

Dear Friends and Visitors

April has seen Palm Sunday and the splendid and moving Holy Week and Easter Triduum. We were pleased to have several guests in the guest house during the Triduum to share these most holy of days with us. The Paschal Candle still burns in our church as we gather for prayer throughout the Easter season, and for daily Eucharist.

This year more than in previous years, there is a lot of talk about unusual weather patterns. We have experienced such unusual weather here in the Ozarks. After some typically warm early spring weather in late March, the mercury plummeted in the first weeks of April, with sustained temperatures below freezing. Easter morning saw a low of 18 degrees F. Even by Holy Thursday, the dogwoods, in near-full bloom and gloriously white and expansive, had shriveled and wilted. The hardwoods -- oaks and walnuts -- that had put out their first leaves, were also hit hard, and now, as May begins, bear only dry, brown, aborted nascent growth. The roses were set back too, as were most of the plants that typically flourish in the spring.

Even as the nature around us was being set back some, human and spiritual growth continued to take place within the monastery. An example was on April 11, when the conventual chapter gave their consent to Abbot Mark's proposing of novice Br Lazarus for first profession of monastic vows. Br Lazarus will make his simple profession (for a period of three years) on May 31, the Memorial of the Visitation of our Lady to Elizabeth. This will be a signal event both for Br Lazarus, now completing his third year of initial formation, and for the Ava community. The last time someone made monastic profession was ten years ago.

On April 12, Br Thomas and Abbot Mark left the Abbey to pay a visit to our daughter house in the Philippines. After a brief layover in San Francisco, they boarded a PAL jet for the fourteen hour flight to Manila, and then took a domestic flight to Iloilo. In that city they were met by Dom Filomeno, Abbot of Our Lady of the Philippines, Guimaras, and Br Aelred, a monk of the same abbey. Dom Fil and Br Aelred accompanied Thomas and Mark in the open air "pump boat" across the stretch of sea separating Iloilo and Guimaras. Our brothers enjoyed the hospitality of the monks of Guimaras for a full week, and then went further south, to Mindinao, to spend a few days with the Trappistines there. The Philippine monks are working hard developing their food manufacturing business (a variety of jams and jellies, dried mangos and pineapples, a small line of bakery items), growing mangos and coconuts, managing their farm where they raise maize and rice, and running a large and popular guest facility.

While Thomas and Mark were away, a dramatic and fatal incident took place on our grounds. A small two-seater plane crash-landed on our property, about one mile distant from the Abbey

buildings. The pilot was killed, but the passenger "walked away" with only minor abrasions and contusions. The plane itself was totally broken apart and crushed. It is still not clear what caused the plane to come down. We hope eventually to go to the site of the accident to conduct a simple prayer service for the deceased.

April 23 was the fiftieth anniversary of the ordination of Fr Cyprian to the priesthood. The community will celebrate this special anniversary later in May. Meanwhile, on April 27, Fr Cyprian drove to New Melleray Abbey, Iowa, where he will be joined by four others who were ordained with him on the same day at New Melleray.

That same weekend, on April 28th, there took place here at the Abbey the first meeting of the Lay Advisory Committee for Assumption Abbey. This is a committee of eighteen or so lay men and women assembled by Abbot Mark for the purposes of advising him and the community on various important questions as the Abbey and its friends and associates moves into the future. Topics of special emphasis during the meeting were: the monastic economy, the guest house, and vocations to our way of life. The committee members took their task seriously, offering creative and practical advice on all of these topics, in a spirit of mutual respect and with obvious love for the Abbey and the monks. More will be said in coming months about the Committee and about the topics it considered.

After Vespers on April 28, the Advisory Committee members and the monastic community got together in the monastic refectory for pizza and beer, and casual conversation. Entertainment was provided by Porter and Sheldon McCullaugh, 8 and 10 respectively, two brothers in the neighborhood who are quite accomplished fiddlers in the Ozarks musical tradition.

As always, we are grateful that you take the time to visit our site, to read our newsletters, and to follow our life of prayer. God bless you all.

Fr Mark, Abbot