

## “...In Our Midst.”

*Dear Mission Friends,*

You may have heard the story before.

There was a famous monastery which had fallen on very hard times. Its many buildings used to be filled with young monks. Now a handful of old monks shuffled through the cloisters and praised their God with heavy hearts.

On the edge of the monastery woods, an old rabbi had built a little hut. Now and then he would spend a little time there praying and fasting. For as long as he was there the monks would feel sustained by his prayerful presence. One day the abbot decided to visit the rabbi and to open his heart to him. So that’s what he did one day after the celebration of the Eucharist.

The rabbi welcomed the abbot with arms outstretched. It was as though he had been waiting for this moment for some time. They sat for a while in silence in the presence of the book of Scriptures.

Then the rabbi said: *“You and your brothers are serving God with heavy hearts. You have come to ask a teaching of me. I will give you a teaching, but you can only repeat it once. After that, no one must ever say it aloud again.”*

The rabbi looked straight at the abbot and said, *“The Messiah is among you.”*

For a while, all was silent. Then the rabbi said, *“Now you must go.”* The abbot left without a word and without ever looking back.

The next morning the abbot gathered the monks together and said to them, *“The rabbi said that one of us is the Messiah.”* The monks were startled by this saying. *“What could it mean? Is Brother John the Messiah? Or Father Matthew? Am I the Messiah?”* They were all deeply puzzled by the rabbi’s teaching. But no one ever mentioned it again.

As time went by, the monks began to treat one another with a very special reverence. There was a gentle wholehearted, human quality about them now, which was hard to describe but easy to notice. They lived with one another as men who had finally found something. But they prayed the Scriptures together as men who were always looking for something. Occasional visitors found themselves deeply moved by the life of these monks. Before long, people were coming from far and wide to be nourished by the prayer life and witness of the monks, and young men were asking, once again, to become part of the community.

In those days, the rabbi no longer walked in the woods. His hut had fallen into ruins. But somehow or other, the old monks who had taken his teaching to heart still felt sustained by his prayerful presence.

At a time when we are all affected by the pandemic, are we learning to live our life together as a family, as a parish, as a religious-missionary community with a “family spirit,” with more love, patience, and understanding, in a way that shows “the Messiah is indeed in our midst?”

With deep gratitude for all your generous love for us and the Missions,

*Fr. Mark and the Xaverian Missionaries*

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