



December 2014

# A LETTER FROM THE ABBEY



Briefly

## Fr. Justin is Ordained

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## Cistercian Spirituality

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## Monastic Portraits

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# MERRY CHRISTMAS FROM CISTERCIAN

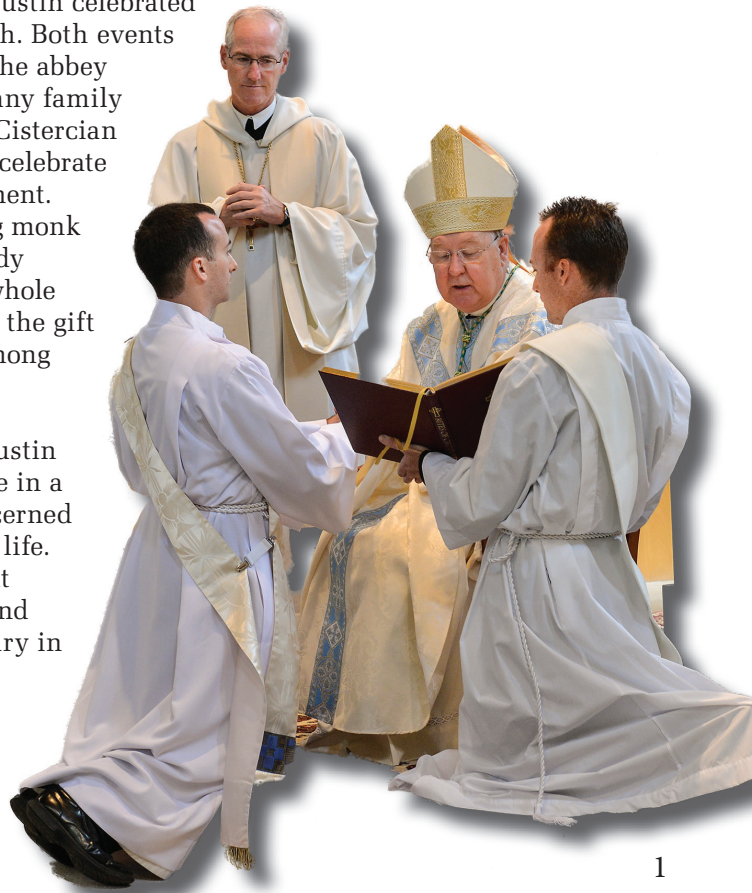
## Fr. Justin is Ordained

by: Fr. John Bayer

On Friday, August 15, 2014, the Feast Day of the Assumption of Mary, Br. Justin McNamara was ordained a priest. On Sunday, August 17, 2014, Fr. Justin celebrated his first mass in the abbey Church. Both events were followed by a reception in the abbey courtyard, which allowed the many family and friends of Fr. Justin and the Cistercian community to gather together to celebrate such a joyful and important moment.

Fr. Justin is the eleventh young monk to be ordained a priest at Our Lady of Dallas in only six years. The whole Cistercian community rejoices at the gift of such a peaceful young man among the new vocations at the abbey.

Among the young monks, Fr. Justin is the only one to have spent time in a diocesan seminary before he discerned that his vocation lay in monastic life. His ordination, in fact, is the fruit of several years of discernment and formation, four years in a seminary in Chicago and five here at Our



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NEW PRIEST OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH  
Fr. Justin was ordained by  
Bishop Farrell in August.

## The Incarnation in Cistercian Spirituality

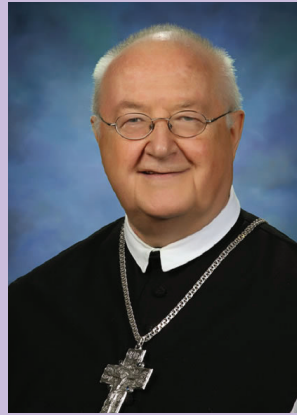
What is in the center of Cistercian spirituality? There were people in the past who replied promptly: *The Rule of Benedict* and they would point to the ancient documents describing the beginnings of the Cistercian Order, focusing on the desire of the Founding Fathers to practice the Rule, fully, with no mitigations or adjustments. Others would say: *humility* and they can find texts which prove this claim from Benedict's Rule and from Bernard's writings. Others may say *Marian Devotion*, quoting texts from St. Bernard that excel most other Marian sermons or homilies.

The correct answer is "the Incarnation" – God's "becoming flesh" and his "dwelling among us." These expressions come from the Prologue of Saint John's Gospel (Jn 1:1-18). While they were used abundantly by Saint Bernard, we are not speaking only of words and texts but of the reality to which these expressions refer. The reality behind the words is mind boggling, not only by exceeding human comprehension but defying man's imagination. It is cannot be deduced by mere reasoning, nor explained by plausible motives or with implications set clear.

If I want to speak bluntly, Advent celebrates God's "love affair" with mankind, which a human being understands only as a weakness when he or she has an irrational experience by falling in love and feels caught by storms of emotional instability. God, however, is the absolute crystal clear intellect and yet declares himself vulnerable to the human response (or lack of response) of love. He goes out of his way in order to lead the human being on a path of conversion, loving response and ultimately finding fulfillment in a mutual embrace with God.

The Incarnation is about God becoming a human being without diminishing his divine identity. Cistercian spirituality, formulated most clearly in Saint Bernard's writings, makes statements like the following: "the Creator and Lord of the Universe came to Man, for the sake of Man, came as a Man" (*Sermon in Advent* 3). "Man" is so strongly and explicitly put into the center of this statement that you would think it is a quotation from a Humanist author of the 15th century, the peak of the Renaissance era, and yet, the evidence is clear that this comes from the first half of the 12th century, from that "God-centered" period of the Middle Ages. Is Bernard anticipating some later development of a "Christian Humanism" or rather providing us with a fully concentrated sample of that thinking, which was set in motion much earlier by the Church Fathers (Saint Ambrose, Saint Augustine, Gregory the Great and others) who saw that the Incarnation promotes the human being to a level of unspeakably elevated dignity.

One of Bernard's favorite ancient sources, Origen of Alexandria from the 3rd century, had already stated this with exceptional force and Bernard did his best to express it in the language of a sweet and ornate prose of the high Middle Ages as the motto of Christmas: "God became man so that man could become God."



Fr. Denis Farkasfalvy

## Excerpt from St. Bernard's famous Advent Homily:

We know that the coming of the Lord is threefold: the third coming is between the other two and it is not visible in the way they are. At his first coming the Lord was seen on earth and lived among men, who saw him and hated him.

At his last coming All flesh shall see the salvation of our God, and They shall look on him whom they have pierced. In the middle, the hidden coming, only the chosen see him, and they see him within themselves; and so their souls are saved. The first coming was in flesh and weakness, the middle coming is in spirit and power, and the final coming will be in glory and majesty.

This middle coming is like a road that leads from the first coming to the last. At the first, Christ was our redemption; at the last, he will become manifest as our life; but in this middle way he is our rest and our consolation.

If you think that I am inventing what I am saying about the middle coming, listen to the Lord himself: *If anyone loves me, he will keep my words, and the Father will love him, and we shall come to him.* Elsewhere I have read: *Whoever fears the Lord does good things.* - but I think that what was said about whoever loves him was more important: that whoever loves him will keep his words.

Where are these words to be kept? In the heart certainly, as the Prophet says *I have hidden your sayings in my heart so that I do not sin against you.* Keep the word of God in that way: Blessed are those who keep it.

Let it penetrate deep into the core of your soul and then flow out again in your feelings and the way you behave; because if you feed your soul well it will grow and rejoice. Do not forget to eat your bread, or your heart will dry up. Remember, and your soul will grow fat and sleek.

If you keep God's word like this, there is no doubt that it will keep you, for the Son will come to you with the Father: the great Prophet will come, who will renew Jerusalem, and he is the one who makes all things new. For this is what this coming will do: just as we have been shaped in the earthly image, so will we be shaped in the heavenly image.

Just as the old Adam was poured into the whole man and took possession of him, so in turn will our whole humanity be taken over by Christ, who created all things, has redeemed all things, and will glorify all things.



# Priestly Ordination

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Lady of Dallas. Altogether, Fr. Justin says he was concretely discerning the priesthood for over eleven years. Such a lengthy period of discernment makes him a testimony to God's faithful guidance in every human life: "Even though I struggled from time to time throughout my years of formation, not knowing exactly when or how I was to become a priest, the call to the priesthood itself never subsided."



After my conversion in 2003 and the encouragement of my pastor I simply tried to follow the call wherever I heard it leading. All that was left was to listen and live out my faith from day to day, trusting in God's wisdom and love."

During his formation at Our Lady of Dallas, Fr. Justin studied at the University of Dallas, where he completed graduate degrees in both theology and the humanities, and he taught religion and Latin at Cistercian Preparatory School. After several years of schooling in Dallas, he now heads to Heiligenkreuz, an ancient and thriving Cistercian monastery in Austria, where he will further his studies in theology, history, Latin and German.

When asked about his plans for Austria, Fr. Justin offered the following thoughts: "It is a blessing to be given the opportunity to travel abroad and experience the Church on a larger scale and in a foreign setting. My time in Heiligenkreuz has the immediate goal of firming up my German skills; but it also includes the chance to live with fellow Cistercians and to see how they respond to our Lord's call to serve him daily in community and in their apostolate. But the greatest gift I hope to acquire and bring back with me is an ever-increasing appreciation of what is already here in Dallas, to see that the vows we profess and the ministry with which we are entrusted are meant to bear fruit."

Fr. Justin's brothers in the abbey and his students and friends at the school will certainly feel his absence in the coming months. All look forward to his safe return, when he will set the gifts of such a special formation at the service of those whom God will place in his life.



## Requiescat in Pace

### Fr. Benedict Monostori

On September 22, 2014 Fr. Benedict Monostori passed away. At 95 years of age Fr. Benedict had long served as the Abbey's most senior resident.

Fr. Benedict was among the first Cistercians to come to Dallas in 1954. In 1956 he was one of nine Cistercians on the original faculty of The University of Dallas, where he initially taught math and philosophy. He was soon asked, however, to study physics.

Throughout his life, Fr. Benedict enjoyed assisting in parishes throughout the Dallas-Fort Worth area. Upon retirement from full-time teaching, he became the chaplain for the Holy Family of Nazareth Sisters in Grand Prairie, where he served for 22 years. In the Cistercian Monastery here in Dallas, Fr. Benedict served as Prior from 1975 to 1988. Fr. Benedict's greatest joy was to see fulfilled in the Cistercian Monastery Our Lady of Dallas that dream with which he and so many Cistercians fled Hungary.





“I have always been drawn to the charism of St. Francis of Assisi that embraces a love for the whole of creation, a preferential option for the poor and a deep reverence for the blessed sacrament. I also was interested in showing solidarity with the tone set by Pope Francis (who obviously is also named after Francis of Assisi) in the first months of his papacy.”

–Br. Francis Gruber on his monastic name

**On August 10th Br. Francis and Br. Raphael signed their first set of temporary vows. The two former novices were joined by their friends, family, students and co-teachers. As simply professed brothers the two exchange their all-white habit for a black scapular and cincture. They also began teaching at the prep school this fall.**

“As I signed my vows on the altar I imagined the universe focusing on that single sheet of paper. Promising my vows “before God and all his saints” put the event in perspective: that one signature bound me canonically, legally, morally to this life, and I have all of heaven as my witness.”

–Br Raphael Schaner on his mindset as he signed his vows



## Fr. John in Europe sends update

Fr. John Bayer spent the first part of the fall semester in Rome, assisting with the Cistercian monastic formation course. Cistercians from all over the world went to the General House in Rome to hear talks on monastic spirituality. Fr. John’s main task was that of an interpreter.

After the monastic course Fr. John finished his comprehensive exams for his theological degree at the Pontifical Gregorian University.

He then traveled to Heiligenkreuz (German for “Holy Cross”), a Cistercian Abbey in Austria where he joined Fr. Justin who is studying German and Theology there this year.

Here are a couple of his stories from his adventures in Europe:

**Vatican Observatory:** For a little over two years I wanted to visit the Vatican Observatory in Rome. I was finally able to do so in September with the help of a friend, Fr. David Brown, who is a Jesuit physicist working in the observatory. This picture is of one of the telescopes that is still “armed and fully operational” on top of Castel Gandolfo. There is an inscription on the side with the motto for the observatory: *Deum Creatorum, venite adoremus.*

**Busy at Heiligenkreuz:** So far Fr. Justin and I have had a wonderful time at Heiligenkreuz, as his email the other day illustrated. Our custodian, P. Justinus, has

an incredible amount of energy, and he seems determined to make sure that we learn as much German as possible. Fr. Justin and I have a seminar with him. He playfully chides us when we speak English and is often organizing little excursions for us: a trip to the University of Vienna to hear a lecture by Cardinal Kasper, to St. Stephen’s Cathedral in Vienna for Sunday mass, an overnight trip to Augsburg, and so on. He is so much fun! I continue to enjoy his friendship very much.



# Christmas Greetings

by: Fr. Abbot Peter Verhalen

The second-century author Apuleius tells the wonderful story of Cupid and Psyche. Psyche, the most beautiful of three royal daughters, is struck by Cupid's arrow and falls in love with the god. He whisks her away to his divine residence, where her every need is met by voices, invisible servants. Though her husband visits her every night and holds her in his embrace, she is not allowed to see his face.

Beginning with Apuleius himself and extending through C.S. Lewis, authors have seen in the story an allegory for the human being's love for God. God takes the initiative, satisfies the human being's longings, and yet leaves unfulfilled the one desire, to see Him face to face.

At Christmas God shows us his face. He becomes flesh, and allows men and women of a particular time and particular place to see him. Paradoxically, when they look into the face of Jesus, many do not believe they are looking into the face of the Son of God.

We face the same paradox. We look upon the face of God present in Jesus Christ still present in the

Church, in the countless saintly men and women who belong to the Body of Christ, in the Word of God, and in the sacraments. Yet too often we do not the Son of God.

St. Bernard offers a great suggestion: *Nosce teipsum, nosce Deum*. Know yourself, know God. We must come to know ourselves, using the Advent and the Christmas season in particular to find the few minutes of quiet in which we can, before our conscience, ask ourselves who we are, how we use our freedom, what we value, whom we serve. In the process we will see that we are called to greatness, created in the very image of God, and that we, sadly, have freely enslaved ourselves to various idols. We will come to know ourselves.

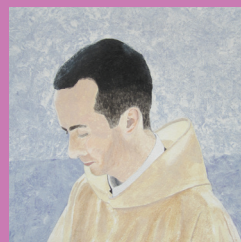
At the same time, in those moments of prayer, we will come to know God. He is the one in whose image of freedom and truth we have been created. He is the one who speaks to us the word of freedom and love in the gospel. He is the one who frees us from the bonds we have forged for ourselves. He is the one who redeems us in his own Son, the Second Person of the Trinity, whose birth among us we celebrate at Christmas.

May you all have a Blessed and Joyful Christmas.

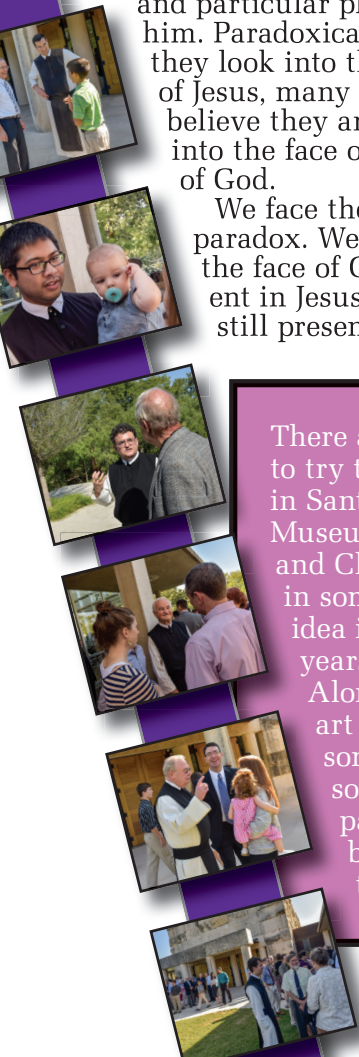


**SUNDAY CONVERSATION** Abbot Peter Verhalen speaks with Pat Levine after a Sunday mass in October.

## Fr. Ignatius Paints Monastic Portraits



There are several reasons that came together to spur me on to try to paint portraits. A few years ago while on vacation in Santa Fe, I saw an exhibit at the Georgia O'Keefe Museum which was about artists like Norman Rockwell and Chuck Close, among others, who used photography in some way for their paintings. The exhibit planted the idea in me of trying to paint a portrait with the help of a photograph. After working several years on word paintings, I thought it was time to move on, though I may come back to them. Along with this thought, I was reflecting on why I paint and what my intended goal for my art is. My conclusion: I want others to be able to enjoy my art and I want it to bring them some happiness. I figured many people would enjoy a portrait of a person, especially of someone they know. Another factor was my growing interest in a Norman Rockwell's painting *Saying Grace* was sold for a record high at an auction in 2013. In addition, a new biography on Rockwell was released about this time to a lot of media attention. Needless to say, it got me excited about his work.



## Abbey Church Services

### UPCOMING EVENTS

#### Christmas Eve Vigil Mass

Dec. 24th 11:30 pm

#### Christmas Morning Mass

Dec. 25th 9:00 am

#### New Years Eve Adoration

Dec. 31st 9:00 pm-12:00 am

### DAILY SCHEDULE

#### Office of Readings

& Morning Prayer 6 am

Evening Prayer 6 pm

Daily Mass (Mon - Sat.) 6:30 am

Mass on Sunday 9 am

Confessions Wed. 4-5 pm



*Cistercian Abbey Our Lady of Dallas*  
3550 Cistercian Road  
Irving, Texas 75039

Br. Francis Gruber, Fr. Augustine Hoelke and Fr. Thomas Esposito host a sing-a-long in the school courtyard.

## ST. THOMAS MORE AS A MODEL OF DISCERNMENT

by: Fr. Thomas Esposito



Thomas More rightly occupies a prominent place on the list of most popular patron saints today. Given his genius in a variety of human and scholarly areas ranging from lawyer to theologian, from Lord Chancellor of England to devoted father, from statesman to martyr, he is a powerful patron in Heaven on account of the faithful witness he gave while on earth. Yet while the details of his death at the hands of Henry VIII are widely known, those of his discernment as a young man are not.

His father, a successful lawyer and judge, wished him to enter the same line of work. After a classical education in which he mastered Latin and Greek, More turned to the study of law in his early 20s. For at least two years, he lived near a Carthusian monastery on the outskirts of London, using their church as his private chapel and occasionally joining the monks for Mass. While he felt drawn to a religious vocation, he ultimately discerned that God was calling him to “be a chaste husband, rather than a licentious priest.”

Those years spent with the Carthusians provided More with the point of reference he needed to ground his life in the will of God. Though he did not enter the Charterhouse,

it was his refuge from the hubbub of London life and his demanding law studies. He found refuge in the silence of the monastery, and incorporated several monastic themes into his adult life as a father and husband, among them disciplined study and obedience to the will of his heavenly Father (which cost him his earthly life and gained him an eternal one).

Our Abbey offers the same prayerful refuge to men and women seeking to hear God's voice, whether alumni of our Prep School, students at the University of Dallas, or people who have heard of the peaceful oasis to be found within our walls.

If you are discerning a religious vocation and would like to discuss your calling with Fr. Thomas, Vocations Director, he can be reached at  
[fr-thomas@cistercian.org](mailto:fr-thomas@cistercian.org)

