

Dear Associates and Friends:

The Lord be with you...

An old Irish monk told us that flexibility is an important virtue in monastic life. The program for priestly studies within the monastery, which was being arranged between our daughter house in the Philippines and San Carlos Seminary in Manila, is making a good beginning. A teacher from the seminary spent a fortnight at OLP giving a condensed, intense course on Ethics. Then another replaced him to give essentials of two other fields of Philosophy during the Filipino school break (March-May). The first semester (June-October) would be on-line with active sharing in San Carlos' classes on Ontology. The second semester the four OLP monks would do Theodicy by interactive video.

Dom Fil wrote that, since the studies were taking much time and work, and since it was rice planting season followed by corn harvest, his original plan for a three month course on Patrology would be crowded out. Our higher superiors also thought that Fr. Cyprian should be home during the next several months, when the possible coming of Vietnamese Cistercian monks to Ava would be considered more fully.

The Vietnamese Frs. Peter and Philip visited our motherhouse, New Melleray in May, which gave Dom Brendan and his community better acquaintance and understanding of them and their thoughts. Dom Timothy wrote from Rome that the Trappist and Cistercian Abbot Generals should meet before anything further was done. Once mutual agreement is realized, the next steps involving a visit to Vietnam and approaching the governments of Vietnam and the USA can start.

Fr. Paul constructed an efficient corner angle desk for Jill in the guest master's office. This makes for a better workstation and less clutter in the room. He also continued to organize our basement area where woodworking, plumbing tools and tasks, paint and tile supplies are located. Gena Valli's week here coincided with Fr. Paul's visit, so they teamed up and that area of the basement never looked so neat. Not to mention Gena's hobby of recycling our dump in the woods.

Fr. Alberic and our "jack of all trades", Elmer drove to Mountain Grove and found a Skaggs zero turn mower, complete with joy sticks and a rollover bar. It appears rugged enough to master our terrain.

Jean Pierre Auge, the French chef who gave us his recipes and supporting advice for our fruit cakes, stopped by for an afternoon visit, along with his wife and another chef and wife from Paris. Jean Pierre had not seen our bakery constructed in 1999. As we toured the bakery and explored the ingredients, equipment and process, he told of an early occasion when Fr. Theodore told him that the cakes were somehow not up to standard. Jean discovered that the monks had skipped marinating the fruit and nuts in wine before making the batter to save time. He mentioned in passing that he had been pastry chef for Charles De Gaulle for two years. "A very interesting man." Their visit was a nice renewal of contact during this 25th anniversary of our fruitcake industry. Michael, our manager ordered silver cake tins to highlight the Silver Jubilee.

Fr. Paul and Bro. Francis keep working with men who are interested in our long-term retreat and/or Family Brother program. It has been a common practice for Trappist and Trappistine monasteries to allow someone to live within the community for a temporary period to deepen their spiritual life, prayer, and to share in the monastic values and discipline.

Today's widespread movement among lay people seeking to share more fully in our Trappist/Cistercian spirituality has taken the flexible form of Lay Associates. Our Family Brother approach tries to be a flexible form also compatible with our contemplative monastic life and constitutions.

Our Family Brothers feel called to live as Monks in the World. They come periodically to live within our community as long-term retreatants (for a week or two). Then they return to their life in the world. If a Family Brother is free to leave the world, he may live outside our strict enclosure in our Family Brothers Quarters, which is a wing completely separate from where our monks live and work. He composes his daily rule of life, consulting with Fr. Paul, the director of Family Brothers. Once a month he lives within our community for a week or two. A Family Brother wears a gray smock, but not outside the monastery grounds.

Tony Coleman, a Harvard student from Tennessee is a long-term Protestant retreatant. Dick Ortez, a farmer from Oklahoma made final Family Brother commitment on Pentecost. Ran Lahan, an Israeli, has made his first six-month commitment. Dane Clement, who is a therapist for soldiers returning from combat at a VA Hospital in Little Rock, made his Family Brother retreat during the long Memorial Day weekend. Mike Roth, a pilot from Pennsylvania, and Mike Cronin from Chicago will be living in our Family Brother's Quarters.

The General Chapter of 2011 encouraged us to find creative ways to continue our contemplative presence in this missionary diocese. We are working toward this goal by entering into dialogue about the Vietnamese Cistercians, and by developing our Family Brother program. We go forward in cooperation with, and under the guidance of our Fr. Immediate, and our Abbot General with his council, trusting that by the obedience of faith we will clarify and accomplish God's Will.

Holy Mother

"O God, I know You are a Father, but you have the heart of a mother." This was the prayer of our Abbot General Gabriel Sortais in the 1950's through the early 1960's

Since human beings, father, mother, and children, are made in the image and likeness of God, then somehow the mystery and reality of being a mother comes from God and is a part of who God is and what God does.

In pagan times, when men were fashioning gods and goddesses after their own human images and behaviors, they had mother goddesses as part of their myth. In the fullness of time, the one true God revealed His inner life to be a family of three divine Persons, eternally giving and receiving one same uncreated Godhead. Our Lord Jesus built His revelation on Old Testament images of the Lord God, the Word of God, and the Spirit of God. Christ spoke of the Father, the Son, and The Holy Spirit. He said that the Father had given all of Himself to the Son in His love for Him, and that whoever saw the Son, likewise saw the Father. Like Father, like Son—so that gives us two created and imperfect, yet real and truthful images of two divine Persons of the Holy Trinity. The Father is eternally giving all that He is and that He has in love to the second divine Person, and the Son is eternally receiving all that He is and has from the first divine Person.

The question is: Has God revealed a created and limited, yet real and true image of the third divine Person, Who is the mutual love uniting Father and Son? At the Son's baptism in the Jordan, we have a Dove descending and remaining on Him. At the Transfiguration, we have a cloud overshadowing Peter, James and John. At Pentecost, there is the noise of a great wind and tongues of fire descending on each one. Yet none of these images tell us What or Who the Holy Spirit is, as a divine Person.

The human family consists of male and female persons. Our Lord Jesus used masculine images for the first two divine Persons, the Father and Son. He did not directly use a feminine image for the Holy Spirit, Who is the mutual divine love eternally uniting the Father and Son in the Divine family, just as a mother is the mutual love uniting fathers and children in the human family.

Israel in the time of Christ was embedded in a universe of fertility cults and pagan goddess myths. Perhaps using direct feminine terms to reveal who and what the Holy Spirit is and does, would have been too easily misunderstood and perverted then—just as the feminine is misunderstood and perverted in our own time, as when Elizabeth Taylor called herself “Mother Courage”, or when Madonna dresses up as a goddess of peace during the Super Bowl, or when President Obama and his “Catholic” vice-president, Joe Biden recognize the union of two people of the same sex as a legitimate marriage.

Yet when Our Lord Jesus on Calvary addressed Mary at the foot of the cross, “Woman, behold your son”, and told the beloved disciple, “Behold, your Mother”, He was telling her and us that she is the New Eve, Mother of all the living—born of water and the Holy Spirit.

When Christ told Nicodemus about being born of water and the Holy Spirit, He was using the image of a mother giving birth to describe who the Holy Spirit is and what the Holy Spirit does. Now on Calvary, He applies the same image of mother of His beloved disciples to Mary.

So Our Lord reveals that Mary has a role on the human level, which is similar to the role which the Holy Spirit has on the divine level—the role of Mother. Therefore, the Blessed Mother Mary is a created and imperfect, yet real and true image of the Holy Spirit...of Whom and What the Holy Spirit is and does.

Celebrating Mother’s Day gives us a very noble ideal of a mother’s vocation. We renew our appreciation and gratitude for our own mother’s birth pangs and her labor of growing pains as she shepherded us from infant to child to adolescent to young adult and beyond. We pray that God will bless and reward our own mothers with an even fuller indwelling and joy of the Holy Spirit.

At Pentecost, Mary the Mother of Jesus was praying with the disciples. The coming of the Holy Spirit upon them all was the birthday of Holy Mother Church. It was also an inaugural prophetic experience, giving Mary the grace of her vocation as the Mother of the Church.

“Lord God, I know you are a Father, but You have the heart of a mother.

In the Heart of Christ and His Mother,
Your Monks of Ava