

Dear Associates and Friends,

The Lord be with you!

Abbot Joseph of Our Lady of Divine Grace in Vietnam visited us in early Lent. He had personal interviews with both his own monks here and also with our American monks. That provides him and his community in Vietnam a good picture of the progress we are making in our program of gradual blending and eventual transfer.

The Commission of the Future with Abbot Mark Scott of New Melleray met here in April. Our retired Bishop John Leibrecht is a member of the Commission. He and our present Bishop Edward Rice shared in their consultation. The support of our local bishops has been vital in this project.

Fr. Leon, a hermit of our community, has served from the beginning as builder and chaplain for our neighboring Nazareth Hermitage. This small diocesan group of hermits celebrated their 30th anniversary not long ago.

Fr. Leon's health has been limited after a heart attack and bypass surgery over a year ago. In mid-April at the end of his Mass Fr. Leon collapsed. Several days in the hospital did not improve his condition. The doctor called Hospice finally. So now he has an infirmary room next door to Fr. Robert our other long time hermit. The four hermit nuns, along with their Br. Joseph, attend our community Mass. The nuns provide Fr. Leon with three meals a day and with company. Br. Joseph stays with him at night.

The weather seems ever more strange. There came a "100 years Flood" which dug inaccessible trenches at both ends of our concrete low water bridge. The County dumped several loads of gravel into the trenches, so at least pickup trucks can cross the bridge.

Then a high wind storm knocked out electrical power the night before the feast of our Lord's Ascension. Fortunately the small generator in our basement supplied electrical current to keep Fr. Leon's oxygen machine working during the power out.

Of course the garden is flourishing with all the rain. Plenty of greens so far, but we must wait for vegetables to come. The Vietnamese Sisters of Mary Queen brought some orchids. Br. Gabriel has shown a particular interest and skill in nurturing them. Orchids have an intriguing variety of color and form.

Fr. Peter travelled to Vietnam for the ordination to priesthood and diaconate of monks, whom he had taught earlier. The abbot and community there will decide and choose the next small group of monks slated to come here at the end of the year.

Two candidates are already knocking on the door of the new Cistercian community here. Fr. Anthony is transferring from the SVD Congregation. He is now doing a postulancy at Our Lady of Divine Grace in Vietnam. After vows he can enter here. Peter Vo is a young Vietnamese American from California, who feels called to the monastic life. He is spending an observership period in our community, as a preliminary step.



A CONTEMPLATIVE VOCATION

Let us reflect a little on the role of the Mother of Jesus after His Resurrection.

Our Lord could well have said the same to His mother as He did to Mary Magdalene, "Do not hold me back. I have not yet ascended to the Father. But you are to be a witness to all that I ascend to my Father and their Father, to my God and their God."

At His Ascension Our Lord tells His disciples to wait in the city for the promise of the Father. They will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon them, and they will be His witnesses in Jerusalem, in Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. Then the eleven return to the upper room, and they devote themselves to prayer together with the women and the Mother of Jesus.

At Pentecost the Holy Spirit comes with the sound of a great wind and with tongues of fire, and fills them all with His indwelling presence. The apostles and other disciples begin their mission of preaching and baptizing. Step by step the Holy Spirit directs and moves them throughout the Holy Land and into pagan territory.

We have vivid accounts of St. Peter's, and especially St. Paul's, travels and teachings. They faithfully carry out their vocation of active apostolic ministry.

But what of Mary? On Calvary Christ addressed her as "woman", and gave His beloved disciple to Mary as her adopted son. Even today there is a shrine at Ephesus, where tradition tells us the Blessed Mother and the beloved disciple made their home for some fourteen years.

During those years Mary lived out a contemplative apostolic vocation. In her prayers during the course of each year Mary pondered in her heart and relived the events of her divine and human Son's Incarnation and hidden life, His public ministry and redeeming sacrifice, His Resurrection and Ascension. She bore witness to all who came to her asking and seeking the truth. Mary saw the Infant Church continue living out the mysteries of Christ. She supported the Church and active missionaries with her hidden life of intercessory prayer and sacrifice. She rejoiced with the rejoicing members, and suffered with the suffering members of the Body of Christ.

This is the Biblical foundation of our contemplative monastic vocation. May our Blessed Mother keep us faithful to our vocation.

In the Sacred Heart,

Your Ava Monks



