



The Tabernacle of the Abbey Church

Summer, 1993

LETTER FROM THE ABBOT



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The Tabernacle: A Guided Tour

The number of visitors to the Abbey Church is still increasing and, of course, one would like to give each one of them a guided tour. The guided tour usually culminates in visiting the centerpiece of the sanctuary, the tabernacle hewn into the largest stone block of the church with a robust bronze door, the work of a renowned Texas artist, Billy Hassell, an alumnus of the Cistercian Prep School, class '74.

The door was the result of intensive planning, study sessions, and continued correspondence between Billy Hassell and myself, his Form Master for nine years and religion teacher for six.

Billy has drawn three designs for the door. They all resembled one another in the rich assembly of early Christian Eucharistic images, which I had collected for him from different books on early Christian art.

The pre-history of the door, however, reaches much further into the past. In the fall of 1965, Billy as a Pre-Former (grade 4) and myself as a "novice" Form Master went on our Form's first outing to Cleburn State Park. On our way into the park a deer jumped out of the forest and Billy was immensely excited. The next day a double period was scheduled for Art, but the art teacher did not show up. As Form Master I got stuck with the task of teaching art to 25 fourth-graders. Putting on the mask of "expertise," I distributed paper and crayons and told the boys to draw whatever had impressed them most from the outing. From the 25 boys 24 drew a picture of the dam with those cliffs which they had attempted to climb until out of fear of accidents, I succeeded in stopping them and sending them to the other end of the park. Only Billy drew a remarkable picture of the deer jumping out of the wilderness - for him the greatest experience of the day. Years passed. In the summer after Fifth Form I drove with some boys of the class, among them Billy Hassell, to Wyoming where we spent a week in Grand Teton National Park. One morning we got up at 3 AM and drove all the way into Yellowstone to watch the animals going to the rivers for a drink at dawn. Billy kept count of the wild life: that morning we saw 116 animals from close distance.

Under the tutelage of Fr. Melchior, his biology teacher, Billy took care of all sorts of animals: turtles, fish, rabbits, opossums, even skunks. And his art developed and grew. Up to this day, gorgeous pictures of animals dominate his canvases. On them he does not only "picture nature." These animals convey deep meaning and symbolism.

All this needed to be told to explain why I collected all the available nature symbolism concerning the Eucharist to help Billy Hassell design the tabernacle door.

And now look at the picture. Under the figures you see the waves. This ocean symbolizes the world, as the place of chaos and perils. On the two sides fish are springing out of the water, trying to catch the anchor of hope and the key to the Kingdom, a symbol for faith. In the middle the Cross of Christ stands as the new tree of life. The tree is enwrapped by the "true vine," the Church growing

out of the tree of life, with abundant fruit: twelve clusters of grapes, symbolizing the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve apostles and thus all the redeemed.

In the middle a mother bird presents one of the nicest symbols of the Eucharist. A mother pelican sits over her nest, feeding her nestlings with her own blood. (Ancient people thought that the mother pelican does that. To see why, you must look it up in an encyclopedia!) St. Thomas Aquinas in a famous Eucharistic hymn wrote about this image. Some of you may like its Latin text:

*"Pie pelicane, Jesu Domine
me immundum munda tuo sanguine,
cuius una stilla salvum facere
totum mundum quit ab omni scelere."*

In translation:

*"O my dear Lord Jesus, kindest Pelican,
wash me clean with your blood, unclean as I am.
One drop can accomplish, of no more is need,
that from all stain of sin, the whole world be freed."*

With their luxurious feathers, the two peacocks sitting on shells held by coral islands, represent by the life of paradise, and thus the persons who have reached eternal life. In this way, the images on the door represent three stages of our Christian life: 1. Conversion: jumping out of the chaos of the world by means of faith and hope; 2. Our life in the nest of the Church, as we are fed by the sacraments that pour from the heart of Jesus; 3. Eternal life in Paradise.

When you bring some one to the Abbey Church, do not forget to approach the tabernacle and explain the rich symbolism of the door. And take pride in this artwork. In a very deep sense, it is the product of Cistercian which keeps on affecting the art world in Texas through the works of Billy Hassell, now living and working in Houston.

LIFE IN THE ABBEY

Religious Vows Taken

Shortly after the last *Newsletter* was published, on January 3, 1993, Br. Paul took his first vows and Br. Mark Ripperger took his perpetual solemn vows. This meant for Paul the end of the novitiate and the beginning of his theological studies for the priesthood. For Br. Mark, the spring of 1993 constituted the last semester of formal education in theology and the immediate preparation for ordination.

Ordinations

On January 30, 1993, Bishop Grahmann conferred upon Br. Mark the order of the diaconate. After that, he preached at several occasions, baptized and distributed communion. Finally on May 9, at 4 PM, in a mass concelebrated by all the monks with Bishop Grahmann, Br. Mark was ordained a priest in the Abbey Church. His ordination marked the first anniversary of the consecration of our Church.

The Choir of The University of Dallas Perform in the Abbey Church

The Abbey was privileged to host the choir of UD on two occasions. On March 5 an evening concert was performed in our church. The choir's director, Mrs. Marilyn Walker (mother of CPS alumnus Bob Walker, class '81) conducted the choir in the performance of motets by Bruckner, Palestrina, Vittoria and Mozart. This first part of the concert took place "a cappella," i.e., without instrumental accompaniment, and took full advantage of the church's excellent acoustics. After a brief intermission, Msgr. Schuler from St. Paul, Minnesota, conducted the choir, guest musicians and soloists in a fine performance of Mozart's Coronation Mass. The columns of the Church literally shook at the fortissimos of the Glory and the Sanctus.

At Fr. Mark's ordination the choir returned and sang during the different parts of the mass. Their performance moved them and us equally: they felt that sacred music was truly fulfilling its function, we felt that the dignity and beauty of the ordination was immensely enhanced. We look forward to the opportunity to host the University's choir many more times!

Fr. Mark's First Mass

The day after his ordination, on Sunday, May 10, at 4 PM., Fr. Mark celebrated his first mass in the Abbey Church. His father, brother and sister with many of his relatives came to rejoice together with our community as a new priest again joined our ranks. His deceased mother, we believe, was also with us in spirit and saw her son, issued from her short life on earth, take the role of Christ at the altar. The joy of all participants was eloquently expressed in Fr. Peter's sermon.

Short-lived Novitiate

On March 20, Glenn Jones took the Cistercian habit and began his novitiate as Brother Joseph. After six months, he felt that - in spite of all earlier evidence to the contrary - he had no vocation to our way of life. Somewhat saddened but grateful for the six months spent with us, he left our community in the middle of July.

Fr. Damian's Art Show

As Fr. Damian reached his 80th birthday and the Prep School, which began under him as its first Headmaster, became 30 years old, the Abbey and the School jointly sponsored an exhibit of Fr. Damian's works in the Abbey. Fr. Damian's magnificent Stations of the Cross were completed for the occasion. From a grant by the Patrick and Beatrice Haggerty Foundation, and with an introduction by the renowned art critic, Gerald Nordland of Chicago, a beautiful catalogue was published, picturing an impressive collection of Fr. Damian's sculpture. The exhibit lasted a week. For its design and organization we remain indebted to Gary Cunningham, class '72, and Mrs. Jan Pritchett, the School's Director of Development and mother of two alumni Leslie (class '89) and Jack (class '93).

CONSTRUCTION AND REMODELING

Following upon the construction of the Church, the past ten months have seen a great deal of change on the first floor of the Abbey. The largest part of the

Old Chapel is now a full-sized Abbey Library, housing stacks of books on theology, spirituality and monastic history. A small collection of books constitute "The Hungarian Library," for the benefit Hungarians living in the metroplex and attending the Abbey's monthly Hungarian mass. About one half of the old Chapel's sanctuary has become a small chapel for private masses, confessions and for worship by small groups.

AWARDS FOR THE CHURCH

After having received an award from the Texas Chapter of the American Institute of Architecture, our Church was chosen also by the Dallas Chapter of the same organization for a local citation. At a luncheon held on June 12, 1993, Abbot Denis and architect Gary Cunningham jointly accepted the Certificate of Merit given for the building. Meanwhile, the Andres Construction Company received an award of excellence for the construction of the Church.

NEWS FROM THE CISTERCIANS IN HUNGARY

The Cistercian Order is working hard to reconstruct its life and activities in Hungary. The country is politically free, but social, economic and spiritual changes come about only with difficulty. To a large extent, the bureaucracy of the old Communist regime is in office, and tries to slow down the changes. The state that is now in possession of previously confiscated church property has worked out a system of excuses and delays, hoping to retain most of what is valuable. Only run-down buildings are being returned to the church as a matter of course. Since the major part of our Abbey of Zirc was transformed into a boarding school, only a small portion of it is in the hand of the Cistercians. The twelve young men who have joined the Order since 1989, have practically no home in which to stay between semesters. When convening for a retreat during the Christmas holidays, the twenty-some monks, including, these young candidates, doubled and tripled up in the rooms; some of the youngest slept in the hallways. Out of necessity all those studying for the priesthood, stay and study in Rome, but, of course, this arrangement has quite a few difficulties. They cannot form there a community of their own, nor does each of them have an easy time studying theology or philosophy in Italian.

On the bright side, one of our former schools, that of Pécs in southern Hungary, founded in 1813, has been returned to Cistercian possession. At the solemn act of receiving back the school, Fr. Henry represented also our community of Dallas. To increase the number of the monks, for the school year of 1993-94, Fr. Benedict Monostori, a retired professor of Physics at UD, will go back to Hungary and be on the faculty of that school. This was the first such request received that we have been able to honor.

SUMMER TRAVEL

Due to a drop in the price of transatlantic flights, this summer was particularly busy for our community in both directions over the Atlantic. Besides the Abbot, leaving to attend a chapter meeting of the Congregation of Zirc, Frs. Placid, Henry, Moses, Gilbert, Melchior and David have gone to Hungary while the two Marton brothers (Fr. Henry and Bernard) hosted the visit of their third

brother, László and his wife. Fr. Julius also had his sister visiting here. Fr. Gregory traveled with a group of students to Spain and Italy, Fr. Timothy went to Dijon, France for further French studies.

Frs. Peter, Roch and Mark, together with Brs. Edmund and Paul went on a vacation trip to New Mexico and Colorado for hiking and backpacking.

PUBLICATIONS

In honor of Fr. Louis Lékai, a member of our Abbey, who was paralyzed in 1982 by a massive stroke and thus confined to a nursing home, the University of Dallas sponsored a *Festschrift*, a volume of articles by fellow scholars about Cistercian history. Editors were Fr. Louis' former colleagues, Professors John Sommerfeld and Francis Swietek. The volume contains an article by one monk of the Abbey, Fr. Bede, professor of history at UTA.

Another *Festschrift*, honoring Prof. Frederick Wilhelmsen, has also been sponsored by UD. This volume was edited and furnished with introduction by Fr. James Lehrberger, O. Cist., a professor of philosophy at UD.

NEW APPOINTMENTS

In 1993-94, besides Fr. Benedict, also Fr. James will be teaching abroad. He was asked to be on the Rome Campus of the University of Dallas for both semesters. Fr. Mark Ripperger will be teaching full-time at the Prep School: Math and Computer in Form I and Physical Science in Form III.

LOOKING FORWARD

We look forward to a good year but with the usual caution and some anxiety.

The Prep School has, as of **August 1**, 330 students enrolled, which means a new peak. Our new First Form is one of the best ever admitted.

On **August 15-18**, we hold our community retreat, with our dear friend, Fr. Pat Koch as retreat master.

On **October 3**, we will hold an evening mass for the students of UD, honoring with a reception the new freshmen. As a first, the choir of the University, now called *Collegium Cantorum*, will sing as the ordinary of the Mass the *Missa Brevis* by Palestrina, while the choir of monks will sing the proper parts in Gregorian chant. The texts of the mass will be, as usual, in English.

As in the last few years, on **November 27**, the evening before the first Sunday of Advent, 7 PM through 9:30 PM, we will hold a Eucharistic adoration in the Abbey Church, praying in particular for priestly and religious vocations. This is still the main focus of our petitions to the Lord and we ask all of you to join us daily. In the local and the universal Church, the need for new priests, good and faithful, is more urgent than ever.

