

Dear Friends and Visitors

The flaming warm colors of an Ozarks autumn passed on to browns and grays all too soon this year. By the end October the woods were mostly in their winter dress.

At Assumption Abbey the last months of autumn mean extra work in the offices of Assumption Abbey Bakery.

The bakery production itself doesn't change. Br Fidel, our main bakery, and his hired assistant, Mr. Andrew Martin, continue to manufacture the same daily quota of one hundred twenty-five cakes Monday through Saturday, while the rest of us are assigned variously to injecting, decorating, wrapping and boxing our singular confection.

But it is during these last months of the year that most of our aged and cured cakes are finally sent out to their intended destinations, the tables and the palates of our customers and their families and friends. While people buy our cakes year around, it is especially during the Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays that our friends and customers seek out Assumption Abbey Fruitcakes as gifts, and as offerings on holiday tables.

In late September and early October we send out a huge mailing of order forms to our customers, and almost immediately our customers begin to send them back to us filled in with names and addresses and accompanied by checks and credit card numbers.

In addition, dozens of orders arrive daily via phone and inter-net. We handle each order individually, frequently double-checking the data.

Then, even as we are taking the orders, we print mailing and shipping labels, attach them to the boxed cakes and send them on their way making use of either the U.S. Postal Service or UPS.

Also at this time we ship out to Williams-Sonoma Stores the 12,000 cakes they will offer in their stores and in their holiday catalogue.

So October and November are exceptionally busy months in the Bakery Office. It is our Bakery Manager, Fr Anthony Sloan, who expertly and conscientiously coordinates and oversees this work, as he does the entire Bakery business throughout the year. Our permanent employee, Mrs. Vicky Thompson, together with additional office personnel Anthony hires this time of year, assists Anthony in the office.

In October Fr Mark participated as a director of a Busy Students Retreat at the University of Kansas in Lawrence, KS. The five-day Retreat was sponsored by the St Lawrence Catholic Center at the University. There were seven other directors, men and women religious, clergy and lay, and over 50 students participating.

It is unusual for a Trappist monk to be doing that kind of thing. It was an experiment of the part of Fr Mark and Assumption Abbey who are looking for ways to let people, especially young people, know about the Abbey's presence and about the beauty of monastic life and Cistercian spirituality. It seems that the present state of society and of the Church is calling for this kind of outreach and visible presence. As it turned out, the students on the Retreat were enthusiastic over the opportunity to know a Trappist monk close up. For his part, Fr Mark returned from the Retreat with a fresh appreciation of the desires and the goodness of young Catholics.

At the end of October and for the first three weeks of November Fr Mark was again on the road; better, in the air and on the sea. The venue this time was the Philippines.

Assumption Abbey is the motherhouse of Our Lady of the Philippines Abbey on the island of Guimaras in the Philippines. It is the responsibility of the superior of a motherhouse to make the biennial canonical visitation of the daughter house. Fr Mark was accompanied by Dom Brendan, abbot of New Melleray Abbey (it is becoming more and more common in the Order for two superiors together to conduct the regular visitation).

Our Lady of the Philippines (OLP) was founded in 1972 by a group of American monks from various monasteries. The first buildings were nipa huts and bamboo structures. Many of these early structures are still in use, but the original bamboo church now serves as the Chapter Room, while the monks' community prayer and Eucharist take place in a beautiful new structure of brick, tile, wood and glass.

OLP is a young community almost entirely Filipino: only three monks, members of the founding group, are not Filipino. The community is overwhelmingly joyful and hospitable. Their liturgy is excellent, formal and artistic but at the same time spontaneous and natural. They work hard, and visitors from all over the country seek out their large and attractive new guesthouse. Ava is privileged to have this thriving Abbey as a daughter, and benefits directly from the daughter's care for the mother in the person of Br Fidel, our baker, who is graciously "on loan" from his own Abbey, OLP.

It is our custom on Thanksgiving Day to invite into our refectory for Thanksgiving Dinner our guests, neighbors, and any friends who would like to join us. Our cook, Br Boniface, prepared

four roast turkeys with dressing, mashed potatoes, candied yams, freshly stewed cranberries, and so forth. Fr Mark made enchiladas, and Br Dominic turned out several pumpkin pies. Fr Anthony and our former postulant, Kevin Nguyen, arranged and set the tables. After midday prayer we all assembled in the refectory to sing the table blessing and enjoy a splendid Thanksgiving afternoon.

Our building project is in its final stages. The infirmary and novitiate wings, with the cloister and garth they define, will surely be one of the finest examples of monastic architecture in the country. As always, we are not hesitant to ask our readers for financial assistance in favor of this architectural gem. Please contact Fr Mark at frmarkscott@catholic.org.

On December 8 of this year the monks of Assumption Abbey will hold an election for its next abbot. This will be a significant moment in the Abbey's history and important for its future. The monks have been preparing for the election since August, holding community meetings to discern the Abbey's primary needs in the near future and to discuss possible candidates who would be able to help the Abbey address these needs.

We will count on the prayers of our friends as we approach December 8, that, like Mary the Mother of the Lord, the monks of Ava truly listen to the word of the Lord and respond with a whole hearted fiat. We hope you will be able to join us for the abbatial blessing. When the date of the blessing is finally decided upon we will try to let our friends know in plenty of time for them to work it into their calendars.

Until next time, please be assured of our wishes for a warm, safe, and holy holiday season.

Fr Mark, Abbot