

Dear Associates and Friends,
The Lord be with you.

Fr. Alberic returned on October 1st from Assisi, where the Trappist and Trappistine superiors had gathered from all over the world. Every three years they assemble as the governing body of our Order. This always involves a lot of issues, a lot of preparation, and a quite demanding operation. Each community prepares a House Report for their consideration. The overall situation of our Order reflects pretty much the whole condition of our post-Vatican II Church—renewed vitality and growth in some areas, along with severe pruning in other areas.

The commission, which reviewed Assumption Abbey, gave us a very supportive and encouraging letter. They are happy to see the creative response we are making to our challenge of aging and reduced numbers. They find our program of the gradual blending of our American Trappist monks with Vietnamese Cistercian monks, and the eventual transfer of our monastery to them, to be a work of the Holy Spirit.

Bro. Joseph Reisch made final profession of vows in the hands of Bishop James Johnston on September 14, feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross. As a member of our neighboring Nazareth Hermitage, he is a diocesan hermit. All but one of his nine brothers and sisters attended, along with his father. Our chapel was overflowing. Our bakery workroom was just right for the reception and lunch afterwards. Teenagers, Sheldon and Porter McCullough, came with their fiddles and contributed to the festivities. Bishop Leibrecht who accompanied Nazareth for so many years shared in the Mass of Profession and celebration afterwards. Now back to the quiet solitude of the daily hermit life.

Fr. Paul has completed his project of a cross-shaped pond complete with a splashing fountain within our cloister garth (courtyard). The water sounds evidently attracted a large soft-shell turtle. It was discovered on the bottom of the pond. Somehow it got through the doorway, then climbed up the raised side of the pond. Later the turtle climbed out and is hanging out underneath some bushes in the garth. Fr. Paul is not sure he wants to put fish back into the pond.

At one corner of our cloister garden a patch of wild onions springs up and blossoms in late summer. The bulbs and stems have the usual onion smell when picked, but the clustered blossoms give out a delicate pleasing aroma. The many blossoms are covered with small butterflies, bees, and lightning bugs. Long ago the band leader Phil Harris had a song entitled, "I'm a Lonely Little Petunia in an Onion Patch."

During the past four months, some of our family brothers have come for periods of refreshing their vocations of living as monks in the world. Ran Lahan, an Israeli living in Vermont, Dick Ortez from Oklahoma, Dane Clement from Arkansas, Vince Edwards from Louisiana, and Shawn Askinosie, a Springfield, Missouri man, have shared our community life recently. This particular form of Associate life helps them deepen and put our Cistercian spirituality, into daily practice.

PROBLEM AND ANSWER

Some years ago a man who is a specialist on St. Bernard gave us several conferences. He made a striking statement, "God is the problem. Jesus is the answer."

The prophet Jeremiah in today's first reading expresses the problem which God has become for him in his life. The Lord God first came to Jeremiah when he was a young man. He told Jeremiah to speak in God's name to the people. Jeremiah objected that he was only a youth and was not skilled in speaking. The Lord God told him to go, for He would be with him. Now in his older years Jeremiah cries out in pain and complaint, "You have deceived me, O God and I have let myself be deceived." God's words were sweeter than honey to his taste but he has become a prophet of doom. They all mock his prophecies.

The great problem is the mystery of evil, the presence and reality of suffering in the world and in human life. God saw that all He made was very good. And yet evil is present. There is the

possibility of wrong choices, and the reality of suffering resulting from wrong choices. Even apart from humanly responsible evil and suffering, there are natural disasters, physical ailments and tragedies built into the system of our created world.

God is all good, all powerful and wise, all loving and merciful, all just and patient. How can the divine level of the true personal God be reconciled with our created level of real human life and experience? God is the problem. Logical reasoning can circle around the mystery of evil and suffering, but it can't find a fully satisfying answer.

In the end we must look to the person of Jesus Christ. In today's Gospel Jesus says that He must suffer greatly from the religious leaders and be killed, and then be raised on the third day. Our Lord Jesus does not indulge in philosophical reflection, nor in theories of theology. He simply says that this must be.

Peter understandably is shocked, and tries to correct such a prophecy of doom. But Jesus tells Peter that he is thinking only on the natural level of man. He is not thinking on the spiritual level of God. As long as Peter functions on that level, he is an obstacle/a satan or adversary/to his Redeemer and Savior.

Then Christ goes on to spell out more fully the thoughts of God. If we wish to come after Him, we must deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow Him. If we wish to save our selfish life, we will lose it. If we lose our self-centered life for His sake, we will find true life.

If God is the problem and Jesus is the answer, then how did Jesus in His human life deal with the problem of God's ways, and God's Will for Him? Jesus lived as a true man among men, but always as a Son looking up to His Father. The heart and center of his life was love for His Father, His living relationship of Son to Father. The Father asked Him to be the true elder Brother for all God's prodigal sons and daughters—to enter completely into our human condition and to lead us stray sheep back to the Father's house. Jesus answered the problem of God by listening to the Father's word, by doing the Father's Will, and by striving to please the Father.

Sometimes God's ways became so agonizing for Him that the Son asked the Father if His cup might pass over Him, yet Jesus held fast to His devotion to the Father. He prayed that not His will, but the Father's Will, be done. The Father in His love for His Son did raise Him to glory on the third day.

God is the problem. Jesus is the answer. We enter into that answer by trying to live out the same personal relationship with Jesus, as we see Him living out—Son to Father. Our vocation and calling is not to something, but to Someone. As the Father never failed the Son, so the Son will never fail us, because the Father sent His Son to redeem us and to save us from the mystery of evil and suffering.

St. Paul encourages us in today's second reading to offer ourselves as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, our spiritual worship. Do not conform ourselves to this age, but be transformed by the renewal of our mind, that we may discern what is the will of God, what is good, pleasing and perfect.

In the Sacred Heart,
Your Ava monks