

Dear Friends and Visitors

Passiontide, Holy Week, and even the Easter Octave came this year with storms, tornadoes, and floods beating against the land. Bryant Creek came close to its all-time high flood mark. We will see how much damage was done to our low water bridge, once the waters go down. Yet, our inconvenience is nothing compared to the human lives and homes destroyed across the United States and in Japan.

The turmoil in nature reflects the destructive turmoil among nations today: Egypt, Libya, Afghanistan, Syria, and Africa. Thomas Merton expressed his personal situation and feelings during the Vietnam era in his book *Guilty Bystander*. The challenge to us Christian monks is to live faithfully our vocation as penitents and contemplatives in union with Christ, Who continues His saving presence and action in the world and in peoples' lives.

We have been preparing for the USA Regional Meeting of superiors at Holy Cross Abbey in Berryville, Virginia. Each monastery draws up a House Report telling their history during the past three years. They will be reviewed at The Regional Meeting in order to give our Order's General Chapter in September an overall view of our condition in the USA. Bishop Emeritus John Leibrecht is showing himself to be an energetic and thoughtful facilitator for our community dialogues about all of this.

Last year Fr. Justin put a lot of work into flowerbeds and planting Rose bushes at the base of 2/3 of the columns in our cloister courtyard (or garth). Luckily, we got the bushes trimmed at the end of this winter, just before their sap started flowing for new growth. Now they have abundant shoots with many buds. The strange alternation between unusual cold and unusual warm days (tornado weather) delayed blossoming, but on Mercy Sunday the central climbing rosebush opened up a half dozen lovely red flowers with a delicious aroma.

Sister Ann Marie, our Trappistine guesthouse portress, went to her sister's home in New England for a family gathering. Then she will visit Genesee Abbey in New York, where she knows the monks and Dom John Eudes.

Bro. Boniface had eight teeth extracted, besides four others filled. His dentist has prepared a partial plate for him. He will come home for a long weekend and his appointment. Another monk will replace Boni, staying with Bro. Dominic. It will hardly be a vacation, because he will cook Saturday and Sunday. This gives Jill and Joe Reisch a break from the weekend cooking they do for the monks and guests.

Bro. Dominic is more alert and responsive, now that his radiation treatments are over. Fr. Donald goes back and forth in his own personal world, sometimes alert and sometimes not. Both are happy with the care (and food) they receive at their nursing homes. We still offer Mass weekly with each of them.

Blessed John Paul II

Pope Benedict beatified his predecessor on Mercy Sunday, May 1, 2011, only six years after John Paul's death. He began and ended his years as pope with the note of Mercy, as well as making Mercy a high point in the middle of his course. Pope John Paul's first encyclical was entitled "Rich in Mercy." He died at First Vespers of the Feast of Divine Mercy. He prepared the Church to enter her third millennium by dedicating each of the three previous years to one of the Divine Persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Then he canonized St. Faustina as the first saint of the New millennium, and instituted the second Sunday of Easter as Mercy Sunday, faithful to the request of Our Lord Jesus, Who appeared to St. Faustina as the King of Mercy.

Karol Wojtyla's experiences as a youth, and many of the persecutions of Nazi and Communist regimes formed him into a spiritual athlete. When he was a new and fairly young pope, the media made much of his love for skiing. He had a swimming pool built into Castel Gondolfo, the papal summer retreat. Some cardinals complained of the cost. John Paul replied that it was less expensive than a conclave to elect a new pope.

The Jesuits were divided between quite liberal and quite conservative groups. Their General was not healing the breach, so Pope John Paul retired him and functioned as General of the Jesuit Order himself for a few years.

An assassin wounded him gravely on The May 13 anniversary of Our Lady's first appearance at Fatima. John Paul did survive, and went on to visit his attacker with forgiveness in prison. He also made a pilgrimage later to Fatima to thank Our Lady for saving his life. He organized all the bishops of the Church to join with him in consecrating all the nations of the world to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. A few claim this was not sufficient to fulfill her request for the consecration of Russia. However, the Soviet Empire's later, rather peaceful dissolution without WWII seems to confirm her promise that in the end her Immaculate Heart would triumph.

Pope John Paul improved relations with the Jewish people. Under his direction, the Vatican State finally recognized the state of Israel.

When Lech Walesa was leading the Solidarity movement in Poland, and there was threat of Russia moving their tanks in, the pope announced that, in case of invasion, he would resign his papacy and go to be with his Polish people.

John Paul II attracted great media attention when he made his first few plane trips, but in time he got less mention as he kept traveling to some 129 countries. On a visit to Nicaragua, a group of organized hecklers chanted and interrupted. The pope finally thundered "Silentio" into his microphone and they became quiet as church mice.

The Catholic faithful were wavering in confusion about the church's teachings. Pope John Paul II wrote encyclicals covering all the fundamentals of our Christian faith and morals. The publication of the Catechism of the Catholic Church gave a good and thorough presentation of our religion. The canon lawyers presented their proposed new Code of Canon law. They were not expecting the pope to read every canon, adding his own comments, as he actually did.

John Paul canonized a great number of saints-more than anyone had before. He spent the first hour of each day in private prayer. Sometimes he could be heard groaning as he wrestled with God or with himself. He was an extrovert who regularly invited others to concelebrate Mass with him, and to share meals at his table. Pope John Paul's optimistic buoyant spirit was expressed in his frequent exhortation, "Do Not Fear", and in St. Faustina's prayer, "Lord Jesus Christ, King of Mercy, I trust in Thee."

The Mafia killed the Cardinal of Sicily, who was working against their activities. Pope John Paul traveled to Sicily and rode through the streets in an open convertible, smiling, blessing, and daring the Mafia to shoot him. They backed down, knowing that all the people would turn against them. The pope's personal courage carried the day.

Pope John Paul II never lacked opponents or critics, who objected, disagreed, or disobeyed. He held the USA invasion of Iraq was not moral, because the conditions for a just war were not present. He was duped by Fr. Marciel, founder of the Legionnaires of Christ, who was leading a double life. He did not respond to the great scandal in the USA of some priests sexually abusing minors and of some of the bishops covering up the crimes. He swung the pendulum back towards a more conservative tack, counteracting the more liberal swing following Vatican II. He was much hindered by illness in his old age, but would not resign. However much John Paul may or may not be faulted, it remains true that each human being has their own failures and wounds. Christian holiness is not the same thing as human perfection.

It is striking how God raised up great saints in a time of great peril for the Church: Pope Leo the Great and Pope Gregory the Great during barbarism invasions (before and after 500 A.D.) Pope Gregory VIII when the papacy had become a political football for noble Roman families (around 1000 A.D.) St. Ignatius Loyola and his Jesuit followers to defend and renew the Catholic faith during the Reformation (mid 1500's). Now Pope John Paul II at the turn of 2000 A.D. to steady and set the Church's course during the growing pains of spiritual adolescence following the renewal of Vatican II.

The marvelous thing is that we are witnesses of Pope John Paul's life and work. We have lived through these events and can bear witness that Blessed John Paul II is evidence that Christ and His Holy Spirit are alive and well in our poor struggling human family and Catholic Church.

In the Sacred Heart

Fr Cyprian, Abbot