need forgiveness and grace.

The life to which God calls us accords with this truth of three dimensions: turning away from anything contrary to God’s will, abstain from all that promotes the self at the expense of the others, make ourselves available to serve God’s will just as Jesus came to serve, not to be served.

“This conversion is not something that can be done in a day. Would that we could accomplish it In a lifetime.” (2nd Sermon in Lent, no.2).



Fr. Denis Farkasfalvy

## UPDATE FROM ROME

“I will spend Easter at the Abbey of Lérins, a monastery located on an island off the southern coast of France and a center of monastic life since the 5th century. John Cassian and Vincent of Lérins spent some time there. Today it is a Cistercian monastery with, from what I have been told, a very unique liturgical tradition. I look forward to experiencing the Byzantine influence on their chant and participating in the processions around the island during the Easter celebration!

Fr. John  
Bayer

Studying  
in Rome

this year



## Remember

Consider including Cistercian in your will  
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# MEMORARE

SOCIETY

Contact Erin Hart at 469-499-5406 or [chart@cistercian.org](mailto:chart@cistercian.org)



# Life as a Novice

## *Br. Raphael shares a bit about life in the novitiate*

I had always considered myself a morning person. Then I entered the monastery. Here, “morning” happens hours earlier than what I was used to, and adjusting to the abbey schedule (which is regulated by an unforgiving bell) is an ongoing battle.

Fortunately, I have fellow men-at-arms in white. With three novice mates, I have discovered that even in this monastery there is safety in numbers: we four keep each other company in our morning classes, share the workload of our afternoon chores (setting tables for meals, re-shelving library books, re-re-shelving library books, setting up for Mass, etc.), and are quick to play a few rounds of “Bananagrams” in the evenings while the “grown up” monks grade homework.

We “kids” of the family began our life here in an environment of newness, not only as the first novices under Fr. Peter’s abbacy and Fr. Ignatius’ care, but also in witnessing the entire life-cycle of the monk during our two-week postulancy: our reception of the novice habit, Br. Justin’s renewal of vows, Fr. John’s priestly ordination, and Fr. Pascal’s passing away.

Of course newness is part of the novice job description. At our investiture we became “new men,” and were thrust into a world centuries old with the express instruction to become ever new. Our white habits recall

our baptism and help maintain that newness in the spiritual practices we have adopted since entering, while giving new flavor to the norms we had before entering: the Mass, evening Rosary, even grace at meals have become “new.”

In March, the opportunity to prepare the 8th Graders for Confirmation was a highlight for me not only in meeting new people, but also in seeing my vocation in yet another new light. It is a renewing which I hope to continue with the help of God, who is “unchanging, always new.”



## Requiescat in Pace Fr. David Balas

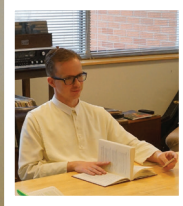
*On February 8, 2014 Fr. David Balas, O.Cist passed away. In the following weeks the abbey received many cards and well-wishers, all with a story to tell of this great theologian, philosopher, priest and monk. Fr. Julius Leloczky shares one of his own below.*

Young Cistercians who study in Rome live in the Cistercians’ mother house called Casa Generalizia. On Thursdays we did not have classes. On such a “giovedì libero” (Thursday day off) the whole Generalizia community went out-of-town for an all-day outing by bus. In the afternoon we parked on a hill top. At the west end of the hill there was a deep precipice which offered a fantastic view of the area: vineyards and a few houses at the foot of the hill, the seashore and the endless Mediterranean Sea with the

setting sun in the background. Everybody was just standing at the edge of the precipice and admiring the view. Fr. David had a great fear of heights but he was also very curious and he wanted to see the panorama. So he prostrated and, lying on his stomach, crawled to the edge of the abyss and, flat on the ground, joined the admirers of the view.







Fr. Gregory Schweers is studying Art History throughout Europe this year. While living in London, Fr. Gregory has had opportunities to read about and view masterpieces throughout England and the Continent. Here he speaks about a few of his favorite paintings seen in recent museum outings.

In Brussels, a brand new institution, the Musée Fin-de-Siècle, just opened a few months ago. It is totally underground! As you go through the galleries, you finally find yourself at the end, some eight stories underground! I very much enjoyed the dreamy Symbolist painting by Constant Montald, a Belgium painter from the turn of the last century. This museum covers the period of 1868 - 1914, hence its name.



## Fr. Gregory's ART HISTORY CLASS

In the René Magritte Museum, in Brussels, one gets some sense of the kind of bizarre, playful surrealism of Magritte who still holds firmly to 'elements of reality' while adding many twists and contortions to each part of the painting, much like an Escher graphic/etching plays with your eye as you say "That can't be!" but it is!



Of all the great landscape and seascape painters in England's 500 years of painting, Turner is at the very top. The most famous painting, *The Battle of Trafalgar*, is really not so typical of Turner's best work, but it was a royal commission from the king. This huMUNgous (technical art term!) painting just swallows you up as you stand before it and think about the events it depicts which changed the course of history.



## Fr. Ignatius featured in Newspaper

Fr. Ignatius Peacher was featured in the *NeighborsGo* section of the *Dallas Morning News* in January, 2014. The article, written by Nanette Light is featured below. Photo by Rose Baca

A monk at Cistercian Abbey of Our Lady of Dallas, he has created contemporary art paintings that don the walls of the school and abbey, telling the story of the Bible's Song of Solomon.

"That book of the Bible is very universal. People who are not Catholic, Christian or don't believe in God can relate and find beauty in that poetry because it's talking about the love between a man and a woman," said Peacher, 37, who was born in Mexico and immigrated to the United States when he was young.

He also teaches art to sixth-graders at Cistercian and a religion class to fifth-graders.

Growing up the son of a military medical doctor, Peacher didn't fantasize of becoming an artist or a monk.

The art came first. As a teenager, he spent afternoons doodling cartoons. In college, he majored in art at St. John's University, a liberal arts Catholic school in Minnesota.

From there, he spent two years studying art history, literature and French in Paris.

"I had no intention of becoming a monk or anything like that, but they impressed me very much," Peacher said. "Then the idea started to form on its own, and it scared me."

Peacher graduated in 2004 and worked for an architecture firm in Austin for a year before entering the monastery in 2005.

"I tried to move on and carry on and hope the idea would just pass away. But it didn't. It wouldn't let me go," he said. "To my surprise, I liked it. It gave meaning to my life, and I was searching for that."

# Letter from the Abbot

by: Fr. Abbot Peter Verhalen



St. Benedict begins his chapter in the Rule with the following words: “Although at every time the life of a monk ought to have the character of a Lenten observance, nevertheless, because few people have such virtue, we urge everyone together to guard their lives in all purity during these 40 days.” What St. Benedict says of monks is true of all Christians. Several principles stand out in this rather long and somewhat awkward sentence that can help not only us as Cistercian monks but every Christian who wants to grow in virtue and prepare to meet the Risen Lord.

First, our entire life should have the character of a Lenten observance. Such an observance is, first of all, preparation for the joy of Easter. Conscious of our sins and compromises with our fleshly desires and egos, we certainly must do penance. We want to be the best we can be to meet our Risen Lord. But we must also lift our eyes to the Lord with longing. When you visit the abbey, take a look at the art on the walls. You will see that St. Francis, the other saints, or the Blessed Virgin Mary all have their heads leaning to the side so they can look up to heaven. Our Lenten observance should have this twofold thrust – atoning for my sins and weaknesses and fanning our longing for heaven.

With his second principle, St. Benedict actually reiterates one of his favorite themes: we are not as virtuous as the men and women who have gone before us. St. Benedict says in other chapters of the Rule that the monks of old recited the entire Psalter in a single day and that they abstained completely from wine. His monks were, he knows, not of such virtue. We should look for reasonable progress in virtue, and we should be ready to renew our efforts every year.

Finally, St. Benedict emphasizes that our Lenten observance is a community effort: he urges “everyone together to guard their lives in all purity.” Each one of us is encouraged by the effort of the other to grow closer to Christ. We are certainly encouraged when we see so many people attending our 6:30 am Mass, and these are largely university students and men and women hurrying off to work. More than the encouragement of a good example, we can by our simple act of charity support one another in our penances. The observance of Lent calls for the courage to face

my own weakness and sins, to persevere in seeking the good even when we’d prefer our familiar comforts. We can encourage one another to persevere in our observances by showing here and now the love that we seek, the love that is Christ.

Our whole lives should have a Lenten character, we are not heroes in the faith, and we must help one another, and accept one another’s help, in our service of Christ.

I hope you will join us for the liturgy, especially the Holy Triduum of Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter Sunday. You are a blessing for each one of us in the monastery. May we be a blessing for you. Happy Easter.

*Mark your  
calendar*



Holy Thursday	5:30 PM
Good Friday	5:30 PM
Easter Vigil	11:00 PM
Easter Sunday	9:00 AM

## JOHN THE BAPTIST AS A VOCATIONAL MODEL

by: Fr. Thomas Esposito



John the Baptist calls himself the “friend of the Bridegroom” who rejoices to hear the voice of the Bridegroom, that is, Christ. When he heard that Jesus had started his ministry, he literally sent his own disciples off to join the one he knew was the Lord. John’s joy is reflected most beautifully in the verse “He [Christ] must increase, and I must decrease” (John 3:30). Every priest must think of himself as the “friend of the Bridegroom.” In terms of spiritual direction, the priest adopts John the Baptist as his model in guiding souls: he is to lead a person, a bride of Christ, to Christ the groom, so that they may “rejoice to hear His voice” and perceive His grace and love guiding their life.

Spiritual direction is available for men and women who feel they need help finding or staying on the path leading to the Lord, whether it be in a period of darkness and doubt or a question about discerning one’s vocation. The priest provides an objective voice other than the one in your own head on the spiritual matters you bring to him. Ideally, God will give him the prudence to mediate His grace and will to you in speaking of prayer and particular troubles or doubts. His goal is to lead you closer to Christ the Bridegroom- and then, like the Baptist, to get out of the way!

If you are discerning a religious vocation and would like to discuss your calling with Fr. Thomas, Vocations Director, he can be reached at [fr-thomas@cistercian.org](mailto:fr-thomas@cistercian.org)



## Abbey Church Services

### UPCOMING EVENTS

#### Holy Thursday Mass

April 17th 5:30 pm

#### Good Friday Service

April 18th 5:30 pm

#### Easter Vigil Mass

Saturday April 19th 11:00 pm

#### Easter Sunday Mass

Sunday April 20th 9:00 am

### DAILY SCHEDULE

#### Office of Readings

& 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

The Collegium Cantorum will join us for Mass on the First Friday and third Sunday of each month during the school year.



**Cistercian Abbey Our Lady of Dallas**  
3550 Cistercian Road  
Irving, Texas 75039

During a Friday Form Master Period Father Philip Neri Lastimososa leads his clan in praying the Stations of the Cross on the via crucis trail.

## Fr. Mark bakes bread for the community

The smell of the baking bread often drives the students in the Science Building crazy. Fr. Mark Ripperger has been baking bread for decades and often uses the small kitchen near his school office. "I like to bake breads for many reasons." He said, "Bread is the most basic of foods in all cultures. It can be made with so many different ingredients and in so many different ways there is always something new to try."

While in the Navy, before entering the monastery, Fr. Mark started experimenting with different ways to bake. "When I lived in a barracks I didn't have access to a stove so I experimented with baking breads in crock pots and covered electric skillets with fairly good success." The fresh bread was a hit with the sailors. "While out at sea in the submarine I was assigned to, we had bread made fresh every day. So I like to make it available to others now to eat at the Abbey and School."

During the Homecoming Auction, held each year during the Homecom-

ing football game, Fr. Mark's bread is often one of the hottest items up for bidding. "People enjoy eating a nice piece of bread made fresh with nothing added to speed up the process," he said.

His personal favorite bread to bake is the slow rise black pepper and coconut milk bread. He said, "I really enjoy the taste of black pepper, and the coconut milk makes the bread silky."

Bread is also central to the Christian message Fr. Mark has dedicated his life to spreading. In addition to the Bread of Life, the Eucharist consecrated at mass, bread is a frequently mentioned symbol. "Within Christianity bread takes on many different meanings. Although we cannot live on bread alone but on every word of God, Jesus took the few loaves of bread that the disciples had and fed the crowds."

Bread can be a symbol of the dying to the self, for so many grains of wheat have to be ground up to

make one loaf of bread. The process of the yeast changes the whole dough into something that is living and will have to 'die' in the oven to become what it is really meant to be: a loaf of bread."



Fr. Mark baking bread in the kitchen in the Science Building