

“Yes” from the Beginning

- *brother Augustine*

OUR CAR WAS BARELY MAKING IT UP THE LONG, STEEP hill on a snowy March afternoon in 1959. I was coming for a short retreat at a small new monastery called Weston Priory that, on this wintery day, seemed closer to the North Pole than to the rural mountains of southern Vermont. My classmate, Douglas Everson, from Holy Apostles Seminary in Connecticut was coming to enter the community, and I had a vague interest in experiencing what this young Benedictine monastery was all about.

When we finally arrived at the top of the hill, having gone through a minor snow squall on the way up, our driver exclaimed, “Where is it, this Priory?” What we saw ahead of us through the blowing snow was a small, white painted barn and farmhouse, with an enlarged chicken coop in the back. “Are you sure this is it?” asked Jerry, Douglas’ brother, who had offered to drive us up to Weston. Douglas assured his brother that we were on the right wooded hilltop of Vermont.

Father Stephen, the Prior at the time, welcomed us warmly and settled us into our sleeping quarters



Abbot Leo at the front door of the monastery, 1953



Renovated chapel and monastery, around 1953

in the farmhouse. After the evening Vesper Prayer with the brothers and a light supper, taken in a very small, multi-purpose dining room, we retired to our rooms. While preparing for the night, I was already beginning to feel the excitement of the challenge that these brothers had chosen in living this simple, monastic life in rural Vermont.

The next day, Douglas was invited to settle into the community area and I was invited to help the brothers in their maple sugaring operation. One of the brothers drove me up the half-mile road behind the monastery to the sugarhouse in the brothers’ old 1950 Dodge Coupe with chains on the tires to get us through the foot of snow that had fallen overnight. At the barn-sugarhouse, two brothers were stoking the wood-fired sap evaporator and canning the hot maple syrup as it was drawn off the pans. I helped to tap the metal tops into the mouths of the syrup cans and to seal the covers.

We worked on the sugaring until dark, and then returned to the farmhouse for Vespers and supper with the community. That night I slept very well, with brief dreams of sweet syrup flowing into metal containers and clouds of steam coming off the evaporator. In the morning, after chanting the Vigil psalms with brothers at 4:00 am and a quiet period of reflection, I could feel a word beginning to form in my heart—Yes! ■

