

Dear Friends and Visitors

In the tradition of the Catholic west, May is the month dedicated to Mary, the Mother of the Lord. Usually, the Solemnity of Pentecost falls in May, as it did this year, May 27. At Pentecost, the Acts of the Apostles tells us, 'they were all together in one place' when they 'were all filled with the Holy Spirit' (2:1, 4). Earlier, in chapter one of Acts, Luke tells us who 'they' were: the eleven apostles, 'together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and...his brothers' (1:13-14). Pentecost presents us with Mary in the midst of the Church, just as Mary and the disciple whom Jesus loved were at the foot of the Cross, and just as she had been with Jesus and his disciples at the wedding of Cana, when Jesus began to reveal his glory.



The month of May always concludes with the Feast of the Visitation of Mary to Elizabeth, May 31. This year at Ava, the Feast of the Visitation took on a singular splendor. In the morning before Lauds, with the community gathered in the Chapter room, Br Maria Lazarus made his first (simple) profession as a monk of the abbey and of the Order for a period of three years. In the simple yet moving rite, Br Lazarus promised his stability, obedience, and conversion of life, in accordance with the Rule of St Benedict and the Constitutions of the Order.

Externally, at the hands of Abbot Mark, Br Lazarus was divested of the white scapular and cloth cincture of the novice, and invested in the black scapular and leather belt of the professed monk. This milestone in Br Lazarus's life brings to completion his period of initial formation, one year of postulancy and two years of novitiate. The day was suffused with an evident joy in the community, the quiet and maybe even unobservable joy that filled Elizabeth when the greeting of Mary reached her ears (Lk 1:43).

At the opposite end of the month, on May 4th, the community celebrated the fiftieth jubilee of ordination to the priesthood of Fr Cyprian. His ordination anniversary was actually April 22 but we postponed our quiet local celebration until after Father had celebrated the occasion in a deservedly solemn and public way with four of his fellow ordinands at New Melleray Abbey, Iowa, where all of them had been ordained together in 1957. Fr Donald had celebrated 60 years as a priest earlier in the year, and in October Fr Mark will mark his 20th anniversary, resulting in an accumulated 130 years of priesthood among the three of them, a real blessing of our small community.





On that same day, May 4, there began in our woods a small 'improvement harvest' under the direction of David Haenke, a local forester who works together with us for the maintenance and good health of our extensive woods. Earlier in the spring, David had marked a number of trees in a small section of the woods just across Road OO from the Abbey buildings. In David's method of harvesting, only inferior trees are taken out, leaving the more robust and healthy trees

the space and sunlight to grow and flourish. An objective of this method is to maintain and preserve in the woods the naturally occurring variety of tree species, including under-storey trees, and representing a large range of age and development. Two men did the harvesting, cutting and hauling to the lumber yard only the trees David had marked. Instead of employing the huge 'skidders' commercial harvesters customarily employ for taking out the cut trees and loading them on trucks, David's two men used a small tractor, hauling each felled tree individually to the small truck on to which the logs were loaded one by one. This method results in minimal damage to the forest floor and to the small trees and other forest plants. The operation continued throughout the month of May, interrupted a few times by typical Ozarks spring rains.

This year, 2007, and next, we will be celebrating the twentieth year of our Assumption Abbey Fruitcake. As part of this celebration Abbot Mark organized and hosted a gathering of the 'principles' instrumental in getting the business going twenty years ago. The event took place in St Louis on May 11th, and included Mr and Mrs Jean-Pierre Auge, Mrs Louise Salmon, Mr Kevin (Bernard) Fitzgerald, and Mr Joseph Reisch. Mr Auge is the professional chef who generously supplied



the recipe for our fruitcake and worked with our first bakers adapting the recipe for large quantities (or semi-large: 125 cakes, compared to the huge commercial bakeries, is just slightly larger than what issues from grandma's kitchen!). Mrs Salmon is the woman who first put us in contact with Mr Auge, and worked with our late Fr Theodore Koster in getting the business off the ground. Mr Fitzgerald, then Br Bernard, was our first baker. Bernard returned for a few years in the early 2000's to help us refine our techniques to ensure the uniform excellence of our product. Finally, Joseph Reisch, an External Oblate of the Abbey, succeeded Kevin Fitzgerald as our second baker and is our principle baker at the present time. These five met with Fr Mark for

dinner at a fine St Louis restaurant, then attended the St Louis Symphony Orchestra performance of Benjamin Britten's War Requiem in the historic St Louis concert hall. It was an evening of informal elegance to express the monks' gratitude especially to Mr and Mrs Auge and Mrs Salmon.

Three men interested in being affiliated with the Abbey as External Oblates visited this month. For one of these men, it was his first visit to the Abbey. Another man has visited as a guest several times over the years, but this was his first visit as a candidate for External Oblate membership. These latter two were with us for just a few days and had rooms in the guest house. The third man lived in the monastery and was with us for a week, fully participating in the life of the monks. He had visited as a guest and as an External Oblate candidate in the guest house; now he was taking the next step in the process of discernment. These men are all from different states outside Missouri, and their personal and career situations are different. The Abbey is open to adapt its External Oblate life style to accommodate the needs of the individuals who are called to it, without, though, in any way 'watering down' the seriousness of such a commitment to the community.

On May 19th, a Saturday, a group of our Associates from Cuba, Cabool, and Springfield, assembled with Michael Hampton, one of our bakery employees, in the bakery packaging and shipping department and began the task of 'retro-fitting' several hundred of our packaged fruitcakes with materials celebrating our 20th year of baking. These cakes had been packaged by the monks before the anniversary material arrived from the printers and the monastic work force has enough to do keeping up with the packaging of the daily volume of newly baked cakes. The Associates did an excellent job and continued the work on the following Saturdays of the month and into early June. They work with wonderful cooperation among themselves, in an atmosphere of silence and quiet conversation, and stop midmorning to pray the office of Terce together, just as the monks do in the monastery. We are grateful for the generosity of these Lay Cistercians, and we are happy to offer them this opportunity to participate more directly in our way of life.



As many of our readers know, the monks of the Abbey will be holding an abbatial election in December of this year. This is the last year of Fr Mark's six year mandate as abbot. Throughout the year, the monks have been preparing and will continue to prepare for this important moment in the Abbey's history. One of the ways we chose to prepare for the election was to invite our friend from Fort Smith, Arkansas, Sr Rachel Dietz,

OSB, to help us discern the most significant needs of the community at this time and in the near future, and so get a better idea of what skills and qualities will be asked of the next abbot, and how the community will need to support him. For two days, then, May 28 and 29, the monks met together as a group with Sr Rachel for a very dynamic and fruitful process. What this process revealed, most of all, was the high degree of trust within our community. There was great comfort and ease in speaking both truthfully and respectfully; there was evident effort to listen to one another and to receive what was said without defensiveness or reaction; there was a great deal of good humor and, most of all, realistic hope about our place in God's plan and about our future.

As the month of June begins, and summer moves in, we at the Abbey wish our friends a happy and restful and safe vacation time, and look forward to seeing some of you who might drop by on a swing through the southern Ozarks!

Fr Cyprian, Abbot

