

Dear Associates and Friends,  
The Lord be with you--

The old Romans named the first month of the year January, taken from the Latin word Janus, meaning gate or door. Their god Janus was pictured with an old face looking back and with a young face looking forward. But, the second winter month was named February, taken from the Latin word Febris, meaning fever. The month of the flu. Maybe they gave it the least days, hoping it would pass as soon as possible. This year did see a particularly bad strain of influenza. Our small community was spared that trial, though we did rock and roll with the rest of the country under the unusually extreme changes of weather.

In mid-January, Fr. Thaddeus and Fr. Basil arrived from Vietnam. These two Cistercian monks, along with Fr. Peter who came last year, and with Bro. Roberto (who arrived two weeks later) make up the founding group of the proposed new community. Their Abbot Matthew came two days afterwards for a short visit.

Our Bishop Johnston come shortly afterwards for a photo opportunity. Two of our Family Brothers were also on hand, so the picture included a nice size and a nicely varied number of men. We have been working over a year to realize this new beginning, and now it is off to a good start.

Fr. Thaddeus has a Masters in Theology from Fribourg in Switzerland and Fr. Basil has a Masters in Theology from Holy Apostles College in Connecticut. Bro. Roberto completed Philosophy at the Cistercian Institute in Vietnam. All four monks have enough English to communicate and function in our daily community life.

They are developing skill at decorating, wrapping and packaging fruit cakes, now that production has begun for 2014. The two priests take their turn as main concelebrant at daily community Eucharist. They all take an active part in our shared lectio at Sunday morning Chapter. Their Abbot Matthew made good choices in the monks he named for the first group of founders.

Our liturgies are all still in English. Fr. Peter is gradually making a Vietnamese translation of one day's Divine Office. It is a great advantage that their written language uses Roman letters. We American monks can read and pronounce (more or less accurately) the Vietnamese words. Fr. Peter has started Saturday afternoon classes for us to learn the basics of their language and a few prayers in Vietnamese.

February began the Lunar New Year. This is the year of the horse. Each year in that cycle is dedicated to a particular animal and to a special good quality embodied in that animal. The Vietnamese Sisters of Mary Queen in Springfield celebrated that New Year with a Saturday Mass, dinner and party. Our Fr. Alberic took Frs. Basil and Thaddeus in for the day. One contest featured a ring toss around wine bottle's necks. Fr. Basil won a number of bottles. The Sisters complained, "Your arms are too long." He replied that he must use the gifts, which God has given him.

Fr. Joseph Cusimano, superior of Mt Savior Benedictine contemplative monastery in Elmira, New York gave our community retreat the last week of January. That week of spiritual exercise rounds out our six week break from fruit cake baking. Father Joseph's conferences covered a vital theme, one after another, embodied in our monastic way of life. He has a knack for pithy one-liners.

"Salvation is not in perfection, but in forgiveness."

"Bitterness and discouragement can't take root in a grateful heart."

"Cultivate an awareness of God, until you become prayer."

"The Church is founded on Peter--The Church is founded on second chances."

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## **EAST IS EAST, AND WEST IS WEST!**

King Solomon, wisest of all people, allowed his heart to be divided between the true living God of Israel and the false gods of the pagan nations. So the Lord God allowed his kingdom to be divided between the ten tribes of Israel and the tribe of Judah.

During the early Christian centuries, religious leaders and political leaders were embroiled in conflicts of material and spiritual matters, compromised by political, national and religious currents, especially between claims of the Roman West and the Byzantine East. This resulted in a definitive split between the two churches in the 1090's, (when our Cistercian Reform was born.)

Today's Sts. Cyril and Methodins lived out in their own lives the tragedy of the division between the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Church. They were blood brothers. Born in the 800's and raised in the area of the Balkans and Greece. This area was flooded with invasions of Slavic tribes, who formed a buffer between the Holy Roman Empire and the Byzantine kingdom of Constantinople. The two brothers learned and spoke the Slavic language as they grew up.

When Cyril was fourteen, he was sent to Constantinople for further education. He became a teacher at Hagia Sofia and gained the nickname of The Philosopher. Methodins, his older brother, had become a governing official, but retired to a monastery on Mt. Olympus. Cyril soon followed him.

A few years later, the Prince of Moravia asked the Emperor of Constantinople to send a missionary who could speak the Slavic language to instruct his people who had turned from paganism to Catholicism. Cyril and Methodins were sent. They translated liturgical texts and celebrated Mass and the Sacraments in the Slavic tongue. Their mission was so successful that clergy of the German Latin rite became hostile and opposed their vernacular liturgy.

The two brothers traveled to Rome and obtained the Pope's permission to celebrate Christ's mysteries in Slavonic. Cyril died young at Rome, but Methodins returned to Slavic eastern Europe. There the Latin Frankish clergy arrested and imprisoned Methodins for three years. After his release, Methodins was supported by a group of disciples and continued to spread the Gospel among Slavic tribes in their own language for more than a dozen years.

When Methodins died, a storm of persecution hit the disciples. Some were captured, sold as slave and transported to Venice, where a government official of Constantinople bought their freedom and sent them to join their companions, who had traveled to Southern Poland and the Balkans. There they continued their missionary work with the Slavic tribes. They preserved the Cyrillic alphabet and the Scriptures translated by Cyril and Methodins.

The Eastern Orthodox Church for many centuries has venerated the two brothers as heroic Byzantine missionaries persecuted by the Roman Catholic Church. More recently, the Roman Catholic Church extended their feast to the universal church, and Pope John Paul II declared them co-patrons of Europe...St. Benedict is the patron of western Europe and Sts. Cyril and Methodins are patrons of eastern Europe.

The division of Solomon's kingdom between the tribes of Israel and Judah, and the division of Christ's Church between Roman West and Orthodox East, bear witness to the tragedy of our fallen, wounded human condition. In today's Gospel Our Lord Jesus is so pained by the deaf and dumb man's suffering that He looks up to heaven and groans with anguish. He cures the man. Christ does all things well in His work of the New Creation. He gives us Sts. Cyril and Methodins as patron saints for this present ecumenical age--this time of a New Pentecost in which His Holy Spirit is bringing the divided children of Holy Mother Church back into the unity of Christ's charity and faith. This work is impossible for people, but all things are possible for our Redeemer and Savior.

In the Sacred Heart,  
Your monks of Assumption Abbey