

Dear Friends and Visitors

February was given its name derived from the Latin word for fever. The old Romans considered this bleakest time to be the month of fever/flu (Febris). For us though, February is the time we go back to the bakery, singing like Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, "Hi ho, Hi ho! It's off to work we go!" The nice thing about fruitcakes is that the more they age, the more their flavor improves-provided they stay moist.

There was only one real week of winter, and that was the last of January during our community retreat. Bishop Leibrecht, retired and free from diocesan shepherding, gave our conferences. He was very good to us during his years as our shepherd and gave us the fruit of his wisdom and experience in the retreat.

We were isolated all those days in a beautiful winter wonderland. That Sunday, Sr. Grace Mary at the Nazareth Hermitage was due to make her vows in our new bishop's hands. Their road was still bad, so we had two bishops, the Nazareth Hermit nuns, along with some of our monks, present in our church for a second Mass that morning. A surprise blessing.

A group of our Assumption Abbey Associates came for a weekend retreat. Fr. Paul worked with them, as some renewed their personal covenant and others made a first covenant. The Associates are free to live their share in our Cistercian contemplative path in a free-spirited fashion, or to express their practice in a personal covenant form. This essential unity with legitimate diversity reflect our Order's new Constitution, which makes all members equal, with no second class citizens.



From left-right: Gary, Rita, Rachel, Loretta, Joan and Gloria

Wally's second cousin and wife have a four-month-old baby girl. They brought her here for baptism, so that Wally could share in the celebration. Richart and Jennifer Van Dy intend to enter RCIA classes, but time will tell if they do become Catholic. They wanted Baby Reagan to be validly baptized now. We contacted Pastor Mark Hatcher, who assured us that he intended to do what Christ and the Church want, when he baptizes with water in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Pastor Mark's wife, Amy came with him, bringing her own four-month-old baby girl to help with the celebration on St. Valentine's day. Both babies behaved like angels. You can see Reagan's picture below here on the newsletter.



Fr. Cyprian, Baby Reagan, and mom, Jennifer. Notice the small wings.

An unusual storm of sleet first, then freezing rain, topped off with snow, built up a thick heavy crust of ice on our steep roofs. When it started to melt and slide down the pitch, the ice chunks took roof vent pipes and heat stacks with them. Those have been replaced without too much trouble, but the storm also showed several leaks, which still need to be located and repaired. This leaking roof situation goes on and on, but Larry Bessette, our roof man, says he has solved worse problems than that.

Fr. Donald had a special Christmas. Very early on December 25th, he was bleeding. The nursing home staff called an ambulance, and off he went to St. John's Hospital. Bro. Lazarus and I went in to see him after our community Mass at 9 A.M. He was chipper enough, so I offered the second Christmas Mass in his room. After his lunch and before we left I offered the third Christmas Mass for him, again in his room. They found that his blood thinner med was too high and working a little too well, which caused the bleeding. He returned to the Heart of the Ozarks on Saturday in the midst of a thunderstorm.

Joseph Reisch, our external oblate and baker, is living at a hermitage in our neighboring

Nazareth Hermitage group. He comes over daily to bake fruitcakes, then returns to his cabin in the afternoon. His friends all tell him he does not have a hermit calling, but he must try it to satisfy his own attraction.

The tail end of Hurricane Ike knocked down a number of trees in our woods. The forest manager, David Haenke and our liaison, Bro. Lazarus, have started loggers to do the salvage and harvest work. A local woodcutter can cut up the treetops into firewood in exchange for keeping Fr. Robert's woodpile supplied.

Our two transitional oblates, Fr. Justin and Bro. Andrew continue to do well. Paul Miller has come into the community, as a long-term guest. He will be here for a couple of months of vocation discernment. He had been a novice for a different religious Order.

Lent began with the customary blessing and imposition of ashes. Our Lord told this parable of the Prodigal Son to show the religious leaders of His time a picture of themselves as the Elder Brother, who refused to share in the day of the prodigal son returning home. If we change Our Lords' story a little, we can see a picture of Jesus as the true Elder Son and the rest of us as prodigal children.

Our first parents went out from their first home in the Garden. They had lost their inheritance of union with God, and wandered into strange territory. Our human family kept going farther astray until they did not know the way back home, and they did not have the strength to start on that long journey of return.

The Father still watched over His prodigal children made in His image, but having lost their likeness to Him. Seeing their misery and natural helplessness, He asked His divine first-born Son to go in search for them, to identify completely with their fallen human situation and to walk Himself the long hard road of return to the Father. In the process of His wilderness pilgrimage the true Elder Brother sacrificed his human life for the sake of His younger prodigals and by His sacrifice opened up a new way home for us. By His teaching and life, He showed us the right way, and by His gift of His own indwelling Spirit, He gave us the love and strength needed to return to the Father.

On our own day by day journey through the year, we accumulate some of the dirt and stain of the road, our shoes and clothes become worn and torn and we get tired of forging ahead always uphill. Therefore, Holy Mother, the Church, gives us a special time of refreshment and renewal by focusing forty days on the true Elder Brothers' personal journey of returning home to the Father. On Ash Wednesday, we begin those forty days, following the First Born Son on

His journey to Jerusalem.

Our Cistercian Fathers picture the Christian and monastic life as a growth of three stages. Each Father developed his own version. One of St. Bernard's triple images is the Slave, the Servant, and the Son. The Elder Brother tells his Father that he has slaved for him all his life, never getting off the track. However, the slave serves out of fear of punishment. The Elder Son was afraid of losing his share of his Father's property. The younger Prodigal finally came to his senses, feeding pigs in a far country and said, "The servants at my Father's house have better lives than I have, so I shall return to my Father and say, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like a servant in your household.'" The Father, out of his own prodigal love and compassion, restores the boy's sonship fully. "Clothe him in the finest garments, put the best pair of shoes on his feet, place a ring on his finger, slaughter the Paschal Lamb so that the lost might be found, and the dead given life again. It is right that we should rejoice."

The moral of the story is: In the first stage of conversion, we serve/obey more like slaves, from fear of hell and the loss of heaven....to avoid punishment. As we are purified and grow over the years into the second stage, we begin obeying more like servants, who look forward to their reward, the just wage for fruitful service. Toward the end as we are coming into fulfillment, we grow more into the third stage as sons and daughters serving our Father with love, filial devotion, and the family virtue of pietas.

During Lent, we enter into and share more in the redeeming sacrifice and holy communion with The First Born Son, our true Elder Brother, Who is leading us these forty days of Lent on to a further stage of our journey of returning home to the Father.

Fr Cyprian, Abbot