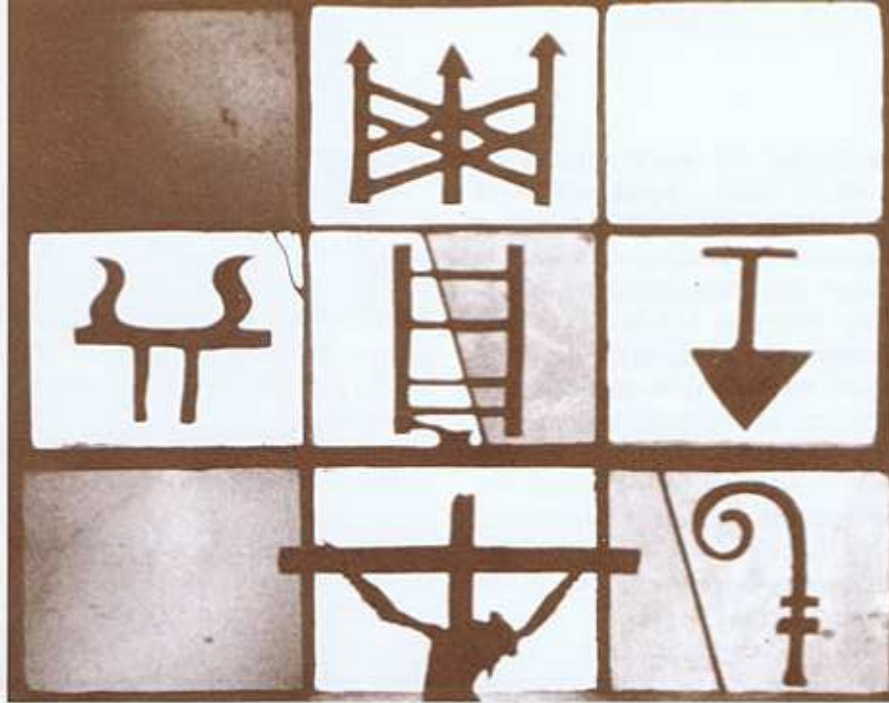


Mt. Saviour
1950 - 1980

PASCHALTIDE

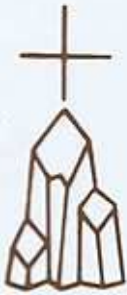


1500th
Anniversary
of the birth
of St. Benedict

No. 58

Mount Saviour Pine City, N.Y. 14871

Chronicle



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Paschaltide, 1980

Dear Friend of Mt. Saviour,

Several days ago we received an \$8.97 book with the compliments of the publishers. It was not a copy to be reviewed, but simply a gift with no strings attached. I had this Chronicle in mind, wondering how to say something about the 1500th anniversary of St. Benedict's birth and the significance of monastic life today without seeming chauvinistic, triumphalistic, or apologetic. There is a pride, a joy, and an awareness of deficiency that is part of our life which I would want to come through, but they are neither the focus nor the substance of its beauty and meaning. Then in the space of a few weeks, this gift of a book, a letter from a guest, and a passage in Newman came together as a fine

combination to portray monastic life from the inside, as it is rooted in Scripture and the life of the Church, and as it is experienced by guests and friends of the monastery.

The dedication of the book, *Studies in Monastic Theology*, reads as follows: "With gratitude and respect this volume is dedicated to the memory of Dom Odo Brooke, OSB, monk of Farnborough, 1905 — 1971. Like William of Saint Thierry, of whom he wrote so well, Father Odo was a Black Monk who greatly enriched the White Monks and all who seek sure guidance in the ways of the Spirit." Most of you know that by reason of the color of the choir robes, we

Benedictines are black monks and the Trappists are white monks. Though we all follow the same Rule of St. Benedict, a fresh inspiration of the Spirit resulted in the 12th century Cistercian renewal, and another in the 17th century produced the Trappists. So we form three households within the same family. It is more complicated than that, since we have Camaldolese and Sylvestrine relatives as well. Anyway, with this splitting and amid the pain and confusion that surrounded the new births, there was always a matrix. Historians concentrate on the divisions and the storms; the ordinary monk is more aware of the matrix and the support systems that maintain the flow of life between these "local churches" which belong to the fullness of the Church.

The words of the dedication of the book quoted above express so well why Benedictine monastic life has endured almost 1500 years and has been a source of new life within the Church. Gratitude and respect for one another, dedication to one another, enriching one another under the guidance of the Spirit are not only words, they have been the deeds of monks. William of Saint Thierry was a 12th century black monk, an Abbot who retired and lived the last thirteen years of his life with the Cistercian white monks at Signy in the Ardennes. The book is published by the Trappists who are a species within the genus of Cistercians. But the book is by a black Benedictine. It is not just that all the bases are touched, but a family circle is manifested, a life cycle is expressed, a unity like the 100 sheep or the full complement of coins in the Gospel accounts. This gift of a book will go unnoticed amid world events. But it is evidence of fraternal exchange, hidden perhaps, but so is our life hidden with Christ in God. And that is important in world events; it is the world event. This is not only the meaning of monastic life, but of the lives of Christians, and of all of humankind. And it is to be lived out in this world, not merely talked about. This is where the passage by Newman fits:

The Daily Service: Newman once preached a sermon, now in volume 3 of his *Parochial and Plain Sermons*, on "The Daily Service". It is in part an *apologia* for beginning the practice of daily prayer — we would say the Divine Office — in his Anglican parish. He says in part: "Therefore, in beginning and continuing the Daily Service, I do not, will not measure the effect produced by appearances. If we wait till all the world are worshippers, we must wait till the world is new made: but, if so, who shall draw the line, and say how many are enough to pray together, when He has told us that His flock is little, and that where two or three are gathered together in His name, He is in the midst of them? . . . Nor is it a service for those only who are present: all men know the time, and many mark it, whose bodily presence is away. We have with us the

hearts of many . . ."

The hearts of many: Guests have always been part of the structure of Benedictine life. Exercising hospitality is taking Christ in because he has taken us in. It is one of the ways we learn of him, simply by doing what he does. Adalbert de Vogue, in his commentary on the Rule of Benedict, says that by sharing in Scripture and prayer the person from the outside was integrated into the community. But the monastic sources from which St. Benedict drew, applied Christ's words on the reception of strangers as himself, only to "brothers", that is, monks. Benedict applies to all comers the rites conceived for the reception of monks! This is an audacious extension which results in presenting even to the secular guest not only the mystery of Christ hidden in them, but their vocation to listen to God and to answer God, to hear the Scriptures and to pray.

This is another reason Benedictine monastic life has not only endured, but has been a leaven in the world. It is an application in time of the Sermon on the Mount, a contact with Christ and the kingdom of God.

Of the many letters the Guestmaster receives from people who have dwelt with us, very few are seen, even by the community. If only once in thirty years we publish a letter, it is not that we are ungrateful for them. I believe the substance of the following letter could have been written by any guest in any Benedictine monastery. That it was written by a particular guest to a particular community only helps to establish the distinctness of persons and oneness of nature which has its origins in the Triune God.

Sister Camille D'Arienzo is a Sister of Mercy in the Diocese of Brooklyn and is presently teaching at the University of Michigan. Her letter reads in part:

"We who come here walk through many worlds. We're college professors and laborers, educated and unlettered, rich and poor, broken and healers, and, as Henri Nouwen put it, "wounded healers." We're celibate and wondering if we've really served the Lord in barrenness. We're married and anxious that we've not sufficiently prepared the children we've brought into the world. We're young and restless, old and discouraged. We're young and discouraged, old and restless. We're changing and are, have been, or soon to become, many of the above.

"We come, for the most part, as strangers, bonded only by the qualities that draw us like magnets to this monastery. Our worlds, our environments differ, as do the miles that stretch between this place and those from which we come. This monastery, your community of Benedictines, acts as a kind of centrifugal force that pulls us to seek God — to respond again to a personal need for centering. We come in search of a credible evidence of faith from which we can draw strength and encouragement.



"Many of us, for all our failings, care deeply about the Church. A number of us, women in particular . . . see ways to bring truth and tenderness to those in need of both, to those whom Scriptures tell us, 'stand on tiptoe waiting to be saved.' We are part of a Church that rebuffs our offers of service, squelches our enthusiasm, contradicts our vision, denies our gifts . . .

"We come because we have a great need to know that our faith is not folly. We need to come in touch with enough reality to enable us to live comfortably (but not complacently) with mystery and disappointment and uncertainty.

"So we sit in your chapel, walk your grounds, drink the milk from your cows, and enter into the lives of other guests — pilgrims like ourselves. There are many surprises.

"What we find in you is openness and easy hospitali-

ty. We find more. We find constancy — a handful of men who in good times and bad praise God, in the presence of outsiders, in the privacy of community.

"You may think of yourselves as weak, imperfect, tired, discouraged, anxious, at odds with one another and yourselves — less than exquisitely successful.

"You may be all that, but you are real. The regularity of your lives, the predictability (even in creativity) of your prayer is a sign of God's fidelity to all of creation, to each of us who live today and come to you because we thirst for living waters. You speak to us of Jesus Christ and image him in the fidelity of your lives. You help contemporize the Gospel message. You compensate for much that is deceptive and shallow in the Church. You support much that is good, many who are good and want to be better, many who are weak and long to be strong.

"We know bits and pieces about each of you — some facts, some apocrypha. You'd be surprised at the tremendous trivia!

"And the facts? You are here and we are welcome. We — the old-timers among us — have watched other monks come and go. We're grateful for what they gave us and you when they were here. Now they're signs of pilgrimage, as you are of constancy.

"Behind the beautiful liturgies, the solid, solemn Eucharistic prayer and chanted hours, we see the effort streaming from your faith. Unlike the lofty incense, we recognize the harder labor of holding on to words and formulas and gestures that testify to God's continued, loving presence among the people . . .

"We're comforted to know that you're not perfect. In terms of function, what you do is different from the way most of us work out our salvation. Mine is a world of textbooks and students, newspaper print and radio waves. I certainly don't know what it feels like to get up in the middle of the night and in the first icy awakening, have to grapple with the stress and scent of the barn and cows waiting to be milked. I'd find it near impossible to endure the rigors of your life: the dairy farm, pruning trees, even cleaning up after guests.

"We bring with us our confusion, noise, importunate demands, and limitations. We leave behind refuse, dirty linen, and, occasionally, reminders of inappropriate behaviour. Some of us, I'm sure do better than that. Some comfort, challenge, affirm, and enrich you.

"The cold of a winter's morning, the heat of the August sun, the hostile earth and demanding animals, the financial problems come together to exact payment from you for the gifts that are yours. But your efforts to pay your own way, your determination to keep this place alive, draw us to pray with you.

"Two people live inside me — the dreaming idealist and the hard-nosed realist. They tell me that the

harshness and coldness in your lives produce the warmth not only of your prayer, but of the environment you create for our spiritual exploration.

"You don't fawn over your guests. You let us come and enter into a dimension of your life. That's fitting because your prayer is for the whole Church. You help restore balance and integrity to the larger picture of Christianity.

"The atmosphere you provide makes up for the structures and rebuffs of the institutional Church. Somewhat. You can't make us holy, but you do inspire us to try harder to become so ourselves. You give us welcome, encouragement, and hope. You respect our individuality. You ask nothing in return.

"We leave. And many of us come again. And again. We bring friends, relatives, sometimes people who are suffering too much for us to help all by ourselves.

"Once we've come to terms with this place that you make holy, we carry its spirit with us wherever we go.

We carry it, in some translation, to worlds, events, and issues you may never see or know. We know you pray for us.

"You are life-givers. And most of us haven't the foggiest notion of how to thank you. This is one person's attempt to do so."

* * * *

Please accept this Chronicle as our attempt to thank God and all of you for our thirty years in this wonderful Benedictine tradition: life as the Paschal Mystery, rooted in God.

In Christ,

J. Mactur



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