

Dear Associates and Friends,

The Lord be with you.

We have moved into autumn without going through our usual mid-summer drought. The lawns have stayed green, the garden flourishes. However the occasional gulley-washer has revealed a leak from the roof in the hallway outside our Church door. Frs. Paul and Cyprian had painted some rust spots appearing on the roof panels. Further investigating discovered the Achilles' heel which let the water in. Plugging and caulking have been applied. Now we wait for the next gulley-washer to check out the repair work.

Our superior Fr. Alberic traveled to Holy Spirit Abbey in Conyers, GA to attend the Blessing of their new Abbot Augustine. Dom Francis Michael their former abbot gave us our annual retreat a few years ago. He turned 75, and has now retired to a more free monastic living. Fr. Alberic gave us a slide show from pictures he took during his visit there.

Fr. Robert, our senior monk at 91, made a visit to the Mercy Hospital emergency room one evening with chest pain. After a long night on a bed in a hallway nook, the doctors released him with some new and adjusted medication. He is doing well, attending community exercises, and dividing his days between reading and praying before the Blessed Sacrament.

Michael Hogue is our regular fruit cake baker. He had an infected molar. The infection went into his tongue and throat, which swelled up so badly that it clogged his breathing. Several IV antibiotics and extracting the tooth enabled him to get back on his feet so he is back in the harness again.

Fr. Matthew left for Vietnam after spending several months in our community. He is the abbot who accepted our invitation to establish a new Vietnamese foundation in this monastery. He intends to return here in November and become a permanent member of their group. Br. Bennett has gone back to his monastery in Nigeria. He was with us over a year experiencing the more traditional Trappist way of life. Their Abbey of Our Lady of Mount Calvary has been designated a pilgrim center by their bishop, so they are overwhelmed by pilgrims.

At present we are five Americans and seven Vietnamese monks. The four newly arrived men are part of our daily routine. Br. Ambrose cooks and helps Elmer. Br. Gabriel decorates and packages fruit cakes. Br. Alphonse is assistant baker. Fr. Bruno does bakery work and house maintenance. This program of having four Vietnamese monks come in every couple of years seems to work well and gives time for a gradual adjustment on both sides. Dom Stan of Mepkin Abbey, who directed our retreat this January, said he experienced this as one community, rather than two in the same monastery.

The Associates of Assumption Abbey made their annual retreat here for the feast of our Lady's Assumption. Our Family Brothers continue coming for spiritual R&R; the two Johns from Texas, Dane from Little Rock, Jim from Kansas, recently.



ST. BERNARD - CONTEMPLATIVE AND CRUSADER

St. Bernard blazed across the Church in the 1100's like a shooting star or meteor, leaving a trail of many lights. Two areas relate in a special way to us today.

The first area is contemplative prayer. Bernard composed over eighty sermons on the Old Testament Cantic of Canticles. This is an allegory celebrating the covenant union of the Lord God and His Chosen People Israel. It is a collection of songs describing the adventures of a human courtship. It presents in a poetic way the mutual search and longing separation and reunion of a long courtship. It does not end in the fulfillment of marriage.

We have a New Testament Cantic of Canticles. This Song of Songs is not poetry, but prose. It presents the New Covenant union of God and His faithful people not only in symbolic images, but also in clear reality. Our Lord Jesus' farewell discourse in St. John's Gospel goes on for five chapters (13-17), unfolding the meaning and goal of the new covenant which He is establishing in His Body and Blood at the Last Supper with His disciples.

Christ begins by washing His disciples' feet—a prophetic parable in action, which expresses His redeeming cleansing work as the Suffering Servant in His passion and death. A little later Jesus tells them that He is the vine, they are the branches. This is a Eucharistic parable. We can have life and bear fruit only in union with Him. The essential agreement between covenant partners is that "We will be Friends." The Old Testament covenant was an agreement between the Divine Being and His servants. In the New Testament the Son of God has become man, so Our Lord tells His disciples that He no longer calls them servants, but friends. His new commandment is that we must love one another just as He has loved us. No greater love has one than to lay down His life for His friends. If He the Master washes our feet, we must wash each other's feet. We are His friends if we keep His commandments.



This New Testament Song of Songs extends beyond the Old Testament Canticle in its beginning, middle, and end. The Bridegroom reveals His origin—He Has come forth from the Father into the world. Also, there are two deadly powers at work trying to destroy this covenant union. These enemies are the devil and the world. But there is a still stronger power protecting this ongoing New Testament courtship between God and His people. Our Lord says take courage because He has overcome the world. He also will send another Paraclete, the Holy Spirit, to be with us and in us. This Spirit of truth will bear witness and we will bear witness to Him.

Finally, this New Testament courtship does arrive at its goal and fulfillment, when the Bridegroom returns in the glory which the Father has given Him before the foundation of the world. We already receive a first taste, an experience of contemplative prayer, a beginning of mystical union with god when we receive our Lord Jesus Christ in the Eucharist.

The second area in common between St. Bernard and us today is the struggle between Islam and Christianity. The armies of the Saracens had conquered the Holy Land, and overrun all the Middle East, and were invading areas of the West. St. Bernard preached the Second Crusade of military battle against the Saracens.

Today we are called by our Holy Father Pope Francis and by Our Lady of Fatima and Medjugorje to a different kind of crusade...a crusade of prayer and sacrifice for the conversion of poor sinners, for world peace, and for forgiveness and reconciliation, for healing, justice, and for salvation. Monks are called to be penitents and contemplatives. St. Bernard was first of all a true monk. We, his children, pray today for a share in his monastic contemplative prayer and spirit of compunction, as we live out the magnificent adventure of the New Testament Canticle of Canticles.

In the Sacred Heart,
Yours Ava Monks

