

Dear Associates and Friends,

The Lord be with you.

I am writing this from our daughter-house in the Philippines. Abbot Fil's second term ended February 20, so I came to look after the new election. My arrival was early, so that I could attend the Abbatial Blessing of Mother Giovanna at their Trappistine foundation of Our Lady of Mt. Matutum in Mindanao.

Fortunately, the closest big city is General Santos with a large Catholic population. The nuns have been accepted well by their Christian and Muslim village neighbors. The Italian foundresses came almost 20 years ago. They now have 17 Filipina Sisters in final vows.

They are situated on a mountainside plateau in a quite nicely designed abbey. Some of their land is close to the extensive Dole pineapple plantation. Dole buys the pineapple raised by the nuns, which helps their self-sufficiency. Mother Giovanna said that she had an unfavorable impression of that company's monopoly on such large areas of Filipino land. After seeing how Dole provides higher up medical clinic and care, housing, and education for the native workers, she has moderated her view, though there are some issues.

The monastery of our monks has grown over the years of 1989-2012, when I first visited them. Their octagonal church with its very spacious and high central dome, along with three wide aisles extending from that center, provide an attractive place of worship for the monks and the many Filipino people who come especially on Sunday and fast days. The layout is more village-style than the traditional monastic quadrangle. Their separate cemetery, infirmary, residence for seniors, and library buildings run out on one side from the church. Then, a small family guesthouse, prelate's hut, abbot's hut, refectory, chapter room, and monk's quarters run out from the opposite side. Covered walkways on either side bond everything into a united whole. This also leaves a magnificent long wide lawn in the center with a view of the sea far down in the distance. Some of the sunsets could inspire a composer to write a symphony.

The greatest part of the buildings were constructed from earth/cement block made by hand labor of the monks, so the buildings are protected against fire and termites.

We expected the election to be routine, but after a number of ballots, the voting monks chose to have a temporary appointed superior, rather than to continue voting for an elected abbot. This involved taking the time to interview any and all monks, as well as reviewing the whole situation. There is a peaceful and good spirit in the community now, while I confer and reflect (and pray!).

The monks say it is warmer than usual this time of the year, but I respond that this is very comfortable compared to February and March in the USA.

A NEW BEGINNING

Our first parents at the beginning of creation were made in the image and likeness of God—in a state of union with God. They walked and talked together in the coolness of the evening. However, the serpent deceived them to disobey God's word. Then they were afraid of God and tried to hide from Him. They were expelled from the Garden by an angel with a flaming sword.

The wickedness of men increased until the waters of the great Flood fell day and night for forty days. All living things were wiped out, except for Noah's family and the animals in the Ark.

God's justice says that the wages of sin is death. However, God's mercy is above all His other works. God had compassion on men—fallen wounded children of Adam and Eve, whose thoughts are bent to evil all of their lives.

The first reading on the First Sunday of Lent tells that God made a new beginning in His work of Creation. He determined that never again would a great flood wipe out all living things. God made a covenant of peace and reconciliation with all of creation. When the storm clouds gather in the heavens and the rainbow appears in the clouds, that is the sign of God's cosmic covenant. It is a reminder of His abiding love for all of creation.

The story of Noah's Ark tells of a new Beginning for God's work of creation. The Gospels for the First Sunday of Lent tells of a New Beginning for God's work of salvation.

St. Mark shows Jesus as the New Adam driven into the desert by the Holy Spirit, just as Adam was driven out of the Garden by a flaming sword. Jesus spent forty days in the desert with the wild animals, like Noah with the animals in the Ark. Jesus was being tempted by the devil, as Adam was tempted. However, he was not deceived. He did not disobey, so the angels of God ministered to Him. Jesus persevered in union with God by keeping faithful to the word of God, as the true Son of God loving His Father.

This was the New Beginning of God's work of Salvation. In the second reading, St. Peter tells us about the completion of this new work of salvation. Christ, the righteous One, suffered once for the sins of the unrighteous. This is the paschal Mystery. Put to death in the flesh, He was brought to life in the spirit. After Calvary, Christ spent three days in the company of people, who had died since the disobedience of Adam. Just as at the new beginning of His work of salvation, Our Lord Jesus preached all through Galilee, "The time is fulfilled. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the Gospel." So now, at the completion of His work, He preaches the Good News of Salvation to the departed souls of the just, whom He will lead into heaven.

St. Peter says that eight persons being saved in the Ark through water is a symbol of Christians being saved through the waters of Baptism. It is through faith and baptism that we enter into the New Covenant union with God, that we become children of God, friends of God.

Hoy Mother Church is giving all of us this joyful season of Lent as a New Beginning on our journey of following Christ, of living out our covenant love of friendship, this working covenant partnership with Our Lord Jesus, Who intercedes for us at the right hand of the Father. The Holy Spirit is urging us, "Now is the acceptable time. Now is the day of salvation." Let us

recognize that Christ is inviting us to a fuller share in His Paschal Mystery, by the darkness and the light, which we experience. Let us prove that we are true children and friends of God by persevering in faithful obedience to the word of God.

In the Sacred Heart,
Fr. Cyprian