



## CHRISTMAS GREETINGS!

Mt. Saviour and Weston celebrate  
the joy of monastic life.

Christmas 1994

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Dear Friend of Mt. Saviour,

A visitor shared a story with me about how a life-long friendship began. It bears repeating and a little elaboration at this Christmas time. My friend was in a bar having a lonely drink after work. He found himself eavesdropping on a conversation in German, sprinkled with some theological words, which he was able to recognize. One of the men was saying that their church had two bell towers: one bell called Faith and the other Charity. Sadly, he related to the other "we have no bell of Hope!" My friend emboldened by what he had imbibed, burst into the conversation with the remark, "But you are the bell of "Hope!".

God's word to us, if we can believe the language, is exactly the same: "You are the bell of hope!" The Incarnation is this expression in a non-verbal way. Not only is Jesus our hope, from his infancy through his resurrection, but the gift of his spirit makes us the visible expression of the Risen Christ and the hope he brings to our world. Our hope resides not only in God or in an after-life. We are God's hope humanized, just as Jesus was and, of course, still is. God's hope in us is not that we will behave or be morally superior creatures. We incarnate God's hope for the world and this should come across to ourselves as well as to others. It can be like the tintinnabulation of the bells or like a gloria of the bells or the hongs of the Big Ben -depending on who we are and

what we are called to do by God at the moment.

Advent and the Christmas season are supposed to be times of hope. During the recent elections, the polls indicated that people had very little hope. My concern is that they (and we?) find ourselves in this churlish and cynical mood because we have misplaced our hope. Most folks complaining were, by standards of the world, fairly well off. They were worried about the future. Americans seem to have bought the notion that it is our birth right that things get better and better. At election time, this verse of a psalm rings in my ear, "The worthless are prized highly by the children of men". That insight is a few thousand years old and still seems valid. However, I was elected myself, so it can't have universal application.

Two books I have read recently have given me considerable confidence that genuine hope, which does come from God, both remains in us and binds us to God by a bond that cannot be broken. One was, He Leadeth Me, by Walter Cizak, S.J., which unfortunately is out of print. It is the story of his spiritual odyssey during some 23 years in Soviet prisons and the labor camps of Siberia.

Fr. Cizak tells of a time when he and a Jesuit confrere were so frustrated and discouraged that they were about to abandon their work with Polish workers in Russia and return to Poland. They came to recognize that, although the situation was unique, the temptation itself was not. It is the same for anyone who follows a call and finds the realities of life are nothing like the expectations they had in the first flush of their vision and enthusiasm. It is a daily temptation. The great test for Fr. Cizak was not whether he stayed or left, but whether he could look at his situation from God's standpoint and not his own. The 'will of God' in our lives is not an abstraction or a subjective desire based on what we think God's will ought to be. The will of God is first of all the circumstances, places, people and problems we encounter each day and the acceptance of the grace to meet them.

Five years later, in a Moscow prison, feeling abandoned by God and betrayed by the scriptures which promise success in these circumstances, the author yielded to the temptation to give up. In the depth of his despair, he finally realized that all along he had presumed things would turn out his way. That God might have another way wasn't even part of his portfolio. Fr. Cizak writes: "The greatest grace God can give to such a man (sic) is to send him a trial he cannot bear with his own power and then sustain him with his grace so that he may endure to the end and be saved".

The second book is not only in print, we have it in our bookstore. By an other Jesuit, Frans Josef van Beeck, it is entitled Loving the Torah More than God? Toward a Catholic Appreciation of Judaism. It deals with two modern Jewish responses to the Holocaust as they confront the God of the Covenant with the problem of suffering and Fr. van Beeck's reply.

It is most important for us as Christians to realize that Jesus is not presented in the gospels as a paragon of solitary perfection. Jesus sums up and crowns a tradition! Namely, Israel's great tradition of tested faith in the

invisible God who created the world and holds out hope for everlasting goods. Furthermore, that tradition of Jewish faith, tested by suffering, of which we Christians say Jesus is the high point, did not die out with the birth of the Christian church. So Jesus must be recognized as an associate of all the Jews who have unjustly suffered in the course of the Christian era! His suffering as a faithful Jew is precisely one of the meanings of what we call the Incarnation. He embodies and personifies Israel's Torah, the Wisdom of God, lived out in a world where goodness does not always succeed in being victorious.

On the theme of hope in this year's Christmas season, I made three considerations. To be lacking in something, like the bell of hope, is not so terrible. We may simply be unaware of the gifts God has given us as was the person in the opening story. Secondly, what we call the will of God in a given instance, probably isn't. Unfortunately, it usually takes a strong adverse event to bring that fact to our consciousness. Finally, we are or can be in solidarity with the best aspects of the human project if we want to be. Living nonchalantly and mindlessly as most of us do most of the time, without a definite choice to follow Christ to glory, is to miss this time of his visitation. The angels are singing, the bells are joyfully ringing. God's gift is hearing. Ask first to desire that gift, then to receive it and then to live by it. That is: in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

In Xto

*J. Martin*



Chuck Campbell and helpers at shearing time.



**1994 Summer Program participants and staff.**

## NEWS ITEMS

I've often wondered what Jesus was doing in the hills of Galilee instead of hanging out in Jerusalem or Rome. Since living in the hills around Elmira, I think the choice had something to do with the time and environment conducive to learning what it is to be a human person and learning something of God and other persons as well as the earth and its creatures. The best news at Mt. Saviour comes out of our daily life. Those items would make a great novel while what goes into these notes hardly does justice to those events.

That is not entirely accurate. Some novel events occurred like the celebration of Br. Pierre's 25th anniversary of Profession. The event was actually last December but that isn't the best time of year for his family to come from Three Rivers and Montreal in Canada. Mary Navone and her helpers prepared an other magnificent feast. In comparison, Babette's Feast was a snack. Besides, we started out with more love and that affects the taste! Also last June, Br. James Cronen celebrated the 40th anniversary of his ordination and, a little later, 50 years since high school. On 10 July, Br. Leo Courcy, Br. Thomas Maley and Br. Daniel Magni were received as novices. The joy of that event continues through the present and we ask your continued prayer for them and for us.

The negative stereotypes of monastic life are so strong that it is a wonder anyone comes here. For many who visit any monastery, it is like going behind the looking glass. One response of guests, after discovering this life, is to want to prolong their stay. It was out of our experience with long term guests that we developed our Life Together program in the late 60's, the University of Notre Dame student program in the early 70's, and that we began the Summer Program for men 20-35 years of age, 5 years ago. It is directed at Catholics who intend to remain laymen. Since the monastery is a sort of 'living library', one can learn by 'reading' the life of a small community centered on faith. The long lasting effects of learning and living the basic values of Christianity in a monastic setting make this a rare opportunity for those who can take part in it.

We were also grateful recipients of the musical talents of a number of our guests. Maura Tenner, who helped Madeleva during the summer, gave a lovely vocal concert celebrating her parents wedding anniversary. Marriage is full of surprises, but I don't think they ever expected to hear their daughter singing in a Catholic monastery with themselves in rapt attention. Elisa Quinn, who held the mother's helper job last year and is studying voice at Ithaca College, delighted us the next evening. Linda Piontek, a doctoral candidate at Eastman School of Music, gave a brilliant piano concert last month. Finally, Johannes Somary brought the Amor Artis choir from NYC to sing polyphonic compositions of Palestrina, Orlando Lassus and Tomas da Victoria. They also sang four twentieth century motets. Brahms' "How Lovely Is Thy Dwelling Place" was the finale. Twenty eight voices and a Master conductor/composer had most of us thinking we had died and gone to heaven.

Br. Ronald Fogarty continued the workshops on the role of the emotions in religious life. We are especially grateful for the visits of Prior Philip Lawrence of Christ in the Desert and Abbot Claude Ehringer of Prince of Peace Abbey in Oceanside, California. I celebrated my 25th anniversary as Prior in October and the brothers of Weston Priory joined us for a few days. Our agenda was beautiful music, this time in a contemporary style for which they are famous, and a renewal of friendships which began with our founders, Leo and Damasus before we were born. So a season of countless blessings for which we, in turn, bless God and those in whom God blessed us.

Mary Lu Walker provided the joyful folk songs many of you remember from Dedication Day. We are very grateful for the blessings of your prayers, visits and financial response to our Dedication Day appeal for help with the extensive building repairs. We met with an architect and several others who have volunteered their expertise in building matters. We can provide temporary protection to the east building, this winter, and the extensive repairs will begin in the spring. It is quite a



**Francis Smith, Matthew Rosa, Tom Galambos, Maura Tenner in concert.**

challenge to keep costs down. Such detailed planning is needed and the variety of materials endless. Again we have been blessed in the people who are involved in the project. Their experience, knowledge and cooperative spirit is amazing. You will hear more about this in the future. Please, keep this project in your prayers.

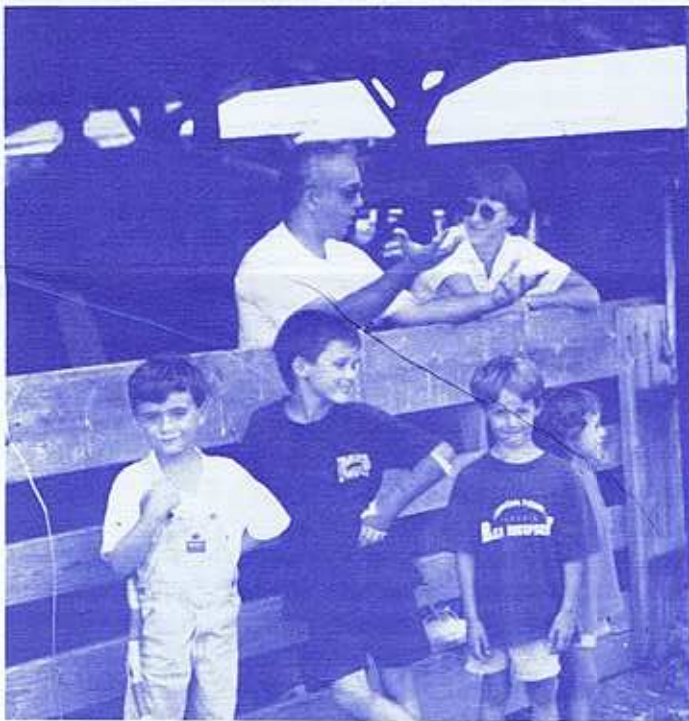
Br. Gabriel, Br. Daniel and I attended the 9th annual meeting of an informal Benedictine association in the northeast. We met this year at Glastonbury Abbey, Hingham, Mass. and helped celebrate the 40th anniversary of their founding. We intend to write more about this association in the future.

Br. Gabriel spoke on the history of Mt. Saviour to the Friends of Mt. Saviour, his second conference on the topic. Br. Gerald Ragis was in Montreal for sessions on spirituality with friends of the former Priory there.

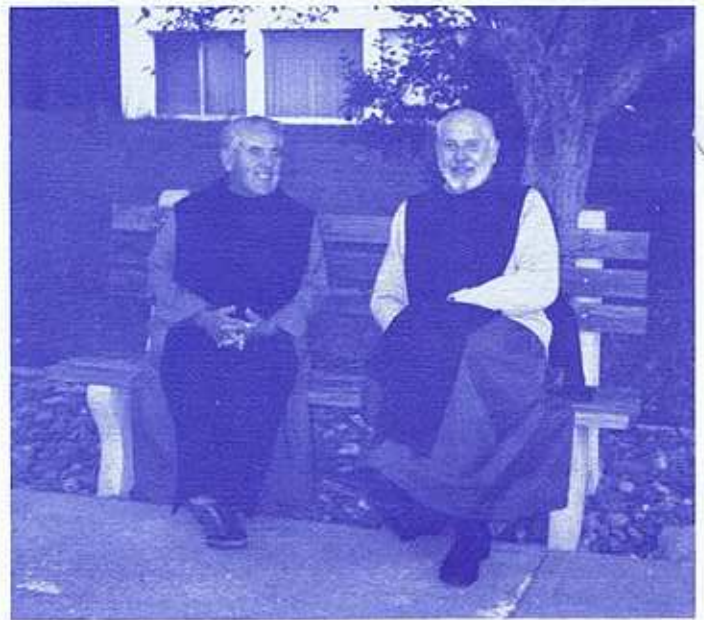
A most important and practical workshop on Cardio-Pulmonary Resuscitation was presented on 18 and 19 October by Marlene Packard. She thought we did so well we could invite people here to have their heart attacks. A committee is taking that up.

We will end these notes with the good news that Br. James Kelly is back with us having completed his assignment in Germany.

Please, remember in your prayers the deceased relatives and friends of the community: Bridget Brown, Br. John's mother; Antoinette Gaetches, Br. Joseph's sister; Jane Minor Davidson, Br. Gabriel's cousin; Gloria Govantes, Enrique's sister; Marie Carnavale, Margaret Farrell, Irene Jane Clare Lester, Joan Milliken, Helen Shaw and John Shirley.



**Lambs yet to be shorn: Daniel Malloy, Philip, Thomas and Anne Cernera.**



**Priors John and Martin enjoy a moment of rest.**

There are now six priests in the community so we can handle many more Mass Offerings. The Rochester Diocese set the stipend at \$10. We will also accept less.

Mt. Saviour has arranged for a tour of Siena, Florence and Rome from 25 April to 6 May through National Senior Tours. If you would be interested in joining a future tour, send your name to be on a mailing list and we will keep you informed. Suggestions for destinations would also be welcome.

#### FROM OUR BOOKSHOP

Our bookshop staff tells us that Ernest Kurtz and Katherine Ketcham's The Spirituality of Perfection -Storytelling and the Journey to Wholeness is a best seller. The hard questions about the human condition are asked and responded to with healing stories from all the great traditions. Since everyone loves a story, this collection contains over a hundred illustrative stories about the deep need we have for God. It doesn't need to be read chapter by chapter but can be picked up anywhere and read with great profit. \$11.95

A Tree Full of Angels by Sister Macrina, O.S.B., is a delightful book written by a most engaging Benedictine Sister about our ache for God, our hunger for God, and all the wonderful crumbs in our daily, ordinary living to feed this hunger-ache. She writes in a poetic and sometimes whimsical style about traditional Benedictine values. A real helpful book to be enjoyed. \$9.00

Harvard Diary. A Pulitzer Prize winning child psychiatrist, Robert Coles turns his attention to many things - people, including Dorothy Day, Flannery O'Connor and Edith Stein; "hot issues" including abortion, teen age pregnancy and prayers in public schools. Robert Coles is excellent on the spiritual life of children, on Tolstoy and on forgiveness. He is profound on sin, grace, and on the faith of Simone Weil. \$11.95

Loving the Torah More Than God? Towards a Catholic Appreciation of Judaism by Frans Josef va Beeck, SJ. Comments on this exceptional book are in the letter of Fr. Martin in the Chronicle. \$9.95

Crossing the Threshold of Hope by Pope John Paul II. We just received this book. It comes highly recommended by the widest variety of people. It is genuinely deserving of a wide readership and serious study. \$20.00