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GAUDETE! Reflections from Abbot Lawrence



The occasion of the Solemn Monastic Profession of Br. Simeon Spitz, O.S.B., as a monk of St. Gregory's Abbey on January 6, 2013, has provided a wonderful opportunity for reflection on the mystery of vocation – of God's call to each baptized person to follow Jesus in a particular way for the building-up of God's Kingdom in this world and to rejoice in the fullness of life opened to us by Christ in the eternal life of heaven. In particular, this

happy event has provided a special occasion to reflect especially on the vocation of men and women who profess vows in some form of consecrated life.

Consecrated life is not well understood in today's world. With its emphasis on individual freedom, materialism, sensuality, mobility, immediate gratification and utilitarian pursuits, it is difficult for our contemporary culture to grasp the idea of making a life-long commitment to a lifestyle that involves – among other things – obedience, stability, chaste celibacy, individual poverty, and ongoing conversion. And as the Church in recent years happily has learned to honor and to celebrate the universal call to holiness and the important role of the laity in the life of the Church, it is even difficult for many Catholics to appreciate the place of “religious vows” or consecrated life in the life of the Church. In fact, one who is discerning his or her vocation can – and should – ask the honest question: “if all are called to holiness, and if I can be active and even have a role of ministry in the Church while at the same time embracing the beautiful role of marriage and parenthood, why should I consider the consecrated life?”

It is in this context that Blessed Pope John Paul II wrote a special exhortation entitled *Vita Consecrata – On the Consecrated Life (VC)*. And while the exhortation was addressed in particular to men and women called to a vowed life as sisters, brothers or priests, its message is actually for the entire Church. In this document he wrote:

Many people today are puzzled and ask: What is the point of the consecrated life? Why embrace this kind of life, when there are so many urgent needs in the areas of charity and of evangelization itself, to which one can respond even without assuming the particular commitments of the consecrated life? Is the consecrated life not a ... “waste” of human energies which might be used more efficiently for a greater good, for the benefit of humanity and the Church?... These questions are asked more frequently in our day, as a consequence of a utilitarian and technocratic culture which is inclined to assess the importance of things and even of people in relation to their immediate “usefulness.”

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...Those who have been given the priceless gift of following the Lord Jesus more closely consider it obvious that Jesus can and must be loved with an undivided heart, that one can devote to him one's whole life, and not merely certain actions or occasional moments or activities.

... [For individuals captivated in the depths of their hearts by the beauty and goodness of the Lord], what in people's eyes can seem a waste is... an obvious response of love, a joyful expression of gratitude for having been admitted in a unique way to the knowledge of the Son and to a sharing in his divine mission in the world.”

(Vita Consecrata 104)

Far from being a waste, Blessed Pope John Paul II writes that a life consecrated to God has an indispensable role to play in the spreading of the Good News of Salvation. Along this line, he writes:

“The consecrated life has the prophetic task of recalling and serving the divine plan for humanity, as it is announced in Scripture and as it emerges from an attentive reading of the signs of God's providential action in history (VC 73).

... The specific contribution of consecrated persons... to evangelization is first of all the witness of a life given totally to God and to their brothers and sisters, in imitation of the Savior who, out of love for humanity, made himself a servant. In the work of salvation, in fact, everything comes from sharing in the divine agape [God's self-giving love]. (VC 76)

This is the significance of what we know as the consecrated life: God calls some persons to be living signs of the saving love of Jesus Christ that brings salvation to all the nations. This is the significance of the solemn monastic profession of Br. Simeon and of the vocation of all those called to consecrated life.

With its emphasis on individual freedom, materialism, sensuality, mobility, immediate gratification and utilitarian pursuits, it is difficult for our contemporary culture to grasp the idea of making a life-long commitment to a lifestyle that involves – among other things – obedience, stability, chaste celibacy, individual poverty, and ongoing conversion.

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Change: No Need to Fear

By Robert J. Allen

Why do people fear change? Because, as human beings, we are too attached to what we know.

There are many different fears: the fear of death, which is inevitable; the fear of success, which is to be who we are capable of being; and the fear of public speaking, which involves sharing openly. But I propose that most people fear change and do not want to change because they fear success. Notice I did not say they do not want change, but that they do not want to change.

People avoid change in all walks of life. We do not start out this way, but we are taught to avoid change by the examples of our parents, our friends, and by associates. Then our own selfishness urges us to keep what we think is ours and thus to avoid change. We become fearful of change, not realizing we are attracted to false security.

Jesus Christ taught us just the opposite in the way He lived, by the things He said, and most of all by His love. He commanded us: "Love one another as I have loved you." If we would make all of our judgments based on this command, then we would be open to positive changes in our lives, and we would be a source of positive change for others.

Change should only be feared when it is selfish, when it is self-serving, and when it prevents real positive growth. The virtue of Hope makes it possible for us to be open to positive change. In Hope, the Church gives us the wonderful 40 days called Lent for this purpose: for the change that is conversion.

In order to understand who we are, we should begin with the principle that all we have is a gift from God. This being true, then the only thing to fear is the inability to give to others by sharing, by making sacrifices, by loving. And to do this, to do it in an accountable and opportunistic way, means giving of ourselves without an expected reward. This means change. Whoever ran out of love by loving too much? The more love we give the more love we receive, and the more love we have to share. The unexpected rewards are immeasurable.

Christ came to change the world and He did this by giving Himself away totally so that each person could change. In the light of his example, we should not fear change, but rather the false security of selfishness. That, in the end, will be how we are judged. We will be judged not by how much we have, but how much we gave away through love.



Fr. Nicholas serves the Abbey Ash Wednesday meal to Br. Dominic and Br. Novice Francis. The Rule of St. Benedict calls monks to add to their normal routines some additional prayer, reading, ascetic discipline and charity to help prepare them for the celebration of Holy Easter. Each monk shares with the Abbot their plan for Lent, so that they might receive his blessing and thus safeguard against the dangers of spiritual pride.

Rite of Solemn Profession Rich in Symbolism

The inspiring *Rite of Solemn Monastic Profession* takes place during the celebration of the Mass. After the candidate is questioned by the abbot, he lies prostrate before the altar as the *Litany of Saints* is chanted by the assembly, invoking the assistance of the entire Church. After this, the monk makes his profession of solemn vows "...before God and his saints," and in the presence of the abbot and monks of the monastery. He signs his profession document on the altar, leaving it there as a testimony of his complete gift of self to God. Then, standing in the middle of the sanctuary, the newly professed sings three times the verse: "Receive me, O Lord, as you have promised and I shall live. Do not disappointment in my hope."

It is at this point in the ceremony that the newly professed once more lies prostrate in the sanctuary and is covered with the funeral pall. This is a sign of his death to self so that he might rise to new life in Christ. While he is covered with the pall, the abbot solemnly prays the *Prayer of Monastic Consecration*. Following the prayer, the monk is called to rise once again, and is vested with the monastic "cuculla," a flowing robe worn during prayer by monks in solemn vows, and in which the monks are interred at the time of their physical death. Finally, the monk is admitted formally into the Monastic Chapter, thus gaining full admittance in the future life of the community.

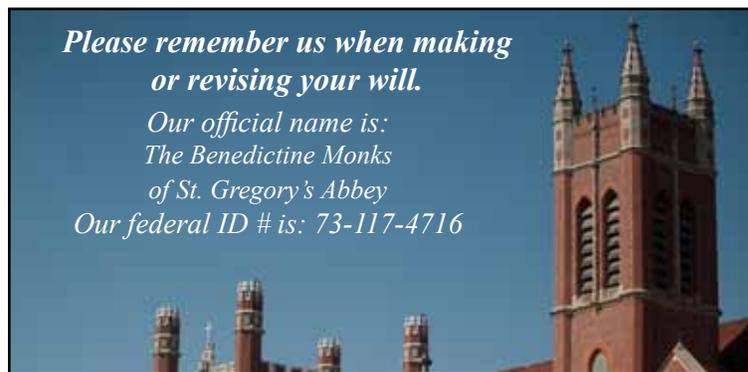
*Please remember us when making
or revising your will.*

Our official name is:

The Benedictine Monks

of St. Gregory's Abbey

Our federal ID # is: 73-117-4716



Br. Simeon Makes Solemn Monastic Profession

In an ancient and solemn ritual, Brother Simeon Z. Spitz, O.S.B., made his solemn profession as a monk of St. Gregory's Abbey on Sunday, January 6, the Solemnity of the Epiphany of the Lord. His vows were received by Abbot Lawrence during the celebration of the Eucharist in the presence of the monastic community and a large assembly of oblates, family members, and other guests.

Brother Simeon spent most of his early life in western Oklahoma, in the small town of Canute. He was a member of both St. Matthew Parish in Elk City and St. Anne's Catholic Church in Cordell, depending upon the seasons of the year and the demands of the agricultural life in which he was raised. After graduation from high school, he attended St. Gregory's University, where he completed bachelor's degrees in both political science and philosophy. Following his graduation from St. Gregory's, he completed two years of theology at St. Charles Seminary in Philadelphia, PA, as a seminarian for the Archdiocese of Oklahoma City. Br. Simeon entered the novitiate of St. Gregory's Abbey on January 5, 2009, and made his first profession of vows on January 6, 2010.

Br. Simeon made his solemn monastic profession on the Solemnity of the Epiphany, when the Church celebrates the revelation of God's salvation to all the nations, represented by the Magi who came from afar to pay their homage to the newborn King of the Jews. Referring to the gospel account of this story, Abbot Lawrence called Br. Simeon to vows by saying:

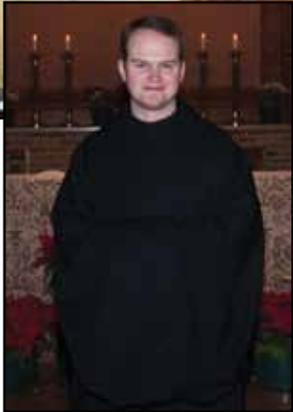
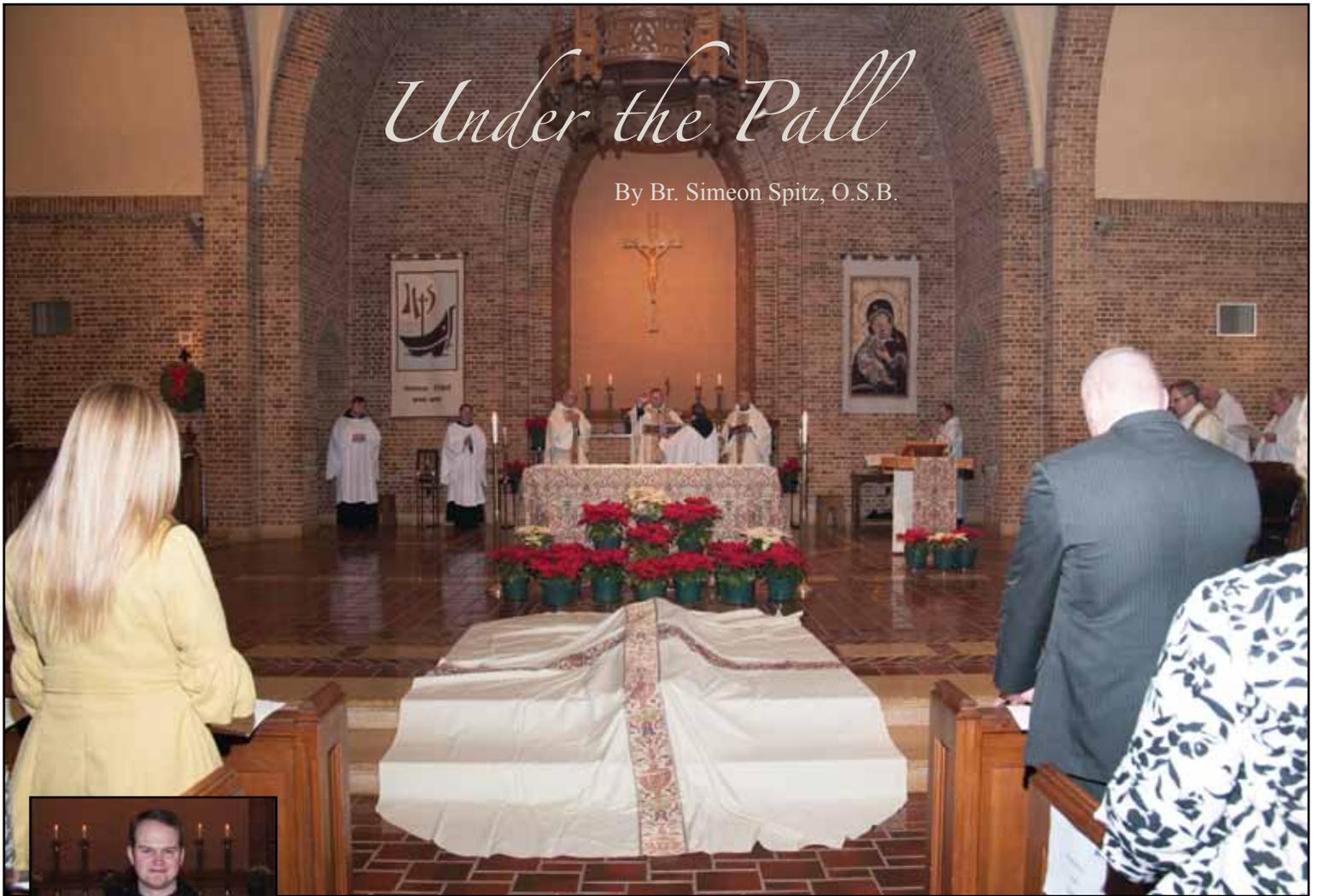
"When the Magi came to the place to which they had been guided by the star of faith, the assistance of others, and careful reading of Sacred Scripture, they prostrated themselves before the Christ Child, did him homage, and presented to the true King their most precious gifts that they had carried and guarded so carefully during their long journey. In just a few moments, you will do the same. You will prostrate yourself before the altar of the Lord not once, but twice, in a gesture of complete worship, supplication and surrender before the true King, Christ our Lord. And between these two prostrations, you will offer to the Lord your most precious gifts, which you have carried and guarded so carefully along your journey in life.... And yet, just as you give yourself completely to God, God has already given himself even more completely to you and will continue to provide you with all that you will need to live your life of consecration with joy and in a way that will bear much fruit. Knowing this by faith, and after careful deliberations with those who have guided you in your formation and with the monks of St. Gregory's Abbey, I accept you, Brother Simeon Spitz, for solemn profession in our community."

Br. Simeon now continues his theological and pastoral formation at St. Vincent Seminary in Latrobe, PA, where he is in the third year of a four year program.



Under the Pall

By Br. Simeon Spitz, O.S.B.



In the time that has passed since my solemn profession of vows on the solemnity of the Epiphany of our Lord, many people have asked me, “What were you thinking under the pall?”

At the pinnacle of the profession ritual, the monk who is making solemn profession is led from the abbot to the altar. The monk prostrates himself on the floor before the altar and is then covered with the pall that is used to cover the casket during monastic funerals. While he remains covered, the abbot recites the *Prayer of Monastic Consecration* over the monk. After the prayer of consecration, the abbot and the monks bid the newly professed monk: “Arise, you who sleep, arise from the dead, and Christ will enlighten you.”

During the actual covering of the monk, the prayer of consecration and response, and the re-folding of the pall, there is indeed a good deal of time for the mind of the monk to wander, and for many others to wonder about what he is thinking.

While I was being covered, I remembered that the funeral pall that was covering me was the same pall that had covered many monks before me at their solemn professions of vows, and it had also covered many of their caskets during their funeral masses. The pall is most certainly a symbol of death. In this particular ritual, it is a symbol of the monk dying to him-

self, his former way of life, and his will and desires.

But the symbolism of death is actually a great sign of faith and hope. It is dying to self that allows for total consecration to God. It is only in dying to self that one can be summoned to “rise up” to new life with Christ.

While I was being covered with the pall, I prayed that God grant me the grace to die not only to my self and to die to my will, but also to die to my doubts and to die to my fears, so that I might be transformed, weak and sinful as I am, into the image of His own beloved son. Just as bread and wine are transformed by consecration into the Body and Blood of our Lord, so I asked that God accept and consecrate me.

I didn’t hear any of the prayer for consecration. Not because I couldn’t hear, but because I wasn’t listening. In a retreat just before my profession, Abbot Lawrence had me read and meditate on the prayer of consecration. He told me that I should meditate upon the prayer before the profession because I shouldn’t hear it when it was prayed. Not that I couldn’t, but that I shouldn’t. Rather than listening to the prayer when I was covered with the pall, the abbot wanted me to listen to what God might say instead.

So what was I thinking? What did I hear? That’s between God and me. But if God is nudging you toward a vocation to the monastic way of life, then you just might get the chance to listen for yourself!

Abbey Conducts Annual Community Days

The monks of St. Gregory's Abbey gathered for their annual "Community Days" January 7-11, 2013. During this time, the monks receive continuing formation and engage in ongoing strategic planning for the community.

This year the monks reviewed and ratified a revised *Book of Policies and Procedures* for fostering an ethical and safe environment for ministry, especially as it involves the safety of children and vulnerable adults. Existing policies were updated in light of a revised set of standards for safe environment accreditation adopted by the Conference of Major Superiors of Men in August 2012.

The monks benefited from a half-day workshop presented by Dr. Kenneth Adams. Dr. Adams, a noted author and counselor, provided insightful formation on the dynamics of addiction and emotional health. He assisted the monks in a reflection on obstacles to and opportunities for mutual support in fostering healthy community living.

The community also enjoyed a visit from Diane Wood, Program Director for the Oklahoma Alzheimer's Association, who gave an informative presentation on the effects of Alzheimer's Disease on those who suffer from the disease, as well as on how the disease affects their families and support communities. Following her formal presentation, Ms. Wood led the monks in a lively conversation based on our own experiences with persons who suffer from the disease.



Dr. Kenneth Adams



Diane Wood

Abbot Appoints Visitation Preparation Team

Abbot Lawrence has appointed Prior Martin Lugo, OSB, Fr. Boniface Copelin, OSB, Fr. Adrian Vorderlandwehr, OSB, Fr. Charles Buckley, OSB, Br. Isidore Harden, OSB, and Br. Benet Exton, OSB, to serve as the Visitation Preparation Committee for the Abbey.

Monasteries of the American-Cassinese Congregation of Monasteries engage in a "visitation" process every four to five years. The visitation is conducted by two or three monks from other monasteries, appointed by the Abbot President of the congregation. The visitors review the overall life at the monastery at that point in its history. In preparation, each community engages in a self-study of its current priorities, opportunities and challenges, out of which it compiles a report that is sent to the visitors before the site visit takes place. During the visitation, the visitors interview each member of the community and prepare a report of their findings to the community and to the Abbot President and his council of advisors. The visitation process is a valuable opportunity for the community to receive outside input from their peers.

The next visitation for St. Gregory's Abbey will be in September of this year.

Fr. Boniface Elected to Board

The Monastic Chapter has elected Fr. Boniface Copelin, OSB, to serve a four-year term as one of its four representatives on the St. Gregory's University Board of Directors. Fr. Boniface replaces Fr. Matthew Brown, OSB, who has served on the Board of Directors for the university since the 1980s. Other monastic representatives include Fr. Adrian Vorderlandwehr, OSB, Fr. Charles Buckley, OSB, and Br. Benet Exton, OSB.

The university is a corporate work of the monastic community, but its immediate governance of the university is entrusted to a larger Board of Directors, which includes the Archbishop of Oklahoma, the Bishops of Tulsa and Little Rock, the Abbot of St. Gregory's, and a number of laypersons with a variety of professional and personal expertise.

Sabbatical Rest is Important

By Fr. Patrick McCool, O.S.B.

In August 2012, Abbot Lawrence asked me if I would be interested in taking a three-month sabbatical experience through a program offered in Oakland, California. After thinking briefly about it, I realized that it would be good for me. Arrangements were made and on August 27th I found myself at St. Albert's Priory, a Dominican House of Studies in Oakland.

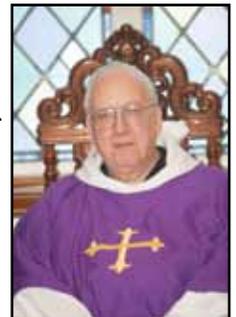
There were about twenty five other persons, both men and women, in my sabbatical group and they were from many countries beside the United States, such as Australia, the Philippines, Canada and Kenya. All of the members of our group were there to rest, relax, and enjoy meeting other people.

Lectures were offered during the three months I was there and they covered a wide variety of topics, including scripture, art, personality issues, religious studies, and communication. There also opportunities for spiritual direction, physical training and personal counseling. We were taught the importance of taking care of oneself spiritually and physically.

I found that my time spent on my sabbatical was relaxing, refreshing – freeing me from worries and responsibilities. It especially gave me time for prayer and a chance to enjoy the beauty of God's creation around us at the priory and other areas of California. We spent time away from St. Albert's Priory for a day of recollection, and a retreat for four days at the Presentation Center in Los Gatos, CA.

By the end of the sabbatical I felt relaxed, refreshed and very appreciative of my confreres and my Benedictine community. I was also ready to come back home in December.

Everyone needs the chance to take time off from the anxieties and stresses of life. I am thankful that I was given this chance.



Goals are Dreams with Deadlines...

By Robert J. Allen – Director of Abbey Development

One of the goals I have is to encourage every person to have a WILL. This is a very important document which is relatively inexpensive. So why do over half of Americans die each year without having created a will? The reasons that seem to exist are: “I don’t have enough money or assets to count.” or “Let my family decide for me.”

In both statements, there seems to be a misconception that you should not be concerned with your possessions. On the one hand, we are taught not to let worldly passions occupy our thoughts, yet on the other hand we are called to be good stewards. These two moral concepts are not in conflict, however, but provide a good foundation for dealing with your assets.

You have dreams. But you should not let those dreams turn into nightmares for your estate, family or the court! The average person thinks about accumulated savings in connection to his or her estate, but often overlooks his or her home, insurance policies or personal possessions in addition to money saved. It all counts. You may not have a million dollars as an individual or even as a couple, but you likely have real property is an important part of your estate.

By preparing a will or estate plan, you exercise your basic right to transfer your accumulated cash, property and personal effects to others at the time of your death. Why not take time to ensure that your estate is entrusted to the persons or charities you want, thus distributing your goods according to your values and wishes. This is easily done by drawing up a will which can direct a judge on how to settle your estate according to your wishes while avoiding long debates and possible needless conflicts and difficulties for those who survive you in this life.

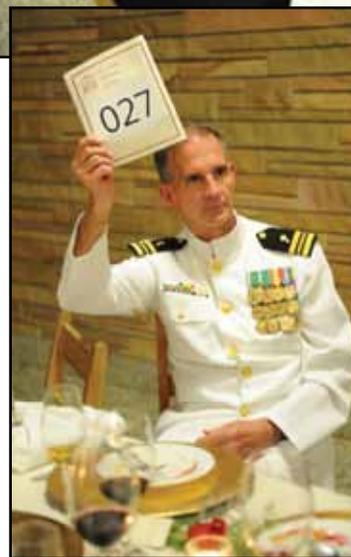
I urge you to contact an attorney to set up an appointment to plan the distribution of your estate through a will. Prepare for this meeting by listing persons you want to remember in your will and how much each is to receive (probably by percentage so as your assets change the same portion can be shared). You then can consider giving the residue (that which remains after you have taken care of your family) to the charities you support.

If you would like one of the brochures that we have prepared on wills or living trusts, we will be happy to send one to you for free and without obligation. Consider your loved ones first, but also consider supporting St. Gregory’s Abbey in your will. For more information on Planned Gifts, call the Development Office at (405) 878-5490, or Bob Allen at (817) 371-9447.

Popular Banquet and Auction Scheduled for May 17

The 2013 edition of *The Abbot’s Table Banquet and Auction* will be held on Friday, May 17, 2013. The popular event is held only every other year and benefits the mission of St. Gregory’s Abbey and University. The evening begins in the beautiful Mabee-Gerrer Museum of Art on the campus of St. Gregory’s with gourmet hors d’oeuvres and a tasting of fine wines by Joullian Winery in Carmel, CA. Guests are then escorted to the private monastic dining room at St. Gregory’s Abbey for a multi-course meal prepared by the internationally recognized Oklahoma Chef Kurt Fleischfresser, with each course accompanied by the premier wines of Far Niente, Nickel & Nickel, and Dolce, from Napa Valley. Winery proprietors Richard “Dick” Sias and Beth Nickel serves as co-hosts for the evening and provide special information on their wines that are served during the course of the evening. Following dinner, a limited number of specialty wines, travel packages, and other high-quality items are offered through a live auction.

The limited tickets for this elegant evening are available for \$250 per person. Special opportunities for underwriters are available. Round-trip complementary transportation by coach to the event from Oklahoma City is available by reservation. For more information or to purchase tickets contact the Abbey Office at 405-878-5490.



Schedule for Triduum & Easter 2013

Holy Thursday – March 28

6:00 a.m. Office of Readings
 7:15 a.m. Lauds
 8:00 p.m. Mass of the Lord's Supper
Eucharistic Adoration until Midnight

Good Friday – March 29

7:15 a.m. Office of Tenebrae
 12:05 p.m. Midday Prayer
 3:00 p.m. Solemn Liturgy of the Passion
 7:00 p.m. Compline

Holy Saturday – March 30

7:15 a.m. Office of Tenebrae
 11:30 a.m. Midday Prayer
 5:00 p.m. Vespers
 9:00 p.m. Easter Vigil

Easter Sunday – March 31

8:30 a.m. Lauds
 10:00 a.m. Eucharist for Easter Day
 11:30 a.m. Midday Prayer
 5:00 p.m. Solemn Vespers
 7:30 p.m. Compline



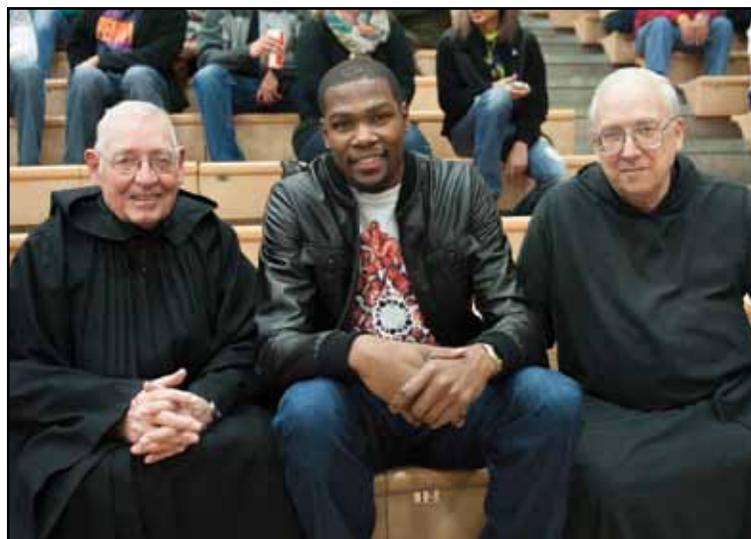
Abbey Golf Tournament

St. Gregory's Abbey will hold its 2nd Annual Golf Tournament on Monday, June 17, at the beautiful Twin Hills Golf and Country Club in Oklahoma City with a start time of 9 a.m.. The tournament will raise funds to support the continuing education of the monks as well as the meeting their healthcare costs.



The fee to play is \$150 per player (\$50 minimum deposit required), or \$1,000 for a 4-Player Corporate Sponsorship (\$250 minimum deposit required). Lunch is included and prizes will be awarded at the course following the tournament.

Tee sign sponsorships are \$100. If you'd like to join us for lunch only, the cost is \$25. To make a reservation, please call (405) 878-5470.



During a recent basketball game at St. Gregory's, Fr. Louis VanderLey, OSB, and Fr. Patrick McCool, OSB, enjoyed a visit with NBA All Star and Oklahoma City Thunder Forward, Kevin Durant.

St. Gregory Abbey Charitable Gift Annuity



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**Do you ever wonder where
 God is leading you?
 Are you interested in becoming a monk
 of St. Gregory's Abbey?**



**Contact Fr. Boniface
 Copelin, O.S.B.,
 for more information.
 405-878-5455 or
 frboniface@
 stgregorys.edu**