



## SAINT LOUIS ABBEY



### Assumption

By Augustine Wetta, O.S.B.

Right around this time, about eight years ago, I had my first 'vocation crisis.' That was about three days after I arrived at the monastery, and I remember running to one of the senpectae (the 'wise hearts' as Saint Benedict calls the elders of the monastery), and explaining to him how frightened I was that I might have made the wrong decision. In reflection, it seems almost foolish. How could a year of prayer possibly be the wrong thing to do? And yet, I had managed to convince myself, somehow, that the next twelve months would be filled with tragically missed opportunities. The old monk put his hand on my shoulder and said, 'Jason, God will not be outdone in generosity. Abandon yourself to Him, and He will see that your decision works out in the end.'

Today, in contrast, we celebrate the last great event in a life given over in perfect trust and obedience to God. It is, in my opinion, the most startling aspect of Our Lady's personality that she is so utterly abandoned to Divine Providence. When she said that earth-shattering 'yes' to God's angel, she couldn't possibly have known how gloriously her own story would end. In fact, as Abbot Confroy pointed out to the monks yesterday, she had every reason to believe that her life would come to a quick and tragic end. Yet she responded to God's invitation with heroic obedience. Dom Paul Delatte, in his great commentary on the Rule of Saint Benedict, calls this 'supernatural docility.' 'This same docility,' he writes, 'is what gives our monastic life its authentic character.'

Now 'docile' is not an adjective I would easily, enthusiastically, or even very accurately ascribe to myself. To the modern ear, it sounds anything but heroic. Yet, in the presence of God's will, what are the alternatives? St. Bernard, in his famous sermon on the Annunciation, reflects, in the most vivid terms, on that moment between Gabriel's message and Our Lady's answer—when the whole Cosmos held its breath, all the angels stopped what they were doing, and all the demons cringed in anticipation of Mary's 'Yes.'

'Let it be done to me as you have said' is really much more than a 'yes' because it submits to something unknown. So often, we find ourselves saying: 'If I only knew God's will, I'd do it.' Well, sure. Who wouldn't? The point is to accept God's will WITHOUT knowing it. To sign our lives onto a blank check. That is what is meant by docility.

'Let it be done to me as you have said.' One would think that, in light of a decision of such magnitude, Mary might have stopped to consider all the options, insisted on making an informed decision, weighed at length the consequences of her response... But unlike most of us, she simply gave herself over: 'I am the



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handmaid of the Lord.' Her response doesn't expect a reward. Couldn't possibly have foreseen it. Yet we read in the book of Revelation that she is clothed in the sun, crowned with stars. God literally gives her the moon. He will not be outdone in generosity. It's worth keeping this in mind as we monks prepare to renew our vows tomorrow. 'Forget your own people and your father's house! The king desires your beauty. The queen stands at his right hand arrayed in gold.'

At the end of one of her stories, Isak Dinesen wrote:

'Mercy and truth have met together. Righteousness and bliss shall kiss one another. Man, my friends, is frail and foolish. We have all of us been told that grace is to be found in the universe. But in our human foolishness and short-sightedness we imagine divine grace to be finite. For this reason we tremble... We tremble before making our choice in life, and after having made it again tremble in fear of having chosen wrong. But the moment comes when our eyes are opened, and we see and realize that grace is infinite. Grace, my friends, demands nothing from us but that we shall await it with confidence and acknowledge it in gratitude. Grace, brothers, makes no conditions and singles out none of us in particular; grace takes us all to its bosom and proclaims general amnesty. See! that which we have chosen is given us, and that which we have refused is, also and at the same time, granted us. Ay, that which we have rejected is poured upon us abundantly. For mercy and truth have met together, and righteousness and bliss have kissed one another!'

--Isak Dinesen, "Babette's Feast"