



Mount Saviour Chronicle

THE BENEDICTINE MONASTERY OF MOUNT SAVIOUR
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Dear Friends of Mount Saviour:

At the beginning of the Lenten season, St. Benedict invites his monks to look forward with the joy of spiritual longing to the holy feast of Easter, the "sanctus pascha," as he calls it. The fact that we shall celebrate Holy Week this year for the first time according to the new ritual lends a special significance to St. Benedict's admonition. With greatest joy we look forward to celebrating the "Feast of Feasts" in a way which will impress upon our minds much more strongly the vital truth that the death of our Lord is the source of our life as Christians.

It is necessary that each individual Christian comes into vital contact with the Sacrifice of the Cross. "He suffered for our sake and left you his own example; you were to follow in his footsteps." (I Peter 2:21) Every Christian has to be "moulded into the pattern of Christ's death." (Philippians 3:10). This is true in a special way for the monk. The "pascha" of the Lord, his passing through death into life of the resurrection, is the *exclusive* pattern of the monk's life, the one purpose for which he makes profession.

The year 1956 brings to our community the first Solemn Professions. That of Brother John Brown took place on the feast of the Epiphany. On March 21st, the anniversary of the "passing into glory" of St. Benedict, Brother Benedict Tighe took his solemn vows at S. Anselmo in Rome. We hope that Brother James will be able to do the same on the Solemnity of St. Benedict, July 11th, at Monte Cassino. As their "big day" Brother Maur and Brother Paul look forward to August 15th, the feast of the Assumption, of our

Lady's "passing into glory." It seems therefore the right moment to explain the meaning of the monastic profession, and offer some glimpses of the way in which the life of the monk is a "pascha," a passing through death into glory. I am sure you will see your own Christian life in the light of this same mystery.

To acquaint you with the procedure for a Solemn Profession, let us go back to the feast of the Epiphany, the day of Brother John's Profession. We prepared ourselves for the event by a six day retreat. Brother John's family had come to share our great happiness. Brother John often spoke to me about the wonderful family life he had enjoyed at home, surrounded by the love of his parents and the company of his three brothers and his sister. The contentment and harmony of his home had been the natural preparation for his monastic life. In fact, the ideal of the family life had attracted him to the monastery.

The feast of the Epiphany provided an excellent setting for the Profession, which took place at the Offertory during Mass. The Gospel told of the three magi who, following the star, had found the Child with Mary his mother, and falling down, adored him, and offered him gifts. At the Offertory, we become the magi; following in their footsteps we offer gifts to the Infant King. It certainly was a wonderful way for Brother John to follow in their footsteps by offering himself at this moment without reserve to the service of God. He had followed the star of faith. He had found the house, his monastery. He had cast himself down at the feet of the Son of God when four years ago he had asked to be received as a novice, and now

he brought the gifts: gold, frankincense and myrrh; the gold of the natural talents God had given him, the frankincense of adoration and praise, and the myrrh of suffering and dying with Christ.

The ceremony of the Solemn Profession as outlined in chapter 58 of the Rule of St. Benedict follows in many ways the pattern of baptism. It is truly a "second baptism." The promise every candidate for baptism makes, to renounce Satan and all his pomps and to adhere to Christ, is renewed at the beginning of the Profession, when the superior addresses the one to be professed saying: "My son, consider well the contract you are about to make with the Lord. Angels are here invisibly present waiting to record your profession of which you must give an account at the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Wherefore I present to you the Perfect Life which is expressed by imitating the Lord's manner of life. What you must reject and what you must embrace I shall make clear to you. Therefore, my son, speak: Will you renounce this world and its pomps?" The one to be professed answers: "I will." The superior continues: "Before God and His saints, do you promise stability, reformation of your life, and obedience?" The one to be professed answers: "I do promise." It is the meaning of the monastic life to fulfill the baptismal promises to the full. The monk wants to live wholly for the world to come, the world of the kingdom of God. But in order to do so he has to renounce the present world because "it lies in the power of the evil one." (I John 5:19). It is not the physical universe that is meant when we speak of the "world," but fallen mankind as "organized" by the "prince of this world." All it has to offer is "gratification of corrupt nature, gratification of the eye, the empty pomp of living: these things take their being from the world, not from the Father. The world and its gratifications pass away; the man who does God's will outlives them forever." (I John 2:16,17).

The three vows are the way in which the monk fulfills the will of God. They constitute the difference between him and the ordinary Christian. They are the instruments through which the monk dies with Christ in a way which puts him into the same category as the martyrs.

Through the vow of obedience he not only renounces his evil inclinations, but he becomes a "soldier of Christ" who fights under the orders of his abbot,

with everything he has, soul and body. Moreover, he becomes a disciple, a son who receives new life through the teaching of his abbot as his spiritual father.

Through the vow of "reformation (or conversion) of life" he accepts new standards for his actions, more exacting than those which rule the life of the Christian in the world. He renounces all right of ownership, all claims of just reward, the legitimate satisfaction of his natural appetites. He also pledges himself to make the purification of his heart the one and exclusive concern of his life through repentance, humility and vigilance over the impulses of his fallen nature.

Through the vow of stability in the community, he withdraws forever from his country, his kindred, from his father's home. This he does not out of an antisocial instinct, but in order to enter a new family based entirely on the "good zeal" which leads the brethren to endure patiently one another's infirmities, to vie with one another in mutual respect and obedience, and to seek what is good for the other rather than oneself.

St. Benedict sums up the meaning of the vows when at the end of the Prologue to his Rule he says: "... so that never departing from His guidance (obedience), but persevering in the monastery until death (stability), we may by patience share in the sufferings of Christ (reformation of life), that we may deserve to be partakers of His kingdom."

The vows are made not only *before* God as witness, but *to* God as the one who receives them, and who also judges the monk when he does not keep them. However, the taking of the vows also involves reception into the monastic community. Therefore the monk binds himself by a written document which he reads aloud and signs before the representatives of the community, the saints whose relics are kept in the monastery and the abbot. He shows the signature to the abbot and his assistants, and then places it upon the altar. He has signed himself over to Christ, to be offered with him to his heavenly Father, and thus to enter into the "pascha," the passing of the Lord from this world into his glory.

With his arms extended in the form of the cross and his eyes lifted up confidently to heaven, the newly professed monk sings three times, each time on a higher tone, the beautiful verse of psalm 116:118: "Suscipe me, Domine, secundum eloquium tuum et vivam, et non confundas me ab expectatione mea"—

"Receive me, O Lord, according to your word and I shall live, and let me not be confounded in my hope." The Latin term "Suscipere" means the act through which the father, taking up his newborn child, recognizes it as his own. Through his profession, the young monk has been "baptized" anew. He has been put upon the altar like Isaac. Now he stands before his heavenly Father like a newborn son. "Take me upon your arms," he says, "recognize me as your son." However, the newly professed monk does so not because he is proud of what he has done, not because he thinks that through his surrender he has the right to be adopted: "Take me on," he says, "according to your word." God could never be bound by what man does had he not bound himself by a covenant he made which was sealed with the blood of his Son. God's promise is his Word which became flesh, died for us and rose for us. Through the blood of Christ we can enter the sanctuary with confidence, by following the new and living path he has opened for us through the veil of his mortal flesh. Therefore, we may cling, without faltering, to the hope we profess, for he who has given us the promise is faithful (cf. Hebrews 10:19-23). "Let me not be confounded in my hope." The newly professed kneels down and crosses his arms over his breast while he sings this, eager to show by his attitude that his confidence is accompanied with the humility which realizes again and again we have no claim on God's grace, that it is only Christ in us who is our hope of glory (cf. Colossians 1:27).

The monastic community takes up the verse of the psalm each time after the new monk has sung it, because he is now one of them. He does not stand alone before God. The whole body makes its own the petition of one of its members. For the first time, the young monk realizes the strength he derives from the fact that by offering himself with Christ he has broken through the narrow limitations of self and entered into the bigger dimensions of a community which will carry him and support him in his endeavor. He prostrates himself at the feet of the abbot, and his family of monks, to receive their prayers. The abbot rises and leads the community in a series of solemn invocations. "O most kindly Ruler, Lord, we invoke thy fatherly love upon this thy servant John, who it has pleased thee to call away from the world into the society of thy chosen ones, and we beseech thee that he may worthily

persevere in this new life and that he may obtain whatsoever he may ask that be for his soul's welfare." (After each of the following invocations all the community say "Amen.") "May he be wise and humble; may he be true in knowing; shining in obedience; correct in doctrine; undismayed by reproof, grave and dignified; compassionate and loving; cautious in acting; solicitous in his charges; strong in time of trial; patient in the face of injury; established in peace; ready to give to the poor; diligent in prayer; merciful mindful that on the judgment day, thou art to be the in deed; loving to those under him; may he ever be judge of his deeds.

"And may it please thee, Lord, to receive thy servant that he may be united to us by the bonds of fraternal love. Make him sober, simple, at peace in his soul, and may he know that the grace of his conversion was a free gift to him. Through our Lord Jesus Christ . . ."

The fullness of the monastic spirit has been called down upon the young monk in a way which reminds us of the solemn invocation the bishop sings over the baptized Christian at his confirmation. It is like an anointing with the spirit of monasticism, and it is only logical that now the young monk receives the garment as the outer sign of his new state, just as the neophyte is clothed in the white tunic as symbol of the new life he has received through baptism. The clothing with the monastic habit was originally the only ceremony through which the novice became a monk, as we can see in the life of St. Benedict.

The removal of the worldly clothes and the putting on of the habit symbolize the death of the monk. The monastic cowl is a symbol of humility. "Humility is the garment of the Deity," says Isaac of Syria. "The incarnate Word was clothed in it and, through it, conversed with us in our bodies, covering the radiance of his greatness and his glory by his humility, lest the creature be scorched by the sight of him. The creature could not have looked at him, had he not taken on some part of it, and thus conversed with it. Therefore, every man who clothes himself in garments of humility becomes clothed in Christ himself, since Christ desired to be clothed also in his inner man in that likeness in which he was seen by his creature and in which he lived with it."

When the abbot clothes the newly professed monk in his cowl he also covers the head of the professed

with the hood to indicate that he is now dead to the world. A last prayer is said over the monk: "Almighty, everlasting God, this thy servant, on fire with the love of thee, has, by promising thee stability in this community, bent his neck to thy yoke; in thy mercy grant that on the day of thy final scrutiny, placed at thy right hand, he may rejoice in having fulfilled all that he devoutly promised thee." While the community sings psalm 47: "Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised in the city of our God," the abbot uncovers the head of the professed as a sign of the new life into which he enters, and from his abbot and every member of the community he receives the kiss of peace. This ceremony is an integral part of the monastic profession. In Christian antiquity, it was given also after Baptism and after Ordination. It indicates that the profession is not only a juridical act through which the monk takes upon himself new obligations, but that it also confers upon him a new being, a new degree of likeness with Christ and makes him therefore a true

brother to those who have received the same initiation into the ranks of the monks. The kiss of peace expresses the spiritual friendship which is the fruit of their common participation in the same monastic spirit.

With Brother John's profession, we can say that Mount Saviour has "come of age." As Solemn Professions will occur at regular intervals in the future, we shall be made more keenly aware of our great responsibilities as monks. We sincerely believe that these include fervent prayers for all of you who share in our life through your interest, your material help and above all your own prayers for us. All the community join me in wishing you a blessed and joyous celebration of the feast of our Lord's Resurrection.

Devotedly yours in Christ,

F. Ramon Wignm, O.S.B.

THE NEW BUILDING

It will be two years this summer since work was begun on the new building behind our farmhouse monastery—it is really on the way to completion, at last, but there is much to be accomplished still on the interior. Most of the work has been done by the community, particularly by Brothers John and Maur. The building has 15 cells, a refectory and kitchen. We shall have to use it temporarily for the community, but as soon as we can build a wing of the monastery behind the chapel, it will become our guesthouse.

We are now faced with the problem of financing the interior plastering, painting — inside and out — and furnishings of the refectory and cells. A simple design for bed, desks, chair and bookshelf has been worked out by Brother David, using materials we have on hand. This makes it possible to furnish a cell for \$100. We would be most grateful to individual benefactors or groups interested in furnishing a cell. A plaque with their name, or the name of a person in whose memory the cell is furnished, will remind the occupants

always to pray for them. Those interested in providing furnishings, such as tables and benches, for the refectory, are asked to write.

EUROPEAN TRIP

You are reminded that under Mount Saviour auspices there will be a European Tour from June 12-August 17 (including trip over and back by boat). The trip will be guided by Dr. Balduin Schwarz, professor of philosophy in the Graduate School of Fordham University. Father Gregory Borgstedt, subprior of Mount Saviour, will be chaplain. The cost is \$975.00. For further details and registration write to: Study Abroad, Inc., 250 West 57th St., New York 19, New York.

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