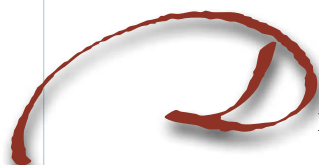
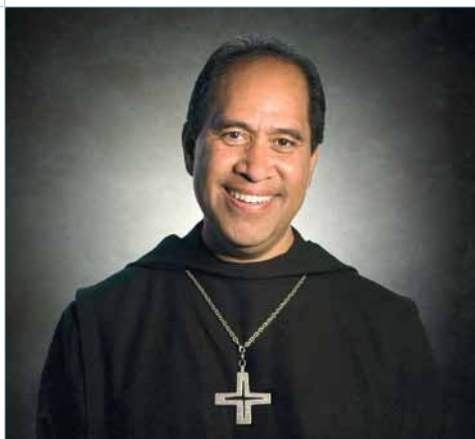


THE VALYERMO  
*Chronicle*

ST. ANDREW'S ABBEY



Nº 234 ✠ CHRISTMAS 2011



EAR FRIENDS,

I know many people who like to listen to Christmas music all year long, whether it is March, July, or October. There is just something about Christmas music they like.

I remember being a passenger in the car of one of my good friends. It was mid-August in good ol' smoggy Los Angeles, the temperature was in the low nineties, and we were on the way to the beach. Instead of listening to music that would help get us more in the mood for the beach, like America's top 40 hits or some Oldies but Goodies, in his cassette player (dating myself here!) was a tape of the Mormon Tabernacle Choir singing very beautifully all the popular Christmas songs: "Silent Night," "The First Noel," "Away in the Manger," "O Little Town of Bethlehem," "I Heard The Bells On Christmas Day."

My friend and I were both in a choir, so we could appreciate the beauty of the music and the magnificence of the world-famous choir. Though the music was beautiful and well performed, I just couldn't get into it for the simple fact that it was August, the middle of summer, and not December. So I asked him several times if I could change the tape, and his response was something like, "Why? This is good music. It's historic and has a positive

message. Why do you want to change it?" Of course I couldn't argue with that. The only (weak) response I could give him was, "It's not Christmas yet." It wasn't good enough for him. So, needless to say, I enjoyed my day at the beach, but the whole time I was in the water the tunes of "Silent Night" and "The First Noel" were going through my head.

As the years have gone by and I have grown older, I think about my friend who to this day still listens to Christmas music throughout the year. I am beginning to understand a little more of what he was trying to tell me. Though December twenty-fifth is the day we celebrate the birth of Jesus, the day we call Christmas, the actual message of Christmas, "God loved the world so much that he gave his only-begotten Son to save the world," is a message that is not meant to be restricted to just a few days of the year or to a particular time of year. It is a message that transcends time, transcends the months and the seasons of the year because of its power to save lives, to change lives, and to give life.

The message of God's love for humanity expressed through the birth of Christ is such a powerful and life-changing message, that to pay attention to it only once a year doesn't seem to do it justice. It seems to make it less important than it really is. It's like meeting the person who saved your life, and simply smiling at that person, patting him on the back and saying, "Thanks, I appreciate it." The response is not proportionate to the selfless deed performed.

The message of Christmas is a message that is appropriate to every day of the year. It is precisely what the world needs to hear now and throughout the year because every day of the year people struggle to live, people fight to hope, and people long to be loved.

We are the messengers of these powerful tidings of God's love. We are the ones who have been chosen to continue to share this life-changing and life-giving message. What a different place the world would be if people

were told every day, or better yet, if people were *shown* every day just how loved they are, that there is hope. God didn't just talk about loving us, he showed us his love for us when his Son was born with the animals on that first Christmas day. And he gave us hope and life when he died on the cross and rose from the dead thirty-three years later.

This is the message of Christmas, a message that warrants being shared any time of the year, whether it is March, July, or October.

Wishing you all a very blessed and merry Christmas,

*Abbot Damien ✠*

*From the (New) Editor*

DEAR READERS,

With the Fall, 2011 issue of the *Valyermo Chronicle*, nine years under the editorship of Fr. Aelred Niespolo, OSB, came to an end. I wish to thank him for nearly a decade of hard work and for the creativity that characterized that work.

As Fr. Aelred's successor I shall have achieved much if I manage to continue along the trajectory he established. I aspire for the *Chronicle* to be more and more a prism through which the spirit of Valyermo is refracted, allowing our readers (including the monastic community) to see the full spectrum latent but not always perceived in the monastic life that is lived in this place and for the world.

On a practical note, we intend to begin publishing the *Chronicle* regularly on or near the traditional "quarter days" of each year: Christmas (December 25), Lady Day (Annunciation, March 25), Midsummer (Birth of St. John

the Baptist, June 24), and Michaelmas (SS. Michael and all Angels, Sept. 29).

Wishing you all joy of Christmas,

*Bede Hazlet, OSB*



# THE VALYERMO *Chronicle*

NUMBER 234 ✠ CHRISTMAS 2011

**St. Andrew's Abbey**

PO Box 40, Valyermo, CA 93563-0040  
saintandrewsabbey.com

**Abbey Retreat Office**

(661) 944-2178  
retreats@valyermo.com

**Abbey Books & Gifts**

artshop@valyermo.com

**St. Andrew's Abbey Ceramics**

(888) 454-5411, (661) 944-1047  
standrewsabbeyceramics.com  
saintsandangels.com

**Development Office**

(661) 944-8959  
development@valyermo.com

**Abbey Youth Center Retreat Office**

(661) 944-2734 or (661) 944-2161

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Br. Bede Hazlet, OSB

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FROM LEFT: BR. MARK, FR. MAXIMOS, ABBOT NICHOLAS, FR. BASIL, FR. MOSES

## GOOD MONKS!

### ABBOT NICHOLAS

**A**S THE BYZANTINE CATHOLIC MONKS of Holy Resurrection Monastery leave Southern California for our new home in St. Nazianz, Wisconsin, our feelings are very mixed indeed. Despite the joy and anticipation we feel as we embark on this new chapter in our community's life, we are very sad to be leaving so many wonderful and supportive people. Among those we will miss the most are the monks of St. Andrew's Abbey, their oblates and extended community. Words cannot express our gratitude to St. Andrew's for their friendship, hospitality and love over these past few years.

I wonder whether people outside the monasteries involved realize just how profoundly linked our two monastic families are. In many ways St. Andrew's has been, as it were, *in loco parentis* to our orphaned monastic family! In fact we have long thought that the two monasteries we have always been closest to, St. Andrew's and St. Antony's Coptic Orthodox Monastery (our closest monastic neighbor when we lived at Newberry

Springs, in the Mojave Desert) have provided us with the same kind of example, training, and support, that have enabled us to grow and mature as monks.

This metaphor is really rather rich. In a very real sense, Holy Resurrection Monastery came into the world an "orphaned" monastery.

History has not been kind to monasticism in the Eastern Catholic Churches. In the centuries following their establishment in Eastern Europe and the Middle East, monasteries had been either suppressed or reformed along the lines of western religious congregations. When in 1995 Pope John Paul II issued his appeal, via his Apostolic Letter *Orientalium Lumen*, for the renewal of authentic Eastern Catholic monasticism, this call was in effect for the rebuilding of a tradition almost from scratch. This was especially true of the so-called diaspora, including America, even though the pope took pains to state explicitly that his appeal applied as much to these countries as to the traditional lands of Eastern Christians.

Most new monasteries are founded by another, more established community, generally called by the evocative name, "mother house." But in 1995, when a small group of men who responded to the appeal in *Orientalium Lumen* gathered to form Holy Resurrection Monastery, there were effectively no other monasteries to provide this maternal care. From the very beginning our community was aware that there was no canonical source it could call on for monastic formation, for that spiritual and material support usually available to help a monastery get started.

So, like any orphans, we set about looking for someone to fill the parental void. As already stated, among those monastic communities



thanks go also to the extended community of Valyermo, the oblates and many friends and employees who have imbibed the generous, friendly spirit of the monks and have shared this with us for the past two-and-a-half years. I know that the small extended community of Holy Resurrection Monastery has also felt this warm welcome during our stay.

As we travel together to different locations to make real God's Kingdom in this exciting time of the New Evangelization, may God bless both our monasteries and all our friends. Please remember the Byzantine monks in your prayers and be assured of ours! ✠



we know, our two closest friends, St. Andrew's Benedictine monastery and St. Antony's Coptic monastery, have been the closest thing we have ever known to family.

The monks of Valyermo had contact with our foundation from the very beginning, providing valuable friendship, direction and encouragement. They welcomed us very generously as brothers when we needed a temporary home. In their gentle, unassuming way the monks of Saint Andrew's Abbey have been such a fine example to us of down-to-earth, loving monastic hospitality. We will always remember fondly our time at the Abbey. Our



CREDIT FOR ALL PHOTOS THIS PAGE: AMADOR VARGAS  
TOP RIGHT: FR. MOSES PROCLAIMS THE GOSPEL AT THE DIVINE LITURGY.  
MIDDLE LEFT: ABBOTS DAMIEN AND NICHOLAS AT FAREWELL AKATHIST.  
BOTTOM RIGHT: MONKS OF VALYERMO AND OF HOLY RESURRECTION.

HARRIET HOSKINS, ObIOSB

**T**HIS YEAR HAS BEEN ANOTHER whirlwind of changes in my life. I truly can relate to the shepherds in the field tending their sheep: you are minding your own business, taking care of the herd of animals; it's cold and damp and every sound can be heard in the night air. The cold, still, quiet air; the sky brilliant with stars like diamonds. The shepherd checks his sack: a meager loaf of bread and if he's lucky a chunk of cheese. No wine to wash it down; just still water with maybe a bug or two in it. Swearing under his breath—he knew he sealed it tight; how did those little buggers get in there?—he steels himself against the cold of the night, wrapping himself in whatever rags he can find to keep out the chill. Keeping one eye open for predators, he closes the other to seek nothingness.

Flash back to my own real life, nothing picturesque, in downtown Los Angeles: crowded; I'm unseen and unknown. No one greets anyone anymore, no Good morning or Have a nice day. My own voice echoes back at me as I meet not stares of wonder but looks of, What do you want from me? "Nice day" I say as I rush to job number X; it seems endless for me at times. I never know from Christmas to Easter where I will be working, a sign of the recession that will snatch the next victim in this great storm. The pay rate changes, bargaining from one job to the next, trying to outshine hundreds of others out of work like myself. If I hear of a friend or former colleague competing for the same job I back off, waiting for the next opportunity, trusting alone in God in silence. Sometimes the tears will not stop. I wonder when this recession will end, or will it end me? There's no medical coverage if I fall sick and no back-up funds. Just me, God, Mother Mary, and the angels and saints pushing to the next step on the road. Please keep the car working, Father; please allow enough money for food, Father; please let there be enough to

## TWO REFLECTIONS ON ADVENT & CHRISTMAS

BY OBLATES OF  
ST. ANDREW'S ABBEY

buy  
food  
for the  
animals, Fa-  
ther ... please.

The shepherds the night Christ was born echoed these same thoughts; I have been told there is nothing new under the sun. Everything rotates around to a different date, a different time. I am sure the shepherds kept an eye open for any strangers, new-comers; anyone who did not fit in. And how others viewed the shepherds: wanderers, people to be avoided—the smell alone! The shabby dress, the meager food rations. The very thought of those shepherds and their flocks seeing those diamonds in the sky come alive and sing out the triumph of the Word, "Hosanna, hosanna in the highest! The King has been born. Do not be afraid for unto you this day a Savior has been born. Follow yonder star; there you will find the King."

Can you imagine? Shepherds in their smelly clothes following a large diamond star in the sky to the place of birth of the King, kneeling down in homage, bowing low to the King of Kings. God called the lowest of the low to reveal his kingship, showed his redemption of the world to ones who had nothing to give but their hearts—these shabby shepherds given the knowledge that every great scholar, scientist, or man of great thought longed to know, see, and experience. In dirty rags not fit for daily man, the everyday man of our world, they were

allowed to see the greatest gift God could give, his Son. To have that gaze of purest love, unconditional love, the very eyes that contain the universe, look directly into the eyes of a shepherd, a nomad. To have that little hand raised to the sky in blessing the shepherds. The pure sweetness of the air that surrounded the Christ Child and Mother Mary the holiest of the holy ones. In a place unfit for a king.

This is what keeps me going. That is how I know the Lord loves me and will see me through this endless recession. I can love Christmas, I can rejoice with the angels singing and praising the Lord. Holy is the Lord, holy is his name. Merry Christmas, world! If the Lord can empty himself to come as a

ANNE BREMSER, ObIOSB

**I**AM OFTEN ON THE INTERNET with friends I have made all over the world. I am especially close to two in India, one in Estonia, one in Ontario, Canada, and one in Maryland, USA. We are all of different religions (or none) and talk about all kinds of things from daily ordinariness to what makes our spirits sing. One of my Hindu friends asked me about how Americans celebrate Christmas. She gets a message of Santa Claus, Christmas trees, spend, spend, spend ... and very little about the spiritual meaning of the Christmas Season. So she asked me what I have to say about Christmas as we celebrate it here, and how I think about it. My answer is what follows.

What I have to say about Christmas has nothing to do with popular culture. No Santa Claus, no store-bought presents, no jingle bells, or the bell ringer at the grocery store. Well, maybe him a little. I think the way it is celebrated is heretical. First, all the parties are in Advent, before Christmas. Advent is not a time to party. It is a time of patient waiting, of expectancy. The whole world holds its breath. This year my daughter is expecting a baby at Christmas. It is like that,

child to deliver this sinner, this sinner can trust the Lord.

I will close with a funny reminiscence of *It's a Wonderful Life*. Jimmy Stewart plays George Bailey, a man who had lost everything and saw no meaning to his life. God sent him an angel, Clarence, to show him what life would have been if he had never been born. His town was a place unfit to live in, his brother died early and his beloved wife was a small shadow of her real self. The angel allowed George Bailey to see how his life touched others, and to see the true meaning of his own life. The true meaning God gives to each of us on that precious day of his birth is the Christmas gift of God himself made man in flesh as a child. God bless!



waiting for new life to come, preparing a place in our hearts, making space for her in her new home, and making clothes for her. We are getting ready. Who will she be? Advent is like a pregnant woman waiting for that day that seems like it will never come.

Or Advent is like a farmer who has prepared a field, plowing and fertilizing and seeding, waiting for something to sprout in what looks like barren land. It takes faith to be a farmer. Knowing that the seed is there is one thing, but knowing if the rain will come, or if the seed is good, or just simply if it will grow this year, is entirely another. Patiently waiting for the brown soil to begin to sprout, grow and bear the food we will depend on is an act of faith.



It is a time of introspection and looking to one's conscience: am I ready? Is my heart open to the coming of the Prince of Peace? It is a time of thinking about Mary's answer to the Angel Gabriel when she was told she would be pregnant by the Holy Spirit. I'm sure she could just hear Joseph and the rest of the town say, "Spirit? You have to be kidding! Everyone knows how you get pregnant, and it ain't by no spirit!" It was a stoning offense, being pregnant by another man after engagement. When she said, "Let it be done to me," she was taking a huge risk, stepping out in faith into thin air, towards possible death. When God asks us to do things that are difficult, can we say with Mary, "Let it be done? Yes. Yes! Yes!!"?

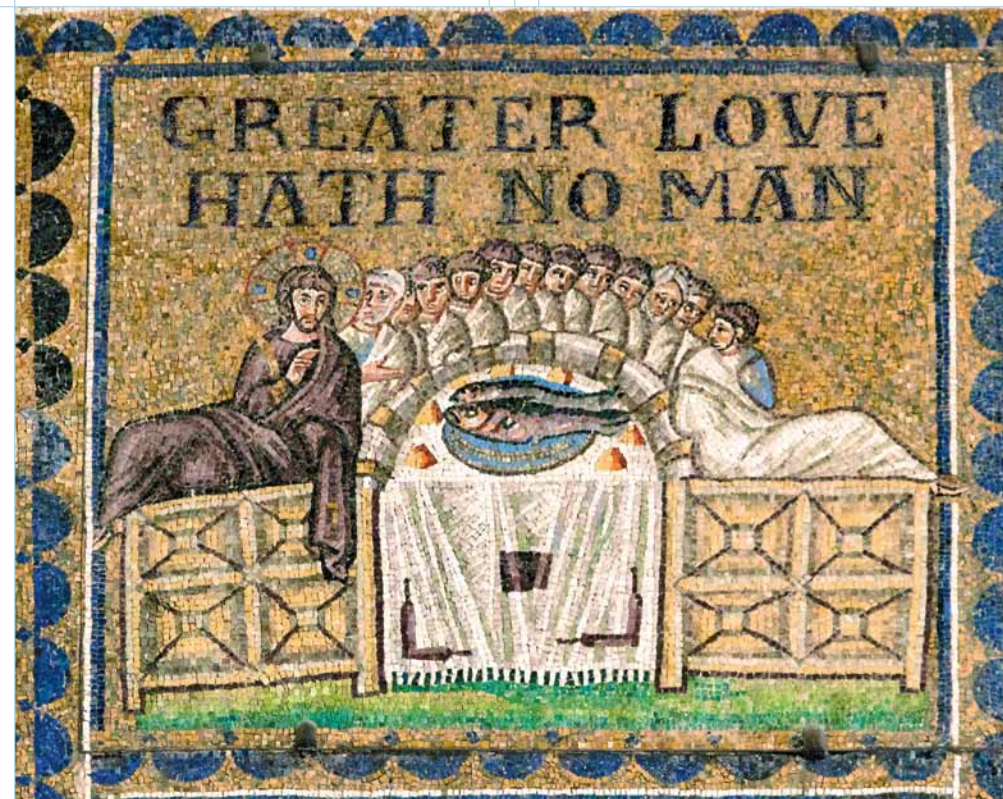
It is a time to think of the darkness covering the earth, of war and man-made famine, and social injustice of every kind, and to know that God weeps for us in our suffering, and out of love for us became one of us to save us. Do we realize that with the advent (coming) of Emanuel (God with us) that the divine is taking the form of a human being to share our suffering and our joy, our successes and failures, loving us always? That he would tell us what God is like? What the Kingdom of God is like? Not a bunch of cute little baby angels flying about in the clouds, but a state of being, of being in love with yourself, your neighbors, and with God. Heaven starts a long time before you die, and so does hell. Because God is outside of time, there are moments in all our lives when the kingdom of God breaks through and we, for an instant, see what love is, what justice is, what mercy is.

In first-century Palestine the Messiah was expected to be a

military liberator, like Cyrus the King of Persia. Many years before, he defeated the Babylonians who had exiled the Jews, leaving them to wonder if the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob still lived. Cyrus allowed the Jews to go back to Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple. After the grief of exile they found proof that God reigns. What the people of Jesus's time were looking for was someone like Cyrus, who would lead them to victory against the Romans who occupied their country. Instead, they got a child born in a feed-trough who grew up poor; the son of a carpenter, who was weird growing up—running off to talk to the elders of the Temple when he was just twelve—and who died the most undignified and most horrifying death, one that was reserved for the worst criminals. That is what the gifts of the Magi represent: gold for kingship; frankincense for his Godhead; and myrrh, which was used to wrap bodies in their shrouds. The ox and ass that we see every year in the Christmas Creche stand for the gods of Egypt, Seth and Apis, bowing down before him. The shepherds were despised people. That the angels announced the birth of the King of Kings to the shepherds, and that they were the first to adore him, means that he came for the lowliest of us. No one is excluded from the grace of his birth.

So you ask what I think of Christmas? It is wonderful. God is with us, made human. If you ask how it is celebrated, no, it is not okay. It isn't about stuff. Or making money. Or office parties. It is about the Lord of the Universe becoming so small and so weak, that he has to be cared for by human beings, experiencing all we experience: stubbed toes, colds, the everyday brutality of living in a country under occupation. An amazing thing. He became fully human to tell us what God is like, show us how much we are loved and how we can love like him. Christmas is the time to rejoice, to have the parties,

*Please turn to page 16.*



## A REFLECTION ON THE EUCHARIST Part 2 of 5: "O Sacred Banquet"

BY BR. CASSIAN DIROCCO, OSB

**I**N THE LAST ISSUE OF THE *CHRONICLE*, we began our reflections on the Eucharist by focusing broadly on the great and selfless gift that our Lord is to all of us. We looked at the vivid example of a life poured out and made radically poor as he washed his disciples' feet on the night he was betrayed, and the humble charge he gave to them—and to us—to live a life in the same humble spirit. We also began to see the great scope and power of what followed upon this example as Christ, anticipating his complete self-immolation on the Cross as an offering to the Father for us, instituted the sacrament of the Eucharist and made his disciples priests of the New Covenant so that he might be continually "broken and shared" throughout

the entirety of his Church's pilgrim life. We also established a fitting lens through which to see and experience all of this in the beautiful vespers Magnificat antiphon of the feast of Corpus Christi composed by the "Angelic Doctor" St. Thomas Aquinas:

*O sacrum convivium! in quo Christus sumitur:  
Recôlitur memôria passîonis ejus:  
Mens implêtur grátia:  
et futúrae glóriæ nobis pignus datur, alleluia.*

O sacred banquet! in which Christ is received, the memory of his Passion is renewed, the mind is filled with grace, and a pledge of future glory is given to us, alleluia.

Having seen the Cenacle as the historical point from which the Eucharist extends mystically and timelessly throughout the life



of the Church, in this current reflection, we will use the first line of this great antiphon (“O sacred banquet! in which Christ is received”) as a way to enter more fully into the unitive reality of the Eucharist. The Eucharist is a sacrament of sacrifice, of presence, and of communion, and it is this last aspect—communion—that we will focus on most particularly here in this reflection.

In a word, communion is how we were created to be. Our communion with one another is centered in the “heart,” that center of self which spiritually encompasses what we mean when we say “I.” The way that we were created, though, was not only an “I”-focused reality, but a “*we*”-focused reality. Christ did not come to save me “despite” my brothers and sisters. He came to save me *with* them. But in life after the Fall, we often live as if handicapped at the level of the heart, finding communion a beautiful ideal to strive for while at the same time running up against serious challenges as we actually seek to live it out. But in a sense, this is all good news. It’s good news because striving is a sign of real life, an indication that we are tending toward the beautiful realities for which God created us. It’s also good news because this “gap” between the ideal and the real brings home to us like nothing else the fact of our human limitations, and inevitably points us toward our ultimate dependence on an “other.” At one level—the human level—this “other” is my brother or sister who shares this same struggle and striving with me. But on an even higher level, this human “other” is the litmus test<sup>1</sup> for the *ultimate* “Other,” God, who fills and builds my capacities for communion with my brothers and sisters *and with him* in ways that I simply cannot realize on my own. In other words, he gives me the grace and the strength to live in the communion of love for which I was created.

<sup>1</sup> 1 John 4: 20, “If a man says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar. For he who does not love his brother whom he sees, how can he love the God he cannot see?”

This communion of love is intimately, integrally related to the fullness of our human dignity. “Integration” is a big watchword in modern spirituality, and rightly so. We realize today more than ever that to compartmentalize parts of ourselves is a recipe for fragmentation and artificiality, and so we recognize modern culture’s drive toward integration as our collective want to be the “one” we were created to be. This requires a fundamental, consciously-lived union, a union which starts first of all within myself, between those aspects of “body, soul and spirit” that make me who I am as a human person. It then extends to the unity of life that I am called to share with my brothers and sisters. And it all is rooted in and finds its ultimate expression in God, the Communion of self-giving love who calls me into being in order to live a similar exchange of love.<sup>2</sup> To eliminate any of these fundamental realities of communion—union within myself, between my brothers and sisters, and with God—is an exercise in denial. And though this intentional life of integration may *seem* “new,” truth be told, at some level this struggle toward integration has been a battle waged in Christian life since its inception. Being made in God’s image and likeness—a likeness of communion realized in love—is a pearl of great price, for the degree to which we live that image in its fullness is the degree to which Christ’s saving love is made radically present among us as his Kingdom of Heaven is lived even now on earth.

And so, communion is important, to say the least! And as we have seen, the communion that we share with one another is rooted in the eternally-lived communion of God: Father, Son, and Spirit. It can’t be any other way, because we weren’t made any other way. And that fact leads us to the place that the Eucharist has in being the heart-center of the way that we live out this communion of love.

<sup>2</sup> “God himself is an eternal exchange of love, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and he has destined us to share in that exchange.” *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (hereafter “CCC”), 221.

The Eucharist is the “source and summit”<sup>3</sup> of our whole lives. While the other sacraments mediate the healing presence of Christ in different ways, the Eucharist *is* Christ. While this truth of the faith may be a “stumbling block” in some circles, that is nothing new. St. Paul told us clearly that in his day this is how Christ was received by many (cf. 1 Cor. 1:23), and we shouldn’t expect that the truth of a life in Christ be received any differently now. However, we need to remember that the best apologetic for the faith is not a polemical argument, but rather a life well-lived, and the Eucharist—being Christ in all his fullness—is our empowerment to do just that. And though the Eucharist is indeed the “source and summit” that Vatican II proclaimed it to be, it is part of an integral sacramental life, a life that begins with baptism.

The Eucharist and baptism are the two great pillars of the sacramental life, which taken as a whole is the ambiance of grace in which the Catholic Christian life is lived. The sacrament of baptism is the “doorway” to the sacramental life, and itself *is* the entryway into the life of communion that the Eucharist fosters and sustains. Baptism incorporates us into a communion of believers, but it is much, *much* more than a “welcome to the Church” ceremony. It frees us from the bonds of original sin, and introduces us into a life of grace by making us tabernacles of the living God. It is because of baptism that God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit abides in the Christian soul and thus gives to us an unspeakably sacred dignity as sons and daughters of divine love. In a word, baptism introduces us into the mystical life that every Christian is called to share, and while it is a doorway into that life, because it is a living font of grace it is never left behind.

As our means to mystical incorporation into the trinitarian life, baptism introduces us into the deep realities of heavenly relationships. First, our relationship with

<sup>3</sup> *Lumen Gentium* 11 (Second Vatican Council).

the individual persons of the Trinity is established and deepened in grace. But along with that comes a whole host of heavenly friends: our Blessed Mother, the angels, the saints, and the holy souls who have gone before us and still await the fullness of a life in Heaven. These relationships are begun in a beautiful way at our baptism; strengthened in our life of virtue; and explored, deepened, and nourished in our life of prayer. All of these relationships are what form the fiber and fabric of a life in Christ, without whom *none* of this would be possible.

But this isn’t all. In his wisdom, Christ knew that we needed something more, something tangible, repeatable, memorable. Christ knew that we needed *him*, again and again and again ... and so he gave us the Eucharist: a sacrament that never ceases in its familiarity to be ever-new; and in its memorial celebration, a never-failing pointer to the “forever” of an unceasing life with him in Heaven. As often as the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is celebrated, the Heaven I long for touches down to earth and takes up a special dwelling in my heart. I am given confidence in the spiritual life, not because *I* am strong, but because God is strong *in* me, filling me with all that I need to put one foot in front of the other and walk the dark roads of this life in and toward a light that never dims. Christ is that light, and it is him in all his fullness that I receive into my very body when I say “Amen” and allow him to fill me with the gift of himself at every Mass.

But, it is not only him: to paraphrase the great church father St. Irenaeus, “Christ is the anointed one. The Father is the one who anoints, and the Spirit Himself is the oil of unction.”<sup>4</sup> Where we find one person of the Trinity, we always find the other two. Love cannot be parceled out, and so when Jesus comes to us under the form of bread, he “brings” with Him the fullness of the divine

<sup>4</sup> Cf. CCC 438, and also Olivier Clément, *The Roots of Christian Mysticism* (New York: New City Press, 1993), 204.



life that he shares with the Father and the Spirit, too. Another church father, St. Ephrem the Syrian, boldly gives voice to this in saying, "He who eats it with faith, eats Fire and Spirit...Take and eat this, all of you, and eat with it the Holy Spirit. For it is truly my body and whoever eats it will have eternal life."<sup>5</sup>

The promises of a life in Christ are so overwhelmingly good that sometimes it may seem *too* good to be true. But not so. All of this is real. And all of this is gift. When we really open our hearts to receive Jesus as he is in the Eucharist, to recognize all that He offers to us and does for us in the spiritual life, we find ourselves called to a new maturity and responsibility to live out "our end" of the covenant of love. If the spiritual life is not lived practically, it is not truly lived. Remember, the Eucharist is part of an *integral* sacramental life. It is the best, culminating part of a divinely instituted system of grace that begins with baptism, but it is not the only part. When we are baptized, we become quite literally "temples of the Holy Spirit." And when we receive Christ in the sacrament of the Eucharist, that indwelling gift is awakened, strengthened, and sustained. But think of what a temple is: a dwelling place of God where His loved ones celebrate the gift of communion with him. And think of how carefully we keep our "temples," our churches, clean and well-tended in order that they may be welcoming, fitting places of worship and praise. Would it not be true to say that today we run the risk of living in neglect of the "primary" temple of God, the human soul? True, baptism takes away original sin. But do we not sin and fall in a myriad of ways in our life's journey between the baptismal font and the grave? If our earthly temples have no "self-cleaning" mechanism, and so need to be lovingly tended and consciously made clean in order to be places in which communion and worship can be celebrated most authentically,

how much more, then, can we say the same about the temple of the soul? Blessed John Paul II once said, to put it simply, that it is a *good* sign that our communion lines are getting longer and longer, but a troubling sign that our confessional lines are getting shorter and shorter. Remember, *integration*. Communion and confession are two sides of the self-same coin, and when lived and practiced in an integral way, not only are we readying the dwelling place of our soul to receive Christ worthily in his sacrament of love, we are afforded the singular grace of a "peace that the world cannot give" (cf. Jn. 14:27) and that money cannot buy.

"O sacred banquet! In which Christ is received..." By God's grace we have all been warmly welcomed to this banquet. To receive God himself into our very bodies, and to live in the eternal communion of love that God is and has called us to share in, is a reality of great promise and importance. The integrity to which we are drawn when living a life in Christ is like a centripetal force of grace beginning in baptism, weaving gracefully throughout an enfleshed sacramental life of virtue and prayer, and finding its apex in the Eucharist—in Christ himself, from whom this all begins and to whom this all belongs. Truly, it is a life like no other, if we only dare to try. This is the "communion" of a Eucharistic life in Christ, an awakening in his sacrament of love to the reality of who he is in us that we may be full of joy for who we are in him. ✠



**Br. Cassian** is a monk of Valyermo. He entered the Abbey in 2007, and is currently in monastic and priestly formation in Rome, residing at Sant'Anselmo (the "mother house" of Benedictine life in Rome) and studying at the Pontifical University of Saint Thomas Aquinas, more commonly known as the Angelicum.

## SELF-DISTRUST

BY THOMAS SCHULTE, OBIOSB

I recently read a book written by the sixteenth-century religious Lorenzo Scupoli entitled *The Spiritual Combat*. This little work, first published in 1589, was one of the most widely read spiritual guides in the history of our Christian faith. By the time of Scupoli's death in 1610 there were sixty different editions in most of the languages of Western Europe. Throughout the centuries there have been hundreds of editions, guiding Christians toward a deeper and more authentic spiritual life. Up until about 150 years ago, *The Spiritual Combat* rivaled in popularity Augustine's *Confessions*, Thomas à Kempis's *Imitation of Christ*, and the *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius of Loyola. It is said that St. Francis de Sales carried a copy in his pocket, referring to it daily for guidance and direction.

Why, I wonder, has this work retreated from the popularity it previously enjoyed? Once so widely read, it seems to have lost favor among modern readers. It occurs to me that one reason for this phenomenon is Scupoli's emphasis on what he refers to as the virtue of self-distrust. Modernity's focus on the gift of reason and humanism's elevation of the value of the individual person seem to clash with the concept of self-distrust. However, I will propose in this article that a careful reading of this wonderful work can lead us into an even deeper understanding of our relationship with God, complementing modern thought.

Scupoli viewed spiritual growth in terms of battle, a conflict between good and evil. He approached his own spiritual life as a soldier, employing discipline, self-control, and acceptance of authority as the rules of engagement. Like a soldier he found it necessary to put self aside, resigning himself to the will of a superior and sacrificing self when necessary for the higher good. To this end he employed what he called the "four weapons for spiritual combat:" self-distrust, trust in God, spiritual



exercises, and prayer. I like to think of these as tools rather than weapons. The last three of these tools toward holiness could, according to Scupoli, not be used well until use of the first, self-distrust, had become familiar.

Scupoli taught that self-distrust is necessary in order to acknowledge that all virtue and goodness come from God. Nothing good comes from us except through the grace of God. In order to attain this end he recommended four ways of acquiring distrust of self. First, meditate on your own brokenness and recognize the fact that of yourself you can do nothing to deserve eternal life. Second, seek from the Lord with fervent and humble prayer this self-distrust, seeing it as a gift. Third, live in continual fear of self, of your own judgment, because of your proneness to sin and powerlessness to defend against the wiles and traps of the evil one. Finally, as soon as you have had any fall, enter immediately and more deeply than before into a consideration of your own feebleness. Turn your failure into an opportunity to become

<sup>5</sup> Quotation taken from John Paul II's encyclical letter *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, 1.17.

wiser and stronger in this spiritual combat.

Once this tool, self-distrust, has been honed and polished, we can hope to succeed in the development of the final three. The more we distrust ourselves, the more fully we can place our trust in God. This principle presupposes that God communicates with us through nature, Scripture, the teachings of the Church, and the Holy Spirit. The challenge then is to distinguish between our self-centered inclinations and those that come to us from God. Scupoli directs us to use his third and fourth tools, spiritual exercises and prayer, to recognize the difference. His spiritual exercises make up the bulk of his work; in them he examines methods of discerning God's will in our daily lives. The final chapter on prayer teaches us how to listen through contemplative prayer for the movement of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

At first blush this concept of self-distrust seems at odds with our desire for becoming self-assured, having strong beliefs and acting decisively on them. Timidity is seen as a weakness. To become a self-made man or woman is our goal. The strong-willed rugged individual is our model. The image of Christ teaching with authority or chastising the merchants in the Temple square is preferred over the suffering Christ kneeling before his Father in the Garden resigning his human will and inclinations to the divine. It is in that last image, that of Jesus suffering in his humanity, that the wisdom of *The Spiritual Combat* comes to light and that Scupoli's teaching proves consistent with Christian concepts of the stages of spiritual growth developed in the early Church and also in line with modern thought.

From the time of the Desert Fathers, spiritual growth has been seen as a process consisting of stages. The image of Jacob's ladder was often employed to illustrate this process. A believer's movement toward holiness was seen as a three-stage process: purgative, illuminative, and unitive. It is in that first, pur-

gative stage that the virtue of self-distrust is born. In this stage we are called to recognize our own brokenness, the weakness of our human condition and our natural inclination toward self and away from God—in short, to recognize the reality of original sin. This concept has not been forgotten in modern times, a fact exemplified by Blessed Pope John Paul II's teaching in the Encyclical *Contesimus Annus*, where he writes, "... man, who was created for freedom, bears within himself the wound of original sin, which constantly draws him toward evil and puts him in need of redemption." This first stage of spiritual growth, the purgative stage, is believed to be necessary before moving upward toward the illuminative where the will of God is brought to light leading to union with him ultimately in Paradise. Scupoli's concept of self-distrust as a virtue that must be encouraged rather than scorned is perfectly consistent with ancient as well as modern Christian teaching.

In this light, *The Spiritual Combat* can be a useful source for spiritual direction, rather than being viewed as out of step with modern thought. For, like *The Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius Loyola, *The Spiritual Combat* is all about discernment. It gives the reader a method of differentiating between those inclinations, desires, and movements driven by the broken human self and those infused by the Holy Spirit. Each exercise employed by Scupoli involves the process of centering our lives on Christ rather than on self, distinguishing when our thoughts and actions are generated by self love or love of our neighbor. It is my hope to incorporate this work into my life as an oblate. We as Benedictines are called to foster in our lives humility, obedience, and hospitality. All of these virtues can be perfected by starting from a position of self-distrust rather than from pride, willfulness, and selfishness. Distrust of self should be our first step toward holiness. ✠

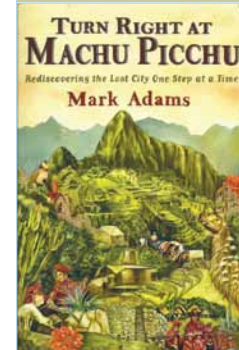
**T**HIS UNEXPECTED SERIES OF BOOK reviews began with an enterprising young American (Bruce Feiler)'s account of his literally walking the Bible from the heights of Mount Ararat to the depths of the salt plain of the Dead Sea. Now another youngish (actually middle-aged!) American has scrupulously followed in the footsteps of the intrepid "discoverer" of the "Lost City of the Incas," Hiram Bingham III—scion of American missionaries to Hawaii. Bingham's five hours in the ruins of an Incan city high in the Andes on July 24, 1911, have put him and Machu Picchu forever in the spotlight.

Mr. Adams, "an editor at various adventure travel magazines in New York City" (p.1) tells us that "sitting at a computer in New York and sending writers off on assignment to Kilimanjaro and Katmandu ... I wanted an adventure of my own" (p.2). At risk of exceeding the reviewer's license to violate copyright, I should like to put before you in the author's own words the genesis and intent of this most engaging book:

Bingham's search had been a geographic detective story, one that began as a hunt for the Lost City of the Incas but grew into an all-consuming attempt to solve the mystery of why such a spectacular granite city had been built in such a spellbinding location: high on a secluded mountain ridge, in the misty subtropical zone where the Andes meet the Amazon. Fifty years after Bingham's death [in 1956], the case had been reopened. And the clues were still out there to be examined by anyone with strong legs and a large block of vacation time [p.4] ... I wanted to retrace Bingham's route through the Andes on his way to discovering Machu Picchu. I also wanted to see three other important sites he had visited: the mountain top citadel of Choquesquirao, now considered by many to be Machu Picchu's twin city; Vitcos, site of one of the holiest shrines in Inca Empire; and Espiritu Pampa, the long-lost jungle city

## QUARTERLY BOOK REVIEW

by fr. philip edwards, osb



**TURN RIGHT AT  
MACHU PICCHU:  
Rediscovering  
the Lost City One  
Step at a Time**  
Mark Adams

Dutton, New York, 2011

where the Incas made their last stand against the Spaniards. Exactly how we were going to accomplish this—buses? trains? llamas?—was a detail I hadn't thought through very well ... I had mixed feelings about the Inca Trail. For trekkers, it was like making the hajj to Mecca; you had to do it once in your life. But every story I had read about the Inca Trail—and when you work at an adventure travel magazine, you read a lot of stories about the Inca Trail—made it sound as crowded as the George Washington Bridge at rush hour. The best parts of Bingham's books were the sections describing Peru's natural beauty, and I was hoping to get a sense of Peru as Bingham had seen it if such a thing still existed [pp.5-6] ... "You know, Mark, all Incan roads lead to Machu Picchu," John said. He reached across the cleared table for a jam jar. I couldn't help but notice how different our hands were. His had square-cut nails and looked like they'd spent a lifetime hauling lines on a trawler. Mine looked like I'd just visited the salon for a mani-pedi. "If this is Machu Picchu"—here he placed the jar at the center of the table—"and this is Chaquesquirao"—he aligned the sugar bowl—"then these are Vitos and Espiritu Pampa." He moved the salt and pepper shakers into position. The four pieces formed a Y shape with Machu Picchu at the bottom [p.6].

Represented by jars of breakfast condiments, the trip didn't look especially daunting. About a hundred miles of walking, by



my rough calculations. From the sound of what John had described, we'd go north, cut through the mountains, bear left toward the jungle, then double back toward Cusco. For the big finish, all we had to do was follow the river and turn right at Machu Picchu. This last part sounded like a pleasant afternoon stroll, something to kill a few hours and work up an appetite for dinner.

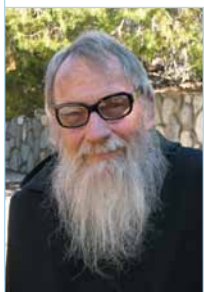
"I know it's a lot to take in," John said. "Any questions so far?"

I could think of only one. "Is this harder than the Inca Trail?"

For a split second, John looked like he didn't understand me. "Mark, this trek is a LOT harder than the Inca Trail!" [p.8]

\*\*\*

And so it proved to be! You know the story: the brash but plucky naïf perseveres, challenged and chastened, but achieving the goal, wiser and hopefully humbler, certainly more compassionate and understanding—he will surely never let his young son set foot on the trail without two layers of sock between toe and bootleather! It is in the genre of Bill Bryson's captivating *A Walk in the Woods: Rediscovering America on the Appalachian Trail* (New York: Broadway Books, 1998)—another foot-on experience of another middle-aged softie who learns to live more leanly and consciously trekking and tenting in the steps of historical wilderness. Feiler's goal in tracking the faith of Abraham is ultimately more important but Adams and Bryson are good reads and keep us truthful with our blistered feet on the ground while looking to the clouds enshrouded in mystery. ✂



Fr. Philip Edwards, OSB

## REFLECTIONS from page 8

to express fully with our whole selves how grateful we are for such a gift. The weeks after December twenty-fifth are the time for singing and dancing and music and lights. ✂



**Ann Bremser** was raised in a Buddhist-humanist leaning family and became a Catholic at nineteen. She has fought autoimmune disease most of her life, starting at age seven, and it has interrupted her life-plans numerous times. She now knows that there is only God's plan, which may have little resemblance to her fine ideas. She has a Certificate in Pastoral Studies from Loyola, New Orleans. She has lived in the desert for twenty-six years, and finds it a very good place.



The monks of Valyermo at St. Andrew's Abbey have begun a new venture. "MonksInk" is designed to fulfill your printing needs and let you support the Abbey at the same time.

MonksInk.com offers high-quality ink and toner for all major brands and models of printers, copiers, and fax machines at discounted prices.

The Benedictine way of life sees the extraordinary in the ordinary. Printer ink may not seem extraordinary, but sometimes it's the little things that make the difference. With MonksInk, your home or office work place can share a little in the Benedictine spirit of *Ora et Labora* (Prayer and Work) and *Pax* (Peace).

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## Around and About THE ABBEY

### ADIEU ...

In October, observer Paul Cloney decided to leave Valyermo. Please join us in praying for him as he continues to discern his vocation.

### FALL DRAWING WINNERS

Congratulations to the winners of this year's Annual Abbey Fall Drawing!

First prize: Marie Picerni

Second prize: J. R. Adams

Third prize: Pearl Henzgen

### OBLATE NEWS

For information—as it becomes available—on 2012 oblate meetings held at the Abbey, please visit [saintandrewsabbey.com](http://saintandrewsabbey.com). Hover over "Oblate Program," then click on "Oblate Meetings."

### ABBEY BOOKS & GIFTS

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

**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.

### MONKS' FEAST DAYS

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

Call Carolyn Jordan at (661) 944-2178, ext. 112 or email her at [carolyn@monksvalyermo.com](mailto:carolyn@monksvalyermo.com)

**THE CHRONICLE IS NOW ONLINE** If you prefer to read this publication online just send an email, including your name, indicating this preference to [development@valyermo.com](mailto:development@valyermo.com). This is a cost-saving convenience for the Abbey.

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**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 automatically donate 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](mailto: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.

WE VALUE OUR FRIENDS AND DO NOT BUY, RENT, SELL OR SHARE OUR MAILING LISTS.

**FOREWORD**

As a former teacher, I frequently cut letters out of construction paper for my classroom bulletin boards. I amassed a considerable collection over the years—multiple versions of the alphabet in a variety of shapes, sizes, and colors that were stored in a cabinet. One September, as I reached for the letters, I jostled the open box they were kept in, righting it just before it could fall off the shelf. The only casualties were a handful of letters that spilled onto the shelf and just three that fluttered to the floor—R, P, and Y. When I stooped to pick them up, I spotted another letter dangling tenuously on the back of the cabinet door, snagged by some imperceptible burr on a screw that secured the handle—an A. Serendipitous? Perhaps. But as this was a time of spiritual re-awakening in my life, I suspect it was more than mere chance. Even now I smile when I think of that pithy reminder to P-R-A-Y.

Why, when, where, how, for what, for whom, and with whom we pray is very personal, but pray we must. Prayer connects us to God, to each other, and to creation. Guided by the *Rule of St. Benedict* and the maxim “Prayer and Work,” our 2012 retreat and workshop offerings focus largely on prayer, particularly contemplative, creative, and community prayer. Our goal is to provide participants with opportunities to consider how others both struggled and persevered in prayer, to discover different, perhaps unconventional ways to pray, and to meld prayer and work into personal and communal oblations to God. We welcome you to join us.

Cheryl Evanson, ObIOSB  
Retreat Center Administrator

FOR COMPLETE DESCRIPTIONS  
OF OUR OVERNIGHT AND DAY RETREATS,  
PLEASE VISIT OUR WEBSITE:

SAINTANDREWSABBEY.COM

FOR RESERVATIONS,

CALL THE RETREAT OFFICE: (661) 944-2178



## RETREAT CENTER

# Calendar

## WINTER 2011

(Day retreats in red, Spanish and bilingual retreats in italics.)

**JANUARY****CUCUMBERS AND PICKLES:****12-STEP WORKSHOP****PEPINOS Y ENCURTIDOS:****UN 12-STEP TALLER (BILINGUAL)**

*Saturday, January 7 / Sabado, 7 Enero*

*9:00 a.m. ~ 3:30 p.m.*

Presenter: Fr. Isaac Kalina, OSB

Donation: \$40 includes morning beverages and lunch

Donación: \$40 incluye café o té en la mañana y el almuerzo

**MID-WINTER DANCE WORKSHOP**

*Friday, January 13 ~ Monday, January 16*

Presenters: John West, ObIOSB

Fr. Philip Edwards, OSB

Room, board, and tuition:

\$350 single; \$287.50 each shared

**DREAMS AND SPIRITUAL GROWTH**

*Wednesday, January 18 ~ Friday, January 20*

Presenters: Victoria Dendinger, ObIOSB, PhD

Diana Janas, ObIOSB, MSJ

Room, board, and tuition:

\$200 single; \$175 each shared

**SPIRITUALITY AND CONTEMPORARY CINEMA: WINTER SESSION**

*Friday, January 20 ~ Sunday, January 22*

Presenter: Nikki Tucker, ObIOSB

Room, board, and tuition:

\$250 single; \$200 each shared

**PRIESTS' RETREAT: COME CREATOR SPIRIT**

*Monday, January 23 ~ Friday, January 27*

Presenter: Fr. Joseph Brennan, OSB

Room, board, and tuition: \$400 single

**INTER-PARISH RCIA DAY OF RECOLLECTION**

*Saturday, January 28, 9:00 a.m. ~ 3:00 p.m.*

Presenters: Victoria Dendinger, ObIOSB, PhD

Diana Janas, ObIOSB, MSJ

Donation: \$40 includes morning beverages and lunch

**WARMING THE HEART: A COOKING WORKSHOP/RETREAT**

*Monday, January 30 ~ Friday, February 3*

Presenter: Fr. Isaac Kalina, OSB

Room, board, and tuition:

\$400 single; \$350 each shared

**FEBRUARY****MOTHER TERESA: MYSTIC?**

*Monday, February 13 ~ Thursday, February 16*

Presenter: Br. Ben Harrison, MC

Room, board, and tuition:

\$300 single; \$262.50 each shared

**LISTEN: A SILENT RETREAT TO BEGIN THE LENTEN JOURNEY**

*Tuesday, February 21 ~ Friday, February 24*

Presenters: Monks of Valyermo

Room, board, and tuition:

\$300 single; \$262.50 each shared

**LENTEN RETREAT**

*Friday, February 24 ~ Sunday, February 26*

Presenters: Monks of Valyermo

Room, board, and tuition: \$250; \$200 each shared

**ORACION Y CULTO LITURGICO (ESPANOL)**

*Sabado, 25 Febrero, 9:00 a.m. ~ 3:30 p.m.*

Presentador: Fr. Isaac Kalina, OSB

Donación: \$40 incluye café o té en la mañana y el almuerzo

**PRIESTS' RETREAT: COME CREATOR SPIRIT**

*Monday, February 27 ~ Friday, March 2*

Presenter: Fr. Joseph Brennan, OSB

Room, board, and tuition: \$400 single



**A NOTE ABOUT COSTS:** Our recommended donations have increased slightly to reflect the rise in the cost of fuel, food, and linen service. Modifications in shared rates also reflect a more equitable distribution of costs per guest. We thank you for your understanding and support.

**MARCH****THE GOSPELS**

*Saturday, March 3*

*9:00 a.m. ~ 3:30 p.m.*

Presenter: John D'Isaaco, ObIOSB

Donation:

\$40 includes morning beverages and lunch

**LENTEN JOURNEY WITH THE JESUS PRAYER**

*Friday, March 9 ~ Sunday, March 11*

Presenter: Fr. Maximos Davies

Room, board, and tuition:

\$250 single; \$200 each shared

**RECONCILIATION AND FRIENDSHIP****RECONCILIACION Y AMISTAD (BILINGUAL)**

*Wednesday, March 14 ~ Friday, March 16*

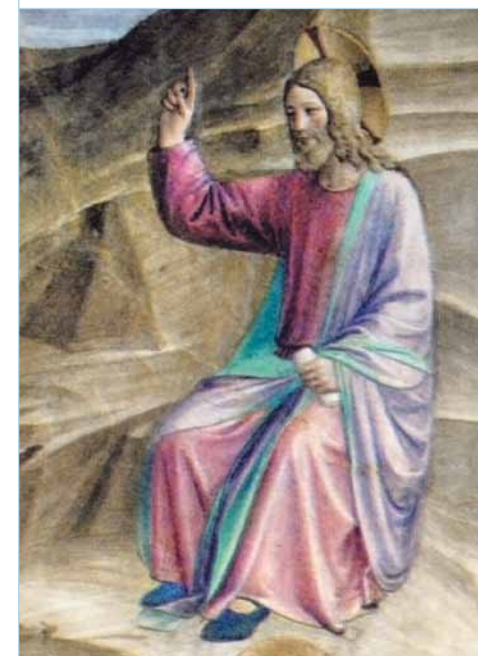
Presenter: Fr. Isaac Kalina, OSB

Room, board, and tuition:

\$200 single; \$175 each shared

Cuarto, alimentos y tutorial:

\$200 una persona; \$175 cada uno (dos personas)







St. Andrew's Abbey  
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