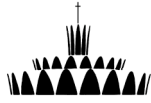


The Monastic Vision at Saint Louis Abbey

I request that you join me in asking the Lord to give us, during the next three days, the first sight of a vision of our monastic life together here at Saint Louis Abbey over the coming years. I want to share with you during these three days what I see; then, beginning with our Chapter meeting on Sunday, and as more days and weeks go by, we shall see what you see, and how it all fits together into a greater and greater apprehension of the vision of our life which is being shown us.

My first sight of this vision has been given form by the parable we have just read. Our monastic life is a treasure, of inestimable value, which, by the ordering of the Lord's providence in our lives, we have found, indeed, stumbled across, in this field which is Saint Louis Abbey and all the concrete structures and circumstances of our life here, and of the lives of the thousands of people who have surrounded us over the past almost fifty years. When we discover this treasure, we hide it, for, when we discover it, we are caught up into the third heaven, we are caught up into paradise and hear unspeakable words which it is not lawful for one to utter. But, in our joy over this treasure, we go and sell all that we have -- everything, all that we have, all that we are, a total renunciation -- for only so shall we be able to have this treasure. But this treasure is so infinitely great that it is worth selling all that we have, and anything whatsoever, for its sake, and the joy even in hoping confidently to possess the treasure is so limitless, that it enables us to sell all as it were without effort, and without regret or even a thought of what we have sold. Then, finally, we go and buy the field -- and this is the long, hard work of our life, initiated and worked in us by the Lord's grace, the long, hard work by which we come into possession of this field which is this monastery and its life, and of the treasure which it contains, or by which we come at last fully to be possessed by this life and the treasure which is everywhere in it.

This, then, is the form of the first sight I have of the vision of our life which, I believe by faith, the Lord is showing us and will be showing us: finding the treasure, selling all, buying the field. (In



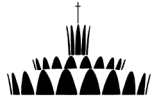
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this I have undoubtedly been influenced by the use of these three phrases as the titles of a recent three-volume study of the religious life.) Today, I wish to say a few words about the treasure, for although it must in this life, as we have just heard, remain essentially hidden, yet we can and we must, from time to time, say something about it, say words which point toward it, for it is the goal and purpose of our whole life. Then, tomorrow, during the Mass for the renewal of our vows, I wish to say a few words about selling all. Then, on Sunday, at our Chapter meeting a few words about the long, hard work of buying the field, the long, hard work of a lifetime, of the lifetimes of all of us, and of all who have been and who will be monks of this monastery.

The treasure, the Lord says, is the kingdom of God. Entering the kingdom is, according to the Prologue of the Rule, the ultimate end or goal of the monk's life. In that kingdom, Saint Benedict says, we shall see -- see, *videre*, no longer seek, but see -- we shall see "him who called us into his kingdom," that is, Jesus Christ the Lord, who is the King of this kingdom, the true King, whom we are to serve, to do battle for, by renouncing our own will, and taking up the strong and glorious arms of obedience. The treasure which is the kingdom is principally and above all, then, the King himself of this kingdom, Jesus Christ the Lord -- he is principally and above all our treasure. Moreover, according to the teaching of Cassian, the Lord is already present to us in this life, and his kingdom already begins to be established within us in this life, to the extent that, by his grace, we cast out the rule of the devil in our souls -- that is, vices -- and replace it by the rule of the Lord -- that is, virtues. So we can already begin to possess this treasure now.

Our treasure, Jesus Christ the Lord -- this is what, this is who, I wish to put before you first and foremost; in the deepest way, this, he, is all I ever wish to put before you. Jesus Christ the Lord, the Son of God, Jesus who is God. Nothing, no one, which or who exists, or has existed or will exist, can ever be brought into comparison with him. "To whom will you liken me?" says the Lord." Every act of his is the act of God; every word of his is the word of God. He is risen, he is alive, he lives forever, he is Life. He is present to us, fully, at every moment, although in this life

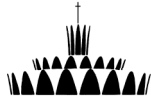


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behind the veil of creatures: present to us in the abbot, who is believed to hold the place of Christ, present to us in the other brother, for says Saint Benedict, we are all one in Christ, present in the sick, present in children, present in the poor, present in every guest (the four groups of people for whom the cellarer is to have particular care), and, of guests, present especially in those who are poor, who are pilgrims (perhaps in our day “seekers”), or who are members of the household of the faith -- therefore, for us, present in every member of the school and parish communities, in every member of the Abbey family. But above all he is present in his Word and in his Sacrament -- in the Divine Office, which brings before us his Scriptural word, and which is extended throughout our day and night by the *lectio* and *meditatio* of Scripture -- and in the liturgy of the Eucharist, where he gives us his Real Presence, as well as in the other Sacraments. Here, I say, he is above all present to us, in his Word, as interpreted by the magisterium of the Church -- Saint Benedict would have us read only the works of the orthodox fathers -- and in his liturgy and sacraments celebrated according to the discipline of the Church -- de facto, and sometimes explicitly in the liturgical code, there is reference to the custom of the Roman Church.

Jesus Christ the Lord, truly present to us, calling us into his kingdom, the King whom we are to serve -- and how, if we keep in our hearts who he is, could there be any question of our choosing to do anything whatsoever with our life except to serve him totally. “Come, children, hear me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord.” And: “run while you have the light of life, lest the darkness of death should overtake you.” So Saint Benedict hastens to set up a “school of the Lord’s service”: and that is precisely, as he understands it, everything and all that a monastery is: everything in it, every structure, every institution, every practice, is set up for one purpose only: to teach us to serve the Lord. The monastery has no other purpose, but then, if we see truly there can be no other purpose in life besides this. It was to remind us of all this -- of Jesus Christ the Lord really present, of his Kingdom, to which we are called, already beginning to be present -- that we read the Prologue of the Rule at the beginning of the week.

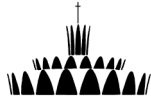


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Now, to serve the Lord, we must keep his commands. And what are his commands? He told us that all of them, and indeed all the Law and the Prophets, hang on two great commandments: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and all your soul, and all your strength,” and “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” So now we come to what secondly I wish to put before you: it is Love. Christ first, who is the King, and then Love, which is that in which his kingdom consists. Our aim and goal, then, in this life, that we may attain the ultimate end of the kingdom in its fullness in the next, must be love. This is the teaching of Our Lord, and this his teaching is transmitted by all the authors of the New Testament, by all the Fathers of the Church, and by all the monastic fathers: by Cassian, whose way of putting the teaching I have just expressed in the preceding sentence; by Saint Benedict, who tells us that, as we progress in his “school of the Lord’s service,” our hearts will expand with the inexpressible sweetness of love, who tells us that at the summit of the ladder of humility we shall come to that perfect love of God which casts out fear, who places the great double commandment at the very beginning of the instruments of good works, who, at the end of his Rule, gives wonderful expression to the love of God and of the brethren as the summit of monastic spirituality; by Saint Basil, who at the beginning of his Rule, gives expression to the primacy for the monk of love for God and neighbor in a way which to me is incomparably grand, forceful and splendid -- so, this week, after the Prologue, we heard from Saint Basil on love.

This, then, is the treasure offered to the one who enters the monastery: Jesus Christ and love, the King and the Kingdom. But there is more: for there is also in the monastery the joy of sharing this treasure with others, and this sharing is part of the treasure, too. How does this sharing come about? According to the long tradition of the church, Jesus himself first shared the treasure -- himself and his kingdom -- with others by his threefold office as Messiah -- the Anointed One -- of Prophet, Priest and King, the three offices in ancient Israel whose holders were anointed, that is, who were messiahs, christs. As Prophet, he proclaimed the Word, taught the teaching, which described the goal -- himself and his kingdom -- and showed the way to it; as King, he gave commands

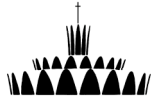


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which, when followed, lead to the goal; as Priest, he mediated to human beings the blessings and gifts of God -- grace -- which enable them to understand the teaching, keep the commandments, and so arrive at the goal. These three functions of Prophet, Priest and King Jesus incorporated into the pastoral office by which his messianic functions were to be continued in his church until his second coming. All then who receive the grace or charism of the pastoral office, or of a share in that office, participate in the sharing of Jesus and the kingdom of love -- the treasure in the field -- with others.

Now what I want to call our attention to here is that in the monastery as Saint Benedict conceives it, the pastoral office is widely shared. Certainly the abbot holds that office: as prophet or teacher, he must teach only what is in accordance with the Rule and the gospel; as shepherd, he must command only what is in accordance with the Lord's injunctions; as priest, he must pray for the brethren, bless them, and so on, and if he is a ministerial priest (of course in ancient monasticism, most abbots were not priests), he must minister the sacraments to them. But a moment's reflection shows that, according to the Rule, the pastoral office is distributed much more widely in the community than simply to the abbot. Clearly the deans share in that office, as well as the cellarer, the prior, the novice master, and indeed all the officials of the monastery; so also do those monks who are priests. But this is not all: we need to grasp fully the radical nature of Benedict's injunction, near the end of the Rule, that, in matters not regulated by the abbot or his officers, the juniors are always to obey their seniors -- an injunction which has no parallel in the Rule of the Master. This in effect recognizes a share in the pastoral office on the part of every monk who, by community rank, is a senior to another monk or other monks, and this means that every monk, as the years go by, is called more and more to share in the pastoral office. This is why every senior monk shares in the title of the abbot: for *nonnus*, the term to be used to address a senior means, according to the Rule, 'Reverend Father'. In the Christian dispensation, one is a father who, as an instrument of grace, begets Christ in another by sowing the seed of the Word in his soul. So it is that, in the monastery as Benedict conceives it, every monk is



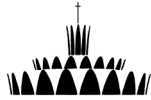
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called more and more to participate in the sharing with others of Christ and his kingdom of love -- the treasure hidden in the field -- by exercising the pastoral office on their behalf.

There is a second way in which many in the monastery participate in the sharing of the treasure of Christ and his kingdom of love with others, and that is by way of a specific development or form of the pastoral office, the office of teacher. In the office of teacher, one of the three elements of the pastoral office, viz., that of prophet or teacher of the Word, is greatly elaborated, so as to enable the teacher not simply to offer guidance to those who have already been formed, already educated, but to instruct in various arts or sciences those who have not yet been so instructed, and who need such instruction. In the Christian dispensation, it is important to note, the office of teacher remains a form of the pastoral office: for all arts and sciences, from the point of view of the faith, are directed toward the Lord, all injunctions for learning an art or science are ultimately directed toward serving the Lord, and grace, and so the ministrations of the priestly element of the pastoral office, are required for learning the art or science if it is to be informed by faith and love. Thus the Christian teacher is always ultimately a pastor of his or her students.

It is easy to see how a monastery tends to become a place of learning in the sciences and of skill in the arts. Here is a quick sketch. We have said that the Lord mediates his presence above all through his Word and through his Sacrament; hence, Word and Sacrament are at the heart of the monk's life. Now for the full grasping of the Word, the skill of reading is needed, and that means grammar. In the Word, and in the great commentaries on the Word of the Fathers and theologians, one encounters the arts of telling a story -- think of Jesus' parables -- of persuading -- think of his sermons -- of disputing and proving -- think of the arguments of Saint Paul and the other apostles from Scripture in the synagogues and in the gentile market places. Here already are the fundamental language arts, the three liberal arts of grammar, rhetoric and logic of the ancient and medieval trivium. But at least three of the quadrivium of the mathematical arts -- arithmetic or the mathematics of discrete quantity, geometry or the mathematics



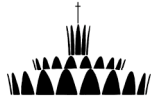
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of continuous quantity, and music, that is, musical theory, an application of discrete mathematics to sound -- will be needed in the life of the monastery: arithmetic and geometry in the administration of its temporalities, musical theory in the direction of music. (And in early monasticism, the fourth art of the quadrivium, astronomy, was needed as well, for the reckoning of times and seasons.) Again, Saint Paul makes the statement that “ever since the creation of the world [God’s] invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made.” A full exploration of this statement -- and there are others like it in Scripture -- would lead into the investigation of all the natural sciences, and into the development of a metaphysics and natural theology based on them. Moreover, this study of the natural sciences will require the use of the mathematical arts, both pure and applied -- and here we have the present-day version of the ancient and medieval quadrivium. Again, the gospel of course has thorough-going implications for the whole conduct of a human being’s life, in the individual, social and political spheres, and so we come to the moral sciences of ethics, economics, politics, and so on. Then, when we consider the liturgy of the sacraments, we see at once how all the fine arts come to be required as its servants: the art of poetics, in its most complete form, viz., the art of drama; music; the visual arts, the making of images, in many media, to give some expression to the beauty of God; the art of architecture; and so on. By such reflections one sees how, over time -- and monks have plenty of time, the time of their whole life -- monks tend to become learned in the sciences and skillful in the arts, and how it will emerge that the more senior monks are in various and sundry ways teaching the junior ones.

The treasure: Jesus Christ, his kingdom of love, the sharing of him and his kingdom with other brothers in the monastery through the offices of pastor and teacher. Now we come to a final development, a final dimension, as it were, of the treasure: that is the sharing of Jesus and his kingdom, through the offices of pastor and teacher, with men and women outside the monastery.

In the monastery as Benedict explicitly envisaged it, and so in

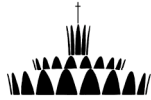


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every Benedictine monastery, this sharing of the treasure with those outside occurs through the guesthouse. That this is so is shown by a review of the prescriptions Benedict gives for the reception of guests: these prescriptions make it clear that the guesthouse is not to be a place where the monks share in the life of the world, but a place where the world shares in the life of the monks. As soon as a guest is announced, the abbot and brothers are to meet him “with all the service of love” -- and here we already have the sharing of the kingdom of love. Then, before anything else, the brethren and the guest are to pray together -- and here we have the encounter with Jesus Christ in his Word, and our prayerful response to his presence. Then the abbot, or those whom he delegates, are to “sit with” the guest: a beautiful expression which, I believe, intimates all the care of a pastor: the monk sits with the guest, listens to him, listens to his story, to his hopes, to his fears, to what he has never been able to speak about with people in the world. Then the divine law is read to the guest “for his building up” -- and here we find not only the exercise of the pastoral office, but perhaps also of the teaching office, although in an informal way. Through all this, the monks are to adore Christ in the guest, penetrating to the guest’s deepest identity, and so helping the guest to accept his identity. All shall be done so that the guest may say, “O God, I have received your mercy in the midst of your temple.”

This is already much, yet in our tradition of Benedictine monasticism, there is yet more, much more: for in our tradition, there have been accepted as appropriate community works of the monastery the works of pastoring and educating those outside, of priestcraft and schoolcraft, of serving in parishes and dioceses, of administering and teaching in schools. Of course, this tradition is the characteristically English form of Benedictine monasticism, originated by Pope Saint Gregory the Great, who saw that an authentic development of the original monastic tradition would be to make use of the inherent evangelizing and missionizing aspect of monasteries by making the founding of monasteries the centerpiece of a missionary outreach to the as yet unevangelized English. Hence, in our reading this week, after hearing from Saint Benedict and Saint Basil, we heard Saint Bede’s celebrated

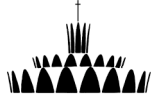


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description of the great pope's inspiration and of the arrival of Saint Augustine and his companions in Kent. In this tradition of Benedictine monasticism which Saint Gregory first developed, the opportunity of sharing the treasure of the monastic life, Christ and his kingdom, by way of the offices of pastor and teacher is present most fully. So in our monastery we have our two chief community works of Saint Louis Priory School and Saint Anselm Parish: Saint Louis Priory School, whose mission, we declared only a few months ago, "is to provide, in a Benedictine setting, a Catholic college-preparatory education of the highest excellence, which helps talented and motivated young men develop their full human potential as children of God", and Saint Anselm Parish, whose mission was declared by the Pastor and staff, after consultation with the Abbot and Council, to be "the love of God through the Mass, Sacraments and prayer, and the imitation of Jesus Christ by loving and serving all people" -- all this to be "in cooperation with the Abbey, the Priory School and the Archdiocese of Saint Louis."

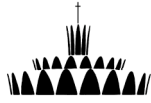
I want to invite us to a renewed dedication to our two chief community works of the School and the Parish, and in particular to a renewed dedication to a specific aspect of each of these works, the aspect, namely, of whom each of these works is principally for. The School Mission Statement is quite explicit on this point: the School is for "*talented and motivated young men*", young people who are capable of receiving and benefiting from a "*college-preparatory education of the highest excellence*". That is to say, the School is principally for young people who are capable of becoming and who indeed have the calling to become members of what the present Holy Father in his Apostolic Letter on the Church in America has called "the leading sectors" of society. Saint Anselm Parish, too, in virtue of its connection with the Abbey and its physical location, serves parishioners many of whom through their professional and business careers are members of these "leading sectors" both with reference to the general society of the Saint Louis metropolitan area and with reference to the Archdiocese of Saint Louis. I want to call us to a renewed dedication to our service of these people. We can sometimes waver a bit in that dedication, because the secular society proclaims to us that such service is "elitist", and that "elitism" is bad, and because



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also we know that the Church has called its members to a preferential love for the poor. As to secular society, ours is to note what it says, without allowing ourselves to be influenced by it when the influence would be contrary to the teaching of the Church. As to the Church itself, and the preferential love for the poor, I have commented on this a number of times before, but will comment again: the present Holy Father makes clear that the preferential love or option for the poor is not to be interpreted in an *exclusive* sense according to which Christian service to the leading sectors of society would be ruled out, also that the “poor” include children, who are lacking in spiritual and natural human formation, so that the Christian education of children is a form of the preferential love of the poor, even when the children are not from *economically* poor backgrounds. Christ died for *all* men and women, and the gospel is to be proclaimed to *all* men and women: Christ says so in the missionary charge he gives after his resurrection, and it is clear that Saint Paul thought he was called to all, including kings, leaders, those in Rome, that is, the center of administration of the Roman world -- all this is clear from a reading of the Book of Acts. We should recall, too, that Saint Augustine of Canterbury and the other early monastic missionaries of the English people, the originators, as we have just said, of our tradition of Benedictine monasticism, made it their policy to go first to the king of the region they were evangelizing, for they knew that his conversion would be the most effective way of disposing all his people to conversion -- they went first to the king, but in such a way as to be witnessing the Gospel to everyone else as well. The fact is that we were called by God to serve the people we serve: in the case of the School, the call was mediated through the group of lay people who had come together before this monastery was ever founded, and the call was confirmed, and has been continually confirmed, by the Archdiocese; in the case of the Parish, the call was mediated by the Archdiocese itself, and has been continually confirmed by it. The people whom we serve require our full attention and energy, as human beings called by God always do, and we should not distract ourselves with unreal thoughts as to other people or classes of people whom we might prefer to serve. “For I say,” says Saint Paul, “For I say, through the grace given to me, to every man that is among you, not to think of

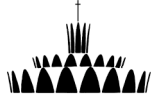


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himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according to the measure of faith which God has assigned him. For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: so we being many are one body in Christ, and everyone members one of another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith. Or ministry, let us use it for ministry, or he who teaches, let him teach, or he that exhorts, let him exhort; he that gives, let him do it with simplicity, he that rules, with diligence, he that shows mercy, with cheerfulness.”

Here, then, is the treasure; that is, here are the poor words which I have been able to assemble in the hope that they might in some way serve as pointers for you toward the treasure. The treasure in the field: Jesus Christ, his kingdom of love, the sharing of him and his kingdom with many others through the pastoral and teaching offices, this is the treasure in the field which is Saint Louis Abbey. How blessed are we to be called to the vocation of ever more and more possessing this treasure. As I have said not infrequently before, so I say again: when the Church is considered from the eschatological point of view, that is, as the communion of the people of God with the Lord Jesus Christ among whom the kingdom, in a veiled way, is already realized, and whose whole purpose is to head toward the Day, that Day, when the kingdom in all its glory will be fully revealed in its everlasting fullness -- when the Church is considered from this eschatological perspective, then ours is the most blessed of vocations in the Church, for it is the whole vocation of monks to realize, by the grace of God, as fully as may be in this age the kingdom among themselves, to make it manifest, visible, as fully as possible, and to share it with others. So the old monastic fathers called the life of monks the life of the angels, so they spoke of the paradise which is the cloister. This blessedness, I say, this blessedness is the calling of monks, and their purpose and service within the church of Christ. How fitting to meditate on these things, on this treasure, on this day of Our Lady's Assumption, when she shows us what all human beings are destined for and what we monks are called, by her intercession and the grace of her Son, to anticipate -- the radiant glory of God



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shining from the human being, and the human community, glorified in soul and body. “Keep our hearts set on heaven,” we prayed this morning in the Mass for her Assumption. May she be our patron and mother, as indeed she is, as we poor earthen vessels, filled with the unspeakable treasure, seek to realize her prayer for us and her Son’s vocation to us.