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Looking for good Advent reading? The best book on Advent that we've ever found: Sr Maria Boulding OSB, *The Coming of God*, 3rd edition 2001.



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Some of the monks and nuns explored our property together in May.



This has been a golden year for us – we have had the joy of celebrating two sisters' Golden Jubilees! We celebrated each on a separate day, so each family would have room in our guest houses. As cloistered nuns we don't normally leave the monastery to go visit family, except for the final illness or death of a close family member. And our families, like so many, are often scattered over wide distances. So a jubilee, like a solemn profession, is a particularly precious time for both the sister and the family to reunite.

On June 22 we celebrated the jubilee of Sr Kathleen (Kathy) Lyzotte, the second woman to enter our community and the first one to persevere until first vows, which she pronounced 50 years earlier, to the day. A native of Cedar Rapids, Sr Kathy is one of only three native Iowans in our community. While in high school she heard about the arrival of the Trappist nuns on the Iowa scene, and the seeds of the call to give her life to Jesus were planted just as Mississippi Abbey was putting down roots. Kathy visited the monastery several times during her years at Mount Mercy College and entered as a postulant only three months after graduation, setting the record as the youngest person to enter our monastery.



Sr Kathy renews her vows

Sr Kathy's service to the community over the years has included stints as vegetable gardener, head of candy production, singing in schola, sacristan, and 16 years as our treasurer. But above all she is a superb seamstress and has measured, cut and sewn many of our habits over the years. At present she is also our sub-prioress and blesses us with holy water after Compline if the abbess and prioress are absent. Her quiet, unflinching presence at community prayers, meals and gatherings is an inspiration to us all.

On the Fourth of July we celebrated the jubilee of Sr Nettie Gamble, whose travels form quite a contrast to Sr Kathy's lifetime in Iowa. Nettie grew up in a devout Protestant family, mainly in New Jersey and Missouri. After graduating from Johns Hopkins School of Nursing, she began her religious life as an Anglican, and in



Sr Nettie renews her vows

May 1973 pronounced her final vows to God at All Saints Convent in Catonsville, Maryland, her home for "20 grace-filled years." Eventually, feeling the call to the Catholic Church and to a more contemplative life, she left All Saints, became a Catholic, and entered our monastery. By the time of her final vows she had already been chosen as one of the founders of Taura Mariakloster in Norway, but returned to us two years later, in time to settle back in before being elected our abbess in 2006.

Under her leadership we built our senior wing, which entailed other major renovations, all of which Sr Nettie managed not only with great competence, but also with a peace and calm that were contagious. She has served several times, both before and since her 6-year term as abbess, as our prioress. Sr Nettie too is no slouch in the needle and thread department, but at present is once more in the saddle as our expert treasurer.



Sr Kathy, newly professed



Sr Nettie with her bishop and her father



Sr Kathy, seamstress



Sr Nettie as prioress

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Just before noon on April 19 we had a hailstorm featuring the largest hailstones we have ever seen, some over an inch in diameter, frozen clusters of smaller stones. Apart from some dents on vehicle surfaces, we didn't see any damage, and did our best to ignore the hours of thumping sounds from distant neighbors re-roofing their buildings. But in mid-summer we bit the bullet and had our roofs inspected – and learned that every single roof on the property needs to be replaced. Completely replaced. While we dread the thought of weeks of noise and commotion, we are immensely grateful that our insurance should cover the whole expense.

In our last newsletter we mentioned that the “local clergy” have really stepped up to help with our chaplain situation. What we didn't tell you was that one of these “local clergy” was our very own Archbishop! Right around the turn of the year, while conversing with M.Rebecca, he volunteered to help by coming out for Tuesday Mass. We thought he must mean just the following Tuesday; but no, it turned out he did mean every week. So beginning the second week in January Archbishop Jackels presided at our Tuesday Mass.

However, the first Tuesday in April the Archbishop told us that he had just received word that morning that his resignation, submitted at his doctor's urging, had been accepted, and he was leaving Dubuque the very next day. It came as a shock to the whole archdiocese. Our dear brothers at New Melleray immediately stepped into the breach, and

have again been presiding at Mass for us three days a week (including Sunday). Given their own shortage of priests this is truly heroic of them and we are tremendously grateful for their generosity. As also for our other priests!

To make things a bit easier for our brothers, for the first time ever we did not celebrate the Paschal Vigil in our own church. Instead, we went over to New Melleray and had a beautiful celebration together. Later in the morning, one of the monks presided at the Easter Day Mass here at our monastery. The best of both worlds!

Meanwhile, Bishop Richard Pates, retired bishop of Des Moines, was called out of retirement to serve as Apostolic Administrator of our archdiocese. He is our fifth bishop since we were founded in 1964 at the invitation of Archbishop Byrne.



sisters and brothers distribute the Paschal light

Our founders arrived in mid-October, and to the astonishment (not to say consternation) of our superior, M.Columba, who should show up at the door our first Christmas Day in Dubuque but the archbishop himself! This proved to be the first of many visits, and until he retired Archbishop Byrne at a minimum came for Mass and dinner with us every Christmas and Easter. In fact, for nearly a decade after the Council (at which he participated) he gave us monthly classes on the Council documents, staying for Sunday Vespers and a spaghetti supper.

While we always enjoyed his visits, it undeniably put a rather different tone on our celebration of

the two main feasts of the Christian year. So beginning with his successor, Archbishop Kucera, we evolved a custom of the archbishop coming for Mass and brunch once a year – on a less liturgically packed occasion. In this spirit, we were pleased indeed when Bishop Pates accepted our invitation to visit us during his short tenure as our shepherd. He presided at Mass and joined us for brunch on the Assumption (August 15). This is the patronal feast of our Order, as we celebrate Our Lady's anticipation of the final glory we all hope to share. It's one of our favorite holidays, with beautiful hymns and antiphons all through the day.

Last letter we wrote of the dangerous situation of our brothers of Mokoto (D.R.Congo), surrounded by violent armed factions, hosting 2000 displaced persons, unable to have the ceremony which would raise their monastery to the status of an abbey, nor have their new abbot blessed. Recently Dom Damien Debaisieux, abbot of Scourmont (Belgium) and Father Immediate of Mokoto, was able to visit the monastery. (The abbatial blessing of Dom Vedaste will take place at a future date when the bishop is able to come.) Dom Damien wrote:

The monastery of Our Lady of Mokoto was erected as an abbey during the Eucharist on Sunday (July 30). The celebration, in which many displaced people participated, was marked by the beauty of the hymns and by joy. The festivities continued with the community meal, which even included some Chimay beer! It was a joyful occasion, despite the situation. That very morning, there were the sounds of bullets and shells in the village a few hundred meters away. The sounds of war resumed in the evening to round off the day.

The political situation in the region continues to be very difficult. The community of Mokoto is facing it with courage and unity. It is also coping with it in a spirit of charity, since it is hosting 15,000 displaced persons on its land. They find security and hope in our brothers.

So thank you to everyone for praying for our brothers and for the people; interceding for and hoping for peace. But thank you also for your prayer of thanksgiving for the help, the light and the hope that the community of Mokoto offers to a whole population in danger. May the Prince of Peace protect our brothers and all these displaced people. May he be in their midst.



Dom Godefroy

On August 4 our Generalate in Rome posted an urgent request for prayers for Dom Godefroy, abbot of Acey in France, a rising star in the new generation of leaders in our Order. He had been giving pastoral assistance to our monks in England, then visited Hauterive Abbey in Switzerland for a few days of rest. The prayer request said that he “left for a bike ride in the mountains on August 3 in the morning, has not returned in the evening and disappeared. The police immediately began a search for him during the night.” His bike was found in a parking lot and it was assumed he continued his mountain hike on foot. Only a few hours later in US time we got the terrible news that his body had been found; evidently he lost his footing and fell from a height of 51 meters.

Dom Godefroy Raguene de Saint Albin had a particularly colorful vocation story we thought you might appreciate. Born in 1970, he entered the Naval Academy of France and became a marine commando, led by a thirst for adventure, an ideal of service to his country and a desire to bring security and peace. As he recounted in an interview with *La Croix International*, “It was the witness of Tibhirine [Atlas] that gave me a glimpse of another answer to my search. Appointed as an exchange officer in the United States, I left with the address of the Spencer Trappist monastery in Massachusetts, where the Lord was waiting for me. A monk put into my



His burial at Acey. The French Navy sent representatives

hands the book of Abbot General Dom Bernardo Olivera, *How Far to Follow?*, which presented the martyred brothers of Tibhirine. I discovered the paradoxical fecundity of this community life, hidden away...” News of a planned attempt to return to Tibhirine fired him with a desire to join the project. Although the plan never materialized, he began his monastic journey at Aiguebelle, served as chaplain to our Trappist sisters in Syria, then was asked to be superior of our brothers at Acey, who are now again in need of a shepherd.

We close with Dom Godefroy's own comments to *La Croix* on monastic life: “The fruitfulness of monastic life, of which our seven brothers of Tibhirine are a shining example, is less a matter of doing than of being. Those who are seasick are often those at the bottom of the ship's hold, who have no horizon. With the shocks of the global health, ecological, economic and political crises, our society is sick for lack of a horizon. Monastic life, by its simple presence, opens a breach towards an Other, who is a promise, opens possibilities towards a horizon of meaning. This is the experience of those who come to the monastery.”

We wish you a beautiful fall and a holy Advent and Christmas –

The Sisters of Mississippi Abbey