



ABBAYE SAINT-JOSEPH DE CLAIRVAL
21150 Flavigny-sur-Ozerain

Chronicle for the Year 2020

DEAR FRIENDS OF SAINT JOSEPH ABBEY,

At the end of this troubled year that was marked, in particular, by the sanitary crisis, the monks of Saint Joseph's Abbey would like to offer you a message of hope. God tests his friends, but He does not abandon them, as the Holy Bible and 2000 years of Church History have taught us.

Our Abbey rejoices in sharing with you the graces it has received in the course of the year which is now drawing to its close.

First of all, as many of you already know, we have a new Father Abbot! Our Father Prior and Administrator Dom Barthélemy Marie announced on April 20th that he did not wish to carry on with this mission; Mgr Minnerath, ecclesiastical superior of the Abbey, therefore decided to organize the election of an Abbot. On May 8th, our Community elected Dom Jean-Bernard Marie Bories Abbot of Saint-Joseph de Clairval. He was "installed" by our Archbishop who conferred the pectoral cross on him; the newly chosen Abbot took up his duties the same day. Due to the sanitary crisis, the abbatial blessing during which the Abbot receives the insignia (the crozier, the mitre and the pastoral ring), was postponed until the beginning of the new school year. It took place on September 6th in the Cathedral of Saint-Bénigne in Dijon. Until the French Revolution Saint-Bénigne was a renowned Benedictine abbey-church; it offered a larger setting than our conventual church for this ceremony, which was attended by three bishops and a large number of abbots, abbesses, prioresses,



Dom Jean-Bernard Marie after receiving abbatial blessing at Dijon

representatives of various monasteries, religious sisters, diocesan priests, etc., not to mention a large number of lay faithful. The whole community of Flavigny travelled there by coach, including our sick Fathers. The assembly was particularly moved by the act of obedience of all the monks who, one by one, placed their hands in those of the Father

Abbot. In his homily, Bishop Minnerath stressed the Father Abbot's character of service, echoing the words of Jesus Christ : "I have come to serve and to give my life as a ransom for many."

We commend our new Abbot to your prayers, as well as the monks who assist him in the "service of authority," for the good of all. "*Honor, onus,*" according to the Proverb : an honour is a burden !

Now we would like to share with you some of the highlights of this year, always bearing in mind the last words of St. Therese of the Child Jesus : "All is grace."

Having returned on February 25th from the Priory of Notre-Dame de l'Écoute, in Benin, our Father Abbot Emeritus Dom Antoine Marie a few days later showed us some photographs and short films presenting this youthful Benedictine monastery, founded about ten years ago by the Abbey of Jouques in the diocese of Natitingou. A dozen or so nuns established Benedictine life at the heart of this nascent African Christian community. It was Father Antoine's joy to take on the role of chaplain to them for eight months. His role soon expanded to include catechesis and the preaching of retreats. He underlined the vitality of this Church, which each year counts many adult baptisms, as well as the spiritual thirst of the faithful. Material poverty, the lack of educational infrastructure (Catholic teaching is highly appreciated but schooling is expensive), and the proximity of regions affected by radical Islam are challenges that the Church is trying to meet, with the assistance of the Holy Spirit.



Work in the vegetable garden

The sanitary crisis caused by the Covid 19 coronavirus and the ensuing lockdown were lived through peaceably by the Community. Thanks to its large park and its remoteness from urban centres, our monastery offered a pleasant refuge and our fate was enviable compared to that of confined city-dwellers. However, we were obliged to suspend retreats, and attendance at religious services – including during Holy Week – was limited

to a few faithful from Flavigny. Each of the Abbey Fathers offered daily Mass for all those deprived of the sacraments ; every evening, the Community sang prayers "in times of epidemics." It was with great joy that we were able once more to offer hospitality at our guesthouse in June, especially for the Ignatian retreats.

Although none of the monks of our abbey were affected by the pandemic, we learned of the illness and death of several religious who were also our friends, in particular Father Bernard Ducruet, former abbot of Saint-Benoît sur Loire, who was carried away at the beginning of April by the virus at the age of 92. In the 1990's, Dom Bernard was the apostolic visitor and religious assistant of our Father Abbot. Another monk with a longstanding bond with the community, Father Irénée Henriot, died on February 18th, aged 98 ; he was our extraordinary confessor for many years and offered us spiritual talks at each of his visits. Father Hervé de Broc, a monk of Solesmes

and former religious assistant of our abbey, and Father Christian Laffargue, who had been preaching Spiritual Exercises for ladies in collaboration with us since 2006, also entered into Eternity during the month of April.

On April 5th, Abbot Dom Antoine celebrated the Golden Jubilee of his monastic profession at Jouques, where he was serving as chaplain to the nuns during lockdown.



*Father Abbot Emeritus Dom Antoine Marie
celebrating his Golden Jubilee of Monastic Profession*

We had to wait until the 6th of July to offer our congratulations to our Father Abbot Emeritus, when he returned to Flavigny.

On April 17th, our Brother Maximilian (who was appointed Master of Novices on May 22nd) gave us a lecture on Saint Regina, the holy martyr of Alesia, whose relics are in the possession of Flavigny since the 9th century. He particularly drew attention

to the archaeological discoveries of the 20th century, which have established beyond all doubt the antiquity of the veneration of the Saint Regina, dating back to the 4th century.

During the month of May, the community gathered every day in church to pray the rosary; this devotion is usually performed in private. But the gravity of the hour meant that more had to be done to beseech the protection of Our Lady over France and the world.

Every year, parents of our monks depart from this life. Mr Besson, father of our Father François de Sales, died on June 12th. And on September 8th, God called to her eternal rest Mrs Vernet, mother of our Fathers Emmanuel, Dominique and Ignace.

We rejoiced in welcoming new Brothers into the community through the monastic profession. On June 20th, our Brother Damien Marie made his first monastic vows, committing himself for three years with the promise of “stability, obedience and conversion of life.” On October 10th, our Brother Samuel Marie made a similar commitment. And on November 21th, our Brother Robert Marie made a lifelong commitment by taking perpetual vows.

Another milestone in this grace-filled year was the priestly ordination of our brothers Colomban, Maximilien and Basile. This ceremony took place on October 17th in the collegiate church of Notre-Dame of Semur-en-Auxois, a beautiful medieval building that is much more vast than our conventual church, allowing us to welcome more guests. In his homily, Bishop Minnerath emphasised that one does not become a priest for oneself, but for others. The monastic priesthood is exercised mainly in the celebration of Holy Mass, through which the Sacrifice of Jesus Christ giving his life on Calvary for the salvation of the world is made present. The monk priest may also be called to participate in various ministries, in particular the preaching of retreats and



Priesthood ordination of three monks

the spiritual accompaniment of guests. The new priests celebrated their first solemn Mass in the presence of the Community on the three Sundays following their ordination.

The Abbey has been assisting the Benedictine nuns of St Loup-sur-Aujon in Haute-Marne for several years. Monks from Flavigny regularly go there to hear confessions and address a spiritual talk to these nuns from many different countries.

The nuns have also come on pilgrimage to Flavigny, and indeed came to Dijon for the abbatial blessing of Dom Jean-Bernard. We recommend these Sisters who are currently experiencing financial difficulties to your charity and goodwill (Tyburn – Monastère du Cœur Eucharistique de Jésus, 52210 St-Loup-sur-Aujon).

But let us return to Flavigny. The repair and maintenance of the monastic buildings as well as the upkeep of the park is an ongoing, long-term effort. This autumn, work was carried out to insulate the church and improve the lighting, which obliged the community to celebrate certain offices in the chapter so as to leave the workmen free to do their jobs. Outside, the vegetable garden was considerably enlarged and our livestock has been enriched with 25 laying hens.

In October, our Fathers Dominique and Ignace returned to Flavigny from the Priory of Saint Georges de Saint-Martin des Bois (diocese of Blois); the plans to set up a new community there were abandoned after careful consideration.

Our Community was once again forced into lockdown on All Saints' Day, like everyone else; it continues to pray for the Catholics who are suffering from the restrictions placed on freedom of worship due to the sanitary crisis. Let us ask God, through the intercession of Our Lady and St. Joseph, to deliver the world from the scourge of the coronavirus, but also the even more dangerous "moral viruses" that threaten souls called to spiritual health : the life of grace given by Jesus Christ, the Divine Physician.

To conclude this Chronicle, here is a message from our Father Abbot :

In the name of all the monks of the abbey, I would like to assure you of our gratitude for your spiritual support through your prayers, but also for your material support, by means of your donations. Divine Providence works through you to provide for our needs, and we ask it in return for the graces you need to persevere in the love and service of God. May the Heart of Jesus be a refuge for you, through the intercession of the Immaculate Hearts of Mary and St. Joseph! I wish you a blessed Christmas, and may the year of grace of 2021 bring you much happiness.

✠ Dom Jean-Bernard Marie, Abbot

P.S. : If you are able to help us to continue our mission through your material support, please be assured of our deepest gratitude. Donations assigned to the work of the Abbey's "Monthly Letter" are eligible for a tax receipt.