

Dear Friends and Visitors

The Lord be with you—

For years, we have not been able to supply a monk as full-time guest master, who would have his own room in that wing. Now we have Sr. Ann Marie, a Trappistine nun, living there as our Night Portress. She is living what their "old" constitutions described as an Extern Sister. Sr. Ann Marie is a jack-of-all-trades at our Guest House, helping Bridget at times during weekdays and filling in the gaps over a weekend, as well as being a monastic presence for our retreatants. She is filling a real need in our role of hospitality.

Next year will be the 60th anniversary of Assumption Abbey's foundation from New Melleray. Joe Pierson gave the land and two original stone buildings in 1950 to our mother house with a couple of conditions: that the monastery have a few rooms for retreatants and that the land would go back to his heirs if the foundation did not continue with at least five monks for sixty years. Now we are coming to the 60th year with the permanent monastery built, including our guest house wing, and double the minimum number of monks.



We have purchased 60th anniversary stickers for our fruit cake flier envelopes. Several volunteers came and put them on the 25,000 fliers over a period of two weeks. Sarah Manville from West Plains came first, then five Ava High School student and three parents, (raising money for their Project Graduation celebration), next three of our Associates from Cuba-Nancy, Loretta, and Debbie, followed a few days later by Tammy, who completed the project. Our new bakery warehouse was just right for their work. We certainly thank them for carrying out that chore-and in less time then expected.

Craig Murray and his crew of Amish workers are putting new roofs on the Franciscan prayer fraternity's buildings (the former Volchok compound.) They will then use the old metal sheets to cover the leaking shingle roof of the old block plant red warehouse.

Labor Day weekend was our Come and See retreat. Five men from California, Texas, Kansas, Oklahoma, and Michigan shared in it, this time. It was a very fulfilling experience for both the laymen and for our monks. The internet has made our little abbey in the Ozark woods widely

known.

August 20th brought the feast of our father St. Bernard of Clairvaux (and also the birthdays of Fr. Robert and Bro. Lazarus, plus Bro. Boniface's profession anniversary.) He was called the Melliflous (honey-flowing) Doctor. That word lives on in Mellifont (fountain of honey) Abbey in Ireland, possibly in Melleray of France, Mt. Melleray of Ireland, and New Melleray, our mother house in Iowa.



Monastic life was seen in the Middle Ages as the ideal way to live the Christian life—a sort of spiritual knighthood. That was the time when the Church was trying to channel the warlike drives of the recently settled barbarians. She could not stop them from fighting, so she worked out a code of Holy Warfare. There were tournaments in which armored knights contended with each other in front of a gallery of spectators (not all that different

from today's football games). The Church put the idea of chivalry before the knights: courage and honor, uprightness and courtesy toward women, a search for the Holy Grail, and Godly truce on Sundays and during Lent.

Wisdom was the Holy Grail for the spiritual knighthood of the monks. The goal of wisdom, which St Bernard and our Cistercian fathers were searching for, was union with God, contemplative prayer, the experience of God's Presence, and living out the courageous struggle against the powers of evil and darkness.

William of St. Thierry encouraged St Bernard to compose a series of sermons on Solomon's Song of Songs. This collection of courtship poems, which expressed the relationship between the Lord God and His people, in terms of human search and desire, of loss and finding, of noble royal love, was in tune with the chivalry culture of their time. It was an attractive and effective form of presenting the ideal of spiritual knighthood—the mutual love of Christ and the Church, of Christ and the soul.



Many monks today find St. Bernard's sermons on the Song of Songs to be a source of spiritual nourishment and prayer. Yet other monks, during some stages of their life are not helped by Bernard's style and imagery. Dom Francis Kline, late abbot of Mepkin, thought we needed a new form of expressing this mystery, in tune with today's culture and mentality.

One possibility is our modern interest in the Biblical theme of covenant. The Lord God revealed himself to Abraham and began a personal relationship with him by establishing their covenant love of friendship, promising that this blessing of Abraham's would extend to all nations of the world.

Through Moses, God developed this relationship more fully. He gave them the ten words of the Covenant-The Ten Commandments-to show how they should live out their human side of this covenant agreement. God promised that on His divine side of the partnership He would always be with them in His abiding protecting presence. This was a conditional covenant sanctioned by blessings or curses.

Later God made an even stronger covenant with King David and his sons. When the kings and people of Israel went astray, God sent prophets to recall the blessings or curses, which would come upon them, because of keeping or breaking, their side of this working covenant partnership. God also inspired one of Israel's wisdom teachers to gather a number of popular love songs into a picture of courtship...an ongoing courtship, which did not arrive at the final fulfillment of marriage... as a symbol of the relationship between God and His people.

Finally the Son of God Himself came on earth to live out in a visible, tangible way the divine side of covenant union, and at the same time He lived out fully the human side of the covenant partnership. Our Lord Jesus, on the last night of His life established the New and Eternal Covenant with His disciples, giving them and us the Eucharist as our redeeming covenant sacrifice and the sacrament of personal union. Sharing in the Eucharist deepens our adopted share in God's divine family life through Christ's gift of the indwelling Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Wisdom.

Focusing on Our Lord Jesus' Eucharistic covenant union with us does not replace St. Bernard's spirituality of the Song of Songs. Rather the theme of the covenant fills out the context both before and after that song of courtship. The book of Revelation pictures the final completion of this mystery, when John hears the voice proclaim that the time has come for the marriage of the Lamb with His bride, adorned as for her husband.

In the Sacred Heart,

Fr Cyprian