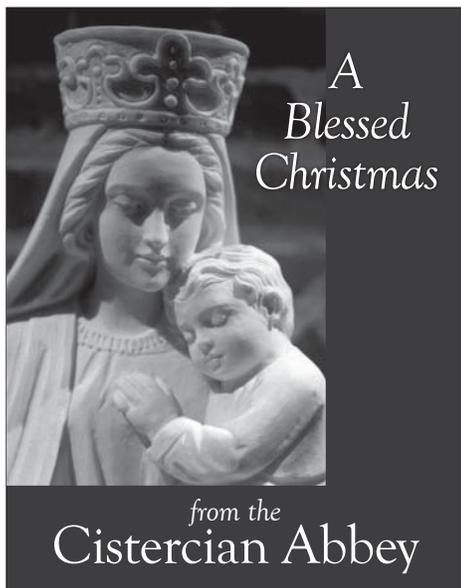




A Letter from the Abbey



Cistercian Abbey • Our Lady of Dallas



A rich Internet resource

Everything you ever wanted to know about the Cistercians

For those with questions about the Cistercian Order, there is an excellent resource on the Internet.

Ocist.org is an ever-expanding web site managed in Rome by Fr. Meinrad Tomann, the Procurator General of the Cistercian Order. He is an Austrian monk from the abbey of Heiligenkreuz.

This web site can be “googled” using the key words “Cisterican Order” or

ocist.org

Among the facts you will find on the Cistercian Order web site (ocist.org) is the number of nuns and monks.

What is the country with the most Cistercians? See page 6.

its Latin name “Ordo Cisterciensis,” which is also our Order’s official name.

Much of the material on the web site is multilingual, a rainbow of linguistic variety: English, French, German, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, Polish, and so on (yes, also Hungarian).

Most useful for perusing this resource is, besides English, a basic command of *continued on page 6*

Try to avoid the Christmas of gluttony

Abbot Denis suggests ways to overcome the commercialistic Christmas that clouds the holiday’s true meaning. See page 2.

Holiday Mass schedule

Christmas Midnight Service on December 24: Office of Readings begins at 11:30 pm and is followed immediately by the Midnight Mass.

Christmas Day, December 25

9 am, concelebrated High Mass.

On New Years Eve, December 31

Eucharistic Adoration

9 pm –12 midnight

(with benediction at midnight)

Every First Friday of the school year, January through May, the Community’s Mass at the Abbey will begin at 7:30 pm. The Collegium Cantorum of the University of Dallas provides the music each first Friday.



The Word

At Christmas, we see God’s Word made flesh in Jesus.

By Br. Stephen Gregg

Although words are small, they are infinitely complicated, because they come from the depths of the human being. Our words start inside us and move outward. When we think, words fill our minds and interconnect until they form answers and reflections.

As thinking creatures, we can even see how our whole life is directed toward words; we feel like we know something when we know the word for it, and as we learn to know and love more and more things, we

move inside from word to word, finding new words and better words, words that reveal more to us about our experiences.

And in the end, we hope to narrow down our inner search for words until we find one perfect word, one word that contains all the things we think. We would turn to that word and hold onto it, gazing further and further into its depths.

But this inner word is met also by all the words around us, all the things other people *continued on page 5*



Ignore the Christmas of gluttony

The seven-headed dragon of Commercial Christmas threatens to consume the spiritual meaning of Christmas. Here's what to watch for and how to combat it.

By Abbot Denis Farkasfalvy

Each year the Commercial Christmas (CC) reappears like a dragon of seven heads. This year, as last, it attempts to devour the holy night with mother and child and replace it with a cocktail of manufactured smiles, pretensions of happiness and disguised despair.

The first head of CC is the head of the artificial smile.

Before you can draw your sword, it looks into your eyes and paralyzes you with its strongest weapon, charm.

Unless you avoid its eyes, your mouth will in a split second twitch to exclaim, "Merry Christmas!" and your plan for a spiritual Christmas is history. You become part of the plot; you begin selling the happiness myth.

What to do instead? Avoid looking into the smiling head's eyes mirroring the vanity of the "vanity Christmases." Instead, open your eyes to reality — the world in which we live — a world full of suffering human beings, a holy night into which God descends from his holy throne and partakes in man's suffering.

To Mary and Joseph, first to them alone, the child arrives and cries into the darkness. Shepherds share the couple's poverty, angels share their adoration and animals offer a share in bodily warmth. Francis of Assisi looks on from the side.

"I told you so," he says: "God becomes most manifest amidst human misery."

The second head of CC is the head of nostalgia.

First, it attacks your ears. "Silent Night" sings a sweet melody into your pious ear, while "I'm Dreaming of a White Christmas" hums another melody into your secular ear. (You can plug a variety of selections into this formula.)

Television, radio, iPod — each with many channels and buttons offer their goodies. You can conquer these if you make one resolute choice: **turn them off**. Not forever, just for now.

Begin keeping vigil in silence, waiting for God's word, allowing Him to address you. What is his word to you?

It may come from the middle of the Creed, "for us and for our

*The rescue comes from faith,
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the Creator of the Universe,
the loving God.*

salvation.” It might come from elsewhere (e.g., the eight beatitudes).

Or from the age-old story about the prodigal son’s search for lost sonship, God seeking me, His lost child. Maybe tonight even the angels sit on heavenly “Amber Alert” because I — the kidnapped child, small and stupid — wandered away from my home.

Slowly, a message begins to emerge from all this — “The Word was made flesh.” Or “with an everlasting love I have loved you.”

The third head is a mask that peeks out from behind the Nativity scene.

As I look at Mary, Joseph, and the Child, I begin my “spiel” of the “Family Christmas.” A large selection of tender feelings: adorable children or grandchildren, and an inexhaustible supply of irresistible family photos.

For those who do not take pictures (like me), the dear, dear photo albums containing tear-jerking memories of our sweet childhoods serve as the dragonhead of the “nice Christmas.”

Conquering it is difficult. After all you cannot turn away from a child. Christ himself is a Newborn Child.

Only faith is able to conquer this head of the CC dragon. Only faith embraces the words, “Unless you become like a child you will not enter the Kingdom of heaven!”

What is this? Me, a child?! Become? Unless you are born again... But a man cannot go back in time and into the womb and start over again! Unless you are born again by God’s Spirit, by a renewal of body and soul.

The “nice Christmas” of picture gazing fades away. I grab my calendar and begin to re-plan my life.

The worst face of CC is the Christmas of Despair.

It may appear as a fear of economic hardships, health problems, loneliness or depressing thoughts.

If you are old, you begin counting your illnesses and re-diagnose every organ of the aging body.

If you are young, you recount the thousands of stories of unfulfilled dreams, failed courses, so-so grades, and lost competitions.

Stuck. Nobody even guesses how I feel. My artificial smile becomes painful. Every “Merry Christmas” sounds like an insult.

The rescue comes from faith, mostly from the beginning of the Creed: the one God, the Creator of the Universe, the loving God: Redeemer, Providence, thousands of blessings.

“Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good.” Not because I am good at asking for forgiveness, but because I need it.

Confession — making up — it does not matter how I feel; this Christmas is for me from God, *not* from the media.

“A Child is born to us,” to each one of us.

The Dragon’s head of Christmas food is the cheapest trick of CC. These sumptuous traps surround you.

There are the Christmas parties at which you can sample endlessly.

And then there’s the feast you prepare yourself (after days of shopping).

Either way (or in some combination), a week of indigestion inevitably follows.

Then you sigh. What a blessing that Christmas comes only once a year!

Defenses against this threat advertise constantly. But most fail. How many of us stick to our diet, or fulfill our vow to exercise more frequently?

Perhaps as we sit down to eat, we should seek to connect true enjoyment with a sense of proportion and measure.

Above all, seek first the Kingdom of the Christmas Child — the community of the gathering, the prayerfulness of the celebrations, and all that is good in human existence.

Ignore the Christmas of gluttony.

Two more heads are left; both are subtle.

During the Christmas of the Philanthropist, projects and duties overwhelm us. People to visit, gifts to give, checks to write (no matter how small). Lots of them. Some of us will eagerly await and register each thank-you note.

A couple of hundred Christmas cards. No person who sends one to you should be left out. You form a league of mutual Christmas wishers and spend long and pointless hours in writing well-formulated sentences about what Christmas means.

It becomes mostly about writing letters. (This newsletter is, of course, an exception.) Or you have no other preoccupation than seeking thanks and appreciation for your card, letter, or newsletter. (This one is, of course, not included.)

How to conquer the Christmas of the Philanthropist? In *medio stat virtus*: virtue stands in the middle. Do this with a sense of measure; move on and forget about the feedback.

The last one is tough: the Christmas of Pride.

This person always expects to celebrate with one unbending tradition — the same words, the same food, the same routine — unforgiving of the exception and often indignantly remarking, “people just do not know how to celebrate nowadays.”

Travel once again back to the manger of Bethlehem.

After all, Mary had a different smile for each shepherd and each one of the magi. The Child enjoys both the gold and the frankincense and does not mind the bitter myrrh.

And when the time comes, rather than asking for a legion of angels to defend them, Mary and Joseph depart in haste to save the Child. Serving Jesus’ life is their highest priority.

Respond to God who became a child for our sake so that each of us may become His child, a child in his service.

So we close the loop and reach a Christmas of humility.

The real Christmas.

A word of special thanks

By Abbot Denis Farkasfalvy

We have not had the chance to thank the many people who, just six weeks ago, provided for us the most beautiful All Souls Celebration ever.

An exceptionally large and powerful Collegium Cantorum from the University of Dallas, under the direction of Marilyn Walker, together with soloists and instrumentalists played and sang Gabriel Fauré's Requiem and brought many of us to tears as we remembered our deceased monks, teachers, alumni, supporters and friends.

For the first time we dedicated the donations we received to the Young Monks' Educational Fund, presently supporting the school expenses of nine brothers in Dallas and two brothers (with room and board overseas) in Rome.



MATH LESSONS Br. Anthony Bigney helps Second Formers with their math assignments.

Teaching at the prep school for the first time

by Br. Anthony Bigney

Sixth Grade Social Studies is one of the best classes to teach. It's all the exciting parts of World History: The Greeks and Romans, the Egyptians and Explorers! And because they're only in Second Form, this is the first time they've seen much of this material. As such, it might be easy to believe that the education is a one-way street, from the teacher to the student. However, as I reflect on my first semester of teaching at the Prep School, I'm struck by how much I've learned from my students.

I thought I'd share with you a few of the important lessons I've gathered over the past few months:

■ For a Middle Schooler, the most exciting part of any home high school football game — no matter how close the score or how tough the opponent — is half-time when you're allowed to run around on the field.

This is especially true if it happens to be the annual "Dot Race."

■ "Tuck in your shirt" means many different things to many different young men.

■ A competitive game of Ultimate Frisbee on Friday afternoon is a great way to start a

weekend.

■ The King Tut exhibit at the Dallas Museum of Art has priceless artifacts, exquisite pieces of art and treasures from antiquity. However, for a boy who is forced to wear a coat and tie, it becomes an opportunity to pretend to be an FBI agent.

■ Math is tough — no matter what grade you're in.

■ Everyone can quote "Monty Python and the Holy Grail."

■ Our sixth grade boys are musical prodigies: They can play the recorder with their nose.

■ And most importantly: the Cistercian "Community" I joined last August extends far beyond the walls of the abbey.

This community is built to include some of the most gifted students I've ever worked with, parents and alumni of tremendous generosity, and the faculty and staff who strive to enlighten and enkindle.

It is a community unlike any I've been a part of — a tight-knit group of hard-working, caring individuals who have each other's best interest at heart.

It's a community I'm only beginning to understand, but one I feel truly blessed to be a part of.



RECESS FUN Br. John Bayer plays with First Formers.

Invasion of the brothers

Nine young monks teach at prep school

By Br. John Bayer

This fall the Prep School saw an "invasion" of brothers: nine of us (all those on this side of the Atlantic) took up various positions of teaching or coaching.

Of the nine, for six of us this was a first time; and the "official" and "unofficial" mentoring — generously offered by so many faculty, staff, parents and monks of the CPS community — was a tremendous gift.

Whether it came in the form of advice from a patient Form Master, a word of encouragement from an experienced mentor or simply a smile from a welcoming colleague, the support has been an inspiration for us all.

In the well-said words of one of the Brothers, it's all "far more than I could ever deserve

or expect as a new teacher."

Love, fraternity, education and opportunity — indeed, God's generosity has been overwhelming.

So much so that at times I can feel uneasy, as if I had to scamper and find some way of justifying all that He has done.

In such moments, I do well to remember the Lord's promise: "I will instruct you and teach you the way you should go" (Psalm 32:8).

I feel, then, that the best return to God and the community is to be ever on watch for His will, trying our best to serve where He leads, and accepting that "to whom much is given, of him will much be required" (Luke 12:48).

Merry Christmas, and thank you again!

Plans for 2009 focus on education of young monks

January 2009 will be the last year of the first decade of our “third millennium.” Plans and anticipations fill our heads.

Our most important plans concern the education of the young Cistercians.

In summer '09 Br. Augustine and Br. Philip will take their perpetual solemn vows and, in September, will be ordained to the diaconate.

But earlier, the Feast of the Assumption of Mary, August 15, 2009, Br. Joseph will be ordained a priest and the following day, Sunday, August 16, he will celebrate his first mass in the Abbey Church.

Beginning in 2009, Fr. Joseph will be a full-time teacher at Cistercian Preparatory School.

Right after these solemnities we expect four other brothers to join Br. Thomas in Rome, and begin post-graduate studies in theology.

Meanwhile, already in this spring others will begin further studies for a master's in various teaching fields (Physics, Math, and Spanish).

Not all plans are finalized, but the study plans are becoming more concrete and detailed.

Eleven different careers in teaching and ministry are planned.

More than ever we need your support both in spiritual, mate-

rial, and monetary terms.

The *Young Monks' Educational Fund* has become an important priority.

Consider making a contribution to the *Young Monks' Educational Fund* and pray for the success of our young men.

The Roman experience

From Ethiopian Cistercians to the ancient catacombs

By Brs. Joseph and Thomas

We cannot explain why the abbot has sent us to Rome without providing some concrete examples.

We live at the “headquarters” of the Cistercian Order, with fellow Cistercians hailing

from places as diverse as Ethiopia, Poland, and Vietnam.

By living and praying together, we gain a special sense of the heritage and hopes of our 911-year-old Order, of which the Abbey in Dallas is just one member.

Our theology courses are obviously enriching and stimulating, and we, along with students speaking many diverse languages, learn from outstanding professors for a common purpose: to sow the seeds of the truth and love of Jesus Christ and His Church.

But the “Roman experience” is far greater than the schools and libraries.

We have prayed at the tombs of Peter and Paul, and walked in the catacombs made by the first Christians of Rome; one of us even got to serve at a papal Mass, and met the Holy Father afterwards!

The universality of our faith is a priceless treasure; enriched by such unique experiences, we will return to Dallas blessed by the wisdom and joy of Christ's whole Church, eager to share them with those we meet.



MONASTIC VIGILANCE Brs. Joseph and Thomas joke around on police motorcycles in front of the Vatican.

The Word

continued from page 1

say. We learn by words. And the more we love someone, the more we let their words enter into our thoughts and mingle with our own words.

When we are listening to important words — from someone we love, from a teacher, or even just from the announcer on the bus! — we quiet ourselves down so that we can hear it.

Words are small, but infinitely complex.

Jesus Christ, the Word of God, encompasses these two aspects of words.

We hear, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1) and “Through him all things were made” (John 1:3).

Christ is the word for “God,” he is what “God” means: and so he is also the meaning

of all Creation. He is the meaning of — the name for — all the things that come from God. He is the way that we human creatures come to know all that is, because it is through words that we bring Creation into our hearts and minds.

When we open our inner ears to Christ the Word of God, all the other things find their real meaning.

But there is more: “The Word became flesh, and dwelt among us” (John 1:14).

Christ the Word encompasses all things, since He is God's powerful Word; but he is also small. That is how he truly enters into our souls, and even our bodies.

Think of the Angel's visit to Mary: at first, Mary was “disturbed at the word” of greeting, but once in her fullness of grace she heard the message of God's salvation, she could say, “Fiat mihi secundum verbum tuum,” “Let it be done to me according to

your word” (Luke 1:38).

Her response to the Angel is her response to God's Word.

In the Gospel, then, we see God the Word making Himself small so that the Virgin Mary could receive him not just in her mind, but in her actual flesh: for “the Word was made flesh,” and he was conceived in Mary's womb after she conceived the Word in her soul, after she ‘understood’ the Word in the fullness of grace.

For us, the Word of God, the meaning of all things, the name of God Himself, is also flesh: in the Eucharist, the Word joins Himself to our world and allows us to eat his own flesh and drink his blood in the sacrament; in the Eucharist we meet the Word who became Incarnate in Mary's womb at Christmas.

Advent and Christmas show us this Incarnation of the Word.

Abbey Church Services

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 during the school year.

Cistercian Abbey Our Lady of Dallas
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The Cistercian Order on the web at ocist.org

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German and Italian.

The most interesting section of the website is called *Cistopedi* — an abbreviation for “Cistercian Encyclopedia.”

This wonderful new initiative provides all sorts of current as well as historical and statistically reliable information about the Cistercian Order’s monks, nuns, monasteries, and membership.

The site includes many beautiful and historical photographs.

Naturally, the site answers some of the most frequently asked questions about the Cistercian Order.

How many Cistercians live in the world? Who are they and where, of what language and nationality?

A statistical table on the web site provides exact answers as of January 29, 2008. Accordingly the Order has a membership of 2,519 persons, 1,688 monk and 831 nuns.

Where do most of the Cistercians live?

The answer may surprise you: more than one-fourth of all Cistercians, exactly 728 belong to the Vietnamese Congregation, which keeps on increasing with unprecedented rapidity.

The Vietnamese monks are expanding also geographically. In the last two years they have opened two monasteries in California, which remain focused on the needs of ethnic Vietnamese living in the U.S.

The next largest linguistic group is German and the German-speaking Austrians and Swiss with slightly more than 500 people.

If you keep on exploring the site, you will find pictures of the Ethiopian and Eritrean Cistercians, numbering half a dozen monasteries, all with an exotic ancient liturgy of the Ethiopian Rite, an oriental liturgy following the traditions of ancient Alexandria.

You will find among the entries of “Cistercian News” a recent picture of Fr. Siyoom Kifle, recently elected prior of Asmara who lived in our monastery for two years and obtained his master of arts degree in English from the University of Dallas.

With your appetite now whetted, please feel free to start exploring ocist.org yourself.

