



Our Lady of the Mississippi Abbey
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OUR LADY
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Our community on Easter Day

Almost every one of our newsletters celebrates an important community event, and this one is no exception. On February 5, our Sister Joan Garrity celebrated her Golden Jubilee of profession with a special Mass and dinner. We were happy that many of our brothers from New Melleray were able to join us in spite of the winter weather.

Sr. Joan entered Mt. St. Mary's Abbey in Wrentham, MA, on Sept 8, 1961, and made her first profession there on February 5, 1964. She was chosen to be one of the founding Sisters of our monastery, arriving in Dubuque with the other Sisters on October 18, 1964. Over the past 50 years Sr. Joan has served the community in many ways, especially with her radiant smile and life of prayer. For the past 34 years she has lived as a hermit in a cabin in our woods, spending much of her work time in our candy house. If you have ever bought or received a box of our candy, the chances are good that she wrapped your box in its cellophane!

At the end of our last newsletter we were beginning to ship out all the candy we made for the Christmas orders. Sales were good, and we thank all who ordered our candy. St. Benedict says in his Rule of Life, which we follow, that monks are to live by the work of their hands, and we are grateful to cover our basic living expenses by our candy industry. We are also grateful to all our benefactors who helped us with recent extraordinary expenses such as replacing windows and roofs.

As soon as the last box of candy was shipped, we started preparing for Christmas. First we practiced the special carols for our Christmas liturgy, especially for our Christmas Masses. Then on December 21 several Sisters cut a tree in our woodlands, and on the 23rd, set it up in our refectory.



Sr. Joan and Br. Dennis of New Melleray

Many of us helped decorate it, and it was truly beautiful. Fortunately, since we decorate so late, we can enjoy the tree until the end of the Christmas season, the Feast of the Baptism of Jesus.

Winter in Iowa was just as bitter as it was in most of the country. It was below zero 43 days, and 24 of those days it was -10 or below. On January 31, our main bell rope iced up, so we could not use it until it thawed two months later. Many of the new bushes around our statue of Mary perished. It seemed like every day it was either snowing or below zero. Somehow in spite of the weather, our black walnut harvest was completed. Our forester tagged 200 trees in one area of our woodlands for harvesting, and contracted out this big job. Some of those trees were planted by our Sisters when they first arrived in 1964. We have been planting trees ever since, steadily adding to our woodlands as part of our stewardship of what God has given us.

We also have two main areas of prairie that we maintain. In April we burned the prairie that is along our driveway, and the conditions were ideal: very dry. Because it was also windy, seven of us

helped our farm manager, making sure no sparks strayed into our woods nearby. By burning into the wind, the fire was tightly controlled. Periodic burning is essential to the health of prairie grasses, enabling the tough grass seeds to germinate.

Also in the early spring, Sr. Grace tapped some of our maples, harvesting 150 gallons. She cooked this sap down, and now we have about 15 quarts of maple syrup to enjoy over the next year. To complete this report of the nature around us, we have acquired two hives of bees. Sr. Ciaran has long been interested in having bees, and in April we got two “packages” of bees – each having 3 pounds of bees and a queen. The bees are settled in now, making honey and nurturing their larvae. We won’t have honey for ourselves this first year since the bees will need the honey during the coming winter.

The past year has brought our share of illness. Sr. Joan, living in the woods, contracted a bad case of Lyme’s disease. She was quite ill during the winter, but is much better now. Sr. Louise had par-



Small group singing at Christmas Mass



Sr Mary Therese finishing decorating our tree



Sr. Joan and Fr. Ephrem at her Jubilee dinner

tial knee replacements for both knees in December, and Sr. Martha spent a couple of days in the hospital with blood clots in her lungs due to an autoimmune disease. Our oldest Sister, Sr. Regina, has been in and out of the hospital a lot over the past couple of years, and is now receiving nursing care in Stonehill, our local Franciscan nursing home. She is doing very well there, and is able to come home for special occasions.

Recently we had our annual community week of retreat, this year led by Fr. Simeon, a monk of our Order from St. Joseph’s Abbey in Spencer, MA. His conferences were about the parable of the 10 virgins in St. Matthew’s Gospel. Have you ever wondered why there is no bride mentioned, just the bridegroom? Traditionally the early Church has said it is because the Bride is us, both individually and as Church. Have you ever wondered why Jesus commends the five who did not share their oil? Doesn’t Jesus ask us to share what we have? But what if the oil is meant to be the essence of our truest self? That would be something that another person could not use as if it was their own. The bride-

groom, our loving God, wants each one of us to mature into our own God-given uniqueness, and no one else can do this work for us. That is an oil we cannot get from another or give to another person. No one else can hand me over to the Lord except myself, and he wants us to give our truest self. May this summer bring each one of us ever deeper into the growth and maturing of the fruits of the Spirit in us.

This summer we will begin to celebrate the golden jubilee of our abbey. During the summer of 1964 the final plans to “found” or begin our monastery were being discussed by the Abbess of Mount Saint Mary’s Abbey in Wrentham, MA, and the Abbot of New Melleray Abbey near Dubuque. In July we will celebrate the opening of our Jubilee year with monks and nuns of our Order, and close the year the following July with Mass with our local friends. The next two newsletters will focus on our past 50 years and these special celebrations. We rejoice in God’s great goodness to us!

The Sisters of Mississippi Abbey



Sr. Grace tapping our maples for syrup



Burning our prairie – carefully



Sr Kathleen and part of the harvested black walnut



Sr. Ciaran tending our new bees