



Monastery of the Ascension

# THE DESERT CHRONICLE

XXXI, No. 2 JUNE 2012

## Oblate Pilgrimage to Italy: May 17-31, 2012

By Fr. Hugh Feiss, OSB

ON MAY 17, THIRTEEN PEOPLE CONVERGED ON THE COMMUNITY OF MATER DIVINAE GRATIAE IN BRESCIA, A CENTER OF FORMATION AND SPIRITUALITY OPERATED by the very hospitable Sisters of Dorothy of Cemmo. We were joined by our friends, Bryan Wyly and Daniela Re, from Gavi, Italy, who shepherded us on our pilgrimage, took us to wonderful restaurants (like one in Cesena, where the placemats as well as the food were works of art), and advised us on what to visit. From Brescia we visited a number of cities to the east of Brescia. Next we moved to lodging at the Dominican community in Bologna, adjacent to St. Dominic's tomb in the Church of San Domenico. From there we were able to visit Corpus Domini, a community of Poor Clares in Bologna, where the incorrupt body of their founder, St. Caterina Vegri, is kept, and Ravenna, home to a spectacular wealth of Byzantine mosaics. Finally, we moved to Monte Oliveto Maggiore, a Benedictine monastery in the Crete Senesi, a region of rugged mountains and magnificent vistas south of Siena from which we visited places in Umbria and Tuscany. Here are a few highlights of our pilgrimage.

### FOUR POPES NAMED PIUS

In the course of our pilgrimage we went to places associated with four popes named Pius, whose colorful career, are attested to by libraries, buildings, and art works.

See "PILGRIMAGE", *cont on page 4*



## INSIDE

**Oblate Pilgrimage to  
Italy: May 17-31, 2012**  
page 1

**From The Prior's Pulpit**  
page 2

**Monastery Chronicle**  
page 3

**Upcoming Events**  
page 8



# From the Prior's Podium

By Fr. Kenneth Hein, OSB

## A GUIDED MEDITATION FOR ORDINARY TIME

As pronounced by bards of old:  
“All that glisters is not gold”.  
Yet for it have souls been sold;  
Hills dug through to depths untold.  
Long ago Man made so bold,  
Turning hearts from warm to cold.  
Then did Wrath itself unfold;  
Death's dark powers were unscrolled.  
Whitened tombs dead bones now hold.

My apologies to William Shakespeare, but with this poem I'd like to make a point: When we allow our self-imposed values to replace the God-given values of our faith and common sense, then we quickly slide down the slippery slope toward death. The cult of death and the culture of relativism go hand in hand. I do not need to give examples; for all of us can discern any number of examples for ourselves. However, we do not always agree about the examples, and that may lead to uncomfortable divisions. So, rather than inspire more division, I would like to offer some words of Scripture to keep in mind as we discern about values in a society that is so confused about them that it declares that, in effect, the ultimate value is the putting aside of values.

A good place to start our meditation is Isaiah 55:8-9: “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord. As high as the heavens are above the earth, so high are my ways above your ways and my thoughts above your thoughts.” Then we might turn to 1 Corinthians 2:9, where St. Paul paraphrases the words of Isaiah 64:3: “Eye has not seen, and ear has not heard, nor has it entered the human heart, what God has prepared for those who love him.” These are comforting words—that is, comforting until we get serious about what it means to love God, which means, among other things, “to love your neighbor as yourself”. This kind of love is “sacrificial love,”

that as often as not is painful love. “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish, but might have eternal life” (John 3:16).

We experience the sacrifice and pain of God-like love especially when we forgive. To forgive is often interpreted as weakness, while vengeance is viewed as strength and the proper enforcement of justice, even though it is only a giving in to sin. Jesus forgave even unto death on the cross, that we may have “life in abundance” (John 10:10). The need and opportunity to forgive is “ordinary”, so ordinary that, as we pray for “our daily bread”, we must immediately add, “and

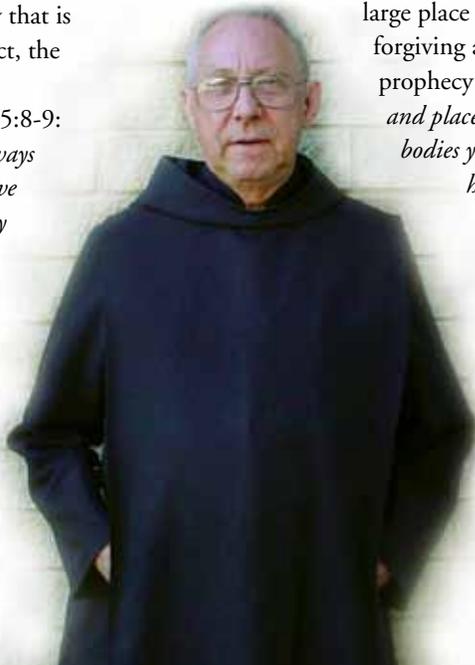
---

*“I will give you a new heart and place a new spirit within you, taking from your bodies your stony hearts and giving you natural hearts”*

– Ez 36:26

---

forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.” To forgive is to do the ordinary, that is, to do that which restores order to one's life. The so-called “ordinary time” in the Church's calendar fills most of the time throughout the year. Could it be that our need to forgive and to be forgiven is ordinary and ordinarily holds a large place in our spiritual lives? Only when we are forgiving and accepting of forgiveness is Ezekiel's prophecy fulfilled in us: “I will give you a new heart and place a new spirit within you, taking from your bodies your stony hearts and giving you natural hearts (Ez 36:26). Ordinary time is a time for extraordinary, spiritual growth, that Christ “may bring us all together to everlasting life” (Rule of Benedict 72,12).•



# Chronicle of the Monastery

## April 1-June 10, 2012

By Fr. Hugh Feiss, OSB

**W**e are going to try this as a new feature of the Desert Chronicle. There is an ancient practice of keeping track of the life of a monastery by listing happenings briefly in chronicle form. That is what this feature will do. It will draw on our new Facebook site, begun and maintained by Joanne Draper, which you can access through Facebook with your browser and putting in "Monastery of the Ascension, Jerome."

**APRIL 1.** The new monastery Facebook page is up and running.

**APRIL 7.** Easter Vigil. Church decorated by Br. Sylvester and helpers. Oblate Anita Koehn maintains an Easter Tree in the oval flowerbed in the front lawn that she keeps beautiful all year long:



**APRIL 17.** Boise quilters staying at the monastery make Br. José a new habit and do some sewing for other monks, including a new alb for Fr. Paul.

**APRIL 29.** Onions and lettuce are planted in the garden now.

**MAY 10-13.** Fr. Hugh attends International Congress of Medieval Studies at Western Michigan University, in Kalamazoo.

**MAY 16-31.** Fr. Hugh, Oblate Vanessa Butterfield, and friends Bryan Wyly and Daniela Re lead a pilgrimage to northern Italy.

**MAY 24-26.** The rest of garden is planted.



**JUNE 4.** Fr. Kenneth and Fr. Ezekiel lead Vespers at the Diocesan Convocation. Fr. Kenneth stays till the June 7 and introduces the new video about the monastery produced by Ryan Bradshaw.

**JUNE 4-10.** Road Scholar Program on Ireland: Sara Parkin and Susanna Lundgren stay with us while they are teaching

**JUNE 4.** We are served lettuce from the garden.

**JUNE 5.** We begin using our new audio system in the conference room; use of visual part will begin when a curtain to block out the skylight is installed. Pastor Rudy Bauder of the First Baptist Church in Jerome comes to some of the Ireland lectures and shares his electronic expertise with us.

**JUNE 9.** June 9. A group of volunteers from Mountain Home AFB come to help with cleanup and maintenance. •



## TWO RENAISSANCE POPES

Pope Pius II (1405-1464) was born Enea Silvio Piccolomini at Corsignano in the territory of Siena. He was educated at Siena and Florence, and then served as a secretary and diplomat for cardinals, going on missions to Scotland and England. In Scotland, he fathered his second illegitimate child. He spent time at the court of Frederick III in Vienna. He reformed his morals, became a priest and bishop of Trieste and Siena. In various capacities, he sought to improve relations between the emperor and the papacy. He invited the Christian rulers of Europe to unite in defense against the Turks. He canonized St. Catherine of Siena. He was the only pope to write an autobiography.

He determined to rebuild his hometown, now named Pienza after him, as a model Renaissance city. On the central piazza of the town, he built a very beautiful cathedral and a three-story palace. The loggias of the palace look out over a garden and the spectacular countryside. The last surviving member of the branch of the Piccolomini family that occupied the palace turned it over to a foundation in the 1960s.

Pope Pius III (1439-1503) was the nephew of Pius II, who made him bishop of Siena when he was only 21, and shortly afterward promoted him to cardinal. He served effectively as a papal diplomat. In 1502 he provided for a room attached to the cathedral of Siena to house Pius II's library. He had it adorned with frescoes by Pinturicchio showing scenes from his uncle's life. He was elected pope in 1503 but died twenty-six days later.



*Pienza Palazzo Piccolomini.  
Loggias Overlooking Garden*



*Pienza Cathedral of Pius II*

## POPES FROM CESENA AT THE TURN OF THE 19TH CENTURY

Although we hadn't planned to visit Cesena, our friends and guides Bryan and Daniela recommended that we fit it into our schedule and we were glad we did. Pius VI (1775–1799), native of Cesena, was an ineffective leader who faced huge problems from nation-states determined to subordinate the church to their aims and power and from Enlightenment thinkers who wanted to purge religion of what they considered to be superstition (for example, devotion to the Sacred Heart), and some bishops and others in the church sought to curtail papal involvement in local church affairs. These problems culminated in the French Revolution, which Pius VI was incapable of resisting. In 1798, when he was old and sick, French troops entered Rome and gave him three days to prepare to leave. He was lodged for a time in monasteries in Siena and Florence, but in March of 1799, though he was almost totally paralyzed, he was driven across the snow-covered Alps to France, where he died. He was not allowed Christian burial. The brutality he suffered in his last months gained him considerable sympathy.

His successor, Pius VII (1742–1823), was a mind-mannered monk and like his predecessor a native of Cesena. He was a man who made his own bed and mended his own clothes. Napoleon, for political reasons, wanted to regularize relations with the church. In 1804 Napoleon coerced him to come to Paris to crown him as Emperor. The Pope was warmly welcomed along the way and in Paris. After that relations between the Pius VII and Napoleon soured. Napoleon annexed Rome and put the pope under arrest in Savona. He kept the pope from consulting his advisors and confiscated his books and writing materials. Finally, in 1812 the Pope was taken to Paris, a very difficult twelve-day journey for the pope who developed a urinary infection. He was kept in confinement until Napoleon returned after his defeat in Russia. Napoleon badgered the pope to sign a draft of a new concordant. The pope soon renounced the agreement, saying he had signed it out of human frailty and fear. In 1814 the Pope returned to Rome and Napoleon abdicated.

Pius VII donated his personal library to the use of Benedictine Abbey of Saint Maria del Monte where he had been a monk. The library remained in the possessions of his heirs and in 1941 they sold it to the Italian State. Its

contents—100 manuscripts and 5000 books—are now housed in the magnificent Biblioteca Malatestiana in Cesena. This beautiful building was erected in the fifteenth century at the Franciscan monastery of the city and enriched with a wonderful collection of books and manuscripts by Novello Malestesta. It was to be a public library, which it still is today. Among the books in the library are some magnificent choir books commissioned by Cardinal Bessarion (1403-1472), a Greek bishop dedicated to reuniting the Churches of Constantinople and Rome.



*Biblioteca Malatestiana*

## DANTE

It was fitting that we pilgrims pay homage to Dante Alighieri, who cast himself in the role of pilgrim in his *Divine Comedy*, and who from 1302 until the end of his life was an exile from his beloved Florence. During his exile, Dante stayed in Verona from 1312-1318 with Congrande della Scala (1291-1329). There is a fine statue of Dante in the Piazza dei Signori there. We visited Congrande's tomb at his family's church of Santa Maria Antiqua in Verona. Later, we visited Dante's tomb in Ravenna. Near the tomb is the spot where Dante's remains were buried to keep them safe during the bombing of 1944-1945. Next to the tomb is the Church of San Francesco where Dante's funeral was held.



*Dante Statue Piazza dei Signori, Verona*

## RAVENNA

We spent more time visiting Ravenna than any other place. Its churches and baptisteries and mausoleums are spectacular examples of the Christian art and architecture of the period between 400 and 700. During those centuries Ravenna was an important residence of the Roman emperors, the capital of the Ostrogoth kingdom of Theoderic and his family, and then the residence of the Byzantine exarches, after the Byzantine armies sent by Justinian reconquered part of Italy. One of the outstanding Christian buildings in Ravenna is St. Apollinare in Classe, named after the first bishop in the area. The church was built in the second quarter of the 6th century. The exterior is very simple. Approaching it one sees a brick façade with an arcade abutting a short tower to the north, with a taller 10th-century bell tower behind.



*San Apollinare in Classe*

On the inside the basilica measures 90 x 165 feet. There are two rows of 12 columns forming narrow aisles on either side of the broad nave. In that nave, St. Romuald received a call to

the monastic life; he eventually founded the Camaldolese Benedictines. The glory of the church is the 6th-century mosaics in the apse. The central scene is of Christ's Transfiguration. Surprisingly, Christ is represented by a great jeweled cross set against a round background, representing a blue sky with 99 stars. In the sky, Moses and Elijah witness to Christ. Three sheep, representing Peter, James and John, look toward the cross. At the top, the hand of the Father reaches down. Below, St. Apollinaris, surrounded by birds and trees, stands with his arms raised in prayer. On the arch above the apse Christ holds a book in one hand and gives a blessing with the other. He is flanked by mosaics of the four evangelists.



*San Apollinare in Classe*



## ASSISI

Although for the most part we avoided prime tourist destinations such as Florence, Venice, and Rome, we had to go to the home of Francis and Clare. Our bus deposited us at the Basilica of St. Clare, from which we could traverse the town downhill to the Basilica of St. Francis. Those who were able went to the Church and monastery of San Damiano, a half-hour walk outside the city walls. Those who went there found it to be a place great beauty and peace. There St. Francis heard the voice of Christ crucified telling him to rebuild the church, composed his “Canticle of the Creatures,” and St. Clare founded her first community and breathed her last. In the Basilica of St. Clare, where the cross of San Damiano is kept, Lynell Jutila, an oblate and one of the pilgrims, found this “Prayer of St. Francis before the Crucifix”: “Most high, glorious God, cast your light into the darkness of my heart. Give me, Lord, right faith, firm hope, perfect charity, and profound humility, with wisdom and perception, so that I may carry out what is truly your holy will.” At the end of the day, we all gathered at the two-story Basilica of St. Francis, where his tomb is located. Among the frescoes in the lower church is a painting of the Crucifixion, attributed to Giotto, which shows clearly the intense feelings of the angels and human beings who witnessed Christ’s death. In the upper church, a vast series of frescoes in two levels, depicts scenes from the Old Testament, the New Testament, and the life of St. Francis. We were privileged to view a similar series of frescoes about the life of St. Benedict in the cloister of Monte Oliveto.



*Assisi Basilica of St. Clare*



*Assisi Basilica of St. Francis*



*Cupola and Bell Tower*



*Cupola from the Inside*

## ABADIA SANT’ ANDREA, VERCELLI

During the twelfth century, the Abbey of St. Victor in Paris was a vibrant center of theology and spirituality and the implementation of improved pastoral care. The members of the monastery were canons regular, priests who lived a common life of shared goods, celibacy and obedience. The members of the abbey were teachers, writers, preachers, musicians and poets. The Abbey of St. Victor became the head of a small, loosely connected federation of abbeys and priories that followed the model offered by St. Victor.

The last great thinker from St. Victor was a monk named Thomas Gallus (“Thomas, the Frenchman,” d. 1246) who was sent from Paris about 1220 to be the first abbot of the new abbey of Sant’ Andrea in Vercelli in northern Italy. Thomas became very influential in Italy; St. Anthony of Padua considered him his friend. To Italy Thomas brought his interest in the writings of an anonymous writer known now as Pseudo-Dionysius, who seems to have been a sixth-century Syrian monk. Pseudo-Dionysius’ writings fused neoplatonic philosophy and Christian spirituality in a way that influenced people as diverse as Thomas Aquinas and the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*. There is much scholarly interest in Thomas’ works now, but what were of more interest to us were the remarkably well-preserved buildings of the abbey.

Cardinal Guala Bicchieri, a papal diplomat and native of Vercelli, financed their construction, begun in 1219. The design of the church blends native Italian architectural traditions with the emerging Gothic design from France. The cross-shaped church has four towers: one on either end of the entrance, a cupola over the crossing (at the meeting point of the east-west and north-south axes), as well as a free-standing bell tower. The church and towers are constructed mostly of red and grey-green stone. Sometimes the two colors are in





*Martyrdom of St. Andrew*

alternating layers to give the striped appearance found in other Italian churches.

Over the central portal is a fourteenth-century carving of the martyrdom of St. Andrew. The Roman official sits at the right, ordering the two men on the right to torture Andrew. Andrew himself looks to the left, toward three Christians of various ages who look at the Andrew sorrowfully. The central tower or cupola rises on four mighty pillars, each accompanied by a symbol of one of the four gospel writers. The cupola itself is eight-sided. In a chapel off the right transept is the tomb of Thomas Gallus, with a fresco showing him as a teacher. Above this Abbot Thomas is shown kneeling before the Blessed Virgin Mary, while St. Andrew presents him to her. On the left are St. Catherine, a patron of philosophers, and Pseudo-Dionysius.



*Façade*

The church is on one side of a beautiful courtyard, which is surrounded by other monastery buildings. The last canons regular left in 2006. The buildings are now occupied by several religious organizations and by some departments of a regional

university. Mass is still celebrated in the church, which has served God, Vercelli, and pilgrims like ourselves for almost 800 years.

### POSTSCRIPT BY CATFAEL

As I read about this pilgrimage, I remember my own pilgrimage to the Monastery of the Ascension ten years ago. I was a small kitten, friendless in the world. I walked onto the patio, whined and schmoozed, and soon I was eating tuna fish and drinking milk. My diet has become more bland since then, but it is ample (editor's note: too ample!). Some other rather irritating cats have become resident, but I try not to be

as hostile to them as the late, lamented Genghis Khan was to me. Anyway, I have been at home here ever since, no longer a wanderer but a stable monk.

I am touched as I read about a little kitten, my spitting image, that Bryan and Daniela rescued from the woods at Monte Oliveto, took care of for several days, and through the good offices of Padre Lorenzo, placed in a nice home. They've named it Percival, which seems a bit dainty for our clan, but that's ok too. I'm very appreciative for their kindness, and I wish cousin Percival the best. I also want to thank Daniela and Bryan for taking care, not just of Percival, but for the whole group of pilgrims, who would certainly have been lost without their help. •



# Coming Event

## JULY 8

**Gathering for Oblates and their friends at the Monastery.**

*Come to any parts of the gathering you would like.*

- 9:00 Eucharist
- 11:00 Presentation on Oblates for those who would like to know more about them
- 12:00 Noon Prayer
- 12:15 Lunch
- 1:00 Music
- 2:00 Talk by Stacie Smith on her artwork at the monastery  
(sculpture *For the Mothers of the Plaza del Mayo; Stations of the Cross*)

**For further information, contact Fr. Hugh: 208-761-9389; [hughf@idahomonks.org](mailto:hughf@idahomonks.org)**



The *Desert Chronicle* is available in digital form on the monastery website: [www.idahomonks.org](http://www.idahomonks.org). If you would like to receive the *Desert Chronicle* in digital form and cancel your paper subscription, please email Fr. Hugh: [hughf@idahomonks.org](mailto:hughf@idahomonks.org) and send him your email address.

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

THE DESERT CHRONICLE  
The Benedictine Monks of Idaho, Inc.  
Monastery of the Ascension  
541 East 100 South  
Jerome, ID 83338-5655

