

Dear Associates and Friends,
The Lord be with you!

A Happy & Blessed New Year. Our program of blending and transferring with our Vietnamese Cistercian monks moves forward. There are seven Vietnamese monks here. Fathers Thaddeus and Basil are applying for permanent residence (Green card), Fr. Bruno and Brothers Ambrose, Gabriel and Alphonse apply for extension of their Religious Workers visas. Fr. Peter is already a U.S. citizen. Four new monks are applying for Religious Worker visas to come this new year from Vietnam. Fathers Thaddeus and Basil each went to a different parish to give Advent retreats for the people.

In September our Trappist General Chapter in Assisi approved our Community vote to dissolve in favor of the new Vietnamese foundation here. Next May their General Chapter can establish them as an independent monastery. Then the way will be open for the formal change, perhaps celebrated August 15th, patronal feast of Assumption Abbey.

Autumn of 2017 was certainly a harvest season for us. Br. Boniface died October 16th, and our Franciscan neighbor Fr. Francis also died the same day. Our Bishop Edward Rice presided at Br. Boniface's funeral Mass. Then, Fr. Robert died November 10th. The Nazareth Hermitage nuns sang the *Salve Regina* for him in his infirmary room the evening before.

Five days later Fr. Leon completed a six months stay in our infirmary with the care of a visiting Hospice nurse. He had improved enough to return to his Nazareth Hermitage.

Br. Thomas returned to our Mother House, New Melleray, in Iowa, December 14th. With his advancing age and ailments he will have better infirmary facilities, along with more professional care there. That leaves three American Trappist monks in our Community. Fortunately, or rather providentially, the fruits of our working together with our Cistercian brother monks these past four or five years are solid, so we continue functioning well in our monastic life at Ava.

Fr. Thaddeus harvested enough sweet potatoes from the garden to eat all year. He has been making jerky in a good supply. It was a good fruit cake season also. The shipping went smoothly, and we sold out our whole inventory. We all appreciate the break from baking them until February 1st.

Advent went too quickly...only three weeks, since Christmas fell the Monday after the 4th Sunday of Advent. Fr. Paul has been in charge of our Christmas decorations for many years. This Christmas he suggested that our Vietnamese monks take care of that. He was delighted by their response. They split up the different areas and completed the whole in good time with their own creative touch.

Fr. Alberic, our superior, has been devoting his weekly evening conferences lately to slide show presentations of the General Chapter and also the trip to New Melleray with Br. Tom. Br. Gabriel was a great help in shipping fruit cakes. He also devotes time to caring for orchids, given to us by Vietnamese Sisters in Springfield. The orchid is an ungainly plant, a parasite growing out from decaying wood with a few low floppy leaves, and a long awkward stem. But the buds open out into long-lasting flowers with striking patterns and lovely varied colors. They are unique Chapel decorations.

We celebrated Thanksgiving Dinner with a modest crowd of our usual neighbors and friends. Jill was the chef preparing the mostly traditional American menu. We have much to be grateful for from God's spiritual and material blessings this past year and for the prayerful support of all our Associates, Family Brothers, and friends.



MOTHER OF GOD – MOTHER OF THE CHURCH

At the beginning of a new year, we look back and we look ahead. Pope St. John Paul II advised, "Look to the past with thanksgiving, look to the present with enthusiasm, look to the future with confidence." His exhortation was always, "Fear not!"

Friday, October 13, 2017, was the 100th Anniversary of our Lady's final appearance at Portugal, Fatima to three little children. This final appearance took place on a rainy day. A great crowd of people stood in the rain, having gathered to witness the great sign, which the Blessed Virgin Mary had promised the children would accompany her last appearance.

The three children, Lucia, Jacinta and Francisco, went into ecstasy. They saw and heard Our Lady this last time. Then the crowd of people saw the sun break through the clouds. The sun began to rotate and spin. It started to come down from its place in the sky towards the earth. They wondered if this was the end of the world. But then the sun stopped spinning and went back up into the sky. As the people recovered from their fear, they found that their clothes and the ground, which had been wet and muddy, were all dry, which eliminated the question of illusion or mass deception.

God sent Our Lady to the children at Fatima in 1917 with a message. She asked for prayer and penance for the conversion of poor sinners and Russia, and for world peace. Mary said that if people did not respond to her request and warning, then there would be terrible wars, Russia would spread her errors throughout the world, whole nations would perish...but in the end her Immaculate Heart would triumph. The world would be granted a time of peace.

It seems that enough people did not listen and respond. World War II fulfilled the prophecy of terrible destruction and suffering.

Here we are 100 years later. The worst bloodshed and warfare may be in the Middle East and Africa, where Muslim people are fighting fellow Muslims, Jews and Christians.

Why did God and Mary choose a small village named Fatima for her appearances in Portugal? Fatima was the name of Mohammed's daughter. Did heaven prepare for a future outreach to the Muslim people?

In 1981 a number of children in Medjugorje experienced appearances of the Blessed Mother. This was a small town where Catholic, Orthodox and Muslims lived in tension over religious differences. Our Lady brought the children and eventually the whole town into prayerful peace.

The Church has not yet given approval to the appearances at Medjugorje. At least the message and the fruit of people from different faiths living together in prayerful charity and peace is solid. This is the first step and necessary foundation for an openness and conversion to receive the full truth and revelation of Christ's Gospel and His Church.

The bishop of our diocese, Edward Rice, distributed holy cards to all the school children in the diocese. The holy card has a picture of Our Lady of Fatima with her Immaculate Heart visibly shown. On the back of the card is a prayer of consecration. Bishop Rice asked every child of our diocese to consecrate themselves to the Immaculate Heart on Friday, October 13, 2017, the 100th Anniversary of Our Lady of Fatima.

We celebrate January 1st as the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God. She is also Mother of the Church.

In the Sacred Heart, Your Ava Monks



