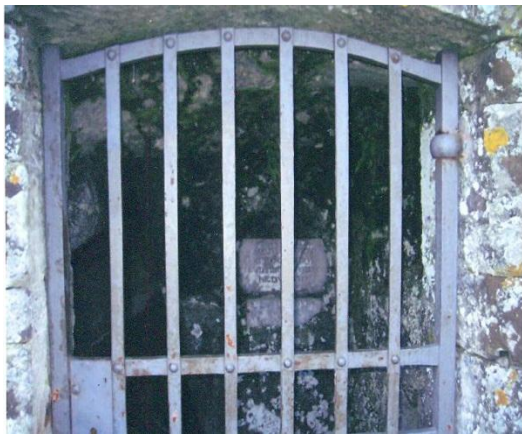


February Servite Letter

February is a special month for the Servants of Mary and the men of the Order called Friars. The reason for this is the celebration of the feast of the “Seven Holy Founders” of the Order, which occurs on February 17. Every group of religious men and women has a “Founder” or “Foundress” – a person who, because of his/her yearning to spread the gospel, help the poor, and be close to God- organizes a group of like-minded people to pray together, assist the poor together, and form a “community.” Most Orders have one founder; the Servants of Mary, however, owe their beginning to seven men focused on honoring Mary in her Sorrows, helping the less fortunate, and living a life of prayer and solitude.



The Seven Holy Founders – as these men became known - were all from Florence, Italy. They belonged to seven patrician families of that city. They abandoned their families and lived together in prayer going around in the city asking alms for the poor, (This gave them the name of “Mendicants” who along with the Dominican and the Franciscan friars made up some of the Mendicant orders of the Catholic Church). Ultimately, the seven men retired to “Monte Senario,” a beautiful area about 18 miles from Florence in the Tuscan Mountains surrounded by immense pine trees. Here they continued their life of solitude,

contemplation and prayer. They lived in caves, which still exist today, on Monte Senario. Visitors still come and pray at these sites to this day.

Recently, I was fortunate enough to visit their place of seclusion and observe the living



conditions of the time. I prayed at each of the caves which are still visible. In each of them are rocks which were used as a “chair” or “pillow.” The caves, enclosed with iron gates, bear the name of the founders above them so that visitors may recognize who lived where.

The most astonishing surprise for me occurred when I went into the church on Mount Senario adjacent to the caves. As I entered this dark, holy, prayerful place, I glanced to my left and there, standing as silent guardians and protectors of our history, stood the seven golden relics containing the bones of the Seven Founders!

As a final note, in an effort to help with the expenses of maintaining a place of devotion and pilgrimage for visitors from all over the world, the Friars of Mount Senario have begun the making and selling of a fragrant and delicious golden color liqueur called, “Gemma D’Abete” (Gem of the Pines). The liqueur is made by using the needles from the tall pines surrounding the Monastery. **Sr. Marianna DeSimone, OSM**