

Dear Friends and Visitors

It is Trinity Sunday as this installment of Assumption Abbey News for 2004 is being composed. The entire Easter Season has been celebrated and now for the rest of the year its memory and content is compressed in the Alleluias we continue to sing at every Sunday Eucharist. There has been Ascension, then Pentecost, and soon the Solemnity of the Body and Blood of the Lord. The liturgical seasons and the round of feasts connect us to a past that extends out of time to whatever was “before” the “Big Bang,” and to a never ending future where the One upon the Throne and the Lamb will be praised and worshiped without end.

In late April a man from Mississippi entered the community as a postulant. He had completed his six-week observership a month earlier. Our new postulant has begun our formation program in earnest. This includes three classes per week. For this first “tri-mester” the classes are Monastic History I, The Psalms, and Christian Anthropology. The most important and most effective element of formation, however, is simply living the monastic life day in and day out, doing the things that monks do.

In early May a man from Norway arrived to begin his observership. Because of the distance he has had to come, this man’s observership will last for ten weeks. Observers at Assumption Abbey have their own curriculum. It includes an introduction to Cistercian life and spirituality, an introduction to the Opus Dei and the liturgy, and an introduction to the theory of lectio divina.

At Assumption Abbey, postulants and novices as well as observers spend thirty minutes each day after Vigils doing lectio together in the Chapter Room. The Novice Director and the Abbot also participate. Their presence underscores the fundamental and essential nature of this monastic practice. In addition, there is a great grace to be experienced from brothers pondering the Word of God at the same time and in the same place. It is also a way of forming deep spiritual bonds among the brothers.

During the month of May the International Pilgrim Statue of Our Lady of Fatima was making a visit to our diocese, Springfield-Cape Girardeau. She visited Assumption Abbey May 11 and 12. The brothers received the statue and escorted Her into the Church in procession, installing her in the sanctuary. During her visit, there were special hymns and readings at the canonical offices in Church, and at Vespers the monks consecrated themselves and the Abbey to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Several devotees stopped into the Church during the Statute’s brief visit.

For most of the month of May Abbot Mark was in the Philippines. He made a pastoral visit to

Assumption Abbey's daughter house, Our Lady of the Philippines, Guimaras (OLP), and gave the community their annual retreat. Last August, Fr Mark appointed Ava's Fr Alberic Maisog as superior ad nutum of OLP. This was Fr Mark's first visit since Fr Alberic began his service. As Father Immediate of OLP Fr Mark wanted to support the new superior and get a sense of how things were going. After a week at OLP, Fr Mark and Fr Alberic both went to the Trappistine monastery of Our Lady of Matutum on Mindanao in the south of the Philippines. There Fr Alberic, as Father Immediate of Matutum, conducted the Regular Visitation of that Community, and Fr Mark assisted him.

Matutum was founded in 1995 from Vitorchiano, Italy. (Vitorchiano is the community that Blessed Maria Gabriella is from. It may be the most numerous community in the Order and has given birth to several daughters, including one in Italy, one in Venezuela, one in Indonesia, and Matutum itself. Presently, Vitorchiano is in the initial stages of making a foundation in Czechoslovakia.) Matutum enjoys what must be one of the most beautiful monastic architectural complexes in the Order. It is a full monastery, built for forty sisters. There is also a large and attractive guesthouse, and the chaplain's house. Ten of the original twelve founding sisters who came from Italy remain in the community. In addition, there are two young solemn professed nuns, five simple professed nuns, five novices and three postulants, all filipina women who joined in the nine years since the foundation. This rate of recruitment is remarkable and says volumes about the quality of Cistercian life offered by the "Vitorchiano family," as well as about the generosity and zeal of the filipinas. The monastery is in a mountainous region, resulting in a much milder climate from the one found at OLP. The sisters are working on developing several small industries, including printed and hand made cards, baked goods, and religious articles. In addition, they run a small farm. They are able to produce all their rice, a significant amount of corn, and garden vegetables. They have recently devoted some of their land to pineapples. This seems to hold promise.

Fr Richard Fox continues relatively stable in his weak condition. His patience and good humor are uncanny and certainly must be close to divine. He has been the occasion of some of us finding and bringing into play virtues and strengths until now unacknowledged and unknown, and maybe even unwanted. We are grateful for the love and concern shown Richard by his many friends.

Fr Mark, Abbot