

Dear Friends and Visitors

"Christ has risen, my joy!" That is how St Seraphin of Sarov greeted everyone on Easter Day, and we wish to greet you that same way this Easter Season. Christ is our joy, you are our joy.

The Easter Triduum, beginning with the celebration of the Lord's Supper in the evening of Holy Thursday, unfolded and proceeded with great simplicity, sobriety, and holiness. Always, the liturgies of Holy Week and Easter, culminating in Vespers Easter Sunday in the glow of the Paschal Candle, are encounters with the Living One.

In his homily at the Easter Vigil Mass, Fr Mark was inspired by the Epistle reading from Romans, 6:3-11. In these few verses, Paul over and over again uses the words "with" and "in" referring to our relationship with the Risen Lord: Baptized into Christ, buried with him, united with him, crucified with him, dead with Christ, live with him, alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Fr Mark went on to point out that all this is the effect of baptism. In Greek, the word for baptize mean to dip or to immerse. It is not like a Dairy Queen cone dipped in melted chocolate. Then, you can easily nibble the chocolate away from the ice milk underneath. Rather, the dipping of baptism is like a sponge in water, or a hunk of bread in wine. The bread and wine, while still distinct, are inseparable. Forevermore, the bread, which is us, will have the complexion and the bouquet of the wine, which is Christ.

From this point of view, which is the Pauline and the Catholic one, a question like "What Would Jesus Do?" (WWJD) is on the wrong track. It implies that Jesus is one thing, and I another, separated. Instead, it is a question of Christ acting in our acts, smiling with our smiles, crying with our tears, deciding with our rational and volitional powers.

To put it another way, the depth of Christianity is not a moral imitation of Christ but a mystical intimacy with him. When this intimacy is owned and allowed to take over, the moral stuff will follow naturally. Fr Mark read from a short poem by the British poet Kathleen Raine:

To write down all I contain at this moment,
I would pour the desert through an hour-glass,
The sea through a water-clock,
Grain by grain and drop by drop
Let in the trackless, measureless mutable seas and sands.

For earth's days and nights are breaking over me

The tides and sands are running through me,
And I have only two hands and a heart
to hold the desert and the sea.
What can I contain of it...?

Earlier, on the 6th Sunday of Lent, April 6, Fr Donald remarked in his homily for Mass,

Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could just see Jesus, eyeball to eyeball? What a boost to our faith, our hope and our love if we could see Jesus in person, in the flesh! It would dissolve all our doubts about his existence, his humanness and his holiness.

Or would it? Let's not forget how people who actually did see Jesus reacted to their visual contact with him while he walked this world. Since Jesus did not wear a halo or glow in the dark, most of the folks who saw him did not see anything special about Jesus...

Thus, seeing the physical Jesus was not guarantee of an instant conversion to and acceptance of his person and his principles. What really counts, therefore, is not the physical sight of Jesus but rather the spiritual insight...

This, then, is the basic lesson of Lent: We see Jesus best when we see him with the eyes of faith working, praying, living and loving with us and for us. And we see ourselves best when we see us working, praying, living and loving with Jesus and for Jesus.

Just before First Vespers of Palm Sunday, a brush fire was discovered on the property, a little over a mile from the Abbey buildings, across Bryant Creek and just beyond the Family Guest House. Seven or eight of us, plus the dogs Seamus and Peanuts, grabbed gloves, rakes, a chain saw, and a powerful leaf blower, jumped into two vehicles and took off for the fire. It took us two hours to ring the fire with a firebreak, then to saw smoldering and burning felled trees. It was the second fire of the year. There was no wind, the weather was mild, and all in all, it was a pleasant experience of concerted and communal effort. We returned to the abbey in time to take showers and pray Compline.

On Palm Sunday morning Br Fidel returned from his month's solitary retreat. He was truly refreshed, and it is wonderful to have him back in the community. His singing, his attentiveness to everyone's needs, his way with flowers in decorating the church are some of the ways Fidel is appreciated.

On April 8 to 10, Dom Brendan, abbot of New Melleray and our Father Immediate, paid us a

pastor visit. He will make the regular canonical visitation later this year but before that thought it would be a good idea to see how things stand at Ava in the context of a less formal occasion. He noted with us the facts of our aging, our small numbers, and the declining health of some of us. These and other factors challenge us to be creative and imaginative in the way we approach the future. Fr Mark on several occasions has already raised the question if in today's world and church monasteries can still rely on new vocations of the "classical" model, that is, postulant - novice, -- professed-for-life. In the next few months the community of Ava will need to look at itself, look at trends, and use the imagination of the Resurrection to move from where we are to something new and maybe so far unexpected.

On Easter Monday Fr Mark left for an absence of nearly six weeks. The principle motive for his trip is to make the regular visitation at Ava's daughter house, Our Lady of the Philippines on Guimaras, Philippines. The biggest issue of the visitation will be discernment of a new superior for OLP. The term of the present superior ad nutum comes to an end this summer.

We want our readers and visitors to know how much their attention and friendship mean to us monks. We want you to know how much you are loved by God, who raised Christ Jesus from the Dead.

Fr Mark, Abbot