



LETTER FROM THE ABBOT

December 15, 1990

CHRISTMAS GREETINGS

Just a Christmas Card would be enough if we were able express in one picture or one word our gratitude, appreciation and best wishes to all our friends who have helped us reach this Christmas in a thankful spirit.

To express the message of Christmas I choose a better qualified Cistercian abbot from the 12th century, Blessed Gueric of Igny (1087-1157), whose memory has not faded especially because of his very inspirational Christmas sermons. The following passage is taken from one of them:

How happy a feast, what a lovely birthday when the infant Jesus is born. It sets right our birth, reforms our life, destroys our guilt, cancels the record of our fallen nature. If anybody is desperate, feeling that he has been born to doom, he obtains a chance for new birth! For all who receive You are given the power of becoming children of God. Gratitude is due to you, our God, for the gratuitous grace of this generosity! We obtained access to this grace in which we live and boast with the hope of God's children. What a wonderful exchange: you take our flesh and give your divinity. This deal was worked out by grace, not greed. It exalts the glory of your indulgence while making rich the poverty of my indigence.

Little Boy, it was mercy that made You become a child; although in You both kindness and truth made their journey to us. By becoming small, You wanted to make us great. Our gain, not Your profit you sought as you chose to be born among us with the only purpose of enhancing us by becoming poor, exalting us by your humiliation. You emptied yourself so that we may obtain plenty; by your impoverishment, You transmitted to us all the riches of your divinity.

Do you want to see God emptying himself completely? Look at the child lying in the manger. You see only a baby? This is the One who fills heaven and earth by his power! Do You see a small child wrapped in swaddling clothes? He is the One who is clad with inaccessible light as with a garment. Do You hear a Baby cry? He is the One at whose mighty voice of thunder the angels fall prostrate and cover their faces. But Isaiah, the prophet, was right: this is *our* God, becoming empty to make us fulfilled, reducing His own life in order to reproduce ours anew.

Watch out, brothers, see to it that this little child born to you may grow in you and reach full stature in you: for that purpose was He born in you!

About Building the Chapel

The Chapel Project stood in the center of our preoccupation for most of the Fall. We spoke and thought about it in two ways. The building of a church is a spiritual event that must impact our thinking and life. Every time aesthetic considerations emerge, we must ask: Is this the way we think about ourselves, called to be the church, the dwelling place of God's Spirit, both as individuals

and as a community? And also in externals: Will our way of daily worship match the care and concern with which we want the chapel building to praise God? So we took a few steps to improve our prayer life, and became more and more involved in the Chapel Project -- a project of constructing a building.

Plans of Worship

We have planned for three evening of recollection. On the eve of the first Sunday of Advent and the eve of the first Sunday in Lent, we plan to spend the evening in silence and prayer with the Blessed Sacrament exposed in the Chapel. Hopefully, this Eucharistic devotion will continue in the new chapel, a sign of recognizing our vocation to prayer as Christians, monks, priests.

On December 31, 1990, the last night of the year, we will have an exposition of the Blessed Sacrament from 8PM though midnight. While all sorts of New Year's Eve celebrations are taking place this evening, we plan to hold a few hours of quiet vigil, kept in awareness of Christ's Eucharistic presence and his faithfulness to the cause of Redemption. The last hour of this program will be a Holy Hour from 11PM through Midnight, which will be open to all our friends who feel inspired to greet the New Year and the New Decade in the form of a Eucharistic Vigil. Its main theme will be: praying for priestly and religious vocations.

Just a few people praying and keeping vigil mean a great deal in God's eyes. As you know, this insight is the basis of all religious life as it is lived by few for the sake of the many.

On the first Sunday of Advent we started another "innovation." To add solemnity and inspiration to our common prayer, we introduced the singing of the hymns assigned to the liturgy of the Hours at Lauds and Vespers.

Activities toward Constructing the New Chapel

So far the the community of the Abbey has met with our alumnus architect, Gary Cunningham, four times. At these meetings we have discussed all basic issues preliminary to detailed planning. What has emerged is the plan of a rectangular chapel closing the courtyard of the Abbey with an almost exact East-West orientation. In front of the main entrance to the church an open courtyard will provide "transitional" space between the parking lot and the chapel's entrance. The chapel will be connected to the Abbey from the sanctuary and from its entrance porch. A new path will lead from the school to the chapel's main entrance. There are as yet no final decisions on questions concerning windows, the structure of the roof and the final arrangement of the choir stalls in the sanctuary. The "looks" of the chapel will reflect both the Cistercian tradition developed for monastic churches and the nature of those modern means and materials that we plan to use.

To resolve the remaining questions, we felt the need for more live contact with buildings of the Cistercian past. Upon request we have received two courtesy tickets from American Airlines so that the Abbot and the architect can make a "blitz-visit" of half a dozen Cistercian churches in Europe. During the second half of the Christmas holidays, December 29 through January 6, they will

visit the abbatial churches of Casamari, Trefontane and Fossanuova in Italy, of Heiligenkreuz and Lilienfeld in Austria, and of Zirc and BÉlapátfalva in Hungary. For the last night of their trip, they will be guests of the Cistercian nuns in Mönchof, Austria, a small monastery which has just recently built its own very attractive chapel.

Financing the Chapel

Meanwhile all our gratitude goes to the Alumni, Alumni Parents and Parents of current students of the Prep School. The Chapel Committee has indicated that they have just about reached the figure of \$700,000 in pledges. This amount, added to \$300,000 pledged by the Abbey, constitutes about 75% of the goal of our campaign. Of course, in every race the last stretch is the most difficult. By the end of the spring we hope to have 100% of the costs collected and the design finished and fully endorsed by the Chapel Committee as well as by the Abbey's membership.

Community News

August 16-19, we held our annual retreat. Fr. Timothy Horner OSB, the first headmaster of the St. Louis Priory School, was retreat master. The encounter with Fr. Timothy was quite interesting: The Benedictines of Ampleforth, England, started their school in St. Louis, just a couple of years before our Prep School opened. It was interesting to compare notes with the British monks who -- surprise!?! -- had experiences of "cultural adjustment" very similar to those of the founders of Our Lady of Dallas. St. Louis Priory has completed the construction of its chapel already in 1963, though it became an Abbey only in 1989.

On October 6, the freshmen of the University of Dallas were invited to visit the Abbey. About 40 students came to an evening Mass followed by reception. In spite of a conflict in schedules, we saw some increase in attendance in comparison with last year's event, and so we plan to continue next fall our young tradition of inviting the freshmen to a Mass in the monastery.

At the beginning of September, Fr. Abbot and Fr. Peter went to Rome to represent the Abbey at the General Chapter of the Cistercian Order. The General Chapter has its ordinary session every fifth year. It discusses the state of affairs in nearly 200 religious houses of men and women, all belonging to the Cistercian Order. This year's General Chapter treated a number of technical and juridical topics which would make no easy reading material for you, but, as always, it was an enjoyable opportunity to compare notes and get informed on trends, problems and successes. Although sadly diminished in number, all the Eastern and Central European Cistercians were represented. Contrary to our expectations, the abbots of our five monasteries in Vietnam have not been able to arrive; they were represented by the superior of a Cistercian monastery founded by Vietnamese refugees in Switzerland.

News About Individuals

For two years, Fr. Siyum Basil Kifle, a Cistercian from Ethiopia, lived with us as a guest. He was studying for a Master's Degree in English at the University

of Dallas. By November 15, 1990, he finished his thesis and on November 27 he traveled back to his country via Rome.

Fr Julius has written a few letters just to let us know that he has quickly adjusted to his new job and is quite busy. He is in charge of eleven students, some newly ordained priests, some seminarians studying at various Roman universities. Four are from Hungary, two from Austria, two from France, two from Poland and one is Italian. It seems, Fr. Julius is "speaking in tongues" all the time.

Fr. Gilbert's book "Monastic Quest and Interreligious Dialogue" has just been published by the international publishing house of Peter Lang (New York, Paris, Frankfurt, Bern).

Fr. Roch's "magnum opus," a textbook on Christology, has been accepted for publication by Alba Press (Staten Island, N.Y.).

Two new issues of the Claudel Studies (vol. XVII/1&2), edited by Fr. Moses, have recently left the press. The editor has several contributions in both.

Besides minor bouts with the flu, all members of the monastery have managed to continue in good health. Only Fr. James scared us and the University's community with what seemed for 24 hours to be a heart attack. He was later diagnosed as having pericarditis, caused by viral infection, and his recovery was quick.

Hopes and Prayers

In the center of our request for prayers stands the issue of vocations to the priesthood and religious life. In spite of the various debates on the matter, words will not solve the issue. Our celebration of Advent should be especially rich in focusing on the Blessed Virgin who heard her call, accepted her vocation, and did not hesitate to define her life as that of service: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it done to me according to your word." This is how Mary became the model of a monastic and priestly life centered on the task of forming the Body of Christ and carrying out the Father's redeeming will for the life of the world. Only a Catholic Christianity accepting Mary as Mother and Virgin will be again able to think and speak of consecrated virginity and celibate priesthood in a way that leads to an increase of priestly and religious vocations.

*Let us remain
united in prayer and hope
during the holy season of Christmas.*