

Pax Regis June 2006

After having completed his first fresco, *The Temptation of St. Benedict* in 1974 Fr. Dunstan was asked by Abbot Eugene in 1978 to paint another fresco, a Last Supper in the refectory. Although the work began immediately with lime slaking, sand washing and grading, it was interrupted in 1980 with the building of the Abbey Church. The twenty-two high reliefs that had to be modelled and cast in cement for the church occupied Father Dunstan the next fifteen years.

So it was only in 1997 that work began again with the slaking of new lime and the reworking of the aged lime putty in 1998. However the size of the fresco still needed to be determined. Fr. Abbot Maurus and the council with Fr. Dunstan finally settled on 31 feet wide, 20 feet high at the centre, a total of 465 square feet.

One other problem arose regarding the extra weight of a brick facing. To circumvent this problem steel framing replaced the bricks. Br. Peter installed the frames and attached a stainless steel lath to hold the plaster. An assistant from Ottawa, Mr. Ron Munroe was engaged in mortar mixing from September to December 2001, and in the next eight months of the new year he applied single handedly four coats of mortar to the fresco frame. He also did the acrylic plastering of the border and laid a course of bricks at the bottom.

From September to December 2002 Fr. Dunstan and Ron enlarged the entire design, preparing perforated pounce sheets which would be used to transfer design to fresh mortar for each day's painting session. 2003, January to August was devoted to grinding and mixing colour values. A colour study was made at the same time as a guide in the painting sessions.

The work began in the fall and continued through the next year till January 2005. When Ron returned to Ottawa, well over half of the fresco had been completed. The work was resumed in June with Ed Sawatzky and the fresco was completed by the end of November.

This mural is called *Coena Coelestis* or *The Heavenly Banquet*. It was suggested by the words of Jesus at the Last Supper when he said: "I tell you I shall not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom" (Mt. 26:29). Also of importance was Peter's question, "Lo, we have left everything and followed you. What then shall we have?" Jesus said to them, "Truly I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man shall sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Mt. 19: 27-28).

Fr. Dunstan recalled at the mention of the twelve tribes, the design of the high priest's breastpiece in which there were four rows set with three precious stones in each, and the twelve stones were engraved with the names of the twelve tribes (Ex. 39:8-14). A further question arose: Are the precious stones linked with the twelve apostles? The connection was found in the Apocalypse where, John says, speaking of the Heavenly Jerusalem, "The wall of the city has twelve foundation stones, and on them twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb" (Rev. 21:14). Later he lists,

with several variants, the names of the stones; jasper, sapphire, agate, emerald, sardonyx, sardius, chrysolite, beryl, topaz, chrysoprase, jacinth and amethyst (Rev. 21:19-20). The same stones in both old and new testaments! One of the variants, a diamond, becomes the throne of Christ. The prismatic rainbow of the other gems become thrones for the Twelve. They are seated left to right, as follows; Bartholomew, James son of Alphaeus, Andrew, Matthias in Judas' place, Peter, John. At the centre, Christ, then Thomas, James brother of John, Philip, Matthew, Simon the Zealot and Thaddeus.

Matthias offers the Eucharist to Andrew, and James the Greater to Philip. Bartholomew speaks of the real presence with James the Less while Matthew shows Simon the passage in his gospel, "Until I drink it new with you". An eternal chalice waits upon the communion of the wedding guests, while the Father declares, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased; listen to him", and the Spirit descends on Christ and the Twelve (Mt. 3:17, 17:5).

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