

The 50th Anniversary of the Reception of the Monks of Weston Priory by the Diocese of Burlington, Vermont

Homily at Evening Prayer by Bishop Paul Gregory Bootkoski - August 12, 2003



Bishop Paul Bootkoski

Today we commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the reception and acceptance of a monastic community by the Roman Catholic Diocese of Burlington, a fledgling Benedictine foundation established by Abbot Leo von Rudloff and the small band of monks he had gathered from various backgrounds and monasteries. He had a dream to establish a community that would live the Rule of Benedict in its pristine glory as the Saint originally intended.

Thomas Merton wrote of this foundation in one of his earliest writings, *The Silent Life*, which described Benedictine, Cistercian and Trappist monasteries throughout our United States.

So Brother Leo and his small community were welcomed here in the State of Vermont and put down their roots because as Brother Leo used to say, "the price was right." Actually the property was acquired with the payment of back taxes as its previous owner had abandoned it.

It is always a major event in the history of a diocese when a religious community establishes itself within the boundaries of the diocese.

A religious community brings their own charism to the diocese and thereby enhances and complements the building up of the body of Christ in this local Church. Bishop Angell, by his presence here, acknowledges this and demonstrates the mutual fraternal love and respect he and the community have for each other. In the name of the Benedictine Monks of Weston Priory we thank you.

In the Prologue of the Rule of Saint Benedict we read: "Listen with the ear of your heart." In this initial statement we realize why the monks are here and what attracts so many of us who come to seek and find what we all spiritually hunger and thirst for – the presence of the living God, the search for the interior meaning of our lives.

You men, as John Paul II stated, are counter-cultural, and you share with us your lives by opening up your home in hospitality where we find in its silence, in its prayer, in its simplicity, in its community life, the living God. The Acts of the Apostles truly comes alive, "they shared all things in common and cared for all in need." Realize in doing so how many have found solace, peace and direction in their lives by your acts of compassionate hospitality. The Rule of Saint Benedict states, "let all guests be received as Christ." You embody this!

For over thirty-seven years I have come here to find the Lord, sometimes in his peace, sometimes in frustration, but always being challenged. In the early years, 1967 to be exact, I remember Brother Leo telling me: "The Spiritual Life must be compared to the growth of a human body. It grows not according to our plan, but as God wills it. Sometimes slowly, sometimes seemingly almost too quickly that it appears gawky, out of sorts, even out of sync." We who are your extended family have seen this in your growth as a Monastic Community, and we have stayed with you because as Saint Peter stated: "Where shall we go, for you have the words of everlasting life." You have enabled us to find the Lord.

We have witnessed your joys, your pain and suffering when you have lost a brother in death or through disagreement and separation. We have seen you rally as a family when a brother became ill. You have prayed continually and have persevered in every hardship. With the Scriptures as your constant companion and the Rule of Benedict as your guide, you have maintained the monastic life. Your stability and constant response to conversion give us hope when we are confronted with suffering, pain and controversy. For your heroic example we thank you.

In prayer, the Scriptures take on new meaning as you share your insights with us. The Eucharist is blessed, broken and shared, the food for our spiritual journey. The Lord Jesus becomes one with us in our life's journey. The Psalms become your poem and ours. As you pray them, we hear the dialogue that goes on between you and our God. God speaks to us and we respond through the words of the psalmists. Their words become our words, our prayer. We become transformed for a time, because we realize we are on Holy ground. This mountain has been made holy by the stability, compassionate prayer life, and work of this Benedictine monastic community. It is a place that draws thousands of people each year. A place that is so ordinary that it becomes extraordinary, for it draws like a magnet people seeking the Lord.

As your extended family we pray that men who have the monastic calling will respond to the Lord and join you. That they will not be hesitant and fearful of a vocation that entails permanency, stability, prayerfulness, collaboration, obedience, compassion, being counter-cultural and totally Christ-centered. A lifestyle that seems so ordinary that it becomes for us, who witness it, extraordinarily prophetic.

As we pray with you at Vigils, "We go on waiting, knowing that You have come, yet we are not ready to be transformed. Give us Your Spirit and we'll carry on. The day is long ahead of us and we'll carry on, and we'll carry on."

**FOR ALL THAT THERE WAS, WE THANK YOU!
FOR ALL THAT THERE IS, WE BLESS YOU!
FOR ALL THAT THERE WILL BE, WE WAIT WITH YOU TO SEE!**

**HAPPY ANNIVERSARY,
AND MAY THE SPIRIT OF
OUR COMPASSIONATE AND LOVING GOD
BE ALWAYS WITH YOU.**

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