

In the Beginning . . .

- brother John

A BENEFIT OF LONGEVITY IN OUR COMMUNITY AT WESTON Priory is the opportunity to work in the archives. It is a place where I can be right at home amidst the chaos of accumulated photos, documents, news and magazine articles, and correspondence. It would be a temptation to get lost in nostalgia were it not for the vibrant, creative and engaging daily life that continues in our small Benedictine Community today.

As we celebrate our 60th anniversary with the publication of yet another Bulletin of Weston Priory, I decided to look back and see what the first Bulletin was like. With the help of technology that we didn't even dream of sixty years ago, I was able to scan the first Weston Priory Bulletin, written and edited by Father Michael Ducey, the first resident Prior of Weston, and to share an excerpt with you, our current friends.

Our scanner is a great gift of contemporary technology and makes it possible to share the contents of a faded and crumpled two-page, 8½" x 14" document that might otherwise have gone quite unnoticed. It works wonderfully well but does need a little help in translating some of the blemishes and distortions that creep in with aging:



South Park, Burlington, Abbot Leo presiding at Pontifical Mass, 1953

B U L L E T I N

OF

WESTON PRIORY

Vol. 1, No. 1.

Weston, Vermont

Advent, 1953

It is indeed a pleasure to send you this report of progress at the start of a new Church Year. Many great and good blessings are in store for all of us, we know, in the coming weeks and months of 1954, from God's abounding granary of grace and mercy now opening wide its doors again, as Mother Church begins a new cycle in her liturgical celebration...

Almighty God has been very good to us during these past months, making it possible, despite many trials and difficulties, to organise at least a rudimentary monastery on this remote Vermont "backwoods" farm...

To begin with a rapid survey of events, the chief one being the purchase of our 280 acres of land last December. Abbot Leo Rudloff, of the Dormition Abbey in Jerusalem, had long sought a suitable site and sufficient personnel for establishing a branch of his Abbey in the United States, which would eventually serve as a source of strength for his community in the Holy City, now beset by so many critical problems. He was finally able to obtain the abandoned Peabody farm, four miles from the town of Weston, at an attractively low price... Almost simultaneously with this transaction, he was also able to acquire the services of Dom Hugh Duffy, former prior of Delbarton Monastery in Morristown, New Jersey, who was loaned to the new foundation through the kindness of his superior, Abbot Patrick M. O'Brien, of Newark...

Thus, having secured an appropriate site for his projected foundation, together with a competent American Benedictine to supervise its initial development, Abbot Leo left for his Abbey in the Holy City, where he arrived early in January of this year. Unfortunately however, even before his arrival there, Father Hugh, who had already begun negotiations with local contractors for remodeling the Peabody farmhouse into a temporary priory, suffered a severe heart attack and had to be taken to a hospital in Boston.

... Hearing of this, ... Abbot Patrick made contact with Dom Michael Ducey, former prior of St. Anselm's Priory in Washington, who had previously been associated with Father Hugh in a similar project at Fifield, Wisconsin. Father Michael received permission to come and fill the breach almost at once. Arriving in mid-January, he succeeded in re-starting the machinery temporarily halted by Father Hugh's illness...

...Months passed, and when Abbot Leo was able to return. early in June of this year, everything was ready for an official opening of the Priory. The two Fathers moved in, bag and baggage, on July first...

Two events during this period were of special significance. One was the Pontifical High Mass celebrated by Abbot Leo on the Fourth of July at the American Legion Stadium in Burlington, which had been arranged by our good friend, monsignor Towne, of that city. Father Abbot preached a splendid sermon and the Trapp Family Singers constituted the choir at this edifying Field Mass. The other outstanding event of the Summer was an "Open House" held at the Priory on August fifth for the general public. In connection with this, Bishop Ryan, our beloved Local Ordinary... preached a moving sermon on the significance and importance of the new foundation, to the clergy and laity assembled in our rustic oratory...

This brief digest of events does no more than scratch at the surface, as it were, of the joys and sorrows, trials and consolations, that have attended the coming-into-being of this newest American foundation of the Benedictine Order. More difficulties are sure to come, no doubt; but we are not afraid, having had such comforting and concrete evidence of divine help and protection overshadowing us here...

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We are happy herewith to acknowledge publicly (we have done so privately to all of them, we hope) our deepest gratitude to the many individuals who, by their generous contributions, have made this foundation possible; but above all, to the American Benedictine Abbots and communities, who, almost without exception, have given us substantial aid and comfort. May this generosity on their part, as well as on that of all our benefactors, return to them rich blessing and reward, here and hereafter. This will be the constant grateful prayer of all at Weston Priory and Dormition Abbey.

A. M. D. G.

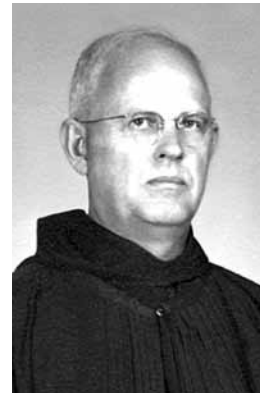
(Cum Permissu Superiorum)

Father Michael was the author of that first informative Bulletin of Weston Priory in 1953. Even though he was not able to be present at the Pontifical Field Mass of welcome in Burlington on July 4, he offered a vivid description of the event. I had the personal good fortune to be among the parish priests present on that occasion. I can verify, as Michael stated, that Abbot Leo gave a 'splendid' sermon during the Mass.

Abbot Leo spoke of a hope, an invitation, and an adventure to create a new kind of monastic community. It would be open, reconciling, contemporary and rooted in the rich and ancient Benedictine spiritual tradi-



South Park, Burlington, Trapp family singers, 1953



Fr. Michael Ducey, 1953



South Park, Burlington, (ctr) Fr. Robert Hammond (br. John), 1953

tion. He spoke with warmth and enthusiasm of a fraternal community of equals, of brothers. It would welcome the stranger, all seekers, and especially those of other faiths. The new community would not return to some 'golden age' of monasticism. It would toil to bring the spirit of the Gospels and the Rule of Benedict into the flesh of contemporary life.

In my years as a seminarian I had frequently visited the friendly, fraternal Benedictine Community of St. Benoît-du-lac in Canada. The writings of Thomas Merton and Dom Columba Marmion sparked a desire for a monastic community and deeper spiritual search. After ordination I found that parish life as a diocesan priest did not fulfill this hope in me. Abbot Leo's sermon was a powerful call that moved me decisively on my journey to become a brother at Weston Priory. The invitation to join in the adventure resounded in my heart.

Beyond the particular gift for those present at the Field Mass in Burlington on July 4th, 1953, Abbot Leo's vision for a new monastic community at Weston Priory foreshadowed Pope John XXIII's dream for renewal that would envelope the Catholic Church ten years later in the Second Vatican Council. Fifty years after the Second Vatican Council, sixty years since the founding of Weston Priory, we celebrate and continue that journey. ■