

Dear Friends and Visitors

February 2 was the Feast of the Presentation. At Assumption Abbey, our practice is to perform the blessing of the candles in the Chapter Room of the monastery before the office of Lauds. When the candles are blessed and lit, we form the procession and move to the Church for Morning Prayer. Mass immediately follows Lauds. The Feast of the Presentation is sort of a return to the Christmas season right before Lent. Fr James Martin, S.J., recently published an interesting piece on the chronological fuzziness of the Christian liturgical calendar. Returning to celebrate the presentation in the Temple of the infant Jesus weeks after the liturgical celebration of the Baptism of the adult Jesus and after several weeks of his public ministry in Ordinary Time, is a good example of the collapsing of time and space that happens with the liturgy. But certainly, as the prophet says, "with God one day is like a thousand years, and thousand years like a day," and the liturgical use of time is very much a reflection of the mind of God. The Resurrection of already present in the Annunciation, just as, so Jesus' transfiguration will tell us, the "eternal weight of glory" we are destined for is already burning within our failing flesh.

A week after that celebration, Fr Mark went to the Trappist Abbey of the Holy Trinity in northern Utah. The monks there had invited him to give them their annual community retreat. The second foundation of Gethesemani Abbey in Kentucky, Holy Trinity its 60th anniversary this year. There are twenty-one professed monks in the community and three novices. The Abbey is located in the spacious, luminous Ogden Valley, the same area where the 2002 Winter Olympic Games were held. For years, the monks raised cattle and alfalfa on their 1600 acres, but now they lease the land and their prize herd to a local rancher. There are plans to build a new monastery a few hundred yards from the present one, which over 50 years ago was constructed as "temporary" quarters, but has served the community and its many guests more than adequately well past its intended life span.

While at Holy Trinity, Fr Mark presided at Mass on February 18. It was the Seventh Sunday of Ordinary Time. Less than a week before, a young man had randomly shot and killed five people and wounded several others in Trolley Square in Salt Lake City, before himself being killed by police. Fr Mark alluded to this sad event in his homily that Sunday:

We continue Jesus's sermon on the plain.

We are on a plain right here, an expanse of level ground stretching out to the southwest. We can certainly imagine Jesus choosing this very spot to deliver his sermon. We can imagine the alfalfa fields and pastures filled with people and how quiet they would have to be to hear him.

And it is only to those to whom he spoke: "To you who hear, I say..."

Imagine Jesus really speaking the words we just heard, here, today, this weekend, less than a week after Trolley Square. "Love your enemies, pray for those who mistreat you. Stop judging, stop condemning, but rather, be merciful, just as your father is merciful. And forgive."

Imagine Jesus saying these words in Northern Utah today, to those who hear. And then imagine some hearing. Imagine them to be the mayor of Salt Lake City, and the families of the five slain, and the wounded, and all of them boarding a plane later this week and flying to Bosnia and laying flowers after his burial on the grave of Sulejman Talovic.

Jesus' words today are so clear and straight forward, they don't need any commentary from me or from anyone. They need only hearers and doers of them. It's impossible, but it's not really. We have the impossible but real example late last year of the Amish community back east. And a few years ago in Missouri, the monks of Conception Abbey insisted that the anonymous man who killed two of the monks and then himself in the Abbey church be taken to the morgue in the same ambulance as their dead brothers. The monks paid for and attended the man's funeral.

We do not need more words; we need practice, we need living examples, and they are there.

And us? In our own situation, what does loving the enemy look like? Doing good to people who do us bad? Jesus gives us an easy one to start with: "pray for those who treat you badly." What would happen if I did? If I did pray for my enemy? Probably nothing, to them; but something certainly to me. Can I hate and resent and condemn for long someone I pray for? Some wise old person, inspired by Jesus, once said, "If there are mean and nasty people in your life, consider it might be partly your fault...And even if it isn't, try serving them, even unnoticed, never losing hope...Have faith to the end...And if only as few as two people act like that, that is already a world, a world of living love."

The same day Fr Mark returned home from Utah, a young man from Nevada paid his second visit to the Abbey, this time for interviews with the vocation team in preparation for his observership later this spring. At the same time, two laymen had joined our long-term monastic guest Jon for an experience living in the monastic enclosure for a few weeks, following with the monks the schedule of work and prayer. It was nice to have our little choir and our refectory full during those weeks of February.

The previous week, Fr Alberic Maisog went to Kansas City to render his oath making him a



citizen of the United States of America. Fr Alberic, our novice master, is from the Philippines, but has resided in the US for over ten years. The picture here, taken in the Abbey guest house, shows Fr Alberic holding his citizenship papers and being congratulated by our friends and Associates Allen and Paulene Pearson.

On the First Sunday of Lent, February 25, Joseph Reisch was received by the community as our first External Oblate. Joseph has been a friend of the Abbey for over twenty years. We hope that others will follow Joseph's steps in choosing this way of participating in the grace of the Cistercian vocation. In the picture, Joseph is with Fr Donald, right, and Br Lazarus.

The Heartland Monastic Vocation Directors Meeting was once again held here at the Abbey in February. This three-day annual meeting of Benedictine and Cistercian vocation directors from the midwest was started some fifteen years ago by Fr Basil Pennington. Participants come from Oklahoma, Arkansas, Missouri, Kansas, and Illinois. It is always a valuable moment for these women and men devoted to helping young and not-so-young Catholic men and women discern how they can best follow the Gospel call to conversion and life.



On the evening before Ash Wednesday, as is our custom, we gathered in Chapter for the distribution of the Lenten books. This is a custom that comes from the Rule of St Benedict. Each evening during Lent, the monks spent the forty minutes before Compline engaged in lectio divina, Lent being a time to especially renew our ability to listen to the voice of the Lord, in scripture, in one another, and in nature.

Finally, we received and installed in our new infirmary chapel a bronze sculpture, the corpus of the Crucified Christ. Commissioned over a year ago, the sculpture was done by Sergei Mitrovanov of Michigan, originally of Russia. It is a splendid piece of religious art. As we join together twice each day in this little chapel for the

offices of Terce and None, it is as if the dying Christ silently joins our circle of prayer as we sing the Gradual Psalms, the Psalms of ascension, hope and fulfillment. This piece of art inspires devotion and is now a splendid witness to the meaning and goal of Lent, the liturgical season we have just begun.

Fr Cyprian, Abbot

