Father Cassian Folsom was born in Massachusetts and grew up in Connecticut. In 1979 he started his religious life at St. Meinrad Archabbey in Indiana. Father Cassian was ordained a priest in 1984, received his Doctoral Degree in Sacred Liturgy in Rome in 1989 and became the president of the Pontifical Liturgical Institute in 1992. He founded the Monastery of San Benedetto in a small apartment in Rome in 1998, but then moved the community to Norcia (the birthplace of Sts. Benedict and Scholastica) in the year 2000 at the invitation of the Archbishop of Spoleto-Norcia. The monastery there had been closed since 1810, but now the community has grown from three members to seventeen, and they follow a full observance of the Rule of Saint Benedictine.

Fr. Cassian has also played a role in assisting the growth of vocations in our diocese. In 2003 Father Brian Doerr and a few of our diocesan seminarians made a pilgrimage to Rome, Assisi, and then finally Norcia. During their time at the monastery in Norcia, Fr. Cassian led the men in a series of reflections on the writings of St. John Chrysostom, aimed at aiding the discernment of their vocations. Many of the seminarians have since taken personal opportunities to return to Norcia to spend time visiting and praying with the monks. Some have gone as a part of seminary programs, such as Fr. Andrew DeKyser who went with a schola from the Pontifical College Josephinum in Columbus. Fr. Adam Mauman has returned several times since 2003, spending varying degrees of time discerning his vocation at the Monastery in Norcia, ranging from one week to three months.

Regarding his time with the community in Norcia Fr. Mauman shares, “Personally Fr. Cassian helped me to examine the various vocations one may be called to: priesthood, consecrated life, and marriage. He helped me to examine my gifts and talents, afforded me with the opportunity to live as a part of their community, to experience the monastic life in a way one cannot appreciate by reading a book, and challenged me to understand what it means to make a commitment to simply doing God's will, to being 'a man of God.' One of the fundamental questions I have heard Fr. Cassian ask on more than one occasion, and one that was a part of their own vocational video, is "What is your heart's deepest desire?" This I believe could help any man or woman to discern God's will for their life, and this particular question has always appealed to me as I believe that is what discernment is all about.”

Fr. Cassian was named the 2011 Person of the Year by Inside the Vatican magazine for his demonstration of courage and faith in his life and work. On April 14, Fr. Cassian's work and impact was again lauded as he received the Pro Fidelitate et Virtute Award, given by the Institute on Religious Life during its national conference. The Pro Fidelitate et Virtute Award was initiated in 1986 by the Institute, and it is given to an individual who has been outstanding in their faithfulness to the teaching of the Church in promoting religious life and defending authentic religious life.

Upon receiving the award, Fr. Cassian delivered his acceptance speech entitled: “The Inseparable Link Between Holiness and Worship”. In the speech he explains, “The humble priest has a certain ars celebrandi, a certain way of carrying himself, a certain respect for the holy things, a fitting decorum in the presence of God. The arrogant priest has a different ars celebrandi, and the faithful can tell the difference immediately. The humble celebrant is transparent, so that the Lord can shine through. The priest knows that the liturgy is not primarily his work, but the work of the Holy Trinity, and his job is to
be a good instrument and to get out of the way as much as possible so that the Lord is free to accomplish his work of grace within the hearts of those present. How does the priest become humble? By a life of Christian asceticism, by allowing the Lord to break his stony heart, so that a heart of flesh can emerge. By allowing Christ--by means of physical and spiritual suffering--to empty him of all that is not godly."

We give praise and thanksgiving to God for this holy priest, a strong personal witness to a life lived totally for the Lord. Fr. Mauman says, “From my experience, Fr. Cassian has always sought to lead others closer to Christ: through the liturgy, through affording them an opportunity to witness and experience monastic life and, most importantly, through his prayers. That may be the greatest gift our diocese has received from Norcia: the gift of prayer.”

Continue asking the Lord in your prayer to form holy men and women open to receiving His will for them and responding with faith and courage in their daily lives!