

Dear Associates and Friends:

The Lord be with you.

Donna and Tim Hobart came down here from St. Louis at the end of October to do an annual blood work for our monks, and to give shots for flu, pneumonia, tetanus, and this year's special...whooping cough. They offer the same benefit to our neighbors, the Franciscan friars and the Nazareth hermits. Donna is very informative with the written report, which she sends back to each individual. This is a most useful form of charitable service the Hobarts offer us.

Fr. Paul restored two rows of choir stalls, which had been stored in our former block plant warehouse. We need more places in chapel for the Vietnamese monks. This adds a row of four stalls on each side of choir. Their Abbot Matthew is coming the first week of December with Bro. Roberto. The other two Cistercian monks will arrive the first week of January.

Fr. Peter Vu Dat, who has American citizenship after spending twenty years in the USA as a refugee, has been with us several months already. Those four monks will spend two years as guests in our community. Then we plan to receive four more Vietnamese Cistercians for a second period of two years. This process of gradual and mutual interculturation will be the ground work for an eventual transfer of Assumption Abbey into their hands. Then we Trappist monks will continue here as their guests.

Fr. Peter recently took part in a retreat for Vietnamese priests held in California. Over one hundred priests (and three bishops), out of some nine hundred in the USA attended. Then he was chaplain for a group of Vietnamese pilgrims who traveled to Rome and Medjugorje. He found both experiences to be very inspiring.

Charlie, our black Labrador, went missing for a few weeks. We feared that he had gone off to die. Then he showed up very thin and with his shaggy hair clipped neatly. He had a growth from one front elbow. The vet removed it and found it to be benign. However, Charlie started limping from his other front leg. This turned out to be a case of bone cancer. Bro. Joe Reisch had him put to sleep and cremated. Our other shaggy dog, Elijah will miss Charlie, but he has the two young cats for company now. The male kitten had been a great friend for Charlie, grooming him and sleeping on his front paws.

We have painted the under side of our long guesthouse porch a light blue. Lore claims that the color repels wasps and spiders. New lights will be put up soon that will provide a soft welcoming glow. It does seem to improve the appearance. We shall see.

Jill, our daytime guest master, will cook for the community on the Tuesday before Thanksgiving. This gives Bro. Boniface and Bro. Thomas the opportunity to share in the Thanksgiving Dinner put on by the Heart of the Ozarks nursing home for our Fr. Donald and their other patients. Once, when Fr. Donald had been doing quite well the nurse told him maybe he could return to the monastery if he continued to improve. Fr. Donald replied, "I will tell you a secret--I kind of like it here." He continues to be his bubbly self, but keeps having bad spells and is gradually declining, but he does receive a lot of tender care.

We have much to be grateful for this Thanksgiving...in particular the blessing of new life. Closing our novitiate was a form of dying, and the coming of our Vietnamese brother monks is a form of resurrection. God keeps bringing His divine victory out of our human failure.

THE TWO WAYS

Our Lord Jesus is pretty hard on the Pharisee in the parable about the two praying in the temple. The Pharisee says that he fasts twice a week and pays tithes. However, in today's second reading, Paul, a Pharisee, says that he has finished the race, has fought the good fight and has kept the faith. They sound pretty much alike, boasting of their accomplishments, yet Christ says the Pharisee did not go home justified, but Paul claims that a crown of justice is waiting for him.

What is the difference?

First of all the Pharisee took credit to himself for his good observance. He was convinced of his own righteousness and despised others who did not measure up to his own standards. But, Paul gave credit to the Lord Jesus for standing beside him, and giving him strength, and he added that the Lord would give that same crown to all others who kept their eyes on the Lord Jesus.

Paul had started out with great zeal for the strict observance of the letter of the law, even to the point of persecuting others, whom he considered to be going against the Law of Moses. In a great act of mercy the glorified Christ revealed to him on the way to Damascus the difference between natural perfection, which cannot bridge the gap between creature and Creator, and supernatural holiness, which is a gift of God uniting the human creature with our divine Creator. This gift of sanctifying grace, the Gift of the Holy Spirit, came to Paul through faith in Jesus Christ and baptism. That was the beginning, the starting point of St. Paul's lifelong journey of conversion. Conversion is a journey, a following of Christ on his way of return to the Father.

Pope Benedict XVI found three stages in St. Augustine's conversion. As a young man, Augustine kept searching for Truth. He studied neo Platonism, was trained in the School of Rhetoric, and tried Manichaeism. Finally, came the moment of grace, when the living Word of God spoke to his heart from the page of scripture, giving conviction that Christ, the word made flesh is the Truth. Later as a bishop, Augustine pursued the mysteries of faith, but stopped his writing on the Blessed Trinity, saying that we must present the common man the truth on his own level. After that second stage of conversion, St. Augustine learned from years of experience that no one lives up fully to the Truth of Christ. At the end of a day, everyone--Apostle, bishop or priest, monk or layperson, must ask for forgiveness and Christ's mercy. We need a Redeemer and Savior each step of our way.

In today's Gospel Our Lord tells us that the sincere prayer of the publican, "O God be merciful to me, a sinner" was pleasing to God and won him justification. Christ concludes by saying that those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted. Christ, the Word of God is Truth, and humility is Truth. So, the one who stands in humility meets Christ, and walks with Him as the Way and Truth and Life on his journey of return to Father.

St. Benedict took this saying of Our Lord about exalting self and humbling self, to describe the monk's journey of conversion as a ladder of twelve steps of humility. Benedict's twelfth step has the monk conformed to the lamb of God, bearing the sins of the world and praying always, "Lord, be merciful, to me a sinner." But, that is not the whole story. St. Benedict adds that having come to that fullness of humility; the Holy Spirit gifts the monk, with the fullness of love which casts out fear.

The prayer which Our Lord gave to St. Faustina, "Lord Jesus Christ, King of mercy, I trust in you," expresses the other side of the coin of humility. Our journey of conversion is a lifelong path of following Christ, always giving

us a more full share in humility, the shadow side of His Paschal Mystery, and at the same time, it is a life long path of always receiving a more full share in Love, the glory side of His Paschal Mystery.

At Mass, we enter into the mystery of Our Lord's Eucharist, sacrifice and holy communion. His Mystery of humility and love.

In the Sacred Heart,
Your Ava Monks