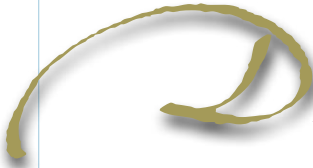


THE VALYERMO
Chronicle

S T . A N D R E W ' S A B B E Y



Nº 230 ✧ WINTER 2010



EAR FRIENDS,

AT THE WRITING OF THIS ARTICLE, the leaves on the trees at the Abbey have changed colors. The scenery is stunning! Lots of yellows, reds, oranges and everything in between. Throughout the day the light from the sun plays on the leaves, providing awesome photo and painting opportunities, especially in the evening when the leaves just seem to sparkle in the light of the setting sun. Simply beautiful!

In a few short weeks, however, it will all change. The trees will look totally different. There will be no vibrant colors, no leaves dancing or glistening in the sun, but only bare branches. The trees will be stripped bare and left naked for a time. They'll look as if there is no life in them. Still, however, there will be a beauty about them, a beauty that only God can create.

To reflect on this cycle of nature is a great way to end the calendar year. It gives me an opportunity to reflect on God's presence in my life; both in the fullness

of my life like trees in the autumn, full of leaves and color, and in the emptiness of my life, like the same trees in the winter, naked and colorless. The cycle reminds me that no matter the season of my life, no matter what changes may be happening around me, in me, or to me, God is unchanging. What a comforting thought. He is always the same, always faithful, always here. He is Emmanuel, God with us.

Emmanuel is a name of the Lord that, unfortunately, we only associate with Advent and Christmas, and what a beautiful name it is: God with us. It is full of meaning; full of hope; full of promise for everyday living! This is a name that needs to be on our lips and in our hearts more than just once or twice a year, and more then ever before, because it is too easy to lose sight of God's presence in our busy global lives. It is even easier to lose hope because of the economy, the war, and our seemingly divided country ... I mean world.

It would make sense for us then to call on that name, Emmanuel, with more frequency; to speak that name with more conviction; and to pray that name with more faith, because in that name alone is our hope, in that name alone is our peace, and in that name alone is our salvation. O come, O come Emmanuel!

Though the calendar year is ending, there are a few things at the Abbey that are just beginning. In October, we received two new members into our monastic community: Paul Cloney, a computer graphic designer, who was born in Inglewood and grew up in West Covina, and Gene Reyes, who managed the patient finance department for a local hospital, who was born in Los Angeles and grew

up in Baldwin Park. Please keep them in your prayers as they (and we) seek to do God's will.

Also in October, Br. John Mark professed solemn vows. His mother, sister and five year old niece flew out from St. Lucia (Caribbean) to be here for the evening celebration. After a life's journey, which involved keeping books for Carnival cruise lines, Br. John Mark's patience and perseverance has been rewarded, and we are grateful.

Then in November, Br. Patrick was ordained a (transitional) deacon at Padre Serra parish in Camarillo. He was ordained by Bishop Oscar Solis, auxiliary bishop of Los Angeles, with nine other of his classmates from St. John's seminary. God willing, Br. Patrick will be ordained a priest in the summer of 2011.

It goes without saying that these beginnings at Valyermo are nothing less than blessings from God. They are signs of life in the midst of seasonal change. They are signs of growth and cause of great joy for the community. More importantly they are reminders to us of the goodness and faithfulness of God to the Abbey.

Additionally, we are grateful to you for your prayerful and financial support of the Abbey. God is indeed working through you to help us continue his work here in the desert. Through your prayers and continued support, may we continue to do his work willingly, faithfully, and courageously. Know of our deepest appreciation and gratitude for your kindness and generosity. May God be glorified in all we do.

Abbot Damien ✠

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What is a Sacrament?

PART 3: SACRAMENTS AND THE HOLY SPIRIT



FR. MAXIMOS DAVIES

WE SAW IN THE FIRST REFLECTION how strongly the Western tradition emphasizes that the sacraments are the extension through history of the saving works accomplished by Jesus Christ in His earthly life. The current *Catechism* sums up the tradition, “the mysteries of Christ’s life are the foundations of what he would henceforth dispense in the sacraments, through the ministers of his Church, for ‘what was visible in our Savior has passed over into his mysteries’” (*Catechism*, para. 1115, quoting St. Leo the Great). The sacraments are the continuation of that same saving activity inaugurated in a unique way through the Incarnation, an activity that will reach its fulfillment in the *parousia* when Christ will return in glory and the scroll of history will be rolled up in the realization of the Father’s economy of love. Then all our sacraments will pass away because the saints will no longer see dimly as in a mirror, but “face to face” (1 Corinthians 13:12).

Now one of the problems with this theological approach is that we can lay out the entire mystery of salvation in a few words without once mentioning the Holy Spirit. There is, of course, nothing in this theology that *excludes* the Spirit, it’s just that the

“system” as it were seems quite neat without Him. Christ enters the world as a man, does the will of the Father, is raised, ascends and will return in glory. All of this we memorialize in the sacraments. Once again we are faced with a view of reality expressed largely in terms of *things*, in this case of discrete historical, or trans-historical, occurrences. These occurrences are *events* in only the most rudimentary sense that they have a certain concrete character within the matrix of time and space. But how do I access these events? Traditional scholastic theology expended so much intellectual energy in the attempt to explain how these discrete occurrences could cause the salvation of individuals, viewing salvation here as an occurrence, or even as a “quality” inhering within the saved. The fruit of this expenditure was an elaborate taxonomy of created grace, of grace seen primarily as *tool* (or collection of tools) rather than an event in the fullest sense, an *event of love*.

Again, the problem is not that the Holy Spirit is excluded from this theology. But it does seem to place the emphasis on other aspects of the Mystery. Part of the reason may go back again to St. Augustine and his theology of the Trinity. St. Augustine saw the Holy Spirit primarily as the “bond of

love” between Father and Son. In a sense the Holy Spirit is the witness and testimony of the infinite love that binds the Holy Trinity in a perfect unity of essence and energy. When this is translated into the economy of salvation it does seem that the Latin tradition tends to emphasize the auxiliary and testamentary role of the Holy Spirit. This can even be seen in the name given to that sacrament that is peculiarly the sacrament of the Holy Spirit, “Confirmation” as in “confirming” what Christ has achieved for the neophyte by Baptism into His (Christ’s) death and resurrection. Again, the issue at stake here is not a dogmatic one. Scripture frequently gives to the Holy Spirit precisely this kind of role, as we see for instance in the synoptic accounts of the Baptism of the Lord. The *Catechism* quite properly quotes St. Paul who tells the Corinthians that the “seal” of the Holy Spirit in our hearts is the “guarantee” that we are established in God (para.1295, quoting 2 Corinthians 1:21-22). But even if this is an *adequate* account of the role of the Holy Spirit, is it a *complete* one?

So let us move eastwards again and see the question from a different perspective, one in which St. Augustine’s theology was much less influential. The Eastern Churches, have been marked above all by the Trinitarian theology of the great Cappadocian fathers. Here the weight is not so much on the Holy Spirit testifying to that love by which the Father and Son are bound. Rather the tradition emphasizes the perfect unity of the Trinity being due to the Father’s free constitution of Himself as the Son’s Begetter and the Spirit’s Sender. Embedded deep within this theology is the idea (first articulated even earlier than the Cappadocians by St. Irenaeus) that the Son and the Spirit are like the two hands of the Father through Which the Father gathers the whole cosmos in an embrace of love. It is this theology that was first enshrined in the universal Creed defined at the Second Ecumenical Council in 381 which proclaimed

that the Holy Spirit is the “Lord and Giver of Life Who proceeds from the Father.” This is the form of the Creed that is still recited in all, or at least most, Eastern Churches whether they are Orthodox or Catholic. If the subsequent introduction of the so-called *filioque* to the Latin Creed has given it a more “Augustinian” rather than Cappadocian flavor, this need not prevent Catholics today from acknowledging that they too are heirs to fullest theological inheritance of both traditions.

But let’s not get sidetracked on that particular question! Instead, let’s consider this issue of the role of the Holy Spirit in another way more directly related to sacramental theology. As you know, it is very common within the Roman Catholic Church today to separate the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation. In many cases the gap is so long that the sacrament of Holy Communion comes to be administered, chronologically at least, as the second rather than the third sacrament. Paragraphs 1290–1292 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* make it clear that this practice is, in historical terms, something of an anomaly. The original practice of the universal Church, both East and West, was to administer Baptism and Confirmation together with the Holy Eucharist. In the West the first sacrament was divided from the second two probably in order to retain the link between each believer and the Bishop. It is only very recently indeed—the pontificate of Pope St. Pius X—that Catholics were officially authorized to administer Holy Communion to children who reach the age of reason irrespective of whether or not they have been confirmed.

In the Eastern Churches, on the other hand, the ancient unity of the three sacraments is retained. The link with the Bishop is preserved by the completion of the Mystery of Holy Illumination by chrismation with the holy *myron*, the oil consecrated by the Bishop (or more commonly the Patri-

arch). Holy Communion is nearly always administered as the climax of the threefold initiation into the Church, irrespective of the age of the neophyte. In fact in many Eastern Churches babies and small children are the most frequent communicants!

So what does this tell us about the role of the Holy Spirit in the economy of salvation generally, and in the sacraments in particular? Let me quote the prayer of the minister of the Mystery of Holy Chrismation said just before anointing the newly baptized:

Blessed are you, Lord God Almighty, the source of blessings, the Sun of righteousness, who have made the light of salvation shine for those in darkness through the appearing of your Only-Begotten Son and our God, and have granted us, unworthy though we are, the grace of blessed cleansing by holy Baptism, and divine sanctification by life-giving Anointing. And you have now been well-pleased to make your newly-enlightened servant to be born again through water and Spirit, and have granted him/her forgiveness of sins both voluntary and involuntary. Do you then, Master, compassionate, universal King, grant him/her also the Seal of the gift of your holy, all-powerful and adorable Spirit and the Communion of the holy Body and precious Blood of your Christ. Keep him/her in your sanctification; confirm him/her in the Orthodox Faith; deliver him/her from the evil one and all his devices, and by your saving fear guard his/her soul in purity and righteousness; so that being in every deed and word well-pleasing to you, he/she may become a child and heir of your heavenly Kingdom. Because you are our God, a God who has mercy and who saves, and to you we give glory, to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, now and for ever, and to the ages of ages. Amen.

This prayer assumes the reason for the anointing about to take place is that the neophyte might be worthy of Holy Communion. But the really key word here is “Seal”, *zphragis*. In the anointing formula that follows, the

minister simply says, as he spreads the consecrated oil over the most significant parts of the body, “the *seal* of the gift of the Holy Spirit.” There is a sense in which the new life that has been received in Baptism needs to be activated, just as a royal decree is simply words on paper until it is sealed with the king’s mark which makes it law. (In the Slavic Churches in particular, the idea of the Holy Spirit as Life-Giver is emphasized by reserving the green as the liturgical colour of the feast of Pentecost.) The metaphor of “seal” also suggests that the newly baptized, fresh from the font, is warm and pliable like wax, that he or she is now more perfectly receptive to the imprint of the Divine image as it were carved onto the “Seal of the Holy Spirit”.

This theological perspective helps remind us that the Holy Spirit is not simply the ratifier and guarantor of an economy established by the Father through the Son. Scripture begins with the Spirit of God “hovering” or, as several Fathers interpreted this, “brooding” over the waters of chaos at the very beginning of creation. Likewise at the inauguration of the renewal of creation, it is the Spirit Who “overshadows” the Virgin, making the waters of her womb not merely a new earth, but a new heaven as well. The Holy Spirit reveals Jesus as the Son of God in the waters of the Jordan and then, “leads” or as St. Mark puts it, “drives” Him into the place of his first trial with evil. And, of course, it is the Spirit Who gathers together all the energies of the apostles at Pentecost, reversing Babel’s chaos of tongues and establishing the Church in power through the seven gifts of which St. Paul speaks.

Fundamental as all this is to the Christian faith, it seems that the sacramental praxis of the Christian East tends to reflect these truths rather more strongly than other traditions. Although the *Catechism* cautions Catholics against seeing the sacrament of Confirmation as a “sacrament of Christian maturity” or thinking that somehow the Holy

Spirit simply “ratifies” in adulthood what the child received in Baptism (para. 1308) the very fact that these cautions are needed tells us something. Catholics would do well to reflect on and pray to the Holy Spirit as an active Divine agent of the Father’s love. The Holy Spirit does not simply give us useful, even “spiritual” tools. The Holy Spirit is not simply a kind of Divine electricity that makes things move. He is a Person Who loves, is love and searches the depths of the wisdom of God, making intercession in groans that cannot be uttered, all for the sake of love.

The Holy Spirit is above all the One Who invites us, gathers us, empowers us and authorises us in the event of love we call salvation. This is why in the Byzantine Rite during the Eucharistic liturgy when the priest invokes the Holy Spirit in that prayer known as the *epiklesis*, the “calling down upon”, he prays not merely that the Father will send His Spirit “upon these Gifts” but “upon *your people* and upon these Gifts...” The prayer is that we too will be gathered up in the divinizing energy of the Holy Spirit and presented as a pure and spotless oblation in union with the Body of Christ to the Father. In other words, if we really take seriously the idea that reality is *event* rather than a collection of *things* then we need above all to come to know and love the Inaugurator and Sustainer of that event of creation and re-creation in Christ. The sacraments are not merely the “works” of Christ. They are equally the event of the encounter with the Spirit of Christ Who gathers us into the Kingdom.

This leads us, finally, to the relationship between the sacraments and private prayer. The *Catechism* rightly emphasizes that the sacrament of Confirmation “perfects the common priesthood of the faithful, received in Baptism” (para. 1305). One of the most beautiful ideas developed by the fathers of the Byzantine Church (particularly St. Maximos the Confessor) was that the Christian is a true “microcosm” of the Church. Just as the vis-

ible Church has its ministers, its altar and its place for the people, so the Christian has her priestly intellect, the altar of the heart and the bodily nave by which is meant the quiet multitude of sensations and emotions gathered together and disciplined for prayer. When looked at this way, it seems that there is really no clear line separating liturgical from private prayer. Nor is there any great gulf between prayer and physical asceticism. All these are simply phases in one single event of prayer and praise, manifestations of the very same reality in its various modes of experience.

In the last reflection I argued that Christian East can show us how to see the link between liturgy and sacrament in such a way that we avoid any question of excessive or superstitious regard for the externals of *cult*, which I identified as one of the dangers of a defective view of the sacraments. Now I am arguing that the East can also help us avoid that other danger, *moralism*, the sense that I don’t really need anything like liturgy as long as I do *good* and maintain a *personal* relationship with God. In both cases the solution the East offers is to insist that *every* level of human reality, body, mind, and spirit, must be gathered up and participate in the event of love. Salvation is not the accumulation of cultic or moral forms of assistance, but a real transformation of the whole person, a passing over from the scattering of death into the gathering of life.

I’ll complete this cycle of reflections next time by looking in greater detail at that great “gathering together” which we call the Church. ✠

Fr. Maximos Davies is a priest-monk of the Romanian Byzantine Catholic monks of Holy Resurrection Monastery, currently living here at St. Andrew’s Abbey. He is a graduate of the University of Sydney, Australia and of the Patriarch Athenagoras Orthodox Institute attached to the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, CA.

Wit AND Humor IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

BRO. PATRICK SHERIDAN, O.S.B.

CHURCH FATHERS SUCH AS Jerome, John Chrysostom, Rufinus and Salvian held fast to the position that Christ never laughed. This is possibly based on the fact that the New Testament specifically mentions laughter in only two places, and then in a menacing context (Luke 6:21 and 25).

Orthodox Christian belief, including the belief of mainline Protestant denominations, is that Jesus was and is fully human and fully divine. Read Hebrews 4:15. "Fully human" means that he was like us in everything, *everything*, except sin. He was a Jew steeped in Jewish tradition and the Jewish tradition of wordplay and irony, some of which we have seen in the article on Old Testament humor in the previous edition of the *Chronicle*. The humanity of Christ is Catholic Dogma. Is there anyone in your experience who absolutely never, under any circumstances, cracked a smile, was never amused by some situation? No matter how dour a person is, an awareness of incongruity or irony, at some point in their lives, causes at least a smile. To deny that Jesus had or appreciated humor, if carried far enough, denies the reality of the Incarnation.

Do you think Jesus never smiled at little children? Do you think he never rolled

his eyes at some of the things Peter and the other Apostles said? "Lord, (wash) not only my feet, but my hands and my head." *"All right, Peter, calm down."* "Lord, should we call down fire from heaven to destroy them?" *"Noooo."* "Lord, command that in your kingdom these two sons of mine may sit, one at your right and one at your left." *"Is that all? Isn't there anything else I can do for your sons? Their own planet, perhaps?"*

Psychologists tell us that a healthy sense of the absurd, a healthy sense of humor, makes for a well balanced individual. One would think that Jesus was the most balanced, well rounded person in history. He must have had a sense of humor, and the inspired authors who wrote his story, each of them in his own particular style, seemed to have had a realization of this in that their writing reflects this aspect of Jesus' personality.

The website biblestudy.org tells the story of a seven-year old who was being read to by his father from the seventh chapter of Matthew's Gospel. Dad was reading along quite seriously when his son began to snicker and then broke out laughing. His father was at a loss to understand why his son was laughing and so he asked his son what was so funny. It turned out the boy was laughing because he saw in his mind the preposterous picture of a man with a big beam of wood in his eye trying to find a speck in another person's eye. The boy understood perfectly that the human eye is not large enough to have a beam of wood in it and the picture in his mind struck him as funny. His father, so familiar with the passage, failed to respond to humor in an unexpected place. Whether this story is true or just related to make a point, it is on the mark. Do you think the crowds listening to Jesus relate this parable did not realize that a beam of wood could not fit in a human eye? Don't you think he was using a gross exaggeration to make a point? What about the time Jesus told the crowd that, just as God keeps watch over the spar-

rows, so much the more will he keep watch over them, because: "You are worth more than many sparrows?" Don't you think they knew perfectly well that they were worth more than a bird? Can't you picture Jesus saying this with a tongue-in-cheek smile on his face? Don't you think a few of the people looked at each other and chuckled a bit?

We are so familiar with Jesus' teachings in Scripture that I believe we are a bit like the father reading Scripture to his son. We have been hearing and reading all our lives about putting a camel through the eye of a needle, straining a gnat and swallowing a camel, men being white-washed tombs full of rot, washing the outside of a cup and leaving the crud inside, Pharisees screwing up their faces to look like they are fasting.

People who heard these stories for the first time probably smiled. What now strike us as solemn, quiet words on a worn Bible page, probably struck the crowd as colorful, outrageously incongruous, and humorous word pictures which drove home a message. As the website says: "Perhaps we need to reset our minds to approach Scripture with fresh eyes, a lightness of spirit, a new alertness to detail, and (see) a savvy human nature on display in all the settings of real people Scripture presents." I think if we adopt such an attitude, Scripture will become more alive, less boring; we might even be getting the point that Jesus was making.

Aside from the time leading up to his passion and death, most of the rest of Jesus' min-

istry is full of joyful interaction with people. Remember that the pious Pharisees accused Jesus and his disciples of being what today we might call party animals. *Read Matt. 11:19.* There was lots of banqueting, laughing, eating and drinking. His first miracle was at a wedding, to make sure the fun didn't stop. Do you think Jesus and his mother and dis-

ciples were invited because they were wet blankets who would spoil everyone's fun?

Read Luke 5:27-39.

Jesus lets Levi throw him a party after he answered his call to follow him. All his tax-collector buddies were there (and you know how the Jews of that time felt about tax collectors-collaborators with the hated Romans and extortionists of their own people).

The party causes the Pharisees to criticize and talk of the

need for fasting and prayer. Jesus responds with humor, sarcasm, a parable and then a sad declaration that the Pharisees, like fools, prefer their old ways.

Read Mark, chapter 7. Jesus' response to the Pharisee and the lawyers is sarcastic and somewhat earthy. He talks about evacuation of the body and that what comes out of the body after eating is unclean. Unrepentant people, like the lawyers and the Pharisees, are full of spiritually unclean stuff that comes out of them like bowel movements. One of the sources I researched voices the opinion that Jesus is telling his opponents that they are "full of crap." It's hard to argue with that paraphrase. If you read this passage with a stuffy literalism you miss what

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I think is obviously a wry, earthy, and sarcastic put-down.

Here is an interesting take on a familiar passage that I never would have interpreted in the way one commentator does. *Read John 1:43-47*. His take on this passage is that Nathaniel is ribbing Phillip about being taken in by this preacher from, of all places, Nazareth. “Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?” When Jesus finally meets Nathaniel he has a comeback for him: “Behold, an Israelite, indeed, in whom there is no guile.” Now I, probably like you, have always thought that Jesus was praising a good quality in Nathaniel. Here is a different interpretation: Jacob was the father of all Israelites. The name Jacob

means “full of guile” or “deceiver”. With a bit of sarcasm Jesus is saying: “Well, well, well. What have we here? We’ve found the first guileless son of Jacob!” Not so guileless if he used a politically incorrect put-down about Jesus’ home town. Jesus zings Nathaniel in a playful manner and shows that he can dish it out as well as take it.

I have always thought that Jesus was gently teasing the Syro-phoenician woman who interrupted his meal in *Mark 7: 24-30*. I was gratified to find out that some commentators agreed with me. I could never picture Jesus refusing to cure someone. He never, as far as I can remember, treated any supplicant in such a manner. He must have been gently teasing her. He uses ethnic humor (today politically incorrect) with a playful challenge to this gentile woman. She apparently went along with his humor and flipped it back on him. “Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from the master’s table.” Can you not see him smiling at this clever answer and then gladly doing what he intended to do all

along-cure the daughter of this poor gentile woman who had great faith?

In the parable of the wedding feast (Matt. 22:1-10) the king throws a wedding feast in his son’s honor. It’s the social event of the year. Servants are sent out with invitations to all the A-list people, perhaps including the first century equivalent of Paris Hilton or Lady Ga Ga (Okay, maybe not). These people know how to dress and how to act at a royal banquet. But the glitterati, the Pharisees with

their clean robes and punctilious manners, the scribes with their jots and tittles, can’t be bothered to attend.

What is a king to do? Fed up with those who think they’re too good to come, he invites those who *know* they aren’t. He sends

his servants to round up the religiously and politically incorrect, the powerless, the disenfranchised, the “out” crowd, the homeless. Imagine a royal wedding feast filled with such people. Scandalous! This is a comedic break in expectation, exaggerated to drive home the punch line. The outsiders have become the insiders. And if you are one of the insiders listening to Jesus telling this story, the joke is on you; and just as it’s not funny if *you* slip on a banana peel, I would think that the in-crowd listening to Jesus did not find this story very amusing; but the common people did.

The parable of the unforgiving debtor (Matt 18:23–35) uses a comic device that today’s comics refer to as the *topper*. While the audience is still laughing at the last line, you hit them again. Imagine a slave who owes his master ten thousand talents. A talent in Jesus time was the equivalent of \$20,000 in today’s currency. Ten thousand times \$20,000, a truly outrageous sum for a slave to owe anyone. We modern readers don’t necessarily get the

“Jesus was a joyful person, continually urging his followers to be joyful.”

joke when we hear ten thousand talents, but Jesus' listeners would have. It's as if your college freshman son or daughter calls you up and says they've run up a little balance on the credit card you gave them. "Exactly how much, honey?" "Oh, two hundred million dollars! But I'll get a summer job to pay it off." This is essentially what the slave says to his master. "Give me a little more time and I will pay all." Fat chance! So what does the king do? Instead of laughing the slave to scorn or throwing him into prison, he forgives the debt. It's like you calling the credit card company. Whine a little, and they say, "Oh don't worry about it." The slave is left off the hook, just like that.

Then comes the topper: the slave leaves and finds someone who owes him a hundred denarii—a few months' wages. Not only does the slave demand the money, he starts to choke the poor guy! This is almost comically cruel, especially in light of the situation the slave just got himself out of. As we know, in the end the slave gets his comeuppance. He is tossed into jail until he can pay his debt, which is never.

Jesus lays one exaggeration on top of another until his audience can't help but see how utterly ridiculous it is to hold a petty grudge against one's neighbor when God, the gracious King, has wiped clean a fortune's worth of sin.


I think we all would agree that the speakers we most like to listen to are those who have something substantive to say and manage to hold our attention as they say

it; they are able to reach our intellect as well as our emotions, and perhaps they can add a touch of humor in their speech. Jesus was obviously a very captivating and effective speaker. We have not one sentence of anything he may have written, if indeed he wrote anything. But his disciples recalled his stories, parables and teachings so well that they spread across the Roman World, and inspired authors were moved to write an account of his life and teaching, which would eventually spread to the ends of the Earth. Remember that oral recitation and the memorization of lengthy texts were common in the Ancient world. Bards could recite the entire Iliad and Odyssey from memory. The stories in the Old Testament were also orally transmitted long before they were written down. So Jesus' words must have been as compelling as epic poetry or the stories handed down by the Jewish people, in order to have made such an impact. I don't think that it is too much of a stretch to say that His use of humor helped to imbue his parables in peoples' minds.

Jesus was a joyful person, continually urging his followers to be joyful. In John 15:11 he says to his disciples; "I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete." Jesus preached happiness. Remember, that in the Beatitudes, the word "blessed" doesn't mean some solemn otherworldly virtue. Most scholars agree that the word Jesus used in Matthew 5, commonly translated "blessed" could just as well be translated "how happy." Matthew 5:12 urges his listeners to: "Rejoice and be exceedingly glad..." Our God is a God of joy; praise be to God. ✖

Brother Patrick Sheridan, O.S.B., is currently in his fourth year of theology studies at St. John's Seminary in Camarillo, California, where he has become well-known not only for his academic work, but also his stand-up comedy.

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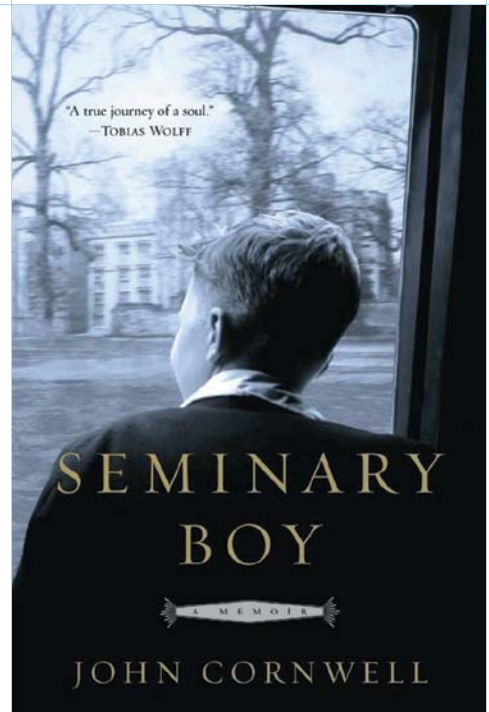
QUARTERLY BOOK REVIEW

by fr. philip edwards, o.s.b.

WE KEEP ON PRAYING “for vocations to our monastic community” (and for priests and religious generally). We respond instinctively to the inexorable reproductive pressure of “Nature” to propagate and feed new members into the inevitable cycle ripening into decay and death. (Whether species with whom we share the pressuring urge share also our transcendent consciousness, we are still trying to learn as “scientists,” those who “know.”) The mellow Cadfaels that come in are welcome and comforting, but for the long haul one needs the possibly exacerbating greenness of those provide more years of promise.

A generation or so ago, one simply prayed for “vocations” with the implicit understanding that the only “call” worth hearing was to serve God explicitly as a vowed or ordained minister/servant of the institutional church. We have since learned, hopefully, that God’s call is much more inclusive of all manners of service and being, that no one is excluded from His attentive promise and presence; simply because one “didn’t make it” in either seminary or religious community doesn’t mean one is “spoiled” but that one’s calling (at least for the moment) lies elsewhere.

The Spirit who calls, gives; the widespread and freely given “Gifts of the Spirit” spelled out in the New Testament listings highlight the non-clerical calling of “prophet” (and also “teacher”), that unsettling member of the body (often *un*honored by fellow members) who may comfort the afflicted but certainly afflicts the comfortable. It is not that the ordained minister does not have both the gift and the obligation to speak out God’s truth—in the Old Covenant there were priest-prophets such as Jeremiah and Ezekiel, and prophets attached to the place of communal worship as well—but it is a gift and



SEMINARY BOY: A Memoir

John Cornwell

Doubleday, 2006

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calling in itself, burning and burdensome as Jeremiah tell us, “...a fire burning in my heart ... I could not bear it...” (Jer 20:9, *Jerusalem Bible*) often with the gift of “sight” as well, the Seer who shares his vision in word and sign. Bard, Jester and Chaplain all played their parts in this sharing in a mediaeval court. In the salons of our enlightened times it falls on the Artist —poet, painter, performer, et al.—to speak to the seeking heart.

John Cornwell seems such a one—truth seeking/seeing/speaking. His love of God and Church is not blind. Some years ago, his critiques of Pius XII’s relationship with the German National Socialist state and its leader created a stir. (I must confess that, lazy and distrustful, I read only some of the articles and letters-to-the-editor but never the book itself!) At the time of publishing this memoir, 2006, he had several books to

his credit, a few novels and many non-fictional forays into matters not only of Church and churchmen but also of “science and religion.” Since that time there have been responses to Richard Dawkins, and, just this year, a new biography of Cardinal Newman that I truly and duly hope to read. All his giftedness as critical writer and sensitive novelist converge in this incisive and reflective remembering of what and who had once been. “In the absence of diaries and other independent sources I have relied mostly on unaided personal recollections for the writing of this memoir. In some instances I have concealed the identities of those still living” (“Author’s note,” copyright page).

The book is structured loosely in four “Parts” of uneven length and a twenty-page Postscript. It begins *in medias res* with a chance meeting of his absentee father

in the east London suburb of South Woodford.... He accosted me affably with his familiar limelight smile, as if greeting an invisible audience somewhere above my head. Nobody would have guessed he had left my mother and his five children a year earlier ... he fetched out a large bright horse chestnut, a conker. Buffing it on his sleeve, he handed it over, saying: “Cheerio there, Jack.” I stood watching him until he was swallowed up in the lobby of the Majestic cinema, where a matinee was about to begin. He did not look back. I would not lay eyes on him again for forty-five years. I was missing him, but he had always been more of a troublesome sibling than an ideal father. In any case I had other father figures to contend with. (p. 3).

And so he returns for his final year at Cotton, the junior seminary that fathers him into young adulthood.

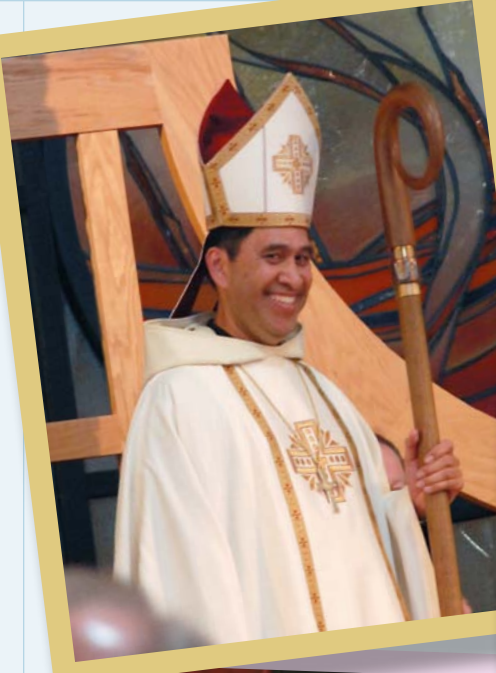
The book ends appropriately with “the return of the father” as the Cornwell household welcomes and helps to ease the final passing of the priest who most in that place where fathers were called “Sir” came close to being the longed-for father in John’s coming of

age—and the final rediscovery of his “real” father, in the faithful care of his second wife’s sister. He takes his own son, Jonathan, to visit him “to where they lived ... in the Medway valley ... a small detached house standing on a crest. The bottom half was painted bright red; the top half white. The front garden was filled with daffodils...” (p. 317).

I had not expected any great epiphany on achieving reunion with Dad. But I felt a sense of ripeness at being able to locate him in my mind and heart. As for Mum, when I reported an account of his situation after meeting him, she said: “you make him sound like an old reprobate, instead of what he really is....” But what was he, really? It had never occurred to me when I was a child that Dad was a clever man with a range of subtle emotions. Nor had I appreciated what it took for him to survive humanly despite a childhood of pain, isolation, and humiliation.... As a young married man during the war his tendency to lie undoubtedly cost others dearly. But he had found, despite that weakness, two women in his life who over a period of more than thirty years saw his qualities, experienced his ability to love and enabled him to flourish and be loved in return (p. 319).

This memoir has been an attempt to locate a boy who lived at Cotton half a century ago. It has been that boy’s attempt, too, I suspect, to locate and come to terms with his adult writing self. After many years’ absence, my journey back to the faith of my fathers has not been easy. The story of that return is for another narrative. At the Mass I attended on the first Christmas of my return to practice, the choir of our local church sang “Happy Birthday to You”: at the consecration. I staggered out into the open air, thinking, I’m not going to make it. Where were the ancient rhythms, the sacred repetition, the Catholic musical splendors of my youth? I had to learn the benefits of the new ‘participation,’ while sorrowing over the lost liturgy of my

Please turn to page 19.



BLESSING *of* ABBOT DAM

SEPTEMBER 11, 201





MIEN
TO



PHOTOS COURTESY
OF SUZANNE FARLEY
AND OTHER FRIENDS
OF THE ABBEY.



Theology's Essential Task

IN SPIRITUAL GROWTH

In May of this year, Dr. Pat Mitchell, Professor Emeritus of Theology at St. John's Seminary, and an oblate of Saint Andrew's, addressed the graduating seminary class, faculty and student body. His remarks, the fruit of decades teaching at St. John's, offered an important, and pertinent, perspective for us to reflect upon as we all search for God and for an ever-deepening spiritual life. He has kindly allowed us to publish his address.

VERY Rev. Rector/President,
Colleagues, Seminary Staff,
Students, Friends and Family
of the graduates and, of course,
most especially graduates in theol-
ogy for the year 2010.

I AM ESPECIALLY DELIGHTED TO HAVE been given an opportunity to address this topic for many reasons. One of them is that it allows me to return to the theme of the first talk I gave here at St. John's on March 25, 1973. On that occasion, I spoke to the faculty and students of the seminary college, never guessing that I would be spending the next thirty seven years of my life here at St. John's.

In the Gospel of St. John we read the following words of Jesus:

Father, the hour has come;
glorify your Son
so that your Son may glorify you;
and through the power over all humankind
that you have given him,
let him give eternal life to all those you have
entrusted to him.
And eternal life is this: to know you,
the only true God,
and Jesus Christ whom you have sent (17:3).

I hear in these words echoes of our theme, for they speak of knowing God and Jesus Christ as the essence of eternal life. This knowing is also central to theology.

However, let us not limit our understanding of theology to what academic theolo-

gians talk about at their professional meetings and write about in their books and papers. The theology I have in mind includes something people do spontaneously. It can take the simple form of a question like, "Why me, Lord?" Or it can be more developed reflection, as was the case with my daughter when she was about six years old. One day, as Easter was approaching she shared with me the following "theological" insight relating to the Easter Bunny. Our conversation went like this: "Daddy, I know why we never see the Easter Bunny." "Why is that?" I asked. "Because if we saw him we wouldn't believe in him," she replied.

The Jesuit paleontologist, Teilhard de Chardin, recounted his own theological reflections as a child. First he "worshipped" a piece of iron because of its apparent solidity and permanence. When later he discovered that iron rusts he drew the appropriate theological conclusion and gave up his devotion to iron for something more substantial, the world of rocks, which, he says, set him on the road toward what he called the "planetary" (see *The Heart of Matter*, page 20).

Examples like these can help us understand a little better the place professional theology has in our spiritual life. Like my daughter and the young Teilhard, we are theologians by nature, but without the help of professional theologians we may never get beyond our devotion to the Easter Bun-

ny or to rocks. When we have legal or medical questions we turn to professionals all the time, but much more is at stake in the case of our spiritual life, since it is about “eternal life,” to use the language of St. John’s gospel.

We live in an increasingly secular environment where the value of faith and institutional religion are being constantly challenged. It is a world in which science and technology, commerce and industry, and Hollywood, reign supreme. Material progress and success are among the highest values, while utility and convenience override what is true or right, or of faith. It is a world in which new questions are posed to faith on a daily basis, and the answers to these questions are not found in a catechism or in the teaching of the Magisterium. Indeed, all too often, the new questions present their own challenges to magisterial teaching.

This is not a new phenomenon by any means; in fact, it is as old as the Christian faith. But since the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, since the days when Voltaire published his *Encyclopedia* and Notre Dame was turned into a Temple of Reason, the process has been speeding up. In the last hundred years or so, advances in science and technology have been moving so rapidly all attempts at control seem hopeless. Toyota’s recent problems with out-of-control acceleration provide a marvelous image of what has happened to our lives in this respect.

Goethe’s story of the Sorcerer’s Apprentice gives us another image of where things are today. You remember how the young apprentice, exhausted by the labor of having to carry water in one bucket at a time, overheard the sorcerer saying a formula that filled the bucket magically. Thinking this was a good idea, he said the same words over his bucket, which to his delight magically filled with water. However, too late, he realized that he did not know the words to stop the magic when the bucket was full.

Our situation in relation to science and technology today is much like that of the foolish apprentice, but like the ostrich we ignore the reality and hope the questions will go away. The ostrich’s way of dealing with life when it is out of control is quite popular with large segments of the population. It is all too easy to ignore the questions being asked all around us; they are worrisome and make us uncomfortable.

A better response, though, is to engage the questions and challenges as they present themselves to faith. The questions, when heard from the perspective of faith can really become opportunities to grow spiritually. But to do this we need professional help, and this is what theology is for. Its vocation is to help the Church “associate the light of revelation with the experience of humanity,” as Vatican II’s *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* puts it so well. Again, what good theology will do for us is connect the light of revelation with our own experience. Listen to these words from the *Constitution*:

Humanity has always tried to develop its life by its own effort and ingenuity. Nowadays, it has extended and continues to extend its mastery over nearly all spheres of nature with the help of science and technology.... In the face of this immense enterprise now involving the whole human race people face many worrying questions. What is the meaning and value of this feverish activity? How ought all of these things be used? To what goal is all of this individual and collective enterprise heading? *The church* is guardian of the deposit of God’s word and draws religious and moral principles from it, but *does not always have a ready answer for every question. Still it is eager to associate the light of revelation with the experience of humanity* in trying to clarify the course on which it has recently entered (GS 33, emphasis added).

The Christian community has a right to good theology because with baptism and



confirmation we are given the responsibility to live lives of faith and holiness. Listen to how Vatican II speaks of this responsibility in its *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*:

It is ... quite clear that all Christians in whatever state or walk in life are called to the fullness of the Christian life and to the perfection of charity, and this fullness is conducive to a more human way of living even in society here on earth. In order to reach this perfection the faithful should use the strength dealt out to them by Christ's gift, so that, following his footsteps and conformed to his image, doing the will of God in everything, they may *wholeheartedly devote themselves to the glory of God and to the service of their neighbor*. Thus the holiness of the people of God will grow in fruitful abundance, as is clearly shown in the history of the church by the lives of so many saints (LG 40, emphasis added).

This quotation is found in the *Constitution's* chapter on "The Universal Call to Holiness." Note that holiness, a fully mature spiritual life, is spoken of as "wholeheartedly devot(ing) (our)selves to the glory of God and ... the service of (our) neighbor." And one way to serve our neighbors is to share with them the wisdom found in our faith tradition. But before we can share anything with them we will need to listen carefully to the questions they are asking, questions that might very well challenge our faith in God, Christ and the Church. When we take their questions seriously we will turn to theology for the guidance we need.

It is important to understand that what our neighbors need and what theology gives is wisdom and not just information and knowledge. The value of wisdom is expressed beautifully in the book of Sirach:

Happy are those who discover wisdom...
Gaining her is more rewarding than silver,
more profitable than gold....
Her ways are delightful ways,
her paths all lead to contentment.

She is a tree of life for those who hold her fast,
those who cling to her live happy lives
(Sirach 3:13–18).

Our neighbors need wisdom desperately these days, and theology's contribution is essential. When we have found wisdom, we can then share it with our neighbors. This has been called sharing with others the fruits of our contemplation.

Notice that Christian spirituality is essentially about relating to God and neighbor. Sometimes this truth is forgotten and spirituality is thought of solely in terms of prayer: liturgical prayer, personal prayer, contemplative prayer, and various devotions. These get most of our attention, but they are not ends in themselves. They are ultimately all intended to make us a better neighbor and, in that way, to glorify God. When we reflect on the life and ministry of Jesus as the gospels present them, we see him focused primarily on serving the needs of those with whom he comes into contact. In one way or another, he is involved with healing. Physical and spiritual healing get our attention, but we should also notice how much of his ministry is in the service of wisdom. He is, after all, the Wisdom of God incarnate. Without this wisdom, no matter how wonderful his miracles might have been, we would still be "sheep without a shepherd."

For us to carry out this wisdom dimension of Christian ministry, it will be necessary to devote ourselves to the study of theology as well as to prayer. There is no way around it. Ordained ministers and lay leaders clearly have a special obligation here, for it is their responsibility to bring the wisdom of Christ to the people they serve, and then to help their people apply this wisdom to the world in which they live day in and day out.

It is also important to encourage the laity to engage in their own study of theology. The people addressed in the First Letter

of Peter are urged to “reverence the Lord Christ in (their) hearts, and always have (an) answer ready for people who ask the reason for the hope that (they) all have. But do it with courtesy and respect, and with a clear conscience...” (3:15–16). Peter is addressing ordinary merchants and trades people and not academic professionals. However, if we encourage people to study theology we must also be capable of guiding them.

“Always have an answer ready for people who ask you the reason for the hope you have.” The hope our faith gives us is one of the most important things we can share with our contemporaries. This hope is the child of wisdom. Remember, though, that wisdom begins when we recognize that we are confused and ignorant, for this is when honest questions are asked. Then in the dialectic between faith and reason, prayer and study, wisdom will be born and begin to grow. The wonder is that we are created with an eternal destiny and that therefore our capacity for wisdom can expand infinitely. In this dialectic “eternal life” begins here and now and theology makes an essential contribution to that:

Father, the hour has come;
glorify your Son
so that your Son may glorify you;
and through the power over all humankind
that you have given him,
let him give eternal life to all those you have
entrusted to him.
And eternal life is this: to know you,
the only true God,
and Jesus Christ whom you have sent (17:3). ❄

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BOOK REVIEW *from page 13*

boyhood. I soon discovered that I could not ‘return’ to faith by attempting to recapture what I had left behind all those years ago. And yet I found myself thinking about Cotton as if it contained a secret to be discovered, a riddle to be solved. I continued to return there in dreams which seemed to contrast my boyhood innocence with a sense of adult shame.... I returned by car one summer’s afternoon to look at the valley and the old buildings ... much the same ... but looted, vandalized ... burnt ... overrun with weeds...smashed ... locked up.... As I wandered the ruins of Cotton, I remembered how I had walked its pathways and cloisters during the Easter retreat, seeking God in fasting, and silence and seclusion from the world. Now, decades on, it struck me that the desert places shut themselves away to find God in self denial and abstinence. The desert can lie at the very heart of a person’s life, amid the turmoil of everyday distractions. Many who have turned away from religion to embrace atheism, and agnosticism, as I had done, are perhaps as much in a state of desert spirituality, the ‘dark night of the soul,’ as any contemplative. What we are escaping is not God at all, but the false representation, the ‘trash and tinsel,’ as W.B. Yeats once put it, that passes for him. And so “Hatred for God may bring the soul to God.” At Cotton that summer’s day I recognized the truth of that “darker knowledge,” and it eased the feelings of a former apostate’s remorse. And yet, I sensed that for years my younger self, the seminary boy, had still to forgive me for having turned my back on the auspices that had saved his soul from ruin all those years ago. As I walked through the overgrown pathways of Cotton, the seminary boy came to meet me: without reproach or condemnation on his part, and with a sense of healing reconciliation on mine” (pp. 319-20).

If you have not yet read this book, you should. ❄



WHY THE ABBEY IS IMPORTANT TO ME

3 IN A SERIES OF PERSONAL STORIES

Al and I were both born and baptized Catholics, but we were raised in the Church for only a short period of time. Both of our parents divorced when we were eight years old, and have had many unsuccessful marriages. They were not able to be role models for a healthy or happy marriage. As adults, Al and I were "sometime" Christians, attending Mass on the major holidays, and having no structure to support to guide us morally or spiritually. When we got married and had our first son, it really began to sink in on a very deep level that God is good. We were filled with love for our child. Perhaps there was a very deep awareness (and a sinking feeling), that we didn't have all the right pieces to be a successful family, given our childhood backgrounds. We felt drawn to connect with a spiritual community. It seemed we came to the Abbey almost by accident - to visit someone. We were captivated by the deep sense of peace and the palpable spiritual intimacy that pervades the Abbey. The warmth and hospitality of the monks made us feel spiritually "at home", and led us back to our faith. The Abbey has provided us with so much spiritual sustenance and support, it is hard to know where to begin. I have particularly appreciated the wisdom and guidance of the Rule of Benedict, and the structure it provides for living my life as a spiritual person. The oblate community has been a wonderful source of spiritual energy which nourishes me on my journey. My spiritual director, Father Philip, has helped ensure that I remain consistent in my commitment to my spiritual goals. Al has been deeply grateful for the loving compassion of his spiritual director, Father Isaac. Father Isaac has taught Al to understand characteristics necessary for a successful marriage: Communication, patience and forgiveness. Father Isaac's love has welcomed Al into a deeper conversion into the Catholic faith, and has helped Al to become a better husband and father. Our children have also benefitted from the personal nature of their relationships with the monks. They do not feel "anonymous" at the Abbey, and are able to see and know people who are actively living their lives completely dedicated to God. This helps them integrate spirituality into their own lives. We love it when they discuss bible passages (though last night it was Cain and Abel - hmmm), and spiritual dreams. The Abbey provides us a constant reminder of what is "truly important" in life. We are extremely grateful for everything the Abbey has given us, and very much need the Abbey to grow more deeply into the Christians God intends us to be.

Al Rodriguez & Maria Rohde



Rodriguez Family

Please consider donating to the Abbey through Dollar-a-Day. Your gift will support the monks of Valyermo in their indispensable spiritual ministry.

Around and About

THE ABBEY

DEACONING

BR. PATRICK SHERIDAN, O.S.B.

On Saturday, November 20, 2010 I will have the privilege of being ordained a transitional deacon along with ten classmates from St. Johns' Seminary in Camarillo, California. Ordination has always been an event that I thought of as being far in the future. But as I write these words on November 9, I am acutely aware that this major event in my life is, as the saying goes, just around the corner. My class attended our pre-ordination retreat last week and all of us have been reflecting and discussing among ourselves thoughts and insights about the diaconate. I have also been reading Cardinal Walter Kasper's book, *Leadership in the Church*, in which he writes about the role of ordained ministers. What follows is the fruit of these conversations among my classmates as well some insights of Cardinal Kasper.



Other orders such as lector, acolyte or Eucharistic minister are offices. Deacons are deacons by virtue of sacramental orders. In my Catholic Elementary School in Queens in the 1950s, the nuns taught us that a priest has an "indelible character" imprinted on his soul after ordination. St. Augustine used the word "character" to describe the permanence of ordination. In the Roman world of Augustine character referred to the practice of branding or tattooing soldiers. This is one way of expressing the fact that, after ordination, one is always a priest; the "brand" is always there. The same is true of deacons; one cannot stop being a deacon. Ordination is forever.

I think it is fair to say that permanent deacons have a somewhat harder task than transitional deacons. If deacons are to minister to God's people and proclaim the word, they must be contemplatives. They must read and meditate upon Scripture; they must be students of Theology. As a monk, I have time for contemplation and study built into my daily schedule. Transitional deacons will be ordained priests and the priesthood will be their full time "job" in a sense. Permanent deacons, most of whom are married, need to support their families, minister to the people of God and still find time to pray, study and meditate on the Word of God—not an easy task. As Cardinal Kasper writes, "If deacons are to be and do all those things that the Church asks of them...they must first make space

MONKS' FEAST DAYS

December	20	Fr. Isaac
January, 2011	12	Fr. Aelred
	15	Fr. Maur
	31	Fr. John Bosco
February	29	Br. Cassian
March	17	Br. Patrick
	19	Fr. Joseph
	21	Br. Benedict



for God and the things of God in their own lives.”

Deacons are ordained to service at the altar. They have a specific role as servers at the cup at the Eucharist. Deacons perform marriages, baptisms, benedictions, funeral services. From the earliest days of the Church, as attested to by the *Acts of the Apostles*, *The Shepherd of Hermas* and the writings of St. Polycarp, deacons were ordained to special service to the poor. They distributed alms collected from the faithful and served Christ by serving the least among us. Deacons today are often involved in serving the poor and the homeless.

The Second Vatican Council proclaimed that deacons were ordained for ministry of the Word and for evangelization. This seems to be an expansion of their perceived role in the early Church. Acts says that deacons would free the Apostles from certain tasks so that the Apostles could devote their time to preaching and evangelizing. In the twenty-first century Church, preaching and serving at the altar are seen as integral to the ministry of the deacon and not something to be done only when Father can’t make it.

In this reflection I have related some of the insights I have gleaned from reading and from speaking with my fellow ordinandi. I will conclude with some thoughts of Cardinal Kasper about the diaconate:

“Spiritually motivated, well trained deacons ... are a necessity in the Church today. They are neither substitutes for parish priests nor social workers. They represent the deacon Jesus Christ in a sacramental manner. This is why we must press on with renewal...of the diaconate, translating ever more fully into ecclesiastical life the impetus given by the Holy Spirit.”

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SOLEMN PROFESSION

BR. JOHN MARK MATTHEWS, O.S.B.

On the 24th October, 2010, I made my final monastic vows of stability, obedience and conversion of life. As I reflect I realize that as each day passes, it would be easy to forget what these vows really mean. When one hears the call to follow Christ and answers the call, it is simply an exercise of faith. One never knows fully what to expect, but as Benedictines we are given a rule to follow. It is by placing our trust in the Rule that we expect to accomplish God’s will for our lives. St. Benedict clearly states in the Prologue of the *Rule* that it is by listening carefully to the Master’s instructions, and by attending to them with the ear of our hearts that we are lead back to God, from whom we have drifted through the sloth of disobedience. However, one has to be aware that these vows are not ends in themselves, but rather the means that will lead us back to God. Stability means that I commit my life to the community of St. Andrew’s Abbey, and obedience is the agent by which I am led back to God. The goal is the conversion of our life; however, the end is to be transformed into the image of Christ and subsequently inherit eternal life. The lessons that we need to learn are not always easy; therefore, stability and obedience are necessary for conversion to take place.

After living seven years in the monastery, I have begun to see how blind I really was and in many ways still am. In other words I really did not recognize the truth of the Gos-

A GREENER JOURNEY? BR. BEDE HAZLET, O.S.B.

If you are a moderately experienced cyclist, consider making your next trip to Valyermo by bike and train! When I have occasion to leave the monastery I try to use this method whenever I can. I enjoy it, it's good exercise, and it's probably better for the environment than driving. Below I've given the route I usually take. Use it at your own risk, improve on it if you can, and remember that YOU are responsible for exercising good judgment in preparing for your ride and while on your bicycle! The total cycling distance is just under twenty miles.



- Take Metrolink's Antelope Valley Line to Palmdale.
- Exit the Palmdale Metrolink Station parking lot toward the South and turn left onto Transportation Dr.
- Transportation Dr. immediately dead-ends into 6th St. E. Turn right. Use the bike lane.
- Where 6th St. E. dead-ends (after about a mile), turn left onto Ave. R, in the left-turn lane if traffic permits, or on foot using the crosswalk.
- Immediately after crossing the railroad tracks, turn right onto Sierra Hwy.
- At Ave. S (about a mile later), turn left, using the left-turn lane if traffic permits, or on foot using the crosswalk.
- Continue on Ave. S for about four miles (for part of this distance there is a bike-path on the right, separate from the road), then turn right onto 47th St. E./Hwy. 138.
- Continue on 138 for just over five miles. Where 47th St. E. breaks away to the right (at the traffic signal near The Place on 47th St. shopping center), bear left to continue on 138 (which at this point is also called Fort Tejon Rd.).
- At 87th St. E., turn right.
- Just after crossing the Aqueduct, where 87th St. E. dead-ends, turn left onto Fort Tejon Rd.
- Where Fort Tejon Rd. dead-ends into Pallet Creek Rd. (after just over seven miles), turn left.
- Turn right immediately onto Valyermo Rd. (where Pallet Creek Rd. dead-ends).
- Turn right into the gates of St. Andrew's Abbey.

pel. I realize that I must allow God to open my eyes each day. That is, a little at a time. When I was in my teens, I thought that my parents just did not get it. In other words, they were not wise. At the age of twenty one, I thought, they seemed to have gotten a little wiser. At the age of thirty I thought, wow, they have really become wise. It may seem funny, but the point is that we all think we are wise and know what is best for ourselves. However, as we grow older we begin to better understand the reason that our parents set rules and regulations which they expected us to follow. We soon realize that it was not because they wanted to control our lives, but rather to protect us. In a similar way, it is God who knows what is best for us but it is not until we begin to humble ourselves

and let God act in our lives that we begin to understand the wisdom of God.

It does not mean that simply by living in a monastery I am responding to God's love or experiencing conversion of life. I must also follow the rules of the monastery, and the teaching of Christ, which will allow for conversion to take place. However, although I may know what is required for conversion to take place, I can interpret stability and obedience to mean what they do not. In other words, I can justify and rationalize my behavior when I don't live by the *Rule*. Truth is the conformity of the mind to reality. For example, if I look at an object and it is black, it means that my mind conforms to the object, rather than the object conforming to my mind. Therefore, it is likely that everyone else

will see the object as black. With regards to tangible things, truth is easier to recognize; however, with regard to intangible and spiritual things it becomes more complex. It is for this reason that Jesus said, “I am the way and the truth and the life,” (John 14:6), because we can intentionally or unintentionally try to twist reality to conform to our needs. This eventually leads to spiritual blindness. Therefore it is necessary that we consciously depend on Christ as our guide, which means that we must follow his teachings. It is a slow process because our ego can get in the way and instead of acting “Christ-like,” we often tend to respond from our emotions and what suits our needs. Consequently, like the Pharisee, we risk hearing the following words from Christ: “If you were blind, you would have no sin; but now you are saying, ‘We see,’ so your sin remains” (John 9:41).



LETTER FROM ROME

Br. Cassian DiRocco, O.S.B., is currently studying and living at Sant' Anselmo, the international house of Benedictine life and study in Rome. He shares the following with the readers of the Chronicle:

Some gifts so strongly elicit the “fullness of life,” that it is difficult to adequately thank God for them. My time in Rome is one of those gifts—full of new challenges, tell-tale discoveries, and unforeseen awakenings. To try to put into words here in a few paragraphs (or in a write-up of any length) what this experience has been for me so far would be impossible to do. And yet, when new chapters in life open such vistas of the soul, one somehow feels the need to at least *try* to share with others the insights and blessings received.

The “Eternal City” is aptly named. For a person of faith to set foot into this land so rich with the history and the present-day witness of saints striving for Heaven is to be taken into a whole new dimension of life, brimming with prayer and hope. So many shades and expressions of Christianity are here, all praying, living, and working at “the heart” of the Church and pointed toward the same goal of eternal life. For me, this is given form most vividly in the Liturgy. In my first month here, I have had the gift of being “in choir” for high Latin Mass celebrated in the “extraordinary form” (the “old rite”), being invited to pray side-by-side with the Ethiopian Orthodox community during their Divine Liturgy and at Churches of the Greek Catholic, Serbian, and Russian Orthodox communities. These times have been for me like a mystical glimpse of Heaven, experiencing some echo—even if faintly—of what the “celestial choirs” may be eternally singing, even now.

The community of Sant' Anselmo (where I live and study) has been similarly wonderful, not only for its liturgical and prayer life, but for the genuine sense of brotherhood that seems to happen so naturally here. The psalms remind us how “good it is when brothers live in unity” (Ps. 133:1), and I am reminded of that fact daily here. We have well over 100 monks from 39 different countries in all different levels of study. Some, like me, are here for priestly formation. Others are in advanced studies of spirituality, canon law, church history, and a host of other fields. But for all of the different fields of study, and even the many different expressions of Benedictine life that one finds here, it is our spiritual life that bonds and strengthens us, uniting all of these “differences” into that mysterious synthesis of “work and prayer” so lauded by those who endeavor to live a Benedictine way of life.

In a word, this time in Rome is a life-changing blessing, and I am ever grateful for it. Please pray for me as my priestly formation continues in the “Eternal City”!

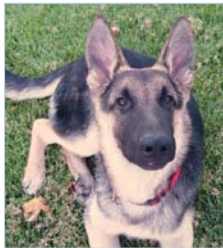


NEW ADDITIONS TO THE MONASTIC COMMUNITY

This past fall the monastic community was delighted to welcome two new observers, **Paul Cloney** (above left) and **Gene Reyes** (above right). Please pray for them as their life at Valyermo begins!

ANOTHER NEW FACE

Last August, Klondike (one of the community's beloved dogs) was killed by a car, saddening all who knew him and leaving Scholastica without a canine companion. In November the community adopted **Hugo**, a stray German Shepherd found in a Palm-dale street by the Hudock family. We are delighted by his cheerful and energetic presence among us, and Scholastica seems to be, too! (Photo: Hudock family.)



OBLATE NEWS

The last 2010 Oblate Meeting at the Abbey will be on December 12. The first few meetings of 2011 will be on January 9, February 13, and March 13. Conferences begin at 2 p.m. in the Conference Center. Reserve your place for lunch by calling the Retreat Office at 661-944-2178 or emailing retreats@valyermo.com.

VOLUNTEERING

The gift of time cannot be measured. The Abbey and the monastic community need you. There are projects and positions available year round and without you we cannot accomplish our goals. Please consider spending time here at the Abbey. We need help in:

Abbey Ceramics Abbey Books & Gifts
Development Office Retreat Office
Call 661-944-8959
or email development@valyermo.com

THE CHRONICLE IS NOW ONLINE

If you prefer to read it online just send an email indicating this preference to development@valyermo.com. This is a cost-saving convenience for the Abbey.

SEND US YOUR CONTACT INFORMATION

Please help us stay current with your updated postal and email addresses and phone number. Doing so helps us to save money as the Post Office charges us when they forward mail we send. You can help us eliminate additional fees by letting us know when your address changes. Contact the Development Office at development@valyermo.com.

ABBEY BOOKS & GIFTS

Shop the Abbey Books & Gifts Store! Open seven days, 10–11:45 a.m. and 1:30–4 p.m.

GIVING MADE EASY

Please consider the Direct Gift Program. It is easy to give to the monks of St. Andrew's Abbey. We accept Visa and MasterCard, or you can donate automatically from your checking account. It is safe and simple and you can make changes at any time. Please call the Development Office for full details at 661-944-8959 or email development@valyermo.com.

BEQUESTS AND WILLS

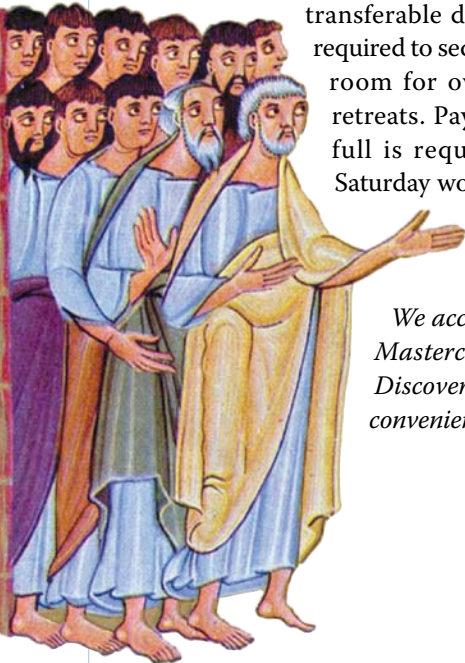
Please remember St. Andrew's Abbey if you are writing or updating your will. A bequest to the Abbey, a non-profit California Corporation located in Valyermo, CA, will help us to continue the ministry of the Benedictine monks here. It is a great investment in the future. Thank you.

MASS AND PRAYER REQUESTS may be sent to: Br. Dominique Guillen, OSB, St. Andrew's Abbey, PO Box 40, Valyermo, CA 93563.



RETREAT CENTER *Calendar*

THE RETREAT CENTER PROUDLY presents a new season of retreat offerings. Full descriptions are available online at saintandrewsabbey.com. Link to Retreat House. Please call the retreat office at 661-944-2178 for availability and reservations. A \$75 non-refundable, non-transferable deposit is required to secure your room for overnight retreats. Payment in full is required for Saturday workshops.



*We accept Visa,
Mastercard, and
Discover for your
convenience.*

ADVENT 2010

Friday, December 3 – Sunday, December 5

ADVENT RETREAT

Presenter: Fr. Matthew Rios, OSB

Room, board, and tuition:

\$260 single; \$170 shared

Friday, December 17 – Sunday, December 19

SILENT RETREAT

Presenter: Abbot Damien Toilolo, OSB

Room, board, and tuition:

\$260 single; \$170 shared

WINTER 2010–2011

Friday, December 24– Sunday, December 26

CHRISTMAS AT VALYERMO

Room, board, and tuition:

\$260 single; \$170 shared

Monday, December 27 – Friday, December 31

PRIVATE RETREATS

Room, board, and tuition:

\$70 single; \$60 shared (per night)

Friday, January 1– Sunday, January 3

LUMINOUS DARKNESS: Knowing Beyond Knowledge with St. Dionysius the Areopagite

Presenter: Fr. Maximus Davies

Room, board, and tuition:

\$260 single; \$170 shared

Friday, January 14– Monday, January 17

MID-WINTER DANCE WORKSHOP

Presenters: John West, Obl. OSB

Fr. Philip Edwards, OSB

Room, board, and tuition:

\$350 single; \$250 shared

Friday, January 21 – Sunday, January 23

SPIRITUALITY AND CONTEMPORARY CINEMA: Winter Session

Presenter: Nikki Tucker, Obl. OSB

Room, board, and tuition:

\$260 single; \$170 shared

Monday, January 24 – Friday, January 28

PRIESTS' RETREAT: Come Creator Spirit

(This retreat also offered

February 28 – March 4.)

Presenter: Fr. Joseph Brennan, OSB

Room, board, and tuition:

\$380 single

Monday, January 31 – Friday, February 4

LEADERSHIP AND COMMUNITY

Presenter: Dr. Michael Carey, Obl.OSB

Room, board, and tuition:

\$380 single; \$300 shared

Monday, February 14 – Friday, February 18

WARMING THE HEART: Soup's On!

Presenters: Fr. Isaac Kalina, OSB

Michael Kalina

Room, board, and tuition:

\$380 single; \$300 shared

Friday, February 18 – Sunday, February 20

THE LORD HEARS THE CRY OF THE POOR:

Praying with the Poor; Praying as the Poor

Presenter: Br. Ben Harrison, MC

Room, board, and tuition:

\$260 single; \$170 shared

Monday, February 28 – Friday, March 4

PRIESTS' RETREAT: Come Creator Spirit

Presenter: Fr. Joseph Brennan, OSB

Room, board, and tuition:

\$380 single

Friday, March 4 – Sunday, March 6

LECTIO DIVINA: The Monastic Art of Praying the Scriptures

Presenter: Fr. Luke Dysinger, OSB

Room, board, and tuition:

\$260 single; \$170 shared

Tuesday, March 8 – Friday, March 11

LISTEN: A Silent Retreat to Begin the Lenten Journey

Room, board, and tuition:

\$285 single; \$225 shared

Friday, March 11 – Sunday, March 13

LENTEN RETREAT

Presenter: Fr. Matthew Rios, OSB

Room, board, and tuition:

\$260 single; \$170 shared

**FOR COMPLETE DESCRIPTIONS
OF THE RETREATS, VISIT OUR WEBSITE:**

www.saintandrewsabbey.com

(click "Retreat House")

PLEASE CALL THE RETREAT OFFICE AT

661-944-2178, ext. 102

FOR PRICE AND RESERVATIONS.



ABBHEY ANGELS

DIRECT GIFT PROGRAM

The Abbey Angels Direct Gift Program enables you to make a monthly gift automatically to the Monks of Valyermo. You can authorize your bank to transfer a monthly gift of a specific amount from your checking or savings account. The donation is automatically deposited into the account of St. Andrew's Abbey.

No more checks to write, no more envelopes to mail.

Your bank statement will show the date and amount of the transaction and you can make changes at any time.

To get started, please call
the development office at

661-944-8959,

or email

development@valyermo.com.



St. Andrew's Abbey
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