

A Visit from the Monks of Weston Priory to Monasterio Pan de Vida, Torreón, Mexico

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[Introductory note: In the mid-twentieth century, a group of Benedictine Sisters, in the name of their community at Mount Saint Scholastica Monastery in Atchison, Kansas, embraced a new challenge: to share their Benedictine charism of prayer and work with the Mexican people, and to dedicate themselves to the education of Mexican girls and young women. Then in 1992, a small group of these Benedictine Sisters set out from their Monasterio de San Benito in Mexico City, for the semi-desert land of the state of Coahuila in north-central Mexico. There, attentive to the promptings of the Spirit, they began anew, with the hope of inculturating the charism of Benedict and Scholastica, and giving their monastic life a new expression. The sisters of Monasterio Pan de Vida give flesh to their commitment to serve the Reign of God in the Mexico of today: "Seeking to be disciples of Jesus, rooted in the Gospel, in the Rule of Saint Benedict and the monastic tradition, we commit ourselves to a preferential option for the cause of women, and in a special way, for women who are impoverished, so that they may discover that they are the well-beloved daughters of God." Information about the Sisters' community can be found on their website, www.pandevidaosb.com. Sister Patricia Henry, author of this reflection, is prioress of the community of Monasterio Pan de Vida.]

WITH GREAT EXPECTATION WE PREPARED for the visit of our brothers from Weston and our Spanish-speaking sisters from four communities. Patricia had participated in two previous encounters and had come home each time to share the joy and enthusiasm she felt after participating in the life, dreams, and concerns of the monks from Weston Priory and the sisters and brothers who gathered on an informal basis to reflect on the meaning of monastic life in the twenty-first century.

We were counting on two days filled with prayer, song and good conversation, not only with each other, but also with our oblates and friends. Due to a snowstorm in Boston, our activities were squeezed into one unforgettable day.

As we look back together we remember and give thanks for many things. As one sister said, "I have prayed with the brothers' music so many times on CD, it was delightful to do it in person." There was a marvelous awareness of community, not only because of the way the brothers travel together and care for one another, but also because we are Benedictines and share many similarities: we are small, cross cultural and non-hierarchical. We strive to give priority to our lives together in loving relationships and shared reflection; we seek simplicity. We want to remain always sensitive to the signs of the times, and seek a monastic response to our world's needs.

There are also differences, which gave us much to ponder. Here in Torreón, we are more involved in direct ministry. While this has always been a part of our way of life, we realize that it tends to absorb us and to leave little time for profound personal and community reflection. Hopefully part of our on-going giftedness to each other will consist in the brothers sharing the fruits of their reflection and the sisters handing on the wisdom we receive through our ministries, especially with poor women.



We spent a very special rainy day together and wondered if perhaps Scholastica didn't have something to do with it, since rain is a rare treat in Torreon. It was a time of great hope for us as we joined with sisters and brothers from Arizona, Texas, Vermont, Mexico City and Cuernavaca. Being small and far away from other communities (five hundred miles from Mexico City and over three hundred miles from Boerne, Texas), at times it feels a little lonely here in our semi-desert surroundings. Our time together was a hands-on experience of the Benedictine charism, alive and well; of our solidarity with one another and the larger community.

Our friends and oblates commented many times on how much the day meant to them. They feel a part of the Benedictine family because of our presence here, but have very little experience of Benedictine monks. The group that gathered came from a mixture of socio-economic backgrounds. Some barely know how to read and write, others left professional jobs to spend the morning with us, and everyone went away feeling enriched. As we shared with them afterwards about the visit, the words we heard most often were: " joy, simplicity, care, community, the beauty of song, concern for the world's needs, hope," in a word, *verdaderos hermanos* [true brothers].

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