



A Letter from the Abbey

Cistercian Abbey • Our Lady of Dallas

Briefly

Happy Holidays



from the Cistercian Abbey

The abbot's haunting Christmas memory

Christmas 1944 brought World War II to Hungary's back door, darkening a young boy's holiday and marking the first days of the Soviet's 45-year occupation. 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, beginning on September 7, the Community's Mass at the Abbey will be at 7:30 PM.

The Collegium Cantorum of the University of Dallas provides the music each first Friday.

The abbey's "home bodies"

A day in the life of Brs. Anthony and John

What's a day in the life of a novice like?

Well, it starts pretty early. In fact, neither the law-firm nor the classroom prepared us for the 5 am wake-up call; but now after a quick shower or a few loud rounds of Handel's "Hallelujah Chorus," we're both awake and ready to go.

Nevertheless, John still tends to miss a few buttons on his scapular (thankfully Anthony is able to point that out by Mid-day prayer).

At 6 am the first unalterable "rock" of our schedule begins, Morning Prayer.

One of the new (and great) things about

life at Cistercian is the fixed schedule. We know exactly where and when we can meet with our "brothers."

And whether it's in the Church around the name of the Lord or in the Refectory around the table, living the "community life" is one of the most enjoyable parts of the novitiate.

But as the "home bodies" of the monastery family, we're in a unique position to appreciate it — when everyone else is away at work we're waiting at home doing our work of study and discernment.

Throughout our days of reading, sweep-

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Divine guidance

Brs. Thomas, Ambrose, Stephen, and Nathanael begin teaching

By Br. Stephen Gregg

When four of us junior brothers began teaching at the School this past August, we knew that our involvement there meant far more than 'earning our keep.'

After all, we read in the Prologue of St. Benedict's Rule this description of God's call to the monk: "Seeking his workman in a multitude of people, the Lord calls out to him and lifts his voice again: 'Is there anyone here who yearns for life and desires to see good days?' (Ps 34:13)...What, dear brothers, is more delightful than this voice of the Lord calling to us? See how the Lord in his love shows us the way of life."

St. Benedict presents God's call not as wholly inaccessible, but rather as close, loud, even urgent: a shout over a crowd, and

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NEW NOVICES (left to right) Brs. Thomas, Ambrose, Stephen, and Nathanael at their new place of employment, Cistercian Prep School.

A haunting Christmas memory

December 1944 brought World War II to Hungary's back door, darkening a young boy's holiday and setting in motion 45 years of Soviet oppression

By Abbot Denis Farkasfalvy

AS CHRISTMAS APPROACHES many people tell about the best Christmas they ever had. For me, Christmas conjurs up a very different kind of memory. I am haunted by an unholy Christmas nightmare that took place a few months after my eighth birthday in 1944.

My awareness of existence erupted on the night of December 15 of that year. Like Calderon's play "Life is a Dream," I felt as if I was waking up from the dream of another life. Suddenly, I was catapulted into a personal awareness and, from that point forward, I began experiencing life in an uninterrupted continuum.

The first chapter turned out to be sad for me, but much sadder still for my country.

While World War II was trudging through its final six months, the war only now was beginning to hit home for us in the town of _____. German forces were retreating from the Russian front towards their homeland with the Russian Army in hot pursuit. We were caught in the middle.

On December 14, German soldiers had occupied every room in our house except for one, into which my entire family – my parents and their four children – were forced.

In the wee-hours of the night of the 15th, the thunderous explosions of heavy artillery guns on the outskirts of the city awoke me. I found the rest of the family already awake and engaged in conversation.

Our peaceful existence had come to an end, and for the next five months, war would become the central preoccupation of every living being my town.

I do not know what my family members were discussing that night. I learned only later that under such circumstances adults do

not directly communicate with children about what is really going on. But through the tone of their voice and the melody of their speech, I discerned a clear sense of anxiety and uncertainty.

There in the middle of the night, my family was making plans to move out of the house, which was to be occupied permanently by the German military. They planned to move into the old center of the city and join my two aunts (abandoned by their husbands and deprived of their grown-up sons). We would face the next months of horrors huddled together with them.

For me, I must admit, the next days were full of fun. I managed to climb upon the roof and watched the heavy guns emit rhythmically on the horizon little balls of white smoke. But their explosions never allowed us to forget that our city was under siege.

We had hid most of our valuables in the basement, or in holes dug in the yard, and in different other places like under the coal we bought as fuel for the winter.

We had not yet learned that foreign soldiers are more skillful in robbing riches than in fighting wars. They found all our treasures and began to ship them home or use them themselves.

The day my family left the house in which I was born, a thick layer of fresh snow covered the garden where I had spent so many carefree hours. Before the truck with our belongings moved out, my sister invited me to say "good-bye" to the garden.

Did she know that the memory of this enchanting farewell would remain in my heart as a delicate and touching gesture? It continues to remind me that when tragedies strike, "facing realities" too promptly may not be the wisest thing to do.

The next few days were spent by my family in nervous confusion. My cousins and my oldest brother (all boys older than six-

teen) had been drafted by the Hungarian Army, which was now under German control. In the home of my aunts, there remained only one man, my father, four women (my grandmother, my mother and her two sisters) and three children, my brother (11), my sister (10) and me (8), all waiting for the Russian troops to arrive.

My sister and I were still dreaming of Christmas gifts. For in Hungary, children are made to believe that on the Holy Night the Child Jesus visits the homes in person and brings in Christmas trees and Christmas gifts through locked doors to those who were good. He would not fail to show up now, would he?

The little colony of my family was settling in and preparing for the worst. Long before the siege of the city had begun, my aunts had transformed the safest basement of the family's department store into a bomb shelter. The corridor leading to the store was filled with food of all sorts and essential clothes for each person in the bomb shelter.

The shelves on the walls were transformed into beds. A huge oven was put into the middle to provide heat. The room was poorly lit, but a couple of days after the siege began, electricity went out, anyway. As the shelling of the city continued in earnest, there we were sitting by candle light, listening to undecipherable noises of a battle fought above our heads and waiting for the end of it all and hoping to survive.

As the Vigil of Christmas drew close, the adults agreed among themselves not to mention that it was Christmas. Their hearts were breaking anyway by worrying about the unknown fate of their boys who were fighting somewhere with the military on the western border.

My sister and I exchanged secret messages stating that Christmas and Santa Claus were obviously only a myth, and thus joined, in our own way, the somber and demoralized mood of the adults.

Twice in the middle of the siege, unexpected guests interrupted the eventless flow of time.

First, an elderly friend of my grandmother arrived with her maid, telling about the collapse of her house and begging for a place in our shelter. The second arrival was more dramatic, although not much different in content.

A middle-aged peasant woman from a nearby village made a spectacular arrival as she ran to our house barefoot in the night, carrying a bag on her shoulder. She knew my mother and my aunts who were her customers as she used to sell them cottage cheese,

sour cream and other dairy products. Halfway out of her mind, she gave an animated report in colorful dialect about the doomsday events of her town.

In a bombing raid her house had collapsed, her husband – hit by shrapnel – had died on the spot. She jumped out of the bed picked up her valuables and ran as fast as she could some eight kilometers straight into the city looking for shelter. Now she was begging us to give her a corner in our hide-out as she had no other place to go.

We children moved up to the highest shelves of the walls, letting the new arrivals share the warmth and safety of the bomb shelter.

On Christmas Eve my grandmother solemnly told us that Christmas would not pass without hot food. She went upstairs to cook. One of my aunts went with her but soon came back to the shelter. Her nerves could not take the noise of the explosions of the shells hitting the city from all directions. But we still had our Christmas dinner and the little colony slowly fell to sleep.

The next day we awakened to perfect silence.

The quiet made us aware that the Russian soldiers must have already moved into the city. The male members of the colony, my father, my brother and I began to sneak upstairs to find out what happened.

As we peeked out through the second-floor windows of the house we saw the first groups of Russian soldiers walking along Main Street, kicking in the display windows of the shops and looking for people in the houses. Soon our house was also discovered and the Russian soldiers began pouring in.

Through the whole day new and uninvited visitors came into the house, looking for Germans, sampling our belongings and taking away valuables with a special concentration on wrist watches. It was late night when all this seemed to come to an end.

The women hiding in the basement felt relieved for having survived the first day unharmed.

For awhile three Russian soldiers wrestled with the big black safe which my uncle who had left behind with no key. The safe resisted every effort of opening and the soldiers' suspicion grew all the more that it contained hidden weapons or explosives and, therefore, kept on trying to force it to open.

My grandmother had cooked another, a bit more festive Christmas meal. We, the three children began to sleep on sofas and armchairs, while the soldiers continued to hit, force and hammer the



BEFORE THE SEIGE The Abbot and his sister dressed for their First Communion in May 1943.

*Before the truck with our
belongings moved out,
my sister invited me to say
“good-bye” to the garden.*

iron safe until it finally cracked. Late in the night, in pitch dark, we felt our way back to the basement, and climbed upon the shelves for the night.

What I remember next was nightmare itself.

In deafening noise and confusion I saw the bomb shelter filled with moving bodies, people shouting and screaming, grabbing the children and moving them over their heads in the dark.

Bewildered I resisted, trying to return to my shelf as the only safe place I knew. My mother was forcing me into my pants, a sweater and shoes. Finally a man lifted me high and handed me over above his head to others who held me by my arms.

In a few seconds I was tossed through the emergency exit out of the bomb shelter. As the icy wind slapped my face, my screaming was silenced by the spectacle I beheld.

My grandfather's department store was engulfed by towering flames. An eager Franciscan friar from a nearby church ran around the burning building holding high a cross.

Gun shots were heard from a distance, Russian soldiers were shouting, commanding everybody to clear the streets. Next to me my brother ran barefoot; no wonder, his shoes had been put on my feet by mistake. My sister was crying aloud, women screamed, a few dogs barked. Christmas, 1944.

In the night we were led to a neighboring house's bomb shelter.

Why such a story at Christmas time?

Is this a Christmas story you wanted to read? I have buried it in my heart but cannot help returning to it each year.

May it teach you an awareness that the Son of God became man not in order to merely enjoy the human experience but (mostly) to teach us to carry our (His) cross.

While I have never before written about my experiences during the Christmas of 1944, perhaps this nightmarish chapter in my life will remind us that Jesus' birth itself fell far short of a picture-book Christmas.

Perhaps it can, on this Christmas 64 years later, help us understand and accept experiences of despair, homelessness, poverty, and anxiety.

May it serve as a reminder that God's vigilant salvific will (and the way our families – like Mary and Joseph – extend it to us amidst all our trials) remains the only truly lasting reality on this earth.

There I learned what happened. My grandparents' department store was fully sacked during the day. It was filled with boxes, wrappings and bags. In the middle of the night, organized forces intending to cause chaos have set on fire every major store in the city.

The Russians, whose paranoia reached its climax by the night, suspected saboteurs who were supposedly giving signals to German airplanes where to drop their bombs. And, indeed, a few planes began throwing bombs on the city. And so it was that my grandfather's store, the fruits of a long life's labor, was burned down to the ground.

The bomb shelter in which we hid, was connected to the store by a corridor filled with food and belongings. In minutes we would have suffocated and then burned as the bomb shelter caught fire through the corridor. But we were

rescued by the neighbors who noticed the fire and knew about the location of our shelter.

No one was hurt. But my father, the only man on the scene, was arrested and led to the Russian commander, then brought to the courtyard for execution. Only at the intervention of the mayor was a translator allowed to speak to the commander and he was finally released.

So the second half of my life began on Christmas Day 1944 in the shadow of new occupying forces whose presence in Hungary lasted for over forty-five years.

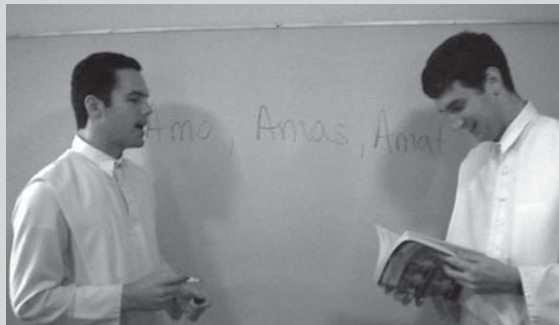
A day in the life of Brs. John and Anthony

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ing, church cleaning and Latin vocabulary we both often find ourselves looking forward to the next "rock" of the day, knowing that everyone will soon be back (and maybe we'll get a basketball game going!).

After breakfast, a cup of coffee and the daily comics we are ready for class, where we'll meet another rock of the novitiate — Fr. Roch, that is. And getting there on time isn't a problem as the novice classroom is just a few steps from our bedrooms.

But while the commute is easy, once we're "on the job" we've got to put in a bit more effort — with only two students in class you had better know your material. From *amo, amas, amat* in Latin, to *Zinna, Zirc* and *Zwettl* in Cistercian History, our classes prepare us for futures as monks, teachers and priests.



LATIN Brs. John (left) and Anthony study Latin during a class in the abbey.

And how fortunate we are to study with these men! I'm sure the prep-schoolers will agree that "class with a monk" is a real gift.

Homework, exercise and the occasional doctor's trip (helping our elderly to the doctor) make up our afternoons.

After dinner and Compline the community gathers for some much deserved recreation, which ranges from good conversation over a bowl of ice-cream to a game of "Mafia."

Before retiring for the night we have two final tasks: setting up for the next morning's mass and saying the rosary with the other brothers.

By about 10 pm we're in our rooms getting ready for the next day of being a Novice.

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not a meaningless cry but a call with definite content, a set of directions for the way of life — a divine job offer, if you will.

Furthermore, our constitutions clearly define our understanding of our calling to be God's workers: "According to the tradition of our congregation, our monasteries devote themselves in a special way to the education of youth, primarily in our own institutions and in other Catholic schools."

Our work in education is essential to the path God shows our community, and thus for us four young monks, our first work at the School — though only a single course for each of us — is a significant stage in our growth toward full sharing in the life God offers this community.

In discerning his vocation in college, Br. Nathanael came to see that teaching was an important part of his monastic calling. He visited several monastic communities, and sensed that he needed to enter one where his activity would be "more than just prayer and baking bread."

After beginning to teach, he sees even more clearly how this work is vital to our monastic life. One day he was explaining to his Second Form Religion class that there is both sin and holiness in the Church because, though the Church is holy, its members are sinful; a student quickly raised his hand and asked with that wondering innocence, "Do you mean *you* are sinful?"

Br. Nathanael quickly realized what an image the boys have of the monks who teach them, and saw that "there is an impetus there that forces us into the place of a role model and challenges us to be stronger monks." Our work in fostering the development of these boys is not one-sided; "teaching forms us."

A certain wonder at finding himself at home in the "world of ideas" in college deepened and directed what was for Br. Thomas already a strong desire: "To be



ENJOYING THE INTERACTION Br. Ambrose shares a moment with his Form IV students. Br. Ambrose teaches the basics of the New Testament. Br. Thomas teaches the Old Testament to Form III, Br. Nathanael teaches Religion in Form II, and Br. Stephen teaches Latin in Form II.

around kids." In a rather unexpected way this two-fold desire that helped guide Br. Thomas to this monastery is already finding fulfillment.

On the one hand, he teaches the basics of the Old Testament to the Third Form, and can revel in leading them to see "the immensity of God, who encompasses all time and history," and can share his joy with these young boys who, perhaps for the first time, find themselves "open to the infinite."

Furthermore, this work as a teacher has provided an unexpected balance to his own life as a student: being able to pass on in his own classroom the fruit of what he learns at the University helps to circumvent the "necessarily selfish" aspect of being a student.

On the other hand, there is more than academic exchange here: Br. Thomas gains further insight into the boys' personali-

ties as their assistant soccer coach. He sees a connection between his work in the classroom and on the field: in both places he helps train the boys to use their own abilities, and so his work has not been "about power, but empowerment."

It was not a distinct calling to teach that first guided Br. Ambrose in his discernment; rather, for some time he had considered primarily a vocation as a diocesan priest. Now that he has begun teaching, though, he sees that there was in his calling to priestly life an "implicit desire" to teach.

Thus, in his first two years in the monastery he did not feel that he was merely preparing for a job as a teacher. He found that the beginning of his monastic life was simply to "learn what it means to be a good monk," especially by engaging in prayerful study of Church history, theology, and the lives of the saints — material that can lead to "spiritual growth."

In teaching the basics of the New Testament to the Fourth Form this year, Br. Ambrose has realized that teaching follows naturally upon his striving simply "to live the Christian life."

Furthermore, this harmony of our way of life and our work guides his understanding of teaching: our classroom work must "go beyond the material" by communicating to our students our own "passion for learning, love for the boys, and sense that the virtuous life is truly worthwhile."

As monks we work to be led to God, as teachers we work to lead to God. We must educate our own eyes to see "the joyful goodness of the kids over there," so that, as teachers, we may "preserve and increase it."

I hope that these thoughts we four monks and teachers have gathered in our first steps along our "way of life" provide a clearer sense that our work as teachers is not a matter of 'making ends meet,' but is essential to the only wealth we can have here: the abundant richness of God's calling.

Abbey Church Services

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|------------------------------------------|---------|
| 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
3550 Cistercian Road
Irving, Texas 75039

Br. Joseph reports on his activities in Rome

Greetings to Irving, and beyond, from the Eternal City!

In my fifth year in the monastery this August, Abbot Denis sent me to Rome to continue my theological formation. It's been a fascinating journey so far!

While here I have the great asset of living in a house of the Cistercian Order. It is located in a quiet corner of Rome on the Aventine Hill; it is not an ordinary monastery. It was built for Cistercians sent to Rome for advanced studies at one of the Roman universities, as well as for a handful of other Cistercians assigned to live here to help our Abbot General as part of a team of "centralized administration" for the Order.

In all, there are currently about 20 Cistercians here, hailing from Vietnam, Sri Lanka, Ethiopia, Spain, Italy, Austria, Poland, and the U.S. We rent out spare rooms to about 20 diocesan priests from around the world who are in Rome to study.

All this is a huge richness: we can see we are bound together by our common faith and by serving ways, the same Master. In fact, both here and at my university, Rome undeniably offers a unique witness to the catholicity of the Church.

It has also been particularly enriching to get a fuller sense of the worldwide nature of the Cistercian Order, and to learn to feel at home amongst a widely diverse group of Christians united by common Cistercian traditions and the same spirit.

My school in Rome is "the Pontifical Gregorian University," the flagship ecclesiastical university of the Jesuits, founded as "the Roman College" by St. Ignatius himself back in 1551.

It's an amazing academic environment, with several thousand students and professors from every continent and literally hundreds of different cities and regions (the Italians are a minority!), as well as a world-class library and programs in fields of special Church in-

terest ranging from theology and Church law to art history and social communications.

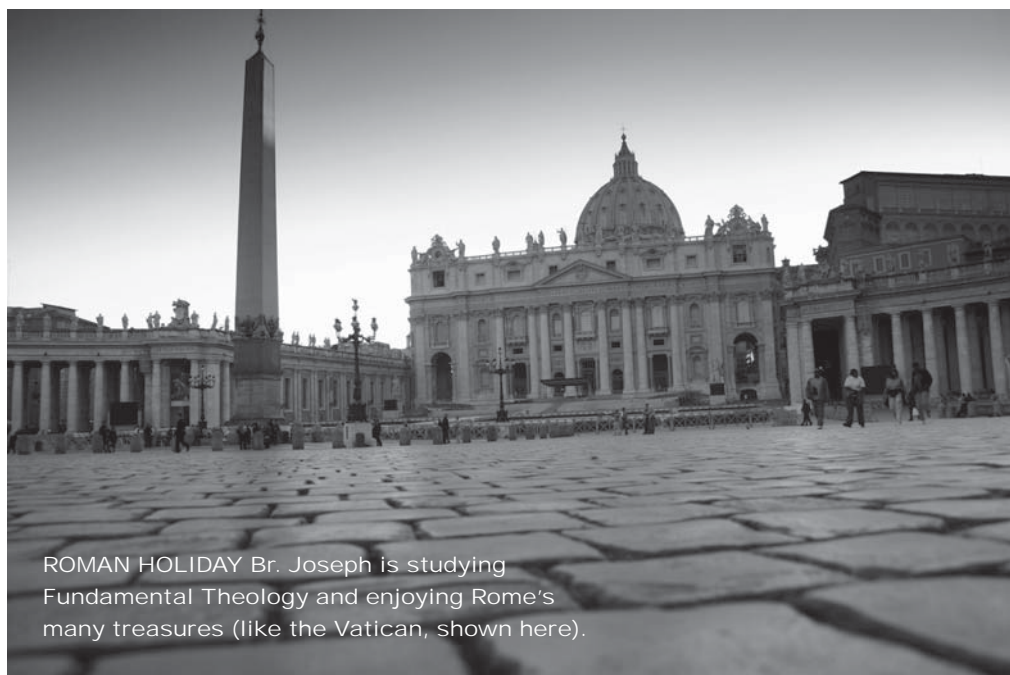
My field of specialization is called "Fundamental Theology", which is the formal study of the basics of faith in Christ – what difference God's message makes for mankind in the first place, the credibility of Christ and his Church, and how the Church is called to relate to the world in its current situation.

I like to describe it as the intellectual "front door" between the house of theology and faith and the wide world of philosophy and culture.

I should be able to finish the degree (called a "licentiate", or S.T.L.) by the summer of '09, and will be thrilled to have the opportunity to be in Dallas both this Christmas and this coming summer.

I also look forward to the prospect of having a few more brothers from Dallas to join me for my second year.

Prayers for this special project of mine as well as for the other



ROMAN HOLIDAY Br. Joseph is studying Fundamental Theology and enjoying Rome's many treasures (like the Vatican, shown here).