

Magnificat

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

NOW!

This is the time of fulfillment. The reign of God is at hand! Reform your lives and believe in the Gospel.

(Mk. 1:15)

These are urgent words. Jesus is the fulfillment of salvation history. He is the enfleshment of the very mercy of God. In the saving events of His life and death, the Kingdom of God breaks forth into the world of men. By His death and Resurrection, we are freed from the death of our bondage to sin and given a share in His eternal life.

We have done nothing, can do nothing to deserve this. Salvation is not something due to us; we cannot earn it, or win it by our own efforts. It is a gift, freely given, and available to all. This is the Gospel, the Good News, that Jesus proclaims. And it is through the Gospel that we learn how salvation is lived.

Salvation is integral to our lives. It is not something that happened a long time ago, nor is it something that will happen after we die. Salvation is here and now. Eternal life for each one of us begins today. We accept it and make it our own by living out the Gospel. We must reform our lives and hearts according to its precepts. We must turn away from sin and reorient ourselves to God. In a word, we must repent.

Repentance is a change of heart, and, ultimately, it is a grace, a gift from God. Only God has the power to touch our hearts and work such profound changes in them.

But we must do our part, as well. We must co-operate with God's grace. By every means He has placed at our disposal, we must lay ourselves open to His action upon us. Above all, we must constantly seek the Lord's help, through prayer and healing sacramental encounters.

But His grace is not confined to specifically religious situations. Many a sinner has been called back from his way by a relative, a friend, or even a stranger. Often the spark of conversion comes from some circumstance in his life, some trauma, frustration, or failure. Anything, even this newsletter, can serve as an agent of God's grace.

We beg you not to receive the grace of God in vain. For He says, "In an acceptable time I have heard you; on a day of salvation I have helped you." Now is the acceptable time! Now is the day of salvation.

(2 Cor. 6:1-2)

Today God is calling you to conversion. He wants you to accept His gift of salvation. There will be no better time than now.

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.

Toward New Life

Are you not aware that we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Through baptism into His death we were buried with Him, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live a new life. If we have been united with Him through likeness to His death, so shall we be through a like resurrection. This we know: our old self was crucified with Him so that the sinful body might be destroyed and we might be slaves to sin no longer. A man who is dead has been freed from sin. If we have died with Christ, we believe that we are also to live with Him. We know that Christ raised from the dead will never die again; death has no more power over Him. His death was death to sin once for all; His life is life for God. In the same way, you must consider yourselves dead to sin but alive for God in Christ Jesus.

(Rom. 6:3-11)

Baptism marks the beginning of the life of grace. It is the rebirth from water and spirit that is necessary for entrance into God's Kingdom. Through it we gain a share in the new life of Christ: we are washed clean of our sins and united to the Risen Lord, we put off our former way of life and put on Christ Jesus, and with Him and all the baptized we become one body, the Church.

Thus, Baptism is not only the purification of individuals, but also of the whole Church. Through it we are incorporated into the Church and its life of grace, and the Church is built up and strengthened, as well.

Baptism can never be a private affair. It is an occasion of joy for the entire Church and should take place in the midst of the worshipping assembly. Because of Baptism's intimate connection the Savior's death and resurrection it is most fittingly celebrated at Easter.

Certainly, this was so in the beginning. Easter Baptism remained the norm - even for infants - for more than a thousand years, although in places with cold climates it might be delayed until Pentecost. (The old English name for Pentecost Sunday, Whitsun, refers to the white garments given the newly baptized.)

Given Baptism's critical importance for the individual and for the life of the Church, it

entailed, not only solemn celebration, but intense preparation, as well. Catechumens, those preparing for Baptism, received instruction in the faith over a period of months; from time to time they were subjected to examinations or scrutinies to test their knowledge. They were formally given certain important prayers, such as the Creed and the Lord's Prayer, to mark the various stages of their pilgrimage. They might also be admitted to a larger part of the Church's worship services, but they remained excluded from the Eucharistic Liturgy.

As the time drew near, they devoted themselves especially to good works, prayer, and fasting in anticipation of Easter when they would be baptized and could at last share at the table of Our Lord's Body and Blood. As an expression of solidarity, the baptized fasted and prayed with them and on their behalf. In AD 325, the Council of Nicaea fixed the fast to the forty days preceding Easter. Lent, as we know it, was born.

Within several generations of the Peace of the Church, most of the Roman Empire had embraced the Christian faith. The Easter Baptisms were now mostly for infants whose catechesis was entrusted to the faith of their parents. On the periphery, whole tribes and nations were often baptized *en masse*, their catechesis being left to the mercy of God and the future work of the Church.

The fast remained. No longer associated with preparation for Baptism, it began to assume a penitential character. And with good reason.

Despite the importance of Baptism and its deep spiritual implications, few people were actually living out its graces. Sin remained very much a part of the human condition, and it was difficult to see the life of Christ manifested in the lives of most Christians. Nor were the clergy exempted, their personal and corporate sinfulness sometimes reached scandalous proportions.

But the Church is the Body of Christ, and His risen life courses through it. She is the sign - hidden sometimes, perhaps - of His salvation for the whole world, and she does not cease to proclaim His saving death and resurrection until

He comes again. Filled with His grace of regeneration, she carries within her the seed of her own reform and renewal, and she continually echoes His call for our conversion and repentance.

In our Baptism, Christ has joined us to Himself, irrevocably claimed us as His own. Despite our many failures, our turning again and again to sin, He does not reject or forget us; He keeps calling us back to His love.

Christ's death to sin was once, for all, but we, poor, weak creatures that we are, must die to sin each day. Conversion is the work of a lifetime; we must continually listen for the Lord and strive to grow in His grace. We allow Him to transform our lives and, through us, the whole world.

Certainly, our world is in need of transformantion. It is marked by gross inequity, injustice, and disregard for innocent life. Society seems motivated solely by self-centered greed, extravagance, and lust. Government increasingly intrudes upon us its own man centered faith, while the news and entertainment media stifle and distort our perceptions as they strive to impose their own amoral ethic.

The Church does not seem to offer much help. Effective catechesis has all but disappeared in some places. The faithful are luke warm, at best, and a complacent clergy seems little interested in calling them to repentance. The fire has gone out of preaching, and reteratants are cheated with feel-good psychological pap.

Sometimes it seems an impossible situation. We feel abandoned; nothing solid is left. How are we to discern the voice of God in the midst of all this confusion and noise? It is said that ultimately we get the society we deserve, but we find it hard to see our part in all this. How can we see our way out of this mess?

REPENT!

In some way, we have all contributed to the problem. Our luke warmness, apathy, and laziness have, in some part, allowed it to happen. Our collective, personal sinfulness has brought it about.

But God does not leave us helpless, even in these dark times. His grace is sufficient, and, although we may feel overwhelmed, he is with us even now.

Through Baptism we are all members of Christ's Body. If we are sick, we weaken the whole; if we are strong we increase its strength. The grace of Christ within us enables us to effect positive, if invisible, good.

Let us, then, these remaining weeks of Lent, examine ourselves in the light of our Baptism. Let us ponder our own lives and see how well we have manifested the life of Christ that is in us. Let us once again reject Satan and all his enticements. Let us root sin out of our hearts and turn back to the Lord through discipline and penance.

Are we self-indulgent in food, drink, or personal relationships, extravagant in shelter, transportation, or dress? Are we plagued with some personal vice? Then, let us fast, denying ourselves comfort, strengthening our hearts for the fight against sin, making reparation for our self-indulgent, excessive times.

Are we greedy, acquisitive, hoarding our wealth and refusing to trust in God? We must let go, and give to the poor, the needy, the suffering. Anything we have beyond our needs for survival belongs by right to the poor. Let us restore them their due and right some of the world's injustice.

Are we proud, arrogant, insolant of speech? Let us, then, serve the lowly, visit the sick, elderly, confined, and imprisoned. Let us welcome the destitute and the stranger, comfort the afflicted, and cherish our subordinates. Through our love let us soften the all-pervasive cruelty of the world.

Above all, let us pray, deeply and from the heart. With sighs and tears let us implore his mercy on ourselves and on this sinful world. Through His mercy, the world will indeed be transformed; the transformantion will begin with us.

God grant us all a holy Lent leading to Easter joy. May the renewal of our baptismal promises truly signal the life of Christ within us.

The Third Station

Jesus falls the first time

Lord Jesus,
This Cross we have placed upon you
becomes suddenly too heavy;
You fall,
crushed beneath the weight
of our sins.
Forgive us.

Lord Jesus,
at first you trembled, shuddered
under the burden of our guilt,
but You bore it up,
despite your pain,
and carried it for us.
Forgive us.

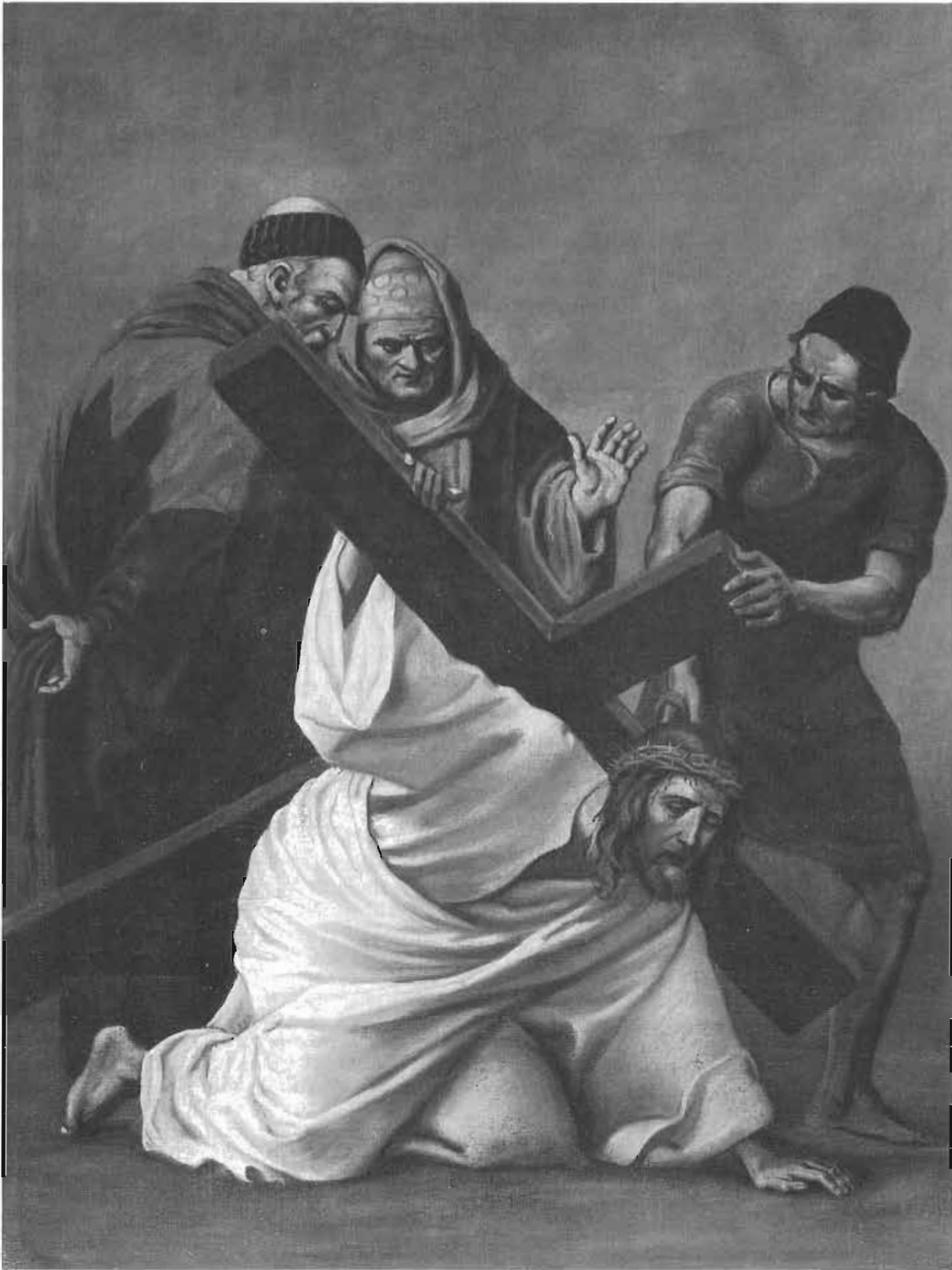
Lord Jesus,
but for now it seems to overcome You;
it presses You down,
bruises Your already bleeding flesh
between rough wood and gritty earth.
Forgive us.

Lord Jesus,
how often we fall!
We repent and fall again,
into the same sin, into something new;
each time we add to the burden
of the Cross that weighs You down.
Forgive us.

Lord Jesus,
You struggle
and rise up;
lifting our weight on your shoulder
you drag it on.
Forgive us.

Lord Jesus,
lend us Your strength for the struggle,
help us up from our many falls;
by the grace of Your holy falling,
raise us up from our sins.
Forgive us.

**We adore You, O Christ, and we praise You,
because by Your Holy Cross You have redeemed the world.**



Monastic Renunciation

The Christian life begins with renunciation:

Do you renounce Satan?

I do.

And all his works?

I do.

And all his empty promises?

I do.

These promises, which we made - or were made on our behalf, if we were infants - at our Baptism, and which we renew each year, are our precondition for the embracing of the faith. Only after we have made them, do we go on to profess our belief in God, the Father, in Jesus, His Son, and in the Holy Spirit; in the Church, in the Communion of Saints, and in the forgiveness of sins; in the bodily resurrection and eternal life.

We cannot serve two masters. If, by sin, we make ourselves slaves of Satan, we cannot enjoy the freedom of the Children of God. We must reject the sinful deeds and enticements of this passing world and advance steadily toward the Kingdom of God. It is because of our Baptism that we find this possible.

By His suffering and death, Jesus broke Satan's bonds forever. He has risen to new life, and Satan has no power over Him. Through our Baptism we share His death and burial that we might rise with Him to the fulness of life. With Jesus we overcome sin and death; in Baptism we are given a share in His victory.

This, then, is the grace, the gift of our Baptism: everlasting life in Christ Jesus. From this gift the other graces of the Christian life continually flow.

The monk is a Christian who lives out the grace of his Baptism in a radical way. As every Christian is called to renounce sin and be converted to Christ, the monk is called to make his renunciation and conversion in a sweeping and profound manner. His new life in Christ must engage and transform the totality of his being. He must live out the moral, spiritual, and physical aspects of his life in absolute fidelity to the Gospel.

The monk vows obedience to the Gospel, and, by his obedience, he is set free. Loosed from the bonds of selfish attachments to people and things in this world, he is radically free to follow Christ and seek His Kingdom above all else.

Go and sell what you have and give to the poor; then you will have treasure in Heaven. After that, come and follow me.

(Mk. 10:21)

None of you can be my disciple if he does not renounce all his possessions.

(Lk. 14:33)

The monk renounces all his possessions. He gives up his right to claim anything for himself alone. He owns nothing, not even the fruits of his labor. He holds everything in common with his brothers in community, and the community provides for his needs. The use of certain material things may be necessary for his survival, but ownership of them is not. Having no exclusive claim on anything, he trusts that the Lord will provide what is needed.

His poverty frees him from grasping possessiveness; it relieves him of concern about what he is to eat or wear; it centers his trust, not in himself, or in the accumulation of wealth, but wholly in the mercy of God. With no investment of himself in material things, he is totally free to follow the Lord.

Some men are incapable of sexual activity from birth; some have been deliberately made so; and some there are who have freely renounced sex for the sake of God's reign. Let him accept this teaching who can.

(Mt. 19:12)

By the grace of God, the monk is one who can. This teaching is, indeed, a difficult one, and not everyone can embrace it, but, to those who can, God gives a foretaste of the future Resurrection:

When people rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage but live like angels in Heaven.

(Mk. 12:25)

By his gift of chastity, the monk is placed in the vanguard of the future. He is granted a taste of the angelic life and is made witness to the inexorable coming of God's Kingdom. His chastity frees him to keep Christ Jesus as the center and focus of his life, the sole object and fulfillment of his love. Jesus is the pearl of great price for which he has given up all else. The monk lovingly trusts in His promise:

Everyone who has given up home, brothers or sisters, father or mother, wife or children or property for my sake will receive many times as much and inherit everlasting life.

(Mt. 20:29)

Ultimately, the monk gives up his self:

Who ever wishes to be my follower must deny his very self, take up his cross each day, and follow in my steps

(Lk. 9:23)

The monk lives an ascetic life. He goes without many of the niceties of food, clothing, and shelter that others in our day take for granted. He sleeps short hours and spends his waking time in prayer, work, and sacred reading. He has no idle hours to fill with entertainment. By conventional standards his life is quite austere.

But his self denial must go beyond these mere externals: he must strive to eradicate wilful self-centeredness from his very being. He places his life totally in the hands of others; he is absolutely obedient to his community, to the needs of his brothers.

This flies in the face of worldly wisdom. The present age exalts the self. Self fulfillment is the gospel of our times. We are told that we must have a good self image, that we must believe in our self worth, that we must feel good about ourselves. The self is elevated to divinity, and its devotees revel before it in a frenzied of greed, arrogance, and lust. The petty idol's every craving must be satisfied, its every whim pursued, til we nearly burst from our compulsive gluttony of self fulfillment.

The monk stands as a witness against the idolatry of our time. Like Jesus, he empties himself (cf. Phil. 2:5-11) and embraces the Cross.

He knows he is a sinner, and he undertakes a humble life of prayer and fasting in atonement for his own sins and for those of our selfish world. Stopping his ears to the world's shrill cacophony, turning his back to its lurid temptations, and quelling its insatiable appetites, he retires to his quiet cloister and gives up his life in loving surrender to God. He lives now, not for himself, but for Christ Jesus and for his brothers. In love, he lays down his life for his own salvation and for that of all the world.

Our world needs more monks. It needs their witness, lest it suffocate in its morass of wilful self indulgence. It needs their prayers and penance, lest it be crushed beneath the increasing weight of its sins. Perhaps through their intercession it may be given the grace of conversion from its idolatry. The time is short. Judgement may already be at hand.

The monastic life proceeds from our baptismal promises to reject the Prince of this World and all his empty works. It flows from the newness of life, the life of the risen Christ, which we share by virtue of our Baptism. It offers a foretaste of the Kingdom of Heaven and witnesses to the reign of God among men. It is a gift, given out of love. Dare we refuse?

Inquiries Welcome

In our community life at Jacob's Falls we have found a joy and peace the world cannot provide; we are certain that in time others will come to share them fully with us. In hopeful anticipation we welcome the opportunity to make our life better known and to share it in some way with others.

Men who wish to learn more about our life and observance and are free to respond to the call should it be heard are invited to spend time with us observing our life at close hand. They share in our meals and in our celebration of the Divine Office and are encouraged to spend time alone in prayer and meditation. We make no formal presentations but remain ready to discuss whatever matters the Spirit may raise. We pray they be given the courage to respond fully to what the Lord may ask of them.

Please write for more information.

**Christ suffered for you,
and left you an example
to have you follow in His footsteps.**

**He did no wrong;
no deceit was found in His mouth.
When He was insulted,
He returned no insult.**

**When He was made to suffer,
He did not counter with threats.
Instead he delivered Himself up
to the One Who judges justly.**

**In His own body
He brought your sins to the Cross,
so that all of us, dead to sin,
could live in accord with God's will.**

By His wounds you were healed.

Toward the Coming of Spring

The English word for the forty day Easter preparation period is derived from the Anglo Saxon word, *lencten*, meaning springtime. This, in turn, seems to be related to the Anglo Saxon *lang* which means long. For these early English speakers, the liturgical season was known by its most obvious natural phenomenon, the lengthening of days and the return of spring. As such, Lent was a time of hope and joy despite the black fast and the privations that most often accompanied Winter's end.

At Jacob's Falls the approach of spring is not always concurrent with Lent. Some years winter does not release its grip until after Easter and spring is not full blown until almost Pentecost. The fast is often accompanied by blustery, gray days and heavy, wet snows. The St. Patrick's Day snow storm - we have also seen it on St. Joseph's Day and even the first day of spring - seems almost an annual event. The situation this year, up to now, at least, has been quite different.

Winter came late, a real blessing for getting out the last minute mail orders. The permanent snow did not begin until a few days before Christmas, and we were able to get all of the pre-holiday shipping done without once having to shovel out the Jampot, although, when the last three packages went out on the twenty-third, there seemed some question as to whether the UPS truck was going to make it back to the roadway from our loading dock.

We cut down a modest balsam tree not far from the Jampot and dragged it home on the afternoon of Christmas Eve. We stood it in the snow on a small deck on the lakeward side on our community house and proceeded to make our Oratory ready for Midnight Mass. The night was cold and calm, and "Silent Night" seemed to have a special appropriateness as we celebrated the Redeemer's birth.

We had been asleep a couple of hours when the storm hit. It was not unexpected. The weather reports had been predicting it for several days, and a number of people who had been planning to join us for Midnight Mass had decided it best not to come out. Still, the fury with which its initial winds slammed against the house gave us quite a start; for a moment, we

thought we felt our old buildings surge off their poles. By morning it was blowing strong and steady.

By the time we had finished morning Mass and breakfast, a plow had been by and one lane of the road was open. We gave Father's car a jump-start, pushed it out into the plowed lane, and waved him off on his trip to visit family. Back in the Oratory, we lit a candle and said a prayer for his safety.

Meanwhile, the snow had all blown off the deck, and only the railing had prevented the little balsam from sailing off down the beach. We, ourselves, were nearly swept away as we struggled to bring it indoors. Only after we had fixed it in its stand did we turn on the radio and learn that, for the first time in our ten winters at Jacob's Falls, we were experiencing an official blizzard.

We spent St. Stephen's Day and St. John's Day decorating and cleaning the house. We had visitors and guests throughout the Octave and until Epiphany, often more than one at a time - there were eight of us for dinner on New Year's Eve. Through it all, the snow continued to come. By the second weekend in January we had to shovel off the Jampot kitchen - the snow was nearly three feet deep on the roof.

By mid-January, when we hosted a two day retreat for a group of college students, the snowfall had moderated, and we began to see blue sky from time to time. The temperatures were relatively mild, as well, but cold enough to give us three ridges of ice in front of the house and a sizable pack of floating ice on the Bay which came and went with the wind.

During the intervals between the guests and retreatants, who were scheduled for almost every week during January and February, we managed to make some headway on the long neglected domestic work and began to tackle the desk. The initial effort in this area was in bringing our financial records up to date. We were somewhat pleased with what they showed.

Our over all revenue had increased by 23% during 1992 over the previous year. This

resulted almost entirely from a 37% increase in Jampot and mail order sales. Donations, during this year of economic downturn, had remained about the same as the previous year, despite a substantial increase in our mailing list; we hope the coming year will allow us to do better in this area, especially since we are about to embark on a major building program.

Still, the increased income allowed us to accomplish the initial planning work for our chapel and community house complex and reduce our indebtedness by about 70%; we hope to retire the remainder this summer so as to be able to devote as much as possible to the great work ahead. We were also pleased to note an increase of 153% in our library accessions and of 86% in our help to those in need.

January's mild temperatures culminated in a brief thaw at the beginning of February when there were two or three days with temperatures nearing forty degrees. The weather was also blustery and the outer ridge of ice succumbed to the waves. The cold returned, and most of February saw night time temperatures near zero. But the skies were clear, for the most part, and the lengthening days were hearteningly bright.

The temperatures moderated around Ash Wednesday as we again began to see the sun set over the Lake - our most cherished harbinger of spring. Now, at the end of this first week of Lent, after a series of mild days with high temperatures in the thirties, the snow has begun to recede from around the trunks of trees and has nearly disappeared from atop the much diminished wood pile. We begin to see bare ground along the road and, here and there, on exposed high spots. And each day the bands of pebbles widen on our beach.

This morning we briefly played hookey from the work at hand and picked our way down the still icy steps and across the crusted snow to the beach. The sun had only begun to reach down here and the russet pebbles sparkled yet with their night time frost. They crunched familiarly beneath our feet, but our attention was drawn by the voice of the Lake.

From along the entire width of the bay the crisp air was alive with rumbling, creaking, groaning, and hooting as the sheet of thin ice that had formed on the still water between the

floating packs during the night began to break up under the impetus of the mildest of northwest breezes. We were astonished and amazed: after ten years, here, yet again, was something utterly new.

Although, as the slow melting had begun to expose the sand locked within them, the ice ridges had assumed a somewhat golden cast, they seemed dazzlingly bright in the morning sun as our eyes travelled the curve of the Bay. We walked to the crest of the first ridge - it looked solid beyond, but prudence dictated we go no further - and examined the coves and caldera formed by wave and cold only two months before. After following its erratic, sinuous course for a time we turned back to look at our community house from this winter only vantage point.

It seemed a curious and strange complex, this old weatherbeaten building that had been our only shelter for our first five years and the various additions that had increased our living space nearly three fold during the ensuing five. We tried to picture how it would look in a few years more with - God willing - the new Oratory completely dominating and dwarfing the existing structure, but found it a little too overwhelming to think about this soon. We had such a long way to go before then....

And the next step was getting out the newsletter. It was already more than a week behind schedule, and other things were even further behind. The Jampot would open in only two months; we truly had much to do.

Meanwhile, our finances were as they always seemed to be in late winter - nil. Once again, our Lent issue would be mailed with borrowed funds. Once again, we were left with only our trust in God. We knew that He would somehow provide.

The wondrous consolation of the marvels around us seemed a blessed assurance. He Who had graced us with such a luminous morning would surely make good our poor failings and bring us to the promised fulfillment, even when our own vision was too dim. In Him, as always, we would find our flagging strength renewed.

The winter's rest is over; already the days lengthen toward spring.

A Hurdle Cleared

This winter a significant hurdle in our building program was suddenly and unexpectedly overcome. The development restrictions we thought would require at least a year of negotiations with the State to satisfy turned out not to apply to our building site. While this does not actually move the project closer to ground breaking, it does relieve us of a major headache and allows us to concentrate on other matters.

Still remaining are completion of the architectural plans, cost projection, and the phasing of construction for Phase I of the project, the Chapel and modifications to existing structures. We hope to have these completed sometime this summer. If all goes well, we expect to be able to break ground sometime in the spring of next year. We will, of course, keep you posted on our progress.

By far the biggest concern remains securing funding for the project. Buildings of this sort are apt to be expensive. Their public nature and the nobility of the functions they serve require a solidity of construction beyond that of most

domestic architecture. When we have arrived at a cost estimate, we will begin a formal fundraising campaign with stated goals. In the mean time, we know that much will be needed, and we will establish a fund for that purpose as soon as funds allow.

This much we know: it will require much generosity on the part of many people to bring it about in a timely fashion. Left entirely to the surplus from the Jampot, it will take a long time, indeed.

In either case, we remain committed to seeing it through. With these buildings we will begin to see the realization of the vision that brought us to this place almost ten years ago.

We trust that the Lord Who has given us the vision, and Who has provided what was necessary so often in the past, will raise up the generosity needed to bring it to fulfillment. In prayer we fervently invoke His abundant blessings upon all who contribute to this holy work.

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