

Dear Associates and Friends,

The Lord be with you.

This will be the 30th year of our fruit cake baking. We are enclosing a community picture with every cake. We have five American Trappist and seven Vietnamese Cistercian monks presently in our monastery. The name of each monk is printed by his picture—you don't know the players without a program.

The unusually mild and dry days of March were ripe for woods fires. One Friday evening we scrambled out with rakes and shovels for a fire coming downhill towards a roadside hermitage. Then, the next Sunday morning and afternoon we fought a fire coming uphill toward the same building. The wind was blowing in the opposite direction each day. There were fires on the road near Nazareth Hermitage those same two days. Our local volunteer fire departments came to battle those fires and others that weekend.

Fr. Thaddeus' mother died rather unexpectedly the end of November so he returned to Vietnam for the bittersweet family reunion of their mother's funeral. He and Fr. Basil will be home for Holy Week and Easter. Then we can begin the process of applying for permanent residence in the U.S.A. for both of them.

Fr. Peter accompanied their Vietnamese Abbot Joseph during his February and March visit to their support groups in the U.S.A. Fr. Peter came to America over thirty years ago as a refugee. He is a American citizen and speaks English well so he serves Abbot Joseph as a translator. We enjoyed a week with them here, as the Abbot interviewed each and all of us.

Our dog Elijah has lost his monastic vocation. He spent some ten years residence at the monastery where he was a friendly Chow mix getting along with our outdoors cat, our monks, and our guests, who treated him with dog biscuits. Elijah began missing a few days at a time. Then he did not return. He found a new home at a neighbor's house, where he has the company of a half dozen other dogs. Our neighbor has provided him with flea collar and vaccination shots, as well as daily food, so Elijah is well cared for, though we miss him.

Fr. Paul's recent project was to renovate the cable to the sound box in Church. It had been running across the double doorway at the back, and also across the doorway to the confessional. It took a bit of creative engineering but the final result is quite satisfactory.

Five oak trees in the area behind the monastery and near the garage had been dropping heavy branches during strong winds. It is time to harvest them. A local logger will drop the trees and will haul off the logs cut from their trunks. Br. Ambrose and our handy man Elmer will saw up the branches, and clear the lawn and roadway.

Fr. Bruno, Brothers Ambrose and Gabriel have developed into good cooks. They take turns preparing noon and evening meals. Jill had to help as cook while the three older monks were absent early in the year. That way we have a share in both American and Vietnamese dishes.

Temptation



In the late '40s there was a moody song titled *Temptation*. A popular singer recorded a hillbilly rendition of the lyrics, and it went to the top of the charts.

Holy Mother Church begins Lent by telling us in Matthew's Gospel that the Holy Spirit led Jesus into the desert to be tempted by the devil.

Our first parents were deceived and overcome by their temptation. Jesus overcame His temptation. What did they do wrong? What did He do right?

Our first parents focused their attention on an immediate attraction and lost sight of the whole picture. Jesus stayed centered on His loving Father, so He rejected that immediate attraction.

God our Creator blessed the original human beings with a pleasant state of life. In the center of their home area a Tree of Life grew. If a person ate of its fruit they would live forever. Also, another tree grew there called the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. God told them if a person ate from that fruit, they would die the death.

Temptation came to them in the form of a lie, a false suggestion. *How do you know you would die? Maybe you are missing out on a good experience?* They were wavering. The fruit looked attractive, good to eat, and they could choose for themselves what they liked to do. So they went against God's command and lost union with God. They became subject to death. They had lost sight of the whole picture.

In contrast Jesus had been fasting forty days in a hostile environment. He was hungry, tired, and lonely. Temptation came to Him in the form of relief from such hardship. *How about some fresh bread instead of these stones? Perhaps a display of power at the temple to win followers? Or make a deal with the Roman Emperor to set up a kingdom in this world?* Jesus did not waver. Each time He looked to His Father: *Not by bread alone, but by every word from God—you shall not tempt the Lord your God—you shall worship the Lord your God, and Him alone shall you serve.* In all His temptations He proved to be truly the Son of God, in whom the Father is well pleased.

We try to learn from our mistakes. It is said that those who do not learn the lessons of history, are doomed to repeat those mistakes. The tragedy of our first parents' fall was that they could not regain union with God again by their own natural created power.

So the history of the human family kept going from bad to worse. Yet God the Father did not abandon His creatures made originally in His image and likeness. He promised that in the end a son of the woman would crush the head of the tempter, the liar and murderer from the beginning.

This would be the work of a New Creation. In His work of the first creation God simply spoke the word, and the whole universe came into being, step by step without effort on God's part. In the work of the New Creation God the Father sends His divine Son to become the Son of Mary, Son of the woman He had chosen. As the new Adam He must identify fully with the fallen children of the human family—tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. He takes on Himself the sins of the world as the lamb of sacrifice. By His Passion and Death He offers divine reparation to God for all sins. By His Resurrection to eternal life and His gift of the indwelling Holy Spirit He restores our union with God, making us adopted sons and daughters of God. The gift far exceeds the offense.

As we unite with Our Lord Jesus in His redeeming sacrifice of the Mass and His Holy Communion of the Eucharist, He tells us the same thing that He told His apostles at the Last Supper. **We are those who persevere with Him in His temptations. As the Father has given Him a kingdom so He gives us a share in His kingdom, so that we eat and drink with Him at His table in the Kingdom.**

In the Sacred Heart,

Your Monks of Ava

