



ABBAYE SAINT-JOSEPH DE CLAIRVAL
21150 Flavigny-sur-Ozerain
www.clairval.com

Chronicle for the Year 2021

DEAR FRIENDS OF SAINT JOSEPH ABBEY,

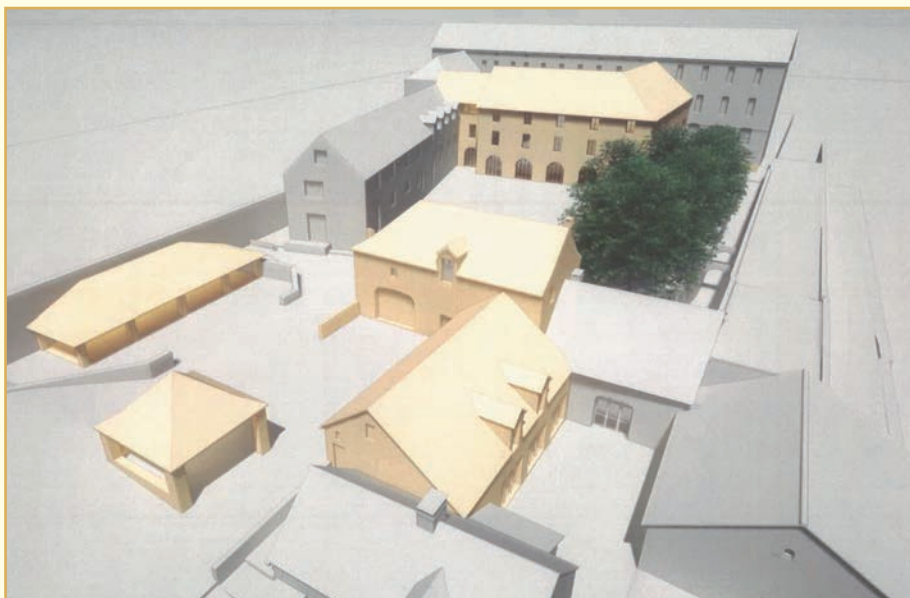
As 2021 draws to a close – a year during which several significant decisions for our community were made – we are privileged to share with you our expression of thanksgiving for the gifts God bestowed on us this past year.

“Every best gift, and every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no change, nor shadow of alteration” (Epistle of Saint James 1 :17). It is comforting in these troubled times to remember that God does not change, that He is all-powerful, infinitely good, and that He knows our every need. Certainly, we have faced trials, we have faced the cross, a heavy one for many; but let us not forget that Jesus is calling us : “Come to me, all you that labour, and are burdened, and I will refresh you.... For my yoke is sweet and my burden light.” (Matthew 11 :28-30). The yoke of the Lord is sweet, not because it is not heavy, but because Jesus carries it with us.

On four consecutive Fridays, January 15, 22, 29 and February 5, our abbey responded to the call of the bishops of France asking the Catholic faithful to pray and fast on those days in order to “break away from misguided bioethics”. When confronted with legislation that is increasingly contrary to natural law, and that increasingly negates the inviolability of the human person, the first recourse is prayer and fasting, to which Our Lord calls us (cf. Mark 9 :28).

On March 12th, the conventual chapter approved in principle the decision to work on a project for the construction of buildings within our monastic enclosure in Flavigny. The following important construction works appear to be necessary :

- to install an infirmary for the accommodation of sick brothers in the best possible conditions, and to allow to maintain our elderly brothers within our walls;
- to remedy the cramped conditions and inconvenience of the present kitchen and commissary;
- to allow for the installation or transfer of workshops that are currently inconveniently located (laundry, carpentry, garage, etc.).



The construction project in Flavigny (architect's drawing)

The works are scheduled to begin in the spring of 2022, with the construction of a building that will house the garage and various workshops; the geometric measurements have already been taken and our architect, Mr. Gigou, has drawn up plans that have been approved, after some modification, by the architect of the Bâtiments de France : since Flavigny is classified as one of the “Most Beautiful villages of France”, nothing can be done without the authorization of this agency.

And now for the main project : for a year, the Abbot and the Community had been considering whether it would be wise to found a new monastery. The growing number of monks, the relative crampedness of the buildings at Flavigny, calls coming from several dioceses, and the suggestion of the Abbots who had conducted our previous canonical visitation, seemed like so many signs that Providence wants our monastery to swarm.

With this perspective in mind, we looked for a propitious location, preferably a place long sanctified by monks, and situated in a region where religious communities are scarce. The abbey of Solignac in Limousin, founded in 638 by Saint Eloi and occupied by Benedictines until the French Revolution, was mentioned to us. Several of our monks have travelled there and the Abbot met with the Bishop of Limoges, Bishop Pierre-Antoine Bozo in the beginning of January. The diocese had purchased the abbey buildings in 2011; since 1945, these had housed various religious communities, in particular the Oblates of Mary Immaculate.

On January 23 and 24, Bishop Bozo, accompanied by his vicar general, the parish priest of Solignac, Father Venitus, as well as two lay faithful involved in diocesan initiatives, came to visit us. He expressed his desire that our community gain a foothold in Solignac “if God so wills”. The diocese of Limoges no longer has a male religious community; apart from the essential value of the prayer of a contemplative monastery, it would be a precious asset for this largely de-Christianized region to offer Catholics of the diocese a place to “recharge their batteries” in Solignac, which is not far from the greater Limoges agglomeration.

The main difficulty arises from the fact that the abbey church has become a parish church and is therefore the property of the municipality of Solignac. This raises a problem of coexistence. The Romanesque church is a classified “historical monument”, which places any important alterations under state supervision. The acquisition of land adjoining the abbey’s domain will also require careful consideration.



The abbey buildings of Solignac

At the initiative of our Father Abbot, several groups of monks visited the site and were cordially received by Bishop Bozo, Abbot Venitus, and Mr. Damien Deleersnijder, special adviser to the diocese of Limoges. Subsequently, following a period of intense reflection on the part of the conventual chapter of the Abbey of Saint Joseph, the plan to found a priory in Solignac was approved by a two-thirds majority on June 4th. This priory, founded during the “Year of Saint Joseph” decreed by Pope Francis, will be dedicated to Saint Joseph.

On June 11th, this decision was made public in a joint press release issued by the Bishop of Limoges and the Abbot of Flavigny. In the words of this communiqué, “on Sunday, November 28, 2021, the first Sunday of Advent that marks the opening of the new liturgical year, the monks will be officially established and will have the use of the abbey church for Holy Mass and the monastic offices (...) The abbey church will be reserved in priority for the monks and for their liturgical and devotional life.” However, the parish priest will be able to celebrate baptisms, marriages and funerals there for the residents of the parish.

The first monks arrived in Solignac in early August. The community comprises about ten monks. The abbey buildings are large enough to accommodate participants in Ignatian retreats, as practiced in Flavigny. They are not without character, but have not been used for several decades. Not surprisingly, they are in need of major renovations. We would like to set up a guesthouse as soon as possible to welcome visitors and retreatants.

We entrust this bold project to your prayers and thank in advance those benefactors who are able to help us with the first expenses. Donations should be sent to the Abbey of Saint Joseph, Flavigny.

Some more brief updates on our life in this year 2021 :

From January 17 to 22, Father Louis de Jésus, a Carmelite from Montpellier, preached the annual retreat to our community, following in the footsteps of the great mystics of Carmel.



Ex voto to Saint Joseph

On May 1st, an ex-voto was blessed in thanksgiving to St. Joseph for his protection during the Covid-19 crisis. Not a single monk was severely affected.

On June 25, our Father Thomas returned from the hospital in Montbard where he had spent a month following a sudden deterioration in his health. A more appropriate treatment for his Parkinson's syndrome and the help of a cane allowed him to resume community life with his customary enthusiasm.

In July, Fr. Guillaume Jedrzejczak, former abbot of the Mont des Cats, presented his doctoral thesis in theology on the interpretation of Holy Scripture in Cassian. Saint John Cassian, a monk from Marseille in the 5th century, is one of the main inspirers of the Rule of our Father Saint Benedict. According to Cassian, “Scripture grows along with the reader”, in the sense that as we make progress on the spiritual path, the veil that covers the sacred text, like the veil that covers our own hearts, is removed, allowing for knowledge “by experience”.



The relics of Saint Reine

The Maison Sainte-Reine has been restored in order to welcome our families and friends of the abbey. Being in fact made up of two separate dwellings connected by a passage, it was split to allow for the accommodation of an extra family in the new “Maison Sainte-Chantal”.

For more than a year, we were privileged to have the custody of the relics of Saint Reine and of the holy Apostles Simon and Jude; in the autumn, the municipality of Flavigny asked us to give them back for them to be stored in a cupboard in the parish church of Saint-Genest. The parish priest of Venarey wanted us to be the guardians of these relics, as the monks of Flavigny have been for a thousand years, so that they would be venerated...

but we also had to take municipal traditions into account : the relics have been kept in the parish church for two centuries. Finally, with the permission of our Archbishop, on September 7, the solemnity of Saint Reine, two fragments of the relics of the holy martyr of Alise were extracted from the main reliquary to be venerated in our abbey. The main reliquary as well as those of Saints Simon and Jude will remain in the church of Saint-Genest, until a better day.

On September 9, a new digital press was installed in our print workshop, replacing the old offset press, which we sold. The new machine is easier to use and will allow us to print in four colours.

One last piece of good news : our henhouse has been expanded to accommodate 62 laying hens. Two roosters and geese stand guard to keep out overly greedy birds of prey. This allows us to wake up to the crowing of the rooster : “*Gallus somnolentos increpat... negantes arguit*”, “the rooster threatens the sleepy, it accuses the lazy”, as the monks sing in the Ambrosian hymn at Lauds on Sunday.

While continually giving profound thanks for all the bounties that God has granted us, as well as to our friends and benefactors, and sure of the help of His divine Providence for the future, we entrust all your intentions to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, and to the paternal Heart of Saint Joseph.

✠ Dom Jean-Bernard Marie, Abbot

P.S. : If you can help us materially to continue our mission, we would be most grateful. Donations for the renovation of the abbey buildings in Solignac, or for the work of the “Monthly Letter” of the Abbey, can qualify for a tax receipt. But above all, a heartfelt “thank you” for your prayers.