



CHRISTMAS

GREETINGS!

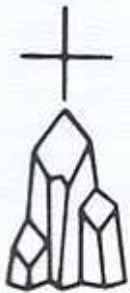
*Father Martin and Pilgrims
at St. Peter's in Rome*

Christmas 1995

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**MONASTIC LIFE:
ENTERING THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY**

Dear Friends,

Recently, I presented the above topic at St. Mary's College, South Bend, Indiana. I was a bit disconcerted that only teachers asked questions after the presentation, but found out later that the students did have some inquiries. They did not want to embarrass me, but were dying to know, "What does he wear under that habit?" And they also wanted to ask if I really thought that monastic life would even last into the twenty-first century, especially in the United States.

Sister Katherine Kraft, a Benedictine from St. Joseph, Minnesota, gives the same answer as I would have to the second question in the September issue of the **American Benedictine Review**. She does it better and more colorfully, and I quote her here. She notes that those who write most appreciatively about monastic life today are often Protestants. The late Douglas Steere, Quaker, of Haverford College, has written, "The monasteries will be renewed when more and more monks in a fresh burst of experimental freedom find their way ever more deeply into the contemplative orientation of the whole life of prayer. Nothing could more directly redeem the times, restore the sense of the divine image that lives in each human being, and lift the inward and outward sense of responsibility of men and women for each other than a rekindling of these deepest ranges of prayer."

Sister Katherine selects a marvelous dialogue between two non-monastics, Wally and Andre, from the play, *My Dinner With Andre*, to underscore her point.

Wally: "We just put no value at all on perceiving reality. On the contrary, the incredible emphasis we place on our so-called careers automatically makes perceiving reality a very low priority, because if your life is organized around trying to be successful in your career, then it just doesn't matter what you perceive or what you experience."

Andre: "Right. Our minds are just focused on our goals and plans, which in themselves are not reality... There have to be centers, now, where people can come and reconstruct a new future for the world. These centers are actually growing up everywhere, and that's what they are trying to do... in a way these are all attempts at creating a new kind of school or a new kind of monastery... call them "reserves" -- islands of safety where history can be remembered and the human being can continue to function, in order to maintain the species through a Dark Age. We are talking about an underground, which did exist during the Dark Ages, among the mystical orders of the Church. And the purpose of this underground is to find out how to preserve the light, life, the culture. How to keep things living. I keep thinking we need a new language, a language of the heart: a language between people that is a new kind of poetry, the poetry of the dancing bee that tells us where the honey is."

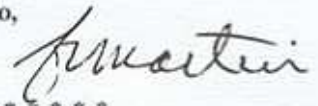
Sr. Katherine remarks that this testimony of perception is by persons who are probably not Christian or even believers, yet they capture the critical, contemporary, and enduring need for monastic life. It is ironic that Andre had probably not read the Rule of Benedict when he alluded to the "new kind of school." But St. Benedict's description of a monastery as a "school for the Lord's service" is one that captures best his own perception of the needs of his world. Fifteen hundred years has altered neither the perception nor the need.

Persons who know "where the honey is," who tend the light that keeps things alive, who are a kind of poetry, living metaphors of God's desire for all creation -- to have life and have it abundantly -- have found that school in monasteries throughout the world. Mount Saviour doesn't have a coat of arms. If we ever do, the dancing honey bee will be on it! Psalm 80/81 ends with the Lord saying: "I will feed them with finest wheat and fill them with honey from the rock." We understand that to be the Eucharistic bread, divine life, the gift of God in Christ through the Holy Spirit.

Many guests and our summer program participants often have a sense of going through the looking glass while they are here with us. Life at a monastery is like being in a world they never knew existed. It becomes for them, as it is constantly for us, the necessary "school" in a Dark Age.

Neither the world nor human nature has changed much since Benedict wrote his Rule, indicating where the honey is. A good reason to be confident that we will dance joyfully into the twenty-first century.

In Xto,



Father Placid's death on 12 June ranks first in the events that have shaped our lives this summer. We rely upon his witness to perseverance and stability as we welcome new members who aspire to follow in his footsteps.

Fr. Leo Courcy (Brother Timothy) and Br. Thomas Maley (Brother Raphael) completed their novitiate and made their first profession in July. Br. John Thompson has completed his postulancy and began his novitiate year in October. Raymond Price has joined the community as a postulant, and Br. Daniel Kelly, FSC, is residing with us to observe monastic living firsthand.

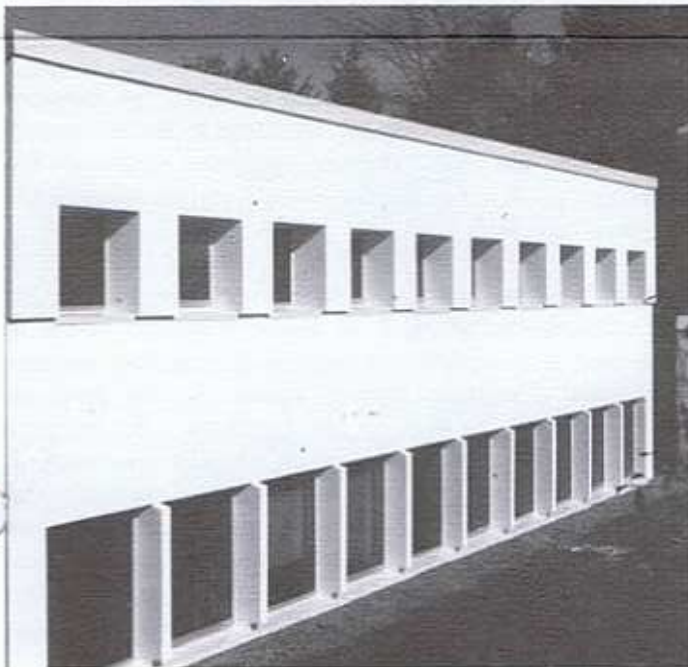
Father Damasus always insisted on the little steps necessary in human, spiritual growth. The annual community retreat given this year by Sister Irene Nowell, OSB, scripture specialist from Mount St. Scholastica, was in fact, an advance of giant steps. Sister Irene led us to a deeper understanding of Christ, the God-Man, as the fulfillment of Wisdom Tradition -- indeed as Wisdom in the flesh. Starting from the Book of Genesis we accompanied her through the Old and New Testament all the way to the writings of St. Paul and St. John. Jeremy Driscoll, OSB, of Mount Angel Abbey, presented a four day workshop on *Lectio Divina* and the early desert monks. Ronald Fogerty, a Marist Brother from Australia, returned for a fourth time to share his systemic program on emotional development. We are grateful to these guides who were so helpful to us.



We were again encouraged by the zeal and enthusiasm of the participants in our sixth summer program for young men seeking to intensify their lives as Catholic laity. Jonathan Laib (Littleton, CO), Craig Puffer (Brooklyn, NY), Bryan Robinson (New Albany, PA), and Mark Smith (Binghamton, NY) spent five weeks experiencing the monastic dimension of life in the Church. We are grateful to the dimensions they added to our lives and to our oblates, Tony Cerner and Chuck and Connie Campbell, without whose assistance we could not offer this program. The dates for the 1996 Summer Program are 1 July to 7 August.

TRIP PLANNED

Last April, Fr. Martin and some forty-five Friends of Mount Saviour spent twelve days in Italy. Siena and Rome were the hinges of the tour, with side trips to Florence, Assisi, Montalcino, and Subiaco. Much credit for the "best ever" appraisal of the trip goes to our contacts in Italy, Fr. Tim Verdon and Wes Kennison, who guided us to places off the beaten track. We thank them and Jack De Paul who initiated and booked this grand adventure. The enthusiasm of the participants prompts us to offer another trip. The hill towns and the Veneto of Italy is the venue of a trip being planned for 17-29 May 1996. It will include four nights in Padua, a day trip to Venice, five nights in the quaint hill town of Sansepolcro, and two nights in Stresa on Lake Maggiore. The cost is \$1,995.00 based on double occupancy, and \$280.00 for a single supplement. A \$250.00 deposit per person is due by 22 December 1995. Make checks payable to Mount Saviour Monastery. It will be first come, first serve for forty people. Call the monastery if you need more information or if you want to be notified of future trips.



DECEASED OBLATES AND BENEFACTORS

Special prayers are said several times each day for our Oblates and Benefactors. They are also remembered at the daily Liturgy and at a special Mass once each month. We ask you to join us in prayer for the following who died recently:

Father Placid Cormey, OSB
Abbot Primate Jerome Theisen, OSB
Theodore Duffee, Br. Gabriel's oldest brother
Caroline Botsford, probably our oldest Oblate
Mary Minor, Br. Gabriel's aunt
Mary Martin of Elmira, NY
John James Gilbride, infant son of Ed and Ann Gilbride
Nancy Pomilio of Rome, NY
Agnes Ellis Levinger
Catherine A. "Katie" Cain

BUILDING PROJECT: FIRST PHASE

We are eternally grateful for all of you who contributed to the first phase of the Building Repair Project. Meticulous planning and expert advice came from Wally Ochterski, Robert Gill, Ron Cassetti, Alain Verley, Ray de Pasquale, and Enrique Govantes. Much patience on everyone's part enabled us to present this phase of the project for bids. Three of the four contractors were within \$2,000 of each other. Unfortunately the cost is \$117,000 and not \$2,000! We will keep you apprised of progress on this work and ask your continued generosity and prayers for its completion.



HOMILY FOR THE MASS OF THE RESURRECTION FOR FATHER PLACID CORMEY

Five years ago, a man named Nicholas Lash published a book with the title: Easter in the Ordinary. If Easter was ever in the ordinary, it was in Father Placid.

The emphasis is on Easter, not ordinary. Only after we have some hold on the mystery of Easter, can it be recognized in the ordinary. People with brilliant personalities or who radiate a strong magnetic charism, can easily obscure the Easter light that is truly within them. When the manner is ordinary, the Easter mystery is often more apparent -- at least for those with eyes to see. It is good to remember that Our Lord was considered quite ordinary among the villagers with whom he lived. The Spirit had not been given yet. Nevertheless, beauty is not only in the eye of the beholder, it is often, in fact always there. We don't have the eyes to see it.

There is an incident in Mark's gospel that fits very well in the context of remembering Father Placid. Mark writes, "When the centurion who stood facing him saw how he breathed his last, he said, 'Truly this man was the Son of God.'" For those of us who attended him, as for many others who witnessed him breathing his last -- not over three hours agony, but three and a half years -- do find the centurion's discovery our own. Truly Father Placid was the son of God. That is the promise of St. John's Prologue to those who accept the Incarnate Logos, Christ. Those who believe are given the power to become the children of God; they are born of God.



Father Placid received and fostered this power to be a child of God. As much as we knew him by living with him for over forty years at Mt. Saviour, we had only the faintest notion, or none at all, of the wit and courage we discovered during the last years of the shipwreck which is old age. When the discovery of Easter mystery in his life has been made, then we can look back and a new light illumines the many incidents we shared.

I never knew what G.K. Chesterton was driving at when he wrote that if something is worth doing, it is worth doing badly -- until I heard Father Placid play the cello! It is humorous on the surface, but the discovery is more wonderful than that. Ten or fifteen years ago he had a stroke that paralyzed his right side. I told the young woman who wrote the story in the Star Gazette that he learned to play the cello with his left hand. She wrote that he learned to play it with "one" hand. There were times when it sounded that way, or one wished he would use only one hand. He did learn to play the cello with his left hand. He practiced faithfully for one half hour after Lauds every morning. He recognized and resonated to beauty in music even when it wasn't perfectly performed. The beauty was there, put there by the composer (and by God), and Father Placid "felt it" and wanted to be part of it, to participate actively in that beauty. "To find God in all things," says Ignatius of Loyola; "That in all things God may be glorified," wrote Saint Benedict. Everything is beautiful in some degree, even badly played music. Father Placid appreciated this and was grateful.

St. Paul writes to the church at Philippi, "For his sake I have accepted the loss of all things...that I may find Christ and be found in him...to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing in his sufferings by being conformed to his death...I may attain the resurrection from the dead." We tend to make death and resurrection TWO things, first one and then the other. Especially during these last years of his life, Father Placid taught us that they are two aspects of the same reality...the Paschal mystery...being beloved of God, being given life (agape) by God, and responding. We are being raised through sufferings, not struck nor damned by them. St. Benedict said, "Faithfully observing his teachings in the monastery until death, we shall, through patience, share in the sufferings of Christ so that we deserve also to share in his kingdom."

Father Placid was not known for his verbal preaching. He was a witness to the words we heard in today's gospel, to the action of Our Lord who says, "I will continue to make your name (Righteous Father) known that the love you have for me may be in them and I in them." We are sure Father Placid knows the power of Christ's resurrection. Christ would have us sure he has been revealing the Father's name -- the one who is always with us, giving us divine life, freeing us, forgiving and loving us. This steadfast love was present for us in the martyrdom, the witness of the life and death of his beloved son, John Everett Placid Cormey, Jr.