

Dear Friends and Visitors

The year of the Lord, 2007. New Years greetings to all our visitors and friends.

We Cistercians, monks and nuns, sing the Salve Regina every night at the end of the office of Compline. The last sound out of our mouth for the day is the word, Maria, sung.

The Salve was well known and established in France and Germany by the 12th century. That means that our Cistercian Father, Robert, Alberic, and Stephen, knew the Salve and probably sang it, as we do today. One legend has it that when Bernard of Clairvaux, in 1146, was in Speyer, Germany, preaching a crusade, he entered the cathedral just as the Salve was being sung. At that time, so the legend goes, the hymn ended with the phrase, Et Iesum, benedictum fructum ventris tui, nobis post hoc exilium ostende. Bernard was so moved by the hymn and by the moment, that he spontaneously added the words, O clemens, o pia, o dulcis Virgo Maria, genuflecting at each phrase. Today, if you go to the cathedral in Speyer, you will see the three phrases, O clemens, o pia, o dulcis Virgo Maria embedded in gold letters in the pavement of the nave, at the places where Bernard genuflected.

Alphonsus de Liguori used the Salve Regina the outline for Part I of his treatise, The Glories of Mary. I wonder if some of us pre-Vatican II Catholics remember praying the Salve after the low masses. That practice was thanks to Leo XIII, and lasted until the reforms of Vatican II in the 1960s. Sometimes, the Salve was prayed before Mass, and sometimes before the last Gospel.

With regard to the musical setting of the Salve, you really won't find many, apart from the two we are most familiar with, the solemn one so characteristic of Cistercians, and the simple, more popular setting that we use here at Ava. Since both the solemn and simple plainchant were so familiar and much loved, relatively few musical settings have ever taken root.

The Salve invokes Mary as *Advocata nostra*. This title is recalled in Chapter 8 of *Lumen Gentium*, the Council's decree on the Church: "[The] motherhood of Mary in the order of grace continues uninterruptedly from the consent which she loyally gave at the Annunciation and which she sustained without wavering beneath the cross, until the eternal fulfillment of all the elect. Taken up to heaven she did not lay aside this saving office but by her manifold intercession continues to bring us the gifts of eternal salvation... Therefore the Blessed Virgin is invoked in the Church under the titles of Advocate, Helper, Benefactress, and Mediatrix." (LG 62; CCC 969).

This is the meaning of the Salve Regina. Mary has been drawn to heaven but does not forget those who still journey on this earth. Alphonsus di Liguori quotes from the Cistercian Blessed

Amadeus of Lusanne who said that Mary 'our Queen is constantly before the Divine Majesty, interceding for us with her most powerful prayers.' And as in heaven 'she well knows our miseries and wants, she cannot do otherwise than have compassion on us; and thus, with the affection of a mother, moved to tenderness towards us, pitying and gentle, she is always endeavoring to help and save us.' (Glories of Mary, 167.)

Hail, holy Queen,  
Mother of mercy  
our life, our sweetness, and our hope.  
To you do we cry, banished children of Eve;  
to you we send up our sighs,  
mourning and weeping in this valley of tears.  
Turn, then, most gracious advocate,  
your eyes of mercy toward us;  
and after this our exile,  
show us the blessed fruit of your womb, Jesus:  
O clement, O loving, O sweet virgin Mary.

This meditation of the Salve is fitting both for the Solemnity just celebrated, the Nativity of the Lord, and for the Solemnity that begins the New Year, the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God. Mary, the Mother of God, the Mother of Jesus, the Mother of the Church, the Mother of each Cistercian, and of each soul, even those who have forgotten their need for a mother.

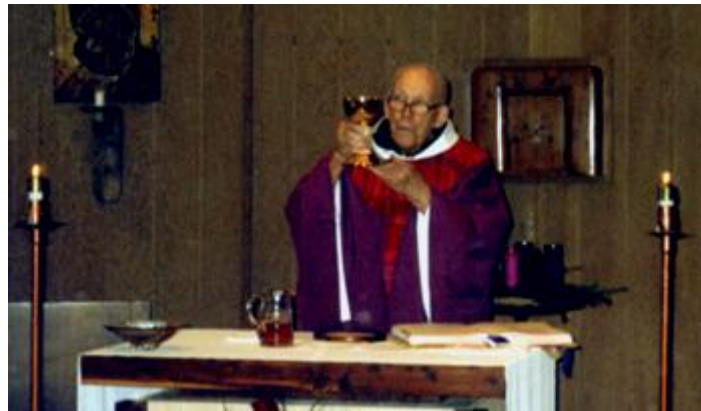


At Ava, at First Vespers for the Solemnity of the Nativity of the Lord, we had the profound joy and privilege of blessing and installing in our little Abbey Church a new icon done especially for Assumption Abbey: "Mother of God of Tenderness." The icon, measuring 20" x 26 1/4", is by iconographer Elizabeth Zeller of Independence, MO. It is written on oak wood covered by pure linen which is then layered with chalk. Most of the pigments are from the earth, including



finely ground stone. The background, as well as highlights on the clothing of Mary and Jesus, is 24 carat gold leaf. The icon is inexpressibly beautiful. It is a "fifth gospel," an apostle and evangelist of the word, illuminating, warming, charming and consoling our church and the monks and guests who worship there.

A few days before Christmas the monks celebrated in a quiet but intense way Fr Donald's sixtieth anniversary of ordination to the priesthood. To mark the occasion, and to stand in the Abbey as a perpetual remembrance of Fr Donald's priestly vocation, we blessed and used for the first time at Mass a new chalice of hammered gold with exquisite lines.



Earlier in the month, we hosted a special Advent Retreat. The retreat, held the weekend of the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, was organized and led by Associates of Assumption Abbey (lay Cistercians). Fr Alberic and Fr Mark each were invited to give a talk as part of the retreat. Fifteen people attended the weekend experience. As was the Lent retreat earlier this year, so this retreat proved to be an opportunity to experience God in solitude, in sharing, and in the Word.

During the month of December we were happy to receive two men who feel drawn to monastic life, and to Assumption Abbey in particular. Each of these men has visited several other of our monasteries, and have found that Ava speaks to them in a particularly inviting way. It is the mystery of a monastic vocation that it eventually is always a vocation, not just to a "life style," but to a concrete place with its own spirit and characteristics. We are grateful to God for calling men to know him through the monastic way, and pray that we do not stand in the way of their response, but rather can be channels for its full flowering in love and dedication.

As usual during January, we will be having our community retreat. Also, we traditionally suspend our fruitcake baking during this first month of the year. We have received so much good feedback about our fruitcake this year, and we are grateful and encouraged. It is our intention to provide our customers with a quality product that at the same time delivers some "taste" of the monastic spirit of prayer and praise. We are happy to think that we have succeeded.

Again, to all, a New Year of Peace and Friendship.

Fr Mark, Abbot