

Dear Associates and Friends,
The Lord be with you—

A time of change or passage. Last winter was severe enough to convince Fr. Robert, our hermit, that it was time for him to leave his rustic hermitage and move back into our monastery. The Arizona Trappistine nuns, when he was there as chaplain this summer, gave him a T shirt with the logo, "It took me 89 years to look this good." So he now lives in an infirmary room, but insists that the name of that wing be changed to Seniorate.

Fr. Robert is the most flexible of hermits. When decades ago we asked him to leave his hermitage of three years in order to be our abbot, he took the change in stride. After a total of seventeen years as superior, he simply returned to hermit life. There was need of temporary chaplain help for the nuns, so he shifted gears to spend a couple of summer months each year with them. We need a laundry man, so he does that work. Any monk or retreatant can always knock at his door. He now attends all the hours of the Divine Office and all of our community exercises, yet when he is free, Fr. Robert always returns to the silence and solitude of his hermit calling. A genuine hermit is a true blessing for us cenobite (community) monks, showing us a vocation beyond our own.

Fr. Donald made his final passage/Passover in great style. After seven years in the Ava nursing home ("I kind of like this place"), his failing condition reached the critical point. Jill, our Jack of all trades, showed her health care training and love by staying at his side till the end during his last day here. Fr. Donald completed his journey at Compline. We received Fr. Donald's body in the church at Vespers on All Saints Day. Three visiting Vietnamese friends attended his funeral and did the greater share of covering his body with dirt as it lay in the ground of Mother Earth.

The three Vietnamese friends of our Cistercian monks are professional electricians. They installed a heater in our carpenter shop and replaced some relays in our church heaters during their visit, mixing work with pleasure.

A couple of days later our community had an evening sharing of memories and impressions of Fr. Donald. Every monk had something to contribute. Fr. Paul commented that there is a long term conversion story there, which he would like to know more about. Our sharing was a comforting closure, giving a vision of three transforming energies at work in Fr. Donald's life: his own personal efforts, the support of our monastic family life, and the active presence of Christ's Spirit.

Orders are coming in for the fruitcakes. The Springfield TV station KY3 came out for some filming and interviews, as part of a presentation of events in our local town of Ava. Years ago Fr. Theodore quipped in an interview, "If you liked our concrete blocks, you'll love our fruitcakes."

Bro. Thomas has recovered well from his hip fracture. A side benefit from that medical care has been treatment now for his chronic pain and challenge from lower spine arthritis and displacement. This involves a better support belt and physical therapy, as well as some medication. Still Bro. Thomas is out working everyday at his garage projects.

Our Vietnamese monks, Frs. Peter, Thaddeus and Bro. Roberto relieve Bro. Boniface from his cooking chores twice a week. Our mutual inculturation includes everyone getting used to alternate national food dishes.

Fr. Donald Joseph Hamilton
January 17, 1922- October 30, 2014

Fr. Donald Hamilton died as our monks were chanting Compline on October 30, 2014. He was born January 17, 1922 in Iowa City. After graduating from the seminary courses at St. Ambrose College in Davenport, Iowa and at Catholic University, Washington, D.C., he entered New Melleray Abbey. There he was ordained priest on December 22, 1946, and made final vows April 9, 1954.

Fr. Donald was sent to our new foundation of Assumption Abbey in 1951. He was a strong worker and contributed to the demanding chores of the new beginning. He also taught a variety of classes for our monks in those early years.

Gifted with an artistic temperament, Fr. Donald had an unusual flair for music and mathematics. On the other side of that coin, he had a great challenge with anger to find his peaceful balance within the confines of contemplative community life. However, as years went by, Fr. Donald's basically cheerful disposition prevailed and he mellowed graciously.

Plagued with health problems and a growing confusion Fr. Donald needed round the clock care in his mid-80's, so he spent the last seven years in the Heart of the Ozarks Care Center in Ava. The staff there found it a joy to attend such a bubbly cooperative patient. When his end was near, we brought Fr. Donald home to die among his brothers.

Bishop Ed Rice, here on retreat gave him a final blessing. His body was laid in state in the church all during All Soul's Day. Our retired bishop John Liebrecht was the main celebrant for his funeral Mass the next day. The Good Shepherd seemed to be celebrating the blessed completion of His lifelong care for this special sheep.

Some of Fr. Donald's one liners: Welcome to Heaven!! I am a mystery even to myself. Keep on Keeping on. Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!! He was 92 years old, and had been a monk and a priest for 68 years.

We would like to extend our thanks to the wonderful care that Fr. Donald was given in the last years of his life. Each and everyone involved in his care is appreciated and have had prayers said for them.

Memorials may be directed to the Heart of the Ozarks Resident Music Fund.

WELCOME TO HEAVEN



In the Sacred Heart,
Your Ava Monks