

Dear Friends and Visitors

Sunday October 3 was of some minor historical importance at Assumption Abbey, Ava. On that day Fr Mark, our Abbot, concluded his series of Sunday Chapter talks on St Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians. Fr Mark began the series immediately upon his being named canonical superior of the Abbey in August, 2000. Over the course of the four years, he devoted approximately 65 Sunday conferences to commenting on 1st Corinthians, from chapter one through chapter 16, and applying what Paul said to the Christians of 1st century Corinth to the needs and realities of Cistercian monks of 21st century Douglas County, MO. Fr Mark explained that it was Fr Charles Dumont, OCSO, a monk of Scourmont, Belgium, who gave him the idea. Years before Fr Mark assumed the service of leadership at Ava, Fr Charles had remarked to him that, in Fr Charles' opinion, 1st Corinthians was the biblical text for monastic communities. Fr Mark treasured this word and pondered on it until he had the opportunity to act upon it.

Fr Richard Fox continues to reside at Mercy Villa, Springfield. He has been there since June. His condition improved so much that he was removed from the care of Hospice. On October 7 we brought Fr Richard back to the monastery for a long weekend. It was a delight having him home again, and he himself was thrilled about it. Even so, our visits to Richard at Mercy Villa a few times each week confirm that he is doing very well there and receiving excellent care. The variety of people and the many activities are stimulating for him in a healthy and positive way.

October brought plenty of rain, some cold weather, and a spectacular display of autumn colors in the woods. At month's end the temperatures rose a bit, but autumn is definitely here. Soon the monks will be donning their white cowls and cloaks, removed because of the summer heat, and the return to Standard Time will help prepare our hearts and souls for a new liturgical year and a new winter.

Several Associates of Assumption Abbey made retreats during this month. First there was a small group from St Louis, and then a group from Belleville, IL. Our Franciscan brothers also visited. These are the friars who will be leasing our Volchok house and acreage to establish a Franciscan Prayer Fraternity. This is an exciting and original project and we are quite happy to be involved in this inter-order collaboration.

Our third observer for the summer and fall continues his live-in experience with us. Joining him in mid-month was another man whom we had been in touch with and who asked to do a "pre-observership." This man was a participant in one of our first Vocational Discernment retreats a year or so ago. After looking at other abbeys, he has returned to us with fresh interest. Both these men seem quite suited to monastic life and we do what we can to help them discern their

vocations.

In mid-October Fr Mark went to California where he led the annual retreat for the permanent deacons and their spouses of the archdiocese of San Francisco. The retreat was held at the lovely San Damiano Retreat Center in Danville, CA, in the East Bay. Some 40 deacons and their spouses attended the retreat, which went from Friday, October 15, till Sunday, October 17. Fr Mark based his conferences on the "Travel Narrative" of the Gospel of Luke, beginning at the end of chapter 9. The deacons were very appreciative, and Fr Mark was deeply impressed by this rich reality in the American church that is still so little understood, and too little appreciated.

In the latter part of the month Daniel Griggs, Ph.D., of Chico, CA, spent a week living in the monastery. Daniel gave to our men in formation two classes on the life and hymns of the Byzantine Medieval mystic Symeon the New Theologian. Fr Fil, Br Thomas, and Fr Mark also participated in the classes.

On Sunday the 24th the monks hosted a celebratory dinner at noon in honor of Sr Janet Winogrocki. Sr Janet has lived in our Family Guest House for the past four years. There, she lived out her vocation to the hermit life in solitude and silence. At the same time, Sr Janet was always willing to receive guests who might be lodged in the capacious house. She kept an eye on the property and alerted us to repairs that needed to be done. Daily, Sr Janet was with us in the Abbey at Lauds and Mass, and frequently marked the birthday or the anniversary of one or another monk with a "decadent" desert. This year, Sr Janet observes 50 years as a vowed religious. She will be leaving in November to take up "retirement" lodging in St Louis. Our friend Matthew Flatley of St Louis prepared the festive meal, with many monk hands pitching in. Fr Mark produced a gallon of vanilla ice cream with the help of the new White Mountain ice cream freezer procured not long ago by Br Dominic. Fr Leon and the four hermit sisters of neighboring Nazareth Hermitage joined us for this fun and delicious meal. We took the opportunity to celebrate several other golden jubilarians at the same time: Sr Mary of Nazareth, Fr Leon, Fr Robert, and Fr Donald, all who made their final monastic or religious vows in 1954.

Homily for October 7:

The Feast of the Holy Rosary, October 7, was established to mark the victory of Christian Europe over the Muslim Turks. It happened at the battle of Lepanto, an sea battle, that decisively turned back the Muslim invasion of Italy, and postponed, for a time, the islamicization of the west. Now, it seems, Muslims are increasing in droves in Western Europe,

even as Christianity is, by the admission even of some Catholic cardinals, dying there. The rosary was once used as a weapon of war and a shield of defense, an emblem demarcating sides, who is in and who is out.

Kathleen Rain, the late British poet, wrote a poem about her new birdfeeder. She installed it to attract bluetits into her yard, but instead common sparrows came and ate all the feed. At first she is miffed, but then she asks: "How are peacock and nightingale...more miraculous / Than these two-a-penny sparrows / Each feather bearing the carelessly-worn signature / Of the universe that has brought them to the Lord's table / With such delight, never doubting their welcome?"

Today is Thursday, the day of the Mysteries of Light. Each of these Mysteries is a breaking through of customary barriers of physics or culture or space or time. May the Rosary, and our Lady of the Rosary, the Woman clothed with the sun, be for us today an instrument for the challenges of the 21st century -- peace, harmony, reconciliation, understanding, and humility.

Fr Mark, Abbot