



Mount Saviour Chronicle

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

To conclude from the reactions which have reached us, you have received the last Christmas Chronicle with great joy. Now that Easter has come, the Holy Spirit will make your joy full, because Easter is the crown of Christmas. It is the second and the greater birthday of Christ. And it is our birthday in a really deeper sense than Christmas.

To express the greetings and good wishes of the community for this greatest of all Christian feasts and for the blessed Fifty Days until Pentecost, I adopt the words of St. Paul: "We now bring you the good news that God has fulfilled the promises made to our forefathers for us, their children, by raising up Jesus, as also it is written in the second psalm: You are my Son, this day have I begotten You." (Acts 13:32, 33)

This Chronicle was written in Mexico, at the monastery of Our Lady of the Resurrection, which was founded by Don Gregory Lemercier on a lonely and barren hillside above Cuernavaca, about a year before Mount Saviour came into being. New beginnings of any sort are exposed to all kinds of trials and failures. This is especially true when the coming into life of a community is concerned. It follows the pattern set by our Lord's death and his resurrection, which he has summed up in the words: "Amen, amen, I say to you, unless the grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies it bears much fruit." (John 12:24)

Through a strange coincidence, Don Gregory Lemercier, originally a monk of the Abbey of Mont Cesar in Louvain, Belgium, was visiting Abbot Ildefonse at Maria Laach. He happened to be in the room when I came to ask Ildefonse for his blessing on the trip which brought me to the States. Little did we know that at one time we would be engaged in a similar mission; he in Mexico and I

in the States, and that, in many ways, our lives would become alike.

The first attempt to realize monastic dreams in Keyport, N. J. met with failure. Likewise, Don Gregory had to bury his first hope. But what looked like catastrophe at the time became, in the hands of God, a means by which both of us were enabled to make a new and better start. We should never forget that in the act of sowing there is a falling. But the grain must be there. It is the element which has in itself the principle of the new growth. In Don Gregory's case, his deep faith in the Risen Saviour carried him through his time of trial and darkness. The words of St. Paul became a reality to him: "That I may know him and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings: become like him in death, in the hope that somehow I may attain to the resurrection from the dead." (Philippians 3:10, 11)

For this reason, Don Gregory placed the new monastery under the patronage of Our Lady of the Resurrection. The people in Mexico have a fervent devotion to Our Lady under the title of "Soledad," Our Lady of Solitude. One sees her dark statue everywhere in the churches: Our Lady in her bereavement, during the lonesome hours in which she was deprived of the company of her Son.

But then, when the Easter-sun has risen, the "Soledad" appears again, now all dressed in white. People crowd around her and carry her in triumph through the streets. Our Lady of Solitude has become Our Lady of the Resurrection. Her desolation is changed into the purest and deepest joy over the glory of her Risen Son. She has become the mother of many generations of children who call her blessed.

At the monastery here, there are about forty young men. Night after night they gather around a lovely old painting of "Our Lady of the Seven Joys" to close the day

with a last gesture of love for the one whom Christ gave to us as our mother when she was standing beneath the Cross.

One can see the power of the resurrection at work. One can see it not only in the numbers, but also in the spirit of the members of the community, in the faces which radiate it into the hearts of those who come — and they do come, hundreds of them, from all over the country. On Sundays, the little cloister is filled with people. They follow with marked devotion a way of celebrating the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass which allows everybody, without the help of a missal, to understand and to participate. This is something completely new in Mexico where the Liturgical Movement, not very active, is desperately needed.

I talked to a guest of the monastery, a well-educated, serious industrialist from Mexico City. He had listened to the talks Billy Graham had just given there, and had been very much impressed by them. He said to me: "You see, Father, if it had not been for Don Gregory, his sermons on the Scriptures, and the Mass as it is celebrated here, I would probably have made my decision for Christ with Billy Graham, but now I know that the Church is our real Mother who has infinitely more to give us." Then he sadly continued: "But how many people here in Mexico know of 'Our Lady of the Resurrection', and how many people know the treasures of the Liturgy and of the Scriptures?"

On that same day, a copy of a Catholic paper happened to come into my hands which displayed a big headline on the front page: "Billy Graham's forecast of Protestant's future in Latin America Upset" and then the article went on to explain that the vitality of the Church in Brazil, which according to Graham is expected to be predominantly Protestant within 20 years, is shown in the increase of dioceses from 95 to 140 within 20 years; in the increase of priests from 7,000 to 12,000 in the last 17 years; in the 550 social aid centers, the 6 daily newspapers, 100 weekly newspapers, 200 magazines and reviews.

It all sounds as if quantity would assure the future of the Church, but it is evident that the effectiveness of quantity depends on the quality. By quality, I do not mean the degree of "know how" or of scientific and cultural standards. Catholic quantity would enjoy greater assurance for the future with this kind of quality, but it is not the root of the problem. What really constitutes the vitality of the Church is the "power of the Resurrection". The Church is essentially the sharing of the life of the Risen Saviour with men here on earth. The effectiveness of any church-organization depends ultimately on the degree in which it possesses this life.

Here lies the importance, for a Latin American country like Mexico, of a community of monks whose lives are dedicated to the service of the Risen Saviour: who therefore

represent the Church in her joy over the triumph of her Son: Who are mystically Our Lady of the Resurrection.

The spirit of the Mexican people could be expressed in two symbols: the 'heart' and the 'volcano'; the heart the symbol of affection; the 'volcano' the symbol of exploding contradictions. The superior of a community of Sisters in Mexico City, radiating motherliness in the best sense of the word, said to me: "The Mexican is a man of the heart". There is indeed an abundance of kindness and tenderness, and an incomparable emotional richness in evidence everywhere.

Never before have I seen such superlatives of church decoration. Among the cool Yankees in the States, the jungle of garlands, in silver and gold, the figures of angels, men and animals, sprawling all over the walls would be an inexcusable excess, completely out of tune with the general climate. But here they are not. They blend with the effusion in which one seems to swim and which expresses itself in the lavish use of diminutives. People seem to transfigure the whole of creation into an enormous wedding cake. Who could resist the little Indian imp when he asks, with a disarming smile: "Padrecito, un cinquito." "Dear little Father, just a little nickel." When we celebrated the feast of Don Gregory, one of the novices sang an original song in which the word "gollito" played a major role. I asked my neighbor what it meant, and he explained: It's a Mexicanism for Gregory." The typically-Mexican in this case was the tripling of the diminutive: Gregorio had become Gorio, and Gorio Gollo and Gollo Gollito. But the limit of "diminution" was reached when one day, in a small hotel in the south, I pointed out to the maid with understandable indignation some black things crawling on the bed sheet, and met with an unexpected outburst of tenderness. "Cucarachitas", she explained in enthusiastic delight — in English: "Darling little cockroaches!"

I realize very well that all is not sweetness in Mexico. There is another important ingredient in the national diet, the chile. Both meet in the "mole", a thick brown sauce which is poured over meat, preferably pork. "Mole" is a declaration of war against human logic, the squaring of the circle, a combination of chocolate and peppers. There is no better symbol for the volcanic side of the Mexican soul than "mole".

However, leaving aside the "volcano" for the present, and concentrating on the "heart", we realize that there is a "Mexican" in everyone of us, and that the consecration of emotions is indeed the most burning problem of every Christian soul. Therefore, when I now try to explain what "Our Lady of the Resurrection" does to transform the heart, let us remember that our own soul is involved, and that whatever is said of her applies also to Mount Saviour's Queen of Peace.

How the power of the Resurrection transforms human affection is most beautifully shown in Mary Magdalen.

(John 20:11,18; cf. the Gospel of Thursday in Easterweek) She was devoted to our Lord with the whole power of womanly emotion, which clings to what is visible. Even the dead body of Christ remains to her "the Lord". (John 20:2) As soon as she sees the open sepulchre, the thought that she may have lost the body of her Lord throws her heart into deepest mourning. Even after Peter and John had inspected the tomb and had left 'believing', Mary Magdalen "continued standing at the sepulchre outside." (v.11) "A stronger affection riveted to the spot one of a weaker nature." (St. Augustine) Blinded by her sorrow she stooped down in the vain effort to discover the living among the dead. She remained lost in her loss even when the angels asked her: "Woman, why do you weep?" "They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him." (v.13) The loss of the beloved seems to make love more selfish. And yet, the first manifestation of the Risen Lord is granted to the blind searching of Mary Magdalen's loving heart.

Don't you see the Easter-sun rising on the horizons of millions of humans that have lost their bearings in the turmoil of their emotions? Look further. Don't rejoice over the condescension of the Lord without watching the consecration of a sinner's heart.

The first words of the Lord are a repetition of the angel's words: "Woman, why do you weep?" But then he continues: "Whom do you seek?" He interprets her mourning. He penetrates beyond the surface into the true depth of the heart. She is not looking for something, a dead body; she has lost someone, and she will not be satisfied until she has found him among the living.

But Mary's eyes are still blind and her ears are still deaf. She only feels that it is the voice of a friend that speaks to her. This little spark suffices to kindle her hope and her love into a blaze: Sir, if you have borne him hence, tell me where you have laid him and I will take him away." (v. 15) Her heart is so full of him that she cannot conceive of anybody else not thinking of him. But still, to her, he is hers, and love makes her feel strong enough to take him into her own.

Now watch how the Lord frees the true depth of Mary's heart from the crust of possessiveness: Not by a correction, not by an admonition, not at all remaining in that impersonal distance from which he had called her first when he said to her: "Woman, why do you weep?" No, he removes all barriers and steps right into her heart by using her individual name and, as if that were not enough, he gives it an intimate touch which is expressed in the minutiae.

His call is like a kiss, but the kiss of the Risen Lord. It is a kiss which awakens in Mary Magdalen her true

God-loved self. Now her soul begins to rise. "Master," she calls him, a title of reverence, but still belonging to the past, not fitting the glory of the Risen Lord. She has found him as she had known him, and she clings to his feet, lest again he should be taken from her.

A last transformation was awaiting her. "Do not cling to me," the Lord says to her, "for I am not yet ascended to the Father: but go to my brethren, and say to them: I ascend to my Father and your Father; to my God and your God." (v. 17)

One would not do justice to these words, if one would see in them the stern statement that the imminent Ascension forbids the old forms of earthly intercourse. The Ascension is, on the contrary, presented as the beginning of a new union, as the fulfillment of all the deepest longings of Mary's heart.

The language of the Lord is the language of love, but of a love which has its source in the Father who is in heaven. He does not rebuke Mary Magdalen's passionate devotion, but he lifts it up, beyond what she can see and touch of him now, to his eternal sonship.

The words "to my Father and to your Father" make it clear that he who is 'the Father' is Father of Christ and Father of men in different ways, but still they contain the solemn declaration that the wall of separation has been torn down between God and men, that the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ is also the Father of the new family of those who believe in the Lord's Resurrection.

"Go to my brethren," the Lord says to Mary, indicating that "the day" had come which he had prophesied at the Last Supper when he said: "In that day you shall know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you." (John 14:19, 20)

Read psalm 21, the psalm our Lord prayed while he was hanging on the Cross. The psalm begins with the words: "God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" It tells the whole story of the crucifixion to the scene of the soldiers parting the Lord's vesture among them and casting lots for his tunic. (v. 18)

Then it turns into a prayer for help, and immediately (v. 22) the whole tone changes. Salvation, the new life is there, and the psalmist triumphantly promises in the person of Christ: "I shall announce your name to my brethren, in the midst of the Church shall I sing your praise." These words form the background to our Lord's words to Mary Magdalen. (cf. also Matthew 28:10) They at once satisfy and exalt her affection. Like a lark she rises into the sky to become the first messenger of these glad tidings of a new spring. "She who would have chained down heaven to earth is commissioned to proclaim that earth is raised to heaven."

The meeting between our Lord and Mary Magdalen "early on the first day of the week" (John 20:1) is not an

isolated episode. It is repeated whenever the Church gathers to celebrate Christ's death and resurrection in the mystery of Holy Mass. This sacred Action consecrates the deepest longings of the human heart. Instead of being allowed to follow its natural trend to chain heaven to earth, it is raised to heaven. The Risen Saviour announces to the Church, as he once did to Mary Magdalen, the glad tidings of his resurrection and his ascension. We are asked not to stoop down into the empty tomb in lonely desolation, but to raise our eyes to Christ's Father and our Father in the company of our brethren. Here the Holy Spirit unites us in the bond of charity and leads us to the altar to offer our gifts. Here our poor gifts are consecrated in the mystical memorial of Christ's death and resurrection and ascension into heaven, and become an acceptable sacrifice to the glory of the Father. Here the table is prepared for the love-feast of Holy Communion, at which the Lamb of God is the server and the food.

The purpose of a monastic community is to give witness to the consecrating power of the Mass. The monks of Our Lady of the Resurrection are deeply convinced that here lies their mission for their own country, which never to this day has experienced the influence of Benedictine monastic life. The wealth of the heart that is there has to be raised to heaven by the spiritual order of the Church's Sacrifice. In a country of sharp social and racial contrasts,

We ask all our friends to share in our joy and thanksgiving over one of the most important events in Mount Saviour's history, which has taken place since the Christmas Chronicle was printed. On November 19, 1957, by a decree of the Sacred Congregation of Religious, the monastery was raised from the dependent foundation status of a "Simple Priory" to that of a "Conventual Priory," an independent member of the Confederation of Benedictine monasteries.

Reverend Father Damasus, who had been up to now, temporary superior, was appointed on December 15, 1957, Gaudete Sunday, Conventual Prior, for life, by the Abbot Primate, the Most Reverend Bernard Kaelin.

This elevation brings with it, among other things, the right of the superior to take his place in the Chapter of all Abbots and Conventual Priors held every six years in Rome. It is the next step to being given the status of an abbey, which will come in God's good time, after the number of those in solemn vows is increased from the present nine to at least twelve, and adequate buildings provided to enable the community to live the monastic life in full accordance with St. Benedict's Rule.

This honor conferred by the Holy See is in large part a tribute to our friends whose interest and help have

the monks form a family in which all members — Indians and whites, rich and poor, educated and uneducated — are one in the Holy Spirit. Where there is so much ignorance, the monks open their minds to the Word of God, making the Scriptures the spiritual foundation of their lives. Where there is still so much paganism and superstition, the monks let their whole life culminate in the "Work of God," which is the adoration of the Father in spirit and in truth.

Let me end with a little episode I watched the other day in the Cathedral of Mexico City. There was an Indian mother on her knees. In her left hand, she held a burning candle. On her right arm, she carried her youngest baby who was sick. Her other children were all gathered around her. Then the little group started moving slowly down the middle aisle toward the altar, the mother on her knees, the children praying with her and helping her by keeping other people out of her way. Dear friends, this is the royal road of the Christian heart: In the light of the burning Easter Candle, on the arms of its Mother, the Church, it is carried to the heavenly altar. When it reaches it, its joy will be full.

Devotedly yours in Christ,

Fr. Damasus Wingen, O.S.B.

brought us through these first years of the foundation. The honor does not lessen, and in fact rather increases, our material burdens. We know we can continue to rely on the charity which God has already put into your hearts and of which we remain in great need.

Another event which will take place on the feast of St. James, July 25th, is the ordination to the priesthood of two of our young monks, now in Rome, Fr. James Kelly of Dansville, N. Y. and Br. Basil DePinto of Jersey City, N. J. Our Bishop, the Most Reverend James E. Kearney, D. D., has generously offered to perform the ordination at Mount Saviour. Besides the grace of having two new priests, we shall also be blessed by His Excellency's first visit since he broke ground for the chapel on the feast of the Transfiguration, August 6, 1951.

On August 17th, we shall celebrate our annual Dedication Day, anniversary of the blessing of the Chapel of Our Lady, Queen of Peace. This is always an occasion for a large gathering of our friends. At the bazaar held on this day, articles are put on sale for the benefit of the monastery. We depend much on the success of this for our summer expenses. All are asked to contribute articles which can be sold on this occasion. These can be mailed to: Mount Saviour Monastery, P. O. Box 272, Elmira, N. Y.