

Dear Friends and Visitors

Our annual July Fourth picnic was put off a week until July 11. The reason for the delay was because Fr Mark had gone to New Clairvaux Abbey, Vina, CA, his former monastic community, to celebrate their Golden Jubilee of foundation with them. The celebrations at Vina covered the first three days of July, July 2nd being the actual anniversary of foundation, so that Fr Mark returned from Vina only in the afternoon of the 4th.

As it turned out, July 11 was a fine day to hold our annual picnic. That is because July 11 is the Solemnity of Our Father St Benedict. Several suggested that we always have our picnic on that day from this time forward, and that seems like a very good idea.

We enjoyed a variety of very tasty dishes at the picnic, along with cold beer and the by-now traditional home churned ice cream for desert. Four dogs joined us, the community's two Peanuts and Goldie, and the dogs of our two friends and employees.

But what made the picnic this year particularly warm and festive was the presence of Fr Richard Fox. Fr Richard had come home from Mercy Villa, Springfield, on July 8 and returned there on the 12th. It is always wonderful to have Richard home with us for a few days.

Participating in the celebrations at Vina in early July were the abbots and abbesses of the US Region OCSO, plus the superiors of the two communities to whom the abbot of Vina fulfills the role of Father Immediate. These were Dom Anastasius Li, abbot of Our Lady of Joy, Lantao, Hong Kong, and Madre Stella Venezia, superior of Juigalpa, Nicaragua. The celebrations were carefully planned and carried out and included a good balance between the more formal liturgical and the more casual social. Vina is remarkable in its multi-cultural composition. The community consists of native-born Americans, Filipinos, Vietnamese, Central American, west African, and Chinese. The challenges are both obvious and not so obvious, but Vina seems to meet them with both creativity and hard work.

On the day of the community picnic here at Ava, July 11, the community gathered in the cemetery after Mass to bless the cross erected there in memory of Clayton Fountain. July 12 was the first anniversary of Clayton's death. (See Newsletter for September 2004 for details about Clayton Fountain.) Clayton died before he had the opportunity to communicate to the authorities his desire to be buried at the Abbey. IN lieu of that, we have place a simple grave marker there, one identical to the crosses marking the graves of our dozen brothers already buried there. Fr Paul Jones, who was Clayton's friend and spiritual guide, performed the actual blessing of the grave marker. As he did so, he recalled, "Clayton's comment in submitting his

request to be a Family Brother of Ava is particularly important as we bless this grave. He said, 'All I have to offer is to be a witness: that if you will have me, by fare the least worthy of any who ever dared to ask, may my grave be a living declaration that no person is beyond the forgiving and reconciling love of God in Jesus Christ.'"

Fr Donald Joseph Hamilton, our senior brother, underwent minor surgery this month entailing the removal of a chronically infected toe. It was an out-patient procedure, so Fr Donald did not miss a day of life in the Abbey because of it. His recuperation was swift and complete, for which we are grateful, and the removal of the digit has not cut into his joy or energy in the least.

In July four Franciscan friars (OFM) from two Provinces took up residence at last in the remodeled and newly furnished house they are leasing from the Abbey, and so began officially Our Lady of the Angels Franciscan Friary, a Franciscan prayer fraternity. We are delighted with this cooperation between the Abbey and friars in bringing yet another style of Catholic contemplative life and spirituality to the Ozarks.

In the latter part of the month Abbot Mark attended the annual board meeting of the Alliance for International Monasticism held in Erie, PA. The Alliance distributes some \$150,000 in grants and finances visits of North American monastics for purposes of formation to Benedictine and Cistercian monasteries in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean. AIM is extremely conscientious in its methods and innovative in meeting the many needs that come its way.

After the AIM meeting, Fr Mark went to Mepkin, South Carolina, where he had been invited to give the community there its annual retreat.

Homily for the 16th Sunday of Ordinary Time Year A

Wisdom 12: 13, 16 – 19

Matthew 13: 24 – 30

"There is no god but you, because you are concerned about everything."

Note that it does not say, "There is no god but you, because you have more bombs and an unlimited intelligence network; there is no god but you, because you can crush your enemies like roaches; or, you know how to cut a good deal."

"Concern for all" is the way you know your God. This is what our first reading proposes to us,

from the Book of Wisdom.

God is the single super-power, and what does that mean? Leniency for all.

Why, you'd think the Book of Wisdom was written by Sojourner's magazine.

But this is the God of the Old Testament and the New, and we humans are in his image: "You have taught your people by your own example, that for a person to be good is to be a philanthropist, a lover of other humans, and that love of us toward our neighbor – even toward our enemies – is, God, your very power; it is the sign of good hope and the door to repentance."

So, what do I do with my pistol, my war plans, my resentment, my fear? What do I do about the weeds in my wheat field and about the enemy who sowed them there?

Move to Jesus' little story, where this same God is in bib overalls, a farmer. The story is really about the farmer and one of his enemies. "An enemy did this" – that is, one of many he had.

What do you do when you're just doing your job the best you can and someone keeps throwing monkey wrenches in it? Or something, like an illness, or a bad habit, or a painful memory from the past?

At least we can note this: Jesus' farmer is neither alarmed nor hysterical; he names the problem truly. His workers, who may be himself talking to himself, want to rush in and make everything just like it was, as if nothing happened, the way things should be.

But the farmer knows you can't go back. In some down-to-earth farmer wisdom, he knows the way things are is the way they should be, too, for now. A good farmer is resourceful. He has alternatives. He is wise.

This farmer on his John Deere is God in the Book of Wisdom. He can do everything, is the lone super-power, and so is sparing and merciful in every critical situation, even in the face of a cowardly nocturnal terrorist attack on his wheat field.

He also is us, for the kingdom of God, says Jesus, is like that, and we, as baptized into the meek and lowly-hearted one, are children of the kingdom. It is not easy, but it is the only way that works – that both reaches harvest and leaves the field fertile for still another crop.

"You are God, because you care for all."

The farmer doesn't take it out on anyone, not even the enemy, certainly not the weeds. Gosh, they are just seeds, after all, and had nothing to say about being in the wrong place at the wrong time. In fact, his concern is about the weeds first of all:

Gather them – that takes attention

Bind them – time consuming

Into bundles for burning – neat and orderly

We notice he does not say, "Burn them." There they are neatly stacked. As for the wheat, it is perfunctory: "gather it into my barns" -- obviously to be eaten by him and his family, maybe by some rats, too; to be sold, and to be planted again next year.

The kingdom of heaven is like this, and one supposes Jesus wanted to hint that the kingdom of earth is like this too, created very good, with over it "that most beautiful creature that God had fashioned to his own image" (Pseudo-Macarius, Hom 1.7).

A 4th Century Syriac monk known as Macarius said, "God does not wage war against wickedness, but since he possesses all power and authority of himself, he brings about victory by himself."

That brings us to Jesus Christ. Look at the Crucified on who forgave his killers. Here is the way, here is the truth, here is the life. The Eucharistic Bread is Him (no doubt there is a bit of weed mixed in the fine wheat) the seed of wheat offered to the field of your life.

Fr Mark, Abbot