

Dear Friends and Visitors

Sr. Mary De Vries, one of the two foundresses of Nazareth Hermitage developed leukemia almost twenty years ago. Twice she went into remission after treatment. Late last year it surfaced again. Sr. Mary chose not to undergo further treatment. She managed surprisingly well in her own hermitage for a few months. Then, Jill, our health worker, began stopping by and attending to Sister's needs.

Sister fell, injuring her shoulder in late January. She chose to go to Heart of the Ozarks nursing home for some recuperative care. Her shoulder healed but other complications prolonged her stay there. She went in and out of coma for a couple of days, and then it became clear that she was dying.

An ambulance brought her here to our new infirmary rooms, where the other four nuns and Fr. Leon, their chaplain met her. Sr. Miriam, the co-founderess and Jill kept the vigil through the night with Sr. Mary. She died just as our community Mass began Monday morning, February 21.

Our retired Bishop Leibrecht presided at her funeral Mass Wednesday morning. Our church was filled with friends and caretakers. Fr. Leon gave an interesting account of their hermit beginnings and events through the 25 or 30 following years. Sr. Mary's cousin Marsha was ice bound in Ohio, but her cousin's daughter Marcie and granddaughter flew up from Memphis, arriving after delays just in time to view Sr. Mary's body resting in her grave, just beyond Nazareth Hermitage's chapel. As Sr. Mary's body was being lowered into her grave, a flock of geese flew overhead, honking and heralding. We are not sure of what they were heralding but the timing was perfect and Sr. Mary would have loved it.

The Benedictine-Cistercian Vocation Directors annual meeting here welcomed March, coming in like a lamb. They were able to visit our Franciscan Friars' house of prayer, Our Lady of the Angels. Our present Bishop Johnston also dropped in to greet them. He had been visiting the nuns at Nazareth Hermitage. After Mass and lunch with them, he came over to our abbey.

We continue our monthly community sharing about the novitiate situation. Bishop Leibrecht facilitates our group discussions. A letter from Dom Brendan arrived the day before our March meeting. He enclosed a copy of our Abbot General's letter to him, which determined that we cannot send any candidates to New Melleray for formation. So now we continue to triage our options, beginning with the effort to have the General Chapter reopen our novitiate this September.

Bro. Dominic has completed his program of palliative radiation treatments. Bro. Boniface is staying with him at the Springfield nursing home, since Dom is pretty much a bed-ridden invalid now. The facility is called Christian Healthcare. They had a private room available for Bro. Dominic, but decided to put him and Bro. Boni in a double room, charging us only for one bed and providing Bro. Boni with three meals daily without any extra charge. They said, "We want to do the right thing." One of us goes in each Sunday to celebrate Mass for our two brothers, and Sr. Frances (a long time retreatant), has lined up daily ministers for Holy Communion.

Ash Wednesday

The new rite for placing ashes on the forehead gives a choice of two prayers: Remember you are dust, and to dust you will return. This is an ancient, traditional prayer and draws more from the Old Testament. Turn away from sin, and be faithful to the Gospel. This prayer is quite recent, and draws more from the New Testament.

"You are dust" of course are God's words to our first parents, when they incurred the penalty of death because they disobeyed. God created the whole universe, and made all things very good. Then He rested in this Temple/Kingdom of Creation, where he had placed human beings, created in his own image and likeness. God created man and woman in a state of union with God-a personal relationship of close friendship and communication. God told them to care for and govern all creation (including themselves).

Their roll in God's plan was a priestly roll to receive all things as gifts from a loving Creator, and to gather up and return all things to their Creator in loving worship and sacrifice. They were responding to this dialogue with God, begun when He spoke His Word, and were to give God faithful obedience to His Word and command.

Folk wisdom claims that first you get married, and then you learn to love. That proved all too true in our first parent's case. They received love from their Creator, but did not make a return of loving obedience. They lost union with God.

"Turn from sin and be faithful to the Gospel" is the message which St. Mark tells us Jesus began to preach when John the Baptist was arrested. He came into Galilee preaching, "The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the Gospel."

God is an inner communion of love-Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. All through the ages, the

human family still could not learn to receive and give loving Union with their Creator. Therefore, the Father sent His divine Son to become human, and to give Himself as Son fully to a life of hearing and responding to God's words. Jesus said He spoke nothing except what He heard from the Father. Jesus said that His food is to do His Father's Will. He told His disciples that no one has a greater love than to lay down their life for their friends-this is the command the Son received from the Father, that he lay down His life in order to take it up again and be the source of eternal life for all who believe in Him.

When it was the hour for the prince of this world to come, Jesus said that the evil one had no power over Him, but the world must know that He loves the Father, does just as the Father commands Him.

Holy Mother the Church invites us today, by the twofold prayer for signing foreheads with ashes, to become more aware of God's history of salvation, which He began at creation and revealed fully in His Son. God continues His plan and work of salvation now in each one's own personal life, and in the world. The Church invites us fallen, wounded children of Adam and Eve to follow His Son more closely these 40 days of Lent, learning from Him how to live out more fully His true love of friendship for the Father, and for each of his Father's prodigal children on earth.

In the Sacred Heart

Fr Cyprian, Abbot