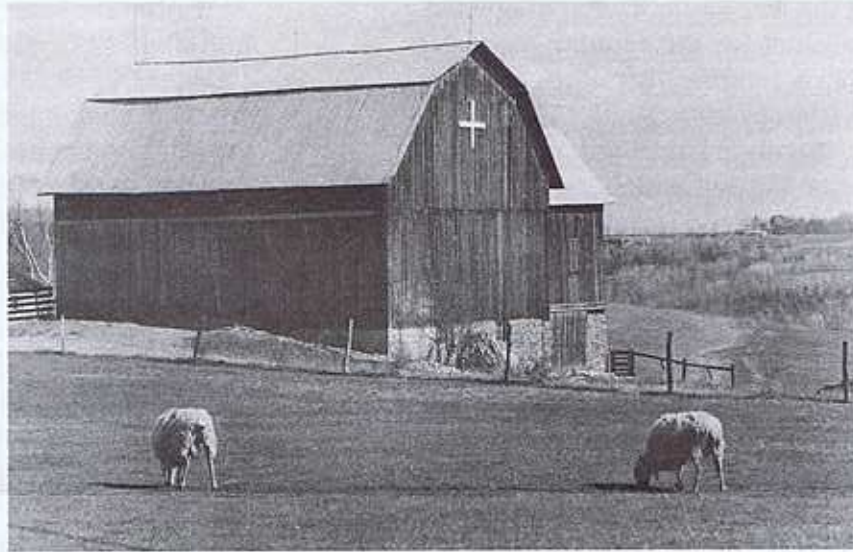


# Mount Saviour Pine City, N.Y. 14871

Chronicle



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## A Moveable Feast Replaces The September Fall Festival

It has been very important for us to have a special day when we invited people to share in our thanks to God and to everyone who has been a part of our being here. On this occasion we invited others to help us in a financial way, so that the Monastery could continue to be a fulcrum of action of the Risen Lord.

The day we originally chose was the Sunday nearest the 15th of August. On that day we dedicated the Chapel under the title of Our Lady, Queen of Peace. We called it Dedication Day. The festivities grew in size and the celebration was moved about until we arrived at the third Sunday in September — and so we called it The Fall Festival. Some of you may remember this with its crowds numbering in the thousands. But there has been a proliferation of attractive events in the Corning-Elmira area and now they are tumbling over one another. It became harder to provide an arts and crafts festival that was unique and memorable. So we cut back a bit in these last few years and had what we called Hospitality Day, not wanting to forgo altogether this coming together to give thanks for one another.

We strongly believe that the world needs a Festival, but at this time, the festival most needed is that of our dedication to the justice and holiness which God shares with us. Our dedication here at Mount Saviour should be to welcome others to share our prayer and communion with one another. So, we go back full circle. This year

you are invited to celebrate Dedication Day on Sunday, August 16. Mass will be at 11:00 AM. It will be followed by an exhibit of some of our art work, with comments on selected ikons as well as some slide presentations on monastic life here. We will have some rides for the young and will scare up a food committee so that we can have light refreshments. We will close the celebration with prayer in the Chapel at 3:00 PM. Please join us for all or any of this day.

In all this revision, we are going to put the Raffle to rest. Although the need for your financial help is still present, we prefer to invite you to help us when you can. (And to help you, an envelope is included for your convenience.) Our mission to guests, who come, as many of you have, to deepen their faith and hope — to celebrate the manifestation of God's love in their lives, makes demands on our time and resources. Enabling others to have an environment for prayer, which gives them a sense of focus and hope through the experience of Christ's peace in a distraught world, is one of our essential contributions to the Kingdom of God. We ask that you share in their endeavor as we ask you to share in our dedication and thanksgiving.

In Xto

*J. Martin*



## A Mystery With Good Reason

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At 4:00 in the morning of April 19, Easter Sunday, the doors of the Mt. Saviour chapel opened. The early hour was not for the regular monastic vigils. It was for a lengthy, strange, unusual event known as the Easter Vigil. This early morning liturgy is remarkable for many reasons. It is an Easter Vigil in which everything is done wrong.

The first thing that is wrong, obviously, is that the time of the Vigil is much too early. To make matters worse the starting time varies each year. The Mt. Saviour Easter Vigil begins at a time calculated so that the Vigil will end as the sun breaks over the tree line in Porta Caeli field east of the monastery. Since the date of Easter varies each year, the time of sunrise varies with it and so the starting time of the Mt. Saviour Easter Vigil is unpredictable to anyone except an astronomer. To add to the confusion there is no publicity.

Any modern liturgy should, of course, be at a decent, regular hour and publicized so that people can attend. Furthermore, it should be short, since busy modern people do not have large amounts of time to spend in Church. Yet the hardy soul who negotiates the disorienting, poorly lit surroundings to arrive in the darkened Mt. Saviour crypt at 4:30 Easter morning arrives for a liturgy which by normal standards begins too early, goes too long, has too many readings and is unpublicized. It is a vigil in which everything is planned wrong. Surely these circumstances should produce a ceremony that the monks of Mt. Saviour would celebrate in solitary splendor without visitors. Yet the visitor arriving in the crypt promptly discovers one of the most surprising things about the Easter Vigil. In the darkness he is likely to bump into a stranger, apologize, turn away and then bump into another stranger. This is so because the dark crypt in the middle of the night is filled with the largest crowd that attends any liturgy of the year at Mt. Saviour.

At 4:30, on the south side of the madonna statue, a wax taper is lit and inserted into a metal cauldron filled with wax impregnated wood. A flame kindles, then leaps up; the crypt is illuminated; familiar faces, friends, neighbors are revealed in the crowd. The fire is blessed; the acolyte hoists a tall, white Paschal candle; the flame is transferred to the candle turning it into a glow tipped white column. The acolyte and thurifer lead the procession around the madonna

to the steps leading up to the altar of reservation. At the top step the acolyte turns, faces the crowd and sings "Christ Our Light." The congregation thunders back, "Thanks be to God", the reply echoing back from the stone and brick of the crypt. The flame is then transferred from the Paschal candle to the small processional candles that the people have in their hands. The fire races through the crowd; smiles break out on faces as the gift of light is received and passed on. In a few minutes the dark, eerie crypt is suffused with a golden glow; the unfocused, disorganized gloom becomes focused on the leaping Easter fire at one end of the crypt and the brightly clad acolyte on the opposite side holding the tall, glowing Paschal candle. The assembly of unseen, anonymous strangers is transformed into a congregation of participating worshippers, recognized friends and neighbors, filled with a sense of expectation of the beginning of the vigil.

The symbolism expressed by the beginning of the vigil is powerful. In a dark, cave-like crypt, reminiscent of the tomb in which all human life ends, and yet centered around an ancient statue of the virgin and child, a symbol of the womb with which all life begins, a scene of gloom and disorganization yields to the light of the fire, symbolizing the light of Christ. The power and beauty of the ritual and its surroundings may account for the large number of people who every Easter morning arrive for the Vigil. And yet as that bright flame leaps out of the cauldron, is transferred to the paschal candle and then to the candles of the worshippers, the worshiping community is engaged in one of the greatest mistakes about the Easter Vigil. We think that we are there to celebrate the Resurrection of Christ and we are wrong.

The restoration of the Easter Vigil mid-way through the twentieth century is a scholarly and liturgical drama of the highest order. Generations of liturgical scholars patiently reconstructed the early Christian understanding of Easter and of the liturgy which expressed it, then, almost miraculously, Popes Pius XII and Paul VI restored the Easter Vigil to its proper practice and place in the Church. Yet the story is incomplete because, though the Vigil has been restored to its early Christian form, we who celebrate it continue to understand it as a more elaborate celebration of the resurrection, and that is exactly what it is not.

The present form of the Easter Vigil was



largely constituted by the Papal decree of 1951, modified by the reform of 1956 and brought to its present form by the liturgical reform of Vatican II culminating in the Roman Missal of 1970. These reforms attempted to restore the understanding that the early Christian Church had of the Easter Vigil in which the Vigil is the celebration not just of the resurrection but of the entire Paschal Mystery: a celebration of the betrayal, suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus and the gift of the Spirit as a unified event. It is helpful to keep in mind that, in the early Church, Lent and Holy Week as we know them did not exist. The sequential, historical commemoration of the last supper, betrayal, and passion of Jesus on successive days before Easter is a product of a later period. In the earliest tradition the celebration of Easter consisted only of the Easter Vigil. Preceded by a short but intense fast of several days, beginning in the middle of the night and finishing at dawn, the Easter Vigil was a unified celebration of the entire Paschal Mystery: of the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus, and the gift of the Spirit. It was Holy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday, Easter Sunday, and Pentecost all rolled into one. This distinction is not simply historical, for it goes to the heart of how we understand Jesus and how we understand His continuing presence among us.

In the spring of 1973, as a senior at the University of Notre Dame, I stayed at school for the Easter break and attended a student Holy Week retreat. A group of us crammed ourselves into cars, drove west over the St. Joseph's River and spent several days at a newly founded monastery of nuns. There was a central building with chapel and meeting rooms. Separate hermitages were scattered nearby. The retreat consisted of conferences, meetings and liturgies in the central building, alternated with time alone in the hermitages. As we progressed through the days leading up to Easter I carefully read the story of the passion in the gospels only up to the point of the commemoration of the day. On Holy Thursday I read the gospels up to the point of the last supper and betrayal. On Good Friday I read the passion narratives up to the death of Jesus. On Holy Saturday I read the burial narratives, and finally on Easter morning I read the resurrection narratives and finished the gospels. My actions reflected what Odo Casel called a "historical — commemorative" understanding of Easter. I understood Easter as a historical event that happened long ago; I and the community remembered it and called to mind its importance,

somewhat like celebrating the American Revolution.

Easter was an event that happened long ago by which Christ saved us. The action was over and completed; God had done it and we remembered it. And this understanding is wrong. It was no accident that all of my college years were marked by an intense religious struggle concerning the existence and nature of God. The questions that I constantly posed to myself usually went like this. "If Jesus has saved us, then why is the world in such a wretched state?" (This was the period of the Viet Nam war.) "If Jesus has saved us from our sins. then why are people so dreadfully cruel to each other?" "If God is as good and loving as the church says he is, then why is there so much suffering in the world?" The questions that I posed to myself and the accusations that I hurled at God and at the Church grew out of the same understanding of Jesus that caused me to celebrate Holy Week as a series of separate, past, historical events. I understood salvation as a past event that God had done long ago and that plainly He had not done well. Like a fairy tale the story of Christ saving the world had a happy ending, but like a fairy tale it had little relation to the modern

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**TWO HAPPY BUYERS** — Eliza Ciccotti and her mother Rhoda take orphan lambs to a new home.



## A Mystery With Good Reason Continued

world in which many endings are far from happy.

Discovering the early Christian understanding of Jesus and its expression in the celebration of the Easter Vigil constituted, for me, a religious revolution. In this understanding of the Paschal Mystery, the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus are continuing events that reflect the lives of each of us. We do not celebrate the Easter Vigil as simply a commemoration of something God did long ago, we celebrate it as the continuing presence of God in our lives and in our world. Instead of living with the unrealistic expectation that God has "saved" us and therefore there will be no more suffering, we live now with the understanding that Christ is present in us in a passage from life and security into suffering and death, and again in a passage from suffering to new life.

When life is filled with radiant light, meaning, and joy, and our world seems secure and ordered, then we are living with Christ at the heart of the Paschal Mystery. Yet when we find ourselves in deep depression, verging on despair in a world in which nothing seems right, then we are also living with Christ as the heart of the Paschal Mystery. But most importantly we live with the awareness that it is not we who control the passage from one to the other. When in the depths of suffering, we wait for God's saving power to bring it to an end, and only by yielding to that power do we achieve passage to new life. When in a time of joy and security, we live with the knowledge that it will prove transitory and still we have confidence that we can survive its loss, pass through collapse and disintegration and come to new life.

In the single celebration of the Easter Vigil we are intensely present to the suffering, oppressed and deprived people of the world and to the sin and evil within ourselves. At the same time we are present to the beauty and joy of creation, to the goodness and generosity of human nature redeemed and restored by God. To celebrate both of these simultaneously may seem a contradiction, even an impossibility, but then the Paschal Mystery is called a mystery with good reason. It is the paradoxical truth at the heart of our religion that life comes only through death and joy comes only through suffering. The Paschal Mystery does not provide an answer to philosophical questions about why the world does not correspond to the way we would like it to be. Instead, it gives us a deep understanding of the

way the world actually is. How many of us would like to convert our religion into a convenient self-help service in which Jesus does all the dying and we do all the rising. What the Paschal Mystery reveals to us is how much God loves us and how He has chosen to save us in a way which is usually different than the way we would choose to be loved and saved. Yet when we experience it we find that God's love exceeds anything we could choose for ourselves or even imagine.

Like the apostles in the Gospel of Mark who understand Jesus only at the end, after a long process of learning, so we too, slowly and arduously, throughout the course of our lives, learn the meaning of the saying, "If you die with him, you will rise with Him."

A two and one half hour ceremony on a cold, rural hilltop in the middle of the night is indeed a strange way to celebrate an Easter Vigil. It may be a ceremony in which many things are done wrong. But that does not matter, for the message of the Vigil is that it is not we but God who does things right.

*Br. Nathan*

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