

Dear Friends and Visitors

Near the end of September Fr Filomeno and Br Meme departed Ava to make their way back to their own monastery, Our Lady of the Philippines. We held a despedida for them the day before, a warm and bitter-sweet send-off. Fil had been with us for two years, and Meme for one, and both had won our hearts and our friendship.

On October 3, Fr Mark left for Europe where he would spend three weeks in Assisi attending the Order's triennial General Chapter.

These three departures within such a short time of one another had an impact on the community that remained, seven persons in all. Adjustments had to be made in the liturgy and in the work arrangement. Fr Robert, our hermit, willingly took his turn as main celebrant at Mass each week of the month, and Br Josef, OFM, one of the friars living nearby, generously took up some of the slack in the bakery. A few minor accidents, Br Dominic cutting a finger on a band saw, and Matthew injuring his hand in the kitchen, presented additional challenges, all of which were met calmly and cheerfully. It is in times like these that the reality of the Psalm verse is made clear: How good and how pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity.

Below is a letter Fr Mark wrote from Assisi. We thought our visitors would enjoy it.

Domus Pacis, Assisi

October 2005

Dear Brothers

Greetings from the land of Francis and Clare.

The Chapter began yesterday. It is held in Domus Pacis, a facility operated by the Franciscans (OFM) and located right next to the Porziuncola and the church of Santa Maria degli Angeli. Most of the capitulars are living, here, too, taking our excellent meals in the large dining room, and worshipping in language groups in the various chapels. Domus Pacis is located in the town of Santa Maria degli Angeli, a fairly modern town below old Assisi and about four kilometres distance from that little city on the mountain. From here you have a striking view of Assisi. On not a few occasions, early in the morning before our sessions began, I have walked up to Assisi to spend time in the basilica, almost empty of tourists at that time of day.

There are many young friars around the basilica of St Mary of the Angels. This makes me think this might be a house of formation. Instead of always joining one or another of the OCSO language groups for the offices, and attending the daily mass with the Chapter participants, several times a week I attend Lauds and Mass in the morning and Vespers in the evening with the friars and the many lay people that attend in the basilica. The singing is strong and prayerful and I love the Italian language. It is also nice to pray with so many lay people, including an impressive number of youths.

I have spoken briefly with Fr Alberic [Maisog, monk of Ava and presently superior of Ava's daughter house, Our Lady of the Philippines]. We will certainly be getting together a few times during the chapter. Unfortunately, we are not in the same commissions.

The commission I am in includes also Thomas of Vina, Gail of Mississippi, David of Tarrawarra, Sr Rita, US delegate from Santa Rita, and about five others from places including India, Bamenda, Ireland, and Japan. We began yesterday reading the house reports assigned to us, a work that will take up most of the time of the chapter.

As you know, the house report is the brief narration each community submits to the chapter telling its situation at the present time. Each of the fifteen commissions is responsible for studying a dozen or so of these reports, a study which includes a conversation with the abbot or abbess of the house and maybe with other people conversant with the community and its needs, challenges and strengths. Much time and attention is given to this task. It is the principle *raison d'être* of the chapter, and an occasion for the Holy Spirit to work through the pastoral solicitude of the abbots and abbesses for each house of the Order.

Before coming to Assisi I spent a few days in Paris with Fr Francis Michael., abbot of Conyers. I stayed with an American friend and his wife and Francis Michael stayed with the Vincentian fathers. My friend, who is a student of medieval architecture, was kind enough to show me several of the famous churches in Paris. He also drove FM and me to Lisieux where we spent the day visiting and praying at the places connected with St Therese.

After Paris, Francis Michael and I went to the Cistercian abbey of Mont des Cats. From there we were able to visit Sint Sixtus in southern Belgium and also Belval in norther France. With the abbot of Mont des Cats and the abbess of Belval we went to Rome, spending the night at the abbey of Frattocchie before driving to Assisi on Monday the 10th with the abbot of that monastery.

About the General Chapter: These meetings of the abbots and abbesses of the Order take place

every three years. We are today beginning the third and final week of the meeting. There are monks and nuns from every continent and I don't know how many countries. Each of the nearly two hundred houses of the Order is represented by its superior. In addition, there are monk or nun delegates from most of the geographical regions, plus a full complement of supportic personnel: simultaneous translators, text translators, secretaries, and even a nurse/doctor to take care of health needs. All of the latter are talented monks and nuns from all quarters of the world. For the first time in over 50 years there is representation from mainland China -- two young monks, and two nuns, also young. Their presentations and their presence both are moving. There is a large contingent from Japan, too, and a smaller one from India. The representative of the monks' monastery in Kerala wears the saffron robes of an Indian sunyasi. The meetings and exchanges are conducted in French, English, and Spanish, and Japanese with simultaneous translations into each of these languages and also German. Each morning a different geopgraphical region is responsible for preparing the community Mass. This morning it was the African region. There was music, and dance, too, from Madagascar, Camaroon, Congo and so forth.

Please know that I pray for you all daily. I think of you all, gratefully and lovingly, including Fr Richard in Mercy Villa. I count on your prayers in return.

Fr Mark, Abbot