

Peace, Quiet Mark Piffard Retreats

By FRANK KELLY
About 42 miles from Rochester and just a few short miles from the college town of Geneseo lies a world that is the complete opposite of the world that surrounds most of us.

This world is the Trappist Monastery of Our Lady of the Genesee at Piffard, New York.

It is a world that is closed to us in many respects but one that opens its doors to laymen for their private communication with God in a private retreat.

LAYMEN HAVE been going into this world of silence since the monastery opened in 1931 and come to its doors from such places as Michigan, Ottawa, Pennsylvania, New Hampshire and Maine as well as New York.

"This is a unique place," according to one retreatant making his third retreat at Piffard. "Even in the quietest place at home, you won't be able to match the peace and quiet that permeates Piffard. It is a wonderful place to solve even the most complicated problem."

Although the retreats are private, the retreatants still have the opportunity to communicate with a Trappist priest, Father Augustine, O.C.S.O., who is pastor and director of the retreat house. Located outside and a short distance from the monastery walls.

FATHER AUGUSTINE, a former Jesuit and a member of the Trappist order for 10 years, arranges for private individuals to come to this world within a world and hear retreatants' confessions and give private counseling.

The retreatants follow a daily schedule that gives many hours for private reading and contemplation. They rise at 4:30 a.m.

Mass in the beautifully simple chapel is at 5 followed by breakfast at 6.

From 7 to 8, there is time for reading and private meditation, after which the retreatants are allowed to attend the solemn high Mass sung by the monks in the monastery chapel. At 11:15 the tenth part of the day's office, Sext, is read and the retreatants make their examination of conscience. Lunch or dinner is served at 11:30 and from that time until Vespers at 1:30, the retreatants spend according to their own dictates.

Dinner is served in the retreatants' dining room at 5:05 and following compliance at 6:30, the retreatants retire. Retreatants have the opportunity to go to confession or receive counseling from Father Augustine between 7:30 and 1:30 each day. The only change in the schedule is on Sunday when Vespers are read at 3 p.m.

THE RETREAT HOUSE is a converted farmhouse which has been turned into a house for retreatants through the hard work of the Trappist monks.



CONVERTED Farmhouse was turned into a house for retreatants through the hard work of the Trappist Monks.

It was formerly an old farmhouse which has since been rebuilt by the monks. An average of 10 or 12 men a week come to make a retreat each week for a period of three to five days.

A large percentage of the retreatants are either priests or seminarians, with a great deal of them coming from Canada and the Buffalo diocese. In fact, of all the retreatants there last week, not one was from the Rochester diocese.

At one time there were regular conducted retreats given at Piffard during special times during the year, such as during Lent, Advent and Holy Week, but because of the lack of Trappist priests in this young community, they had to be discontinued.

Father Augustine encourages college students to make a private retreat here, but discourages high school students because of the lack of planned activity.

AT THE PRESENT time, both priests and laymen live in the same house, but the Cistercians own another building on the extensive property which they plan to remodel and turn over to priests for their retreat house. Simple and adequate rooms

the furniture in the retreat house. The money to purchase the furniture comes from the sale of Trappist Bread and from gifts to the Dom Gerard Memorial Fund, named in honor of the monastery's first abbot, Rt. Rev. St. Gerard McGinley, O.C.S.O.

Retreats are not limited to Catholics, according to Father Augustine. "Just recently, we had a Methodist Minister making a retreat here," he said. "He was anxious to find out about the life of the monks, although I do not think that he was contemplating a change in his beliefs."

The retreatants do more than contemplate and pray, however. There are various chores, such as KP that have to be done, and the retreatants volunteer for this work.

RETREATANTS generally return year after year, Father Augustine said. One such man who

is blind was making his third retreat at the Trappist monastery when the Courier-Journal reporters visited there last week. In addition to the Mass, the retreatants may also attend other exercises in the monastery chapel within the walls of the enclosure. They are especially invited to attend the singing of Compline, the last part of the day's office, and the Salve Regina, the final goadnight hymn to the Blessed Virgin.

Father Augustine said that he received an average of six to seven letters each day inquiring about retreats. "Most of the retreatants have heard about our retreats from individuals who have come to Piffard to make one. We try to accommodate any man who wishes to come here."

There is no charge made to the retreatant. However, if he wants to make an offering, he may do so.

The retreatants are not bound by the Trappist rules of no meat, fish, or eggs and according



FATHER Guido Caspeni, a Conventual Father who teaches at Notre Dame High School in Batavia, reads a prayerbook while walking on the grounds outside the monastery.



THREE RETREATANTS pray in the simple but beautiful chapel in the retreat house at the Trappist Monastery, Piffard. (Courier Photos by Paul Contestable.)



CHARLES Marinucci from Kenmore, N.Y., reads his prayerbook while walking on the grounds outside the monastery.

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