

Dear Friends and Visitors

This chronicle for March is being written on Easter Sunday morning, only a few hours after the celebration of the Easter Vigil. In the quiet blaze of the Easter Candle standing tall in our monastic Church throughout this day and this Paschal Season, the somberness and discipline of March's Lent and early April's Holy Week take on their true value and meaning. In the light of this Candle, and with the strong humility effected in us by our Lenten observance, we greet all of our readers with the words of St Seraphim of Saraov, "Christ has risen, my joy!"

In March three men spent longer or shorter periods of time with us, discerning whether or not they have a vocation to monastic life and to Ava in particular. One of these, in fact, was making his 6-week observership. He will return later this month, April, to begin life as a monk of Ava, as a postulant for one year. One of the others has expressed his desire to make an observership later this summer, and the other is equally very interested. We have encouraged each of these men in their choice, and in God's apparent choice of them, have seen in each of them the qualities and skills for undertaking fruitfully and happily our way of life. One of these men participated in our last Monastic Vocation Discernment Retreat. Another Retreat is scheduled for this May. We invite and encourage men to consider taking advantage of this special experience. Information can be found elsewhere on this website.

Father Mark was away from the Abbey March 15 to March 25 to participate in the Regional Meeting of the U.S. Trappist-Cistercian superiors. The meeting this year was held at Ava's motherhouse, New Melleray Abbey, Iowa. Fr Mark drove from Ava to New Melleray, in the company of Br Tobias and Dom Francis Michael Stiteler, superior ad nutum of Holy Spirit Abbey, Conyers, GA. Francis Michael arrived at Ava a few days earlier, his first visit to our Abbey. At New Melleray, Francis Michael participated in the Regional Meeting, while Br Tobias, a monk of New Melleray on generous loan to us at Ava, enjoyed ten days inserted once again in his monastery of stability.

The agenda of the Regional Meeting was full and varied. Some local issues were addressed, such as the management and administration of Cistercian Publications, which is owned by the college of Trappist superiors, and of Cistercian Studies Quarterly, just beginning its 40th year. Other topics had to do with the Order as a whole: questions arising from the 2002 General Chapters, and consideration of new agenda items for the 2005 General Chapters. There were special presentations on the question of the "precariousness" of many of our monasteries, on the nature and practice of monastic enclosure in our tradition, and on whether or not it is time for the Order to have a single General Chapter, including both abbots and abbesses, rather than the current somewhat artificial practice, required up till now by the Holy See, of two Chapters,

but meeting simultaneously in the same place. Much time was spent discussing the phenomenon of the ""lay Cistercians.""

The entire first day of the Regional Meeting, morning and afternoon, was devoted to Canon and Civil Law topics of importance for religious superiors. The presenter was Fr Dan Ward, OSB, a monk of St John's Abbey, Collegeville. Fr Dan, a civil and canon lawyer, is director of the Legal Resource Center for Religious. He covered a huge amount of ground in an engaging way, dealing with topics as diverse as Sexual Abuse policies, wills and testaments, and evaluation of prospective candidates. The topics were mostly vital and alive to all of us, and there was plenty of interaction and sharing of experiences, problems, and resolutions of problems. The thing is, a woman or man chosen to be abbess or abbot of a monastery has plenty of experience of the monastic life, but usually very little experience of the technical and canonical implications of the authority that comes with the office. That is why a seminar such as this is so important.

It was a delight to all that our Abbot General, Dom Bernardo Olivera, and the Order's Procurator General, Dom Timothy Kelly, former abbot of Gethsemani, were able to be with us for the entire meeting. Their presence and their input were invaluable. Other guests at the Meeting were Fr Lode, the secretary of the Abbot General, and Dom Jacques, abbot of Mistassini, Canada, and president of the Canadian Region OCSO. In the afternoon of the Sunday of the week of the meeting, all of the participants went to Our Lady of the Mississippi Abbey, about 20 miles from New Melleray. We were given a tour of the sisters' new candy house, of the monastery, and of the new reception building. A meeting with Archbishop Hanas of Dubuque was followed by Vespers and an exquisite dinner prepared and served by the sisters.

One of the final acts of the Meeting was to elect the president of the Region for the next year, as well as the two facilitators to help plan the next Regional Meeting. Dom Peter McCarthy of Guadalupe was unanimously reelected president, and Mother Kathy DeVico of Redwoods and Dom Mark of Ava were chosen as facilitators.

Fr Richard continues stable. He and we are receiving the assistance of Community Hospice. Each of the monks participates in some way in caring for Richard. Richard's weakness has occasioned a strengthening of the fraternal bonds among all of us. Many of Richard's friends continue to write and call inquiring about him. His brother and sister-in-law have visited from Indiana on two occasions, most recently spending several days in the guest house and several hours each day with their brother.

The Easter Triduum at Ava was deeply moving, as it cannot help but be, given the reality it celebrates and the ancient and universal ways, in symbol, word, and gesture, it celebrates with.

A small crowd was on hand for the Easter Vigil, beginning at 3:30 Easter morning, and a considerably larger crowd, including many children and youths, was present for the Day Mass.

We hope for all of our readers and friends the deep intimacy with Jesus that is his own desire and prayer.

Fr Mark, Abbot