

Dear Friends and Visitors

For all its accustomed simplicity and sobriety, our celebration of the Easter Triduum, the Vigil, and Easter Day afforded our community and guests a palpable experience of the Love of God in the Self-giving Love of Jesus.

In his homily for at the Easter Vigil, Abbot Mark observed:

The women at the Tomb were the first to hear the news, "He is not here, he is risen. Go quickly and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead." The women depart in fear and with great joy. With great joy, because they believe; in fear, because they can no longer be the same and what and who they shall be is still all unknown. "We know that our old self has been crucified," says St Paul. "As Christ was raised, so we, too, must walk in newness of life." One thing we cannot do encountering the Easter news: Go away the same as we were when we arrived.

Now, the stark white column of the Easter Candle stands alone in our sanctuary, a sufficient symbol and reminder of the ineffable mystery of the Resurrection that we continue to celebrate and be moved by during these seven weeks of the Easter Season.

One of our guests this Easter is a cellist, and brought her instrument. She and Fr Paul Jones at the organ played a medley of Easter carols during the Vigil Mass. At the Day Mass of Easter, when Fr Paul was president, Fr Mark on the recorder and our guest cellist teamed up to play two lovely pieces by Handel after Communion.



Easter, the life-giving revelation of the vindication of the Victim, coincided this year with the dispiriting revelations of the abuse and victimization of our youth at the hands of Catholic priests, and the messy handling of that by our bishops. Reference to these scandals in the American Catholic community occurred over and over in the prayers and homilies of our liturgies, from Palm Sunday through Easter. With the rest of the American Church, we at Ava are stunned, perplexed, ashamed. By fitting all of this into our prayer and into an examination of our relationships with one another we hope we are contributing to the healing that is so hugely needed.

We have saved for this Easter News Update the announcement that our major building project has been completed. Construction, which began on Easter Monday, 2001, was virtually completed in February. In March the buildings, unto then in the possession of the contractor,

were handed over to Assumption Abbey.

The project includes two new wings that neatly join our existing buildings to form a new, intimate cloister and open cloister garth. One of the wings is a residence wing. On the ground floor, level with the rest of the monastery, are six rooms equipped for senior or infirm monks. A lovely six-sided Blessed Sacrament Chapel protrudes from the corridor of the senior wing into the cloister garth.



On the bottom level are eight simpler monastic cells, each with both an interior and exterior entry. Our remaining tasks are furnishing the new quarters and landscaping the garth. St John's Mercy Villa in Springfield generously donated to us six hospital beds, four of them electric, and all in nearly pristine condition. We are pleased to offer these photographs of our new monastic environment.

We cannot sufficiently express our gratitude to our many benefactors who have supported this modest and necessary initiative. In particular, we want to acknowledge the bishop of our diocese of Springfield-Cape Girardeau, Bishop John Leibrecht, Ph.D., for his unflinching support, including a diocesan loan that allowed us to make the final payment on the construction. We acknowledge, too, the pastors and people of the diocese who have dedicated three special collections for the benefit of our building program.



At the end of the Easter Octave, Marsh Dutton, Ph.D., paid us a short visit, as she did in January of last year. Marsh Dutton is a professor of English at Ohio University. In addition, she is Associate Editor of *Cistercian Studies Quarterly*, the semi-scholarly publication of the U.S. Region of the Cistercians of the Strict Observance. Professor Dutton has devoted a great deal of her professional life to Cistercian topics. She is an expert on Aelred of Rievaulx and on Gilbert of Hoyland, two 12th century Cistercian abbots who helped fashion and articulate the spirituality that we Cistercians of the twentieth century continue to be inspired by and to adapt to our particular situations. Marsha gave conferences to the community on the theme of "place" in

Cistercian experience. The stories she related and her wise observations resonated with us sitting there in the Chapter Room, just off one of the open cloister walks of our new quarters, and able to view out the windows the striking octagonal window of the Infirmary Chapel.

Fr Anthony Sloan, our youngest monk and the bakery manager, has communicated a few times from Rome. Along with three other members of the Order from the United States, Anthony is one of twenty-five international monastic participants in the first Monastic Formators Program. Br Inaki, the novice master of our daughter house, Our Lady of the Philippines on the island of Guimaras in that country, is also participating. The program is designed to introduce resources and techniques to monks and nuns entrusted with the formation of novices and juniors in educating is taking place in the Eternal City from March through June. Fr Anthony is benefiting from this experience in many ways, and will in turn benefit us at home when he returns in July.

In late April Fr Alberic took off for the Region's annual Novice Directors' Meeting. It was held this year at St Benedict's Monastery, Snowmass, CO. At the same time, Br Tobias head southeast to Holy Spirit Abbey, Conyers, Georgia, the venue of the second International Meeting of Cistercian Lay Associates. Br Tobias is Assumption Abbey's liaison with the Abbey's own small group of Associates centered in St Louis. The International Meeting drew participants from several countries in Europe. Dom Bernardo Olivera, OCSO, Abbot General of the Order, was present throughout the meeting. Dom Bernardo has been and continues to be an active and innovative supporter of Cistercian Lay Associates. He has virtually constructed a programmatic theology for the spreading of the Cistercian charism outside the boundaries of the traditional vowed life lived in the cloister. Our visitors who might be interested in Assumption Abbey's Associates are invited to contact Br Tobias at the Abbey: [tobiashan@yahoo.com](mailto:tobiashan@yahoo.com). See further the Friends of Assumption Abbey page.

As the full moon of Easter faded and the full moon of April appeared, the Ozarks woods went from dormant gray to the variegated textures and the multi-hued greens of spring and early summer. The stunningly graceful dogwoods put out their solid white and fragrant flowers. The blue jays appeared, with the buntings, and the cardinals became more active. The ticks and chiggers joined the spring festival and will be with us intimately until the first real cold of autumn. Br Thomas is once again mowing grass.

As always, we are happy to hear from our visitors. Please notice that the Guesthouse now has its own e-mail address, as does the Vocations Director.

We extend to you, our visitors, our heartfelt wishes for a glorious and joyful Easter.

Fr Mark, Abbot