

Dear Associates and Friends,
The Lord be with you!

We begin the new year with our community retreat in January. Fr. Simon Felix Michalski OP gave conferences based on religious images and sacred Scripture. He delighted in acronyms. HOST can symbolize Humility, Obedience, Surrender and Trust, relating to Jesus in the crib and the Eucharist. Three Family Brothers, John Paul and Big John from Texas, and Fr. Paul from his hermitage came to share in the retreat.

February 1st was the first day of baking to restock our warehouse with fruit cakes. Last year we made over 29,000 cakes, and were able to ship them all out, leaving the cupboard bare.

A long dry spell in winter dried up many farmers' ponds and triggered some woods fires. Then it rained for most of a week causing a full flood over our low water bridge.

Frs. Thaddeus and Basil assisted at a weeklong parish mission, where most of the people are Vietnamese. It means a lot to have confession and spiritual direction in their native language. Such an occasional apostolate outreach fits the Cistercian way of life.

Fr. Alberic had a crew come and erect a four place carport at the parking area behind our kitchen. The workers constructed it all in one day with impressive teamwork. Our Vietnamese monks said, "Oh, we can build the next one ourselves." So now Br. Ambrose and Fr. Bruno are cutting and fitting the pieces for another carport behind the bakery and garage.

Crushed limestone was used for the platform under the carport. It worked so well that Fr. Alberic had all our gravel roads covered with limestone. He and Family Brother Brian worked with rake, shovel and hoe for the finishing touches.

February 2nd is Groundhog Day, but it is also the Feast of the Presentation of the Child Jesus in the Temple forty days after His birth. The tail end and fulfillment of Christmas Season. This year Br. Gabriel's Christmas cactus put out its graceful red blossoms in early February. Now he is ready to plant tulip bulbs in our courtyard, where the rabbits won't have access to their tasty flowers.

Fr. David, grandson of Joe Pierson the donor of our land and original building, who lives as a host in our Holy Family Guesthouse, is now teaching English to our Vietnamese monks. Their earlier teacher was on the staff at Ava High School. He developed a serious heart condition and needed surgery. Fr. David is well qualified and enjoys the new work.

MERCY WITHIN MERCY WITHIN MERCY

Thomas Merton at the end of his book [The Sign of Jonas](#) has God the Father speak to him about "mercy within mercy within mercy."

Our two readings at Mass today speak to us about mystery within mystery within mystery.

In the first reading King David is weeping over the death in battle of his firstborn son Absalom. He had rebelled against his father, trying to kill David and take the kingdom. But David cries, "My son, my son, would that I had died in your place."

A lady wrote, "If God the Father truly loved His Son, why didn't He come and die in his place?" The only answer is that saints and scholars have pondered that mystery down through the ages. St. Thomas has an article in his *Summa* entitled "Why it was fitting that God the Father should send His Son as Redeemer."

Jesus had said, "Jerusalem, killing the prophets and stoning those sent to you." How often He would have gathered their children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wing—but they would not. And later Jesus wept over the city saying, "Would that even today you knew the things that make for peace, but now they are hidden from your eyes." Still in His Paschal Mystery He died for His people.

In today's Gospel a synagogue official asked Jesus to come and heal his little twelve year old daughter who was dying. On the way a woman, who suffered twelve years from a hemorrhage, touched Jesus' garments and was healed, before He had arrived at the official's house to raise his twelve year old from death.

The Fathers of the Church see this event as a parable in action. It pictures the mystery that Our Lord Jesus came to redeem God's chosen people, but on the way, before He brings salvation fully to Israel, the Gentiles, who have suffered as long as Israel, manage to receive redemption through faith before them. In the end Israel also will be raised to life by saying, "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord."

Today Holy Mother Church presents us with mystery within mystery within mystery. This year in December we will have the fiftieth anniversary of Thomas Merton's sudden accidental death. He told

his abbot that he knew himself as inconsistent: aiming high, getting off the track, then straightening out and flying right again. God the Father fulfilled Thomas Merton's vision of mercy within mercy within mercy. This gives us encouragement to trust in Christ, the King of Mercy, as we strive daily to follow Him on the way of His Paschal Mystery.

In His Sacred Heart

Your Ava Monks

