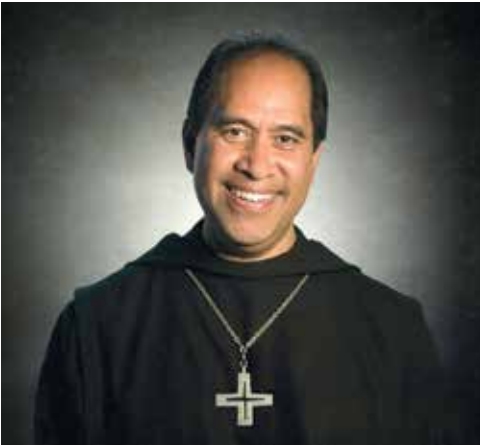


THE VALYERMO  
*Chronicle*

ST. ANDREW'S ABBEY

№ 243 ✦ AUTUMN 2014



EAR FRIENDS,  
AS A MONK, MANY PEOPLE ASK ME QUESTIONS like: What's the secret to praying? What do you recommend to someone who is having a hard time with prayer? How do you get the most out of prayer? How do you not become distracted in prayer? Father Damien, how do *you* pray? People want to know how to pray more effectively. In Matthew's gospel (6:6-15), Jesus gives us a model for prayer.

In the Lord's Prayer, the first two words *Our Father*, remind us that prayer is first of all something that comes from a relationship with Someone who knows us. In other words, when we pray, we don't say, "To Whom It May Concern." Our prayer is not directed to some vague nebulous person, like the letters we sometimes get: "Dear Friend," "Dear Benefactor," "Dear Preferred Customer." But we say "Our Father." It doesn't matter whether we prefer inclusive language or not. With these two words, Jesus makes the point that our prayers are addressed to someone who actually knows us in an intimate way—because He made us. We came from Him.

This is important for us to remember because when we have an idea of who we're talking to, meaning the kind of Person God is, it affects how we pray, what we pray for,

and just as important, how we react when God answers our prayers.

So perhaps the question is not "how to pray"; but more importantly who are we are praying to. What is God like? When we pray, what kind of God do we have in our mind and in our heart? Is He a mean God? A nice God? Is He a demanding God? Is He distant from us or near to us? Is He difficult to please? What is His interest in me?

Scripture helps us to know the kind of God we have. Scripture says Jesus is the image of the invisible God (Colossians 1:15). So all we have to do is look at Jesus. Read what Jesus did. Listen to what Jesus said and how He thought. The way Jesus is, is the way God is because Jesus is God.

So when we pray, it might be helpful to remember that we are praying to the Person who walked on water and who calmed the winds and sea; we are praying to the One who cast out demons and healed people who were sick. When we pray, we are praying to the Person who cried when his friend died, and who felt so sorry for a mother who lost her only son that He raised that son to life. When we pray, we are praying to the Person who fed 5000 people with just two loaves of bread and five fish. When we pray, we are praying to the Person who allowed someone to put nails in His hands and feet because of love. We are praying to One who forgives sins and has conquered death.

The God we pray to is a very powerful Person, but He is also gentle, loving and caring. Come to me, He said, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest, for I am gentle of heart. (Matthew 11:28-30)

The sooner we realize the kind of God we are praying to, the sooner we realize that there really is no mysterious secret to praying. It is simply a matter of us placing ourselves in the presence of an overwhelmingly loving and caring God and allowing ourselves to receive all the good He wants to give us.

Abbot Damien ✧

## FROM THE EDITOR

The Autumn issue of *The Chronicle* highlights the fact that the liturgical year is coming to a close. One of the key images the liturgy presents is that of Christ the King. Our liturgies are filled with predictions of the end of time, and the imagery of Jesus coming, on clouds of glory, with trumpets blasting. This imagery is both enthralling and terrifying at the same time. But Christ as king also tells us *about* the kingdom: about worship, prayer and relationship with each other. Several of our articles this quarter deal with, and focus on, prayer, attitude, life-style; essentially — the lifestyle requirements inherent in this symbolic and dynamic relationship of Christ as King, both in the now and in the future.

The Autumn also brings us a sense of time having passed, the birth of spring and the fruitfulness of summer giving way to mortality and evanescence. This is something we all identify with whether as individuals or even as a monastic community. The importance lies in that with each season we are asked to give something deeply of ourselves to each other — if not the enthusiasm of youth, perhaps, hopefully the wisdom of experience, and a growing sense of God's love in our lives, and a growing sense of missing home.

Perhaps this is a good place to quote a wonderful poem by the Jesuit Gerard Many Hopkins, a gentle, and moving, reflection on our passing state in a time that passes so quickly:

*Spring and Fall*

MÁRGARÉT, áre you gríeving  
 Over Goldengrove unleaving?  
 Leáves, like the things of man, you  
 With your fresh thoughts care for, can you?  
 Áh! ás the heart grows older  
 It will come to such sights colder  
 By and by, nor spare a sigh  
 Though worlds of wanwood leafmeal lie;  
 And yet you will weep and know why.  
 Now no matter, child, the name:  
 Sórrow's spríngs áre the same.  
 Nor mouth had, no nor mind, expressed  
 What heart heard of, ghost guessed:  
 It is the blight man was born for,  
 It is Margaret you mourn for.

—*The Editor*

# THE VALYERMO *Chronicle*

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# An Experience of Benedictine Transition

FROM OBLATE TO  
PROFESSED SISTER

SR. ROSEMARY DEGRACIA, OSB

I BEGAN JOTTING THESE THOUGHTS AS I began my canonical novitiate in August 2010. Shortly after the news arrived at St. Andrew's, I was asked to journal a few notes on what it was like to be a monastic novice—alas, that ended three years ago, and I am finally putting this reflection together.

2010 was the beginning of my second formal novitiate—the first was served as an oblate novice of St. Andrew's Abbey in 1998. In retrospect, many of us serve novitiates of various sorts as we transition from one level of vocation/state of life to another. Each has its own structures and rules. We experience formation in many guises—learning a new job or skill; assuming a new ministry, acquiring new knowledge in many ways. Those of us who experience initiation in a new religious tradition question and expand our previously held image of God and Church. Formation stretches us. I have been blessed to experience that spiritual elasticity—formed as a Methodist in my youth, initiated into the Catholic Church in my twenties, served a graced year

"NUN" (DETAIL), BY ANTON HANSCH\_ (1813–1876)

as an oblate novice for St. Andrew's and am still in formation, now as a professed Benedictine. August 27, 2011, marked my First Profession as a Benedictine Sister of Annunciation Monastery, BMV, Bismarck, North Dakota.

My oblate novice year and subsequent retreats as an oblate of St. Andrew's expanded my love for the Rule and provided a solid "base layer" of Benedictine formation. I feel privileged to have had the opportunity to be formed by such skilled presenters of monastic wisdom as the monks and oblates of Valyermo. I am also grateful for the time and guidance provided by Liza, my oblate mentor, who unpacked the Rule for me weekly as we prepared for my final oblation. When my husband died in 2003, I was mentally and spiritually adrift for at least a year. I cut back on parish and other ministry commitments to discern next steps. As the first nudges towards religious life began to surface, I was wisely counseled by a monk of the Abbey and Sr. Meg to grieve first and continue to pray for God's direction. Two years later I knew that the sense of call would not go away, and I returned to a week-long retreat seeking either confirmation of this yearning or direction towards alternatives. Was this a whim or a genuine summons? My will or God's? It felt like stepping off a cliff into an enveloping void—yet without fear. God was in the void.

I knew that my options in religious life would be limited by my age and marriage; I also limited my search to Benedictine communities. I left the retreat with a short list of communities which I researched and visited. There are pros and cons of older vocations previously married or not, children or not. Older vocations arrive with experiences and history not shared by the rest of the community. This can add to the richness and diversity of a community's gifts, but it can also bring with it the baggage of attachments to status and possessions. I found it somewhat easier to let go of the possessions (but perhaps am still challenged by the attachments), but found disorientation in the necessary humility of being the newest and

least of the members. Older vocations often arrive with a maturity borne through coping with a myriad of experiences. These experiences have formed us—sometimes positively, sometimes not. A large degree of openness to change and possibility is needed. Ongoing transformation/*conversatio morum suorum* is required of all of us—in the monastery or not.

When entering a monastery one leaves behind one's former life—family, friends, work, possessions. I have five grown children whose support I gathered prior to my application for acceptance into the period of an Affiliate—a discerner who then focuses on a specific community. My older son called my transition from "Church Lady" to sister a "logical progression." It is difficult to see them so rarely—even though they are immersed in their own busy lives, with children of their own. I miss close friends, the St. Andrew's community of monks and oblates, parish and other ministry associations, and the work associations that defined a large part of my life.

Although my transition was staged during a two-year period of divesting myself of home and possessions, I worked full time up until the minute I left my going away party to hop into the waiting car ready for the trek to North Dakota. I received formal acceptance to begin the Postulancy in early May, gave formal notice to my employer, left town for a planned vacation, returned home early June to transition my work and ministry responsibilities to new leadership, pack, and attend departure events. I left California August 2. I don't recommend the timeline.

During my first year, the Postulancy, I lived the monastic schedule but had few community responsibilities and still controlled my own funds. Upon entry into the Novitiate, I ceded control of my finances, time and my very self to the monastery. This is freeing, but sometimes, for a "control freak" such as me, scary. The Canonical Novitiate is also a one year plus one day period of increased enclosure. While we are not a cloistered community,

a novice does not travel or work outside the monastery during that year. Emphasis is on prayer, study and discernment. I did not find it restrictive and was blessed with a director who encouraged occasional cultural opportunities and some creative expression. I enjoyed classes in monastic studies, scripture and liturgy and am grateful to St. Andrew's for unfolding the mysteries of reading and singing chant. Several of the gifts of "a year around the house" were the ability to gain appreciation of the inner workings of the monastery and the opportunity to get to know the house-bound sisters personally.

We often think of initiation/formation in terms of orientation; we go through orientation before beginning a new job or volunteer opportunity. Monastic formation, however, entails a dis-orientation from one's former way of life. The sage advice of grieving the loss of my husband prepared me for other losses. This sense of loss continues as I recognize how entrenched my grasp on the world has been and how I daily need God's help to stay grounded in monastic life. This was reiterated as part of my canonical novitiate year. One of the milestones of the novitiate year for Benedictine women religious is Novice and Director Institute—NADI for short. The two-week institute gathers novices and their directors from around the United States for an experience of monastic preparation for First Monastic Profession. One of the talks focused on transition. Sr. Jane explored the many aspects of transition—endings, distress and new beginnings. This helped me to name some of the shifts in my own spiritual and psychological transition. I also recognized my own limitations in attempting the enormity of this transition without casting myself on the mercy of God and the assistance of my Community.

Looking back on the many transitions I made in a very short time, I can smile at my foolishness in not anticipating the numerous challenges. Granted, I had been raised

in Illinois and knew the regional differences awaiting me in weather, diversity and population size; however, that first long winter with freezing gale winds—cut off from family connections and dear friends was difficult. After living in cities my entire life, I now live five miles from town on a silent prairie vista overlooking the Missouri River. We have our own semblance of the high desert with few trees and unencumbered landscape—complete with deer, coyotes, pheasants and wild turkeys.

But these were largely physical challenges; the greater challenge is the ongoing experience of the ordinary within the context of a community centered on Christ. Learning that rhythm and adapting to the gradual change effected by rubbing up daily against the monastic ills of self-will or the boredom of *acedia*, I grow in dependency on God and the ongoing support of community to sustain my monastic profession of stability, obedience and *conversatio*.

I now begin that final year of discernment which begins with a three-week workshop and silent retreat with Benedictine women in this same stage of formation from around the world. We are a diverse group, and that's what Benedict envisioned; yet we all go to God together running the path of God's commands. ✠



**Sr. Rosemary DeGracia, OSB**, began her Benedictine vocation as an Oblate of St. Andrew's Abbey in 1998. Following the death of her husband, and with the blessing of her five grown children, Sr. Rosemary discerned a vocation to vowed religious life and is now a sister of Annunciation Monastery, Bismarck, North Dakota. She completed her MBA and serves in ministry for the University of Mary as Director of University Compliance and as Assistant Director of Oblates. In her spare time, she indulges in her love of learning as monastic librarian.



# KINGdom *and* KING

FR. AELRED NIESPOLO, OSB

**A**S THE LITURGICAL YEAR COMES TO AN END, WE ARE AGAIN ASKED TO LISTEN FOR SIGNS OF THE END TIMES AND to voice ever more insistent pleas for a Savior. We ask for the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of God. What is that kingdom? How can we know it? How can we describe it? One way is to ask a most important question: What does the King tell us of the Kingdom?

The intimacy of a deeply personal relationship between king and kingdom is ancient, a relationship rooted in a singular premise: as the king fared, as the king was, so was the kingdom. If the king was righteous then the kingdom prospered; if sinful, then the kingdom suffered and even died; if the king was healthy, so was the kingdom; but if sick, or wounded, the kingdom became a wasteland. This relationship of king to kingdom goes back through the millennia in humanity's understanding of the king as someone unique, special, and related to God (or to the gods), to life, to the harvest, and to generativity itself, an encompassing of the land and its people entirely into one person. St. Paul refers to a kingly Jesus as someone who in *himself* holds *all things* together. So it is not inappropriate for us to reflect upon Christ the King as the end of the liturgical year approaches almost as an "examen" of what we have made of ourselves and world. How have we built the Kingdom?

But this is a relatively recent feast in the Church's calendar, established only in 1925 by Pope Pius XI as part of his response to the increasingly active and antagonistic secularism that threatened the physical well-being of the Church. This feast became a rallying point for a type of socially militant Christianity which combated the rise of atheistic, or doctrinally secular, governments that attempted to take away the civil, social and even spiritual rights of the Church.

However in our time, for the most part what we face, in our western world, is the force of a systematic and antagonistic trivialization of the spiritual, and of stressing the all-too-human and seemingly apparent failings of our Church. The world sees a lived faith as only a running away from the unimportance of God in one's life, not a search for meaning. Or worse: as a sign of a "God delusion" built into our very being; a conviction that we will become a fully matured humanity only when we rid ourselves of this particular delusion.

Oddly, and significantly, this only seems to increase in our modern western hearts a desire for *some* kind of god. No matter what we do our hearts desire a god. The question is, of course, what god do we desire and want to worship?

Against this kind of secularism, the royal trappings of the feast of Christ the King seem a bit outmoded. The images we might have of Christ as King still seem to resonate with the story-book and historical-novel gilt of Carolingian kings, medieval royalty, Tudor monarchs of absolute power, who live in gilded luxury and splendor, and in our vivid imaginations. It is still so easy for us to get caught up in ideas of dynasty and triumph. For we are in need of spiritual and psychological strength, and so yearn to be awed by a glorious king, instead of being constantly embarrassed and disappointed by the moral pygmies that seem to rule the world today. Or perhaps we even equate the feast with our own well-being, our own status, our own worth in the face of a secularism that finds people of faith to be somewhat foolish at best, and at worst, hypocritical, destructive and deluded. We might also genuinely, and even justifiably, miss some of the pomp and circumstance that no longer seems to typify our ecclesial life and rites — we miss a certain kind of archetypal symbolism and resonance that perhaps made us feel part of something greater, and which points towards something greater than ourselves: the mystery of the Kingdom of Heaven.

And so we must ask ourselves this question again: what does the King tell us of the kingdom?

The feast of Christ the King lies between, and in effect joins, two liturgical periods. Its position does lead us to reflect on the ending of things, but also what a new beginning will be like. It's an inter-connection between a time of fulfillment and a time of waiting, of culmination that will, so surprisingly and so inevitably rightly, end in something small and





fragile: God made flesh; the one who turns all values inside out, the king who is a slave. This feast is a crossing-point where time meets its purpose and results in re-definition.

The phrase “Kingdom of Heaven” is, in fact, a bit misleading. It encourages us to think of a place, of a future place, of something distanced from us. This does not seem to be what Jesus preaches and lives. It is better to refer to a more expanded meaning of the Greek word for Kingdom (*basileia*) which also means the *reign* of God. God acting *now*. This really emphasizes the nature of God’s love: a love that exists now and demands response from us in order for it to be completely transformative. The kind of response is specified in the two great commandments of loving God and loving neighbor. There is a unique and essential union between love, being loved and living the entirety of one’s life out that experience of love.

The three different cycle readings of the gospels assigned to this liturgical feast point us towards understanding.

The gospel reading for this year is almost self-explanatory: Matthew 25, 31-46. This stresses *how* we are to build the kingdom and serve the king — through our generosity towards those in need, those hungry, thirsty; those to whom we give hospitality; those we clothe. Above all those who care for others, visiting them whether convenient or not, beneficial to oneself or not. And the point here in Matthew is not that we did these things *for* Christ, but we did these things because we wish to live our lives in imitation of Christ; we are doing what Jesus would do for those in need, for anyone in need: Jew or Gentile, Christian or non-Christian. Anyone. This is a major factor in building the kingdom, in defining the king we worship: selfless service.

The gospel reading from Luke (23:35-43) is a summary of how Christ as king was understood then, and now. We have those who were both disappointed in, and frightened by, this Jesus — those who wanted a powerful Messiah to lead them out of Roman bondage, and those who felt their religious establishment and positions of authority were threatened by him, and by his teachings. Some remained silent on Golgotha as others jeered in relief and self-justification. There are also those whose idea of a king was and still is a Caesar; men and women who could only mock this naked and dying figure who dared call himself a king.

What is striking in Luke’s portrait of the king is how totally Christ entered into the darkest part of the human condition: injustice, betrayal, pain, humiliation and death itself, out of an experience of love by God and for God. He was not even given the dignity of dying alone, as someone special, but rather with criminals who were despised by everyone — even the righteous. He fully enters into the joint heritage of sin and failure and mortality that belongs to the history of humanity. It is from the mouth of one of those thieves, crucified with him, that we gain the keenest

insight into what our king tells us of the kingdom. The religious leaders, the Romans, the unrepentant thief all taunt Jesus — asking him why he cannot *save* himself — if he is the Messiah, the Christ, *the* King. What we might miss is the Lucan irony that Christ is saving *them*, and that salvation is rooted in the loss of self for others. This is so integral a part of the kingdom’s mystery. Jesus is the king for others.

The force and power of the “good” thief’s statement begins with his very first word to Christ: “Jesus”. This is the only time in all of the gospels that Jesus is referred to in this simple vocative way. It is not Master or Rabbi, but simply Jesus. It betrays an intimacy and openness from one man in pain to another. And this is another aspect of the king and kingdom: our personal relationship with the crucified king. To establish the kingdom means to have an intimate relationship with Jesus, a relationship grounded in the incarnation of God fully sharing the lot of his creatures, of a king being one with his people.

Our last gospel is John: 18:33-37. This the only time recounted in the Evangelists that Jesus confronts, face to face, a representative of the political power that his own followers want him to overthrow. It is an amazing few verses of scripture as Jesus and Pilate look at, and into, each other: two different concepts of power and strength. From the very beginning of Christ’s public life, from the temptations in the desert after his baptism, he has been asked to choose, and always rejected, the kind of authority and leadership Pilate represents. It is only now that he finally admits publicly to kingship and this to the one who can crucify him because of that admission. He will answer Pilate’s question — are you then a king? — *only* if it is being truthfully

asked, *only* if it comes directly from Pilate himself; not something he was told by others. It is only in an encounter with personal seeking for truth that healing and salvation occurs, not in expedient or self-deceptive lies. It is the same for all of us. The same kind of encounter with Jesus we all need. Personal. Truthful. Uncompromising.

Jesus replies that his kingdom is not Caesar’s kingdom, it is not a kingdom built on coercion, or exploitation, or upon a wasteland of lies. It is built upon who he is, and what he has shown himself to be: the one who heals, who gives life, who offers forgiveness, and who saves. This is the truth of his kingship and kingdom, the truth to which his entire life testifies. Jesus’ kingdom is founded on truth, and it is that truth that is to be lived out daily by us in emulating Christ’s integrity and service despite the cost. The truth of Christ as king is not some philosophical concept — it is the reality of God in our lives and in our attempt to live it as dynamically and fully as Jesus our King lived it; it is to show compassion, forgiveness and to maintain, above all, a searing honesty regarding ourselves, our motives, our desires, our fears.

The Church lives out its life in two times: the present and the future, the now and the eschatological. We live out *now* the kind of kingdom we wish to *always* live in, and emulate the kind of king we heartfully recognize and wish to serve. The way we now live our lives is the reign of God, the Kingdom of God. ✠

**Fr. Aelred Niespolo, OSB**, is a monk of Saint Andrew’s Abbey. He teaches theology at Saint John’s Seminary in Camarillo, California.





# Seeing Light

BRO. BEN HARRISON, MC

**S**ITTING BY THE LILAC BUSHES, I WAS gazing out past the row of young poplars, across the little pasture with its white fence, toward the eroded desert hillside above Pallet Creek Road. As I relaxed my focus, it struck me that I was seeing only one thing. I was seeing light. The same light that was fluttering brightly in the cottonwood leaves was soaking into the pale bark of the tree trunks, was reflected by the white fence boards, and was casting shadows of ridges and culverts and juniper bushes on the distant slopes. For those few moments, I didn't see all those things. I saw only one thing — the light.

I'm not sure whether that was before or after I first heard of a nun who worked with the poor in Calcutta. When that happened, I was twenty-seven and had accompanied a group of kids to a church camp in the Sierras by Lake Tahoe. For some reason, when I think of that occasion, I remember standing on a sunny slope, looking past ponderosa pines toward the icy, glimmering lake and the mountains beyond, the one light reflected on many surfaces. That was the moment when someone told me that we were going to watch a film that evening, about this woman called Mother Teresa. It was Malcolm Muggeridge's famous television documentary

called *Something Beautiful for God*, which was later made into a book with the same title.

I was just beginning to crawl back to the faith after some years of looking for happiness without it, and I was surprised to see somebody trying to live Christian values to the full. St. Francis had always appealed to me, even when I was sceptical of religion. But here was a contemporary of my own living a radically simple life according to the program described in the Gospels, which I was beginning to suspect might be worth re-examining. Following my own will, living for my selfish pleasures certainly hadn't proved a satisfactory or satisfying way to organize my life. Maybe this ancient wisdom of living according to noble principles, for the good of others, might have something to offer.

This is not the time to speak of the steps and stages of that exploration. But I began to read a lot of spiritual books. I came across something that helped me over several hurdles. I think it was in a book by Evelyn Underhill, though I haven't been able to relocate the text. The passage was speaking of Eucharistic adoration, and it said something to the effect that what Catholics were adoring in Eucharistic worship was not so much the consecrated host in its own right, even as the Bread of Life. Rather they were seeking to gaze through the "accidents" of the host into the mystery of the Incarnate Word, and beyond even that, into the ineffable glory of the Godhead. I understood that Jesus, the Eternal Word, came to be with us in the host, as he had been with us in the flesh, precisely in order to allow us to look through



him, beyond him, into the deep heart of the Unknowable, the Invisible God, the One who dwells in unapproachable light.

It seems to me that this dynamic of seeing through and looking beyond is a pattern that permeates our faith. When I saw that film and later read some books about Mother Teresa, I could see that she never wanted to be the center of attention but was always pointing away from herself toward Jesus, who had said to her, "Come, be my light." "We do it for Jesus," a frequent expression of hers, was used as the title of a book of her insights. She would

ask newly arriving sisters why they had come, and if they said it was to serve the poor, or to be a missionary, or to follow her example, she would say, "Then, pack your bags and go home. The only reason to be here is to belong to Jesus."

When she received the Nobel Prize, she specifically stated that she accepted it on behalf of the world's poor. And she always spoke at length about the goodness, the kindness, the generosity of the poor whom she served, removing the focus from her own work and directing it toward them. And even in that ministry for the poor, while loving and respecting the person before her, she could also look into and beyond that person and see Jesus, her spouse, in the distressing disguise of that suffering soul who stood before her.

We can detect the same process in the Gospels. Jesus is always trying to get people to look beyond his miracles and his teaching and to see his loving, merciful Father. The Father, in his turn, directs our attention away from himself when he says, "This is my

beloved Son, listen to him.” Christ bears witness to the Spirit, who will lead us into the fullness of truth, but we only recognize the Spirit when he moves our hearts, prompting us to call God “Abba” and to acknowledge Christ as Savior. In fact, the Holy Spirit often seems to be the most diffident and elusive of all and likes to hide himself in the most unlikely places, even in our hearts, or in the words of those we call our enemies. On one occasion, Our Lord assures his disciples that they will do even more marvellous things than he, in effect saying that he would yield the spotlight to them. In his last moments of earthly life, Our Lord directs our attention toward his Mother, and hers toward the beloved disciple when he says, “Behold your son.” Each one is always refusing to be the center of attention and asking us to seek deeper into the mystery of the other.

All this does not mean that we are not to look with the eyes of faith at Our Lord or at Our Lady, or to try to train our attention toward the Spirit, toward God himself. In fact, we are to be captivated by their beauty, but their beauty always reflects and directs our gaze to the others and to the depths. In seeing everything, we see one thing, the Light.

Some Christians are jealous on God’s behalf when people honor the saints and angels, feeling that these lesser figures are distracting us from giving the full glory due to God. But the reflections sparkling on the surface of the lake, the glint of mica and quartz facets in the granite boulder, and the shimmering of sunlight on poplar leaves and pine needles all reflect and magnify the glory of sun and invite us to look beyond the forms, to lift our eyes to the heights, to rest our gaze, not on the sun itself, but on the deep vault of heaven. The hundred prisms of a chandelier don’t ask us to focus on themselves, but help us to grasp the marvel of light itself.

This does not mean that we should efface ourselves and vanish in invisibility, but that we give ourselves as light for others. It does

not mean that we should ignore all the beauty around us, in its myriad colors and shapes, but that we let our glance find its way home from all that glorious diversity toward the light where all beauty resides.

There is a little story in Rachel Remen’s book, *Kitchen Table Wisdom*, that speaks of this homing gaze. As I remember the incident, when she was a teenager Rachel was volunteering at a nursing home and was assigned to care for an old lady who would sit in her wheelchair all day, gazing at a patch of sunlight. She seemed to have lost long since the ability to speak. Frustrated at the old lady’s unresponsiveness, one day Rachel blurted out, “What are you looking at, Ma’am?” Turning slowly toward the girl, the old lady replied quietly, “My child, I am looking at the light.”

Thus we learn this contemplative way of looking into or through or beyond what is visible, of letting our eyes search deep into the wonders of scenes and souls, always seeking that restful poise, that Sabbath repose, where sight becomes insightful, where vision verges on the beatific. For whether the light is refracted through the water of a clear stream, reflected from the leaves of an aspen tree, or resplendent on the face of a laughing child, it is the light of Him who comes near to us to lead us home to the One who “dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has ever seen or can see” (1 Tim 6:16). ✘



**Ben Harrison** is a Missionary of Charity brother currently based in Manchester, England. He has been in brothers’ communities for thirty five years. St. Andrew’s has been an important anchor-point for his spiritual journey since his first visit in 1972.

THE RULE OF SAINT BENEDICT ASSERTS that, for the love of silence, we should at times refrain from speaking. But this is not simply monastic wisdom. The Bible itself, in St. James 1, tells us that we should be “slow to speak.” This admonition is simultaneously connected with God’s own creative word (“the word of truth,” in our text) and the absolute necessity for us to hear it (“quick to hear,” in our text). That is, in other words, we must be “slow to speak” because God’s creative word must be clearly heard before we dare to communicate anything.

Asceticism of speech is an important spiritual discipline. Wisdom suggests that we learn to live by this ascetic practice. How very odd, therefore, that God’s insistence upon silence is often met by a preponderance of words.

God exists from eternity and to eternity. For untold and untellable millennia God was,

Let us take a moment to reflect upon God’s written revelation. We have been given the Bible, the Canon of Scripture, by God. It is a joy to be able to take, “mark, learn and inwardly digest” what God wants to say to us. This is to be celebrated! But have we ever taken the time to think about what God has NOT said? Think about it. God, who inhabits eternity and exhibits all of the character qualities appropriate to unique Divinity, has not verbally said very much.

Holy Scripture is a collection of books, collected over a period of some 1500 years, which reveals God’s will, works, ways and Living Word (Jesus Christ) to humanity. It is important that we revere this revelation. It is important that we read this revelation. It is important that we apply and articulate this revelation. There is, humanly speaking, a lot to learn and live. Given this, however, it

# SLOW TO SPEAK

THE VERY REV. DR. DONALD P. RICHMOND

from a strictly human perspective, silent. God, as far as we know, “said” nothing. At a point in time God spoke “Let there be,” and from this point of time the “good” and “very good” speech of God entered into history. Henri Nouwen has properly suggested that this good speech was rooted in and structured upon silence. God’s speech was predicated upon God’s silence. (See: *The Way of the Heart*)

God, by Divine prerogative, determined to provide us with verbal (Speech), written (Scripture) and visual (Savior) revelation. That which God spoke, was written and ultimately revealed in and through Jesus Christ (Hebrews 1: 1-2). Without the Bible (and to some degree, Holy Tradition) we would have no ability to know or understand the verbal and visual communication of God. Without God’s written revelation, we would be entirely impoverished.

is very odd that the Logos, the Living Word, has said so very little. Being God, the Eternal, He could have said much more, but instead God was textually temperate.

This is a lesson for us, a lesson that we have not entirely learned.

**When we consider God**, the “All-in-All,” He has remained “silent as light.” And yet we have an entire “Science” devoted to His study. The Queen of Sciences, Theology, is therefore intended to be a Theology of reserved speech. The multiplication of “mouths” has only resulted in theological Babel.

**When we consider Scripture**, God’s Written Revelation by, of and for Himself, He has not really spoken a great deal. And yet, how many commentaries and homilies have been composed and communicated about the Bible? Millions! This becomes most painfully illustrated through some Christian educators who have,

quite literally, spent years teaching one book of the Bible. I know of pastors who have actually spent between seven and ten years teaching exclusively, barring holidays, from one book of the Bible. Seven to ten YEARS!! This is really nothing to celebrate. While I do not doubt the intention of these educators, the verbal path they have chosen may communicate far more about them than it does about the true and temperate written word God seeks to speak. Scripture communicates reserved speech, and so should we.

**When we consider the Gospels**, centering chiefly upon our Lord's three-and-a-half year ministry, we will be surprised to know that only about three months of our Lord's life is actually discussed. Yes, we do have references to our Lord's incarnation, youth and ascension, but such references are brief. Primary attention is given to his adult ministry which is also exceptionally sparse in specifics and time: Three months out of a three-and-a-half year revelation of Christ and his life and ministry. In short, once again, very little is actually said. Silence is largely the "voice" God has chosen to use.

This reservation in revelation, this slow speech of God, is important. God has a great deal to speak to us through the punctuated silence he has "written" into our world and His revelation. But, instead of silence, we cultivate sound. Often the soundings of our searching have resulted in separation from God and neighbor. Our sound has created a barrier that often limits the proper intimacy that only silence can attain.

The early desert mothers and fathers were frequently asked for a "word" from their Abbots or Ammas (spiritual Fathers and Mothers).

When they spoke this "word," the disciple would seek to apply it for days, weeks, months and years at a time. I have myself repeatedly stopped my reading of 1 Corinthians 13, the "Love Chapter," when I reached the statement "Love is patient." Why read more when I have not entirely applied this?! This orientation is seen in one of the stories of the desert Fathers. Three young disciples approached their Abba for a "word." The Abba graciously gave them a "word," a spiritual life-principle, to work on. Every week, for the next year, two of the three disciples returned to their spiritual master for another "word." But the third disciple did not return until a year had passed. After a year,



he returned to his Abba and requested another "word." Surprised by the disciple's year-long absence, the Abba asked why the disciple took so long to return. The disciple's answer was telling: "It took me a year to apply the 'word' you gave me, so why should I return to hear more words if I had not entirely applied the first?"

I close with another monastic illustration. A great spiritual Father of the desert was asked to speak a "word" to his guest. He refused. Again his disciples asked him to offer his guest a "word," and again he refused. Irritated by this, his disciples asked why he would not speak to his guest. His answer was simple yet profound: "If my guest would not be edified by my silence, my guest would not be edified by my speech."

Thomas Merton was right. We are "glutton[s] for words." We want to hear and speak them — more the latter than the former. Let us learn the lesson of silence. Let us be slow to speak. ✘

*The Very Rev. Dr. Donald P. Richmond, a widely-published author and illustrator, is a Priest-Oblate.*

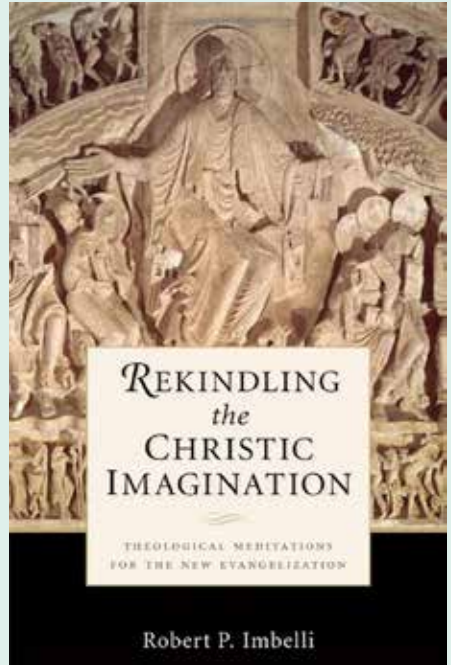
## QUARTERLY BOOK REVIEW

by fr. philip edwards, osb

**B**EGUN WHILE BENEDICT XVI WAS still pope and finished within the first year of his successor Pope Francis' pontificate, this timely book of timeless truth, expressed with contemporary simplicity, reminds us of the "Beauty ever old and ever new" — the Word made flesh and dwelling among us, which is the Good News that we would proclaim.

Father Imbelli, ever a gracious and intelligent voice in both academia as a professor of theology and the popular press as an expert commentator, here serves as a diligent docent in a sort of mystical Vatican Museum, a faithful scribe pointing out where the true treasure lies by putting a helpful guidebook in our hands. This book is not a tome, but "only" a paperback of some 150 pages. It includes four high-quality color reproductions of images produced by past Christian culture. These are, first, the Romanesque sculpture of the eschatological Christ sending the Spirit upon the Apostles carved on the entry tympanum of the basilica of Vezelay, which opens Chapter 1, "The Originality and Uniqueness of Christ"; next, the Rublev icon of the Trinity, which opens Chapter 2, "The Love that Moves the Sun and the Other Stars"; third, Caravaggio's "Supper at Emmaus," for Chapter 3, "The Eucharist, Sacrament of Communion"; and lastly, for Chapter 4, "Ecclesia as Call to Holiness," the apse mosaic of the Tree of Life at San Clemente in Rome.

These four chapters are preceded by a preface and introduction. The preface "says it all" by referencing the great evangelizing thrust of the Second Vatican Council, both in its formal teaching documents and in its encouragement of the *ressourcement* and *aggiornamento* that brought them into being. The introduction highlights two great



**REKINDLING THE CHRISTIC IMAGINATION**  
**Theological Meditations for**  
**the New Evangelization**

**Robert P. Imbelli**

2014, Liturgical Press, Collegeville, MN

ISBN: 978-0-8146-3550-6

contemporary Catholic thinkers: former Council *peritus* and Bavarian priest-theologian, Josef Ratzinger (now Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI), and Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor. In Taylor's words, these two are worried about "the growing secularization of Western culture and society and its increasing spread beyond the North Atlantic region [ to exclude] God from its 'social imagery' ... [that] five hundred years ago was permeated with a sense of the reality and providence of God ..." (p. xxi). The book ends, of course, with a conclusion and a delighted postscript welcoming Pope Francis' apostolic exhortation, *The Joy of the Gospel*.

This book is an excellent companion to the book we last reviewed in these pages,



Christian Wiman's *My Bright Abyss*. There we shared Wiman's personal pilgrimage of rediscovery of the haunting Hound of Heaven, Who had given ecstatic joy to him in his youth and now called him to truth and life through the sufferings and joys of his adult experience. Indeed, Imbelli makes direct reference to this in his chapter of conclusion:

"A twenty-first-century American poet bears striking witness to a deeply personal rediscovery of the Christic Center. It is all the more remarkable because his rediscovery of Jesus takes place *amidst the excruciating affliction of a rare form of cancer*. For Christian Wiman, the paschal mystery is not a merely notional assertion, but a burning experience. In wrestling to express why he is a Christian, he testifies: 'Christ's suffering shatters the iron walls around individual human suffering, Christ's compassion makes extreme human compassion — to the point of death even — possible. Human love CAN reach right into death, then, but not if it's MERELY human love.' Coming to grips with Christ's passion affords new insight regarding the resurrection. Wiman muses: 'Christ's life is not simply a model for how to live, but the living truth of my own existence. Christ is not alive because he rose from the dead two thousand years ago. He rose from the dead two thousand years ago because he is alive right now.' Striving to make Christ's paschal mystery one's own is the process I have spoken of as 'Christification.' Less a possessing Christ than a being possessed by Christ..." (pp.92–93).

But we are jumping too soon to the conclusion! Wiman's other (and first) appearance is found in a trenchant footnote in the concluding section of Imbelli's introduction, headed "The Poetry of Faith." The text reads:

"A final sensitivity common to both Benedict XVI and Charles Taylor ... is their conviction

of the need for a personally appropriated, poetically refined language with which to speak (always inadequately) of the Mystery in whom we live and move and have our being. The perennial risk is for religious language to become hardened into the merely formulaic, losing its mystagogic thrust.

That is why poets like Gerard Manley Hopkins and Charles Peguy assume such importance for Taylor.... Both craft a 'new subtler language.' Certainly not many can match such poetic genius. But we can all sit in the school of the poets to be tutored by them how better to express, in the words of Hopkins, "the dearest freshness deep down things." We can learn to guard against the deadening cliché that coarsens rather than celebrates Mystery" (pp. xxvii).<sup>17</sup>

And here is footnote 17:

"The American poet Christian Wiman asks, 'do we find the fire of belief fading in us only because the words are sodden with overuse and imprecision, and will not burn?'" (p. 106).

It is wonderful indeed to find a champion of a "conservative" papal magisterium appreciating one whose position brought his confessional predecessors the pyre and scaffold! Wonderful and hopeful: Imbelli's loyal persistence in bringing to the fore the continuing Christocentrism of Ratzinger's thought and teaching is heartening. One hopes that Wiman himself may find the necessary counterpart of *Communio* to keep his own home fires burning with the Word.

Words do matter. They can (and do) "communicate" (bring into communion), but they can also cut apart and sterilize relationships. This is the mystery that Jesus himself, the Prince of Peace and Savior of all, expresses, "I did not come to bring peace but a sword [to divide father from son ...]" (Matt 10:34-36; Lk 12:51-53); he further promises rejection, persecution and death to those who will

follow him, trying to speak his word and do his work (Matt 10:16-25; Lk 21:12-19). The first witnesses to Christ were indeed “martyrs” (“witnesses” in Greek).

How do we know that Jesus really did say these exact words, as preserved in documents composed in *koine* Greek from unknown but trusted sources by believing members of the Apostolic Community of Faith? *Pace!* I am not about to smother the reader with an attempted summary of John Meier’s multi-volume modern quest for the historical Jesus, *A Marginal Jew*. But I will suggest a sort of appropriation of Wiman’s remark “... He rose from the dead two thousand years ago because he is alive right now.”

The Fact of the witnessing Church gives us the Christ of history and, in the Gospel accounts, the Jesus of Faith, who looks at us with eyes of love when we are honestly truth-seeking and says, “You are not far from the kingdom of heaven” (cf. Mk 10:17-21 and 12:28-33). And we rejoice that He is very near

(Phil 4:4-9), and give thanks for the beauty and grace of word and image, which this book puts before us to refresh and stimulate “body, soul and spirit,” (1 Thess 5:23) and to rekindle the primal flame of desire for “the mystery hidden from ages and from generations past ... now manifested to his holy ones ... to make known the riches of the mystery ... Christ in you, the hope for glory” (Col 1:26-27). ✠



**Fr. Philip** was born the year this monastic community was founded in China. Newman — especially his *Grammar of Assent* — was important in his own intellectual formation. He made his monastic profession at Valyermo in 1962.

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# AROUND & ABOUT

## THE MONASTERY

In June, **Br. Angelus Echeverry** traveled to Saint Vincent's Archabbey in Latrobe, Pennsylvania, to attend the 2014 Junior Monks' Summer Camp for two weeks, where 18 monasteries were represented from congregations all over the United States and Canada. He reports that it was a rich experience, "full of fraternity, learning about monastic history, experiencing another monastic community, and enjoying trips to Pittsburgh and the western Pennsylvania countryside, as well as participating in diverse activities, including a stained glass workshop."

Following his two weeks at Latrobe he attended the 2014 Sacred Music Colloquium in Indianapolis, Indiana. The conferences and workshops focused intensively on the art of singing, conducting, and appreciating Gregorian chant and sacred polyphony. Along other musical lines, on July 20, in Glendale, California, Br. Angelus conducted three of his own choral compositions ("Suscipe," "Jezu, ufam Tobie" and "O Sacrum Convivium") at the UnSUNg concert series. The concert was professionally recorded and attended by most of the monks and a number of oblates.

All the above leads to the fact that he will be beginning theological studies at St. John's Seminary in Camarillo, California, this August on the priestly ordination track. He will be the third Benedictine from Saint Andrew's on campus as both Father Luke Dysinger and Father Aelred Niespolo will continue their teaching duties and mission at the Seminary. Please keep them all in your prayers.

**Abbot Damien Toilolo** and **Father Martin Yslas** will be attending the General Chapter of our Benedictine Congregation of the An-

### MONKS' FEAST DAYS

October 4	Fr. Francis, OSB
October 18	Fr. Luke, OSB
November 3	Fr. Martin, OSB
November 4	Fr. Carlos, OSB
December 20	Fr. Isaac, OSB
January 12	Fr. Aelred, OSB

nunciation in Jerusalem from September 21 to October 6. Please pray for the success of the Chapter and the safety of those attending.

### CANONIZATION PILGRIMAGE 2014

**Fr. Francis Benedict** led a pilgrimage to Italy from April 14 to May 5 to attend the canonization of Popes John XXIII and John Paul II. He reports: "More than a million extra people were in Rome for this historic event. Many of the group were not able to witness the canonization, being 'trapped' in side streets near the Via Conciliazione; others viewed the Mass on huge television screens. About 10 of our 27 were able to receive Holy Communion. The spirit in Rome was electric and the many pilgrims were enthusiastic. In every church we visited we met people from every country imaginable. After Rome, we went to many historic places: Orvieto, Assisi, Siena, Florence, Padua, and Venice. Masses were offered in many cathedrals and pilgrim churches, making the journey a true pilgrimage. The final day in Venice concluded with a wedding Mass in the crypt of St. Mark's Basilica (friends of Fr. Francis) and a festive 'last supper' with our fellow pilgrims." Another pilgrimage to southern Italy is planned for September 2015. ✨



RETREAT CENTER  
*Calendar*  
AUTUMN 2014

FROM THE RETREAT HOUSE STAFF

## *The Value of a Retreat*

RETREAT REFRESHES AND revitalizes, provides an opportunity to spend more time in prayer and contemplation, and rekindles and deepens one's relationship with God. One may take this opportunity to hear God's call more clearly and to seek God's healing grace, and thereby attain a degree of spiritual renewal. The idea behind a spiritual retreat, as an addition to one's daily spiritual activities, is to temporarily leave behind the usual distractions we all face for a time sufficient for one to relax and allow an inner change to occur: the ongoing conversion of heart that is critical to deepening one's faith.

The *Catholic Encyclopedia* affirms the necessity of retreats: "In the fever and agitation of modern life, the need of meditation and spiritual repose impresses itself on Christian souls who desire to reflect on their eternal destiny, and direct their life in this world towards God."

Yet it is not only the pressures of modern life that impell us to seek periods of quiet contemplation. Long before our times, Jesus' actions and words provided strong scriptural support for the perennial importance

of retreats. Near the beginning of Mark's gospel, for example, we read: "Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. Simon and his companions went to look for him, and when they found him, they exclaimed: 'Everyone is looking for you!'" (Mark 1: 35-37; see also Luke 4:42). Note that He undertook his solitary respite not when there were no other important matters to be tended to, but because of the necessity to make time for prayer *despite* all the things to be done.

Sometimes Jesus would spend an entire night in retreat: "In those days he departed to the mountain to pray, and he spent the night in prayer to God" (Luke 6:12). And we also read this: "The apostles gathered together with Jesus and reported all they had done and taught. He said to them, 'Come away by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while.' People were coming and going in great numbers, and they had no opportunity even to eat. So they went off in the boat by themselves to a deserted place" (Mark 6:30-32). No doubt the apostles were energized by the response of the crowds they encountered, but they still needed to recharge before carrying on.

Retreats vary in character, not only in their duration and setting, but in whether the retreatant participates as a single individual or as part of a group. Both individual (or

personal) retreats and group retreats have the function of interrupting the daily routine and allowing for spiritual renewal.

The personal retreat offers a great deal of flexibility for scheduling and permits the retreatant to pursue relaxation, prayer, contemplation, and study in accordance with their own preferences. It may be undertaken in preparation to making an important personal decision. It can be a way to devote extra time to prayer for healing of oneself or others. It can help one to recuperate from stressful events: Jesus, upon hearing of the death of John the Baptist “withdrew in a boat to a deserted place by himself” (Matthew 14:13).

Group retreats frequently center on a particular theme, and have the advantage of providing guidance and structure for a portion of the retreat; they may also include presentations from guest speakers. Some group retreats emphasize silence (at least when participants are not listening to a presentation or meeting with a spiritual advisor) so as to deter the natural tendency to fall into ordinary patterns of discussion. Others may instead encourage socializing, especially when members of a parish are brought together in restful preparation for certain future activities.

If you have never experienced a Retreat at St. Andrew’s Abbey, or if you have visited us in the past and wish to return, contact us by telephone or email. ✂

# Retreats

## SEPTEMBER, 2014

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### THE HOLINESS OF WORK

*Monday, September 8 – Wednesday, September 10*  
Work is a necessity in every person’s life.

*Presenter:* Fr. Francis Benedict, OSB

### THE JOURNEY OF OUR LIFE:

#### DANTE ALIGHIERI AS SPIRITUAL GUIDE

*Friday, September 19 – Sunday, September 21*

The *Divine Comedy* is simultaneously one of the greatest poems ever written as well as one of the most profound presentations of the spiritual life, containing a well-developed and robust spiritual theology.

*Presenter:* Rev. Greg Peters, Ph.D; Obl.OSB;

### LEADERSHIP AND THE RULE OF BENEDICT

*Friday, September 26 – Sunday, September 28*

Benedictine monks take three vows: Stability, Obedience, and Constant Conversion. This workshop/retreat examines how the first vow — Stability — is the foundation of real relationship, community, and makes obedience and constant conversion possible.

*Presenter:* Michael Carey, Ph.D; Obl.OSB

## OCTOBER, 2014

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### THE LITTLE WAY OF ST. THERESE OF LISIEUX: DISCOVERING THE PATH OF LOVE

*Monday, October 6 – Friday, October 10*

Based on the recent work of Br. Joseph Schmidt, FSC, this retreat will explore the spirituality of this Doctor of the Church, to discover its Gospel rootedness and revolutionary shift from 19th century approaches to the spiritual life.

*Presenter:* Fr. Stephen Coffey, OSB

### “I HAVE COME TO CAST FIRE ON THE EARTH: PRAYING WITH TEILHARD DE CHARDIN

*Friday, October 31 – Sunday, November 2*

This retreat will be based on selected portions of *Mass on the World* by Jesuit mystic and scientist Pierre Teilhard de Chardin.

*Presenter:* Fr. Stephen Coffey, OSB

For complete details about upcoming retreat offerings, including descriptions and presenter information, please visit our website:

[SAINTANDREWSABBAY.COM](http://SAINTANDREWSABBAY.COM)

and click the Guest House link.

FOR RESERVATIONS,  
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(661) 944-2178

**ARTISTS' RETREAT***Monday, November 3 – Thursday, November 7*

This retreat is open to artists at all levels, including beginners.

*Presenter:* Deloris Haddow, Obl.OSB

**HENRI NOUWEN AND THE INTEGRATED JOURNEY***Friday, November 14 – Sunday, November 16*

This retreat/workshop focuses on the spiritual journey of Henri Nouwen—which represents the very nature of our own journey reality—highlighting the inward, outward, and upward (or Godward) thrust of our spiritual life in which spirituality integrates with psychology, ministry, and theology in a seamless fashion.

*Presenter:* Wil Hernandez, Ph.D; Obl.OSB

**PRIESTS' RETREAT:****LIVING MORE CONTEMPLATIVELY***Monday, November 17 – Friday, November 21*

The theme of this year's retreat will be 'how we might live more contemplatively in our active lives.'

*Presenter:* Fr. Francis Benedict, OSB

**PSALMODY AND CONTEMPLATION***Friday, November 21 – Sunday, November 23*

In ancient and modern monastic spirituality the chanting of psalms is believed to have the power of both purifying the soul and enabling the Christian to perceive God's inner purposes ("logoi") embedded within history and creation.

*Presenter:* Fr. Luke Dysinger, OSB

**THANKSGIVING AT VALYERMO***Wednesday, November 26 – Friday, November 28*

This non-directed retreat provides time to reflect on all God has given to us and to enjoy the festive celebration of Thanksgiving with the monastic community.

**ADVENT RETREAT***Friday, November 28 – Sunday, November 30*

On this first weekend of Advent, we will offer a potpourri of monastic insights, enabling participants to experience the Advent season as a time rooted in scripture, history, art, music, and liturgy.

*Presenters:* Monks of Valyermo

**TALLER ADVIENTO EN ESPANOL***Domingo, 7 Diciembre, 9:00 AM – 3:30 PM*

"Adviento" significa venida.

*Presentador:* Carlos Obando

**"THIS IS WHAT THE HEART IS MADE FOR":****THE SPIRITUAL FRIENDSHIP OF FRANCIS DE SALES AND JANE FRANCES DE CHANTAL***Friday, December 12 – Sunday, December 14*

This retreat will explore the theme of spiritual friendship based on the writings of St. Francis and St. Jane.

*Presenter:* Fr. Stephen Coffey, OSB

**SACRED DANCE WORKSHOP: THE FOOTPRINTS OF A STAR***Saturday, December 13, 9:00 AM – 4:30 PM*

In the tradition of the seasons of Advent and Christmas, participants will experience through movement how humanity moves through the stages of life "like a bird or dancing spark..."

*Presenter:* John West, Obl.OSB

**VENI, VENI, EMMANUEL: A SILENT ADVENT RETREAT***Friday, December 19 – Sunday, December 21*

During this final weekend before the Solemnity of Christmas, we will focus our attention on the Word of God and the Mystery of the Incarnation by maintaining an atmosphere of silence, punctuated by short conferences intended to aid in the observance of sacred silence.

*Presenter:* Fr. Matthew Rios, OSB

**CHRISTMAS AT VALYERMO***Wednesday, December 24 – Friday, December 26*

On the Solemnity of Christmas we first contemplate the mystery of the Word becoming Flesh.

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