



ABBAYE SAINT-JOSEPH DE CLAIRVAL  
21150 Flavigny-sur-Ozerain  
[www.clairval.com](http://www.clairval.com)

## *Chronicle of the Abbey Year 2023*

### DEAR FRIENDS OF SAINT JOSEPH'S ABBEY,

ONCE MORE, we pass the milestone of a new year, sustained by the Good News of the Savior's birth in Bethlehem. If Christians are urged ever to look onward to Heaven, "where Christ is seated at the right hand of God" (Col 3:1), they are not forbidden to look back so as to give Him thanks. Allow us, then, to reflect on the experiences of our two monastic communities at Flavigny and Solignac during this last year.

Our foundation in Solignac takes root. Today, eleven monks reside there, with brothers regularly coming from Flavigny. The distance—262 miles by car (422 km)—has been traveled many times, most frequently by our Father Abbot and the Prior of Solignac. Regardless of any geographical separation, unseen union of hearts remains.

Material constructions are not the most important in the life of a monastery. When St Benedict writes in the prologue to his Rule that "we are going to found a school of the Lord's service," he means, above all, a spiritual construction. And yet, stones are also indispensable: we come across them in the life of St Benedict, at Monte Cassino, whose construction the devil tried to prevent by sitting heavily on one. We'll now give you a brief overview of the construction and refurbishment works currently underway at our two homes.

### In Flavigny

The first stage of construction work is on our Traditions Monastiques workshops. It began on January 9 with the demolition of the old aluminum workshop, on whose site the additions to the new workshops for mail orders, publishing, and storage will be located. A rainwater reservoir to meet the needs of our



*Laying the foundation stone for the workshops*



crops will be integrated into this complex. The setting-up of the worksite in the Chestnut Tree Courtyard took place at the end of winter, with the installation of fencing for security, and trailers for the workers. Earthworks began on March 27, followed by foundations. This tedious but essential work continued until July, when the basement slab was laid.

On September 7, for Vespers of St Regina, the martyr of Alesia much venerated in Flavigny, the community processed to the construction site for the blessing and laying of the cornerstone. After the prayers and a short address calling the monks “builders of a civilization whose Architect is God,” Father Abbot, assisted by Brother Gabriel and the site manager, proceeded to lay the first stone: a beautiful block from the Burgundy stone quarry, engraved with an inscription reminding us that the work is placed under the protection of St Joseph.

Work is now well underway, and the second floor will nearly be complete by early winter. Construction of this complex will continue through 2024. God willing, the monks will fit out the interiors of the new workshops, dedicated to St Joseph the Workman, in March 2025.

### **In Solignac**

Restoration of the Porte Saint-Jean, a listed historic monument, began in January. Financed by the diocese and various organizations, the work was completed in September. The inauguration took place on September 15 in the presence of Bishop Pierre-Antoine Bozo of Limoges, and several civil representatives.

Also in January, Bâti Saint-Éloi, a company based in Solignac, undertook the re-roofing of the convent buildings, mainly the wing linking the abbey church to the large Maurist building. The roof of the former refectory of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate was partly redone also. To protect brothers and guest from the elements on their way to the church, an awning was installed spanning the passage from the cloister.

In the abbey church, refurbishment of the choir began in July, and the modern liturgical furnishings were transferred to the collegiate church of Saint-Yrieix, where they will be much appreciated. In Solignac, the beautiful carved wooden Maurist altar has regained its place of honor in the church, and the relocation of the choir stalls



*Re-roofing at Solignac*



*Solignac choir*

has improved acoustics. As a result, the monastic choir harmonizes better with the Romanesque beauty of the 12th-century abbey church.

To fit out a few extra rooms, electrical and plumbing work were carried out—in large part by the monks. With the aim of generating income for the Priory, a monastic industry project is taking shape with the development of three beer recipes which could, God willing, lead to the creation of a brewery. The first brew should be ready by Easter 2024.

### **A look back at the life of our monasteries**

The Abbot conferred the ministries of lector and acolyte on several monks from our two communities:



*The new acolytes*

- in Solignac, on January 13, to Brothers Robert and Odilon.

- in Flavigny, on February 10, on the feast of St Scholastica, to Brothers Gabriel, Timothée, Damien, Samuel and Pierre-Joseph. These ministries are sacramentals that confer graces on the recipient to fulfill their liturgical function at Mass.

In the course of 2023, 32 Ignatian retreats were given by the monks, in Flavigny, Solignac, and other religious houses. Two English-speaking retreats were held in Ireland in July (Co. Donegal and Waterford), and one in England in August (at Godalming, Surrey). Since

May, monthly retreats have been held in Solignac. In addition, a number of special retreats were organized for members of various religious institutes.

On February 11, at the urging of the French Bishops' Conference, we prayed and fasted in defense of human life, threatened by the government bill instituting so-called "active assistance in dying," or, plainly put, euthanasia.

Among those close to our Abbey who were called back to God this year, we would like to mention the mother of our Brother Laurent (February 25); the mother of our Fathers Martin and Vianney (August 7); Fr Pierre Mayol, priest from Dijon, long-time friend and benefactor of the community (January 24); Fr André Venitus, from the diocese of Limoges, parish priest of Solignac until 2022, who encouraged the establishment of our Brothers in this place (April 27). We pray for the repose of their souls and hope for their prayers.

In February, Fr Pierre Dumoulin, a secular oblate of our Abbey, gave us a session, enriched by abundant iconography, on the biblical foundations of the Eucharist. On May 12, Fr Uwe Michael Lang, a London Oratorian, gave a lecture on the Mass of the Roman Rite in the first millennium. Our ongoing training in Gregorian chant continued on May 25, with a visit from Mr Jaan Eik Tolve, a world specialist of the chant of the Latin Church, the "treasure of sacred music" (Vatican Council II). In Solignac and Flavigny, Mr Dominique Habellion helped us work on our singing technique.

On June 1, our archbishop, Mgr Antoine Hérouard, visited us to celebrate the conventual Mass and, in his homily, invited us to "leap" towards Jesus and, in imitation of the blind Bartimaeus, to say to the Lord: "Make me see!" At the recreation break, Archbishop Hérouard shared with us the hopes and challenges of the missions entrusted to him, in particular at COMECE (Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Union), of which he is first vice-president.

On June 26, Bishop Deenihan of Meath in Ireland came to Flavigny to give us news of the Benedictine priory at Silverstream. He asked for our Abbey's continued support for this young monastery dedicated to Eucharistic adoration and prayer for priests. The mission of our Father Basil as prior-administrator should extend for several years. Several monks from Silverstream spent extended periods in Flavigny during the last two years.



On June 30, Bishop Laurent Dabiré of Dori in Burkina Faso came to ask for our prayers for his country and diocese, seriously affected by the progress of the Islamist guerrillas. Persecution is being extended to the entire population, and many refugees are flocking to the churches. The suffering Christians of Africa know that Jesus Christ has defeated the forces of evil with his Cross. Fr Tanchieta, a priest from Benin, introduced us to his parish dedicated to St Joseph, where a chapel is devoted to perpetual adoration of the Blessed Sacrament.

On July 9, we celebrated the 80th birthday of our Abbot Emeritus Dom Antoine Marie. Thirty members of his family came to visit him, joining their affection to our filial gratitude.

As is customary in a Benedictine abbey, lay people who have been frequenting the monastery for several



*Altar of repose for Corpus Christi procession*

years can become more united to it through secular oblation, a spiritual bond that associates them with the monks' prayer and good works. A session for our secular oblates was held in Flavigny from October 13 to 16, entitled: "Celebrating the Liturgy: Entering into the Life and Joy of our God." The Oblate Master developed a teaching of the Second Vatican Council: "The liturgy is the summit to which the Church's action tends, and at the same time the source from which all its virtue flows" (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 10). Since the liturgy is the work of Christ the Priest and his Body, the Church, it associates

all Christians with His worship of his Father, while sanctifying them in pre-eminent way through their participation in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. In this way, "in the earthly liturgy, we participate with a foretaste of the heavenly liturgy" (*ibid.* no. 8).

On October 27, in response to the urging of Pope Francis, we prayed and fasted to obtain from Jesus, Prince of Peace, through the intercession of Mary and Joseph, peace and justice for the Holy Land, which is devastated by terrorism and war.

On December 8, Fr Michel Marie celebrated his golden jubilee of monastic profession in Flavigny. Having been sent on mission to Solignac since the monastery's refoundation, he welcomes guests for Ignatian retreats and acts as sacristan.

We were delighted to welcome three postulants to the novitiate this year, and pray that the Holy Spirit will help them to authentic discernment of a call from God.

The community's annual retreat at Flavigny was preached from December 11 to 16 by Fr Louis Menvielle of the Institut Notre-Dame de Vie.

### **A word from the Most Reverend Father Abbot**

*As you have read above, our Community, under the protection of St. Joseph, strives to advance in fidelity to the mission it has received from the Church. At Flavigny and Solignac, from where our prayer rises for the glory of God and the salvation of souls, we live by the Rule of our Blessed Father St Benedict, with the particular charism of the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius of Loyola. We involve our guests and retreatants in this spirituality through liturgy and organized retreats. The Abbey's spiritual letters, sent free of charge to anyone interested, extend this apostolate.*

*In thanksgiving for the continued support which you give us, through your prayers and financial assistance, I assure you of our intercession for all your intentions and the good of your loved ones, living and deceased.*

*+fr Jean-Benoît  
abbé*