



A LETTER FROM THE ABBEY

December 2016



Merry Christmas from Cistercian



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A Letter from the Abbot

by Fr. Abbot Peter Verhalen

An antiphon from the First Vespers for the First Sunday of Advent sets the tone for our preparation for Christmas: "Behold the name of the Lord is coming from afar and his brilliance fills the earth." The Lord is coming from afar. Our Savior does not belong to this world, even though we like to think and act as though we or someone else in this world can control our environment, can create peace and joy in our lives and in the lives of those we love. But Advent invites us to grow in the faith that our God brings meaning and purpose, peace and joy to us and our world from beyond our world. Advent is, therefore, a time of humble waiting and expectation, for a gift from beyond our world, the Son of God. Tiny points of His light already shine in our lives. The Advent antiphon reminds us to await the source of these many lights in a Savior whose brilliance will fill all the earth, bringing his light into all the dark corners of our lives and of the world.

Please join us this Advent and Christmas Season in proclaiming in our actions as much as in our words the imminent arrival of our Lord, coming from afar and filling the earth with his joyful brilliance.



Though the snowy pictures on this page are from years past, they express some of the peace and joy of the monastery – and our longing for some snow.



Vocation Reflection

by Br. Benedict Lacombe

From the age of five or so, I have thought about becoming a priest. I remember attending Mass with my family in Beaufort, South Carolina and the simple desire to do what the priest was doing. My parents wanted to nurture that desire, so I attended Benedictine Military School in Savannah, Georgia, where my understanding of a vocation matured. This was the first time I had encountered a monastic community. I felt drawn to a life where one could become a priest, live in community and be a teacher. However, I also felt drawn to parochial ministry, where the need for priests is so dire. Thus, after graduation I enrolled at Holy Trinity Seminary here in Dallas, where I began my undergraduate

studies and priestly formation for my home Diocese of Charleston, South Carolina. In my third year in the seminary God decided, however, to reawaken the desire to live out my priesthood in the monastery. I realized then that God has a sense of humor, for through his providence, I had ended up at a seminary next door to a Cistercian community of monks, priests and teachers. I visited over the Easter Triduum, and fell in love with the life and the community. At this point it became clear to me that a vocation was nothing to be afraid of, since Jesus was not sending me away to be alone! Instead, he was inviting me to a new home, and giving me brothers likewise engaged in the labor of loving obedience.

Report on the Course for New Superiors

by Fr. Abbot Peter Verhalen

From July 2-10, more the 50 Cistercian monks and nuns newly elected or appointed as superiors met in the General House in Rome, where they were offered an intensive course in topics pertinent to new superiors. Our week was filled with presentations throughout the day by the Abbot General, the Procurator General, and veteran superiors. Time was also set aside each day for the members to meet in language groups so that they could pray together or share their thoughts on a presentation. The real value, I felt, was the opportunity to meet and talk with new Cistercian superiors from around the world, from Vietnam to Ethiopia and Eritrea, to Brazil and Europe. In the evening, when

they were not watching France and Germany battle it out in the European Cup, the monks and nuns strolled through the Aventine or tested the gelato in a nearby gelateria. Such walks

Vocations Retreats

The Abbey is again offering a series of weekend retreats for young men discerning a call to our monastic life. The first retreat will take place at the turn of the year: December 30, 2016 - January 1, 2017. The second possibility is the weekend of January 13-15, 2017. Those joining us on retreat will participate in the daily prayer and meals schedule of the monks, and will also receive conferences on the nature of monastic life and our Cistercian charism.

For more information, feel free to contact Fr. Thomas:
fr-thomas@cistercian.org

lay the foundations for friendships that can serve us all as we strive to bring the good news of the gospel to those we serve in the Cistercian tradition.



After a special Mass at the tomb of St. John Paul II, young Cistercian superiors enjoy a gelato in front of the Pantheon.

THE INCARNATION: THE ARGUMENT OF LOVE

by Abbot Emeritus Denis Farkasfalvy

It would be a long story to narrate how the extraordinary Cistercian Saint Bernard of Clairvaux has been viewed by his contemporaries, distorted in the memory of later centuries, and then rediscovered and vindicated – in some sense how he has been re-embraced and re-interpreted at times with new insights, at times with new misunderstandings. One distortion presents the late medieval figure of a “sweet” Bernard, a twofold misunderstanding of the adjective “honey-flowing” (*mellifluus*) used as an attribute of him. The adjective originally referred to an exegete who worked busily and joyfully to collect the sweet meaning (honey) of a scriptural text and probed diligently its every detail as a bee would work with every petal of a flower. The adjective “honey-flowing” later signified that a preacher either focused his teaching on a doctrine of love or used a style that was perhaps too sweet, as it appealed too much to affections. This misunderstanding was not helped when Bernard’s original writings were copied in ancient manuscripts that combined his texts with those of his less talented imitators. In the past 50-80 years, such trends have been counteracted by the discovery of “Bernard the Theologian” and then “Bernard the Master of Spiritual Life.”

Bernard’s more popular writings (his homilies on the Annunciation, his sermons for Advent and Christmas) overshadowed his more profound and difficult texts in which he proved himself to be a serious theologian and church leader of exceptional wisdom. Here, I present a mostly overlooked, short piece, written probably in his later years, on the centrality of the Incarnation in the work of our salvation, a topic he could speak about with the theological precision of a St. Thomas Aquinas

or the emotional charge of Saint Francis of Assisi. The short text is from a sermon Bernard preached and then edited for circulation, his 29th Sermon in the collection of “Sermons on Various Subjects.”

St. Bernard writes, “It is most effective for us in developing an affectionate and heartfelt love to think about the Incarnation of Christ, all he did in his flesh for our salvation and, in a special way, his passion.” This is traditional doctrine with nothing special in it until Bernard explains God’s plan of salvation in four steps.

STEP ONE: Could God not just force his salvation upon us? Yes, but He realized: “If I force him with no free choice, I would attract a donkey, not a human person.” So He asks: “Should I give my kingdom to jackasses?”

STEP TWO: God then thought to impose obedience on his creature by scaring him: “I threatened him with the most horrible things one can think of: eternal darkness, never dying worms, inextinguishable fire.” God saw, however, that such things did not convert the human being. He needed something else.

STEP THREE: So He said: “I knew man was not only timid, but also covetous. He wants possessions: gold, silver, precious things and above all life. If he clings so much to his miserable and burdensome life that quickly passes, how much more should he desire my life that is peaceable, eternal and happy?” Therefore, he promised man “what eye could not see, ear could not hear and what was not even conceivable by the human heart” (cf. 1 Cor 2:9), that is, life eternal. But to no avail.

STEP FOUR: Seeing that by all this He had gotten nowhere, God said, “There is only one thing left. Man is

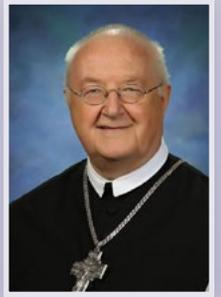
not only fearful, not only covetous, but he is also attracted by a third thing, love. Nor can he be attracted by anything more than by love.”

Thus, God came in the flesh, and appeared so lovable that He showered love upon us. He manifested to us a love greater than any other, a love by which he gave away his life for our sake. Whoever chooses not to convert to him after that response would rightly hear him say, “What could I have done for you and did not do?”

In fact, God proves to us his love in nothing else as much as in the mystery of his Incarnation and Passion. Thus in nothing is his goodness revealed and his kindness manifested better than when he appears among us as a human being, as the Apostle testifies: “God’s goodness and our Savior God’s humanity appeared among us” (1 Tit 3:4).

He divested himself of his power and came in weakness. His wisdom he also concealed because He decided to save by the foolishness of human preaching those who are willing to believe.

This is the deepest thought St. Bernard reached as an old man. We know that as a child barely six years old he had his mystical experience when at Midnight Mass in a vision he saw the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem. Now at the end of an eventful life of stellar successes, he realized once again and better than ever before that only the Baby of Bethlehem brings man the fullest message of love.



Letter From Rome

by Fr. John Bayer

I am starting my second year of doctoral studies at the Gregorian University. The topic of my dissertation is, broadly speaking, the relationship between faith and reason in Anselm of Canterbury, and my moderator is a Belgian Jesuit and emeritus professor from the philosophy department, Paul Gilbert. I spend my days studying languages, theology, philosophy and monastic history – and I am having a blast!

I continue to enjoy my terrifically multi-cultural community in Rome. The student body at my university

comes from some 150 different countries, and I live with students from over 20. In addition to studying, I assist as a chaplain for the UD students studying in Rome. Lately, I have also given several tours to Cistercian alumni, parents and friends of places like *Tre Fontane* (where St. Paul was martyred and where St. Bernard founded a Cistercian monastery) and the *Chiesa di Sant'Ignazio* (the Jesuit basilica where St. Robert Bellarmine

is buried and where Angelo Secchi SJ pioneered astronomical spectroscopy in the nineteenth century).

Please keep me in your prayers!

Fr. John with friends at the General House: Vietnamese Cistercians, Br. Augustine and Br. Alphonsus, and a layman working in Rome for the promotion of human dignity, Benjamin Harnwell



SUMMER MONKS

by Fr. Gregory Schweers

The intensity of *ora and labora* in abbey life tends to lift a bit from June 2 – August 2, when most of the community head for the mountains of Colorado, the Seven Hills of Rome, the sand 'n' surf of California, or the warm welcomes of family. This past summer Frs. Philip, Ignatius, Justin,

and Br. Benedict flew to San Jose, California, rented a car, and toured San Francisco. Later on, in Santa Cruz, they took in some surfing lessons, and finally, after many miles of driving, drove into San Diego and stayed on Coronado beach for more surfing. Father Gregory continued his 'Texas Enculturation' outreach by taking Nebraskan Fr. Thomas on a 1600-mile road trip to West Texas that started

at the Alamo and then traveled to the Caves of Sonora, the Big Bend, Marfa, and the famous artesian pool of Balmorrhea State Park. Fr. Abbot Peter led Frs. Roch, Ambrose and John to a Rocky Mountain High in Colorado for backpacking and campfire cuisine. The 'Discover Americana' trip saw Frs. Lawrence, Stephen, and Br. Raphael, enjoy a week in the Ozarks hiking and spelunking.





Construction at the Abbey

by Fr. Ignatius Peacher

Construction at the abbey is in full gear. Several projects are going on at the same time. The renovation of the retreat house was the first project to begin in late spring of 2016. It should be complete by December 1. It is turning out far better than expected. The small conference room with its 8-ft ceiling has been transformed into a beautiful gathering space with a chimney, clerestory windows, 20-ft ceiling, brick and wood panel walls, Fr. Damian art, a big screen TV for movies and presentations and an adjoining kitchenette. The space will enable us to host Bible studies, retreats, various gatherings, and small receptions

without disrupting the quiet of the monastic enclosure. Just outside the front door of this gathering space will be a spectacular patio designed by David Hocker '97. The patio is expected to be completed by January 2017. Also near completion is the remodel of the west wing of the monastery. We have given more room to the lobby and corridor and more ample parlors. An office for an assistant to the abbot was also added. There is also an addition to the west wing – extending it further to the south. The first floor of the addition will be a classroom with easy access from the outside to avoid the necessity of students passing through

the monastic enclosure. Fr. Denis and Fr. Roch's University of Dallas classes will meet here as well as other gatherings organized by the monks. Above the classroom on the second floor will be three new bedrooms -- a necessity given the happy reality of young men continuing to enter the monastery. Finally, the most significant project is the crypt which is being built next to the abbey church. A simple concrete design by Gary Cunningham '72 puts the crypt mostly underground in the hill between the church and the school. It will be the resting place for the deceased monks. We hope the crypt will be ready early spring.



We thank all of you, the generous friends of Cistercian, who have made this construction possible by giving to the *Building on a Solid Foundation* Capital Campaign.



Abbey Church Services

UPCOMING EVENTS

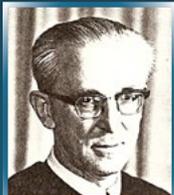
Christmas Eve Vigil Mass	December 24	11:30 pm
Christmas Morning Mass	December 25	9:00 am
New Years Eve Adoration	December 31	9:00 pm- 12:00 am

DAILY SCHEDULE

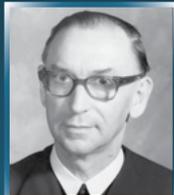
Office of Readings & Morning Prayer	6:00 am
Evening Prayer	6:00 pm
Daily Mass (Mon.-Sat.)	6:30 am
Mass on Sunday	9:00 am
Confessions Wed.	4-5:00 pm



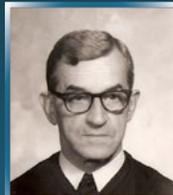
*Cistercian Abbey Our Lady of Dallas
3550 Cistercian Road
Irving, Texas 75039*



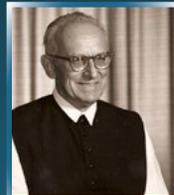
Fr. Rudolph
Zimányi



Fr. Louis Lékai



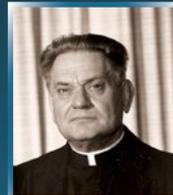
Fr. Victor Falubíró



Fr. Thomas Fehér



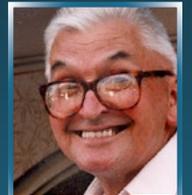
Fr. Abbot
Anselm Nagy



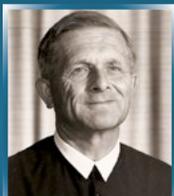
Fr. Lambert Simon



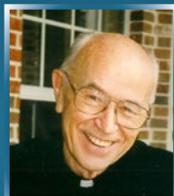
Fr. David Balás



Fr. Baltasar Szarka



Fr. Placid
Cszmazia

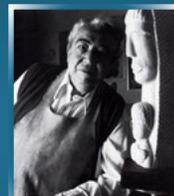


Fr. Pascal
Kis-Horváth

ABBEY CRYPT

“Bringing back the deceased monks to such a beautiful setting is a form of replanting their seed so that they can inspire and live on through the following generations. We should not underestimate how important it will be to the Cistercian community to have their onsite presence...”

—Jim Smith, Class of '72



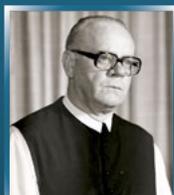
Fr. Damián
Szödényi



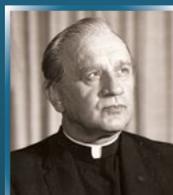
Fr. Aloysius
Kimecz



Fr. Leonard Barta



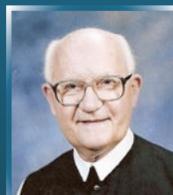
Fr. Odo Egres



Fr. George
Ferenczy



Fr. Ralph March



Fr. Henry Marton



Fr. Matthew
Kovács



Fr. Benedict
Monostori



Fr. Christopher
Rábay

Look for your invitation to the dedication of the new crypt this spring.