



**Mass of Solemn Profession of Brother Alban
Saint Louis Abbey
August 25, 2007, 9:00 a.m. Mass
Abbot Thomas Frerking**

Homily

Brother Alban, you have asked for perseverance in God's service and in this monastic community all the days of your life.

Some months ago, Brother Alban, you shared with me some of the dialogue you were having with yourself as you were preparing to make today the great request which you have just made.

"What is monastic life?" you asked. "It is," you answered, "a life completely dedicated to God through work, through prayer, through conversion of life toward holiness. It is the giving up of one's will to another that one may not make choices contrary to this life. It is a life, once chosen, lived to the end of one's days."

"What is the goal of this life?" you asked. "God is," you answered. "Yes, to dwell with the Lord for all eternity in heaven; to share in the Beatific Vision, in which our joy is everlasting; to be where every tear is wiped away, where fear and loneliness no longer exist, where hope and desire find their fulfillment; yes, eternal life with our Creator, what true desire needs. Oh yes, 'it is love that impels them to everlasting life.'"

"But is monastic life the only way to this goal?" "No."

"Then why would one want to be a monk at all?" "Because," you said, "because God calls one to it, because God chooses certain ones to give him the supreme service of giving their whole life, their whole being to him, because he wants these to begin enjoying heavenly joy already on earth, because he calls them to himself so that he, God, may enjoy their union and sharing of love with him already in this world" -- what an extraordinary thing you say there. "That is why," you say, "That is why God's call to the monk is, 'Who is he who longs for life, longs for life now?'"

It was this call you answered six years ago, Brother Alban, when you made your simple vows. You cried out, "I do!" You cried out, you say, as a child would, so eager, yet with no idea of what was being asked of him. Yes, but there was also in that cry the passion of a youth, a youth who wanted to break through all the dreariness of this world and all its dreary wisdom, who wanted to break through all that and go straight to God, go straight to life, seize joy now, who wanted in one divinely wild gesture to give his very young self to the Lord. There was that in your cry, too, and that is what you did.

And the Lord received you, but he was not easy on you. "My son, if you would serve the Lord, prepare your soul for trial." The meaning of that word of the ancient Hebrew sage you have learned over these six years, Brother Alban.



SAINT LOUIS ABBEY



You had to learn, as all of us have had to learn, that the way that leads to loss is broad, and that the way that leads to life is narrow; that the Lord's way, and the way of the world, are very different; that, if you were to give your life, yourself, to the Lord, you would have to leave behind so many ways of living, so many amusements and distractions, so many desires that had become part of your life as a young person growing up in our world as it is today. The field of battle soon lay open before you.

You had to learn, Brother Alban, as all of us have had to learn, that on this battlefield, in this struggle, your first instinct, the first instinct of us all, to trust in yourself, in your ideas of how to handle things, in your will, will lead not to victory but to loss. As you, trusting in yourself, found that your old self was not yielding to you, but was beginning to enslave you, you began to suffer greatly, you felt very unhappy and very lonely. You asked, not to be released from your vows, but to be assigned to some time apart, that you might pray and reflect, and understand better what the Lord was asking of you, and how you could respond.

Then you came back from that time apart, Brother Alban, and when you came back, you had learned, as all of us have had to learn, that what you thought was loneliness was precisely the call of the monk to be alone with God, that what made you unhappy was not the loss of the things of this world but an enslavement to the things of this world when you longed to answer the Lord's call to leave this world and enter infinite Mystery, that in the battle with the world and your old self that still remained for you, you must put your trust not in yourself, but in God. Now you understood Saint Benedict when he said, "Renounce yourself in order to follow Christ", "Place your hope in God alone." Now you understood Saint Paul, ". . . the good thing I want to do, I never do; the evil thing which I do not want -- that is what I do. Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ Our Lord."

You had to learn, Brother Alban, as all of us have had to learn, that if in this struggle you were going to put your trust in the Lord alone, then that meant obedience, and that obedience means hardships and suffering as one dies to self and rises again in the new life of Christ. But you set out on this way of obedience, and you had often to find your strength only in these sayings of Saint Benedict: "The fourth step of humility is that in this obedience under difficult, unfavorable, or even unjust conditions, the monk's heart quietly embraces suffering and endures it without weakening or seeking escape." And again, "He who perseveres to the end will be saved."

You had to learn finally, Brother Alban, as all of us have had finally to learn, that you need not only the Lord's strength, but that you need his mercy. "Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord; Lord, hear my voice!" Now you understand why Saint Benedict places as his last and highest instrument of good works: "Never lose hope in God's mercy." Now you understand, as well as any of us can understand in this world, the Lord's mercy -- the most wonderful thing,



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you say, that you have ever known, mercy freely given, mercy longing to be accepted, mercy all-encompassing, mercy always present, mercy ready not just to wipe away, but to change one forever, the mercy which is your comfort in times of distress, your refuge in the storm, your point on which to turn in every one of your turnings back to the Lord.

So we come to this day. There before us now is the same person who was here before us six years ago, the same person, but changed. Now there is before us the young man. Now, beneath the always amiable exterior, there is the young man touched by suffering and sorrow and grief, the young man visited by the Lord's love and mercy, the young man beginning to know who the Lord really is. Now before us is the young man with the same passion, but a passion now chastened by suffering, enlightened by the beginning of wisdom, now rising in its full strength in peace, the passion which now, by the Lord's grace, gives the young man the power calmly to survey the whole of the life that lies before him, all the many years as yet un-lived, to gather them all together, and then, in one great God-inspired act, to give them all, and his whole self, to God forever.

You told me, Brother Alban, that on this day you would say, "My heart is ready, O Lord, my heart is ready." Yes, you said you would sing:

My heart is ready, O Lord, my heart is ready.
I will sing, sing your praise.
Awake my soul;
awake lyre and harp.
I will awake the dawn.

I will sing forever of your love, O Lord,
through all ages my mouth will proclaim your truth.
Of this I am sure, that your love lasts for ever,
that your truth is firmly established as the heavens.

O sing a new song to the Lord,
sing to the Lord all the earth.
O sing to the Lord, bless his name.
Let the hearts that seek the Lord rejoice!

Our hearts do rejoice with you, Brother Alban, our hearts do rejoice with you in the Lord. Come then, Brother Alban, and make your solemn vows to him.