

Dear Friends and Visitors

The Lord be with you.

What a tumultuous year 2008 was. We must pray for our new President Obama that the Lord be with him, as he wrestles with the many challenges from within and outside the United States. Especially, we pray that he gains moral value for the sanctity of human life in all circumstances.

It was not clear how our fruitcakes would sell in this time of economic chaos. As it turned out, we sold all of our cakes by the second week of December. Perhaps people chose to celebrate this Christmas with joy and then face whatever 2009 will bring. The quality of our fruitcake was very good, but something was lacking in our shipping skills. We must train and do better next Christmas.

Last year a number of Associates prepared for and entered into personal covenant agreements, which each Associate tailored to his/her own daily life, The covenant expressed the practical ways each would live our Cistercian spirituality during the following year.

Bro. Francis and Wally had cataract surgery on the same day-first one eye, then later the other eye. Both are amazed how vividly colors stand out and how well they can see now.

At Christmas, our two transitional oblates, Fr. Justin and Bro. Andrew, began wearing the traditional oblate habit-all white with a capuche, rather than a scapular. Fr. Paul spent the week before Christmas here as usual. He and our new men did a lot of work on decorations. Fr. Donald would always have an evergreen tree too tall for the flat ceiling in our old refectory, so the top was clipped. Now with our remodeled cathedral ceiling the tree stands tall and whole.

Bridget had a heart attack at home the evening of Our Lady's Assumption. She had five stints put in the blood vessels, but her heart was not badly damaged. After some adjusting of medicines she feels much better and will gradually return to her work as guesthouse factotum.

Lee and Soon Clevenger paid us a short visit. It was good to renew acquaintances. Soon brought homemade cookies, just as Lee's mother had always done for us.

The Springfield-Cape Girardeau diocese assigns forty Hour Devotion periods, honoring Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, to parishes successively through the whole year. We had January 2nd through the 4th for our monastic community's time of special worship. A very appropriate part

of Christmas for our monks and guests.

Here is a slightly adapted meditation on "The Holy Night" from the Marian Movement of Priests' Booklet.

The Dark Cave

On this night, live with me, the mystery of love and light which is Christmas. I want to take you with me on the long journey, which led us to Bethlehem.

I was absorbed in love with the divine Child, whom I was carrying in my womb, comforted by the assistance of my spouse, Joseph, who devoted himself to making the weary journey less burdensome. An interior silence surrounded us in the midst of a noisy caravan. A deep prayer of the heart, and a tranquil peace of soul, in a loving knowledge of the great mystery which was now about to take place.

When we arrived in Bethlehem and every door was closed to our request for hospitality for that night, some shepherds pointed out to us a poor dark cave which, for all its squalor, was ready to welcome us.

This is the Holy Night. This is the night which fulfills the expectation of all the centuries. This is the night in which the Divine Light shines, and brings to an end forever the time of the First Advent.

This is the Night which brings to a beginning the new Day which know no ending.

In this night, heaven is espoused to earth, the song of the angels blends with the voices of the little ones, of the poor, of the pure. To the shepherds is given the announcement which gives joy to all The World -- 'Today is born for you a Savior.'

Bow down, together with me, to the Child, with warmth and love, with sweet and affectionate tenderness.

He is so little; He is just born; He cries because of the sharpness of the cold; He wails because of the great coldness, which enfolds the whole world. Like the shepherds, you too, bring Him simple

gifts. Your welcoming heart becomes for Him his one great comfort.

And you also welcome the great announcement of joy that is given to you this day:

his Second Birth in glory is close at hand. You too are traveling along the last stage of a long journey.

You too are coming to the end of the time of the Second Advent. So therefore, live with me and with

my spouse, Joseph, the hours of this new vigil.

Let a deep silence surround the great noise of words and of images, which today is filling the whole

world. Let the prayer of the heart bring you to a continuous loving dialogue with the Lord Jesus,

who has come, who comes now and who will come in glory. And let tranquil peace of soul mark

the passing of your days, so threatening and thick with sorrows for all peoples. Go forward safely

through the tempest of these last times of great tribulation, without becoming troubled at seeing

that the doors are still closing to Jesus Christ, who is coming.

Your own heart may seem to you to be another poor dark cave.

Open your cave, in spite of its squalor, The Lord Jesus comes

to transform your heart by the Light of his Presence to become

more like the Bright Cave of my

Immaculate Heart.

My Immaculate Heart is the bright cave, which brings to an end this Second Advent, because it welcomes the Lord Jesus returning to you in glory.

Fr Cyprian, Abbot