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GAUDETE! *Reflections from Abbot Lawrence*



Along with all of the joys and blessings of summer, one of the guaranteed features of the season is not a blessing: the appearance of weeds. That's a problem facing every farmer and gardener. Weeds have a habit of growing around any seed we've sown or garden we've installed, no matter how well we've prepared the soil. Weeds seem to be more robust than cultivated plants, and left unchecked they choke the growth of the plants that we so carefully selected, purchased and planted. Weeds

are, to be sure, a destructive nuisance!

With the annual summer battle with weeds in full force, it is very timely that the liturgy this year places before us in the middle of summer the parable in which Jesus speaks of the dilemma that a farmer faces when an enemy sows weeds in his beautiful field of wheat (cf. Matthew 13:24-43). With this parable Jesus confronts a problem which besets the Kingdom of God in every age, including the age in which we live. We easily can apply this simple and memorable image to our society, and even to the Church itself.

On the one hand, we know that God has planted the good seed of His Word and grace in the hearts of many, and these seeds continue to grow and bear good fruit. But we also know that sin continues to have a negative impact on the proclamation of the Gospel, and can do great harm to good people, especially the young. The damage done by weed-like sinners within the Church can be especially tragic – causing scandal and seemingly irreparable harm. No wonder the instinct of many is to rip them out by the roots!

The parable about the weeds in the wheat calls us to reflect on how we are to deal with such real threats to the fruitful cultivation of the Good News. Confronted with the reality that destructive individuals and movements in Church and society threaten the vigor of the Kingdom of God, we might well react like the servants in the parable who asked if they should uproot the unwanted weeds. We want to weed out the destructive sinner from our midst. Then, we might imagine, the Kingdom here on earth would consist only of good, holy people, with no room for sinners. Naturally we assume that we would be among this elite band of Christ's faithful followers!

But that's not the approach that Jesus recommends to us in this parable. Like the wise farmer, Jesus warns us that in pulling up the weeds we could do more harm than good. Instead, Jesus urges patience. In doing so, he points to the two time-perspectives of the farmer: that of sowing and growing and that of harvesting, judgment and sorting. Both of these phases are, of

course, critical. But even though it is obvious that there will be no harvest without cultivation, we must remember that the end goal is not the toil of sowing, but the fruit that will be gathered at harvest. In other words, without the harvest there is no need to cultivate to begin with!

Pope Francis has turned to the parable of the weeds in the wheat to teach us about an important aspect about his call to all of us to be engaged in the "New Evangelization." In his exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium - The Joy of the Gospel* (EG), he writes to us of our need to exercise the type of patience and faith that allows the fruit to grow and mature even in the midst of weeds. He writes:

An evangelizing community is always concerned with fruit, because the Lord wants her to be fruitful. It cares for the grain and does not grow impatient at the weeds. The sower, when he sees weeds sprouting among the grain does not grumble or over-react. He or she finds a way to let the word take flesh in a particular situation and bear fruits of new life, however imperfect or incomplete these may appear. The disciple is ready to put his or her whole life on the line, even to accepting martyrdom, in bearing witness to Jesus Christ, yet the goal is not to make enemies but to see God's word accepted and its capacity for liberation and renewal revealed. (EG 24)

The words of Jesus in the Gospel, and the words of his Vicar on Earth, Pope Francis, are difficult to embrace and implement because they challenge our typical instincts when it comes to weeds among the wheat. Although we know in faith that Jesus has conquered sin and death through his own passion, death and resurrection, our day to day experience makes us fully aware that the Kingdom is still unfolding – and that it unfolds in the midst of an ongoing battle between good and evil. In this we encounter a mixture of good and bad people, saints and sinners. We even experience the battle between good and evil, wheat and weeds, within ourselves. This can cause such great confusion in our hearts that we do not even know how to pray as we ought! (cf. Romans 8:26-27)

In such a state of confusion, we can mistake would-be fruitful plants for weeds, or we might not be patient enough to understand that an unpromising plant might end-up producing something very beneficial. Our judgment is not sound enough to be certain. In an impetuous zeal to purge out evil we may uproot the good with the bad, or even instead of the bad. That would be a serious injustice!

In light of this, Pope Francis stresses that patience is a critical virtue in the task of evangelization, the task of spreading the Word of God. He writes:

Evangelization calls for attention to the bigger picture, openness to suitable processes and concern for the long run. The Lord himself, during his earthly life, often warned his disciples that there were things they could not yet understand and that they would have to await the Holy Spirit. The parable of the weeds among the wheat graphically illustrates an important

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Community Honors Fr. Eugene On 70th Anniversary of Profession

Fr. Eugene Marshall, OSB, the senior member of St. Gregory's Abbey, reached a milestone in his vocation on July 11: the seventieth anniversary of his monastic profession! In an age of instability and secular values, Fr. Eugene's faithful witness to the love and mercy of God has been an inspiration and source of strength for countless persons.

Fr. Eugene Casimir Marshall, OSB, was born and raised in Harrah, Oklahoma, a largely Polish community located about twenty miles from the Abbey. The son of parents who immigrated from Poland and the eldest of eight children, he was raised in a family deeply steeped in Catholic faith and practice. His mother in particular instilled in him and his siblings a deep love for the Blessed Virgin Mary, leading the family each evening in the Rosary, which they recited in Polish.

The future Fr. Eugene was never far from the influence of Benedictine monks. Throughout his childhood St. Teresa Parish in Harrah was led by Benedictine priests who could minister to the Polish speaking residents. He recalls, "I remember Fr. Hyacinth Cismowski, OSB, from St. John's Abbey in Minnesota, and Fr. Norbert Lukes, OSB, from St. Procopius Abbey in Chicago. They were assigned to the parish because they spoke Polish. Naturally they knew the monks at nearby St. Gregory's Abbey."

Fr. Eugene first thought about becoming a priest when he was eight or nine years old. He said that his parents were supportive of his aspiration to the priesthood. When asked if he always wanted to be a Benedictine priest he admitted, "That's the only kind of priest I knew of at the time!"

Given this, it seemed natural for him to attend St. Gregory's College once he graduated from Harrah High School in 1941. "There were forty students in the college in the fall of 1941," he remembers. That number was reduced dramatically, however, after his freshman year. "With the outbreak of WWII, there were only eight in the entire college the next year. All of the others went to war."

The other students who remained at St. Gregory's also were discerning a vocation to the priesthood. Eventually five entered the novitiate at St. Gregory's Abbey and one was later ordained as a priest for the Archdiocese of Oklahoma City, Fr. Joseph Kolb.

Fr. Eugene entered the novitiate for St. Gregory's Abbey in 1943, under the direction of Fr. Blaise Harichabalet, OSB. He remembers studying the Psalms and the Rule of St. Benedict during the novitiate. In addition to studies, he and his fellow novices worked in the large garden that was cultivated at the monastery. "We planted tomatoes, carrots, green beans, corn and other vegetables. We not only used these for our meals in the summer," he added, "but also canned them for use in the winter months." At the end of his year as a novice, Fr. Eugene professed his vows as a monk on July 11, 1944.

Following profession, Fr. Eugene completed his studies in philosophy and theology in preparation for ordination at St. Gregory's. He explained, "We had well-qualified faculty at the



Abbey in this time. This was in part due to the presence of priests who were refugees from the war." In particular he remembers Fr. Suso, a priest from Maria Laach Abbey in Germany who had fled from a monastery in Japan, and Fr. Jerome, who was a monk from Seitenstetten Abbey in Austria. Fr. Eugene added, "We clerics also had to stay home to maintain the Divine Office on the weekends when all of the priests of the community would go out to cover parishes around the state." Fr. Eugene was ordained to the priesthood on February 25, 1950.

It was during his theological studies that Fr. Eugene was first assigned to oversee the library at St. Gregory's. He was not given any real training as a librarian. "I was simply sent to the library and told to take care of it." He remembers, "The library was located in the northwest corner of the second floor of Benedictine Hall. There were not really that many books that were of interest to the students." Although he initially lacked training, his oversight of the library was to last for forty years.

Eventually Fr. Eugene attended the University of Oklahoma to earn a Bachelors of Library Science. "It was a summer school program that took four years to complete. I was at OU each summer from 1951 to 1954." After completing his studies Fr. Eugene became largely responsible for the great expansion of the library collection to meet the growing needs of the school. This was not always easy, due in part to lack of funds. "I had to ask the abbot for permission each time I wanted to buy a book!"

In 1970 Fr. Eugene received his first assignment that would take him away from the monastery. He was sent to Our Lady of Lourdes Parish in East Los Angeles, where he would serve as Associate Pastor while at the same time completing a Masters of Education at the University of Southern California. He explained, "USC did not offer a Masters in Library Science and so I completed the program in education." Fr. Eugene returned to St. Gregory's in fall of 1971 and resumed his role as the Director of the Library for both the college and monastery.

Along with his many years of service as a librarian, Fr. Eugene has faithfully provided sacramental ministry as a priest at St. Gregory's, at many parishes as a substitute priest on the weekends, and as pastor of St. Vincent de Paul Parish in nearby McLoud, Oklahoma, from 1996 to 2006.

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Fr. Manuel is Golden: Celebrating Fifty Years of Monastic Profession

June 24, 2014, was an important day in the life of Fr. Manuel Joseph Magallanes, OSB: it was the fiftieth anniversary of his profession of vows as a monk of St. Gregory's Abbey. In anticipation of this important anniversary, Fr. Manuel was recognized in a formal way during the annual community retreat. During Mass on May 30, Abbot Lawrence received Fr. Manuel's renewal of vows and then conferred upon him a special blessing and a *baculus senectutis*, or *staff of the elder*, in recognition of his Golden Jubilee of profession.

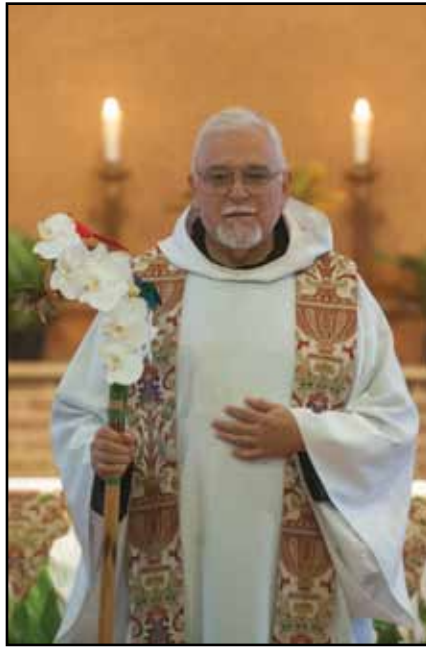
If you ask Fr. Manuel how he finds himself celebrating fifty years of monastic profession, he will try to explain that he has somewhat "backed into" his vocation. But even though he considers his approach to vocational discernment as going backward, he understands that God has been moving him forward all along.

"Truth be told," Fr. Manuel confessed, "I left home for St. Gregory's at age fourteen in order to get out of the house." That was the first concrete step that Fr. Manuel took "backward," which God actually used to move him forward into his vocation.

Growing up in East Los Angeles, Fr. Manuel was named Joseph by his parents and was the second eldest of thirteen children. He remembers with gratitude that he grew up in a home that was filled with prayer. His parents prayed with the children, especially the Rosary. Visits to the homes of his two sets of grandparents also usually involved praying the Rosary as a family.

His family was active at Our Lady of Lourdes Parish, which had been founded and was staffed by monks from St. Gregory's Abbey in far-away Oklahoma. It was as a child that he came to know the priests and sisters who staffed the parish. "My family greatly respected the priests and sisters, who were frequent guests in our home." The Presentation Sisters and Sisters of the Sacred Heart often would ask his own sisters if they wanted to become religious sisters. He does not recall having been asked by the monks at the time if he wanted to be a priest. However, Fr. Manuel did hear the invitations that were extended to his sisters, and while they did not respond in a positive way, he felt a seed being planted within him. He also saw how his parents and grandparents were supportive of those vocations. "The positive attitude toward vocations around our home made an impression on me," he said.

Several of the priests from St. Gregory's Abbey also made a lasting impression on him. He remembers Fr. Vincent Traynor, OSB, directing the choir while standing on the railing of the choir loft – an extraordinary feat. Fr. Robert Dodson, OSB, who later became the Abbot of St. Gregory's, involved Fr. Manuel's father in work around the parish, including making repairs and in



taking a parish census. Young Joseph accompanied his father for much of this work. He also remembers with fondness the faithfulness of Fr. Matthew Brown, OSB, during his tenure as pastor at Our Lady of Lourdes.

A true turning point in his life actually occurred when he had his first up-close encounter with one of the priests, Fr. Benedict Ryan, OSB. When he was about six years old, his older sister had come home from the parish school with her allotment of parish raffle tickets. Thinking that he would be of help to her, he tore the tickets in two along their perforation – thus ruining them and making his sister financially responsible. His mother took him "by the ear" to see the pastor, Fr. Benedict. Thinking that her son would be properly punished, his mother explained what had happened. Young Joseph was terrified. Fr. Benedict listened carefully, paused and then said:

"I tell you what – I'll buy them all." Fr. Manuel remembers this event very clearly and observes: "This was my first experience of redemption! Fr. Benedict, in his love of children and his mercy, paid my debt!"

Fr. Manuel recalls another important moment when he was ten years old. He was attending Mass one day with his grandfather and his cousin Alejandro, with whom he was very close. With the two boys seated on either side his grandfather told them quite clearly: "You and you will become priests." In hindsight, his grandfather's "call" makes more sense to Fr. Manuel in that both he and his cousin were somewhat quiet compared to their siblings and other friends. As it turns out, his cousin did become a Capuchin priest. And although he was very attracted to Franciscan spirituality, young Joseph decided to follow the Benedictines, whom he had known all of his life and who had influenced him so greatly.

At the age of thirteen, Fr. Manuel shared with his parents that he wanted to be a priest. They took him to their pastor, Fr. Lawrence Spencer, OSB, who without hesitation told him he needed to go to St. Gregory's in Oklahoma for high school. Young Joseph knew nothing about Oklahoma, and even less about monastic life. And yet, he trusted the advice that Fr. Lawrence gave – and he also wanted to get away from home. And so, at age fourteen he set out by train along with four other boys from East Los Angeles for a new adventure.

"I thought that St. Gregory's was a seminary that provided priests for my parish. My plan was that if all went well I would be ordained and return to East LA to minister in my home parish." For him, this is yet another example of how he "backed into" his vocation with his own plans, not realizing that God had much more in store for him.

Once he arrived at St. Gregory's he found a welcoming and supportive community. He recalls that even though he was not at all athletic, due in part to his experience with polio at age twelve, the monks and fellow students tried to encourage him and make him feel accepted. His new setting did, of course, provide some real challenges for him. "There were no mountains or beaches; everything was flat. It also seemed to me that everyone looked Protestant." Fr. Manuel went on to explain, "Where I came from, all Catholics were *morenos*, with dark skin, eyes and hair and the Protestants had blue eyes and light colored hair." His worldview was beginning to expand!

It was after completing four years of high school and two years of college at St. Gregory's that Fr. Manuel entered into formation at St. Gregory's Abbey.

He made his first profession of vows on June 24, 1964. Following his monastic profession, Fr. Manuel was sent to St. John's Abbey in Collegeville, MN, to pursue studies in philosophy and theology. This proved to be a real challenge for him. "I struggled with classes and to keep up my grades. I also had very great difficulty with public reading."

This led to what was one of the most challenging moments in his vocation. He recalls: "Fr. Amandus diVincenzo, OSB, who was in charge of my formation, called me in to tell me that he did not think I had a vocation to the priesthood. I was overwhelmed. I went outside to the crucifix in our cemetery and poured out my heart."

Fr. Manuel did not see how he might fit into the roles typical of the vocation of a Brother in the community at the time. He decided to postpone his solemn vows temporarily and to make a somewhat extraordinary request of the abbot: he asked to be assigned to pastoral ministry as monastic brother. Although this was without precedent, the abbot agreed and assigned him to his home parish in East Los Angeles.

This assignment took him into several different roles of ministry. He assisted with door-to-door outreach ministry, religious education programs, and he even worked with gang members. It was this activity that renewed his desire for ordination as a priest. "Some of the gang members would ask me to hear their confession. When I told them I was not able to, they told me they would make their confession only to me." Along with these experiences he also was becoming more confident in public speaking and thought he might be able to pursue seminary studies.

About this time his recently elected new superior, Abbot Robert Dodson, OSB, approached him about the possibility of ordination. Fr. Manuel recalls, "The abbot had seen my work in Los Angeles and knew of my desire. He sent me to St. Mark Seminary in Kentucky, which was a seminary meant for older candidates." With the support of his home community and the

seminary program, he was ordained as a priest on June 25, 1976.

Looking back on his journey toward ordination Fr. Manuel observed, "It is very unlikely that I would have become a priest had I not entered St. Gregory's. Here I had the support and encouragement I needed." He sees this as further evidence that God was leading him forward in his vocation.

Since his ordination as a priest, Fr. Manuel has had many pastoral assignments away from the monastery. He has served in parishes in both California and Oklahoma. He has ministered in traditional parish settings, as well as in alternative settings for the purpose of reaching immigrants and other populations in situations that Pope Francis would describe as "on the margins."

Fr. Manuel's vocation has continued to unfold in un-

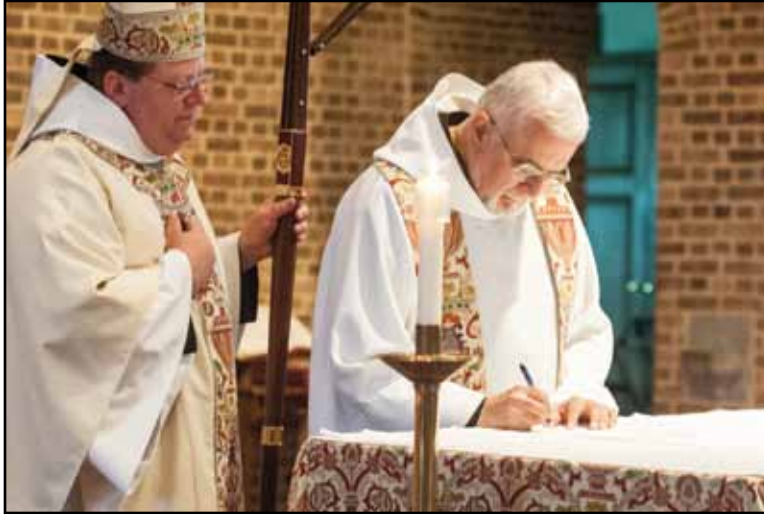
expected ways. "My original experience of the Abbey was the external ministry of the community. That was what attracted me and what I wanted to pursue. Now, however, I find myself assigned at the abbey and I am trying to understand more about the monastic vocation. This is at times real struggle, and I am trying to do my best."

He explains that this yet the latest stage of "backing into" his vocation. Having thought his vocation would be as a parish priest in his native California, or in some other pastoral setting, he now is discovering the realities of life at the monastery. This leads him to look forward to the future with great expectation. "I feel like I am just beginning my spiritual life. There are so many opportunities ahead yet to explore. I feel that I have been only on the peripheries up until now. Now I can explore them in depth. My journey now is more an interior one rather than exterior"

Looking back over his fifty years as a monk, Fr. Manuel observes: "None of my experience is what I would have determined or chosen. I did not make any intentional or positive preparation for the vocation that God has given me." In light of this, he describes his vocation as being a process of "learning to be obedient."

He says that an essential part of discerning one's vocation is in experiencing "the tension that comes naturally from asking what God wants me to do now. An image that comes to my mind is that of metal being transformed in the heat of a forge and being shaped into something new. It is not an easy process, but it is necessary to become complete."

That is the basis of the advice that he would give to others who are trying to discern their vocation: "Try to trust in what God wants. God will take you for a ride!" In light of his story, it appears that God will lead you forward – even if you seem to be traveling in reverse!



Fr. Simeon Spitz, O.S.B., Ordained to Priesthood



Through the ancient gesture of the 'laying on of hands' the Most Rev. Paul S. Coakley, Archbishop of Oklahoma City, confers the sacrament of Holy Orders on Fr. Simeon Spitz, OSB.

In one of the most solemn and ancient rituals of the Catholic Church, the Most Reverend Paul Coakley, Archbishop of Oklahoma, ordained the Rev. Simeon Spitz, OSB, monk of St. Gregory's Abbey, to the priesthood. The ordination ceremony took place during Mass on Saturday, May 31, in the Abbey Church at St. Gregory's in Shawnee.

"The ordination of Father Simeon as a priest of the Abbey is an historic occasion of great joy for St. Gregory's and for the people we serve," explained Abbot Lawrence. "Father Simeon is a person of great talents and enthusiasm for the mission of the Church in service to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He no doubt will bring added energy and creativity to the life and works of our community at St. Gregory's."

Fr. Simeon spent much of his early life in western Oklahoma, claiming the town of Canute as his home. He attended St. Gregory's University, completed bachelor's degrees in political science and philosophy. Upon graduation, he first considered becoming a diocesan priest and was accepted as a seminarian for the Archdiocese of Oklahoma City. After two years of study at St. Charles Seminary in Philadelphia, however, he discerned that his true vocation was to be at St. Gregory's Abbey.

He made his first profession of vows as a monk of St. Gregory's Abbey on January 6, 2010. After continued discern-

ment, Abbot Lawrence assigned him to continue his preparation for ministry as an ordained priest at St. Vincent Seminary in Latrobe, PA.

Fr. Simeon observed that his ordination as a priest is very much connected to his seminary formation. "The ordination was a culmination of the discernment, study and prayer involved in seminary training," he noted. "But the ordination really is only the beginning of my formation as a priest" he added. "It's not 'downhill from here,' but rather 'uphill from here' as I try to grow in this vocation."

As a priest of the Abbey, Fr. Simeon will continue in his vowed life as a monk and his future ministry will be in that context. "As a monk, my future is not about my personal ambitions but rather is about my ongoing call to be responsive to the Holy Spirit to lead and guide me as the Spirit leads and guides the entire monastic community." Fr. Simeon explained that he hopes "to share in the role of the entire monastic community in service to the mission of the Church so that all of us together might be a beacon of hope and place of refuge for all who are in the world."

Abbot Lawrence stated that Fr. Simeon has been assigned to full-time service at St. Gregory's University, the primary apostolic work of the Abbey. "Fr. Simeon will now be serving as Associate Vice President for Mission and Assistant Chap-



Fr. Simeon Spitz, OSB, lies prostrate in supplication before the altar of the Abbey Church as the congregation sings the Litany of the Saints to implore God for the grace of ordination.



Abbot Lawrence publicly vests Fr. Simeon as a priest for the first time.

lain in the university. He also will be assigned on many weekends to provide pastoral support around Oklahoma in Catholic parishes where the resident pastor is absent.”

Fr. Simeon believes his identification with the monastic community will keep him grounded in life. “Even though as a priest I am now a ‘Father,’ I am still first a ‘Brother.’ That has not changed for me in community. That is what will help keep me grounded in the community and in the greater Church.”

Fr. Simeon views his calling to ministry as a priest as being connected to the mission of Jesus. He admits, “I can’t save the world. But Jesus Christ can save the world. I want to have a share in His plan – whatever that calls me to do.”

When asked what advice he would give to a young person considering a vocation to consecrated life or to ordained ministry, Fr. Simeon said that it is important to take action. “One should act and not be afraid of making a mistake. Someone discerning should not wait for some dramatic burning sign, but begin to take action with the help of others. God will not drag, but He will invite. Even a sense of restlessness in one’s heart can be a sign that God has already extended the invitation.”



Fr. Simeon’s immediate family, father Jerry Spitz, mother Susan Boyer, brother Lethern Spitz, and sister Michaela Roe, present the gifts to be offered at the altar.

Fr. Simeon stands at the altar with Most Rev. Eusebius Beltran, Archbishop Emeritus of Oklahoma City, Most Rev. Paul S. Coakley, Archbishop of Oklahoma City, and Abbot Lawrence, as he concelebrates Mass for the first time.



Spring Oblate Days

The Oblates of St. Gregory's Abbey held their usual spring gatherings in California and Oklahoma during the month of April. The Oblates of California gathered on April 6 at St. Benedict Parish in Montebello, CA, for Mass with Abbot Lawrence and Prior Martin. The group then enjoyed gathering for dinner and receiving a conference from Prior Martin. Abbot Lawrence shared the news from Oklahoma.

The Oblates of Oklahoma and Texas gathered at the Abbey on Divine Mercy Sunday, April 27. The Oblates joined the monks for Mass and other prayers, and listened to a conference on the New Evangelization. About forty Oblates were in attendance.



Oblate Director, Prior Martin Lugo, OSB, addresses the oblates gathered in Montebello, CA.

Oblates are men and women who draw inspiration from the spirituality and values contained in the *Rule of St. Benedict*. Through their act of oblation, they become formally attached to the monastic community and have a special share in the prayer and work of the monks.

Fall Oblate Days for 2014

- Sunday, October 5 at St. Benedict Parish in Montebello, CA
- Sunday, October 12 at St. Gregory's in Shawnee

Would you like to learn more about becoming a Benedictine Oblate of St. Gregory's Abbey? Contact Fr. Maurus Jaeb, OSB, Director of Oblates, by calling 405-878-5490.

Benedictine from Canada Delivers Retreat



The monks benefitted from their annual retreat during the week of May 25-30. Fr. Paul Paproski, OSB, a monk of St. Peter's Abbey near Muenster, Saskatchewan, Canada, led the community retreat. Fr. Paul noted a similarity of spirit between his home monastery and what he found at St. Gregory's. Certainly both communities have engaged in parish ministry and higher education. But part of the similarity is no doubt due to being located in the expansive central plains of the continent.

Third Annual Golf Classic a Success

St. Gregory's Abbey hosted its third annual golf classic at Twin Hill Country Club in Oklahoma City on June 23.

Abbot Lawrence observed, "We were very pleased that we had another increase in the number of participants, and that awareness of St. Gregory's Abbey has grown as a result."



The annual event raises funds to support the ongoing operations and ministries of St. Gregory's Abbey, including the ongoing formation of monks for ministry and health care support for elder members of the monastery. Abbey Stewardship Director Robert Allen noted that "the golf classic plays an important role in the ability of the monks to continue their life of prayer and ministry."

Abbot Lawrence expressed gratitude for the corporate and individual sponsors of the event: "A key to the success of this year's event was the generous support of several sponsors, especially the Western Concepts Restaurant Group of Oklahoma City, which served as the event underwriter, a gift secured by partner Carl Milam."

Some 100 golfers enjoyed the beauty and challenge of Oklahoma City's premier golf course, and were especially blessed with a relatively cool day following an early morning rain.

Abbot Lawrence also stressed: "This year's event would not have been possible without the hard work of our organizing committee: Mike and Linda Moxley, Judy O'Brien, Maggie Chaney, Carl Milam, Mary Kay Swenson and Robert Allen. We are also grateful for the assistance of Kevin O'Brien, Golf Pro at Twin Hills Golf and Country Club."

The fourth annual St. Gregory's Abbey Golf Classic is scheduled for Monday, June 25, 2015. Mark your calendars now!

Monks Receive New Assignments

Abbot Lawrence has recently announced new assignments for several monks of the Abbey.

Fr. Basil Keenan, OSB, will serve at St. Gregory's University as an instructor of Latin and as a tutor for students enrolled in the university's unique Partners in Learning Program.

Fr. Maurus Jaeb, OSB, has been reassigned to the monastery after serving for four years as the pastor of St. Paul the



Fr. Maurus and parishioners Brian Stalford, Parish Council Chair, and Sheila Thee at his farewell party.

Apostle Parish in Del City, OK. He has assumed duties as Director of Oblates, Abbey Guest Master and Editor of *MonksOK! Magazine*.

Br. Damian Whalen, OSB, has assumed duties as the Director of the College of Continuing Studies for St. Gregory's University. In this role he oversees all aspects of the university's academic programs for "non-traditional" students.

Fr. Simeon Spitz, OSB, has been assigned to five weeks of intensive study of Spanish in Cuernavaca, Mexico. Following this program he will serve as Associate Vice President for Mission and Assistant Chaplain at St. Gregory's University.

Restoration Work Continues on Abbey Church

On the day before Palm Sunday, after nearly nine months of



continuous effort, workers completed the painstaking process of restoring the exterior surfaces of the Abbey Church. The work process included replacing mortar joints, repairing masonry, cleaning brickwork and waterproofing the surfaces. The result is a very noticeable improvement in the appearance of the church and will go a long way in preserving it for years to come. This work was made possible through the generous donations from some 154 donors.



Work has now begun on the restoration and preservation of the beautiful stained-glass windows of the Church. Craftsmen are removing the old and discolored "Lexan" coverings over the windows, cleaning and repairing the windows as needed, and installing new protective coverings made from a clear and very durable form of acrylic. Many have commented on the stunning difference of the amount of light and color that now enter the church through the windows that have been repaired.

The abbey has launched a second phase of a capital campaign to raise the funds needed to complete the restoration of the windows and the interior of the Abbey Church, including the installation of a new electrical and lighting system, repairs to interior plaster, repainting the interior, refurbishing of reconciliation rooms, instillation of power assist doors, and repairs to the basement areas to make them more useful. Approximately \$390,000 is needed for this work. Those interested in learning more about this effort should call the Abbey Office at 405-878-5490.

Summer Retreats

Abbot Lawrence led the first of two public retreats offered at the Abbey this summer on the weekend of July 11-13. The theme of the retreat was "Our Commission in the New Evangelization." In his conferences Abbot Lawrence traced how the call for a New Evangelization developed from the pontificate of Pope St. John XXIII and through the Apostolic Exhortation *The Joy of Gospel* of Pope Francis.



Fr. Charles Buckley, OSB, led a second retreat on July 25-27. Entitled "We are Seeking God; God is Seeking Us," the retreat focused on the on the mystery that our movement toward God is always initiated by God. As part of the retreat, Fr. Charles introduced participants to the poetry of Mary Oliver, to which he was introduced during his sabbatical experience in fall of 2013.

To learn more about retreats offered at St. Gregory's Abbey, please contact the Abbey Office at 405-878-5490 to add your name to our retreat mailing list.



Fr. Simeon, Br. Damian, Fr. Basil and Fr. Charles work together to send out information on the Abbey retreat program.

Fr. Boniface Attends Vocation Workshop

Abbey Vocation and Formation Director Fr. Boniface Copelin, OSB, attended a workshop organized by the National Religious Vocation Conference (NRVC) on the weekend of July 18-20. The workshop focused on providing vocation directors with the knowledge and skills needed properly assess the suitability of candidates for consecrated life, especially in regard to psychological health.

Abbey handiman Philip Rigney and Oblate Mark Ruiz stand in front of the front doors of the Abbey Church which they refinished this summer to their great beauty. Periodically refishing the doors has been a labor of love for Oblate Mark for several decades. He now has revealed his technique to Mr. Rigney.



A Year of Celebration Begins on October 12

Leaders of St. Gregory's Abbey, St. Gregory's University and the Mabee-Gerrer Museum of Art currently are finalizing plans for a year-long celebration to commemorate the centennial of the establishment of Benedictine life and education at St. Gregory's in Shawnee, Oklahoma. The year of commemoration will begin on Sunday, October 12, which will be the 139th anniversary of the arrival of Benedictine monks in Indian Territory, and will culminate on September 9, 2015, the 100th anniversary of the opening of historic Benedictine Hall to monks and students. The conclusion of the celebrations will be on November 23, 2015, the centennial of the formal dedication of the new Benedictine foundation and university in Shawnee.

Abbot Lawrence explained the reasons for the year-long commemoration. "One hundred years of history and service is an important milestone for any organization and it deserves more than a day of commemoration," he said. "President Greg Main of the university, Director Dane Pollei of the Mabee-Gerrer Museum of Art, and I have been reflecting on how we might best celebrate the centennial of the establishment of our monastic presence and mission here in Shawnee. We hope to host a number of activities which will bring attention not only to our history, but will also raise awareness of the many ways that Benedictine promotion of faith and culture continue to unfold and develop at this historic and treasured place."

Abbot Lawrence added, "We are especially pleased to announce that a centerpiece of our centennial commemoration will be a year-long exhibition featuring the St. John's Bible, a hand-transcribed and hand-illuminated edition of the Bible that was commissioned in 1998 by St. John's Abbey and University in Collegeville, MN. This extraordinary work of art and act of faith will provide us with a means of centering our celebrations around the Word of God and a wonderful example of contemporary Benedictine culture." The exhibition on the St. John's Bible will open on October 12, and will include a showing of the complete seven volume set of the St. John's Bible during the months of December and January.

Benedictine monks first arrived in Indian Territory in 1875 and formally established their original home at Sacred Heart Abbey in 1877. In 1910, the city of Shawnee in the new state of Oklahoma invited the community to establish a Catholic university and high school some thirty miles north of Sacred Heart. The monks accepted the invitation, and after making the necessary arrangements began construction at the new location in 1912.

The monumental building now known as Benedictine hall opened its doors on September 14, 1915, thus inaugurating monastic life and the mission of education in Shawnee. Monastic artist Fr. Gregory Gerrer, O.S.B., moved his studio to the location in 1919, thus establishing what is now known as the Mabee-Gerrer Museum of Art. After it became apparent to the monks that the new campus was becoming the primary center of their activity, the monastery formally transferred to Shawnee in 1929, changing its name to St. Gregory's Abbey.



On May 4, 1913, Bishop Theophile Meerschaert of Oklahoma City came to Shawnee to bless the official cornerstone for the new Catholic University of Oklahoma. Construction actually had begun earlier in the year and would continue through 1914. Present at the blessing were members of the monastic community, local dignitaries and many guests.

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aspect of evangelization: the enemy can intrude upon the kingdom and sow harm, but ultimately he is defeated by the goodness of the wheat. (EG 225)

Admittedly, this is a perspective and a strategy that demands a great deal of faith. It calls us to have faith not in ourselves and our instincts, but in the effectiveness of the power of God. In light of this need for faith, I share with you not my words of encouragement, but those of the Holy Father, Pope Francis:

Faith ... means believing in God, believing that he truly loves us, that he is alive, that he is mysteriously capable of intervening, that he does not abandon us and that he brings good out of evil by his power and his infinite creativity. It means believing that he marches triumphantly in history with those who "are called and chosen and faithful" (Rev17:14). Let us believe the Gospel when it tells us that the kingdom of God is already present in this world and is growing, here and there, and in different ways: like the small seed which grows into a great tree, like the measure of leaven that makes the dough rise and like the good seed

that grows amid the weeds, and [the kingdom] can always pleasantly surprise us. The kingdom is here, it returns, it struggles to flourish anew. Christ's resurrection everywhere calls forth seeds of that new world; even if they are cut back, they grow again, for the resurrection is already secretly woven into the fabric of this history, for Jesus did not rise in vain. May we never remain on the sidelines of this march of living hope! (EG 278)

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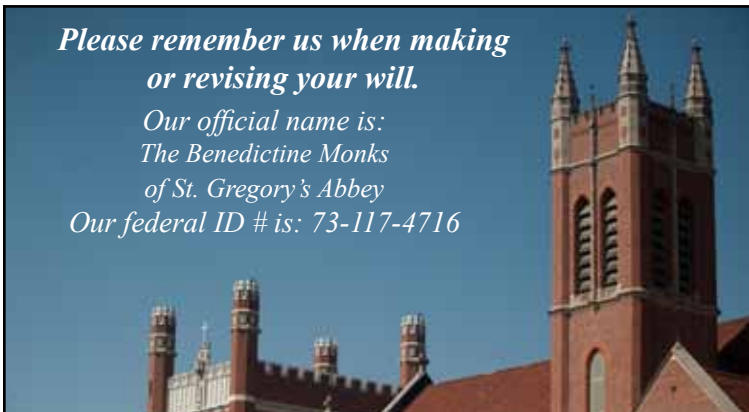
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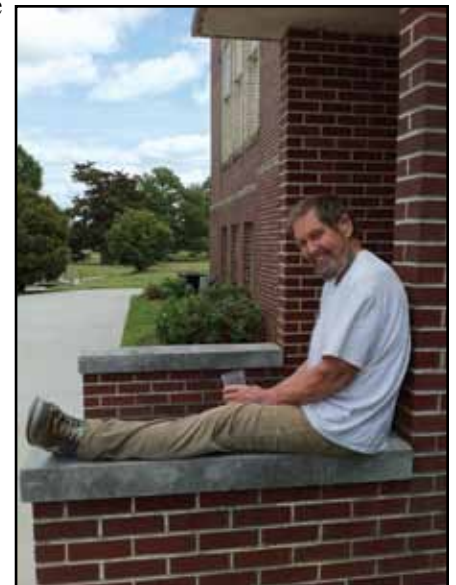
One of the important roles he also fulfilled at the Abbey was as Master of Novices for several years. Fr. Nicholas, Br. Benet, Fr. Boniface, Br. Isidore, and Abbot Lawrence were all formed as novices under his direction. Abbot Lawrence remembers, "Fr. Eugene was the perfect novice master for me. He was a good listener, fair arbiter and could admonish us when necessary without discouraging us. He also kept us in good humor with really dumb jokes! Most of all, however, he taught us by his wonderful example of just getting on with the life, living it prayerfully and faithfully."

Outside of his official assignments, including as monastery prior from 1963 until 1969, Fr. Eugene always has maintained a very active lifestyle through several ongoing projects around the monastery. Over the years he has operated the Abbey's historic printing press, recycled stubs of candles into paschal candles, cultivated and grafted the Abbey pecan grove, and until very recently kept a summer vegetable garden. He still recycles scrap paper into note pads, delivers the Abbey mail each day, serves in the Abbey front office during the afternoon and takes an active role in maintaining the Abbey honey bee colonies and harvesting their honey.

Fr. Eugene recalls that he was drawn to monastic life and the priesthood because he considered it to be "the best way for my soul to be saved. That is how I came to my vocation." He adds: "Parents should encourage their children in their vocational discernment, asking what is best for their salvation."

When asked what has sustained him during his seventy years as a monk, Fr. Eugene is quick to say "the Divine Office and monastic observance." He also is known for his deep devotion to the celebration of Mass and adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, as well as for continuing his love for the Blessed Virgin Mary that was instilled in him as a child. Abbot Lawrence sees Fr. Eugene's faithful observance of monastic life as a model for all of the monks. "Fr. Eugene is humble servant of God who faithfully participates in every aspect of our monastic life. He is living proof that this way of life lived well produces holiness and abundant fruit for the benefit of all."

Br. Kevin takes a short break from his outdoor work on the grounds. The monks are grateful for a generous response from donors to help them "Green-up" the monastery grounds after a long and damaging winter.





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