

Text and Photos by Laurence E. Keefe

While many went to Washington last weekend to protest the war in Vietnam at the Inauguration ceremonies, a group of monks kept watch in prayer and meditation on a hill overlooking Geneseo.

In their silent and modest vigil, reminiscent of troubled periods back in medieval times, the Trappist monks of the Abbey of the Genesee and their guests prayed that "the peace of the Lord" would descend on the nation.

The watch started with a ritual fast and prayer service at Compline, the last hour of the liturgical day set up when monasteries first began. It ended with the office of Vigils at 2:30 a.m., integrated with a Mass for "peace and justice."

From 7 p.m. on, the vigil was maintained in the reading cloister, a long hall dimly lit by three spotlights. While the wind blew fretfully against the tall windows which make up the walls of the cloister, the group sat in a large circle listening, first to articles and Psalms read aloud, and then to the silence and each others' prayers.

Students from the State University at Geneseo and diocesan priests joined in the vigil and Mass which followed.

Announcing their plans for the retreat fast, the Trappist community said it "wishes to express again its solidarity with the peace movement of the nation," because it "is aware of the impossibility of reconciling continued warfare there (in Southeast Asia) with Christian moral principles."

Outside, the bell in the abbey's tower tolled the hours of the night, across the broad fields surrounding the monastery.

Inside, at the altar, Father John Eudes Bamberger delivered the homily as abbot of the monastery, to all of the monks and a group of about 20 men and women.

"Peace is the fruit," said the abbot, "not only of justice, but of the mercy of God. Peace was within the grasp of the United States in Vietnam a very short while ago, but it has proved to be elusive. It is not within man's control, but it is a mercy we ask of God."

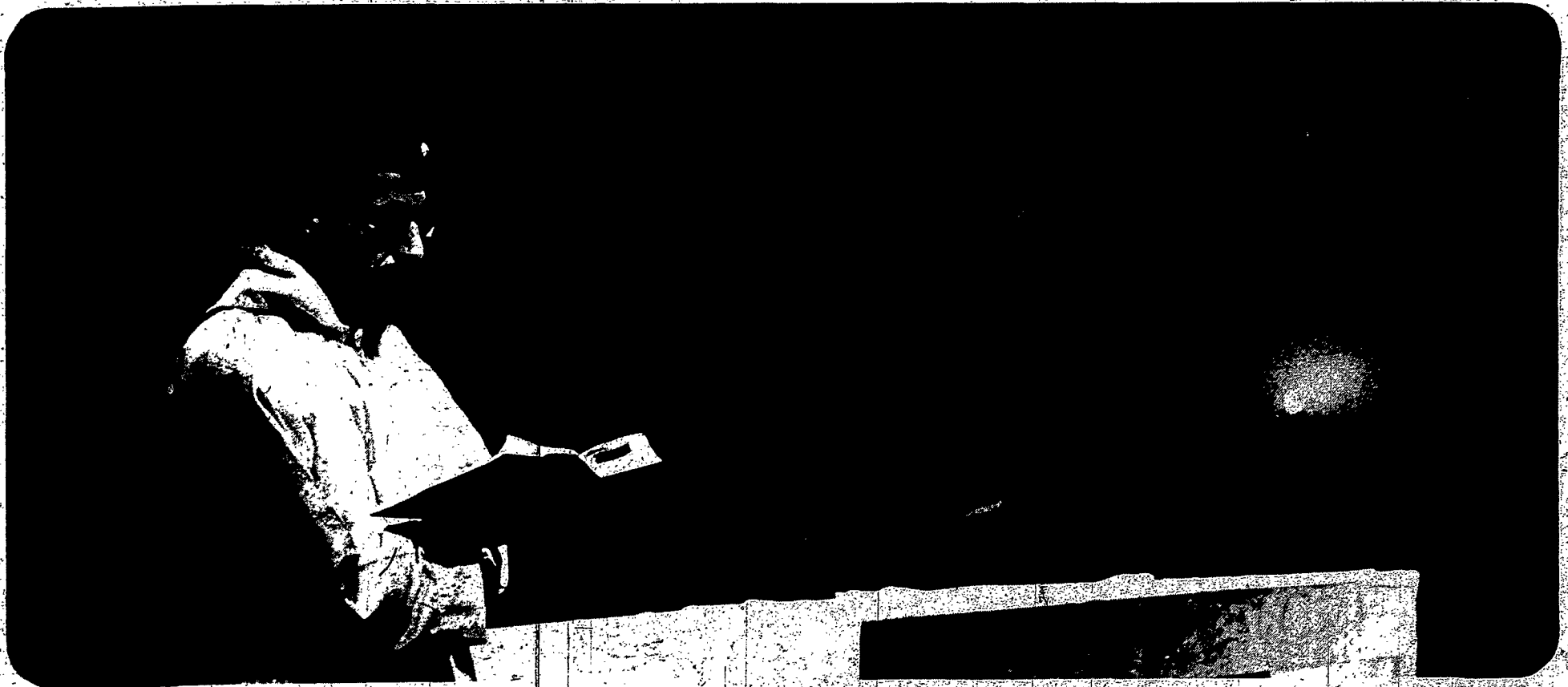
Calling the prayer service the "most efficacious" way to seek peace, the abbot said, "Here we seek peace by the monastic life, first for ourselves because we need it, but also because it unites us with all men."

He concluded, "Let us seek peace for ourselves, for one another, for our country, for all men of good will."

As the visitors filed out, bursts of a light snow fell around the darkened buildings.



Two monks share book of Psalms.



Above: Father John Eudes Bamberger reads Gospel before delivering homily. Left: Brother Anthony, one of the night's organizers, meditates in moment shared, right, by all of the assemblage.

