

Dear Friends and Visitors

The buildings of Assumption Abbey sit practically in the center of the Abbey's 3,400 acres of woods in the foothills of the Ozarks in Southwest Missouri. We live in the woods. The woods, with all their life and activity, are part of us.

At the same time, the monks of the Abbey make their modest contribution to the environment. In March, for instance, the daffodils appeared in splendid profusion. Then came the narcissus, and now, in early May, the irises. None of these colorful flowers are native to the Ozarks. They have been introduced and the woods have assimilated them gracefully.

Over decades, Fr Donald, especially, has divided and replanted the bulbs of these flowers that succeed one another, a parade into springtime.

Now, even when the trees of the woods are still apparently dormant or just barely at bud-swell, daffodils spring up everywhere as Lent comes to a close and Easter comes on. You see them along the roadsides, pathways, and surprisingly deep into the forest.

After the daffodils come the narcissuses. This year, they were ready for Easter and Br Fidel used them to good effect in the Abbey church to enhance our Easter Day liturgy.

And now, as Mother's Day approaches, Fr Donald's irises are standing ramrod straight like ballerinas on their toes where the daffodils and jonquils had been before. As I recall, next will be the daylilies.

The forest itself, without the help of Fr Donald, puts on a captivating display in late March and early April with the flowering of the redbuds and the dogwoods.

Dogwood is the Missouri state tree, and a single spring in the Ozarks lets you know why. One would hardly notice these thin and willowy trees during the winter. Then, the white and black oaks, the walnuts and sycamores, the hickory and hawthorn, so much taller, thicker and straighter, tower over them. But before these latter trees even think of greening up, the dogwoods' cross-shaped white blossoms break out. Their number and density grow and increase as the month of April progresses until the woods are mostly white with them.

Now, the dogwoods have all gone green, and all the other trees of the woods are thick with new foliage, the walnut being one of the last to leaf out. Flowers appear on the forest floor, a variety of shapes and colors that succeed one another all summer long, like Fr Donald's spring

bulbs.

In the forest there come with spring and summer species of insects the variety of which would be hard to match anywhere in the US. There are, too, the birds: cardinals, lazuli buntings, pileated woodpeckers, whippoorwills, owls; and the ground critters: the armadillos, the tortoises, and nocturnal beasts that monks rarely ever see.

This is the terrestrial world we live in and love that shapes us in ways we not entirely conscious of, even as we stand in it looking toward another world, or toward this world as it is in faith by virtue of the Resurrection from the Dead of Jesus Christ.

On Easter Monday, April 16, work began on our new buildings. The work has continued steadily since then with first-rate craftsmanship and expert, courteous supervision. The projected completion date is December of this year. If the work proceeds as it has thus far, we should have a dedicatory celebration by the end of the year.

We cannot repeat enough how grateful we are to our benefactors who continue to support us in this project. We still need to raise several hundreds of thousands of dollars, and are confident that we will succeed. If you, our visitor, would like to contribute, please contact Fr Theodore Koster, OCSO, Assumption Abbey, Rt 5 Box 1056, Ava, MO, 65608, e-mail aabbey@goin.missouri.org.

Fr Mark, Abbot