



# Mount Saviour Chronicle

THE BENEDICTINE MONASTERY OF MOUNT SAVIOUR  
P.O. BOX 272, ELMIRA, NEW YORK

NUMBER 3

CHRISTMAS, 1953



**T**HIS YEAR we send you, dear friends of Mount Saviour, our wishes for a blessed Christmas in the form of another Chronicle. To make it a real Christmas Chronicle, we shall devote it exclusively to the "children" of the community: the "juniors" (those who have taken their first vows), the "novices" (those who have received the habit, but with the short scapular), the "postulants" (those who wear the black habit only), and the "voluntary workers" (those who are 'knocking at the gate').

There are sixteen of these "children", more than four-fifths of the entire community. So you see, when we go into the crypt of our new chapel to celebrate there in the 'hidden place', which represents to us the lowliness of God's handmaid, the mystery of Our Lord's Nativity, we realize what a wonderful thing it is to be placed by Divine Providence in a cradle, and to sing, hand and foot bound in swaddling clothes: "The Lord said to *me*: "Thou art my son. *Today* have I begotten thee."

## MONASTIC VOCATIONS

It is surprising to see how many young people in our days feel the call for the monastic life. Oftentimes I am asked: "What do you do to get vocations?" I have to answer: "*We* don't do a thing; *God* gets them." And when people say to me: "Why do you start a monastery like yours in these times of ours which need the active life so much more than the contemplative?", I answer again that Mount Saviour was not founded to get vocations but that the vocations were there and that Mount Saviour has been founded to offer them a place where they could eventually realize the desire that God had inspired into their hearts.

A monastic vocation simply "happens"; it is not "made". And it happens this way. At the hour of our supernatural birth in baptism, the Lord says to each one of us: "Thou art my son. Today have I begotten thee." But many a child of God, when he grows up, finds out that the world is not his Father's house but the dominion of the devil. He realizes that the powers of darkness in large measure impose their law upon those who live in it. Maybe he has fallen prey to them, and has squandered his Father's substance. He begins to be in want, when in the misery and coldness of exile the thought of home enters into his mind. A flood of Divine Love suddenly invades his heart. He realizes that his Heavenly Father has taken him into His arms and says to him once more: "Thou art my son. Today have I begotten thee." But now these words have a new meaning to him. They fill him with the *one* great desire to leave the world and to live as God's child in his Father's house all the days of his life. God has set His seal upon his heart. His seal upon his arm (Cant. 8:6) and lures him into the wilderness to speak to his heart (cf. Osee 2:14).

## VOLUNTARY WORKERS

is of greatest importance for a monastic vocation that the candidate find the place where God wants him to stay, because he is going to bind himself to it through the vow of stability. Sometimes certainty may be given to him as it were "at first sight". Personally I shall never forget the moment when I first saw the abbey of Maria Laach, situated on the lovely lake in the Eifel mountains. My whole being seemed to exclaim with the psalmist: "This is my rest forever; here shall I dwell." (ps. 131:14) There are other cases where the decision takes more time. Therefore, we have our candidates stay with us for three or four months as "volunteer workers". During this time they live in the guesthouse taking part in the work of the monastery, in recreation and in parts of the Divine Office. But they do not go into choir, nor do they get up for Vigils. In this way the candidate has ample possibility to see, if Mount Saviour is the place where God wants to speak to his heart. He should be careful, however, not to come with the attitude of one who wants to see if the place measures up to his own self-chosen standards of sanctity. Christ has more chance to speak to him when he comes in the spirit of the Prodigal Son who said: "Father, I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight. I am not worthy to be called thy son."

At the present moment we have one volunteer worker staying with us, Ronald Hendry of Philadelphia, Pa. His patience in knocking at the gate may soon move the Father to say to his servants: "Bring forth the best robe and put it on him." (Luke 15:22).

## POSTULANTS

The second preparatory step for joining the monastic family is the postulancy. The "postulant" (i.e. 'one who is asking') takes his place in choir and receives the tunic. I must confess that the tunics which our postulants receive are not the best robes available in the Father's house. In fact, a postulant's tunic rarely ever fits. You should see Brother McGuire, a "six-footer" and former basketball champion. All his extremities are sticking out into open space. But that is only one part of the "harsh treatment" which St. Benedict demands should be applied to anyone who newly comes to be a monk. The whole time of postulancy is a difficult one, because the candidate has to start life all over again. He cannot take anything for granted. Walking, sitting, standing, bowing, reading, singing, everything has to be learned. Be-

As the aforementioned giant from Staten Island, we have three more postulants. Austrian-born Brother Rast who is in charge of the "s-a-a-acristy"; absent-minded Brother Gotfredson from Detroit, whose

greatest "cross" is recreation; and Brother Bernard, a happy-go-lucky New Yorker.

## NOVICES

The postulant eagerly looks forward to the date when he will be clothed as a novice. With this step he becomes a "child" of the monastic family and therefore receives a new name, which is always an exciting affair. The candidate is free to express his wishes in this respect but the final decision rests with the superior alone. The older members especially delight in teasing the newcomers with patron saints who have undesirable names, such as, St. Paphnutius or St. Koukoupas.

If anybody wants to know what the monastic life is all about, he should assist in the reception of a novice. The whole community is gathered together. The candidate waits outside the door in his secular clothes until he is called in. Like the prodigal son he prostrates himself before the Father and his family and, to the question of what he came to seek, he answers: "The mercy of God as a member of your family." And now following the words of the Lord at the last supper: "If I don't wash your feet you have no part in me" (John 13:8), the Father girds himself and kneels down before the candidate, washes his feet, dries them, and kisses them, and then gives room to the other members of the monastic family who come, one by one, also to kiss the feet of their brother, singing the words of the Lord: "If I, your Lord and Master, wash your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. By this all men shall know that you are my disciple, if you love one another." This is indeed the essence of the monastic life: it is a school of Divine Love.

Through the washing and kissing of his feet the candidate is "baptized" as it were in the love of Christ as it manifests itself to him through his new monastic family. Now he receives the new garment, the monastic habit. His secular dress, the symbol of the old man and his works, is taken off. The tunic (and this time a better one!), symbol of the new man, is put on, together with the black leather belt, which reminds the monk of the words of Our Lord to St. Peter: "When you were young, you girded yourself and walked whither you wanted; but when you shall be old, you shall stretch forth your hands, and another shall gird you and lead you where you do not want to go." (John 21:18). The scapular, a hood with two panels hanging down in front and in back, a symbol of the sweet yoke of Christ, completes the habit. The scapular of the novice only reaches down to the knees, while for the monks it is as long as the tunic.

At the end of the ceremony the superior addresses the novice and gives him his new name. Thus the

young novice can apply to himself the words of the Heavenly Father to Israel, His first-born: "Fear not, I have redeemed thee; I have called thee by thy name; thou art Mine." (Isaias 43:1)

"Fear not; thou art Mine", these words are written in golden letters over the time of the novitiate, which is to be continued for a year under the direction of the novice-master. According to the explicit demand of St. Benedict the novice-master should not be a severe disciplinarian or a scholar but a fatherly person, a "senior skilled in winning souls" (ch. 58 of the Rule). He has to find out "whether the novice truly seeks God, and whether he is zealous for the Work of God, for obedience and humiliations." (ch. 58). These are the marks of a true Benedictine vocation. It may have been an emotional "being fed up with things", or a seeking of security or some other natural reason which caused the novice to enter the monastery. His spirit has to be tested, to see if it is truly of God. This is shown first of all through the novice's attitude toward prayer, because prayer is the speaking of the spirit to God. The spirit which does not speak to God is not of God. But the spirit which animates the members of Christ's Body is the Holy Spirit who speaks to God first of all in the public worship of the Church, the 'Opus Dei'. The marks of the singing heart of the Church. "Cursed be he that does the Work of God carelessly", these words of the prophet Jeremias (48:10) must be a constant challenge to the novice to dive into the vast ocean of the Church's liturgy that his mind may be more and more in harmony with the inspired words of the psalms, with the lessons from Scripture and from the Fathers of the Church which make up the bulk of the Divine Office.

However, the mere intellectual understanding of the texts of the Divine Office is not enough. Prayer has to be offered to God with a pure heart, and this purity of heart can only be achieved through faithful practice of The Rule. The explanation of The Rule through the novice-master is, therefore, another important part of the novice's indoctrination.

All this takes time and can be done only within the framework of a well-ordered monastic life. At Mount Saviour the daily 'struggle for survival' would not give the novice enough opportunity to learn the ABC's of the monastic life. It is, therefore of invaluable help to us that the Abbot of St. Benoit-du-Lac in Canada offers generous hospitality to our novices. Living at this beautiful monastery they see what we are striving for here at Mount Saviour. Right now our Brothers Luke Pape and Stephen Swann are there. The first is a native of Canada and had the great joy of visiting his parents at Toronto on his



*Building the 'casa abaziale'*

way to St. Benoit. It might be a little more difficult for Brother Stephen, who hails from West Virginia, to find himself in his new surroundings. However, he has discovered that nearly everybody at St. Benoit speaks English and that, at least as far as language and sports are concerned, there is more American influence on the Canadians than there is Canadian influence on the Americans. We shall never forget Pere Pierre Minard, a monk from Liguge in France, who as novice-master truly became an American to his American 'children'.

Our third novice, Brother Augustine McGowan of Oakville, Connecticut, has just returned from St. Benoit. It is not always easy for our novices to get readjusted to our primitive and hectic life here at Mount Saviour where we suffer so much from the lack of proper buildings.

### *JUNIORS*

The misery of our cramped quarters is most felt by the "juniors", those novices who, after their return from St. Benoit and after their year of novitiate has been completed, have taken their first monastic vows. Although these vows are juridically binding

only for three years, the novice who takes them really has the intention of offering his entire life to God through the three vows of 'stability', of 'conversion of morals' and 'obedience'. Through the vow of stability the young monk promises not to leave his monastic family except with the permission of his superior. Through the vow of conversion of morals the monk binds himself to strive after perfection in the manner prescribed by the Rule. This vow, therefore, includes those of poverty and chastity. The vow of obedience helps the monk to conquer his self-will by submitting himself in all things to his superior.

We now have eight members in the community who have taken first vows. Of these, two are lucky enough to study their philosophy at Conception Abbey, Conception, Missouri, famous for its liturgical spirit: Brother Ildephonse Lundberg of Bridgeport, Conn., who was our first novice and received his name in memory of Abbot Ildephonse of Maria Laach, and Brother James Kelly of Dansville, N. Y. (a place which in his estimation can compete with paradise). The others are staying with us here at Mount Saviour. Some of them will go on to study for the priesthood, some will not. But there is no separation between them. They all go to choir and they all have the opportunity to attend the spiritual conferences and classes which are offered them. Four times a week we get together in the morning at the 'casa abaziale', as the former chicken coop is called after its transformation into living quarters for the 'Reverend Father', for conferences on The Rule, and on problems of the spiritual life. We are very grateful to Rabbi Siegel for being kind enough to come up from Elmira once a week to give us a lesson in Hebrew, which is highly appreciated by all of us. There is also a weekly class of introduction to philosophy. Father Bernard Crépeau, whom the Abbot of St. Benoit has sent here and who is helping us since May in many different ways, gives lessons in French and Latin and Chant not only to the Juniors but also to the postulants and novices.

The afternoon is taken up with manual labor. Nearly every one of the juniors has his field of endeavor. Brother Benedict Tighe of Sumerville, Mass., has a good hand for lettering. But of late the dire necessities of life force him to spend much time in the Religious Articles Shop. Brother John Brown of Woodmere, L. I., is suspected by his brethren of taking "Popular Mechanics" for his spiritual reading. He is our builder. The picture shows him in action transforming, together with his assistant, Brother Laur Laforet of Boston, Mass., the chicken coop into a cottage — an operation which turned out to be a complete success. Brother Paul Schretlen, an-

other pearl found on the shore of Staten Island, is mostly engaged in farm work. When he wants to have everybody praying for him, he drives. A man who has to be treated with consideration is Brother Peter Gravel of Bemidji, Minn., because our life depends on his cooking — sometimes hangs only on some noodles. Father Joseph Riordan of Summit Hill, Pa., is the only junior who is already a priest. Nobody envies him his job as bookkeeper.

We hope that this account will give you a more complete picture of the "swaddling clothes" of Mount Saviour. You see our potentialities. You also see that our biggest handicap is the fact that the "cradle" is simply too small for the fast growing infant. There is already quite a number of vocations booked for entry — up to 1956. We need your help so that we may not have to turn away those whom Our Heavenly Father in His infinite mercy has called forever into His House. Think how much it will please the Divine Child if your generosity aids them to sing in gratitude: "The Lord said to me: 'Thou art my son. Today have I begotten thee'." and these words will be yours, too.

In the joy of the nativity of Our Lord, the community of Mount Saviour joins me in wishing you His grace and peace.

*F. Damien Wignm, O.S.B.*

#### CALENDAR

NOTE: The calendar lists only those Feasts which have particular connection with the monastery or on which a special horarium is in effect.

- Fri., Dec. 11—FEAST OF ST. DAMASUS, Pope and Confessor,  
Feast day of Reverend Father.
- Thurs., Dec. 24—CHRISTMAS EVE  
First Vespers 3:00 P. M.; Compline 5:30 P. M.  
CHRISTMAS NIGHT  
Vigils 10:00 P. M., followed by Midnight Mass and Lauds.
- Fri., Dec. 25—CHRISTMAS DAY  
Prime 7:30 A. M., followed by "Mass at Dawn".  
Terce and High Mass 10:00 A. M. Vespers and Benediction  
4:00 P. M.
- Sat., Dec. 26—ST. STEPHEN  
Terce and High Mass 10:00 A. M.
- Fri., Jan. 1—CIRCUMCISION OF OUR LORD  
Terce and High Mass at 9:00 A. M.
- Wed., Jan. 6—EPIPHANY  
High Mass 9:00 A. M.  
Beginning of Annual Retreat for the Community, which will  
close Tues., Jan. 12.
- Fri., Jan. 15—FEAST OF ST. MAUR, first disciple of St. Benedict.
- Tues., Feb. 2—CANDEMAS  
Blessing of candles, candle-procession to the Shrine, High  
Mass at 9:00 A. M.
- Wed., Feb. 10—FEAST OF ST. SCHOLASTICA  
High Mass will be offered for members of St. Scholastica  
League at 9:00 A. M. Vespers and Benediction at 4:00 P. M.  
On Sundays and great feasts Conventual Mass at nine; Vespers  
and Benediction at four.  
On other days Conventual Mass at six and Vespers at 4:30.