

Dear Associates and Friends,

The Lord be with you.

August was a scorcher. Traditionally the heat is supposed to break August 6th, feast of Our Lady of the Snows. (Actually the Dedication of St. Mary Major Church in Rome.) The story goes that this elderly Roman couple wanted to donate funds for a church, but did not know where to build it. A good snowfall covered one hill during that summer night, so that hill became the site. True to form, August 6th of this year was cloudy and overcast, quite comfortable, but the heat came back the next day.



On August 15th, Our Lady of the Assumption's feast, we invited donors, long-time benefactors, and friends to come and share in our 60th Anniversary celebration. Joseph and Lily Pierson gave this land and its original fieldstone Swiss chalet style house to New Melleray in 1950 for a monastic foundation. Joe attached a condition to his gift-if the new monastic community lasted sixty years, then the land was completely theirs. If they disbanded in less than sixty years, it

went back to the Pierson heirs.

Bishop Leibrecht, recently retired after more than twenty years in our diocese, was the main concelebrant at the Mass. His homily and gracious presence set the tone for the overflowing congregation. The highlight was Joe Pierson's 90-year-old daughter, Mrs. Mary Garrick, who was able to travel from Tulsa with two of her sons, Fr. David and George, and be part of our thanksgiving. Joe had given us an engraved ciborium in memory of his wife. We had it replated for the anniversary. Mary had not known of her father's memorial gift in her mother's name. A comforting surprise. Her memory went back to the time of WWII, when Joe and a couple of his sons were involved in building "The Castle" (as our local people called it). One summer he brought Mary with them. There was a bountiful peach harvest, so Joe arranged for Mary and a neighbor to can that fruit in a great many mason jars. They really roughed it-outdoor privy, bathing in the creek, laundry in tubs, washed by hand.

Mary's brother, Homer, had written his name on a lintel over a doorway. We had to demolish and bury the house around 1995 because of vandalism and misuse there. Archeologists may have a field day several hundred years from now, puzzling over these ancient hidden ruins.

Inevitably, we would have missed some of the names of some of our good friends and benefactors. Please accept our apologies and come visit our present monastic home.

The following weekend was a retreat for the Associates of Assumption Abbey. Our groups are established in St. Louis and Cuba, Missouri, as well as a new group at West Plains and a fledgling one in Springfield. Fr. Paul Jones, our family brother, led the retreatants. Our Associates are free to simply be members sharing in Cistercian monastic spirituality, or they may choose to enter a self-crafted covenant agreement about the form and measure of their observances. This weekend four persons made their first six month promises, four made their second six month, one person made a first one year promise, three people made their second one year, and four associates made their life-time commitments.

A universal interest in contemplative prayer and in monastic spirituality is showing up among lay people. We contemplative monks and nuns do not organize and direct third Order members, as apostolic religious orders do. We do offer the traditional hospitality of our retreat houses, spiritual direction, quiet time and space, and a share in our liturgies. The lay associates do their own organizing, meeting, and supporting of each other, and contact with the monastic liaison person.

The neighborhood watch people continue their low-key work to encourage neighboring families

to swim, fish, and picnic at our low-water bridge on Bryant Creek, and thereby discourage a roughneck element, which in recent years has infested the area with alcohol, drugs, and violence. A sturdy concrete privy is under construction now to provide for changing clothes and the needs of nature. The original abbey was just down the road from that spot, but our new monastery is well away from sight or sound. In the end, this work will help our relations with our neighbors, and keep an area of peaceful solitude and beauty for our monks and retreatants.

There will be an Alumni Reunion here Sept 23 **and** 24<sup>th</sup>: the date of the first founders arrival. We have searched our memories, files, and others' recollections for a list of any and all men, who lived a longer or shorter time in our community these past sixty years. A good number of invitations were mailed out. Here again some alumni will be missed, so if you are an alumnus and have not received any mail, please consider yourself invited and go to the page on our website ([www.assumptionabbey.org](http://www.assumptionabbey.org)) where you can find the full text and details of the schedules and possible residence place. It is a small token of gratitude and a way to express our awareness that our monastery and community (living and deceased) would not be where we are today without your efforts.

Mary Runde, a long-time St. Louis Associate who sends out this newsletter writes that she will have a tracheotomy on September 8th. Since this is the feast of Our Lady's Nativity we pray through her intercession for successful surgery and healing of her upper respiratory ailments.

### St. Monica

A human being is a blend of contrary elements. By nature, we are a union of an immortal spiritual soul and a mortal physical body. Our physical body supports the soul, gives it information through our five senses, sways it by emotions and instincts, and helps or hinders our soul by its physical health or illness. However, our spiritual soul, with its understanding mind and free will gives life to our body, and governs it well or poorly according to our right or wrong understanding and by our personal wise or foolish choices.

On the practical level, this means that the more we go on in life, the more we experience that each of us is a strange combination of paradoxical qualities.

St. Monica had the fortune, or misfortune, to be described by her own son, Augustine, who of course saw the different sides of his mother up close and tells us about them.

Augustine claims that his father was too kind and did not discipline or train his son properly and that his mother was overly attached to her favorite son. Also, that both parents focused mainly

on a good education for him.

His father died when Augustine was 14 years old. He finds fault with his parents for not arranging a marriage for him as a cure for his unsettled and immoral life. Monica was more interested in his worldly career, although she was also distressed by his life-style.

Monica tolerated her unmarried son living with a woman for 15 years and raising a son, Adeodatus (Gift from God). Yet all the while praying with tears for his conversion. Augustine had moved to Carthage, and his mother came along too. Ten years later Augustine was heading for Italy with his woman companion and their son. He ditched his mother at Carthage, but she followed him to Rome. He had already left the Eternal City to go to Milan. Monica traveled to Milan, where St. Ambrose befriended her. Monica set about making her son respectable. She persuaded him to send the live-in mother of his son back to Africa. She was arranging a marriage with a wealthy heiress for him.

Then Monica had the joy of seeing Augustine's true conversion and baptism. Yet Augustine's search for happiness and truth took him all the way to living a celibate, semi-monastic life with a group of men at a country villa. Monica tagged along as a housekeeper. In time, Augustine had come to see and value the Christian wisdom she had acquired through experience and practice, so that he changed his former opinion that philosophy is the supreme knowledge.

Augustine and Monica set out together to return to Africa. At Ostia, the seaport for Rome at the mouth of the Tiber River, they shared a conversation about the mystery of Eternal Life. It was an experience which took them beyond the sense of their physical existence-the vision at Ostia. Monica fell ill, died and was buried there.

Monica's lifetime struggles starting with a fondness for wine as an adolescent, her marriage to an unbelieving, unfaithful husband, her excessive worldly ambition and favoritism for one son, and her long years of anguished tears and prayers for his conversion, purified her through the foolishness of the cross, so that she learned and grew in the wisdom of God, with a final gift of the vision at Ostia with Augustine.

Such a very real and human wife and mother, as Monica was, makes her a favorite patroness for our own very human mothers, as they also learn by experience that the foolishness of God is wiser than worldly wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than worldly strength.

In the Sacred Heart,  
Fr Cyprian