

Dear Friends and Visitors

The date says it all, or tries to. ""September 11"" is now established in United States' vocabulary.

Word was brought us around 8:30 a.m. by Bridget Sorenson. Bridget is our guesthouse hostess. She had just arrived for work that clear morning in the Ozarks. Fr Anthony pulled up the news on the computer in the bakery office. Fr Mark was just leaving the house to run an errand in Mountain Home, Arkansas. He listened on the car radio to the disjointed reports coming in from New York and Washington. Later in the morning, some of the brothers watched the televised coverage on the TV in the guesthouse conference room.

For the most part, though, the monastic day unfolded as usual: Terce, Sext, and None, dinner, bakery work and housecleaning, Vespers, meditation, Compline. ""September 11"" thus found its context at Ava in the life of the monks, in their solitude and silence, their assiduous prayer and joyful penitence. And so it did throughout the month of September, as we continued to pray for peace and to check our own tendencies to anger, to victimization, to trivial concerns.

Monks don't watch TV usually. There is not even a set in the enclosure. Our interest in media presentations is minimal

We follow liturgy. We do lectio divina. These are media of another kind. They don't take you to the scene live and leave you there. The liturgy and lectio take you above and beyond, and deep inside.

September 11 was Tuesday of the 23rd Week of Ordinary Time. The gospel that previous Sunday spoke about the man who built a tower, and how he needed to ask whether or not he had what it took to complete it. What dark brilliance that tower and all it represented took on come September 11.

In the Gospel for that day, Jesus began his Sermon on the Plain in Luke 6. In the following days we heard that Sermon delivered in small pieces. On Wednesday, September 12, it was the Kingdom of God belonging to those who weep, but alas for those who laugh now. On Thursday we heard, ""Love your enemies"" and ""pray for those who treat you badly.""

Friday, the 14th, was the National Day of Prayer and Remembrance. It was also the Feast of the Holy Cross. We heard at Mass that ""God sent his Son into the world not to condemn the world but so that through him the world might be saved"" (Jn 3:17).

On Saturday we resumed Jesus' Sermon. The image is a building again. Jesus says that the person who hears him is like a man building a house. He ""laid the foundation on the rock. When the river was in flood it bore down on that house but could not shake it, it was so well built."" Saturday was also the Memorial of Our Lady of Sorrows. The new patroness of the United States?

The following Sunday was the parable of the Prodigal Son. Repentance. Homilists, not only in the monastery but in other places, too, were bold enough to wonder before their brothers and sisters if September 11 weren't a wake-up call. Our own Fr Paul Jones talked about the Hebrew Prophets. They saw national disasters as mirrors held up to the People of God, saying, ""You are the man."" Our Catholic people listened that Sunday, without getting resentful, it seemed.

And then the next Sunday, September 23, the parable from Luke of the Unjust Steward, another parable of human conniving and divine forbearance.

As September ended, we were praying for peace, praying with great sympathy and admiration for our leaders, praying for a united worldwide effort not so much to Win the War on Terrorism, but to advance the truth of human solidarity played out in the huge embrace of divine pity.

September 24 marked the 51st anniversary of the founding of Assumption Abbey, Ava. The date closed our 50-year Jubilee. Fr Theodore presided at Mass. In his homily, he remembered the occasion.

Today we have completed the first 50 years of our sojourn in the Ozarks. Or better, it is the first day of our second 50 years...Today we pause briefly to look forward to the promises and challenges ahead.

We are in somewhat the same situation as the Jewish people returning from the Babylonian exile. We have a partially completed phase of a long term building program...We look to the people of God for the assistance to complete this good work. One of the Gradual Psalms, which were traditionally sung by the Jews as they ascended from the plain up to the Holy City of Jerusalem, reflects the joy of the occasion. ""The Lord has done marvels for us...we are glad indeed.""

We gather now to discuss our own future leadership, to consolidate the progress thus far and to provide light, leadership, unity, a spirit of trust and confidence in the Lord.

The last paragraph of Fr Theodore's homily refers to the fact that the community of Ava has been without an abbot for nearly two years. The community has decided it is time to fill that vacant seat. December 8, 2001, has been set as the date for an abbatial election.

The regular Visitation of Assumption Abbey took place September 22-27. The Visitation was conducted by the Father Immediate, Dom Brendan Freeman, abbot of New Melleray Abbey, Iowa. In the written summary of the Visitation, Dom Brendan said, "I must say I have never experienced such peace in the community as you face the future. No one seems anxious. There is a mature calmness in the air." This is true, and we do not take this gift for granted.

Br Raphael Cruz, OCSO, visited Ava the weekend of September 28. Br Raphael is a professed monk of our daughter house, Our Lady of the Philippines Abbey, Guimaras, Philippines. Br Raphael is studying liturgy and music at St John University, Collegeville, Minnesota.

Fr Mark, Abbot