



A Letter From The Abbey

Cistercian Abbey

Christmas 1997

Our Lady of Dallas

The three dimensions of Christ's Coming

The Season of Advent, four weeks preceding Christmas, explores the meaning of the coming of Christ in three dimensions: his first coming at his birth in the flesh, his second coming at the close of history, and his daily coming through his grace. The first coming took place at one single time and one single place, at Christmas night in Bethlehem; the second will happen at the end of the time and over all places at the last judgment; while his coming in grace is happening at all times and all places whenever God's grace touches us. The first coming was in poverty and humility, the final coming will be in power and glory, his coming in grace takes place in the hidden realm of our conscience and freedom. The first was prepared by the whole history of the Old Testament, the last one is being prepared by the history of the Church, his coming in grace gives meaning to our personal history and inserts each one of us into the history of salvation. Because of these three dimensions Advent is like a kaleidoscope. It keeps on reflecting, for every person who cares to look, the many meanings of Christmas in ever new ways, in always changing configurations.

Advent is a period of penance. By Christ's coming to us in grace we seek a renewal of life so that He may be born to us and in us. Advent is also a period of joy, for it is loaded with gifts of everlasting value. Therefore for our souls Advent is eminently a season for shopping: we are getting ready for the main event of Christmas, an exchange of gifts with the heavenly Father. He sends us his only Son to become a member of the human race, and we, in response, surrender to Him our lives.

Advent has three leaders. They are Isaiah, John the Baptist and the Virgin Mary. Isaiah announces the messianic coming and its joyful promises. He tells the heavens "to drop down their dew" and foretells the coming of Emmanuel. John the Baptist calls to conversion, penance and renewal, "for the Kingdom of God is near." The Virgin Mary teaches the art of responding to grace as she responds in humble acceptance to the angel's message at the annunciation: "I am the Lord's handmaid; let it be to me according to your word."



In Advent the color of the vestments is purple, for every day is a day of penance. Yet at mass the Alleluia verse is not suppressed, as it is in Lent. Rather because of the joy of anticipation, St. Paul is quoted repeatedly: "Rejoice in the Lord always, I tell you again: rejoice" (Phil 4:4). A wreath of evergreen with four candles is used for decoration. The candles signify the four Sundays of Advent, three are purple and one is pink, because the third Sunday of Advent is that of the Rose. "Behold a Rose is blooming,"—says an Advent hymn in reference to the "flower of Jesse," promised by Isaiah. In the middle of the four candles stands a fifth, a white one, signifying Christ whose coming crowns the season.

The secular business tumult, the loud, laughter-filled Christmas parties, the warm and intimate family reunions, the exuberance of children and the nostalgia of the elderly are only peripheral ornaments that surround the festivities. As the calendar year runs out and we leave behind forever the year of 1997, we turn our back to the past and celebrate the constant novelty of Christ's continued coming. The face of the Child in the manger is ever new if we are ready to face our future and the call it entails. If we leave behind what is evil, the Lord will come to forgive and redeem; if we seek his presence, we will experience his arrival in hundreds of ways; if we accept his call, he will assure that we accomplish what we were created for.

NEWS FROM THE MONASTERY...

A very special baptism

Ms. Le Nguyen came to America after the Vietnam war. Together with three other ladies, her coming to Dallas was sponsored by Fr. Abbot Anselm, the first abbot of the monastery. The other ladies found jobs elsewhere but Mrs Le stayed employed at the Abbey as a cook until 1994. This time was for her a quiet and long preparation for becoming a Catholic. Her formal decision to become a catholic and direct instruction in the faith began about the time Fr. Paul entered the novitiate in 1991. She also learned reading and writing, and after her retirement began her direct preparation for Christian Initiation. With the permission of the pastor of St. Luke in Irving, Mrs. Le Nguyen was baptized, confirmed and received first communion on December 8 in the Abbey Church. The ceremony was held by Fr. Paul with members of the abbey and of the Vietnamese community attending. Ms. Le herself chose a feast of the Immaculate Conception to be her day of Baptism and changed her name to Mary Le Nguyen.

Fr. Aloysius in hospital

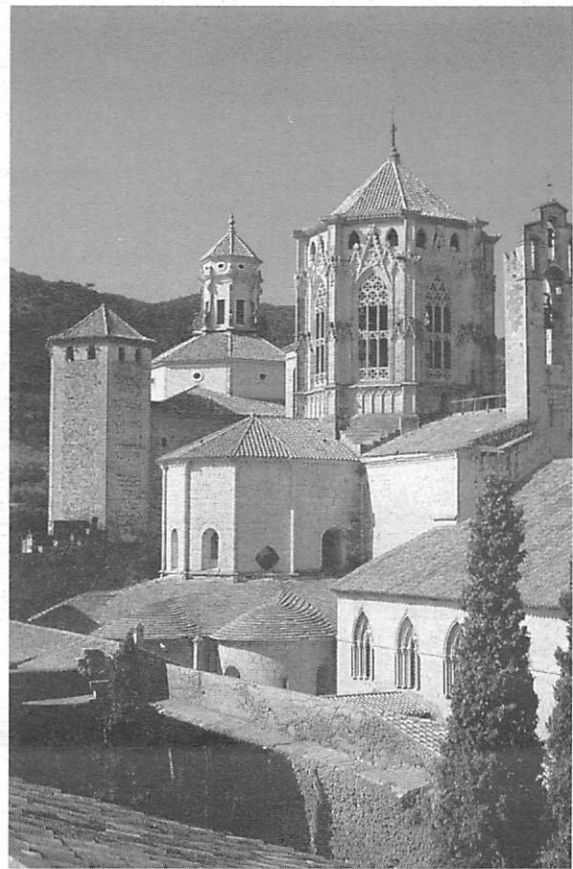
On October 7, 1997, Fr. Aloysius entered Irving Community Hospital. On October 14, he underwent surgery with a fourfold by-pass and had a string of complications that have so far prevented him from recovering. An operation of the colon was a major help in his battling infection but his condition remains unstable. We are very grateful for the prayers and visits that helped him battling so many illnesses in the last two months.

Court-yard renewal

Ever since the three wings of the Abbey were built, there was an unfinished courtyard in the form of a rectangular lawn with two pecan trees, each by now in its 40th year of age. When the church closed up the monastic cloister, the need of landscaping the courtyard became even more obvious. With a sprinkling system installed and the drainage organized, plants, trees, bushes, a fountain and some furniture were introduced. Some thought that we now had a "low-maintenance" garden, others began to pull weeds. However, the weeds did better than the roses. Then came the year of 1997 with three novices: **Brs. Patrick, Gabriel and Ambrose**. They did a great deal for turning around the status of the courtyard. With the end of their novitiate and their return to college studies approaching, they designed a truly low-maintenance solution. They expanded the number of trees and bushes, but drastically reduced the ground cover. Over substantial areas they laid down a felt screen and spread over it a thick layer of rocks. The rest of the ground will be covered with buffalo grass. They also transplanted some Bearded Iris that will add to the color and beauty of the areas not covered with rock, which was chosen to match the stone of the church. On December 6, several Cistercian Upper School students (including **Steven Yelderman, Jonathan Purcell, Brian Price and Allen Wan**) joined the brothers for spreading the rocks. The project is, of course, not finished as yet, and who knows how much more help this low-maintenance garden will demand.

Cistercian Order convenes synod in Spain

On September 21, **Abbot Denis** participated at the Cistercian Order bi-annual Synod at the monastery of **Poblet** in Spain. The Synod is a subgroup of the Order's major superiors chosen to take care of the Order's business between general chapters. At each synod a report is given on the status of each "congregation" (group) of monasteries, mentioning major events and problems in a region or house. The Synod lasted three days, the 22 members held six sessions, each session lasted about four hours. Most issues discussed were of administrative nature. Lack of vocations is causing serious problems for the monasteries in Belgium and Holland, while in Vietnam—in spite of the ongoing Communist suppression—a record number of monks and nuns have joined the Order's six monasteries. Also in Poland, Hungary and the French monastery on the island of **Lérins** of the Mediterranean coast, the number of new recruits has caused a healthy increase of members. On his way to Poblet, Abbot Denis stopped in **Lérins** and visited the monastery, situated on an island at a few miles from the city of Cannes. The monastery runs a retreat house and produces first-class quality wine sold all over the world. Started by **St. Honoré** in the year 400 AD, Lérins is one of the most ancient monasteries in Europe. During most of its history it was Benedictine. However, after being destroyed by the French Revolution, Cistercians revived it in 1858. It has a rather unusual modern history. After decades of stagnation and at the brink of extinction in the 1970's, a group of young men joined it in the early eighties and thoroughly reorganized and re-



The monastery of Poblet

talized it. "I got the greatest inspiration from my visit of Lérins" — Abbot Denis said as he returned.

Prep School library *update* . . .

Since our last Newsletter a brand new building has risen on the Cistercian campus. Behind the Middle School and next to the Science Center, the construction of the new library has made remarkable progress. Planned to be completed in May, presently it is two months ahead of schedule.

At the same time a 35-year old brick building that used to house the heating and airconditioning system of the abbey and the

school is being converted into a brand new art building with classrooms, offices and storage space. A covered walk will connect the new buildings with the Middle School and the Science Center.

The financing of this construction is a true Christmas story. In 1995, **Mrs. Justine Abernathy**, a lady who had quietly watched Cistercian boys grow up in her neighborhood, left her entire estate, nearly one million dollars, to

Cistercian "so that the Abbey's church may be built and, in case it is already built, a library may be constructed." Out of the seed of her estate the 1996 Cistercian Capital Campaign was born, to pay for the land purchase (25 acres), a new library and new art facilities. The capital campaign has raised so far over a total of \$4.1 million. But this is still just \$200,000 shy of its final goal that needs to be reached next Spring.

World-wide preparations for a Year of Jubilee

The 900th anniversary of the monastery of Cîteaux is turning into a major international event. On the feast of St. Benedict, March 21, 1998, the actual day on which Cîteaux began in 1098, a large pilgrimage will take place at and around that monastery, with thousands of participants from the whole world. The two religious orders that issued from Cîteaux, the Cistercians and the Trappists, plan to publish a declaration of brotherhood (*carta fraternitatis*) as the foundation stone of closer, more active and more cooperative relationship for the future. Among other things, the two orders could do much within their own ranks as well as over the whole world for exploring more deeply the essential features of Cistercian Spirituality that has so deeply influenced the church during and after the 12th century.

For this country, the first activity marking the jubilee took place in early November. Choir masters for Gregorian chant from about twenty monasteries, among them **Fr. Bernard Marton** from our abbey, convened in Spencer, Massachusetts and sang together at a workshop of three days. As a result of their labor they taped a set of songs in Gregorian chant of the Cistercian tradition.

The next event, a **convocation of all Cistercian superiors**, is slated for Feb. 6, 1998 in the Trappist monastery of **Gethsemani**. That monastery is about to celebrate at that date the 25th anniversary of its abbot, **Timothy Kelly**. Six conferences are planned about Cistercian spirituality, three by **Fr. Chrysogonus Wadell**, monk of Gethsemani and three by Abbot Denis Farkasfalvy of

Our Lady of Dallas. More than twenty monasteries of Cistercian and Trappist men and women have promised to participate at this symposium.

Here at **Our Lady of Dallas**, in our own small way, we have made plans for a celebration. On Saturday, March 21 at a solemn mass of Thanksgiving we plan to commemorate the 900th anniversary of our Order and 40 years of Cistercian life in Texas. While the first Cistercian group began to live in Dallas as early as 1955, the present monastery's dedication took place forty years ago on February 8, 1958. Thus the year 1998 marks a double jubilee: 900th year of the foundation of Cîteaux and 40th year of the foundation of our monastery. For the celebration on March 21, 1998 we will make special announcements and will mail invitations.

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