

Dear Associates and Friends,

The Lord be with you.

The seventeen Trappist-Cistercian houses in the USA held their Regional Meeting at Holy Spirit Abbey in Georgia early in March. It had the tone of a family reunion, when adult brothers and sisters get together to celebrate their common heritage and also to help and learn from each one's individual development and problems. The general purpose was to prepare for the 2011 General Chapter in Assisi. The Chapter's theme will be FORMATION. Our American houses looked at what is working well and what are seen as the main challenges ahead in the area of formation. Each community had a report. We all listened and then an ad hoc group worked out a synthesis. The final result was a good number of votes which we are presenting to those preparing the agenda for 2011.

The first vote that we approved was the desire that Formation issues be treated concretely and practically, rather than theoretically and abstractly. It seemed to me that our house report did just that by its format of Six Words and Sharing. There was an observation that our report did not give a logical presentation nor reach a conclusion. Therefore, we will work at distilling more clearly logical conclusion(s) from our concrete and practical sharing.

The rector of the theology department at St. John's University at Collegeville, MN proposed a new program, briefly on-campus and on-line, called Christian Cohort. If enough of our monks/nuns enroll, it can begin this autumn. The syllabus seemed to me to be better named Monastic Cohort, since there are no distinctly Trappist-Cistercian courses or specialists included in the list. However, it was pointed out that there are professors available in the USA and elsewhere, who are qualified to teach Cistercian Fathers and Mothers, history and spirituality. So in the future an actual Trappist-Cistercian content could be included.

Our two boilers, for fan heat and radiant floor heat in the new wings, each went out of action just before I left. One is back in operation now and the other is back to the drawing board. Our monks were great for not complaining and finding ways to keep warm. Shortly after I returned, our large washing machine went out. We are now waiting for parts. Bro. Lazarus did all the laundry with a smaller machine, even though it took twice the time.

Fr. Donald gave us a scare. He turned up with stroke-like and diabetic symptoms. The doctor finally diagnosed a severe urinary infection that reached his brain and triggered the symptoms. Thankfully, in true Fr. Donald style, he is back on the mend and is more like his pleasant and bubbly self.

We bought a 2009 Toyota Corolla last autumn. Now that there is a great recall of that model, our dealer asked for our PIN number. It turns out that our car was not in the batch of possible runaways.

Bro. Joe Reisch has at last provided a satisfying speaker system for our refectory reading. Thomas Merton once wrote that their reader sounded like he was talking underwater.

The yearly Heartland Monastic Vocation Director's Meeting took place here this month. One of our former members, Sr. Phyllis McMurray, from St. Mary's Priory at Rock Island, IL, who became their Prioress, has cancer spreading through her system. She will appreciate our prayers.

Two hours after I arrived back home, a storm hit us unexpectedly with hailstones the size of marbles (including "shooters"). It took three or four days for the last pile to melt.

Forty

We are coming closer to the goal of forty days following Christ on His new Passover journey. Our Lord began His public ministry with a baptism in the Jordan and forty days fasting and praying in the desert.

The number forty has a symbolic meaning in Scripture. It rained forty days and forty nights at the time of Noah and the flood. Jonah preached that Nineveh would be destroyed in forty days. That number signifies a time of preparation, or of completion, for God's work.

Moses has three periods of forty years in his lifetime. Forty years living at Pharaoh's court, forty years as a fugitive shepherding his father-in-law's flocks, and forty years being the Mediator of the Old Covenant with the people of Israel and their leader on their journey to the Promised Land.

Saul was king of Israel for forty years. David also reigned for forty years. God made a personal covenant with King David and the House of David.

All of these men failed to a greater or lesser degree in their vocation, but what is impossible for men is possible with God. Therefore, the Father sent the Son of God to become the Son of Man, Who would accomplish all the Father's Will.

There are three periods of forty days in Our Lords' life. During the time of the Joyful mysteries, the child was presented in the temple forty days after His birth. During the time of the Luminous and Sorrowful mysteries, Christ spent forty days and nights being tempted in the desert. During the time of the glorious mysteries, Our Risen Lord was appearing to His apostles and speaking to them about the Kingdom of God for forty days, as the Mediator of the New and Eternal Covenant union between God and His people.

St. Ignatius of Loyola speaks of the imitation of Christ. You begin with meditation on the mysteries of Our Lord Jesus' life. Then you go out and try to live your day in a Christ-like way.

St. Bernard of Clairvaux also had spoke about the imitation of Christ with a little different meaning. He focuses on the mysteries of Christ, especially in the liturgy and in the Eucharist, which make Our Lord's redeeming and saving action present and continuing in our midst. The means we enter into and share in the ongoing mysteries of Christ as members of His Body on earth, the Church.

The early church referred to the Eucharist as The Mystery. Catechumens would be present to hear the Word of God and the homily, but they left at the Offertory, since they were not yet ready to enter and share fully in the Mystery of Our Lord Jesus' Eucharistic Sacrifice and Holy Communion.

Jesus' forty days of prayer, fasting and temptation in the desert was a prophetic parable in action. Holy Mother the Church gives us forty days of Lent as our prophetic parable in action. Both periods confront evil spirits, so they challenge, "If you are a son or daughter of God..." This may be what St. Benedict has in mind when he tells us that the whole life of a monk should be a Lenten observance, praying and walking with Christ-entering more fully into imitating and sharing His mysteries. (But St. Benedict adds, "Then since few have such virtue, at least during these forty days.")

We, just as Moses, David, and the people of Israel, fall short and falter in our vocation. That is why God sent his divine Son to become the Son of Man, as our Redeemer and Savior. Our sinfulness and woundedness is not a reason to slack off efforts at conversion, but a reason to turn all the more to Our Lord Jesus, and to enter more into the liturgy, so that we continue and share more in the mysteries and imitation of Christ, as living members of His Body the Church.

Just as Elijah fleeing from Jezebel received bread from an angel, and in the strength of that bread walked forty days and nights through the wilderness to meet God on Mt. Horeb, so we receive the bread of the Eucharist, Christ's Body and Blood, to nourish us on our forty day

Lenten pilgrimage to see the glory of God on the face of Our Risen Lord.

In the Sacred Heart,

Fr Cyprian