



December 2017

A LETTER FROM THE ABBEY



Briefly

Golden Jubilee

Fr. Bernard celebrates 50 years as a priest
See pg. 3

Cistercian Spirituality

Fr. Roch reflects on a Christmas sermon by St. Bernard
See p. 2

Fr. Joseph in DC

Fr. Joseph updates us on his time at Catholic University in Washington, D.C.
See pg. 2

Vows and Novices

Three monks take the next step in their monastic journey, and two novices take the habit
See p. 5

A Blessed Cistercian

Fr. Denis reflects on the life and influence of Fr. John Brenner, a recently beatified Cistercian Martyr
See pg. 6



MERRY CHRISTMAS FROM CISTERCIAN

A Letter from the Abbot

by: Fr. Abbot Peter Verhalen

St. Benedict says that “guests are never wanting in a monastery,” and that has certainly been the case since we have remodeled the Guest House. We have received family members of the monks, priests and religious in town for conventions or visits with friends, and Cistercian monks and nuns. The renovated Guest House has provided a beautiful space for gathering, among many others, young men and women after a First Friday Mass, hosting the Dominicans in Irving and the priests working in Holy Trinity Seminary, and receptions for visiting Cistercians where they could present slide shows on their monasteries. With the help of architect and builder and so many generous supporters, we have built it and they have indeed come.

Referring again to St. Benedict, we are to receive guests as Christ. The mysterious thing about receiving Christ is that He changes us, both when He comes to us directly in the Eucharist and Scripture, and when He comes to us in the person of a guest. Step by step, day by day, He changes our mind and our will, enabling us to see our sisters and brothers as He himself does, enabling us to think first of meeting their needs as He does. If we seek to meet Christ in our guests, this same process can take place. He can enable us to look upon them as He himself does, to listen for their needs and meet them as He himself does.

Of all the guests we hosted this fall, I think we were most blessed by the visit of Fr. Bernat Berczi, the prior administrator of Zirc. More important than the report he shared about our founding abbey was his prayerful, faithful presence, full of hope that God can bring light and life even when we see no human solutions.

As we all receive our greatest Guest, may we allow Him to transform our minds and wills, filling us with the divine gifts of faith, hope, and charity. Merry Christmas from the Cistercian monks of Dallas.

CHRISTMAS HUMILITY

by: Fr. Roch Kereszty

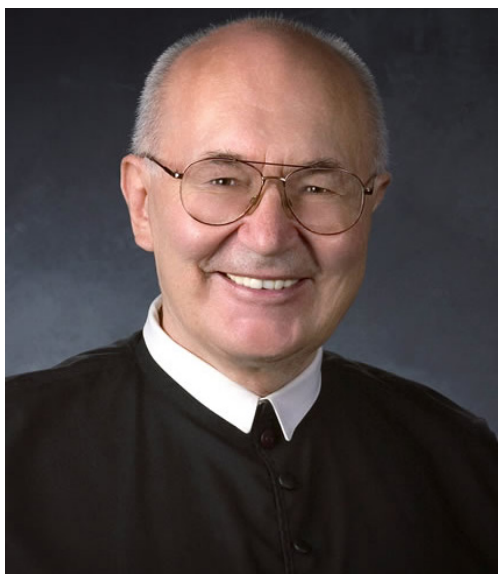
"[The child Jesus] keeps silent, he does not promote himself, does not aggrandize or advertise himself. And behold, the angel proclaims him, a multitude of the heavenly hosts praises him. You too, then, who follow Christ, hide the treasure you have found. Love not to be known, let other lips praise you, let yours remain silent" (St Bernard, the Nativity of our Lord, 3:2).

At first reading, we might be tempted to laugh off Bernard's words: "He has no idea about how our society works. Following his advice would be suicidal for anyone who wants to leave a mark on this planet."

But let's give him a second hearing. Think of Benedict of Nursia and Bernard of Clairvaux: they hid in a cave or in a forest and then later changed the course of their world. The monks of Benedict converted a large part of Europe, Bernard renewed the Church of his time. Francis of Assisi, covered with a ragged sackcloth, gave back the trust in the Church to a growing crowd of urban poor.

The messenger with his episcopal appointment found Karol Woytila in the Carpathian mountains on a kayak tour. Each of these great men and others like them avoided publicity and any form of even covert self-promotion. They ran away from the world but the world ran after them.

A strong person does not need to prove himself. He knows his worth and does not seek validation



by bragging and by seeking to be original.

Think back on your time at Cistercian. Whom did you respect most among your classmates, whom did you vote for Student Council President? For the one who tried to call attention to himself or for the guy who quietly worked for worthy causes and liked to help and serve?

St Bernard's self-esteem rested on two solid pillars. He knew on the one hand that by himself and in himself he was simply nothing. But on the other, he knew that he was a great treasure in God's heart. He was aware that his infinite worth has been unceasingly poured into him from the Divine Spring. With God's strength and love, however, he renewed the face of the Church of his time and left a lasting inheritance for posterity in the Cistercian Order and in his writings.

Fr. Joseph reports from DC

This year I am studying "abroad" at the Catholic University of America, in Washington DC, taking my theological studies to the doctoral level, and so carrying forward that portion of the spiritual identity that our Hungarian founders brought with them to Dallas. It's also a new step, being the first time one of us has pursued a terminal degree in theology from an American university.

During my time of studies I am being hosted by a small local Benedictine abbey, St. Anselm's. It has been a huge blessing to be able to continue to live and pray with other monks during this time.

The year has started out very well. CUA is a research-oriented university founded at the request of the US bishops in 1874; it now has 7,000 students, fully half of them at the graduate level, with Theology and Religious Studies as a flagship program, with about 40 full-time professors and maybe 200 graduate students. It's proven to be a wonderful environment to serve Christ and to gain strength for future service back home – my professors and colleagues are very impressive both intellectually and personally. So far, it is looking like my personal research will focus on the earliest Cistercian authors, which is a great realm to get to inhabit in a more focused way, with the time and resources to gain a deeper understanding. I am excited to respond to this part of my call, and excited to see what God will do with it!

The Abbey has hosted many guests over the past few months, including Fr. Bernat, prior administrator of the Abbey of Zirc in Hungary and Mother Hildegard of Mariastern-Gwiggen, a convent in Austria.



50 years as a Priest: Fr. Bernard Marton

by: Fr. Stephen Gregg



Each man who becomes a priest is led to that point by a remarkable story, winding or otherwise. From that moment of ordination, however, an even more remarkable story follows as the sacrament marks his life with an indelible spiritual mark, configuring him to Christ in a new and permanent way, granting him a specific place in

the life of the Church, and making the rest of his life not only a personal story but somehow the story of Christ at work in the world.

This mysterious character of the priesthood and its way of working something larger in our lives stood out for us all as we celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of Fr. Bernard's ordination this past summer, on the feast of the great Cistercian after

whom our brother is named. Fr. Denis noted in his homily the wonder at work in Fr. Bernard's life, that this one youngest Hungarian, who became a monk and priest here in Dallas without a novitiate or formation in Hungary, should fifty years later be at work in Hungary, almost pushed there by divine Providence, back in Zirc as part of a team seeking to lead and revive the Hungarian roots of our own community.

Fr. Bernard lived the anniversary as a kind of pilgrimage: Beginning with a celebration in Zirc with two elderly priests (the three together totaling 180 years of ministry), he passed then to his boyhood parish in Budafok, to the nuns in Kismaros, to the church of his baptism in Budapest, to the church of his first mass in the abbey of Stams in Austria, back to our home celebration in Dallas, and then lastly to the Cistercian church in Székesfehérvár in Hungary.

"To get wisdom is better than gold!" (Prov 16:16). On a "golden" jubilee, we all wish for that wisdom to persevere as Fr. Bernard has persevered "in the trial of faith, which is more precious than gold" (1 Pet 1:7).



VOWS AND NOVICES

by: Fr. Thomas Esposito

The Abbey was in a celebratory and welcoming mood during the month of August. Brother Matthew completed his novice year and made his first set of temporary vows on August 6th. After he read his vows aloud and signed his name to the sheet placed upon the altar, the Abbot clothed him with the black scapular, and he joined the ranks of those monks who have professed their stability, obedience, and the monastic way of life for at least three years.

At that same Mass, Br. Francis and Br. Raphael renewed their temporary vows for another three years. These three brothers are joined in the juniorate by Br. Benedict, who just completed his first year of temporary vows.

As part of Vespers on August 19, the eve of the feast day of St.

Bernard, we welcomed two young men to the novitiate. Abbot Peter bestowed the white novice habit and a new name upon Michael Kalan, a University of Dallas alumnus and Collin Backus, an alumnus of Benedictine College. Michael is now Br. Christopher, named after the saint who famously and unknowingly carried Christ across a river. Collin was given the name Br. Aelred; his patron is the holy Cistercian abbot Aelred of Rievaulx, a contemporary of St. Bernard who lived in the 12th century.

Please continue to pray that our four junior brothers and two novices will persevere in their monastic calling, and that other young men will prayerfully consider joining them in formation at the Abbey.



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

Crypt Dedication

by: Fr. Ignatius Peacher

The dedication and blessing of the crypt took place on Pentecost Sunday, June 4, immediately after the 10:30 Mass. It was a beautiful day with many things to celebrate. Primarily, it was the final day of the Easter season. Pentecost recalls the sending of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples of Jesus and the celebration echoed the joy that we experienced on Easter Sunday. The day was also the fulfillment of a dream to have a place of burial for the monks next to the abbey church and bring our deceased brothers back to the monastery for their final resting place. The event also marked the

culmination and end of construction at the abbey which had gone on for over a year. Certainly adding to the joy of the day was the large crowd that joined us at Mass. Many familiar faces from the prep school and the University of Dallas brought warmth, feelings of support, and someone to share our happiness. The festivity spilled over beyond the dedication ceremony and Mass to the prep school gym where lunch was served. Yet, many people came back and lingered in the crypt to see it for the first time and to recall memories of the monks whose names are etched in stone.



ABBEY RENOVATIONS

by: Br. Benedict Lacombe

Because the Rule of St. Benedict exhorts its disciples to “welcome all as Christ,” the recent renovations to the guesthouse have allowed us to show an even greater fidelity to our monastic vocation. Prior to the renovations, our guest facilities did not offer the flexibility we needed to serve the various needs of the guests we received.

Now the guesthouse, with its awesome living room, kitchenette, and guest rooms, allows us to meet the needs of our guests, whether they stay overnight or need a comfortable space for Bible studies or other gatherings.

Since the day the contractors left, the guesthouse – and particularly the living room – has astounded us with its versatility.

We have been able to host events at the monastery that we would never have thought about before.

When our confrere, Fr. Melchior Chladek, passed away in June, any attention given to our facilities went naturally to the new crypt since he was the first to be directly interred there. However, what may have gone unnoticed was the role the guesthouse living room played.

The living room allowed us to host a reception after a funeral for the first time, which allowed the monks to remember Fr. Melchior fondly with the people he touched throughout his ministry.

We have also been able to host gatherings for the seminarians and religious who live near us to help strengthen those important bonds.

In most families, it's mom or dad's responsibility to handle the cooking or grill up something tasty for family dinners – that, in addition to their many other familial tasks. In the monastery, though, it's a full-time job to feed 28

monks, a job that has been heroically filled by John Phillips, Cistercian Class '81, for the last ten years.



Prior to his time with us, John worked in the fast-paced restaurant business in Dallas, Las Vegas and Irvine, California for nearly two decades. When a opening was available, John offered to take the job himself. Abbot

Denis, who was John's Form Master, was more than happy to welcome him, not just as a hired hand or an expert chef, but as someone that the monks could rely on (we monks tend to esteem stability!), and one we hold in high regard as a loyal friend to the abbey.

While the monks especially appreciate the “fruits” of his labors: from the daily meals he prepares to the special feast day party and holiday menus he puts together, the wider community has also gladly partaken of his culinary creations, since John organizes all of the receptions that take place at the abbey. So the next time you're attending a vows or ordination ceremony reception in the courtyard, remember the man behind the scenes making it all happen – and if you see him, give him a hearty thanks!

by: Fr. Ambrose Strong



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

Fr. Abbot Peter blesses the crowd gathered for the dedication of the new science building at the Cistercian Preparatory School

THE BEATIFICATION OF FR. JOHN BRENNER

by: Fr. Denis Farkasfalvy



On a cold winter night a 27-year-old priest in Hungary, an assistant pastor in a small parish, was murdered while carrying the Eucharist to a dying man he was called to assist. The sick call was a fake, fabricated by a group of the town's communist leadership, upset by his phenomenal success among the teenagers and even elementary school children.

The name of the priest was Fr. John Brenner. A Cistercian, he began as a novice in our mother Abbey of Zirc in Hungary. As it is known from old and new evidence, he remained a member of our Order, taking and renewing his religious vows, although clandestinely. At this point there are still four of us here in the Abbey who knew and were part of the illegal Cistercian community before we left Hungary the year before Fr. John was killed.

His murder stunned us. At the time the government authorities allowed no publicity around the event. For forty years the memory of his martyrdom was kept private, a matter of oral tradition. Only after the fall of Communism did the process of beatification begin. In spite of the great difficulty in finding witnesses still alive, by 1999 all the documentation had been sent to Rome.

On November 8, Pope Francis announced his recognition of Fr. John's martyrdom, and the beatification was scheduled for the coming summer.

You must think of a young, very handsome but in a sense quite ordinary young man, playing soccer with the young men of his town with as much zest and enthusiasm as he had. For forty years the Communist regime sabotaged the investigation and punishment for the crime by which he was killed. All that can be said with confidence today is that the crime was committed collectively by a group of half-drunken party officials and policemen, waiting for him in the dark as he was carrying the Holy Eucharist and defending it while he was stabbed, 32 times by several knives and hands, as shown by the autopsy report. His surplice covered with blood was preserved and is kept in the chapel built at the place of his martyrdom in Rábakethely, Hungary.

We must pray and hope that in honor of this young brother of ours, a new Cistercian saint, we may be fortified in the faith and our resolve to give away our life to Christ and his People in the Church until his beatification will allow us to celebrate a mass in his honor and turn to him as our saintly intercessor.