

VALYERMO CHRONICLE
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Jubilee Edition

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[1] *Letter From the Abbot*

LETTER FROM THE ABBOT

DEAR FRIENDS,

OCTOBER 11, 2006 is the Golden Jubilee of our monastic community's canonical transfer from the monastic foundation in China to its new home in Valyermo. This milestone has passed by quietly for us but not without much reflection. Traditionally, monastic life is a hidden life; one lived in solitude and prayer. Throughout the Christian centuries, monasteries have been sought-after places, oases of prayer and hospitality for people who come to seek things tangible and intangible. But much of what monks do is not understood by mainstream society. Often we are asked by people who come for the first time, "What do you do?" Most of us answer that we "pray and work." "What good do you do for society?" The answer is somewhat the same. "More than can be seen or imagined."

THIS monastic community through its founding Abbey, Sint-Andries in Belgium, responded to the call of the Church to plant a monastery in China.

Monastic scouts were sent ahead and the monastery was canonically established in 1929. That foundation was full of challenge and creativity as it sought to bring Benedictine life and wed it to Chinese cultural forms of architecture, habit, language and thought. The monks in the early days endured many personal and communal transitions, including the establishment of monastic schools (a seminary for the diocese and a school for local children), the insecurity of war, great poverty, change of locations necessitated by survival so as to find a new livelihood and monastic work, teaching in schools outside the monastery, missionary treks, house arrests, the confiscation of the second monastery by the communist regime and finally expulsion as unwanted foreigners who peddled a foreign religion inimical to the best interests of the proletariat. One might be tempted say that the China mission was a failure yet much good was done in those years and many people were brought closer to God through the prayer and witness and work of the early monks. Perhaps it was a seed that died so as to bring forth new life (cf. John 12: 24). God's ways are mysterious and God is as present in failure as in success.

I HAVE been here for 39 of our 50 years in Valyermo. I have seen our community through many transitions, many men coming to discern their vocation and leaving for another—fewer staying, more leaving; financial crises and rescues, blows and blessings. I have been privileged to know all the founding monks, to benefit from their wisdom, to experience their idiosyncrasies, to marvel at their accomplishments, to inherit the spirit of their courage and perseverance *no matter what*. I have seen the brightest and the darkest moments of our community's history in California and look forward to a positive future. God is the reason for our existence, Christ is our motivation and first love, the life of prayer is the greatest catalyst to our fidelity, and the work of hospitality is the theme of all our personal and pastoral involvement with the world and the Church.

IT is right that we, as monks, cannot point to any specific work to “justify” our existence. The slow transformation of the inner self in each monk, hidden even from himself, is inexplicably revealed through his outward work and relationships within the community and outside. The peace of this place is not just the beauty of the landscape but the reality of prayer that has saturated this monastic environment. The ministry of hospitality has brought to us an interchange of spiritual blessings. Whenever we share ourselves with others, the fruits of monastic living are harvested by those who come.

When people share their burdens with us, we internalize in prayer their struggle and identify with them as fellow pilgrims on this precarious road of life. When they share their thoughts and inspirations, we are enriched and bring what they have shared into our community and more intimately into our silent contemplation.

AS monks, we are not extravagant in our endeavors or expectations. We simply pray and work, day after day, and good things happen. We are not overly self-conscious. We don't have all the answers. We are not leaders in every movement although we read and pray and dialogue with current events and new ideas which impact our contemporary world.

MONKS are preservers of tradition who provide a continuity with past generations of faith while entering into meaningful dialogue with streams of thought and creativity in every field of human endeavor that feeds the human soul: philosophy, theology, history, psychology, literature and art. We keep alive the roots of Christianity by loving the Word of God, by cherishing the wisdom of the patristic era, by reflecting on the generations of spiritual writings which have been neglected or lost to many who live in our frenetic and profit-driven world.

MUCH of what monks do, even today, is not measurable. Yet the inner transformation we seek, the spiritual discipline we undertake, the receptivity of our life of contemplative availability to God and others—these produce men and women who have something worthwhile to say. Thomas Merton once wrote: “Our life is a listening” and more poignantly, “If our life is poured out in useless words, we will never hear anything, never become anything, and in the end, because we have said everything before there was anything to say, we shall be left speechless at the moment of our greatest decision.” Monks don't have to speak. They are familiar with silence, listening, pondering, and waiting on God for understanding. They learn how to suffer quietly as “Jesus learned obedience through what he suffered” (Heb. 5: 8) and to adore the God of mystery in every contingency. The virtue of taciturnity is rooted in the practice of humility, of a life “hidden with Christ in God” (Col. 3: 3).

IF the monks of Valyermo have a future, and I believe we do, then it will be built upon the tradition of our founding fathers and, through them, back through the monastic centuries to St. Benedict himself. This fidelity to our

spiritual tradition is steeped in the Word of God and in the profound wisdom of the Church which is one, holy, catholic and apostolic. In this legacy, faithfully preserved and translated for every generation, we become for the world a harbor of hope, a font of wisdom and an oasis of peace. We may not be known or praised by many, we may never build monuments of architectural genius, but we will, in humility and faithfulness, become what God intends and share “our becoming” with those God sends our way.

I PRAY that our life, as it progresses into the next 50 years, will become a living psalm of praise, fruitful and fragrant in virtue, warm in its hospitality and receptivity, eager in its service to God and humankind. I pray also for you, our Oblates and friends, our co-workers in this spiritual vineyard, our guests past and future. May you be drawn to the depths of God’s wisdom and love, that you may impart to others *your own spiritual legacy* and be for this world instruments of peace, ambassadors of compassion and reconciliation so that the human family will find its way to the fellowship of love for God and neighbor.

IN God’s unfailing love,
Abbot Francis, O.S.B.

[2] *St. Andrew's Abbey 50th Anniversary*

ST. ANDREW'S ABBEY 50th ANNIVERSARY

IT is not uncommon in monastic history that a community of monks find their monastery and lives overtaken, pillaged, and even destroyed by hostile forces. The the monks themselves survive these events it is also not uncommon to re-group in the hope of either returning or beginning again. While not uncommon it becomes very real indeed when one’s own monastery has suffered through such events in recent history, and when several of the monks are still alive as witnesses to both their tragedy and the grace of God which brings good even out of such human darkness.

THIS year marks the 50th anniversary of those expelled monks who began again, re-establishing their monastic life at Hidden Springs Ranch, Valyermo. The editor thought it would be worth sharing some highlights from the earliest monastic letters (now the Valyermo Chronicle) written by Fr. Thaddeaus Yang (“Ta Te”) for about 30 years as a means of sharing the life and growth of St. Andrew’s with its increasing number of friends. In this issue of the chronicle, while the figures of Fr. Raphael, the founding prior, is especially prominent, we begin with the homily of the first mass ever said on this property on Nov. 30, 1955. The mass was celebrated by Fr. Raphael in the Living room of the Ranch House and the homily preached by Fr. Vincent. Following that is the virtually complete first issue of the “Letter” of October, 1956.

WHAT I hope this varied selection conveys is a sense of what our founding monks hoped to achieve, how they went about it, what were some of the motivating factors, and the kind of response that was given to this newly-born community. It’s worth looking at and studying as we, during this 50th anniversary, try to re-discover the charism brought to California by these exiled monks and the very thing that made St. Andrew’s both unique and welcoming to so many

The Editor (Fr. Aelred)

[3] *St. Andrew's Abbey Timeline*

ST. ANDREW'S ABBEY TIMELINE

EARLY YEARS

1927 The former prime minister of China becomes a monk of the Abbey of St. Andre.

1926 The first native Chinese bishops visit the Abbey of St. Andre (Brugge, Belgium) to request missionary monks.

YEARS of PROSPERITY

1929 The Abbey of St. Andre sends the first monks to SiShan in western china to found the monastery of St. Peter and St. Andrew.

1937 The monks of the Priory of St. Peter and St. Andrew's (SiShan, China) start a seminary for the Diocese of Nanchong. The Japanese invade China.

YEARS of POVERTY

1943 The war forces the monks to relocate in the provincial capitol, Chengtu.

1947 Building dedicated

1949 Chinese Communists take over Chengtu.

YEARS of PERSECUTION

1950 Systemic persecution begins.

1952 The Chinese monks are sent home to their families, and the non-Chinese monks are put on trial and expelled from China.

YEARS of DISPERSAL

1955 In China the Chinese monks are imprisoned. In California the Hidden Springs Ranch is purchased in Valyermo.

First Mass: November 30

First overnight guests: December 30-31

1956 Sung monastic prayer begins again on October 10th, on the Feast of Mary's Motherhood (October 11) in the converted stable. The community: 10 monks.

YEARS of GROWTH

1957 The Spring Bazaar of June 1957 evolves into the Fall Art Festival of September 1958.

1958 The new retreat house is blessed for its first guests, November 21-23.

1959 The first summer workshops begin.

1961 The retreat house is expanded to its present size (17 rooms for 34 guests).

1964 The new monastery is blessed.

1965 The Abbot President declares that Saint Andrew's Priory is a Conventual (independent) priory.

1966 The Youth Center receives its first high school retreatants.

1967 The chapel is expanded and Valyermo Ceramics begins.

1968 The guest lounge is finished.

1972 Fr Raphael Vinciarelli, OSB, first Prior after the transfer to California, died November 14.

1977 The cemetery is blessed.

1981 Brother Peter Zhou Bang-jiu is released from prison.

Alberic Deloring OSB, died December 25

Celebrating 25 years at Valyermo were Abbot President, Abbot Theodore Ghesquiere, Prior Philip Neri.

1982 Fr. Thaddeus Yang An Djian, OSB died August 15.

1984 Brother Peter is reunited with his community and makes his solemn profession of vows at Saint Andrew's Abbey in 1985 on the Feast of Peter and Paul.

1991 Fr. Wilfrid Weitz, OSB died October 27.

1992 Canonical elevation from conventual priory to abbey: Francis Benedict is elected the first abbot.

1994 Fr. Felix Tang, OSB died April 14.

1996 Saint Andrew's Abbey celebrates 40 years of service in Southern California.

Fr. Gaetan Lories, OSB died August 27.

1999 Saint Andrew's Abbey celebrates the 70th anniversary of its founding. The community numbers 24 monks (14 priests, 8 brothers, 2 novices) and, always remembering the past, prepares for the future.

Fr. Vincent Martin, OSB died November 30.

2000 Sacred Art Festival celebrated in Pasadena.

2006 New Arts & Crafts building is finished and occupied. Plans are submitted for a Welcome Center in the King David Apple Orchard to be named in honor of Berne & Jean Evans, friends & neighbor (Valyermo Ranch) from the first days on Hidden Springs Ranch.

October 11th begins the 50th Jubilee year of canonical transfer to Valyermo.

[4] *1955 Homily at the Foundation Mass, Fr. Vincent Martin, O.S.B.*

1955 HOMILY *at the* FOUNDATION MASS

Fr. Vincent Martin, O.S.B.

Nov. 30, 1955

FEAST of ST. ANDREW, APOSTLE

FROM the monastery of St. Andrew in Belgium Benedictine monks went to convert the Anglo-Saxon world. And now we are here in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles. But still, our celebration today, the first Mass of the new St. Andrew's Priory in Valyermo, is secondary. Because the main thing is to celebrate the feast of St. Andrew with the whole Church.

ST. Andrew is the first one chosen by our Lord. He was from Bethsaida in Galilee, a fisherman and a disciple of St. John the Baptist. John the Baptist formed his soul for many months if not for a few years. Then there was the time when he was with John the evangelist, his brother, and the Baptist saw our Lord coming and said, "Behold the lamb of God. Behold Him who takest away the sins of the world." And they immediately followed our Lord. And it is Andrew who brought to our Lord his a brother, Peter, and our Lord changed his name from Simon to Peter.

THEN later on they went back to Galilee after this first call at the Jordan. The second call was when our Lord was going along the lake of Galilee and Andrew and Peter were fishing, and our Lord called them and immediately they followed Him.

ST. Andrew somehow represents the pure apostolic vocation. We do not know much about him except that there was a long tradition that he preached the gospel around the Black Sea and northern Greece and died as a martyr. The Acts of St. Andrew are not too authentic, but they are beautifully written. We know that great love of St. Andrew for the cross, and secondly, there is a long tradition that St. Andrew died on the cross as our Lord Jesus Christ, and so did his brother, Peter.

ANDREW had this great love of our Lord. From the little we know in the gospel we feel that great simplicity, that great spontaneity, that willingness to go completely and entirely to God. And that is the reason why he accepted the cross with such generosity.

LET us ask St. Andrew to inspire all of us and to bless this little Benedictine community which is starting. It will be a few months before we will really get going. By next year on the feast of St. Andrew we will be able to have the monks singing the Mass, but you are always welcome, and I am very grateful, and I say the Mass today as much for you as for the Priory.

LET us ask St. Andrew to guide us in everything and to give us this great love he had for our Lord and his sense of the need of the Church. And let us ask God that in our own way we may be true witnesses to Christ and have the message of happiness of the gospel shine through us.

TODAY for the first time from the beginning of the world we are making these few acres holy. Mass has never been celebrated here before and probably since the beginning of time until today Mass has never been celebrated in this area. We hope that some day there will be a beautiful chapel, a big, beautiful church which will be more fitting, but by celebrating this Mass here today we make this ground holy. Let us hope it will always be holy, and that the great and simple love of St. Andrew for our Lord will always shine through our lives.

[5] *Newsletters: 1956-1959*

S A A
N 1956-1959

LETTER NO. 1. – OCTOBER 1956

Dear Friends of St. Andrew's:

For the benefit of those who are not too familiar with the origin and scope of the Priory, we should like to begin this first monthly letter by reproducing a short historical notice published on the Feast of St. Benedict, March 21 last.

“Expelled by the Chinese Communist regime, the monks of St. Benedict's Priory of Chengtu, China, have found a new home in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles. With the authorization of His Eminence James Francis Cardinal Mc Intyre, Archbishop of Los Angeles, they will soon reopen their monastery under the new name of St. Andrew's Priory on the former Hidden Springs Ranch at Valyermo.

“St. Benedict’s Priory of Chengtu, founded in 1929 by the famous Abbey of St. Andrew, Belgium, conducted a diocesan major seminary and a state-recognized school for non-Catholic students. Shortly after World War II, the Priory established the Institute of Western and Oriental Cultural Studies, with a 10,000 volume library.

“On Christmas day, 1949, the Communists took over the city of Chengtu. The Institute was dissolved, the library confiscated, and the Benedictine monks put under house arrest. After three years of hardship, the monks were finally expelled from Communist China in 1952.

“In 1954 the parent Abbey of St. Andrew in Belgium decided to transfer the Priory to southern California. The Cardinal-Archbishop of Los Angeles authorized this establishment in the Archdiocese.

“Plans for the remodeling of the Hidden Springs Ranch, Valyermo, are now ready for execution. A dairy barn will become the monks’ living quarters; a stable will be converted to a chapel, where they will celebrate Holy Mass and chant the Divine Office. The main ranch house will be used as a guest house for retreatants and visitors who wish to spend a few days of peace and prayer in a monastic atmosphere. Beside leading monastic life and chanting the Divine Office, the monks of St. Andrew’s will conduct retreats and devote themselves to intellectual and educational activities. They will also engage in farming, in order to become self-supporting as soon as possible.

“The purpose of St. Andrew’s Priory of Valyermo is therefore to carry on the ages-old tradition of the Order of St. Benedict, whose motto in –PRAY AND WORK.”

Since the publication of this notice, the remodeling operation on the ranch has been completed – thanks to the generous cooperation of the Catholic Action Club of the US Marine Corps Air Station, El Toro, the Catholic Alumni Club of Los Angeles, the Christines, also of Los Angeles, and other organizations and individual friends.

The chapel and monks’ quarters will be furnished and decorated little by little. Meanwhile, monastic life will begin in earnest on October 11, Feast of the Divine Maternity of Mary and first anniversary of the purchase of the Hidden Springs Ranch.

Henceforth Conventual Mass will be sung every day, and “seven times in the day”, declares St. Benedict after the Psalmist, the monks shall “render praise to the Lord” by reciting or chanting the Divine Office, they will devote themselves to both intellectual work and manual labor, and they will do so in silence.

Most of you have met the members of the Priory. May I introduce them here to those who have not:

1. Very Rev. Dom Raphael Vinciarelli, OSB, STD, Prior
2. Rev. Thaddeus Yang, OSB, Subprior
3. Rev. Eleutherius Winance, OSB
4. Rev John Vincent Martin, OSB
5. Rev. Wilfrid Weitz, OSB
6. Rev. Alberic de Crombrugghe de Loringh, OSB
7. Rev. Werner Papeians de Morchoven, OSB, Procurator
8. Rev. Gaetan Lories, OSB
9. Rev. Bernard Huang, OSB
10. Frater Felix Tang, OSB

To spare you all unnecessary effort, just call us by our first (religious) names. In fact, that’s how we should be addressed.

Four of the Fathers are holders of doctor degrees from Rome and Louvain, and as some of you already know, Father Vincent has returned to Harvard University to get his Ph.D. in Sociology. Father Werner, our Procurator, is a professional artist. After his expulsion from Red China, his “masterpieces” were put on exhibit in Belgium, France, and Monaco. Father Eleutherius has been teaching Philosophy at the Benedictine International College San Anselmo, Rome. He will teach the same subject at St. John’s Abbey and University, Collegeville, Minn., during this academic year 1956-57, Father Wilfrid and Father Alberic are still in Europe, anxiously waiting for their U.S. immigrant visas.

As for Frater Felix, he is completing his Theology at St. John’s Abbey. He will come to Valyermo after his ordination to the priesthood, sometime next Spring.

On Sunday, October 14, the Conventual Mass will be sung at 10 a.m. for the reception of Oblates.

A Benedictine Oblate is a faithful of either sex (or even Cleric or Priest) who, through a special rite approved by the Church –the Act of Oblation – affiliates himself with a Benedictine monastery and its community, in order thereby to lead a more perfect Christian life in the world according to the spirit of the Rule of St. Benedict.

The Oblate is not a Tertiary, for St. Benedict wrote only on Rule, and there is only one Benedictine Order.

The Oblate is truly a member of the monastic family, and therefore shares in the commemoration of absent brethren which is made at the conclusion of the various Hours of the Divine Office, as well as in all the spiritual works of the monks, especially in the daily Conventual Mass.

Father Thaddeus will act as Director of the Oblates of St. Andrew's.

Like any other Benedictine monastery, St. Andrew's Priory will always welcome friends and visitors. But a Benedictine monastery is above all a place of meditation and prayer, a "School for the Service of the Lord", as it is defined by St. Benedict. In this "school", our Holy Rule requires that "the customs of the place" be respected as they stand, so that its prayerful atmosphere may not be disturbed (H.R. c.61). On the other hand, a Benedictine priory is the house of religious men with solemn vows. As such, it is subject to the Law of Papal enclosure, which "embraces the entire house in which the religious family dwells, including (the portion of) the garden, orchards, etc., which are reserved for the religious."

The main ranch house is being organized as a guest house according to the Benedictine Tradition. Father Subprior and Father Gaetan will be the Guestmasters.

Canon 597 exempts the guest house (as the chapel) from the Law of Papal Enclosure. It nevertheless constitutes an integral part of the Priory, so that the same religious peace and serenity should always prevail therein as well. For a Benedictine guest house is not a hotel or a motel. It is a retreat house for laymen and priests, with or without scheduled conferences. Not unlike the Priory itself, it is therefore a place of silent study, meditation, and prayer.

Writing to Father Prior some time ago, our Abbot Founder, the Rt. Rev. Dom Theodore Neve, OSB. President of the Belgian Benedictine

Congregation, recommended: “It is a great responsibility that you are going to assume in the name of your Abbey. Either you will succeed in establishing a center of monastic and apostolic life, or you will not. Should you fail, it would be most regrettable. In order to succeed, take the best means –the spiritual arms. Try to create a true center of monastic life, in which prayer holds the first place.”

Our success will be yours too. And you can contribute towards it by continuing your keen interest and sympathetic understanding.

The Chronicler

LETTER NO 2. – NOVEMBER 1956

Two important events marked this beginning of community life. On October 10 some young men were received as postulants. They will be clothed with the postulants habit (tunic, short scapular) on November 1, Feast of All Saints. After the period of postulancy, which varies from about 3 to 6 months according to circumstances, the postulant is admitted to the Canonical Novitiate -- provided no objection is raised either by the Prior of his Council... He then is given a religious name and a leather cincture. All postulants and novices are called Brothers.

Another important event was the investiture of 28 men and women as Oblate Novices. The ceremony took place on Sunday, October 14, at the Offertory of the Conventual Mass, which was sung by Father Prior. At the same time, a former Oblate Novice of the Abbey of Mount Angel, Oregon, made her Final Act of Oblation or profession for St. Andrew's, thus raising the number of the lay members of the Priory to 29.

In the sermon he preached on this occasion, Father Prior defined the Benedictine Oblate as a faithful person dedicated less to St. Benedict than to Our Lord Himself. “St. Benedict would rather call you disciples of Jesus Christ”, he said, basing his assertion on the fact that St. Benedict never founded any “school of spirituality” and knew no other spirituality than the “spirituality of Christ”. This spirituality is a simple one. All through His life on earth, Our Lord had only one thing in mind – do the will of His Father. “Father, here am I to do your will.” And before returning to the Father, He said” I came from the Father, I go back to the Father.” And He told us to follow His example – do the will of the Father. And go to the

Father through the Mass and the Sacraments. By participating actively in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, we glorify the Father with Christ in the unity of the Holy Spirit, and receive, in return, the sanctification of our souls. Through the Sacraments, we obtain the right to call God our Father and to see Him face to face in heaven. Along with the Divine Office, this twofold spiritual reality, this “whole Mystery of Christ”, as St. Paul calls it, is precisely what St. Benedict wants us, Monks and Oblates, to understand and to practice.

God will also reward those men and women and students who spontaneously have organized themselves into a “St. Andrew’s Laymen League” and “St. Andrew’s Sewing Basket”. This Chronicler does not wish to hurt their modesty my naming names, has not our Lord said, “Let not your left hand know what your right hand does”?.....

THE CHRONICLER

LETTER NO 3. – DECEMBER 1956

Were “Betsy”, our cow, and the two calves to peer into their erstwhile barn, they wouldn’t believe their large eyes. For the magic wand of the ladies of “St. Andrew’s Sewing Basket” has made it no longer fit for cows...Only for the monks of St. Andrew’s , and the professed monks moved into the first-floor rooms, and the postulants into those of the second floor, on November 15.

The story of Marines helping to build a Benedictine monastery must be an unusual one, for the Tidings, the official paper of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, took the trouble to dispatch one of its staff members to the Priory on November 10. Instead of just an afternoon, the sympathetic Mr Ron Brownfield spent 24 hours taking pictures and interviewing Marines and monks. I hope I will remember all the things I have seen and heard in this amazing place,” said he to this Chronicleer before returning to Los Angeles.

On November 4 the California Hut Unit #273 of the American Legion Auxiliary and the Veterans of Korean War of Compton ad Lynwood, Calif. sent a deputation to the Priory, to present it with 2 U.S. flags. The monks of St. Andrew’s are proud to be this recognized as a part, however humple, of this great country.

On the same day Fr. Prior received touching letters from school children, offering him some money they had collected to build the Benedictine monastery. I wish we could reproduce some of them here. But Fr. Prior's letter of acknowledgment will enable you to appreciate the truly Christian spirit of these boys and girls:

Dear Friends:

Thank you for your wonderful letters and your donation. Your donations are small, you said, but you know that the big oceans are made of small streams; without these streams, even the Pacific Ocean would dry up in the long run.

Our monastery is like a little tree. It needs water to grow. And you are watering it with your pennies and nickels and dimes. Some day the little tree will become a big tree, and people will come from everywhere to see and we will tell them: "This is the work of Paul and Verna Marie and John and Rebecca and all their wonderful friends." And Jesus and His Divine Mother, Mary, will smile at you, and bless your good hearts.

But the little tree has not grown up –yet. It still needs water, plenty of water. So, take good care of it every month, every day. Even drops of water you sprinkle over it will help it grow. And you will be as happy as the Benedictine monks to see YOUR little tree big.

May God bless you all,
Fr. Rafael

LETTER NO 5. – FEBRUARY 1957

The drawing on our Christmas card must have puzzled anyone who had not been to the Priory. It represented the Priory chapel, the only one in the world that has a "weatherhorse" instead of a weathercock. For until a few months ago the chapel was but a horse stable. On November 23, 1956, "The Tidings" of Los Angeles could write: "The stable-to-be chapel transformation is almost complete. Its brick floor is finished. An altar of stone is the handwork of the Marines. Floor-to ceiling windows stand to the front and rear of the altar. The rear window is colored glass superimposed with a giant St. Andrew's cross." At that time monks and faithful had to sit

“on planks set on wooden crates”, today there are more pews than the chapel can possibly accommodate. The pews, 13 in all, were donated for Christmas by the Rev. Martin C. Hiss, Pastor of Palmdale, and the Rev. David Coleman, Pastor of La Habra, Calif. Around the altar there are now padded kneelers for Holy Communion. These were donated by a benefactor at the suggestion of a friend of his who had discovered, “for the first time in 60 years”, that “bricks are hard to kneel on”...To top it all, a West Los Angeles lady artist had sent in a Chinese rug “to protect your vestments from the dirt”. The rug, sky-blue on light grey, matches beautifully with the grey stone altar, red brick floor, and soft greenish grey wall. We use it only on first class feasts, such as Christmas.

The Christmas night Mass was particularly impressive as it was preceded by the baptism of a Marine. Weekend after weekend, Sgt. Jake Willus, of Indiana, had come to work on the Priory ground and to receive religious instructions from Father Gaetan. The Father baptized him at 11:30 p.m., just half an hour before the Mass. Another Marine, Jack Horan, of Haverstraw, N.Y., served as sponsor.

On Christmas day, Fr. Prior invited the neophyte and all the Marines to the community’s Christmas dinner. After dinner, distribution of presents at the guest house. Everybody got something – from a New Testament for the newly baptized Marine to a “Robin Hood Puzzle Game” for this chronicler (“To test your I.Q.).

A hitherto unknown friend in Missouri, Mr. P.J. Mayer, sent us a Christmas donation with these touching words: “Ever since I heard about your foundation, I have been much interested in it. I am pleased to know that you are doing it with your own hands---from bottom up. I can well understand your problems, because fifty years ago my wife and I also had to build a home with our own hands --- with rocks dug out from this very place. After my mother’s death, I did not have the money to buy her a respectable tombstone, so I built one myself – out of concrete and rocks and pebbles, mostly donated to me by friends from afar. It would be my heart’s desire to join you in your worthy undertaking. But as it is out of the question, I am enclosing a little gift, so that I may have a part in you noble cause.”

In our first “Letter” (Oct. 1956), mention was made of Fr. Eleutherius as being destined to teach philosophy at St. John’s Abbey and University,

Minnesota, during the current academic year 1956-57. On December 26 the Rev. Ernest Kilzer, OSB, Dean of the Department of Philosophy at St. John's, wrote to this chronicler: "The long-awaited Fr. Eluetherius finally arrived here on Dec. 3, a Monday morning. He is fast learning English and will try to begin teaching Metaphysics to clerics and seminarians here at St. John's after the Christmas holidays. Next semester he will continue with their Metaphysics, and will also teach History of Philosophy in my place."

On this occasion, the chronicler should like to reiterate the Priory's gratitude to the ladies of St. Andrew's Sewing Basket for their unbounded generosity. It is a mystery they alone can unravel, that heavy house chores and multiple social duties notwithstanding, they still can find the energy to knit and stitch and fashion habits for St. Andrew's postulants and novices and professed monks.

Unwittingly, this chronicler was dragged into, the "Queen For A Day" TV program in January 16. Not in person, no, that would have been the end of the program! After lunch, just as we were cleaning up the table and washing the dishes, the telephone rang: "Miss Corbett, here present, told us that in your monastery you have to wash your own clothing", came the voice of Jack Bailey, the masterful Master of Ceremony: "Is that correct, sir?" "Yes, Mr. Bailey." –"Well, we'll send you an automatic washer-drier; what do you think of that?" –"Oh! That's WONDERFUL!" –"Ladies and gentlemen", then said the beaming Emcee to the audience, "this is the first time that a man is delighted to receive a washing machine!" Delighted, in fact the whole Benedictine community of St. Andrew's is. Thank you and your sponsors, Mr. Bailey. And God bless Miss Rose Corbett, of the El Toro Marine Corps Air Station for her thoughtfulness. Now the problem is – where are we going to put the washer-drier?

LETTER NO 6 – MARCH 1957

Father Wilfrid Weitz, OSB, arrived from London on February 6. so that besides Fr. Vincent Martin, OSB, who is completing his study at Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass., and Fr. Eleutherius Winance, OSB, who is teaching philosophy at St. John's Abbey and University, Collegeville, Minn., there are now 7 priests at the Priory. These 7 priests are: Fr. Prior (the Very Rev. Raphael Vinciarelli, OSB, STD); Fr. Subprior (Rev

Thaddeus Yang OSB; Fr Wilfrid Weitz OSB; Fr Alberic de Crombrugge, OSB; Fr Werner Papeians, OSB (Procurator); Fr Gaetan Loriers, OSB; Fr. Bernard Huang, OSB.

Father Prior has appointed Fr. Wilfrid, Librarian, Master of Ceremony, and Cantor.

LETTER NO 8. – MAY 1957

For the first time since it was expelled from Communist China in 1952, our community was able to celebrate solemnly the liturgy of the Holy Week, from the Second Passion or Palm Sunday, April 14, to the Paschal Vigil, April 20, inclusive. Scarcely half of the members of the original China community were present at Valyermo, but the new “Ordinal of Holy Week” promulgated by the Sacred Congregation of Rites in November, 1955, was followed to the letter.

During these celebrations our thoughts went to two members of our community who have been lingering in Communist jails since November 7, 1955 – Fr. Paul and Br. Peter, both Chinese.

Br. Peter’s case reminds us of these words of Our Lord’s: When they bring you before the synagogues and the magistrates and the authorities, do not be anxious how or wherewith you shall defend yourselves, or what you shall say, for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say” (Luke: 12: 11-12). Back in 1950, Br. Peter, the youngest member of the Benedictine Priory of Chengtu, had just celebrated his 22nd birthday when he was summoned to the “People’s Tribunal” in the public park. Before hundreds of men and women forcibly herded in as “witnesses”, he was supposed to denounce Archbishop Riberi, the Papal Internuncio to China, as an “imperialist spy”, and the Legion of Mary as a “subversive political organization”. Instead he made a long, extemporaneous profession of faith, of which here is an excerpt:

“If in your judgment the belief in the existence of God is a backward thought, then my thought is backward indeed, and I want to remain backward forever. The teaching of our holy Religion is good only for slaves, you say. Oh! How sorry I am for not having received more of this

slave-teaching! You say also that I am misled by the “foreigner” because of my great confidence and profound veneration. Well, let me tell you that this “foreigner” is called Jesus Christ, the Founder of the Catholic Religion, a Jew. Not only do I believe in Him, but I also worship Him and want to live only by and for Him...Do not try to free me from the chains of Truth. You may dispose of my body as you will, but I shall reserve my soul for God alone, who has created and sustained me, redeemed me, and given me happiness...” The Communists were so impressed by the young monk's courage and eloquence that they set him free – until November 7, 1955, when once more they arrested him, this time for good.

At the request of a number of friends, the Priory has decided to set up a 30-room retreat house. Located above a lake and surrounded by giant cottonwood and Joshua trees, the buildings will be equipped simply but with art and all the facilities required by the Southern California desert climate. The building plans are being drawn up by an architect friend of the Priory's. They will, it is hoped, be ready for execution by early fall.

To help finance this building project, a Cherry Festival will be organized at the Priory on June 22 and 23. The success of the affair will depend on the support and contributions of our friends. You, too, dear reader, can help – by sending parcels (minimum value \$1.00) to: POST OFFICE BOOTH, St. Andrew's Priory, Valyermo, California; or by donating prizes to: CHERRY FESTIVAL COMMITTEE, St. Andrew's Priory, Valyermo, California. Many prizes are needed.

Besides the Post Office Booth, there will be an Apron Booth, a Doll Booth, a Children's Booth (boys and girls), etc., a Dime Pitch, Skillo, and a dozen other games and attractions, and food and refreshments.

Your contributions will rejoice hundreds of people – and hasten the realization of the retreat house, a real need for the Southland, we are assured.

LETTER NO. 9 – JUNE 1957

For the keystone of a Benedictine monastery is the superior – abbot or prior. The superior stands in the place of Christ. His main duty is to lead his monks to God. He is their shepherd, as Christ is of all men, and, as such, is

accountable to God for their spiritual welfare. That's why he appoints all the "officers" of his monastery –from the prior (if he is an abbot), subprior, novice master, prefect of the clerics, instructor of the Brothers, and cellarer, to the cook, gardener, and cowherd. These, as all the other monks, owe him absolute obedience --- not, however, in the manner of a slave to his master, but as dutiful sons to their father. "for (the abbot) is believed to be the representative to Christ in the monastery", says St. Benedict, "and for that reason is called by a name of his, according to the words of the Apostle: 'Ye have received the spirit of the adoption of sons, whereby we cry Abba, Father'" (Holy Rule, ch.2).

This father-sons relationship existing between the abbot (or the prior) and his monks constitutes the strong, homogeneous family character of any Benedictine monastery. In point of fact, each individual Benedictine monastery is so much a family that even monasteries of the same nationality and in the same congregation are never exactly alike. "The individual abbeys are autonomous", writes a Benedictine author. "All have a spirit and traditions, and often works and religious practices, to a greater or less degree their own, not shared by other monasteries of the same nationality or in the same congregation.

This accounts, I think, for the fact that there is no "Benedictine school of spirituality". "Benedictine theologians", remarks the same author, "have always chosen for themselves. They are unconsciously faithful to their founder's idea; they represent the ordinary developed Christian, the man in the street, at once beneath and above schools of thought."

Describing the International Benedictine College Sant' Anselmo, Rome, where young monks from all over the world are sent for their intellectual and religious training, the same author writes: "Beyond the Office and a daily set period for mental prayer before the Blessed Sacrament, there is no religious exercise, private or common, prescribed. During the course of the year no additional devotions are imposed beyond the customary Benedictions on Sundays and feast days. Everyone is left in complete freedom to choose what spiritual books he wishes and visit the church for further prayer, or not, at will." This remark may be applied to any Benedictine house.

Nor is there any work typically Benedictine, for "no labor, whether intellectual or manual, which is religious in its scope and is in accord with the principles of the monastic institute, can be unsuitable to a monk".

Washing dishes with the approval of Father Prior is very Benedictine; but writing this chronicle, and publishing it against his will, or without his knowledge, would be anti-Benedictine. Anti-Benedictine, too, an important work that I would do in my own name and for my own self, independently of St. Andrew's Priory. For the Benedictine monk never stands alone; wherever he goes, whatever he does, he carries, as it were, his religious family with him. His community spirit, the corporate nature of his activities, is the secret of his strength.

Fully equipped, the retreat house will cost around \$150,000. for a one-year-old Benedictine foundation, it is a very heavy burden. But the members of the Priory feel quite confident that God, who has delivered them from the Communists, will take care of any work that they will do for Him in this country of freedom and of plenty. The eagerness with which friends from all over the Southland are contributing towards the success of the forthcoming Cherry Festival (June 22 and 23) makes this confidence all the more unshakeable.

Thanks to the Misses Benziger who came all the way from Altadena, on may 26, with 5 boxes of books for our library. We are still very, very far from the 10,000 volumes confiscated by the Chinese Communists...

LETTER NO. 10 – JULY 1957

A week before the Inauguration of our school for pagan students, two Catholic boys applied for admittance. They had walked 50 miles to get to the school. The elder, Lawrence Tang, was 12 ears old; the younger, Simon Chow, 11. "We want to become Benedictine monks and priests", they announced. Father Prior smiled skeptically, They didn't. They were in dead earnest.

That happened in China some 20 years ago. Faithful to their vocation, both boys went through high school and college and made profession of vows in the Order of St. Benedict. Simon Chow, who became Frater Peter, OSB, was arrested by the Communists before his ordination. Lawrence Tang, sent to St. John's Abbey, Collegeville, Minnesota, for his monastic and ecclesiastical training, received the name of Felix. Ordained a priest last June 1, Father Felix left Minnesota for Olympia, Washington, where Father

Prior was conducting the annual retreat of the Benedictine Fathers and Sisters. He returned to St. Andrew's with Fr Prior on June 18. The first Mass he celebrated at the Priory was offered for the safety of Frater Peter.

“Bing Cherries Ripe! Come And Pick!” On Trinity Sunday car after car drove in without interruption –in eager response to this advertisement. But much to Fr. Procurator's disappointment, the proceeds were amazingly meager. The reasons? Some people spent hours in the orchards and came out with...50-cent worth of cherries. Others were astonished when the lady in charge of the counter asked them to pay for what they had picked. “We thought it was free”, they argued with some impatience. “Do you want to weigh our car too?”, asked ironically one man driving a shiny and cozy 1957, I don't know what, 4-door sedan. After all the birds don't have to pay...Nor do the cows that jumped over the fence to join in the cherry-picking “fun for the entire family”. But the cows pay us in milk, and the birds in songs. “Ye feathered creatures of the Lord, bless the Lord!”

The proceeding lines aren't meant to be a complaint. You don't complain about people's joy, even if it cost you the fruits of your sweat. Doesn't St. Paul ask us to “rejoice with those that rejoice?” And as my Buddhist father used to tell us, “If people take away something from you, it is because they need it more than you.”

This year the cherries ripened 10 days too early, which account for the “cherrylessness” of our Cherry Festival. But the absence of cherries notwithstanding, the festival was real success – thanks to the selfless cooperation of friends near and far, known and unknown.

Judging from the number of barbeque tickets sold on June 22 and 23, between 1000 and 1500 people must have attended the festival. The barbeque dinner was supposed to last until 7 p.m. Sunday, June 23. Long before 5 p.m., however, every ounce of meat had already been consumed, which shows how universally appreciated it was. Those who did not know Mr. and Mrs. Ames were agreeably surprised at the excellence of their art. Besides the barbeque, there were 12 booths and 3 stands, offering anything from sun bonnets (“To protect your face from the sun and make it look prettier, ladies”) to outer-space outfit (“For your next trip to the moon, boys!”). Antique hunters could find “games” at the Trading Post, and lovers of “surprises” at the Parcel Post Booth. And there was plenty to eat and to drink – cherry cobbles (“It's our specialty; don't forget to paint it on the

sign”.); “hot dogs” and hamburgers with beer (“No free loading!”) to wash them down. Old China Hands (25 years of China, 10 words of “pidgin” Chinese) could fish out chopsticks (Confucius’ forks) from the Fish Pond to eat their “hot dogs” and hamburgers (U.S. institution) with. And should wieners or hamburgers not agree with you, a six-poney-drawn stagecoach would take you on a ride around the ranch to help you “forget it”. In short, fun for all.

Except, maybe, for the stagecoach lady driver. Rushing through the crowd, she said, panting, to this chronicler: “Have you seen my son, a six-year-old boy in yellow shirt and brown pants...?” While I was looking for the missing “kid”, a lady in blue stopped me. “I can’t find my husband”, she explained. “If you see a man in pink shirt and blue trousers, please tell him that his wife is waiting for him.” And there I was, hunting the crowded place for a son in brown pants and a husband in pink shirt...The boy was found. But there were 5 or 6 men in pink. How could I know which one was the husband of the lady in blue? And what if their wives were all in blue? At my Oriental wit’s end, I turned the case over to the lost-and-found department.

LETTER NO 12 – SEPTEMBER 1957

We have succeeded to some extent, judging from the following letter written by Dom Theodore de Hennin, OSB, Archivist of the Abbey of Maredsous, to Dom Raymond Losa, OSB, Prefect of the Clerics at our parent Abbey of St. Andrew, on July 1, 1957:

May I tell you again how anxious I am to get hold of the second monthly letter of Valyermo which is missing from our file. I earnestly hope that you still have an extra copy available; if not may I ask you to lend me (with solemn promise of restitution!) the one in your own collection, so that I may be able to have a copy made by a Cleric who knows English. The Valyermo foundation is likely to grow up fast. It will therefore be useful to possess these letters which describe so faithfully the first steps of the China community on American soil.”

Father Theodore may be right in his forecast. At any rate, the one-year-old Valyermo Priory has 365 reasons to be thankful to God for. One Glance

at the chronicler's file and the Priory's scrapbook will be convincing enough.

Fr. Vincent has got his Ph.D. from Harvard University, thus raising to 5 the number of "doctors" in this little community of ours. When this chronicler was completing his post-graduate work years ago, his former Novice Master gave him a holy picture with these words from St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians: "Being rooted and grounded in love, may you be able to comprehend with all the saints Christ's love which surpasses all science, in order that you may be filled unto all the fullness of God."

Fr. Vincent returned to the Priory in company with Fr. Eleutherius. Before coming to this country a year or so ago, Fr. Eleutherius, PH.D. *summa cum laude* from Louvain University, had taught philosophy in China (West China Union University and Szechuan National University) and Rome (International College San Anselmo). Loaned by Fr Prior to St. John's Abbey and University as professor of philosophy until June 1958, Fr. Eleutherius will, on his return journey to Minnesota in September, take along 2 of our postulants –Robert Murphy, from Miami, Florida, and Michael Price, from Lancaster, Calif.

LETTER NO. 22 – JULY 1958

An event of special significance for the priory will mark the Solemnity of the Feast of St. Benedict, July 11. During the Solemn High Mass, at 10:30 a.m., 2 of our first novices will make profession of temporary vows, binding for 3 years. They are Frater Matthew Norton, son of Mr. and Mrs. M.E. Norton, of Galesburg, Illinois, and Brother Francis Despres, son of Mr. and Mrs. H. Despres, of National City, California. Before joining St. Andrew's Priory in July, 1957, Frater Matthew was studying theology at St. Paul's Seminary, St. Paul, Minnesota, for the Diocese of Peoria, Illinois.

Following a disposition of chapter 58 of the Holy Rule, the Benedictine monk takes the vows of stability, conversion of manners or morals, and obedience. Chastity and poverty being included in the vows of conversion of manners and obedience, no express mention of them is made in the profession form.

At a simple ceremony on June 11, Fr. Prior blessed the cornerstone of the Retreat House in the presence of some friends, including the Rev. Charles Dachtler, of Sacred Heart Church, Lancaster, and the Rev. Isidoro Mauleon, of St. Mary's Church, Palmdale. Since then, the walls of the main building, made of grey concrete blocks, have been rising up steadily. Located at the N.E. end of a blue-gill-and-bass-stocked lake, under large and shady cottonwood trees, this structure comprises an office, a 60 seat dining room, a small dining room for lady visitors, a kitchen and store room, a cook's room, and rest rooms for men and women, Further east, and slightly higher, but concealed behind juniper and Joshua tree, there arise two Southern-California-motel-like buildings, one facing the mountains, the other the Mojave Desert. These will be the retreatants' rooms.

The 60-seat dining room indicates that the construction of a retreat house for 60 people is being contemplated. What is now under way is only a part of a general plan calling for the building of other bed room units. A conference room, a library, and a chapel.

To help finance this building project, friends of the Priory, after consultation with the Rec. Pastors of Palmdale and Lancaster, are planning to hold a "Fall Festival" on September 27-28. A detailed program will be published in our August letter. In the meantime, the sponsors of the Parcel Post booth have requested us to make this announcement: "Twill be fun! Won't you help make this a tremendous success? How? Just mail a well wrapped parcel which can be sold for fifty cents (50¢), to: POST OFFICE BOOTH, St. Andrew's Priory, Valyermo, California. Don't tell us what is in it. Let that be a surprise for him or her who'll buy it at the booth. But do print your name and address on the parcel."

LETTER NO. 23 – AUGUST 1958

One of the interesting features of the Fall festival which friends of the Priory are organizing for the benefit of our retreat house, will be an outdoor representation of the THE THREEFOLD WISDOM OF OLD WANG, a play in 4 tableaux by Henri Gheon, translated into English by our Father Subprior. It is the dramatization of an historical event as retold by an eyewitness, the world-famous missionary Father Vincent Lebbe, whose life,

written by Prof. J. Leclercq of Louvain, was published recently by Messrs Sheed and Ward under the title of THUNDER IN THE DISTANCE.

LETTER NO. 26 – NOVEMBER 1958

More than 2,000 people attended the St. Andrew's Fall Festival, Sept. 27-28. Not all of them were from the neighboring towns or the Archdiocese of Los Angeles; some came from as far as San Diego in the south and Carmel from the north. All were visibly pleased with everything they saw and heard, and promised to come back next year.

Responsible for the success were—the different organizing committees and sub-committees; the Knights of Columbus of Lancaster and Palmdale; the Catholic Daughter of America, Court St. Benedict; the Christines; St. Andrew's Laymen League St. Andrew's Sewing Basket; the artists and musicians who took part in the Religious Art Exhibit and the Café Continental entertainment; the actors who premiered "The Threefold Wisdom of Old Wang"; the operators of the Puppet Show; the ladies baby-sitters; the donors of parcels and "white elephants"; and the dozens of anonymous helpers, men and women. Responsible also was the weather; blue sky and brilliant sun, but cool, invigorating air—80 deg. F. The same refrain could be heard over and over, "Oh how cool." Somewhat like the French ritornelle: "Il etait un petit navire"....("There was a little boat...").

LETTER NO. 28 – JANUARY 1959

All the ten priest members of the Priory were home for the celebration of Christmas, beginning with the solemn singing of the first great "O" antiphon, December 7. Father Bernard returned from Formosa and Hong Kong on Dec. 15, enthusiastic over the peace, order and prosperity prevailing on Formosa, but fearful of the future of Hong Kong, where two or three million refugees from the Communist mainland live in wooden sheds, constantly exposed to fire hazard, with little to eat and still less to eat...Father Eleutherius hitch-hiked back from Minnesota...or almost: he took a freight train from Minneapolis to Omaha, Nebraska, another freight train from Omaha to Denver, Colorado, still another from Denver to

Cheyenne, Wyoming, still another from Cheyenne to Ogden, Utah...How he finally got to Victorville, Calif., 40 miles east of Valyermo, nobody knows. In any case his trip across the country gave him ample time to go through his philosophy students' first-semester examination papers. At Victorville a charming young couple, Sgt and Mrs. Charles F. Murphy, saw him in front of the railway station. "You look lost, Father..."—"Yes, I am."—And they drove him all the way to the Priory.

Father Werner has got a new "Chevy" for four broken ribs – not his, but someone else's. Here's how it all happened. One Sunday morning Fr. Prior dispatched a postulant to the nearby Mountainbrook Ranch to pick up Mexican nationals for the 7:30 O'clock Mass. Around 8, the postulant came back minus the car and minus the Mexicans: the car was in a ditch; one Mexican in hospital with four broken ribs; the others got off with little scratches and the biggest fright in their lives...The insurance company paid the hospital bills and presented Fr. Werner with a new (that is, 3-year-old) "Chevy".

LETTER 31 – APRIL 1959

Abbot Neve has a particular solicitude for our Priory, because it is his last foundation. In a handwritten letter to our Father Prior, the Very Rev. Raphael Vinciarelli, OSB, STD, he said: "I want to renew my good wishes...It is a great task that you are undertaking in the name of the Abbey: either you will succeed in establishing a center of monastic and apostolic life, or you will not and it would be a pity indeed! In order to succeed, use the right means –the spiritual weapons. Do create a true center of monastic life in which prayer holds the first place...Write me now and then. I am interested in every phase of the development of your work...At the end of my career; it is a joy to witness the ever-growing expansion of our monastic and apostolic program... Your departure for America reminds me of our voyage to China 20 years ago. Who could believe that China would one day lead you to America.

[6] *An Advent Homily*, Fr. Aelred Niespolo, O.S.B.

Fr. Aelred Niespolo, O.S.B.

Isaiah 63: 16-17; 64:I, 3-8, Psalm 79, 1 Corinthians I:3-9, Mark 13:33-37

This homily was preached last year at St. Benet's Hall, Oxford, England. While the reading is different for the upcoming Advent Cycle, the reflections are equally pertinent for us this new liturgical year.

CERTAINLY among the best known lines of Augustine's *Confessions* is his statement from Book I: "You have made us, O Lord, for yourself and our heart is restless until it rests in you."

In truth, these words encapsulate the season of Advent, a season of desire, and of longing, a season of expectation, of wonder, of hope and perhaps even of restless fear. Advent is very much the season of the heart desiring what the heart desires most.

AS St. Bernard wrote that Advent is really about the three-fold coming of Christ, and this trinity of arrivals is rooted in the very nature of *God With Us*, Emmanuel, Yahweh Saves, Yeshua, Jesus. There is the historical birth which we commemorate; there is the glory, and fearfulness, of his return at the end of Time which we anticipate; and there is the third coming which happens to us now, as we live God's word. For the Incarnate Son is *now*, he exists in our lives. In each of these three comings of Christ there is the gift of life, of the living God continually creating, bringing to fruition, the purpose and continuity which embraces all things.

YET, we often get in the way of what our hearts truly desire. This is why we are told to watch and to stay awake: this watchfulness is a necessary part of our commitment to on-going conversion in our life with Christ. Because of the Incarnation of Jesus, everything, by its very nature, is in the present tense.

Advent is also about the relationship of desire and time: we are waiting for what is already here. The time of Advent, which began from the first "In the beginning when god created heaven and earth" of Genesis, continues with John's "In the beginning was the Word" and ends with the eschaton, the making of all things new: the last manifestation of a Christ already come, but for whom we nevertheless still must wait. Our confusion lies in this: we lose Advent's immediacy because of our unawakened and inattentive lives. As Merton wrote:" the spiritual life is first of all a matter of keeping awake."

THAT is what our readings are about today.

IN the passage from Trito-Isaiah we acknowledge God as creator and Father. We also call him our “redeemer.” The word is translated from the Hebrew *go’el* which denotes one who defends the interests of a person or group, especially defending the poorest members of a family. This *go’el* also provides posterity for one who has died without children by marrying the widow and gathering a child this redeemer pays the debts of an impoverished relative, and frees one who has been sold as a slave. This redeemer avenges unjustly spilled blood. Isaiah is saying that God is our *go’el*, our kinsman, who will take upon himself that which is lacking in our lives: Righteousness, charity, fecundity and justice, It is a relationship with a God who is our now, our present.

ADVENT is about immediacy. And that is why we are able to cry out to God with Isaiah, that he return to us because we do not even have the capacity to convert ourselves. Divine grace must tear open, rend, the heavens so that we may respond. Without God active in our lives, we “are like men unclean”, and all of “our integrity is filthy clothing.” These are striking images because they tell us what we, when alone, make of ourselves, when we are awake only to who we think we are: our posturing, our faux integrity, or self-importance, the world we cling to – and yet, without God our hearts tell us that we wither like the leaves, that our sins hollow us out, till we are blown away by the wind. Driven by this or that passion, hollow, empty and completely lacking any knowledge of self. Because we are the clay and God the potter, we are the work of his hands. We are made by God to share in God’s life. We are made for you Lord, and our hearts do not rest until they rest in you.

If Isaiah speaks to us about the struggles of our hearts, today’s Gospel puts that struggle squarely within our present lives, our present world. Yes, Mark is writing in a particular historical time for a particular people and place, but the words also are for us – now. Our present times are in fact indicated by the word “night.” Mark places the return of the master of the house during the night, which the other synoptic gospels do not use in parallel passages. The scriptures have often identified the night with powers of darkness, the time the enemy sows weeds in the field, times of frightening visions, attacks, suffering. Whether Job affrighted by his visions in the night or Jesus in

agony in the night garden – at best it is an ambiguous time, a time of potential tension. It is the world we live in as Christians, men and women who are to be children of the light. And we are required to be awake and watchful during this night in order to receive the master on his return. Of course we can see this as primarily eschatological, and it is eschatological; but it also tells us that wakefulness in the night lies in leading our lives so that we may always let Christ into them. We are all the doorkeepers that have to stay awake in the present moment.

AS Simon Weil wrote:” we cannot prevent ourselves from desiring; we are made of desire.” She stresses that even if this desire nails us down to the imaginary, the selfish, the temporal, we are able to open it up to *God With Us* as it moves from the imaginary to the real, from the temporal to the eternal. This is expressed in another way by one of the desert fathers who said that “whoever has a heart can be saved.” When we pray for God’s coming during Advent we are opening the door for him, opening the heart that yearns for Him. And we must take care that we don’t circumscribe his coming in by limiting his grace.

Weil wrote in *Waiting For God* that we have to invite him in purely and simply, so that “our thought of him is an invitation, a longing cry.” She uses a striking image: “It is as when one is in extreme thirst, ill with thirst; that one no longer thinks of the act of drinking in relation to oneself, nor even of the act of drinking in a general way. One merely thinks of water, actual water itself, but the image of water is like a cry from our whole being.”

AND during this season of Advent we are asked to reflect on that cry from deep within ourselves and as Christians let us pray that cry is *Maranatha* – Come Lord Jesus.