

A Wisdom Event

- brother Placid

WESTON PRIORY WAS ONLY TEN YEARS OLD WHEN the Second Vatican Council convened. In many ways the Priory was still a toddler stumbling about as we learned to balance and walk. With the Council came a bold challenge to grow and mature and renew: Church, religious life, monastic life, and, especially, our life here at Weston. I came of age with the Council. A young monk in an old Church, a youngster in a centuries rich Benedictine way of life, someone new in a young monastic community, I suddenly became aware of the enormous richness and promise of the rejuvenating call to life and change the Council was offering all of us. I felt it was to encounter the very Spirit of Pentecost.

As we celebrate fifty years since the Council began, we also mark sixty years since the beginning of Weston Priory. It is a good time to reflect on this connection which became a nourishing source and inspiration for our community life. While there are many areas that strike me, I would like to highlight here the Council as a courageous Wisdom Event: it is the Wisdom embodied in the Council that spoke so forcefully.

The wise courage to set about giving new and bold life to the Church struck us all as a personal challenge to forge our identity and monastic way. It was in becoming a genuine community of fraternal love and trust that we could set out together into the future. We chose at that time to let go of an institutional monastic life style and embrace a more familial communitarian life which found its simple expression in reconceiving the hierarchical structures encrusting monastic living and embracing a consensual way of brotherhood in which we all share responsibility for our life. From decision making to household chores we all were mutually carrying our life on our shoulders.

Just as the Council wisely showed that the way continues not in an unchanging linear line but can turn and still remain in continuity with tradition and history, so too we came to envisage a way forward in our own concrete life. ■

Summoning to Council: Pope John XXIII and Weston Priory

- brother Elias



THE SIGNIFICANT IMPULSE FOR RENEWAL IN THE Church through Vatican Council II called by Pope John XXIII made itself felt across a wide spectrum of the Church body. Seeds of this ferment were already being planted some years before the Council actually began. Pope John XXIII's desire to "launch the Church on an adventure of hope"¹ inspired Benedictines, such as our founder, brother/Abbot Leo, to re-invigorate communities founded in the years just previous to the Council. This inspired a renewed examination of Saint Benedict's foundational document, his *Rule for Monks*. In these communities the "adventure of hope" was being articulated in the dream of a renewed monastic life which had as the primary focus of the community's energies: becoming an authentic community of brothers.

In our experience at Weston, this was begun through another, a more local, calling to council. Through the wisdom and insight of our brother John, who became Prior of the community in 1964, the community was being invited to assume responsibility for a deeper understanding of itself as a brotherhood with a shared responsibility for the spiritual and personal growth of each brother in the monastic community.

Chapter 3 of Saint Benedict's Rule: "Summoning the Brothers for Counsel" (*concilium* in Latin) became a touchstone for living out challenging horizons of shared responsibility based on trust that we had begun to explore on a daily basis through community discussions and shared reflections on the Rule. Saint Benedict continues: "after hearing the counsel (*concilium*) of the brothers, let the abbot ponder it and follow what he judges the wiser course."

Both Pope John XXIII and our brother John were in touch with the remarkable wellspring of Spirit that had started to permeate the predictable ways that the Church had expressed itself up to that time.

With the celebration of fifty years since the beginning of Vatican Council II—a Council of Renewal, and the founding of our monastery, Weston Priory, in 1953, we are called to a renewed listening to the voices that inspire us to journey forward into the future. "Listen with the ear of your heart," Saint Benedict reminds us.

Entering into this new season of Advent and the new year of 2013, we are confident that an "adventure of hope" continues to open here at Weston. ■

¹ Peter Hebblethwaite, *Pope John XXIII*, New York: Doubleday and Company, 1985, p. 4.