

Dear Associates and Friends,
The Lord be with you.

Our Christmas fruit cake business tapers off and quiets down after mid-December. Thankfully we sold out, got the shipping done, and apologized to people who ordered too late. The weeks in between will be given to clean up, floor waxing, and restocking supplies.

We celebrated Thanksgiving Day in the American tradition of grateful prayer to God in the Eucharist for His many blessings. Also we share our Thanksgiving dinner with guests, Nazareth Hermits, Franciscan Friars, and employees. This year two teenage neighbors played their country fiddles, and our Vietnamese Fr. Thaddeus with Bro. Roberto sang a lively piece with guitar.

The first full year of our experiment of interculturalization with American Trappist and Vietnamese Cistercian monks is nearing completion. Things have gone well. We have had some growing pains, as to be expected, yet a good spirit on both sides. The four Vietnamese monks will visit their own monastery, Our Lady of Divine Grace, in January and February. They will take part in the election of an abbot there, and then return here. Four additional monks will gather documents needed for applying to the U.S. State Department for religious worker visas. That will be the next step in our program and experiment. We need of course to keep praying that we listen and respond to God's Will in all of this.



Bro. Bennett, a Trappist from Nigeria, arrived in mid-December. He will live within our community for some time. Their abbey is overflowing with vocations. They are also flooded with pilgrims, since their bishop has designated that monastery as a pilgrim's shrine. They are concerned about giving their monks a solid monastic foundation by allowing them to live in some other

communities for a period of time.



Bro. Boniface's younger brother Bill died on December 13th. He was under Hospice care, yet his end was sooner than expected. Advent looks for the Coming of the Lord. That mystery was fulfilled for him. He will have the happiest Christmas ever, though his widow and eight grown children will feel a profound sense of loss. Their parish church in California could not schedule his funeral before Dec. 23, so Bro. Boniface has time with his family there. His return travel date is Christmas Day. His older brother, Fr. Jack, died earlier this year.

REJOICE

Three persons are prominent in the Advent liturgy: Isaiah, John the Baptist, and Mary. The Mass readings for Gaudete Sunday bring together all three. For now let us focus on Our Lady.

The first reading is taken from a Servant Song of Isaiah. "He's sending me to bring glad tidings to the poor, to heal the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to captives, to announce a year of favor from the Lord, a time of judgment by our God." Our Lord Jesus applied this passage to Himself in the synagogue at Nazareth. We can apply the same text to the Virgin Mary in Advent. She was anointed by the Holy Spirit, when the Angel Gabriel brought her the good news that she was to be the mother of the long awaited Messiah, Who would bring the promised Day of the Lord, a day of salvation, a day of judgment.

Isaiah continues, "I rejoice heartily in the Lord. In my God is the joy of my soul, for He has clothed me with a robe of salvation, and wrapped me in a mantle of justice...like a bride bedecked

with her jewels.” God made Mary the bride of the Holy Spirit. Gabriel addressed her, “Hail, full of Grace.” She was already clothed with the created grace of her Immaculate Conception, and then the Holy Spirit poured forth the Uncreated Grace of the Son of God into her womb, so that she became a mantle of justice covering her Incarnate Son, Who became the joy of her soul, dwelling within her.

Isaiah concludes his Servant song, “As the earth brings forth plants, and as a garden makes growth spring forth, so will the Lord make justice and peace spring up before all the nations. “Mary is the Garden enclosed from which the King of Justice and Prince of Peace will come forth, bringing salvation to all peoples-good news of great joy to all the people.

Next Holy Mother Church uses Mary’s song, The Magnificat, as the responsory psalm connecting the first and second readings. The refrain is, “My soul rejoices in my God.”

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for He has looked upon His lowly servant. (This is Mary’s Servant Song.) From this day all generations will call me blessed. The Almighty has done great things for me, and Holy is His Name. He has mercy on those who revere Him. He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich, He has sent away empty. He has come to the help of His servant Israel, for He has remembered His promise of mercy.

Having introduced us into the Advent joy of Mary, now Holy Mother Church gives us the moral of the story from St. Paul—his first letter to the Thessalonians. “Brothers and Sisters—rejoice always—pray without ceasing giving thanks in all circumstances, for this is the Will of God for you in Christ Jesus.” We can picture the Virgin Mother carrying her Child within her, going about her daily tasks, fulfilling God’s Will in the present moment, rejoicing always, praying without ceasing, giving thanks in all circumstances, because Christ Jesus is within her.

Then St. Paul says, “Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophetic utterances with automatic rejection, but test everything. Keep and retain what is good. Refrain from what is evil.” Perhaps that is what Mary was doing when the Angel Gabriel brought his message to her. She was testing the spirit. “How can this be? I do not know a man.” When the angel reassured her that the Holy Spirit would overshadow her, confirming that it would be God’s work, then she was at peace. This is how St. Paul expresses it. “May the God of peace make you perfectly holy, and may you be preserved for the coming of Our Lord Jesus Christ entirely blameless body, soul, and spirit.” The more fully the Holy Spirit dwells in our own spirit, the more holy we will be; able to preserve our soul and body for the coming of Christ. The more fully we will preserve the peace and joy of Christ within us, as the Virgin Mother of Christ did all through her life. St. Paul concludes, “The One Who calls you is faithful, and He will accomplish it.”

In Our Savior and His Mother,
Your Ava Monks