

October 2016

Dear Friends and Benefactors of Saint Leo Abbey,

I hope and pray this letter finds you well.

I have not written you in almost a year but don't worry I have not been lazy. This past year, I asked you to help me pay for the windows and air conditioners we needed in the Abbey; however, the response I received was minuscule. But I understand that this might be because we were still dealing with hard times. On top of that, I have considered how many other pieces of mail you get asking for money. This year, please forgive me if I ask again, but before I say more let me tell you how things are going here at the Abbey.

We have three new people in the Abbey. Brother Lucius who made his simple vows on July 11th, Brother Matisyahu who started his Novitiate on July 10th and, God willing, will make his vows next year. We also have Taten who has begun his Postulancy, as he is exploring his vocation. These three men give me hope in seeing a better future for Saint Leo Abbey. Could you please pray for them?



Br. Matisyahu entering the Novitiate on July 10th.

I would also like to ask: if you have access to e-mail? If so, we may be able to get you more news and pictures and stories of all the great things that are happening here. It is expensive to pay for two thousand letters, first to be printed, then to mail them. Please feel free to send your email address to: saintleoabbeynews@gmail.com, and we will send you more information. For example, every Friday we have the Eucharist at four O'clock in the evening, and right after receiving communion we have Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. When it is exposed, we as a community, make a prayer asking Jesus to help us to be faithful, to be kind and committed to our monastic life. Then at the end of the prayer, we ask not for vocations, but that the Lord help us to be holy, so others may see and follow our Monastic way of life. As you know, we cannot ask for vocations if we are not worthy of the call we believe God has given us. Please pray for us so that we may be holy.

On another topic, but very close to our life, is what Saint Benedict asks of the monks: "Keep death daily before one's eyes" (RB 4: 47).

Having that in mind, I have revisited with the help of others, our own Necrology, the biographies of the monks that have died.



Br. Lucius making his Simple Vows on July 11th.

For some reason or another, whoever wrote the biographies, sorry to say, did not pay homage to those monks that have gone before us. Originally, only negative remarks about the individual were written in the Necrology. That is sad and pathetic, because, as I have said many times before, everything we have today at Saint Leo is from the efforts of the monks that came before us. As in any other family, we do not dwell on the bad things that have occurred in the past, but we remember our loved ones and recall what they did with their lives, and the pains and sufferings they experienced that made them into stronger people. Therefore, I have done that with our monks of Saint Leo Abbey. We are re-telling their story, using their lives as an example for us to follow.

To keep the memory of our deceased brothers alive, we read their little biography during our evening meal. Every year we read about them on the day of their death. It is exceptional for all the monks to hear these stories, not only the senior monks but also the younger monks in formation. By recalling the lives of the monks of the past, we can come to the realization that we are traveling on the right path of our vocation. Many of the monks before us, even though they were not saints, struggled like us, and overcame many issues that affected them. We do this as we await to join them in the presence of God.

This year I am looking for ideas on how to honor the monks that have died and gone before us. We have the Eucharist in honor of them; however, I want to find another way to acknowledge them together with the names of those you may want to honor this November when we remember all those that have died.

Please send me the names of the dead that you would like us to remember, and yes, at this moment I am asking you for your donations and help so I can continue the formation of the monks. As you can imagine, the formation of monks is not that easy and can be expensive. Do you mind to help us in this endeavor by your donation in the name of a deceased loved one? It will be an honor for us to pray for them and a humble service we can do for you and your family.

To form and educate the monks is a difficult task because you have to lead the young people to understand the high demand of Saint Benedict, one of the great values is HUMILITY, something that our society does not encourage. Some misunderstand humility for weakness and ignorance. With the stories of the Desert Fathers, the Readings from Scripture, and the Rule of Saint Benedict we try to accomplish this grand idea. To live a life under an Abbot and the Rule is not easy. Let me tell you what one person said to me. Some time ago, when I was in my early thirties and this person who was fifty-seven years old wanted to enter the monastery. Eventually, this man joined us, and after a week of classes, he was upset. He told me: "I am in my late fifties, you are



Taten receiving the monastic habit as he enters the Postulancy.

so young, you can be my son. What can you teach me?" My answer was: "Not much if you do not want."

This man obviously left us; he will never be able to learn how to be a monk if he thinks that he knows everything. I have plenty to teach, and I am a monk. Today, I have been a monk for twenty-eight years. I know how to stay still in my room for hours. I know my Bible and do my Lectio Divina. I have learned the stories from the Bible that help me to practice silence and listening. Yes, I know how to listen which is impossible to do these days. I have learned to take insults without getting angry because I know people make them out of ignorance. I should have said something smart to that guy, but I think that his packing and leaving was a good result.

When I think of the monks that have spent ten, twenty or more years in this life, I cannot help but believe that there has to be noticeable signs of their relationship with God, there has to be a sense of holiness in their lives. Either because they have suffered and conquered their demons, or because the demons have bitten and humbled them.

To teach others to be monks is to teach them about themselves. It is to set them free and to help them embrace their call to follow Christ in this way of life. I want to believe that embracing the memories of Saint Benedict, as we learn his life, and the lives of all the Benedictine Saints is to honor their holiness and use it as an example to follow.

We the Benedictines are a global order; thus, having a strong influence in the world. In today's society, those that deny God think that all of us consecrated to Him by our Monastic Life make no difference, or are not important enough. However, here at Saint Leo, we have a reason to be, a way to embrace the world through our service. The following describes who we are:

"We the monks of Saint Leo Abbey are a community constantly in prayer. First, as Vatican II defines the lives of the monks: The Official Voice of the Church giving praise to God. Then, we pray for those who do not pray and worship God. Most importantly, we consecrate time to God, so his presence remains with us always. Furthermore, we pray for those who lead and serve the Church (meaning the Priests)."

The motto above is the significance of our presence. As I mentioned before, humility is one of those Benedictine values that we share with the world. Another value is our Prayer and the way we pray for others. It is our desire to include everyone in our prayers. When our community gathers for evening prayer, we say: "We pray for our Oblates, Benefactors, Friends and Relatives and those who have asked us to pray for their needs. We also remember those who work and study at the University. We also remember those who lead and serve the Church".

As I keep on meditating on what we do as we pray, I cannot help but realize that we are in the middle of a mystery. We ask God to help us, but at the same time, we know He respects our freedom.

We put ourselves in the hands of God. It is almost as if we say to Him: "Lord we have done wrong. Help us even when we do not know what to pray for, or how to pray for it. Help us in our weakness."

It is a mystery to enter into prayer, and we do it with joy. We pray for you, for your needs, and I know, those who are gone before us will intercede for us as well. So let us remember them. We remember the monks that have died, and if you send us the names of your loved ones, we will ask them as well to join us in interceding for the needs of us all.

As we make the connection between the new and the old, the new monks and the old monks, you and the younger members of your family, and those you have lost and are gone before us, let us pray together. Let us hope that as we remember them; they will also pray for us and remember us in the presence of God.

I wish you a joyful celebration of all Souls, a blessed Thanksgiving, and I pray that Advent may be a time for us to renew our desire to know more about our Lord Jesus Christ to whom I ask to bless you and keep you, that he may give you peace of mind and heart.

Pax,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Abbot Isaac". The signature is written in dark ink on a light-colored background.

Abbot Isaac Camacho, O.S.B.
Saint Leo Abbey
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