

Magnificat

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News from the
SOCIETY OF SAINT JOHN
Star Route 1, Box 226
Eagle Harbor, Michigan 49950

DIVINE IMAGE

God created man in His image;
in the divine image
He created him,
male and female
He created them.

(Gen. 1:27)

These are astounding words! Perhaps we have heard them so often that we have let them become platitudes. Yet, if we ponder them, we cannot but be amazed. We have been fashioned in the likeness of God.

Among the many God-like qualities with which our creator has endowed us, surely one of the most nearly divine is our own power to create. Just as the results of natural forces may be seen as manifestations of God's power and glory, so may the products of human creativity be seen as reflections of His beauty and of His never failing love.

By exercising our creative abilities we engage in a kind of sacred imitation of God the Creator (Second Vatican

Council, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, #127). In this imitation we can offer to God sincere and loving praise.

God has given us creative abilities in varying degrees and in different fields of endeavor. The use of these gifts, whatever they may be, is artistry. In this sense, all of us are artists, in so far as we work to develop our God-given talents. With the right intention, the carpenter or cabinet maker, the architect or mason, the musician or sculptor, the cook or seamstress, whoever exercises his talents with love and devotion, striving for excellence in the task at hand, is an artist, praising God and bearing witness to His love and care for the world.

We must each continually strive to develop and perfect the talents God has given us. Not to do so is an affront to the Lord's generosity and an occasion of His anger (cf. Mt. 25:14-30). But when we work for the perfection of our

THE SOCIETY OF SAINT JOHN AT JACOB'S FALLS

We are a community of men embracing the Evangelical Counsels of chastity, poverty, and obedience in the spirit of the Rule of Saint Benedict. In our monastic community at Jacob's Falls on the shore of Lake Superior in Michigan's Keweenaw Peninsula we devote ourselves to a regular life of prayer and work for the praise, love, and service of God and for the upbuilding of His Kingdom through the arts.

abilities we manifest our gratitude and love for Him, Who has been so generous to us.

Proper exercise of our own creative powers is praise of God. The more nearly perfect, the more beautiful the resulting work, the closer is its imitation of the boundless beauty of God and the greater its praise of the Creator.

This praise is not exclusively our own. We share it with others. The beauty and fittingness of our works have their impact upon those who perceive them.

Beauty has the power to touch the soul directly, to evoke in the heart feelings of joy, exaltation, or sadness. It may elevate the mind to spiritual matters and make the soul more receptive to the divine. Through their beauty, the works of our hands and minds may move others closer to God.

Here we enter the realm of art. For true art is communication. It carries messages of the Lord's power and glory and of His limitless love. These messages, conveyed by physical beauty, are perceived for the most part in a subconscious or spiritual manner. They bring joy to the heart and prevent the world from sinking into despair (Second Vatican Council, Closing Message to Artists).

The arts, then, may be seen as a bridge between the physical and the spiritual. This has enormous implications for the life and work of the Church. We will begin exploring some of these in our next issue.

Lord, extolled in the heights by angelic powers, You are also praised by all earth creatures, each in its own way. With all the splendor of heavenly worship, You still delight in such tokens of love as earth can offer. May heaven and earth together acclaim you as King; may the praise that is sung in heaven resound in the heart of every creature on earth.

Pilgrimage Begins

We have retired our land contract and now have clear title to Jacob's Falls. This is the culmination of much prayer and hard work; there is a tendency to see it as some kind of fulfillment. In reality it is a beginning. With the help and prayers of many good people we have secured a piece of ground. This does represent a monastic foundation. But the monastery has yet to be built. Much work lies ahead.

Our new dormitory building is a good beginning, but it needs much work and investment before it can be put to use. Other buildings will be needed as well. A chapel is of prime importance. Also needed is a lodge for groups of guests. The bathrooms in the existing guest cabins will also have to be rebuilt.

Improvements to the work areas are likewise necessary. The Jampot kitchen needs enlarging and modernizing. We must provide a proper studio for our vestment business. A woodworking shop is also badly needed.

We must also provide new septic systems and a deep well.

But a monastery is not buildings: it is monks - enough of them for a well functioning community. We must grow. To do so, we must recruit. This means we must travel. We need reliable transportation.

Our present vehicle was a gift; it is twenty years old. It cannot long survive heavy use. Yet we continue to push it. We have no choice. We pray the Lord will continue to get us where we need to go.

The Lord has indeed brought us a long way. We now stand at the beginning of a far greater pilgrimage. We ask your help and prayers along the way.

May Christ Jesus continue to light all our ways.

Frozen Desert

The first Christian monks were men who fled to the desert. Escaping the corrupting and stultifying sham of late Roman society, they took up abodes and eked out a living on the fringes of their world, in the places no one else wanted. Facing the hardships of these desolate places, alone or in small groups, they found their freedom.

This freedom, the freedom of the desert, remains at the heart of the monastic vocation. By his physical removal to a place apart, the monk seeks to free himself not only from the world's sin and corruption, but also from its legitimate pleasures, the things, innocent enough in themselves, that might distract him from his one goal: union with God.

He cannot, of course, so easily escape himself. The demons of his sinful inclinations, desires, and lusts follow him into the desert. They seek to overcome him there, even as they did in the world. The monk must constantly battle against them, lest they destroy him in the wilderness.

But in this unending struggle the desert can be his ally. The desert offers few hiding places. God seems ever present in the immensity of its spaces. In its silence and stark clarity, whatever is corrupt and sinful becomes readily apparent. Away from the murk and shadows of the world, the demons cannot hide and, with God's help, can be put to flight.

The desert is a purgatory. In the harsh environment one must constantly fight for survival. One must be single-minded and ever aware, lest one succumb. From this struggle the monk may draw purification and strength. In these crosses lies his road to salvation.

The desert is also paradise. Its beauty and power speak loudly of the presence of God. Here one can see Him shining through His creation. Here one can speak to Him in the silence of his heart and in his heart can hear Him reply. Alone and free, one can walk with God.



We have found our desert at Jacob's Falls.

A desert is not necessarily dry - but it is deserted. Providing little to support life, it remains scarcely inhabited. It offers broad expanses and sharp contrasts. It displays elemental fury and gives little shelter.

For half the year our land is just such a place. From its furious arrival in the November storms until its rushing departure in the April run-off, the snow dominates the land. Renewed daily in its pristine whiteness, it lies heavily everywhere, blanketing all the complexities of life in silence. In time even the voice of the lake is stilled, immobilized by the relentless chill.

Now all is reduced to the barest of elements: the numbing blasts sweeping across the ice, the starkness of the monochromatic landscape, the silence, the implacable cold. Here is our desert, our purgatory, our paradise where we may walk with God.

COMFORT

Comfort, give comfort
to my people,
says your God.

(Is. 40:1)

It seems fitting these words come to us at winter's start. Now summer's bounty is past and autumn's glory fades from memory. Ahead lie hardship and suffering. Even the everyday actions of life become a struggle, and with the struggle we grow weary.

Isaiah assures us of the strength to carry on:

Though young men faint
and grow weary,
and youths stagger and fall,
they that hope in the Lord
will renew their strength.

(Is:40:30-31)

Strength for facing our personal trials comes from our hope in the Lord. God is coming to redeem us, to free us, to restore our health, to bring us peace. Nations will turn from weaponry to the production of food. Traditional enemies will live in harmony. Rapacious competition will become co-operation.

This will happen because of the Lord's forgiveness:

Speak tenderly to Jerusalem
and proclaim to her
that her service is at an end,
her guilt is expiated.

(Is.1:18)

We have brought evil upon ourselves by abandoning God and serving the gods of this world. Even so, the Lord in His great love has come back to us. By accepting His love we may free our lives of sin and misfortune and inhabit a kingdom of righteousness. God has come to live amongst us.

The King of Israel, the Lord,
is in your midst,
you have no further misfortune
to fear.

(Zep. 3:15)

The Christian finds the fulfilment of this prophecy and the realization of his hope in Christ Jesus. Jesus is our Immanuel, our God-with-us. By His coming among us as Man, in the soft, vulnerable flesh of a new-born babe, in the bruised and torn flesh of Christ crucified, God has reconciled us to Himself. In Jesus our guilt is blotted out and we are freed of our misery.

The Canticle of Zechariah (Lk. 1:68-79) which we recite daily at Morning Prayer expresses something of this marvel:

Blessed be the Lord,
the God of Israel;
He has come to His people
and set them free...

free to worship Him without fear,
holy and righteous in His sight
all the days of our life...

In the tender compassion of our God
the dawn from on high
shall break upon us
to shine on those who dwell
in darkness
and the shadow of death,
and to guide our feet
into the way of peace.

Jesus is our dawn from on high, in Him our death and darkness are overcome, and we are led to peace. Jesus unites in His Person God and Man. We can never be the same.

Beyond the huckster's cry or the sentiment of familiar carols, beyond the nostalgia of Christmas remembered or the warmth of sharing with family and friends, even beyond the splendors of Midnight Mass lies the mystery we celebrate at this darkest time of year. An antiphon from the First Vespers of the Octave of Christmas perhaps says it best:

O marvelous exchange! Man's Creator has become man, born of a virgin. We have been made sharers in the divinity of Christ Who humbled Himself to share in our humanity.

Expansion Begun



We have begun a badly needed expansion of our facilities at Jacob's Falls.

On two successive weekends in October, members of Knights of Columbus Council 692 in Hancock and other friends roughed in the first and second floors of the new building and roofed it over. Materials for this first stage of construction were largely donated, as was all the labor.

The building has now been made weather-tight and construction can proceed on the interior during the winter. Completion is projected for Spring.

Situated immediately west of our present community house and attached to it, the new structure will provide a dormitory on its second floor and a bath and community room on its first floor. Completion of the building will permit us to convert our present dormitory to a library/parlor for the reception of guests and arrange the south-east end of our common room strictly as an oratory.

While still less than satisfactory (we will still be worshipping in the same room in which we prepare and eat our meals) this new arrangement is a good first step. It allows us to better separate the community's living quarters

from the public areas of the community house and to begin providing a semblance of cloister to our lives. The library/parlor will allow us to read or receive guests away from the bustle of domestic activities. The more formal and permanent arrangement of our oratory will promote greater ease and heightened solemnity in our liturgical celebrations and provide a greater witness to visitors. These changes toward a more monastic arrangement of space will make our house more conducive to monastic life and observance.

Most importantly, the additional space will make us better equipped to house new members in our community. The new dormitory will have a capacity of six beds. We remain confident that the Lord Jesus, having provided us with new wine-skins, will also provide new wine.

We extend our deepest gratitude to our friends in Portage Lake Council 692 of the Knights of Columbus who helped in the work and secured the donation of materials. Without their co-operation with the Lord's will, we would not have so soon arrived at this important stage in our growth. Truly, God is at work through His holy people.



From the Jampot

The summer of 1986 will go down in the annals of our community as the beginning of our economic stability.

Unexpected publicity in the press and on television brought more than fifteen hundred people to our Jampot during August and September. Hard pressed to keep up with the demand, we ended many days with empty shelves.

We worked at night in the kitchen, filling two or three hundred jars for the next day's selling. Often it was dawn before the last batch was removed from its water bath and we could return to our community house for the Office of Readings - usually our first office of the day - followed by Night prayer and a few hours of sleep while the jam cooled and set. After Morning Prayer we would return to apply labels and open the doors for the start of the day's sales. By late afternoon the shelves would be nearly empty again, and we would start all over.

Unaided, we would not have been able to accomplish the processing and sales, let alone pick the needed berries. But the Lord, Who sends strength to endure trials, sent us help for gathering His blessings.

Friends and retreatants worked with us at the Jampot and shared domestic burdens during the busiest times. And, although some varieties were in short supply, we never lacked for berries to process. The three or four pickers we had in the patches most days were at times augmented by groups of volunteers such as the Confirmation class of St. Ignatius Parish in Houghton.

By season's end we had produced and sold, directly to the customer for the most part, about five hundred cases of jam and jelly. This represents a four fold increase over our previous best season.

Revenue from these sales allowed us to provide for our daily needs and expenses, secure two winters' supply of firewood, and contribute several thousand dollars toward our property fund. Praise God for His glorious achievement!

Our initial attempts at a bakery also proved successful. The limited variety of bread and delicacies we made available during the Saturdays of August sold well; again we could not keep up with the demand. It soon became apparent that there was a daily demand for baked goods during the summer months.

It became equally apparent that to fill that need the Jampot requires investment. We must expand our kitchen's size and equip it with bakers ovens, commercial mixers, and restaurant stoves. We must make room for kneading tables, proofing shelves, and cooling racks. We must also provide space in our sales area for proper storage and display of the baked goods.

Above all, we need more men to share our life and work. The unexpected arrival of a friend or the generous good will of a retreatant does not provide a proper work force for a stable business. Nor should a monastic community depend on hired help to do its work. Only as our ranks increase will we be able to reap the business opportunities that abound.

We pray the Lord God, Who has been a loving and provident Father for us even til now, will see also to this great need.

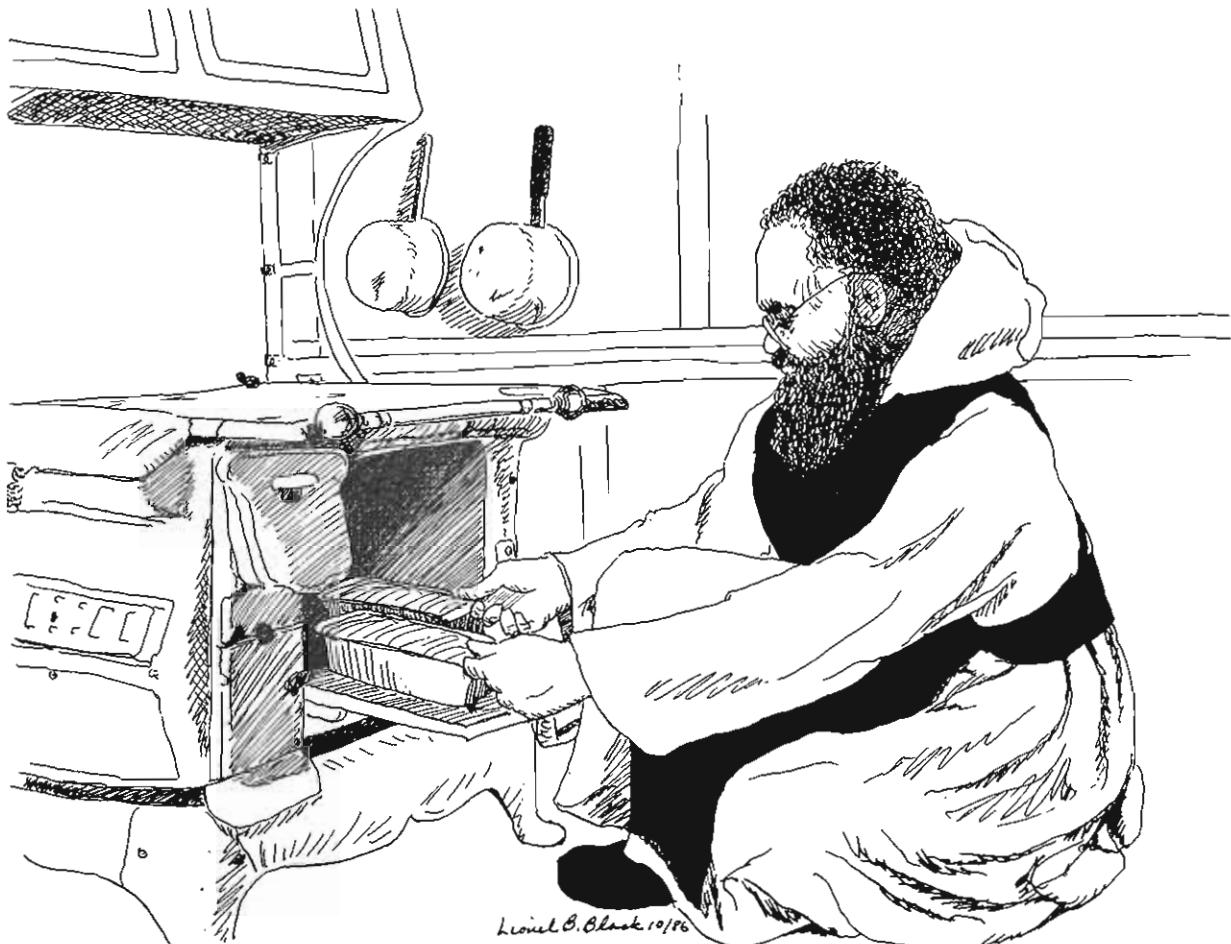
Cakes Offered

Our Abbey Cake has become something of a tradition among many friends of our community. The dark cake, packed full of raisins and walnuts, and liberally fortified with bourbon, seems the perfect accompaniment to a cup of coffee shared with holiday guests.

Rich, moist, and satisfying, a little goes a long way. Wrapped in its moist cheese cloth and stored in an airtight container, it improves with age. With occasional re-moistening with bourbon, it will keep more than a year under refrigeration.

This year, for the first time, we are offering the Abbey Cake by mail. The cost of a three pound loaf is \$20.00 plus \$5.00 for shipping and handling.

To insure delivery in time for Christmas, please order by December 15.



THANKSGIVING

As we begin our fourth winter at Jacob's Falls we find ourselves overwhelmingly blessed. During the past year the Lord has prospered the work of our hands and has provided the beginning of a building program. He has sent a number of men our way who might one day join us as brothers. He has secured our presence at Jacob's Falls.

This all appeared doubtful a year ago, particularly the securing of the property. The land contract balloon payment had been a dark cloud over Jacob's Falls from our arrival in the autumn of 1983. When we began to ask for the needed funds - some \$30,000.00 - last Advent, we were hopeful, but far from assured. Gifts at Christmas allowed us to establish a special account to which we were able to add at Easter. Success at the Jampot this summer made it possible to devote all gifts to the cause and even to contribute some earned income. A local parish made a very generous contribution in late August. But by Labor Day we were still \$15,000.00 short of our goal. When we sent out our final appeal letter on the feast of Our Lady of Sorrows, we knew we were asking for a miracle.

And the funds arrived!

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There were some large checks and many more small and moderately sized checks. There were twenty and fifty dollar bills pressed into the hand and envelopes discretely passed by ladies requesting anonymity. We even found a hundred dollars taped to the inside of our screen door. We had what was needed at the appointed hour and were able to register the deed to Jacob's Falls exclusively in the name of the Society of Saint John.

Blessed be the Lord, the God
of Israel;
He has come to His people
and set them free!

Blessed also be those who, co-operating with His will, have brought this miracle to pass. To you who have supported us these past three years, to you who have kept the vision before us even in the grim moments, to you who have given of your sustenance to secure this spot of earth: to you we declare our unending gratitude. In a very real way you are the founding benefactors of this monastery. You will be remembered in our community prayers as long as it endures.

God bless you, now and forever!

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