



St. Benedict and the Mandala.

Life Together in One Heart



Long before the Night Office began, the man of God (Benedict) was standing at his window, where he watched and prayed while the rest were still asleep. In the dead of night he suddenly beheld a flood of light shining down from above, more brilliant than the sun, and with it every trace of darkness cleared away. Another remarkable sight followed. According to his own description, the whole world was gathered up before his eyes in what appeared to be a single ray of light.¹

THERE IS A PAINTING OF SAINT BENEDICT WHICH hangs in our Gallery Shop's ground floor exhibit room that was painted in 1987 by one of our former brothers, Stephen Leslie, who now lives with his family in Hartland Four Corners, Vermont. You are welcome to come and see it – experience it – for yourself.

The painting depicts Saint Benedict as a compelling monastic figure who is crafting a mandala that is illuminated by a single ray of light that shines from the heavens above. The beam of light passes from the upper reaches of the painting through small images of Monte Cassino and Weston Priory, as well as through the all-seeing eye of a majestic, discerning eagle and the eye of Saint Benedict himself, and then going farther down to the feathered stylus in Benedict's hand that is creating the mandala. The mandala, which is a symbol for Saint Benedict's RULE, is not completed. It is still in the process of being articulated. An interpretation of this feature in the painting suggests that the beam of light brings our attention to the mysterious creative moment that we refer to as NOW. . . the NOW of our own time, place and being. Saint Benedict is offering the wisdom embodied in his Rule to all of us who actively seek to discern the creative energy of this precise and gifting moment in our lives.

It is with gratitude for that ray of light mirrored by the abundant blessings bestowed on us by our God and many faithful friends that we share the following chronology of our "life together" during the winter solstice.

¹ *Life and Miracles of Saint Benedict* by St. Gregory the Great, 1949, Liturgical Press, Collegeville, MN

January

Our community is blessed to have welcomed Nhân Thê' Nguyễn as a postulant on the first day of the New Year. Brother Nhân has been with us since the first of October in a time of Observership whose focus is to live our life at a closer vantage point. The scope of further integration in the year ahead will include study of the Rule of St. Benedict and monastic history, along with scripture and prayer. We look forward to discovering complimentary interests and gifts with which to deepen our relationships as brothers living according to the wisdom of St. Benedict.



brother Nhân.

From the last day of December thru January 5th we welcomed two men into the Monastic Living Experience which we offer twice yearly. We had the joy of welcoming Thom Courcelle of Seattle, Washington and Brendan Kemeza of Concord, Massachusetts, for the seven day exploration of monastic values and prayer as well as sharing in the rhythm of monastic community life. We are grateful for the generous and joyful spirit they shared with us as well as the questions and perspectives they brought from their unique life experiences.



Brendan and Thom (l to r).

February

The community made a two week visit to our Mexican Benedictine Sisters in Mexico City and Cuernavaca, Mexico, from February 5th to February 19th. It is always a joy for us to be with our Sisters and to share in their disarming hospitality and warm affection. Each year our bonds of friendship and our common Benedictine legacy are fostered and strengthened.

During the mid-point of our visit we and our Mexican Sisters hosted an intercommunity encounter with representatives of small monastic



Sisters Maricarmen, Patricia, María, Fidelina, and María José (l to r).



Brother Simón Pedro and brother Placid dancing at the Cuernavaca meeting.

communities who are searching for a renewed contemporary expression of monastic life in today's world and global church. Representatives of the several monasteries were: Brother Simón Pedro of the Benedictine community of Chucuito, Peru; Sisters María and María José of the Trinitarian Nuns in Suesa, (Cantabria) Spain; Sisters Patricia and Maricarmen of the Benedictine monastery of Pan de Vida (Bread of Life) in Torreón, Mexico; Sister Miguelina, the Sisters of her Council and several other Sisters of the Mexican Benedictine Community in Mexico City and Cuernavaca; and we brothers of Weston Priory. Our coming together to explore mutual interests and challenges bore fruit in arriving at a better understanding of each individual community, offering mutual inter-community support, and sharing our hopes and dreams for what monastic life can offer our world today.



Sister Catalina and Sister Miguelina (l to r).



Sister Fidelina and brother Simón Pedro.

Brother Simón Pedro Arnold returned to Weston with us at the end of our stay in Mexico. He will be spending six months with us as a sabbatical experience for rest, renewal, and completing a book he has been writing. Brother Simón Pedro's presence is a singular blessing for us in the richness and depth of his person, his musical gifts and deep spirituality, as well as in the wide experience he has acquired in his outreach to many

Latin American and Caribbean religious communities on local, regional, and national levels.

Sister Laura Bufano, CSJ of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet, Latham, New York, spent two months with us as part of her sabbatical after serving a six year term as president of the United States branch of her religious order. For many years Sister Laura has been a friend and resource person for our community, especially in her expertise in music and liturgy. We hold her joyfully in our hearts and prayer as she continues exploring what the future holds out for her in service to her congregation and ministry to God's people.



Sister Laura.

March

The 24th of this month marked the 30th anniversary of the declaration of our monastery as a public sanctuary for Latin American refugees and the arrival of the Ixcot family from Guatemala: Felipe, Elena, Marta, Julio, Alicia, Juanita, and Maya.

We were happy to have the presence of Alicia, Juanita, and Maya along with their spouses on Saturday the 22nd to celebrate the event with a gathering in our Visitors' Center of many friends and guests. The event began with a brief video presentation which was produced by brother Alvaro using footage provided by our friend and neighbor, Betsy Ungvarsky of Weston, who fortuitously videotaped the arrival of the Ixcot family and the welcoming celebration that followed on that happy day thirty years ago. The day also inaugurated an exhibit of weavings made by Elena, ar-



Jim and Juanita, Patrick and Maya, JJ and Alicia with Isabella (l to r).



Patrick, JJ, Alicia with her daughter, Isabella, Maya with mic, Juanita and Jim (l to r).

chival photographs and media articles both from the day of the family's arrival and then through the 27 years of our sanctuary journey together. The exhibit, and the creative work that went into it, came from the hearts and hands of brothers John and Nhân.

On the 23rd we marked the anniversary at our weekly Sabbath celebration of the Sunday Eucharist which included an emotional, heart-felt greeting from Elena and Felipe sent from Guatemala and read by brother Richard. On the 24th we, the Ixcots, and our guests gathered for a festal meal in our monastic dining room. Afterwards, we gathered in our family room to view a video greeting from Sonia (Marta) and her children, Tohil and Ixta, in Florida, and to listen to an audio greeting from Julio, Elena and Felipe in Guatemala. ■



Sonia (Marta).