

Dear Friends and Visitors

To our visitors and friends, the monks of Assumption Abbey wish you Merry Christmas (the liturgical season of Christmas extends from First Vespers of Christmas, December 24, to the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord, this year Sunday, January 13), and a most blessed new year of Peace, 2008.

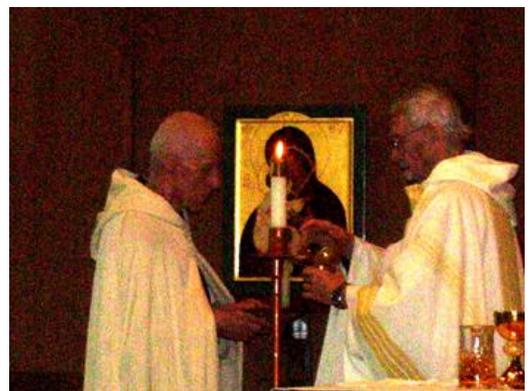


At the Abbey, our Christmas celebrations have been particularly deep and appropriately contemplative. In remote preparation for the Feast of Christmas, Br Lazarus selected passages from St Bernard's Sermons for Advent as the second nocturn readings for Vigils during Advent. With wonderful cooperation and good will we decorated the monastery and the Abbey church for the Feast in the last days of Advent. The homilies have been rich and thoughtful, clearly the fruit of the personal lectio of the preacher, as well as the communal lectio that takes place in the opus dei, the Liturgy of the Hours.

If you have been reading our newsletters over the past few months, you know that the six-year term to which Fr Mark was elected as abbot on December 8, 2001, came to an end on that same date of this year, just a few weeks ago. In late September Fr Mark had made it known to the brothers that he would not be available for reelection as abbot. This news stimulated discernment on the question of leadership at the Abbey. The result of the discernment was the decision to postpone the election of an abbot and agree to the provisional situation of a superior ad nutum, or appointed superior, for Assumption Abbey.

As a consequence, our Father Immediate, Dom Brendan of New Melleray Abbey, Iowa, whose duty it is to appoint the superior when an election has been postponed, appointed Fr Mark as superior ad nutum.

The role of superior ad nutum (ad nutum means, literally, "at the nod of the head," or, "appointed") is not new to the monks of Ava or to our friends. When the brothers elected Fr Mark as abbot he 2001, he had been serving in that role for a year and a half. It is the same office Fr Basil Pennington held from February till August, 2000, and, before him, Dom Flavian Burns. For practical purposes, the only differences between an abbot and a superior ad nutum is that one is elected and the other appointed, and



that one is a permanent office, and the other can be changed at the will of the Father Immediate.

Having said that, for a monastery, especially and abbey, to have a superior ad nutum instead of an abbot is an irregular situation. It is a situation that should be "regularized" as soon as possible, at least within two or three years.

The day of Fr Mark's "retirement" as abbot, and of his being appointed superior ad nutum was, of course, the great Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception. Fr Paul Jones was principal celebrant at the Mass that day. His homily is available elsewhere on this page, or can be accessed by clicking [here](#).



As "abbot emeritus," then, as well as superior ad nutum, Fr Mark participated in the celebration of our Cistercian brothers of Guadalupe Abbey, Lafayette, Oregon, on the occasion of the completion and dedication of their new abbey church. Besides Fr Mark, and the local abbot Peter, eleven other abbots and abbesses of the US Region attended the two-day event at Guadalupe. In addition, the Procurator General of the Order, Dom Timothy Kelly, was present, as well as Dom Bernard Johnson, a senior abbot emeritus of the Region and of the Order.



Fr Mark returned from Oregon with a cold or virus of some kind, and soon this "gift" from the northwest spread through the community. Almost everyone has been affected. Thankfully, the virus has not been too severe, just a reminder of our fragility as mortals, and of the condition that the immortal God was willing to take on himself for our sakes in the Incarnation.

Sunday, December 30, was the feast of the Holy Family, and Fr Mark's homily at Mass that day is available [here](#). If you have not been alerted to the fact yet, let us inform you that Pope Benedict XVI on November 30 issued a new encyclical, his second as Bishop of Rome. The encyclical is entitled "Spe

savli," "By Hope We are Saved." It is a typically original, incisive work, part theology, part reflection and meditation, offering both consolation and challenge to individuals and to the world.

Again, we thank you for visiting us, for writing to us, for asking us to pray for you, for your interest and affirmation shown in so many ways, and we ask the good God to bless you in 2008, the New Year of Grace.

Fr Cyprian, Abbot