

Dear Associates and Friends,

The Lord be with you—
A Blessed and Happy Easter

Spending February and March at our daughter-house, Our Lady of the Philippines, not only gave me a very different experience of those two months than Missouri offers, but it also gave me a more full appreciation of Filipino culture and temperament.

The extra month there happened because of that community not electing an abbot, but instead choosing (after six indecisive ballots) to have a superior ad nutum appointed. It was clear that Dom Fil should be the one appointed, and it was clear that a few loose ends should be tidied up before the appointment was made.

Dom Fil spent three weeks at OLP's Trappistine daughter-house where he got some spiritual R & R, plus some TLC from Abbess Giovanna and her nuns. He was also preparing for his role as co-president of our Order's Asian Regional meeting to be held in New Zealand after Easter.

Meanwhile "back at the ranch" some arrangements were underway to help Dom Fil and the brothers move forward in their life together. A few monks were transferring to different houses. A philosophy program was being set up with the help of Celso Cainglet of San Carlos Seminary, Manila, for OLP's four priestly candidates. Finally, an experienced counselor and long time friend of the community, Mrs. Cynthia Baga, began coming for monthly community sharing and personal direction. All this will foster the next stage of healing and growth for OLP.

Among other things I learned to converse with a gecko, when he would speak just outside, and sometimes inside, the window. I saw a lovely large butterfly somewhat like our Mourning Cloak, but darker colored with a larger band of light color across his lower two wings. Then there were six little puppies, soon followed by the birth of two new kittens.

The weather was just as changeable as it is in Missouri (no little feat!) There is a sparky, spunky spirit embedded in the Filipino and Filipina, which became clearer to me over the weeks.

Overall, a very worthwhile and enjoyable, though hardworking change of pace for me, along with a sense of awe, seeing God making a number of good things come together.

Coming back to Springfield, I met two Vietnamese Cistercian monks. As I described in our January newsletter, our community had dialogued and voted unanimously that we were agreed in principle to offer our monastery and its assets to Our Lady of Divine Grace in Vietnam for a new foundation. We are so few and aged and they are so young and abundant, that it seemed to be a creative right course to explore, as a way to continue our monastic presence in this mission diocese.

We spent two days at the Vietnamese-American Marian shrine in Carthage, comparing and exchanging our mutual thoughts and proposals. This first personal meeting was dipping our big toe in the water to see if this proposal was even possible and practical. Even so, it was gratifying to see how much our ideas had in common.

When we arrived at Assumption Abbey, we found Dom Brendan, our Father Immediate, and Fr. Stephen waiting to talk with us. They felt that enough information had not been given beforehand to them, and were understandably concerned. After several meetings and sharing on both sides, we arrived at a good mutual understanding and accord.

Our Bishop Johnston visited us Tuesday of Holy Week for a noon meal and for sharing with us all. He was also positive and affirmed his support in this project. There are a lot more steps involved before this coming of the Cistercian contemplative monks (and our remaining with them to the end of our days as liaisons) could become a reality. Yet, we are all pleased with this possibility.

It was a soul-satisfying Holy Week experience to celebrate the liturgies with more monks in choir than usual. We began the Easter Vigil at our usual time of 3:30 am. The Blessing of the new fire and Easter candle, the chanting of the Exultet, the readings and responses of the Old Testament text reviewing God's history of creation and salvation, the Gloria with our church bell ringing, St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans and St. John's Gospel, and the renewal of our Baptismal promises, had all been accomplished, but still no sign of Bro. Boniface. So, we prayed at the intercessions for him, hoping that our hardest-working brother had a faulty time clock and not a heart attack. He finally showed up before the Consecration, after someone knocked on his door. He had been up since 2am, preparing breakfast, showering, etc, but missed the signal for rising and he thought the time schedule might have changed. We were happy that he decided to return from the dead.

It was time for a change of superior, so Dom Brendan told us that Fr. Alberic would become our Superior ad nutum on Easter Monday. We had been preparing for a few years for this step forward, so the transition worked well—except that I am behind time in moving the accumulation of several years out of his new office.

Fr. Stephen will come here from New Melleray in June to assist Fr. Alberic and to allow me to take the customary time away, which gives the new superior elbow room to set his own course. It looks like I may spend three months at OLP giving a course on Patrology to their juniors, starting in June. I would find that interesting and should learn something.

The Passover of Christ and St. Benedict

You will see greater things than this. You will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.

Pope Benedict shows how Jesus interpreted Scripture in a typological way—seeing a more full meaning in passages from the Old Testament.

Jacob saw in a dream a ladder reaching from earth to heaven, with angels ascending and descending on it. He understood the vision to mean that the place where he slept was a House of God, a temple where earth and heaven meet, where the prayers of people ascend to God and God's blessings descend onto the people.

In the opening chapters of St. John's Gospel, Our Lord Jesus sees a deeper meaning in the vision of Jacobs' ladder. Jacob is the man of faith and the ladder is a type of the Son of Man, Who reaches from earth to heaven by his real humanity and true divinity. His body is the New Temple of God, and those who believe in Him will see Him glorified—rising in glory from the dead to the right hand of the Father. When St. Stephen was being stoned, he saw heaven opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.

In St. John's third chapter, Jesus tells Nicodemus that Moses lifting up the bronze serpent on a pole for snake-bitten people is a type of the Son of Man being lifted up, so that all who believe in Him might not perish but have eternal life.

In the middle of that gospel, Our Lord is asked by the people, "Who are you?" He sees this as a type of Moses asking God in the burning bush on Mt. Sinai, "What is your Name?" God replied, "Tell the people that I AM sent you." Therefore, Jesus replies to the people, "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I AM."

Towards the end of John's Gospel Jesus recognizes that the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. He sees Isaiah's Suffering Servant as a type of His own mission, "Behold, my Servant shall prosper. He shall be exalted and lifted up. His appearance disfigured beyond human resemblance...despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows. Yet when he makes himself an offering for sin, he shall see his offspring. He shall see the fruit of his soul's anguish and be satisfied. My Servant, the righteous one, will make many be accounted righteous." So Our Lord Jesus proclaims, Now is the judgment of the world. Now is the ruler of this world cast out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth will draw all men to Myself."

The Day of the Lord, the Hour of Our Lord is a day and hour both of judgment and of salvation. To Martha, who professes her faith, "Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, He Who is coming into the world," Jesus insists, "Did I not tell you that, if you believe, you will see the glory of God?" To the council of high priests and scribes Jesus says, "If I tell you, you will not believe. But from now on the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the power of God." Our Lord sees His being lifted up on the cross as the first step of being lifted up in the glory of Resurrection, and as the fulfillment of the types of salvation revealed all through the Old Testament.

St. Benedict in his Rule for monks sees another layer of meaning in the vision of Jacob's ladder. Yes, Jesus Christ is the true Ladder connecting earth and heaven. His body is the New Temple of God. But also, because we are members of His Body, this ladder is an image of the Christian, the monk, whose lifework is to climb from earth to heaven...following Christ, walking on the same path He revealed and walked Himself on Earth.

That way is the paradoxical ladder of humility—climbing up by climbing down. We go upstairs by going downstairs. Our Lord told us to learn of Him, that He is meek and humble of heart. Humility is truth. Our Lord is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. He is the Resurrection and Life. He calls us to keep growing in humility all our life—to keep growing and living in a more true relationship to our self, to our brothers and sisters, and to God all our life.

St. Benedict spells out 72 good works, which we need to carry out—mostly one liners from Scripture, starting with the two great commandments of love of God and of neighbor, then the ten commandments and on down the line. The last good work is never to despair of the mercy of God.

The longer we live, the more we realize how far short we fail in living up to those 72 good works, how limited and wounded we are—in spite of our best efforts. That means we are growing in truth, in humility. That is how we are climbing down the ladder of humility—growing in a more true personal relationship with Our Lord Jesus. We cannot do it ourselves; we need a Redeemer and Savior each step of the way. In addition, we realize that our brothers and sisters are in the same boat as we are. So we grow in compassion (rather than bitterness and disillusionment)—compassion for self, for our neighbors and for Christ, Who takes all our sins and misery on Himself.

St. Benedict ends his Holy Rule with Chapter 72, describing a ladder of charity—some seven or eight steps of true love. He said that, first we labor at 72 good works, and that empties us more and more of self-centered pride. This means that we are climbing down the steps of humility. Then the more emptied of self-seeking we become, the more the Holy Spirit can fill our emptiness with His charity and lead us up the steps of true love of self, of neighbor, and of God..."we put up most patiently with infirmities of body and soul(our own and our brother's). We love one another and our abbot with a Christ like love. We have a loving reverence for God. And we prefer nothing to the love of Christ. May he bring us all together as community/family to eternal life."

At the Easter Vigil, we celebrate the Paschal Mystery of Our Lord Jesus Christ. St. Benedict in his Holy Rule spells out for us how as Christians/monks, live out the same Paschal Mystery in practical daily life. He says that persevering in patience, the more we share in the suffering of Christ, the more we will share in His Resurrection and Kingdom. You will see greater things than this, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.

In Our Risen Savior and His Mother,

Cyprian