

# Vespers in Burlington

- *brother Daniel*



Bishop Christopher Coyne

**S**AINT BENEDICT IN HIS RULE FOR MONKS, DESCRIBES THE MEANING OF OUR Lenten practice as a time to “look forward to holy Easter with joy and spiritual longing.” (RB Ch. 49, 7)

Last February, as we engaged in our Lenten practice, we brothers participated in an Evening Prayer Service at Saint Joseph Co-Cathedral of in Burlington.

Bishop Christopher Coyne had reached out to us with a personal invitation and we were happy to participate in this event for the Holy Year of Mercy in our diocese. Although we had guests in the monastery, we rearranged the time for our Sunday Eucharist, and our Sunday monastic schedule in order to participate.

Upon arrival, there were people ready to help us with parking, and once inside we noticed that many of our priory friends and neighbors had arrived ahead of us, and were already seated.

During the celebration of Vespers, representatives of many Vermont religious orders and congregations, as well as the monastic communities, and a wide variety of lay organizations in the Diocese of Burlington, shared something of their charism and spirituality. The Weston brothers also offered two of our songs during this time of prayer.

Towards the end Bishop Coyne playfully asked everybody to sit down because “we were not going to leave without a sermon”. His sermon, while short, thanked everybody for coming, and especially for the ministry and the gifting presence of the various communities in the diocese. He also acknowledged the great diversity and differences among all of us. Then he spoke about offering trust and respect as well as building bridges. It felt so refreshing!

As I reflected on the bishop’s words, I appreciated the opening to an authentic dialogue. Dialogue requires a certain mutual respect and trust. Moving forward as we live the Christian adventure today, involves risk!

Bishop Coyne’s call for trust and respect opens a Gospel path where risking honest encounter is possible. Perhaps, if our minds have reason to fear, mistrust, and even resent, a true encounter can happen in the heart, where compassion and mercy abide, where love casts out fear! We begin building bridges as both Pope Francis and Bishop Coyne encourage us to do, as we open ourselves in hope to the gift of the other’s presence. We humbly acknowledge that we do not really know. We simply trust and respect the mystery of the other. Amazingly, like the disciples at Emmaus, we find ourselves surprised by the joyful experience of communion with each other and with the Risen Christ. We become an Easter Church, a people of hope! ■