

DEDICATION LITURGY

Behind the Dream

Why a monastery retreat center? Why expend the time, the energy and the money to design and build such a magnificent structure? Aren't there enough places where people can escape and get away for a little R & R in our busy world? Why add another one? Why did Francis and the Brothers dream the Dream?

The answer is really very simple and yet exceedingly profound. The Gospel, the Church and the monastic tradition demand it of us.

First, the Gospel demands the Dream of us. As Pope Francis continually reminds us, all of us, monks included, will be judged not by some abstract perfection or ideal of holiness, but on how we have welcomed and served the needs of others -- the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the sick, the children, the aged. And the hunger and thirst which contemplative monks are called to assuage is the hunger for an experience of the Living God and the thirst for the life-giving waters of the Spirit. The Saint Francis Retreat Center is not built as a place to pamper the senses. There are plenty of resorts and spas for that. But what the architects and the builders have created for us is an environment of beauty which holds us safely so that we can grapple with the deeper issues of life: why am I here, what is life all about, where am I being called to serve?

Second, the Church demands the Dream of us. Through the documents of the Second Vatican Council and through

the personal words of Pope Paul VI and Pope John Paul II addressed to the Trappist Order, we have been summoned to open our doors to all seekers of good will. Who are we as monks? We are men of prayer, dedicated to the praise of God from 3 o'clock in the morning to 8 o'clock in the evening. We are witnesses to God's mercy and love. But the fruits of this life have to be shared, declares the Church of our times. The Saint Francis Retreat Center is not an isolated enclave. It differs from a Jesuit or a Franciscan or a Buddhist or a Muslim retreat center in one unique way. People come here not just to grapple with their issues, but to learn by osmosis from a living community the grandeur of the human calling. People come here because they want to be in a place where prayer is valid, where the Gospel is lived, where the struggles of life are faced in the light of faith. All of this happens by osmosis, and sometimes by words.

And thirdly, the monastic tradition demands the Dream of us. Hospitality was the first and basic rule of the earliest monks who fled to the Egyptian desert. Fasting, praying, working, all were interrupted to welcome the guest. Saint Benedict, whose Rule we follow, states emphatically, "Guests are never lacking in a monastery.... Let all guests be received as Christ.... Let them be invited to pray and let the abbot or an appointed brother sit with them.... Let the Word of God be shared with them and all humanity be shown them." What a wonderful word, let all *humanity, all human goodness and kindness, the warmth of a human smile and friendship be shown them.*

Our present Cistercian Constitutions simply echo this: "Every monastery is to continue the tradition of welcoming guests as Christ, receiving them with reverence and

humanity.” The Saint Francis Retreat Center allows the Mepkin community to do just that. The architects and the builders have given us a place of beauty in which the very humanity and mercy of God can be experienced in all its freshness and simplicity. There is nothing ornate here, nothing luxurious. The simple, clear lines, the natural materials of wood and stone, steel and glass, are meant to lead us straight to the heart of all reality.

The environment of the Saint Francis Retreat Center and the Father Francis Kline Memorial Chapel create the perfect envelop in which to listen to that still small voice within, to seek and to find, to commit and to recommit ourselves to the deeper values of life on this earth.

Let us now, then, Dedicate and Consecrate this Place to the honor and glory of the One God, the God of the Jews and the God of the Christians, the God of the Buddhists and the God of the Muslims, the God of all people of good will. May each one who comes here find the welcome they deserve and the mercy and the love for which we all long.