

Dear Friends and Visitors

January always brings a welcome change of pace. This year, it also brought a slight change of personnel.

In the first part of the month Br Simin (Min) Preap, our probationary Oblate, left the community after his temporary oblature had expired. Min had been with us for four years, coming from Pittsburgh. We know we benefited in many ways from Min's sojourn here. He worked in the bakery, in the laundry, and in the kitchen, cooking for us once a week. Min also helped Fr Donald in the sacristy, and was our utterly predicable bell-ringer. At the same time, we are confident that Ava and the monastic formation we imparted Min will be sources of wisdom and love he will be able to draw on for the rest of his life.

In the middle of the month, BR TOBIAS SHANAHAN left to return to his own monastery, Ava's mother house, New Melleray, in Iowa. Br Tobias had been as Ava for six years. We all knew it was a temporary arrangement, but were nevertheless saddened to see the day arrive when Tobias would return home. During his time with us, Tobias won the hearts of all, both community members and guests. His monastic example and dedication was an inspiration, particularly to our new comers. Tobias was invaluable on the work scene as work secretary and manager of the fruitcake inventory and shipping department. On the eve of his departure the community threw a simple and nostalgic pizza party to bid Br Tobias adieu!

MR MATTHEW FLATLEY, a friend from St Louis, entered into full time employment with Assumption Abbey Bakery this month. Matthew worked for us during the rush season, November and December of last year. In view of Br Tobias's pending departure, Matthew used those months to learn our packaging and shipping procedures so he could assume many of Br Tobias's tasks in the coming year. Matthew, who is a professional gourmet chef, also cooks for the community once a week.

It has been our custom these past several years to close the fruitcake bakery for the month of January. This gives us an opportunity to give the bakery a thorough cleaning, all the more easy to do by the fact that inventories of both raw materials and finished cakes have been depleted by this time.

That task completed, we can then adopt a more leisurely and diverse schedule for the rest of the month, giving time especially to our annual community retreat and to a significant formation event for the entire community.

Our retreat this year took place from the 9th to the 16th of January. Dom Robert Barnes, OCSO, abbot of Holy Cross Abbey, Berryville, VA, graciously accepted to be our retreat giver. His daily conferences were inspired by the Psalms, the fundamental prayers of the monk. Dom Robert, speaking from his long experience of monastic life, his inherited wisdom, and his evident compassion, helped us to see how our sustained exposure to the Psalms of the Bible has the power to change us radically, to conform us more and more to Christ, and to bring us to the radical trust that Christian "sonship" both implies and demands. During the week of retreat, all community work was suspended. Our friend and employee Matthew Flatley even cooked our meals for us during the week of retreat. That meant that each of us had ample precious time to pray, to do lectio divina, to walk in the woods, and even to luxuriate in a rare extended nap!

Near the end of the month Sr Irene Nowell, OSB, was on hand to give us several conferences on the Psalms. Sr Irene is a member of Mount St Scholastic Monastery, Atchison, Kansas. She is also a professional scripture scholar. Beginning in the late 1970's, Sr Irene has been involved in translation projects. In particular, she was a member of the ICEL committee for Psalms translation in the 1980's, and of the committee charged with the revision of the Psalter of the New American Bible. Finally, Sr Irene was a member of the team that has just recently completed the revision of the rest of the NAB Old Testament. Not only a scholar, Sr Irene is also a woman steeped in the Benedictine traditions of lectio divina, opus dei and community life, and the fruit of her nearly 50 years of Benedictine life was evident in her conferences.

Earlier in January the four postulants, Dean, Jim, Gary, and Mike, along with Br Boniface and Fr Mark, paid a visit to David Haenke, manager of the nearby Alford Forest. David is a well-known figure in the environmental and forestry scene of our part of the Ozarks. He is a disciple of Clint Trammel, the forest manager of the nearly 60-year-old Pioneer Forest project in central Missouri. Following the philosophy of Pioneer Forest, David manages his forest with an eye to the long-range effect of any management practice on the forest, the wildlife, the waterways, no less than on the human population and economy. David met us in his office where, with the aid of maps, he described the scope and content of the 3000-acre forest he manages. Then, he led us into the forest itself, walking us through diverse sections of it where we could observe firsthand his theory and philosophy in practice. It was an informative and fun day, ending with a fine meal together at nearby Rockbridge Trout Ranch and Resort. For over a year the abbey has been in touch with David Haenke, working gradually toward his collaborating with the monks on the sustainable management of Assumption Abbey Forest, 3,400 acres of splendid hardwoods, pines, and waterways.

On the last day of the month Assumption Abbey Bakery officially began its 18th season. We are grateful for our fine customers, many of whom take the time to tell us how much they

appreciate our product. Even more, we are touch by and grateful for people, known and anonymous, who entrust their needs and concerns to our humble prayers. One of our prayers is that you, our readers and friends, will know God's unspeakable peace and presence during this year, 2005, the 55th year of Assumption Abbey's existence.

Fr Mark, Abbot