



- *brother Alvaro*

Let us set out on a pilgrimage of the heart,
Wandering in the wilderness,
Learning how to dance¹
- from our song, *Pilgrimage of the Heart*

I like to think that in these sixty years,
brothers here at the priory
have been engaged in daily learning,
a daily practice of a communal dance.

Not fighting, not dancing against the flow,
nor simply following the flow.
Not flowing in a passive repetition of the past,
nor rejecting the teachings of good dance traditions.

Not struggling to be unique or different,
nor searching to do what has always been done—
simply an alternative way of dancing,
a circle dance, and an open circle.

I saw the movement, listened to the rhythm,
and joined the dance.
That was ten years ago,
but every day we learn how to dance anew. ■

¹Song from the recording *Pilgrimage of the Heart*, © 2007, The Benedictine Foundation of the State of Vermont, Inc.



Brothers with Mexican sisters in Mexico, 2010

Fresh Beginnings !

- *brother Daniel*

AFTER FIFTY YEARS, THE SMILE OF POPE JOHN XXIII continues to disarm us with its childlike charm. He seems to have a playful attitude towards life and people which immediately puts all at ease. The photograph displayed in our monastery, of our founder, brother Leo, and the Pope engaged in conversation, brings to mind a statement Pope John offered at the time of the Council: “The Council is simply the dawn, the forerunner of a new day coming forth.” When I reflect on this statement of the pope, so filled with hope and trust, I wonder how this is translated into our own community and how we, as brothers, experience it in an ongoing way.

When I first met the brothers, my first glimpse had the hues of the new sunrise. It was an early morning in January at our Benedictine sisters’ motherhouse in Mexico City. I had known monks, priests and religious sisters since my childhood. The experiences were positive, although at times they seemed formal and tentative. After the morning Eucharist, we gathered in the dining room for breakfast. I was immediately moved by the tenderness with which the brothers and the sisters related. To my amazement these North-American men were seemingly being led by very simple Mexican women. I noticed that the community of brothers were friends and in communion with one another. I kept paying attention as I interacted with them but I could not tell who the prior was, who the priests were, or who was in charge. They were singing with the sisters as well as sharing laughter amidst their attempts to



Brothers playing volleyball, 1980's

communicate in Spanish. The freshness of that morning still makes me smile as I recall it, realizing: this is different, this is new!

It became clear to me that this Benedictine brotherhood was choosing to dance, to play and to sing their prayer with spontaneity rather than with rigid formulas. I was discovering a community which had chosen to be inclusive, recognizing the full equality of women as witnessed by the covenanted relationship with the Mexican sisters. I felt the light and breath of the Spirit.

What is the spiritual craft that enables the Weston community to interact, then and now, in such an inclusive manner? Perhaps our community recreations over the years offer a glimpse into how we pray, work, welcome guests or visit with our Mexican sisters. During my early years as a monk we played volleyball. The rules, however, were a little different. Everybody on one side of the net had to touch the ball before it could go to the other side. You had three chances at serving, and the players rotated to the opposite side of the net. It was hilarious. Oftentimes when someone asked about the score we realized that no one was keeping score. Here we experienced brotherhood.

As we grew older and less nimble we changed the ball for a softer, bigger red beach ball. The onset of age brought further limitations, so we changed the red ball games for contra-dancing. Now, as we continue to face more mobility and balance challenges in our dancing, we again hope to uncover the potential present in our own vulnerability as we receive the gift of a "new day coming forth into our lives."

At the end of the Rule for Monks, Saint Benedict tells us that he wrote it for beginners. (RB 73, 1) As we glance at the dawning light, can we still risk the adventure of making a fresh beginning together? New life and spirit continues to abound. May we live it in the grace of that early January morning and in the prophetic vision of Pope John XXIII! ■



Council & Community

- *brother Mark*

CELEBRATING THE FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF THE SECOND Vatican Council as we prepare to celebrate the sixtieth anniversary of the founding of our monastic community here at Weston Priory invited me to reflect on aspects of our life that correlate with the experience and teaching of the Council.

An immediate visual image of the Council – the gathering of representatives from all parts of the world – expressed the Church as a very diverse embodied community, grounded in ancient traditions, seeking to discern and reveal the presence of God in the world today. This image reflected our Benedictine emphasis on the coming together of diverse persons in the common search for God where each brother is encouraged to contribute his unique person and voice in continually creating and recreating the common life that welcomes God, in each new moment, in all the concrete variety of our created world. Brother Leo's founding inspiration was that the Weston monastic community would not serve as a local parish and would not maintain and staff a school, as was and is the case of many Benedictine monasteries in the United States. The emphasis, rather, was to be the witness of an intense common life. Work would be within the monastery and welcoming guests a special expression, making it possible for the brothers to maintain consistent personal contact in the various times of community prayer each day, sharing meals together, meeting for discussions of community values and practical concerns, and even setting aside a number of days each month for retreat and special reflection in common.

Vatican II's focus was a response to Pope John XXIII's admonition "to be open to the signs of the times." In much the same way, the Weston community has endeavored to be faithful to the admonition of its founder, brother Leo, "to be open to the Holy Spirit." We seek to "listen with the ear of our hearts" to the voice of God in our midst and wherever that voice may be discovered. We always receive a special gift and a new awakening! ■