



PORTSMOUTH ABBEY

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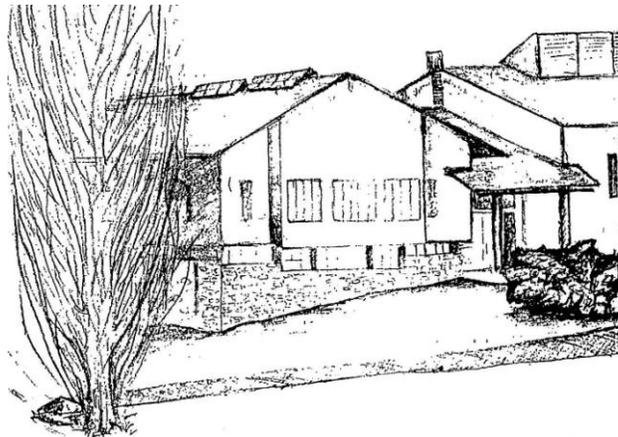
Dear Oblates and Friends of Portsmouth,

The feast of **Epiphany** which used to be observed on January 6<sup>th</sup> (Twelfth Night or twelve days after the Nativity) and now takes place on the Sunday after January 1<sup>st</sup> commemorates three events: the *Coming of the Magi*, the *Baptism of Jesus*, and the *Marriage of Cana*. This miracle of the water being turned into wine marks the opening of Jesus' ministry in the Fourth Gospel and is only recorded by the evangelist, John. This omission is something of a mystery for biblical scholars, since it is such an important occasion in the life of Jesus. One reason may be that the Synoptic writers, Matthew, Mark and Luke, are concerned with the formal opening of his public ministry in Galilee after John the Baptist's arrest, whereas for John, Cana in Galilee is the setting of the first of **Jesus' signs**, the name he gives to the few miracles he records in detail. In the Fourth Gospel *sign* refers to the deeper reality of a miracle, calling our attention to the spiritual significance of the physical happening. The miracle of *the loaves and fishes*, for instance, is for John a foreshadowing of the institution of the **Eucharist**, and he underlines its importance by giving the explanation immediately after the event rather than when it happens chronologically; that is, at the time of the Last Supper. For John, the *changing of water into wine* and on such an enormous scale, since a far greater amount of wine is changed than is needed, this miracle points again to the **Eucharist**, although the significance is not explained here. It is sufficient to call attention to its importance by saying that this is the *first sign* Jesus gives, following the call of the nucleus of his apostles. These disciples were among the guests who were present at the miracle which "manifested Jesus' glory", and served to confirm their belief in Him. It is more of a private event, for the benefit of close friends as a generous gesture to them, a favor granted at his mother's intercession, but chiefly to consolidate the faith of his disciples in his supernatural power.

Another teaching derived from this incident is suggested by the passage taken from the prophecy of Isaiah, echoing the earlier prophet Hosea, that the Chosen People by virtue of the Covenant are elevated, metaphorically, to the status of becoming the Bride of the Lord, whose delight is in them. **“Your builder shall marry you.”** This imagery is to convey the closeness of the relationship between God and his people, something sacred and permanent. In the same way the Christian Church borrows this imagery from the Jewish tradition and asserts that the Church is the bride of Jesus, a teaching that is used in the marriage service in order to emphasize the solemnity of the marital state. John’s marriage feast foreshadows the Eucharistic banquet, in which there is a never-ending supply of spiritual bread and wine, with the added significance of the wine being transformed into the sacrificial blood of Calvary in the Eucharist at the Last Supper.



A final meaning to be taken from this incident of Cana is in the power of prayer and the role of Mary as suppliant on behalf of the wedding party. John alludes to the mother of Jesus only in two parts of his gospel, here at the beginning of his ministry, when he accedes to her request that he respond to the need for more wine, even though “his hour has not yet come,” and at the end, when on the Cross he commits Mary to the care of his beloved apostle just before his death, “Behold thy son, behold thy mother.” We too can find in Jesus’ response to the power of prayer his readiness to grant what is asked for, and especially through the intercession of Mary, who can strengthen our petitions. Nor should we be reluctant to ask for what might seem unimportant matters from our perspective. From God’s vantage point, nothing in our order is too trivial; the very hairs of our head are numbered; it is he who *arrays the lilies of the field*, and we are of far greater importance than birds or flowers that have been created for our benefit. We have **only to seek, and we will find, ask and we shall receive, knock and the door will be opened for us. No father will give a stone when asked for bread, nor a scorpion instead of an egg.** So must we place our trust **in** our heavenly Father who knows our needs better than we do, and will grant us what is in our best interest, if we articulate what he already knows. **This is the way we express our faith and confidence in God as our Providential Father and Creator, who loves us such that he was willing to permit his Son to suffer and die on our behalf, that we might be saved and be worthy of being his children.**



*New Saint Thomas More Library*

picture by Tom Doyle

## **ANNIVERSARY OF PORTSMOUTH'S TWIN LIBRARIES**

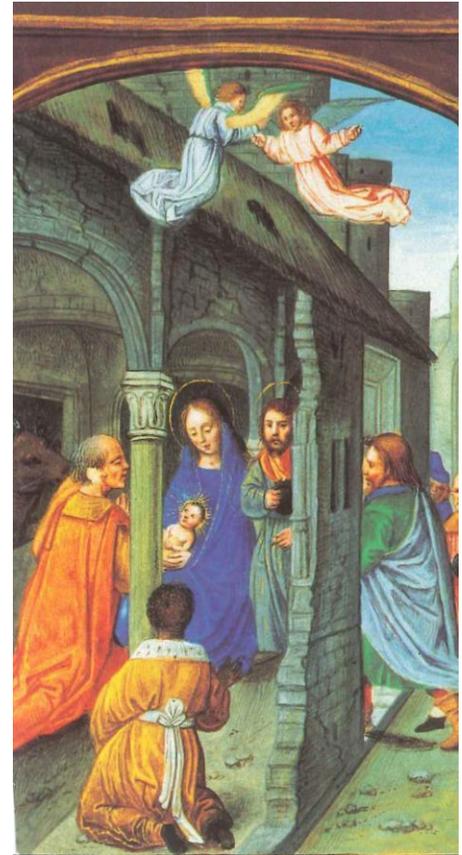
November celebrated the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the construction of the two libraries of the school and monastery for which Pietro Belluschi was the architect and which he regarded as the crowning achievement of the fifteen buildings he designed, giving the upper campus a unity, beauty and reputation that have exerted a positive influence on many institutions in this area and beyond. Father Healey, the President of Georgetown University, was the speaker on the occasion of its opening in November 1990. The building for the school was given by Walter Fitch '35 of California and was attached to the Burden Schoolhouse, being conceived of as a learning center, an extension of the classroom experience. Although its function and use have changed with the introduction of technology, it retains its charm and peaceful atmosphere, which act as an incentive for the use of books as well as for exposure to its outstanding collection of compact discs for music, donated by an alumnus, John Walsh '50, and for the spoken word. One of the most treasured gifts given by Peter and Lily Ferry, Class of 1975, has been the large collection of Greco-Roman vases, glassware and coins, most of which are now housed in the Library, having been transferred from the Art Center, so that the variety and the difference in periods and composition can be better appreciated.

Another feature is the presence of original prints, paintings or drawings and sculpture that decorate the walls and smaller rooms devoted to art. During the year regular displays are mounted in the small gallery at the entrance, which also serve to enhance the learning experience. The monastery library, on the other hand, functions more as a resource for scholarly research, with a large part of its collection devoted to scripture, theology, philosophy, incunabula, church history

and the monastic background. However, there is also a generous amount of literature, both past and present, chiefly Western, and with a not unexpected emphasis on the Classical works of Greece and Rome. The library is accessible to the faculty and outsiders for purposes of research and further work in specialized areas. Among its collections are not only rare books, but also stained glass panels, part of the gift from the estate of Clarence Mackay, most of which are exhibited in the Church and in the lobby of the Stillman Refectory.

**LITURGICAL CALENDAR FOR JANUARY**  
*Cycle of Prayer: Christian Unity; Sick and Caretakers*  
*Peace on Earth; Teachers and Students*

- 1 Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God**  
**New Year's Day**
- 2 *St. Basil & St. Gregory Nazianzen, Doctors*
- 3 FEAST OF THE EPIPHANY**
- 10 Feast of the Baptism of the Lord**
- 11 *St. Aelred of Rievaulx, Abbot*
- 12 *St. Benet Biscop, Abbot, Patron of EBC***
- 13 *St. Hilary, Bishop & Doctor*
- 15 *SS. Maurus & Placid, Disciples of St. Benedict*
- 16 *St. Anthony of Egypt, Abbot, Patron of All Monks*
- 17 Sunday II of the Year**  
*Beginning of Church Unity Octave (Jan 18 – 25 )*
- 20 *St. Fabian, Pope & St. Sebastian, Martyrs*
- 21 *St. Agnes, Martyr*
- 24 Sunday III of the Year**  
*(omit) St. Francis de Sales, Bishop & Doctor*
- 25 Conversion of St. Paul: End of Church Unity Octave**
- 26 *Abbots of Citeaux: SS Robert, Alberic, Stephen*
- 27 *SS. Timothy & Titus, Bishops*
- 28 *St. Thomas Aquinas, Angelic Doctor*
- 31 Sunday IV of the Year**



*February 7: Oblate Day of Recollection (Dom Paschal)*

**Give hope . . .**

The darkest time in the year,  
The poorest place in the town,  
Cold, and a taste of fear,  
Man and woman alone,  
What can we hope for here?

More light than we can learn  
More strength than we can treasure,  
More love than we can earn,  
More peace than we can measure,  
Because one Child is born:

As though a single flake  
Of snow touching the earth  
Would all our thirsting slake  
And turn all death to birth,  
Bidding our spirits wake  
To what makes the many one.  
The deep solicitude  
Which bred both star and bone,  
Claiming, by stable and rood,  
God's will to be our own.

*Christopher Fry*