
"Father, all powerful, and ever-living God, through your son, Jesus our Lord, you bound yourself to the human family by a bond that can never be broken. Now is the time for your people to turn to you and be renewed in Christ your Son, a time of grace and reconciliation. You invite us to serve the human family by opening our hearts to the fullness of your Holy Spirit. In wonder and gratitude, we join our voices with the choirs of heaven to proclaim the power of your love and to sing of our salvation in Christ."

These words from the Mass of Reconciliation announce the same message given by the angels to the shepherds during the night of Christmas. The 'angels' and 'shepherds' of Mt. Saviour make them our message to you during this night of the twentieth century.

J. Martin

Mount Saviour Pine City, N.Y. 14871

Chronicle



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Monks and the Land

The first publication of Mt. Saviour Monastery, shortly after its foundation in 1951, contained a front page photo showing the founders, Frs. Damasus and Gregory, and two neighboring farmers, one of them tethering a dairy cow, with the caption: "A Modest Beginning . . . Monks, volunteer workers and half the herd . . . A start toward eventual self subsistence." That photo, unbeknownst to the monks, was picked up and run by the Catholic newspapers in the New York City and New Jersey area, along with articles on the foundation of the new monastery. Miraculously, at Mt. Saviour, unsolicited contributions began to arrive from Catholic folk, who, moved by the photo and articles, wished to help the struggling monks and their nascent monastery and farm. Those unsolicited and unexpected contributions were crucial to the survival of the fledgling monastery in its first year of life.

From its first years Mt. Saviour has been associated

with a farm and to this day the monastery appears agricultural. To a visitor climbing the monastery ravine out of Hendy Hollow, the first view of monastery land is the sight of the long, terraced pastures sweeping up the hill to the east, these days often speckled with sheep. Going past the bosks of larches and the dense pine plantation on the left, the visitor catches sight, straight ahead, of the high pitched, dark-wood, silver-roofed mass of St. Peter's barn perched atop its gray limestone foundation on the crest on the hill, like a ship with its plimsoll line showing; still supported by the hand hewn beams bearing the axe marks of Melchoir Nagel, the German Catholic immigrant who first cleared and farmed this hill-top a century ago. Past the fruit trees on the right at the site of old St. John's house, then the hedge-row fenced orchard on the left in the final approach to the monastery, a visitor feels him-

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Br. James and Scottish Blackface Lamb

self in the midst of a serene, stable, pastoral setting that has changed little over the years.

Yet, the seemingly unchanging agricultural setting of Mt. Saviour belies a drama that involves a constantly changing, evolving and often troubled relationship between the monks and their land, a relationship that in the thirty-six years of the monastery's existence has been a microcosm of the evolving and troubled relationship between the American people and their land: a portentous trouble of which most of the people of our highly urbanized nation remain blithely unaware.

By the late 1970's the modest beginning of a few dairy cows had grown into a modern, efficient dairy operation, possessing enormous assets in barns, machinery and a prize Holstein herd that was the top producer in the county. Yet, like so many modern agricultural success stories, the Mt. Saviour farm was at the mercy of the price of fossil fuels, feed grains, fertilizers, machinery, and the continuation of price supports amidst a huge food surplus. Further, the hill-side monastery fields were constantly pressed into service to raise grain — a purpose for which they were ill-suited — and the strain of manning the dairy bore heavily on the small monastic community. Finally, in 1981 the dairy was sold and it seemed that Mt. Saviour would join the ranks of most other Benedictine monasteries in this country that have abandoned farming in the past generation.

However, after reflection and discussion, the monks decided that they wished to use their land in an ecologically healthy manner that would be suited to the land itself and to the men who live on it. The fields surrounding the monastery are best suited to be pasture-land producing crops of grass and legumes while retaining a cover to protect the soil. The solution was to switch to the animal that survives best on a diet of grass and legume: sheep.

The monks planned a farm in which the sheep would remain in the fields year round, a system which has many benefits for land and animals. By remaining outside in their natural habitat the animals remain healthier and

freer from parasites than is possible in a barn. When the animals graze the land that supports them, they in turn fertilize the land, breaking the pernicious cycle where animals are fed in a confined area producing quantities of manure that become "pollution" while the fields require commercial fertilizers to retain their productivity. Constant grazing by the animals on the pasture causes "tillering" of the grass, multiplying its lateral shoots while producing a dense root structure that provides excellent ground cover. In time, good sheep pasture comes to resemble a fine, mowed lawn.

To implement this "open grass land grazing" the monks travelled to Nova Scotia to seek out special breeds of imported British sheep, almost unknown in the United States, that are uniquely suited for this purpose. A large part of the Mt. Saviour flock consists of Scottish Blackface sheep, a small, hardy, rugged animal (even the ewes have horns), native to the highlands of Scotland and well adapted to a cold, damp climate, able to live outside in winter tolerating the extremes of climate and meager nutrition found in mountainous terrain. Carrying a coat of warm, coarse wool that in winter grows almost down to its feet, a Blackface, in winter, resembles a fuzzy ball of white yarn with an incongruous horned, black, orange eyed head. However, the hardiness of the Blackface is acquired at the price of a frame smaller than typical American sheep.

The second type of sheep on the farm consists of a small number of Blueface Leicester rams. A larger, less hardy sheep than the Blackface, the Blueface is a native of the hill sides of the English midlands. It is more prolific, has a finer fleece and its larger frame carries more meat than the Blackface.

Animals that are a cross between two pure breeds display what is called "hybrid vigor" displaying many of the best traits of both breeds. So the main part of the flock consists of ewes produced by crossing the Blueface Rams and the Blackface ewes, producing an animal called a Scottish Mule, with distinctive high-pointed ears. The Scottish Mule ewes combine the rugged ability of the



Br. James, Br. Nathan and Blueface Leicester ewes.

Blackface to tolerate extremes of climate with the larger, meatier frame, and prolificacy of the Blueface.

The fourth and last breed represented is the Suffolk, a "Downland" sheep native to the mild climate and rich pastures of southern England. The Suffolk is a large, sleek, beautiful animal with a distinctive, thin fleece of fine, cream-colored wool and a handsome black head without horns even in the rams. A small number of Suffolk rams, unaccustomed to a harsh climate and thus sheltered in barns during the winter, are used as sires for the Scottish Mule ewes to produce "market lambs" with downland characteristics: a fast growth rate and a large, meaty frame. Though intolerant of harsh climate, most of these suffolk-cross "market lambs" are born with the onset of mild weather in the spring and marketed with the onset of harsh weather in late autumn.

Ecological concerns played a large role in the design of the present farm. Mindful of world food problems and the disproportionate amount of feed grains used to produce meat for the American diet, the sheep chosen for the Mt. Saviour farm live entirely on a diet of grass and legumes. Using a breeding system in which the normal reproductive cycle of the sheep is respected — rutting in late autumn, lambing in early spring — keeping the animals outside in their natural habitat where they are least prone to disease and where the land is fertilized and built up by the very animals it supports, the Mt. Saviour farm is designed to best utilize the qualities of its land, its animals and the men who farm it in a manner that conserves resources for the future.

One of our original motives for entering upon the uncertain business of experimenting with unusual breeds was to create a model of low-intensity farming that might be useful to a local farming economy that is being steadily ravaged by the closing of farms and the collapse of rural communities. The innovative methods of the Mt. Saviour farm have attracted attention and in 1987 we have sold live-stock to other farmers in Canada, New York, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Maryland and Texas.

A question we are frequently asked is why monks, who devote themselves to "spiritual" lives of prayer, remain in farming. There is a pointed economic inquiry here. If the proceeds of the sale of the dairy farm in 1981 had been invested they would have produced a higher return than has the sheep farm. The answer to why we continue the farm is not rooted simply in economic concerns, it is also rooted in our spirituality, in a willingness to do humble work, and in a respect and care for the land. Every day at mass we bring to our altar for consecration gifts of bread and wine sprung from the soil beneath our feet. Our spirituality, if healthy, must seek both a love for the brothers and sisters who share this food and for the natural environment that produces it. In these days it is urgent for all people to learn to respect and nurture the earth from which we spring. The community of Mt. Saviour merely participates in this responsibility of all people to give liturgical praise to God, to live in a community of fraternal love and to be in a healthy relationship with the physical environment through which God creates and sustains us.

Br. Nathan

News Notes

Dedication Day, August 16, was a lovely affair. A very simple celebration enabled many of the people who have worked so hard for us on Festival Days in the past to be our guests and enjoy their well earned rest. The blessing

of God's eternal rest and our eternal gratitude goes to all who helped us financially on this (and other) occasions. We do our best to be a leaven in the Church and the world, so a little dough helps the rising. We do not spend money or paper to thank you for your Dedication Day donations. Our gratitude goes to God and to you. We intend your canceled check and our increased dedication to be a token of more abundant blessings coming to you from the Lord.

On November 1, 1987, we gathered at St. James House for a blessing and a formal welcoming for its new residents: Enrique and Chali Govantes. For the past nineteen years St. James House — and the entire Mt. Saviour community — has been blessed by the presence of the Sisters of St. Mary of Namur who used it as a House of Prayer. We are grateful to the Sisters for the witness to God and religious life which they give in our day, and especially for their presence and dedication here. They will continue to be most welcome and special guests.



New Residents at St. James, Enrique and Chali Govantes.

Enrique and Chali Govantes are Cuban schoolmates of Br. Stephen. With their children grown, the Govantes were seeking a way to give their lives to a more direct service to the Church. Their first desire was to do this here by offering to help us in any way they could. As we looked at our present and future needs, it seemed clear that we might help each other to live closer to the Lord in a mutual blessing. They quickly discovered that the monastic horarium provides many tasks for willing hands. We have been enriched not only by their willing service but by their cheerful enthusiasm. The larger community of Elmira has also benefited by their dedication as they have become regular cooks at the local soup kitchen.

So we ask your prayers for them as they embark on a new life in the Church and for the Sisters of St. Mary as they continue to serve the Church as their order has done since 1819.

In addition to our regular guests, it was a special joy this summer to share our life with some long term guests. Br. Rick Donovan O.F.M. made his retreat before solemn vows with us. Br. Maurice of the Little Brothers of Jesus

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spent his "desert month" with us in August. Fr. Gerry McGuigan, CSB, chose Mt. Saviour as his reentry point after having served many years in the African missions. Anthony Nobile, a science teacher from New York, rounded out and was a wonderful addition to our extended community this summer. Presently, we have with us Br. Philip Klees, FSC, who is here for six weeks between assignments. We have appreciated the help of all these visitors and the exchanges made possible by these longer stays. Special thanks and note needs to be made for Bruce Krag, who has been with us since last spring. He has been the extra pair of hands in every department, but a tremendous help to us in reorganizing our business office; he is also a great cook!

TRAVELS

We have had our own share of comings and goings. During Lent of this year we were pleased to have been visited by almost all the members of the Montreal Priory. In April Fr. Martin and Br. Sebastian represented us at the installation and blessing of Abbot Leonard Vickers at St. Anselm's Abbey, Washington, D.C. In an ecumenical exchange, Rev. Richard Keunkler of Grace Episcopal Church, Elmira, read the scriptures at an Advent Vespers and gave us a homily. In Lent, we reciprocated by singing Vespers and Compline at Grace Church and partaking in a delightful buffet, prepared by members of the parish.

Brothers Bruno and Pierre traveled to Nova Scotia to purchase sheep. Fr. James Kelly left for Nuremberg, Germany where he begins an apostolate with the US Army chaplains. Br. Nathan attended a computer workshop in Syracuse. Use of computers is rapidly becoming part of our life where they are being used in the farm, library, business office and guest operations. Br. Luke discovered their value when using a word processor to produce a beautiful, 200 year history of the Pape and Durkin families. Searching the past has occupied Br. Gabriel, who is assembling a booklet on the Nagel and Hofbauer families, who built and lived in what is now St. Peter's. He also spent two weeks furthering a study of his own family roots and hopes to celebrate his twenty-fifth anniversary of profession next summer by continuing his research in Switzerland and Ireland. Fr. Placid celebrated his fiftieth anniversary of ordination on May 22. That is one more jewel in a crown of over eighty years as a human being, over fifty as a Benedictine monk, and thirty-six as a monk of Mt. Saviour.

SPEAKERS

We have been especially blessed by having a variety of splendid lectures and workshops. June was memorable because of Fr. Sebastian Moore, OSB, who spoke to us during Pentecost week and Fr. George Freemesser, CSB, who had a session with us on the prominence and role of spiritual factors in healing the human person. Professor Slobdan Radosevic of Belgrade showed us outstanding slides of Coptic and Serbian Monasteries. In October, Deacon and Mrs. Shelke Shawfix of the Coptic Orthodox Church in Cairo brought greetings from Matta el Meskeen, the Abbot and spiritual father of the flourishing monastery of St. Macarius the Great in Egypt, and shared slides of that ancient Coptic monastery and news of the remarkable revival of the Coptic church in Egypt.

In September we had with us Fr. Terrence Kardong of Assumption Abbey, North Dakota, who conducted a week

long workshop on the Rule of St. Benedict.

In the same month Msgr. Miles Bourke, who did the commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews for the Jerome Biblical Commentary, gave us lectures on the sacrifice of Christ and its relation to the Eucharist. Our studies were also furthered by Rev. Joseph Brennan, who gave us and our oblate guests a series of stimulating commentaries on Psalms 119-133. In mid-October, a professional musician and long time retreatant at Mt. Saviour, Frank Launi, brought some musician friends and gave a jazz concert to an appreciative audience of monks and visitors.

We are grateful to our Oblate, Helen Siegl, who arranged for a well received art show of Br. Stephen's work in Philadelphia in October. Br. Stephen was surprised and pleased to have many of our Oblates at the exhibit.

During the year we remember in our prayers many dead loved ones of those who write to us. We ask you to remember our own deceased friends and family members.

Elizabeth von Rast, Br. David's mother, died Nov. 18, 1986.

Fernand Pratte, Br. Pierre's father, died Nov. 26, 1986.

Jack Pape, Br. Luke's brother, died January 3, 1987.

James Lane, Br. Bruno's brother, died June 24, 1987.

Harry Cormey, Fr. Placid's brother, died Nov. 18, 1987.

Jiggs Rohde and Rosa Ekes, friends of the monastery who often fed hungry and penniless monks in the early years, died in 1987.

Mt. Saviour Book Shop . . .

Suggests the following titles and invites you to visit and browse our enlarged selection of carefully chosen Books.

The "Caring" series by a Mennonite pastor, best sellers in the shop. "Caring Enough to Hear", "Caring Enough to Confront", "Caring Enough to Not Forgive" and "When Caring is Not Enough." \$6.95 each; by David Augsburg.

A well done meditation series, each volume on a different author: "Daily Readings" with: "Julian of Norwich" (vol. 1&2), "St. Teresa of Avila", "Br. Laurence", "St. John of the Cross", "Martin Luther", "Francis de Sales", "Samual Johnson", "Jean-Pierre de Caussade", "The Cloud of Unknowing", "St. Therese of Lisieux", "John Wesley", "William Law", "St. Augustine", and "Prayers and Praises in the Celtic Tradition". \$4.95 each.

And, from Canada, a selection of children's books and cassettes by the well known children's author and raconteur, Robert Munsch, locally known as Br. Nathan's brother.

Books: "The Paper Bag Princess", "Thomas' Snowsuit", "I've Got to Go", "The Dark", "Love You Forever." \$4.95 ea.

Cassettes: "Love You Forever", "Favorite Stories", and "More Outrageous Stories." \$8.00 each.

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New York State orders add 7 percent sales tax
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