

Visit underlines prayer's importance

On Friday, I paid a visit to the Trappist community at the Abbey of the Genesee in Piffard. More formally called Cistercians of the Strict Observance, these 40 men live a life of prayer and work dedicated to the glory of God and building up the Body of Christ.

The monks lead a quiet life. Communication among them is rich, but there is not a lot of talk. They gather to pray the Liturgy of the Hours several times a day and, of course, for the celebration of the Eucharist. Their prayer strengthens the life of our church; the witness of their lives reminds us all of our baptismal call to be people of prayer.

It was a pleasure to enjoy their hospitality on Friday. I presided and preached at the eucharistic liturgy and prayed the hour of Sext with them.



Bishop Matthew H. Clark

Along the Way

After that time of prayer, we gathered in the chapter room for 45 minutes of conversation. I had an opportunity to begin the session by highlighting some of the pastoral issues we are working on in our diocese. Thereafter, we engaged in a free-flowing conversation. Our dear brothers had comments and questions I found very stimulating.

Through their reading and hospitality to their visitors, they are very much aware of our joys and sorrows, and, through both, are always ready to support us in their prayer. I would name as their deepest interests the unity of the Body of Christ, the binding of wounds and work for peace wherever that is lacking.

When we finished that conversation, I joined the community for lunch in the refectory. In keeping

with their rule, there was no conversation during the meal. But, as a special treat, we listened to a substantial portion of Beethoven's "Pastorale Symphony." At the conclusion of the meal, we prayed the hour of Nones.

After lunch I had the privilege of a conversation with Father John Denburger, OCSO, who is father abbot, or superior, of the monastery.

I enjoyed the conversation for many reasons. It was good to compare notes with Father John about our experiences of the leadership to which we both are called. The session was a powerful reminder to me that — whether our call to discipleship is lived in a monastery, a cathedral or a home — we are all called to be people of prayer and servants of others.

And, I took encouragement from the reminder our conversation provided that all of us are on a lifelong journey of faith. We hope that we grow in faith, freedom and maturity as the years go by. As we give thanks for whatever gifts we may have received, it is important to be open to those that will come to us today and tomorrow.

As I drove back to my office after the visit, I was aware of my fascination with the vocation to monastic life that so nourishes the men whom

I had just visited.

Where do they come from? How were they first drawn to this way of life? How did they pursue their interest? What has it meant to them in their years at the Abbey of the Genesee? I know that Father John and Father Jerome, father prior of the abbey, came to Piffard from diocesan priesthood. I would love to know more about the stories of their confreres.

Please be aware that these men pray for us several times a day every day that they live. I have no doubt that this gift does wonderful things for us. Nor do I doubt that they count on our prayers for their continued growth. Just as we must so do, they renew their commitments on a regular basis through the years.

I made mention earlier that the monks lead a life of work and prayer. I have made a few comments about the prayer side. Let me conclude with a mention of the fact that the community sustains itself in large measure through the sale of their Monks' Bread. Whenever you purchase a loaf of that wonderful bread, you have registered a concrete expression of gratitude for the daily spiritual food they offer us through their prayers.

Peace to all.

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