

Dear Associates & Friends,

February went out like a lion, and March came in like a lamb, for one day. Then we got a good coating of ice with moderate snowfall. The last two weeks of February produced two good snowfalls, which meant a test run for our new snow plow...or rather, our new free-floating snow blade. A Carriage is bolted onto the front of our small four-wheel drive GMC pickup. The full size heavy blade fits onto the upright of the carriage. It is heavy enough to clear a wide path through fallen snow; and yet is flexible enough to ride up and over bumps. It can be set to plow straight ahead, or to slide the snow either to the right or to the left of the truck. Fr. Alberic had a great time clearing our entrance road, parking areas, and driveways behind the monastery and around our bakery.

Fr. Alberic inaugurated the season of Lent at our community Mass by placing a cross of ashes on our foreheads with the prayer, "Repent and believe in the Gospel." Then that evening of Ash Wednesday he distributed a Lenten book to each of us. We read them during our common *lectio* period observed after Vespers on Lenten weekdays.

The next day Fr. Alberic left for a pastoral journey to Vietnam, then on to the Philippines. Our Cistercian monks have been encouraging us to visit their monastery of Our Lady of Divine Grace. This would help the growing unity of our two communities. Dom Gerard, the new abbot of Our Lady of the Philippines received his abbatial blessing on the feast of Our Lady of Lourdes but Fr. Alberic was not free to attend. Our monks in the Asian Region receive few outside visitors from the Order, so his journey helps the unity of our Trappist Order also.

Fathers Thaddeus, Peter and Basil returned to Vietnam in February to take part in the abbatial election at their monastery. The monks gave a majority vote to Fr. Thaddeus. However their Constitutions require a two thirds majority, in the case of a monk, who has not yet been in solemn vows for ten years. He did not have a two thirds majority, so they will vote again in early March to see how a period of prayer and reflection will resolve the question. Stay tuned.

On a Sunday morning Bro. Boniface stumbled and fell in a dark passage. He felt pain in his lower back. This did not lesson, and seemed to include pain at his hip bones in the afternoon, so we called the ambulance. The CAT scan showed a hairline fracture in his back, but also a build up of urine and feces. The hospital people fixed him up as well as could be done, and we drove him back to the monastery. There were complications the next day, which resulted in another trip to the E R. After a doctor's visit the next week, Bro. Boni now is pretty much his usual spunky self, sitting out the healing process in a

wheelchair. Jill (jack of all trades) has stepped in to supply our cooking needs in the meantime.

SHEPHERD AT WORK

Today both within the Church, and also outside the Church, there is a widespread impression that we have come full circle to the spirit of Pope John XXIII and his New Pentecost of Vatican II.

Pope Francis comes to us as the Good Shepherd who sees the ninety-nine safely in the sheepfold, and reaches out in search of the sheep who have lost their way. He is like the Prodigal Father going out to meet the younger son and brother, as he struggles to return home.

As Jesus of Nazareth traveled through the country of Galilee, Judea and Jerusalem, preaching the Good News that the Kingdom of God is near, healing the sick, driving out demons, and giving favored attention to the poor, the outcast and sinners, He stirred up concern and disapproval among some of the religious and political leaders. But He also stirred up hope and encouragement among the great crowd of common people, who were confused and wandering like sheep without a shepherd.

Pope Francis seems to be leading the Church today with that same Christlike spirit, and he seems to be stirring up that twofold response of grateful approval and disapproving concern.

At the beginning of Lent Pope Francis gives the Church the image and spirit of a compassionate Mother opening her arms to encourage and welcome all her children, both the faithful in order that they might grow into closer union with Christ His Father, and also the wounded, the wandering, and the outsiders, in order that they might find their way to their Father's House. We pray that Mary Our Lady, Mother of the Church, might obtain for us the grace to hear and respond to what the Spirit is saying to the Church Today.

In the Sacred Heart,

Your Ava Monks