



## SAINT LOUIS ABBEY



### Fr. Gerard On His Call

*"My vow of obedience has afforded me the opportunity to attempt tasks I would never have chosen otherwise."*

***Not with trumpet piercing  
Not with heavens op'ning  
Nor through a heart full-bursting  
Do you call me  
But with wordless whisper  
As silent as love  
And as subtle as mystery.***

The more I reflect on how I became a monk at Saint Louis Abbey the more befuddled I become. As a boy I was crazy about sports. My childhood, outside the classroom, was for the most part spent at pick-up games in the neighborhood. Soccer, football, baseball, basketball and street hockey were the sports which occupied most of my time. Sports were a pretext for camaraderie. Individual sports did not attract me. To this day my best friends, outside the monastery, are my buddies whom I have known since kindergarten, largely through sports. The value I place on enduring friendships would later play a part in my decision to enter a religious community marked by its vow of stability.

Toward the end of high school, during the late 1960's, I became vaguely agnostic. Religion seemed the place for the hypocritical and the superstitious. I stealthily quit going to Mass on Sundays. I was interested in social issues, particularly racial justice and the Vietnam war. I was very liberal with regard to social and moral issues. My high school was located in a black ghetto, and, when not occupied with thoughts about my survival while waiting for and riding on public buses, I spent a great deal of time considering the social inequities in America. I was the features editor on my high school paper and enjoyed creative writing and thought I would enjoy becoming a famous writer.

After several years of college and after receiving an associate's degree in library services and while working for the United Farm Workers Union with a priest who had been my Latin teacher in high school, I thought, "Now here is a Catholic whose religious beliefs are fundamental to the good life that he lives." I returned to the Church, and when the idea of a religious vocation came to my mind a few years later I tried to dismiss it as an unrealistic escape. However, I had a yearning for a life of prayer. Working in the "real world" I felt my priorities were not in accord with my values and needs. I came to think that monastic life, by giving priority to prayer, was more in accord with my values. I wanted a contemplative life but not one markedly separated from the world.

I scheduled a visit to Saint Louis Abbey. I knew there were Benedictine monks at



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the Abbey and I wanted to see what a Benedictine monastery was like. During my visit I was first struck by the prayer life. It was obvious that theirs was a life of prayer. I found the individual monks unpretentious and dedicated. The "Englishness" of the senior monks intrigued me. Eventually I decided to join the community.

My vow of obedience has afforded me the opportunity to attempt tasks I would never have chosen otherwise. I do a bit of coaching and am a poor disciplinarian. The boys run all over me. I work with the audio-visual equipment in our library, in spite of the fact that I am singularly impractical and un-mechanical. I am ever-conscious that someone else, almost anyone else, could perform my jobs much more efficiently. My obedience has occasioned me plenty of opportunities for humility and also has allowed me to gain experience I would not have gained were it not for obedience.

Celibacy has not been easy for me. I realized that only with God's grace can I be transformed from a selfish man to a man for others. I also have become cogently aware that my deepest longings can be fulfilled by no creature but only by my Creator.

I have found that the life here has given me opportunity to strive against my selfishness and weakness toward a life of greater faith and charity. I have been made more aware of my imperfection and my absolute dependence on God's grace. I have come to treasure the regular prayer life and the example and support of the good men who are here. I consider it a privilege to live this life of prayer in this monastic family of pilgrims intent on wending God-ward and beckoning others to do the same.

In 1996, the abbot put my name forward and I was appointed Pastor of St. Anselm's Parish by Archbishop Rigali. I no longer work in the Priory school but I have a host of new involvements and responsibilities. Once again, obedience has landed me a job that I would never have chosen. It is exhilarating and demanding but the Lord helps me through each day.

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