

Dear Friends and Visitors

August 15, the Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary into Heaven, is the patronal feast of our Abbey. As in past years, we were happy once again to have had several of our Associates (Lay Cistercians) join us for the feastday and for the few days prededing it. Fr Paul Jones presided at Mass on the Solemnity and delivered the homily. In the Salve we sing each evening at the close of Compline, we proclaim that Mary is "our hope" -- spes nostra. Many people, especially people of the Reformed Churches (Protestants of one kind or another) have a difficulty accepting the appellation of Mary as "our hope," much less as "our life," a title the Salve also attributes to the Mother of God. After all, certainly Jesus alone is "our life;" he is "the way, the truth and the life." And because he is all of that at more, he alone is "our hope." The mystery of the Assumption, itself difficult for may Christians to embrace, is nevertheless exactly why Mary is our hope, and also our life. Mary, assumed into heaven body and soul, is our hope, because scripture makes it clear that this is the destiny of all Christians. That in fact this destiny is being enjoyed by one of us "already" is all the more reason for the rest of us to hope that it will happen to us. We can say that Mary is the demonstration of our hope, the "firstfruits" of our hope. By virtue of baptism into Christ, we are all destined to be raised with Christ, to sit with him in the heavenly places. One of our race has already been granted this fulness of life; her life is "hidden with Christ in God" in a way that all of us will enjoy at the time God sees fit. Her life now is "our life" "in hope," but a hope that is not wishful thinking, but firmly anchored in the exprience of a real person, Mary, the Mother of the Lord. "He has lifted up the lowly!"



On July 4th, Independence Day, the monks, with our External Oblate Joseph, celebrated our annual picnic in the shade of the great trees at our Family Guest House. We enjoyed a relaxed day together, with eating and conversation and, for some, a little snoozing. Fr Mark wandered to the banks of Bryant Creek and there took his first swim of the summer season in its cool water, near the banks of one of the bluffs bordering the creek and under a sunny July Missouri sky.



A few days later, Fr Mark departed for California to spend the next two months in solitary retreat. These months coincide with the seventh anniversary of Fr Mark's becoming superior at Ava, so this time of retreat is also a sabbatical for him. He is spending the time on a ten acre property in the foothill community of Forest Ranch, just forty miles from the Cistercian Abbey of New Clairvaux, Vina, the community Fr Mark was a member of before coming to Ava in 2000. Fr

Mark reports that the property is equipped with a comfortable furnished house he uses for his meals and for toilet facilities, a small one-room cabin he uses as an oratory and sleeping quarters, and comes with three animals: Dierdra, a Jack Russell Terrier, and Barney and Blue, two large felines. There is also a small vineyard and garden, with trees and flowers around the house. These latter elements provide a small amount of manual labor every day, just as the animals provide companionship and entertainment. Fr Mark says that the objective for his sabbatical is simply to sink into the silence and solitude as icons of God. He reports that, in fact, the location, on the edge of Chico Canyon and in view of Mount Lassen to the north, is perfect for meeting this objective. Fr Mark is very grateful for this privileged time with God. He will return to the Abbey, God willing, on September 8.

The annual "wester superiors pastoral sharing" meeting took place during Fr Mark's sabbatical. Fr Mark took a week away from his Forest Ranch retreat to spend a week in Montecito, CA, with his friends, the other Abbesses and Abbots of the monasteries of the Order west of the Mississippi. All were in attendance save the newly elected abbot of Holy Trinity, Utah, who had already made other plans for that week.





Shortly after Fr Mark left, our friend Matthew Flatley arrived at the Abbey for a week's solitary retreat. We were happy to open our cloister to Matthew for this time of prayer and meditation before he returns to his studies as a seminarian for the diocese of Jefferson City.

This year is the sixth year of our lovely new cloister garth and garden. The landscaping has matured, the lawn well established, and a variety of perennials and annuals adding color throughout the year. This year, a further addition was made to the cloister when Fr Paul and Br Lazarus unstalled a water feature in the center of the garth. Now, our garth has the gentle sound of "living water," a clear pool and gently flowing water reminiscent of the four rivers that watered Paradise!

In the middle of July, Fr Donald underwent foot surgery, and in early August Br Boniface had surgery to repair a chronically torn rotator cuff. During his lengthy recuperation period, Br Boniface, the community cook, will not be able to perform his usual service for us. After considering the options, we were happy to hire Jill Johnston as our substitute cook. Jill has worked part time for us for several years as the very faithful and reliable healthcare giver to our few brothers who have need of daily specialized care. She was happy to have the opportunity to help us out in this time of need. In fact, it is a growing trend in many of our monasteries that the duty of cook is being assumed by lay people and hired personnel. Usually, the reason for this is the dwindling number of monks or nuns and the available monastic personnel. At Ava, we are accustomed to lay and hired help, and really welcome this phenomenon as a way to integrate into our life and spirituality the lives of men and women outside the cloister.

A few days before the Solemnity of the Assumption of Mary, just before Vespers that day, a plume of smoke was spotted somewhere north of the monastery. Not entirely unaccustomed

to fires breaking out in the woods of our extensive property, several of us grabbed fire rakes and other material and headed off to find the blaze. The fire had been burning, apparently, for some time before the monks arrived, but with the help of the Skyline volunteer fire crew that arrived about an hour later, we were able to contain the fire so it would burn itself out, which it did. The system of logging roads and trails in our woods provided welcome, natural, fire breaks.

Meanwhile, in California, on August 12, the Nineteenth Sunday of the year, Fr Mark was able to celebrate Mass with his parents and several of the residents of the retirement village where they live. He has supplied us with his homily. It is available under the heading "Homilies" on our home page, or you can go to it directly by clicking [here](#).

August 19 is the liturgical memorial of Blessed Gueric of Igny. Gueric was a Cistercian abbot of the 12th century, a contemporary of St Bernard. With Bernard, Aelred of Rievaulx, and William of St Thierry, Gueric has been called one of the "Four Evangelists of Citeaux." These four laid the foundations for a solid Cistercian spirituality, and then through their lives, their homilies and chapter talks, and their treatises, articulated that spirituality for generations to follow, up to the present day. This year the Order celebrates the 850th anniversary of the death of Blessed Gueric. By coincidence of design, August 20 is the liturgical solemnity of St Bernard of Clairvaux.

Fr Cyprian, Abbot