

Dear Friends and Visitors

The Lord be with you—

The three musketeers from Cuba, MO-Nancy, Loretta, and Debbie drove down for Gandete Sunday Mass. Nancy has again lost her hair to chemo and her two friends loyally drive her to the St. Louis doctors and treatments. She appreciates all who pray for her.

Bro. Thomas went to Milwaukee to visit his oldest sister Grace, who is under Hospice Care. Fortunately, her medication keeps her relatively free from the pain of bone cancer.

A number of our external oblates and family brothers have come the past few months for their regular stays with our community-Rev. Brian Beckett, Dick Ortez, Eddie Francis, and Dane Clement.

Gena and Tom Valli have crowned their sister/brother project of guest room renovations, by completing the handicapped-friendly room and shower. They still have the hallway job of new tile and paint, plus final changes. So far, we have heard only positive remarks about the good taste and workmanship. The decisive test will be when their mother and family come on retreat this Spring.

Fr. Justin is going about on crutches. Sr. Ann Marie had not been free from her surgical shoe for a broken foot bone very long, before Fr. Justin woke up with a swollen painful foot. Justin had been gardening and digging in rubber boots the day before. A local physician's x-ray showed three broken and one fractured bones in his foot. The foot has more bones in its structure than any other limb.

Water was running into our basement storm drain. There was no rain outside. Our water supply tanks were calling for refill every ten minutes or so. Larry Bessette, our trouble shooter, figured that there was a break in the four inch water line running under part of our new wings and out to the pump house...but where? Sonar indicated the break was about five feet beyond the basement retaining wall, which put it under the concrete floor of the new room above. He and Dwight Reynolds cut and dug out a six-foot square hole, found the break, replaced a section, refilled the hole, and finished the new concrete floor, within a week. A lot of hard work and we were able to maintain an adequate water supply during that time.

Our fruitcake monks baked, decorated, and packaged all year long and produced their quota. Then our office crew alternated between euphoria and despair, depending on the quantity of

each day's orders. In the end, we sold out all our cakes in mid-December. One more reason to thank God.

Holy Mother Church begins the "O antiphons" at Mass and Vespers during the last seven days of Advent. We pray one antiphon each day: "Come O Wisdom...O Leader of Israel..., I Root of Jesse...O Key of David...O Rising Sun...O King of Nations...O Emmanuel." The first day we pray, "O Wisdom, coming forth from the Most High and governing all things well, come, teach us to walk in the way of Your prudence."

The treasured search for wisdom has very early roots in Scripture. The serpent deceived Eve by claiming that to eat the forbidden fruit would make them like God, knowing good and evil. The irony is that God had made humans in the image and likeness of God (that is, in personal union with God,) but by foolishly consenting to that false claim of wisdom, they lost union with God.

Solomon was considered the wisest of men, and the Old Testament wisdom books claim him as an author. Proverbs says Wisdom cries aloud in the streets, "How long will you love being simple? How long will fools hat knowledge?" Wisdom has built her house, and set up her seven pillars. To him without sense she says, "Come, eat of my bread and drink of my wine. Leave simpleness, and walk in the way of prudence."

Isaiah connects the search for wisdom with Israel's messianic hope when he writes that a shoot will come forth from the stump of Jesse and the Spirit of the Lord will rest upon him: a Spirit of Wisdom...

Sirach tells us that Wisdom will speak in the assembly of the Most High, "I came forth from the mouth of the Most High, the first-born of all creatures. I sought rest among all the people, and the Creator of all said to make my dwelling in Israel."

The book of Wisdom says that Wisdom is a reflection of eternal light, a spotless mirror and image of God's goodness. She is not overcome by evil and reaches from end to end mightily, governing all things well.

St. John begins his gospel by identifying Wisdom with the Word of God. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...the Word was made flesh and dwells among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the only-begotten Son of God...and of His fullness we have all received."

Both Sts. Matthew and Luke, have Our Lord declare, "John came neither eating nor drinking,

and they said he has a demon. The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say he is a glutton and drunkard, the friend of sinners. However, Wisdom is justified by all of her children."

St. Paul tells the Corinthians that the Gentiles seek wisdom and the Jews seek for signs, but he preaches Christ crucified, a scandal to the Jews and foolishness to the Gentiles. However, to those who are called, Christ is the Wisdom of God and the power of God, for the foolishness of God is wiser than men, the weakness of God is stronger than men.

The last part of the Old Testament book of Wisdom pictures Wisdom as guiding the leaders of God's people through all the stages of their journey. The New Testament letter to the Hebrews in its last part, pictures the heroes of Israel forging ahead by faith and the author encourages Christians to persevere on their journey of faith in Christ.

Our Cistercian Fathers were enamored with Wisdom, as contemplative prayer, the experience of God's presence or visit of the Word. They sought a growing union with God as the true Wisdom, a recovering of the lost image and likeness of God.

John of Ford writes that if we cannot fly by contemplation, at least fly by charity. If we cannot excel in Wisdom, at least persevere by faith to walk in Christ's way of prudence.

Christmas was quietly joyful, mostly in solitude like the first Birth of Christ at Bethlehem-thanks to the threat of freezing rain on Christmas Eve, and then a nice blanket of snow on Christmas Day.

Our Commission of the Future met here the first week of January. They were happy to see our program for processing the General Chapter's recommended areas of concern. They also agree that our practice of having long-term observers living within our community is a broad yet acceptable interpretation of the General Chapter's vote regarding no postulants or novices until the next Chapter in 2011. We intended to have a Gaudeamus (monastic term for an evening Pizza Party) finale for the Commission, but the great snowstorm sweeping across the western states made them take an early departure.

January's time off from baking gives Bros. Lazarus and Gary the opportunity to thoroughly clean the bakery, refinish its floor, and to take care of preventive maintenance.



We celebrated Fr. Donald's 88th birthday on January 17. He has days when he is more lucid and days when he is more out of it. Yet he still always recognizes us whenever we visit or offer Mass with him. He is always cheerful with the nursing home staff, and some of the other residents stop by his room daily to check on him.

Bro. Francis has been enduring a bad bout of thrombophlebitis. Our retired bishop, John Leibrecht stopped by for a colloquium (monastic term for chewing the rag). He remarked that he did not know about the thrombo, but he has had phlebitis since his teens. After playing baseball he would lay on the floor at home with his legs straight up the wall for an hour or more to ease the pain and swelling. The bishop has had that condition ever since, but you would never know by his demeanor.

The airlines had Springfield in the grip of airway robbery, hiking up the price of fare between here and St. Louis, Kansas City, or Chicago. Now a couple of small new commuter outfits run round trip, non stop flights from Springfield Regional or Branson airports to L.A for just under \$200.00 and to Milwaukee for a bit over \$100.00. Now the big airlines have some competition.

Tyler Sergent, a scholar specializing in our Cistercian Father William of St. Thierry, gave us conferences the third week of January, which opened up more of William's spirituality and devotion to prayer for us.

Gena and Tom Valli have completed their renovation of our 9 Guest House retreatant rooms with very satisfying work-woman-ship and good taste. Now they move on to the Guest House kitchen. We hope our guests (and staff) pardon the ruckus.

The week of Vocation Awareness prompts us to consider the story of two men. They were both named Saul and both came from the tribe of Benjamin. Each one received a special vocation, a call by God for a particular mission.

One Saul began with an admirable spirit of humility, saying that his family was least in the tribe and that he was least in his family. The other Saul began with a spirit of bitter zeal, saying the high priest gave him authority to bring prisoners back in chains.

God stepped unexpectedly into the life of one Saul, while he was hunting donkeys that had strayed from his father. God stepped unexpectedly into the life of the other Saul while he was hunting fellow Jews who had strayed from the traditions of the elders.

One Saul stood head and shoulders above his neighbors, and had a streak of natural willfulness. He wanted to do things his own way. The other Saul seems to have been rather unimpressive in appearance, and had a streak of overcompensation. He tended to boast in an effort to boost himself up.

One Saul received the vocation to govern the people of Israel; to unite the twelve tribes and lead them in their conflicts against the Philistines. The other Saul received the vocation to bear witness to the revelation of God's mystery before kings and the Gentiles, in spite of the sufferings he must endure.

One Saul was tormented by dark moods, and when God's ways and commands did not suit him, he turned aside to other sources trying to get what he wanted. The other Saul was torn inside by the conflict between his fallen human nature and the higher values of faith and union with God, but he turned to prayer, saying that we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Holy Spirit prays within us according to the mind of God.

At the end of forty years, one Saul had failed in his vocation and was killed in battle. At the end of some thirty years, the other Saul was also killed (by beheading), but his defeat on the worldly level was his final victory and fulfillment of his vocation.

What made the difference?

On the human level, both Sauls were given a Mission Impossible. A vocation beyond their natural gifts and skills.

But, one Saul lived before Our Lord Jesus had redeemed the human family, so he had not received the divine love, light and strength of Christ's gift of the Indwelling Holy Spirit. The other Saul could say that he lived now not by his own power, but by Jesus Christ in him, Who loved him and had given Himself over for him.

His greatest value, for which he suffered the loss of everything, was union with God in Christ by the obedience of faith.

He saw his vocation as a working partnership with Christ, Who called him to complete the mission of the Suffering Servant to carry justification and the new covenant to the Gentiles.

He could say that he was making up in his body what was lacking in the sufferings of Christ for the sake of Christ's Body on earth, the Church. He could trust that nothing can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus, and that this hope does not disappoint because the love of God is poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

So we, also like St. Paul, the other Saul of the tribe of Benjamin can boast of our weakness and woundedness, in order that the grace, power and virtue of Christ might dwell in us.

In the Sacred Heart,

Fr Cyprian