

Dear Associates and Friends,
The Lord be with you.

Jesus Christ is risen, Alleluia--He is risen indeed, Alleluia. This traditional Easter Greeting from the Eastern Church expresses it all in a nutshell. Somewhat like their hand-decorated Easter eggs.

Fr. Peter, the first Vietnamese Cistercian monk to arrive here, shared in our Holy Week liturgies. He has dual citizenship, so was able to enter the USA without obtaining a visa. We have completed the extensive paperwork involved in requesting visas for the other three monks, slated to join Fr. Peter this year. The Homeland Security Department has a lengthy waiting list of requests to process. They are very thorough checking out each applicant because of terrorist threats. After they validate the request on this side of the world, then the three monks go to the US Embassy in Saigon/HCM City to present their requests for visas there.

The advantage of Fr. Peter being here several months before the others is that he can give us some headstart work on reading and pronouncing their language. Thankfully, they write in Roman letters, rather than using pictographs, which most others use in the Far East.

Fr. Alberic provided us with some holy smoke about a half an hour before Vigils on Wednesday of Easter Week. Our fire alarm sounds off now and again when a guest burns toast in our retreat wing. However, this time, our abbey kitchen was filled with curling smoke. Fr. Alberic rises earlier to prepare food, and he keeps us supplied with his homemade granola. He had a big pan of walnut pieces toasting in the oven and forgot to turn the gas off, until all the bells and lights awoke the rest of us. At least we know that the fire alarm functions well.

The Family Brother program is alive and well. Brian Walsh from St. Louis has been with us for several weeks. Jim Roedl has the calling to serve in L'Arche communities. Periodically he needs a time apart in quiet and peace to renew his spirit. This is Jim's second time with us. He has a few monasteries, which are "home away from home". Dane Clement drove up from Little Rock for a short visit after Easter. We must keep his wife Anne in our prayers. Her chemo has developed some bad side effects.

An April Fool hacker broke into Assumption Abbey's e-mail and sent a letter under Fr. Cyprian's name to all the addresses in the computer's file... (and wiped out the addresses). It claimed that our guest master/secretary, Jill and family was stranded in London, having been robbed of everything but passports. The US embassy was no help. Plane is due to leave soon and she needs \$1500.00. Can you help? Same old phishing story. Jill and Michael had to shut down our email address and begin a new and different one.

Our retired Bishop, John Liebrecht stopped by for a chat with our monks. He often enough offers Mass for the diocesan hermits at Nazareth, and stays for lunch. Then he visits the next-door monks and the next-next-door friars. On his trip home he many times stops to visit with his old friend Fr. Don. He always finds Fr. Don cheerful and content though a bit confused. Fr. Don always has a secret to tell..."I kinda like it here at Heart of the Ozarks nursing home."

We remember Mary Runde in prayer now. She has an MRI scheduled to determine what the tumor at the base of her neck has been doing.

I Have Prayed for you, Peter

The resignation of Benedict XVI and election of Pope Francis I was a very special event in the Church's history of salvation. The successors #255 and #256 after St. Peter.

The Gospel tells us of four turning points in Simon Peter's life:

- His call to follow Christ.
- His profession of faith in Jesus as the Messiah
- His denial of Christ.
- Our risen Lord's appearance to Peter.

The Gospels of Mark, Matthew and Luke all picture Jesus calling Peter to follow Him at the shore of Lake Galilee. Mark and Matthew have Jesus simply say that He will make Peter a fisher of men. Luke elaborates the scene into a miraculous catch of fish.

However, St. John reduces the call to a simple first meeting. Simon Peter's brother Andrew heard John the Baptist point out Jesus as the Lamb of God, Who takes away the sins of the world. He and another disciple spent that day with Jesus.

The next day Andrew told his brother that they had found the Messiah, and took him to meet Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, "So you are Simon, son of John--you will be called Cephas," (Which means Peter.)

The first three gospels tell us that about halfway through the time of Jesus' public ministry of preaching and teaching, healing and driving out demons, He asked His disciples who that they say He is. Mark and Luke have Peter reply briefly, "You are the Christ (Messiah).

This time Matthew elaborates the event. He has Peter say, "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God." Then Jesus replies, "Blessed are you, Simon son of John, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. And I say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth, shall have been bound in heaven. Whatever you loose on earth, shall have been loosed in heaven."

Here again St. John's Gospel changes the scene. Jesus has just insisted that He will give His flesh and blood as real food and drink. Many say, "This is a hard saying" and no longer walk with Him. So Jesus turns to the twelve and asks, "Will you also go away?" Peter replies, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed and come to know that You are the Holy One of God."

The third turning point in Peter's life is his denial of Christ. Mark and Matthew, show Jesus telling Peter, on the Mount of Olives, after the Last Supper, that he will deny Him that night three times, before the cock crows. St. Luke writes a more full account. Our Lord tells Peter during the Last Supper that Satan will winnow them all like wheat, but Jesus has prayed for Peter so that once he has returned he must strengthen his brothers. Peter protests his loyalty. Then Jesus predicts his three denials. Matthew and Mark simply say that, after Peter's third denial in the high priest's courtyard, the cock crowed. Peter remembered and wept bitterly. Luke continues to elaborate a bit—writing that when the cock crowed, Jesus turned and looked at Peter. Then Peter went out and wept bitterly.

In St. John's gospel, he has Peter ask Our Lord at the Last Supper, "Where are You going?" Jesus answers that Peter cannot follow Him now. Peter says that he will lay down his life for Him. Jesus says that Peter will deny Him three times. Later John simply writes that the cock crowed and Peter began to weep.

So we find that the first three gospels generally give more full attention to Peter's call to follow Jesus, and to Peter's profession of faith in Christ, and to Peter's threefold denial. John's fourth gospel is generally more low-keyed describing these events. In contrast, the exact opposite is true in their treatment of the Risen Christ's appearance to Peter.

So Mark only has an angel tell the women at the tomb to go and tell the disciples and Peter they should go to Galilee—there they will see Him. St. Matthew does not even mention Peter by name. St. Luke merely has the apostles' announcement that the Lord is risen indeed and has appeared to Simon.

But St. John elaborates. He describes the miraculous catch of 158 fish, the early morning fish fry at the lakeside, then Jesus asking Peter three times does he love him? Peter responds yes each time, making up for his denials. The Lord Jesus confirms Peter in his role as Shepherd of Christ's flock, and says that now Peter is ready to follow Him all the way as a good shepherd who feeds and tends his sheep with humble love, and who lays down his life for love of Christ and His sheep.

Just as Our Lord Jesus gave St. Peter a gradual formation through those four turning points in his life, so the Holy Spirit of Christ gave a gradual formation to Benedict XVI and to Pope Francis I to follow Peter in his role as Shepherd of Christ's flock on earth. Likewise, the Holy Spirit of Christ gives each of us ongoing formation to follow Our Lord Jesus, as His true disciple loving and serving Him and His little ones to the end.

In Our Risen Savior and His Mother
Your monks of Ava