

Dear Associates and Friends,

The Lord be with you.

Many things happen during the six weeks of no fruit cake baking from mid-December until February. The shipping of cakes continues for awhile. The volume of sales went down, but then picked up again, so that Michael Hampton our manager, said it turned out ideally. A television crew came and recorded our bakery operation for a Christmas special in 2017.

Deacon Tam Tram, who is a campus chaplain at the University of Massachusetts, gave us a series of video conferences. He was trained in nuclear physics in the United States but could not return to Vietnam. He taught, then began a business career. Now he gives classes on "Understanding God From Science" to the university students.

Fr. Basil's mother is in very poor health so he is visiting in Vietnam with his family to work out their care for her. The Cistercian Brother John of the Cross, who is studying at the SVD college in Epworth, Iowa, spent Christmas break with us. Brothers Lawrence and John Baptist also visited here for three weeks before returning to their monastery in Vietnam. They had spent two years at Gethsemani learning English.

January is maintenance time for the bakery. Floors are cleaned and waxed, windows and equipment washed well. Burnt out fluorescent bulbs in the vaulted ceilings are replaced. We also had to dig around to find its septic tank, then we had it pumped out, as well as having a new distributor field put in.

Fr. Alberic drove our Vietnamese monks to the Mary Queen Sisters' convent in Springfield for their Lunar New Year celebration. This is the year of the Rooster in the Asian calendar.

The Dominican Father Reginald Wolford came from St. Louis to give our retreat the last week in January. He explored with us the themes of Everlasting Life, growth through the three stages of the spiritual life, and finally our Lady, as presented in the works Garrigou-Lagrange. The crises in the lives of the Apostles are shown as times of purification through which our Lord moves them forward in their life and in union with Him. We ended the retreat with a Gaudeamus supper (pizza party), complete with Vietnamese, Filipino, Latin, and American songs.

Fathers Paul and Cyprian did work on the dilapidated steps and small porch of Fr. Robert's last hermitage. We are free to take a personal retreat day each month. Some monks spend their retreat day in their monastery room, and some go to one of our two hermitages.



The Paradise Man

Linhxuan Vu Explores the Spiritual Teaching Of The Paradise Man

Ava, MO. When Linhxuan Vu read the essay "The Recovery of Paradise" written by Thomas Merton, he was deeply interested in Adam, the Paradise Man, and wished to know more about the primordial, original, innocent and perfect world before Adam's fall, when the earth had been totally virgin from any experience of sin. Vu estimated that the period might be quite long, even many years. This prompted him to write "The Paradise Man" (published by Xlibris). The book is filled with the most beautiful descriptions and concepts of an ideal world. The glimpses of the Paradise World are the contributed experiences of saints and holy people. The exploration of Paradise World became more crucial, lively and urgent when he found out that the Paradise is not only a story of the past, but it relates to people of today because the Paradise, though once lost by Adam, was regained by the Second Adam and bequeathed back to every generation of Adam and Eve's offspring as inheritance. The exploration even gets its most breath taking shock by testimonies of the present appearance of Paradise as Dostoyevsky wrote: "We do not understand that life is paradise, for it suffices only to wish to understand it, and at once paradise will appear in front of us in its beauty." (Brothers Karamazov) Thomas Merton expressed similar insight: "Paradise is all around us and we do not understand. It is wide open. The sword is taken away, but we do not know it; we are off 'one to is farm and another to his merchandise'". (Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander). Vu insisted that this kind of experience does not belong only to some special people but it should be accessible to everyone on earth. It is in fact being touched and experienced by many people in our midst.

"The Paradise Man" hopes to provide to frequent Bible readers interesting moments of reading Genesis and meditating on the holy period of Adam before the fall. To those who care for spiritual improvement, they will get the opportunity of trying the virtues of the Paradise Man. To readers in general, revisiting Paradise will be an enjoyable break time, a moment of refreshing and recharging spiritual energy before returning to face the daily challenging world.

"The Paradise Man"

By Linhxuan Vu/Fr. Peter, O.Cist.

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*In the Sacred Heart,
Your Ava Monks*

