



SAINT LOUIS ABBEY



Jesus Christ the Same, Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow: Saint Louis Abbey the First Fifty Years

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[We start instinctively and rightly with Father Abbot, who lays out the principles by which the monks of our abbey have tried to be guided from the beginning. He adds some hints also for laity and points to the harmony that should exist and, as one of God's great blessings to us, has existed between the monks and the Abbey Family. Ed.]

*The kingdom of heaven is like treasure
hidden in a field, which a man found and
covered up; then in his joy he goes and
sells all that he has and buys that field.*

(Mt 13.44)

We monks of Saint Louis Abbey, like all monks, like all men and women who by the Lord's grace have discovered the Lord's vocation to them, know that we have found a treasure. Our monastic life is for us 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, which is our life here, and the lives of the thousands of people who have surrounded us over the past fifty years. When we discovered this treasure, we hid it, for, when we discovered it, we were so overwhelmed by blessedness that we could not speak, we could not say anything to anyone about what we had found. But, in our joy over this treasure, we went and sold all that we had—everything, all that we had, all that we were, a total renunciation—for we knew that only so should 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 went and bought the field, or rather, began to buy it. For this buying of the field is the long, hard work of our life, the long, hard work of a lifetime, initiated and operated 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.

What is this treasure we have found? Although it must in this life, as the Lord conveys in his parable, 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 as monks, is indeed the goal and purpose, although in differing forms according to their various vocations, of all Christians, of all men and women, for all men and women are called by God and redeemed by Jesus Christ. Trusting in the help of the Lord, I shall try, then, to say something about this treasure.

The treasure, the Lord says, is the kingdom of God. Entering the kingdom is, according to the Prologue of the Rule of Saint Benedict, the ultimate end or goal of the monk's life, as it is of every man's and woman's life. In that kingdom, Saint Benedict



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says, we shall see—see, *videre*, no longer *seek*, but *see*—we shall see “him who called us into his kingdom” (RB Prol 21), 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. (Prol 3) 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 the New Testament, a teaching emphasized in the monastic tradition, 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, we should ever have before our eyes, in the deepest way, this, he, is all we should have before our eyes. 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 Holy One.” (Is 40.25) 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 behind the veil of creatures. For us monks, he is present to us in the abbot, who is believed to hold the place of Christ (RB 2.2), present to us in the other brother, for says Saint Benedict, we are all one in Christ (2.20), present in the sick, present in children, present in the poor, present in every guest (the four groups of people for whom the cellarer, the monastic officer in charge of temporalities, is to have particular care [31.9]), 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 (53.2,15)—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, the prayerful reading of Scripture, and the constant repetition of phrases from it known by heart—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 (9.8)—and in his liturgy and sacraments celebrated according to the discipline of the Church—*de facto*, and sometimes explicitly in the liturgical code of the Rule (chapters 8-20), 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.” (Prol 12, 13) So Saint Benedict hastens to set up a “school for the Lord’s service” (Prol 45): 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. “Therefore,” Saint Benedict says, “we intend to establish a school



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for the Lord's service. In drawing up its regulations, we hope to set down nothing harsh, nothing burdensome. The good of all concerned, however, may prompt us to a little strictness in order to amend faults and to safeguard love. Do not be daunted immediately by fear and run away from the road that leads to salvation. It is bound to be narrow at the outset. But as we progress in this way of life and in faith, we shall run on the path of God's commandments, our hearts overflowing with the inexpressible delight of love. Never swerving from his instructions, then, but faithfully observing his teaching in the monastery until death, we shall through patience share in the sufferings of Christ that we may deserve also to share in his kingdom." (Prol 45-50)

Now, to serve the Lord, Saint Benedict has just said, we must keep his commandments. And what are his commandments? The Lord 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 mind," and "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." (Mt 22.35-40) So now we come to that which also we must keep ever before our eyes: 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 Abbot John Cassian, for example, whose way of putting the teaching I have just expressed in the preceding sentence (*Cassian, Conference 1*); 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 is incomparably grand, forceful and splendid (*Reg., i,ii*); by Saint Benedict, who places the great double commandment at the very beginning of the instruments of good works (RB 4.1), 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 (7.67-70), and 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: "This, then, is the good zeal which monks must foster with fervent love: They should each try to be the first to show respect to the other (Rom 12:10), supporting with the greatest patience one another's weaknesses of body or behavior, and earnestly competing in obedience to one another. No one is to pursue what he judges better for himself, but instead, what he judges better for someone else. To their fellow monks they show the pure love of brothers, to God, loving fear; to their abbot, unfeigned and humble love. Let them prefer nothing whatever to Christ, and may he bring us all together to everlasting life." (RB 72.3-12)

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 commandments which, when followed, lead to the goal; as Priest, he mediated to human



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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 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. (71.4) 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'. (63.12) 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 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,



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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 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.” (Rom 1.20) 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 thoroughgoing 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 further development, a further 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 whose lives are led outside the monastery.

In the monastery as Benedict explicitly envisaged it—and so in every Benedictine monastery—this sharing of the treasure with those who live outside the monastery occurs through the guesthouse. That this is so is shown by a review of the prescriptions Benedict gives for the reception of guests. As soon as a guest is announced, the abbot and brothers are to meet him “with all the service of love” (RB 53.3)—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 (53.4)—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,



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are to “sit with” the guest (53,8): a beautiful expression which 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” (53.9)—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.” (53.14)

This is already much, yet in our tradition of Benedictine monasticism, the English Benedictine tradition, 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 who live outside the monastery, of priestcraft and schoolcraft, of serving in parishes and dioceses, of administering and teaching in schools. This English form of Benedictine monasticism was 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, begun in 597 A.D., to the then unevangelized English. In this English tradition of Benedictine monasticism 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. Through them, and through the ever-expanding Abbey Family which has grown up around them and around the Abbey, we have the great joy of sharing very widely the treasure of Jesus Christ and his kingdom with many young people, with many men and women, whose walks in life are different from our own, but who like us are called to serve the one Lord and to enter his kingdom of love.

As is to be expected, the way of sharing Christ and his kingdom in School and Parish is marked by features of the monks’ own way of serving the Lord and entering his kingdom. Two features are especially noteworthy. First, in both School and Parish there is an emphasis on the contemplation of Jesus Christ and of the realities of the world to come, in the light of which the meaning and purpose of created realities is revealed. Thus, Saint Louis Priory School is, as its Mission Statement declares, dedicated to the “thorough formation of its students in the knowledge, understanding and practice of the Catholic faith, [as] the foundation for a life of service of God and neighbor.” In the School there is an emphasis on “the search for God, the interior openness to all that is transcendent in human experience and in the world, [a search which culminates] in the encounter... with the Person of Jesus Christ in the Word of Scripture, the Sacraments of the Church, the lived reality of Christian community, the wonder of creation, and the insights of the human mind.” In the Parish, too, one discerns this emphasis on the search for God and the transcendent, on the service of Lord and neighbor. As the Pastor of the Parish puts it: “In the Prologue of his Rule Saint Benedict calls the monastery *a school for the Lord’s service*. A parish can also be thought of as *a school for the Lord’s service*. Our parish of Saint Anselm is a school from which we never graduate. Each day we learn more and more about what it means to serve our Lord and to serve God in one another.



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This lesson takes a lifetime to learn and to practice. Our teacher in this school is Jesus Christ our Lord. He teaches us, he encourages us, and he fortifies us through his sacraments in which we receive his own life and grace. The greatest of these sacraments is the Eucharist in which we receive Jesus' own body and blood which alone can give us the strength to persevere as students in *the school for the Lord's service* learning Christ's lesson of loving service and trying our best to put that lesson of loving service into practice with the support of our fellow parishioners". (*Saint Anselm Parish: Guide Book and Directory*, April 2004, p. 1)

Then, secondly, that learnedness, understood as a way of glorifying God, which characterizes Benedictine monastic life, and not least English Benedictine life, called as it was to bring to the English people both Christ and a Christian culture, a Christian civilization, which could begin to see and live the treasures of knowledge and wisdom and love within him—that learnedness so understood is present, in different forms, also in School and Parish. In the School it takes the form of exceptionally high academic standards, and exceptionally high academic achievement on the part of the School's students, who are thus prepared to proceed on to distinguished colleges and universities, and to careers for which an education such as theirs prepares them, but careers which—and this is the lesson on which the School most insists—careers which are to be ways of serving God and neighbor. Any who know the alumni body of the School, now numbering over 1870, have much evidence that the lesson has been well learned. In the Parish many men and women have themselves received an education such as the School imparts, are blessed with wisdom and expertise in the management of temporal realities and the affairs of the world, and so are members of what the present Holy Father calls “the leading sectors” of society, the same sectors members of which the School is preparing its young people to become, and so these men and women have correspondingly great responsibilities to that society, especially to its weakest and poorest members. And again, any who know the parishioners have much evidence that these responsibilities are being well met.

Now we come to a final dimension of the treasure in the field of Saint Louis Abbey. It is this: this sharing of Jesus Christ and his kingdom with those outside the monastery, with lay men and women, is of course a *mutual* sharing; the monks have the joy not only of giving the treasure, but also of *receiving* it, receiving it through the wisdom and goodness of the dedicated Christian lay people who are their friends, their brothers and sisters, in the Abbey Family. At first sight the mutuality of this sharing can be surprising, because at first sight the monastic and the lay vocations seem so different. Certainly, every Christian, and so every layperson and every monk, is called to holiness, to the love and service of the Lord and to the love and service of neighbor, to Jesus Christ and to his kingdom of love.

This call is a call to turn away from sin and to turn to the Lord and to obedience to his commands out of love for him, that is, out of charity. This whole turning from sin and to the Lord and to obedience to him in love is conversion, literally, ‘a turning round’. But the monk is called to pursue the love of God and neighbor along one way, and therefore by using a particular set of means appropriate to this way, while the layperson is called to pursue the love of God and neighbor along another way, and so by using a different set of means. How then is there a great sharing between them?



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The monastic way of pursuing the love of God and neighbor is the way of *renunciation*, of the giving up not only of sin, but of anything that could lead to sin or be a temptation to sin, and so the giving up of things good, and even very good, in themselves, but in which a human being can become too engrossed, and so fall into imperfection or even sin. So the three monastic vows arise as principal means for pursuing this way of renunciation, for the object of each of these vows involves the renunciation of some central human good or goods. The good of ownership of material things, and the very great good of marriage and the family, are renounced by the vow of *conversatio morum*, “living the monastic way of life”, while the most fundamental of all human goods, the free exercise of one’s own will, is renounced by the vow of obedience (living by the will of another) and the vow of stability (persevering *for life* in this obedience, and in the whole monastic way of life). Of course, these renunciations would make no sense, and would be not only useless but harmful as means to Christian holiness, unless they were followed by, and were for the sake of, a positive turning to God and to the things of God, to obedience to his commands and to charity. And so the object of each of the vows includes as well forms of this positive turning to God. The vow of *conversatio morum* includes the undertaking of the fundamental practices of monastic prayer: liturgical prayer in common, especially the Divine Office and the Eucharist, and the private prayer of *lectio, meditatio* and that “pure” or contemplative prayer which is meant to arise from liturgical prayer, *lectio* and *meditatio*. It also includes the turning toward neighbor in God in the form of serving one’s brother and one’s neighbor through community living and monastic hospitality and work. The vow of obedience includes the undertaking of obedience to the abbot, whose will, even when in a particular instance it flows from a judgment which is less than fully prudent, is believed by faith to make as it were sacramentally present the will of God for the monk; it also includes obedience to all the brethren in the community. The vow of stability adds to these ways of turning to God the good of lifelong self-dedication to God through them. This whole way of renunciation, followed by and for the sake of the positive turning to God, is the monastic way, and insofar as the monk, by the grace of God, is brought to the goal of this way, he attains love, holiness.

The lay way of pursuing the love of God and neighbor is, on the other hand, the way of the welcoming and use of the good things of this world for the sake of conforming them to the will of God and so giving glory to God. Thus the good of ownership of material things is welcomed with thanksgiving and these things are used for the supplying of the needs of oneself and of those for whom one is responsible; for the rest, they are shared with others so as to promote the good of others and of society. The very great good of marriage and the family is welcomed with thanksgiving and every effort is made to live the marital relationship so that its deepest nature as a sacramental image of the union of Christ and his church shines forth, and so that the children are brought up to follow the ways of the Lord and so to give him glory. The most fundamental human good, the free exercise of one’s will, is welcomed with thanksgiving and is used in accordance with God’s law, in service of the needs of others for whom one is responsible and in service of one’s own needs and legitimate desires and aspirations, and, insofar as one can discern it, in accordance with God’s special will for oneself. In marriage there is a lifelong dedication of oneself to another in accordance with the marriage covenant, and



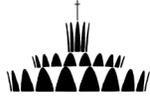
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to the lay life which necessarily accompanies that covenant. And all of this, as we have said, is for the sake of glorifying God, and so of conforming the goods of this world, and one's own actions and thoughts and being, to his commands, out of love—and insofar as, by the grace of God, the lay person is brought to this, he or she attains love, holiness.

At first sight, then, the monastic way and the lay way to love of God and neighbor, to holiness, to Jesus Christ and his kingdom, are diametrically opposite: the one is the way of renunciation of the good things of this world, the other is the way of the welcoming and use of the good things of this world. How then can there be a mutual sharing of Jesus Christ and his kingdom, and of the way to the Lord and his kingdom, between them? The answer emerges when we notice two important points: Firstly, the positive, second phase of the twofold movement of Christian conversion is the same in both the monastic and lay vocations: it is a turning toward God, and the things of God. Therefore, we might well expect that some of the fundamental practices by which, through the grace of God, this turning to God is attained are common, though perhaps in somewhat different forms, to the lay and monastic lives, e.g., the practices of liturgical prayer, of *lectio, meditatio*, of “pure” prayer, of the undertaking of works of service and hospitality to others, and so on. And secondly, the first phase of the movement of conversion, which seems so different as between the lay and monastic life, being on the one hand the welcoming and use of the goods of this world, and on the other hand the renunciation of these goods, turns out after all to have a fundamentally similar or analogous structure in each way of life. For the welcoming and use of temporal goods on the part of the lay person *must be accompanied by an inner spiritual renunciation*, a renunciation of the *grasping* after these goods, of the seeking and using of them selfishly, of the seeking and using of them as if one's ultimate good lay in them: so the Lord gives as a beatitude for all: “Blessed are the poor *in spirit*, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” (Mt 5.3) And, on the other hand, the monk's renunciation of these goods *must be accompanied by a profound respect for and honoring of* these goods, as beautiful creations of God, created in order to give him glory. The spiritual practices associated with the first phase of conversion may turn out, then, though again in different forms, to be applicable to both ways of Christian life, e.g., the practices which promote the rooting out of vices, the growth of virtues, the making way for love, for Jesus Christ and his kingdom.

It turns out, then, that there can be—and it has been the blessed experience of this place over fifty years that there is—a great sharing of Jesus Christ and his kingdom between monks and lay men and women, each witnessing to the other, each enriching the life of the other. For if the monk's life, because it is so stripped of everything else, reveals the fundamental nature of the love of God and neighbor, and points toward the destiny of beatitude towards which all human beings are directed, the lay person's life, because it is concerned with the wise and good ordering of the things of this world, reveals the love of God and neighbor as incarnate in this world, and points toward that image of our final destiny, a civilization of love and a communion of love, which human beings are called to seek in this life. So monk and lay person each give a blessing to the other, so it is that, as the Rule of Benedict says, the lay person comes to the monastery, and says, “O God, I have received your mercy in the midst of your temple,” (RB 53.14) and the monk sees the



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lay person, and adores Christ in him or her, and says, “Give me your blessing, please.” (66.3)

Such, then, are the poor words with which I have tried to intimate the treasure we have found in this field which is Saint Louis Abbey, the treasure we have all shared, monks and lay people, over these fifty years. For all this, we give profound thanks to God: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.” (Eph 1.3)

And what of the coming years, the next decades, the next fifty years, the next one hundred years? On occasions such as a Golden Jubilee, one is inclined to speculate, yet one knows that one’s personal speculations are very likely of little or no value. We Catholics, however, do have some guidance in the recent Magisterium of the Church as to what we should be concerned with respect to the future. I note only this: the Second Vatican Council, in its *The Church in the Modern World*, drew attention to five more urgent challenges for our day: the support of marriage and the family; the ongoing development of a culture open, rather than closed, to God and the natural law, and to revelation; the rectification of the grave economic and social inequalities in our world; the right ordering of the political community; the establishment of a just and secure world peace and of a community of nations. If one reviews the great encyclicals and other writings of the present Pope, one finds, in addition to treatment of these challenges, emphasis on the following matters, which were also themes of the Second Vatican Council: respect for human life; the dignity of the lay, religious and priestly vocations; the dignity and vocation of women; the relationship of faith and reason and the objectivity of moral values; ecumenism and inter-religious dialogue; Christian mission; Mary, the Mother of the Redeemer; the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of Life; Christ the Redeemer of Man; God the Father of mercies.

Not because of the holiness and wisdom of the monks, but because of the nature of the life to which they are called by God to be faithful, one finds in a monastery teaching, as it were, on all these great issues of our time. There human life is an absolute value, from the life of the unborn, for whom prayers are offered day after day, to the life of the elderly monk who stays with his brethren in the monastery until the day he dies. There are recognized both the distinction of the vocations of man and woman, of lay person, religious and priest, and the oneness of all of them in Christ, for, Saint Benedict insists, following the Apostle, “we are all one in Christ”. There is recognized the supreme gift, the supreme good, of a dedication, by the power of grace, of oneself for one’s whole life to God and to love, the common element of the monastic life and of Christian marriage. There is recognized the intrinsic order of human culture, and so of education, to the glory of God, there is recognized the objectivity of truth, of good and bad, right and wrong. There is recognized the equal dignity of every man and woman, there any distinction among persons in the monastery is rejected, there each is given a work he can do, there all try to earn their living and have something left to give to the poor, there no one may grasp anything to himself, there distribution is made to each according to his need, there the fundamental human needs of all are met. There all must be consulted, and so all participate in decision-making, yet the decision itself is reserved to the appropriate authority, and when it is made it must be obeyed. There all violence is rejected, there suffering is not to be inflicted on others, but accepted into oneself, there ‘Peace’ is the



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motto and symbol, but ‘Peace’ surrounded by a crown of thorns. There all men and women are welcomed, there men and women of different Christian churches, there men and women of different religious traditions, come together and search together, there strangers are made into friends, and as they become friends, they more and more hear the one Lord calling them. There, in the life of these ordinary men, these un-heroic men heroic only in God-given perseverance to the end, there is found the Eucharist, there is the Lord, there the Holy Spirit breathes, there the Father of mercies is known, for Saint Benedict, at the conclusion of his long catalogue of good works which lead to God, has this: “And finally, never despair of God’s mercy.” (RB 4.74)

Many would hold that the human race is presently going through an enormous transition of culture and civilization, like the transition in the West from ancient to medieval civilization, and from medieval to modern, yet greater than these, for it is a transition which seems to be involving all the cultures of the world. Monks have no solution to the great challenges of our day; they have no special insights as to how the fundamental human and Christian values can best be realized in our present culture and society, and in the new world order and culture and civilization which may be emerging. Yet a review of history shows that monasteries have been by no means the least useful institutions in times of rapid and profound cultural change. Often indeed they have been centers where fundamental human and Christian values have been preserved while all outside is in great flux and confusion, places where men and women can come for contemplation and peace and refreshment, places to which they can bring their children to be educated and formed with some measure of sanity and perspective. And they have been places where men and women who were not monks but who had wisdom in the ordering of the things of this world have been inspired to see how the fundamental values present as it were embryonically in the monastery could be incarnated in new cultural forms and institutions, in the fundamentals of a new civilization which the monks, without ever intending it or realizing it, were in some way giving birth to.

But now I, after all, am speculating. We do not know what the work of the Lord in the world is, except that he is drawing all things to himself; we do not know what the work of the Spirit in the world is, except that he ever gives life and makes all things new; we do not know what the work of the Father is, except that all his ways are mercy and truth. It is given to us to see only one step at a time—in the words of the great hymn: “Lead, kindly Light.” At each step we see clearly this, that we are called ever to be faithful to the Lord and to his vocation to us, to go on always—as she who is the principal patron of our monastery, Blessed Mary the Mother of Grace, has instructed us—to go on always “doing what he tells us.” (Jn 2.5) We monks of Saint Louis Abbey, then, in thanksgiving and joy for the fifty years of life with the Lord with which he has blessed us, rededicate ourselves to him and to his service, and to walking together with all of you along the way which will bring us together to see him in his kingdom.