

Dear Friends and Visitors

The Lord be with you—

363 days of the year, we live according to our Trappist-Cistercian way. On the other two days, we observe a venerable American tradition with a 4th of July community picnic and a Thanksgiving Day dinner, which includes our retreatants and some friends and neighbors.

This Independence Day the four Franciscans from Our Lady of the Angels prayer community next door shared in our community picnic. For many years, we held the picnic on the hill across Bryant Creek, where our Family Guest House stands. Last year we experimented with the cookout on the inner open cloister walk. Its tile pavement and overshadowing roof, plus no ticks and chiggers, were enough to persuade all of us to celebrate there again this year.

Jason Johnson made a six-month commitment as a family brother at Vespers of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel. Bishop Johnston has assigned each church in his diocese a particular week, during this whole Year of the Priest, for special prayer for priests with a Holy Hour and exposition of the Blessed Sacrament. Since that was our assigned work, we included Jason's promise as part of our Holy Hour. Pope Benedict chose the feast of the Sacred Heart to begin the Year of the Priest in 2009, and to complete it on the same feast in 2010.

July 11 is the celebration of St. Benedict's feast. Pope Paul VI named him Patron of Europe in 1964. Pope John Paul II named Sts. Cyril and Methodius apostles of the eastern Slavic countries, as co-patrons of Europe in 1990. When Cardinal Ratzinger was elected pope, he chose the name Benedict XVI.

St. Benedict is not only our monastic father, but also a Father of the Western Church. There has been a Pope Benedict during almost every critical time in the history of the Church.

The 1st Pope Benedict had to face the Lombard's invasion in the 500's against Rome, just as St. Benedict had to deal with Attila the Hun at Monte Cassino a few decades earlier. The pope's installation was delayed a couple of years, waiting for the confirmation of the Emperor at Constantinople.

The next Benedict in the 600's got rid of the Emperor's privilege of confirmation.

The Benedict in the 800's contended against the many abuses on all levels in the Church, now that the Germanic invaders had settled down and ruled all of Europe. He lived only a few years.

In the early 900's another Benedict faced Saracen invasions, but he lived only a few months and the papacy had become a political football among the Roman noble families.

In the mid-900's the German Emperor Otto was not happy with a newly elected Benedict, so he took him off to exile in Germany where he died in prison. Then later Otto chose another Benedict as pope, but the Roman nobility rebelled, and set up an anti-pope. Benedict was strangled in prison after only a few days.

Otto II chose still another Benedict, who ousted the anti-pope. He especially worked for the conversion of the Slavs. Around 1000A.D, the next Benedict liberated Sardinia from the Spanish Saracens. However, in the mid- 1000's a new Benedict obtained the papacy by simony and at the end of his life, he sold the papacy to his successor.

See what condition the Church was in at the end of her first millennium, besieged by foes within and without.

There was no Pope Benedict during the 1100's, when the Cistercian reform spread throughout western Europe.

There was no Pope Benedict in the 1200's, when the Franciscan and Dominican renewals flourished.

The 1300's had a Dominican Pope Benedict, who was elected by the first ballot. He was holy and a scholar, and a good administrator, but he lived less than a year.

A Cistercian Benedict was pope in the mid-1300's. He reformed religious orders (including our own), but was too rigid to deal successfully in the political field. He lived at Avignon during the century of French exile for the papacy.

In 1400 the Great Western Schism saw an anti-Pope Benedict at Avignon.

There was no Benedict at the beginning of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation.

The Roman Orsini family produced a man in the 1700's who was truly spiritual. (Still the family influence made him a cardinal at age 23.) He was eventually elected as a new Benedict and countered well the Jansenist heresy, but was not a political success.

The next Benedict in the mid-1700's was able to work out a constructive compromise with aggressive kings. He worked to restore the papal states from their rundown conditions. He had effective concern for the poor, but especially devoted his efforts to be a good reforming pastor to the Church's bishops.

Pope Benedict XV governed from 1914 to 1922 during and after WWI. He was short and frail. An injury at birth left one eye, ear and shoulder noticeably higher than their partner. He was studious, and worked as a male nurse for the victims of a severe cholera epidemic, when stationed in Spain. He showed great charity for the war's refugees, giving money and establishing a missing person's bureau at the Vatican. The Germans called him the French Pope and the Allies called him the German Pope. The Code of Canon Law was revised under his care. When he died, the Vatican had to borrow money to bury him, since he had given all to the needy.

See how our Lord Jesus and the Holy Spirit (along with some help from 15 Pope Benedict's and St. Benedict's family of countless monks and nuns) have brought the Church to a much more Gospel condition at the end of her second millennium.

Now we begin the third millennium of Christ's History of Salvation under the shepherding of today's Pope Benedict XVI.

In the Sacred Heart,

Fr Cyprian

