

Dear Associates and Friends,
The Lord be with you.

The forty days called **Lent** could have gotten that name from the Latin *Lente*, which means “slowly.” However, Mr. Webster says that Lent comes from a word meaning “Spring.” As a concession, he does admit that the word is derived from a root meaning “Long”, based on the lengthening days of Spring. Either way, the time of Lent would be long, or its days go slowly. Yet in practice, Lent is already at mid-point before we get into the spirit of the season.

Shortly before Lent, Bro. Francis welcomed the Benedictine Vocation Director’s meeting here. The monks and sisters/nuns come from the surrounding mid-west. Some are long time regulars and a few are recent newcomers. Fr. Basil Pennington organized the first such gathering at Ava in the 1980’s. They find that this small gathering with their more informal sharing about issues in their ministry provides a setting, which is unique. It serves as a refresher, or mini retreat.

Fr. Alberic has Robert, our Filipino family brother or else our Vietnamese guest, Fr. Peter, cook twice a week for the community and retreatants. This gives Bro. Boniface a break from his daily work in the kitchen. He still bakes our white and brown bread and is teaching Fr. Thaddeus the process. So far, he has not shared the secrets of his famous peanut butter or oatmeal-raisin cookies with an apprentice.

Bro. Thomas has switched gears from plowing snow to spreading black dirt. Fr. Peter comes from a farming family and is very interested in starting a vegetable garden on the extended yard behind our monastery. This plot of ground was formed by dumping the clay from building excavation back there. It should make a good garden area when it gets a layer of top soil.

Our Commission of the Future met here in March under the leadership of our Father Immediate Mark Scott from New Melleray Abbey. They were encouraged to find that our four Vietnamese Cistercian monks have settled into our daily community life well, sharing roles in liturgy, housework, bakery and yard work.

Our monks have been working together to prepare a House Report for the General Chapter of our Trappist Order next September. The combination of the House Report and the Commission of the Future will give the abbots and abbesses of our General Chapter a good picture of how life goes at Ava.

Our retired Bishop John Leibrecht is a regular visitor. He comes on a morning to the diocesan hermits to offer Mass and share a noon meal with them. Then he visits our community in early afternoon for a time of conversation. After that, he goes to the Franciscan Friars down the road. On his way back to Springfield, he usually manages a stop at the nursing home to visit with Fr. Donald, our oldest member. Now that he has the time, he is able to show his abiding concern for this part of the flock. He tells us that it is refreshing for him to visit this little enclave in our missionary diocese.

Fr. David Garrick, grandson of Joseph Pierson, who gave the land for our monastery in 1950, is resident guest master at our Holy Family Guest House. His mother, Mary Garrick, recently died at Tulsa, Oklahoma after a prolonged illness. Frs. Alberic and Cyprian traveled there to share in her funeral Mass.

A Valiant Woman

The book of Proverbs closes with praise for the valiant woman. There is a photo of Jacqueline Kennedy, standing on the steps of the cathedral with her two young children, as the funeral procession of her slain husband passes before them. There is a picture in our mind of another valiant woman, left on her own with five young sons, when her husband’s small plane crashed into the ground. Mary Garrick was not left completely alone. Her retired parents moved from Springfield, Missouri to Tulsa, Oklahoma, so they could be near her, as she rebuilt her life and her children’s lives.

Mary’s father, Joseph Pierson, had begun the first overseas edition of the Chicago Tribune in Paris during World War I. Later he bought 3400 acres of rough land in the Missouri foothills of the Ozark Mountains. During World War II Joe and his two sons helped local builders, construct a Swiss chalet style stone house there. Mary liked to recall the summer she spent there. No electricity, no plumbing, the only

running water was the nearby creek. She learned how to put up a bumper crop of peaches in home canned mason jars. Later, Joe donated this property to become our Trappist monastery, Assumption Abbey.

The Wisdom tradition tells us that first, you marry, and then you learn to love. We are slow learners. It takes a while before the lesson sinks in that this is what life is really all about.

Mary began married life with David Garrick. They were off to a good start. He ran his own small business. They had a growing family. Then tragedy struck with that plane crash. Their third son, George, was in the plane and was the only survivor. David the first-born was twelve years old. J.B. was next. Michael and Bruce were only five and two years old.

As we reflect on our own family life, we see the growing pains, which our mothers went through, while they worked to respond and cope with each new stage of life that their children were experiencing. It is a human picture of trial and error, of set backs and successes. It is also a picture of God at work making love grow in right order within a mother's heart, mind, and spirit. Later in life, Mary's interest in charismatic spirituality gave her a deepening share in the grace, light and strength of Christ's Holy Spirit. What can separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus.

Our Heavenly Father gave Mary well over ninety years of formation in His school of love. She is the bond uniting her sons on earth, and now she enters into the true Family Reunion with her human family members and with the Divine Family members of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

In the Sacred Heart,

Your monks of Ava