

S T . A N D R E W ' S   A B B E Y  
T H E   V A L Y E R M O



*Chronicle*

Nº 244 ✕ SPRING 2015



EAR FRIENDS,

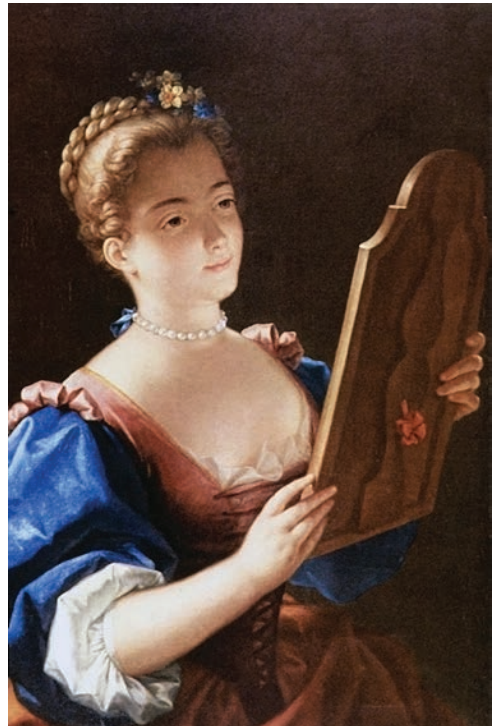
NOT TOO LONG AGO WHILE DRIVING ON one of the busy streets in Los Angeles, I stopped at a red traffic light and was waiting to make a left turn. It was a busy intersection during morning rush hour, so I knew I would have a long wait before I got the green arrow to turn left. As most people do in those situations, I began to look around to see what was going on in the city. The usual stuff: the pedestrian, the speeding car, the boring billboard, the car with the loud hip-hop music. And then there was the driver right behind me: a young attractive woman whom I noticed from my rearview mirror. She was by herself in her car and was also waiting for the green arrow. What she did while waiting for the green arrow both amused and impressed me. Perhaps I shouldn't have been "eavesdropping" through my rearview mirror, but it was intriguing, entertaining and indicative of our society today.

The young woman was looking at herself in her rearview mirror and was primping, fussing and (seemingly) adoring herself — touching up her makeup and fixing

her hair just so. And when everything seemed to be in place and pleasing to her, she picked up her cell phone, aimed it at herself, tilted her head ever so slightly, and puckered her lips just enough, and then click, click, click, click ... taking about 4–5 pictures of herself.

I had no idea that "photo op" was coming. I was dumbfounded to see how much energy and attention she put into that exercise. She was so into it that she was absolutely oblivious to what was going on around her. And I thought to myself, "I bet when the light turns green, she won't even notice it, and she will miss the light." Sure enough (almost). The light turned green. I turned left. I looked in my rearview mirror and she was still there, foot on the brakes, admiring and clicking away. If not for the bus behind her honking its horn, she would have missed the light.

I laughed to myself throughout the day when I thought of that incident. However the



YOUNG WOMAN WITH MIRROR, JEAN RAOUX (1677–1734) (SOURCE: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS)



more I thought about it, the more it reminded me of the spiritual life.

It reminds me of how each of us looks into the mirror every day and how we want so much to see beauty. So we spend lots of energy and attention on that project. We do everything we can, we use everything we can to achieve the beautiful look we desire: hair spray, hair color, make up, tight-fitting clothes, loose-fitting clothes, sunglasses, surgery, angle our head one way, smile another way. And when all is set in place, then we want to capture that (fleeting) beauty in a photo because we know by bedtime that day it will all be gone, and we have to do it all over again the next day.

Sometimes we are so busy looking in the mirror at our self that we are distracted from recognizing the real Beauty, the image of the Son of God, who is within and who cannot be seen in a mirror. This is the beauty we need to focus on. He is the beauty that we need to concentrate on bringing forth to the surface by spending time to nurture and cultivate our relationship with Him through prayer, the Sacraments, kind deeds and gentle words, through acts of forgiveness, compassion, understanding, patience, mercy, and love.

What a different world it would be, what a different people we would be, if each of us made an extra effort to do more of that every day.

So the next time you are at a red light and find yourself looking at the driver behind you through the rearview mirror, beware, for you may very well see yourself, as I did.

May God be praised, and may God give us the eyes of faith to see Beauty in ourselves and in one another.

*Abbot Damien ✧*

# THE VALYERMO *Chronicle*

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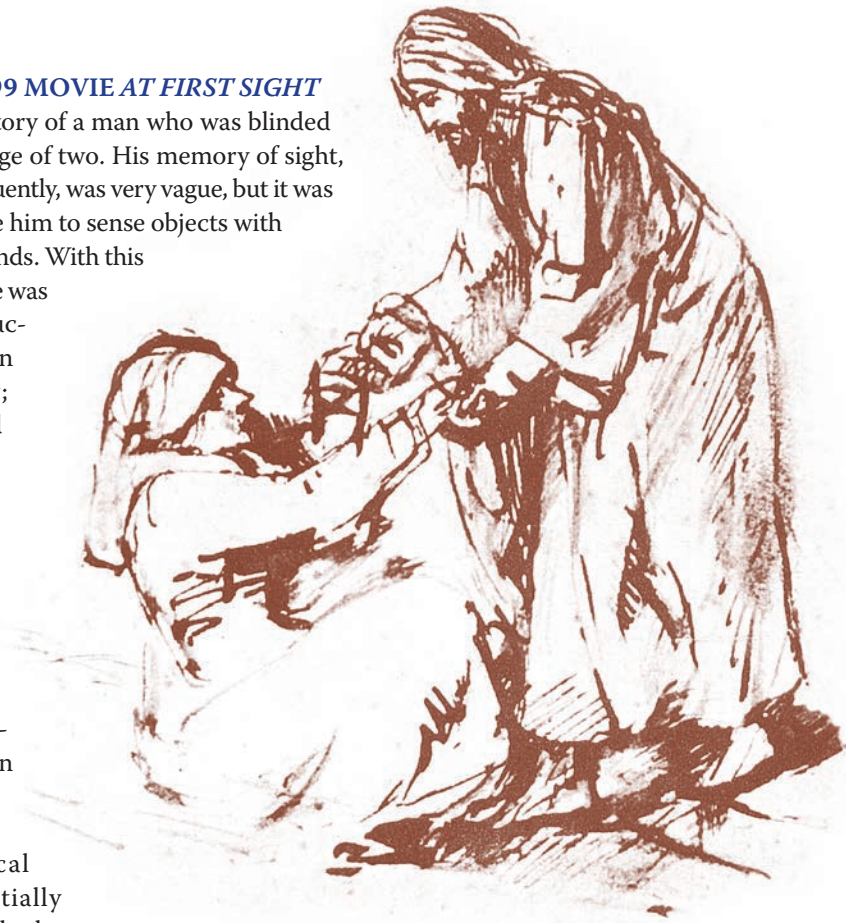
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**T**HE 1999 MOVIE *AT FIRST SIGHT* is the story of a man who was blinded at the age of two. His memory of sight, consequently, was very vague, but it was sufficient to enable him to sense objects with the touch of his hands. With this developed sense, he was able to create a successful career in massage therapy; this, in turn, helped him to stay connected to humanity. Eventually, he encountered a doctor who was able to perform a rare surgery to restore his sight. But this miraculous transformation evoked a surprising response; when the medical professionals initially tried to remove the bandages, he cried out in horror because he could not recognize anything by sight and was frightened by what he saw. It was clear he needed time to move through this dramatic process. A day's pause was taken, and at the next attempt, the trauma was less severe. In the first test, a can of Coke was held in front of him for visual recognition. But in fact, recognition occurred only when he reached out and touched the can. Then he knew.

Vulnerability at any level of existence is scary for most of us. It is not until we can reach out and “touch” the other that we can find a measure of security and inner resonance. To the extent that we allow ourselves



# growing IN V GOSPEL Vulnerability

**FR. JIM CLARKE**

to be “touched” by other people and experiences, we will be moved, hurt, challenged, and enlarged on our journey of illumination. It’s a matter of engaging our whole self in relation to reality. To be vulnerable is to stand before others “naked” without personal armor. It is to share our self with all our fears and anxieties.

Power is different. We are each powerful in different ways: economically, politically, and intellectually. We derive power from, among other things, our educational background, skill sets, physical strength, roles in society, position in family, etc. Jesus’ power was different in that it came from within. His power was grounded in his relationship with the Creator. Jesus’ Abba experience with the Creator deepened his own integrity and relationships. Through him, God shows us a different form of power — a power from below — the power of appropriate vulnerability (Hebrews 5:5-10).

Throughout his life, we see Jesus choosing the way of vulnerability. Right from the beginning, in Luke 2:10-12 we read the story of “a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.” Christ came to us as a vulnerable child born in an earthy stable of animals to a world yearning for a deep connection with the Divine. His birth set in motion a sequence of events that ended in a violent death at the hands of his political and religious enemies. Throughout his life, however, he continued to be the presence of love and compassion to all people.

A poignant story is told of a young orphaned boy, some years ago, who was asked to donate blood to his sister who was in grave need of this gift. He agreed with some trepidation, not fully understanding what this meant for him. As he lay next to his sister, linked by the direct transfusion lines, he began to cry. One of the nurses, noticing his tears, asked if he was in pain. His negative reply confused her, but after a short pause, he asked in a subdued voice, “When am I going

to die?” She immediately understood his tears, and hastened to explain that he was giving only one pint of his blood to his sister, not a life-draining quantity. The boy had thought he was going to die; he was willing to give his life for his sister’s.

Jesus identified himself with the vulnerable, isolated, hurting people of his time. In Mark 1:40-42 we read how he “stretched out his hand and touched” the leper who had been isolated by his community. He shared his own health and position in society. By touching him and healing him, Jesus showed his disciples real power — the power of compassion and right relationship that reintroduced this man into society again.

In John 13:3-5 we see a graphic example of authentic power, as Jesus chooses the role of servant in washing his disciples’ feet. Peter cannot handle this model of vulnerable leadership and refuses Christ’s first offer of service. Only with a second instruction does Peter seem to understand, and accepts Jesus’s gift.

A personal story might help to clarify this teaching. Years ago my brother Larry and I went to El Paso, Texas to visit Fr. Rick Thomas and to participate first hand in his unique ministry to our poor at Our Lady’s Youth Center. The philosophy of the Center was that people seeking support should be helped to discover a means of working with dignity in return for food and other assistance. After the regular healing masses, in which the program beneficiaries played a prominent role, food was distributed to all. The volunteers, for their part, were asked to perform menial tasks to keep the Center running efficiently.

I had written ahead of time, informing the staff that I could offer my construction skills for their use. On the first day, we were given the task of pulling weeds in an orchard. The following day, two large truckloads of onions were dumped on the property, and we were told to separate the good ones from the rotten ones — a very unpleasant task. By

the third day, when we were given another unpleasant task, I was angry and resentful. I had not come to Texas to do this type of labor. Sr. Mary Virginia saw my angst and pulled me aside. She very graciously explained to me that at this time they did not need my construction skills; they needed workers who were willing to do this smelly, dirty work. I was free to go, but I knew that there was an important lesson here for me. I was being asked to accept this gift of service and humbly, vulnerably face my own distaste and judgment of this type of labor. I did not like what I saw and experienced in myself. I had to face my own impoverishment.

Jesus listened to the real hunger of human beings, and so gave himself as nourishment to his followers. In Matthew 26:26-28 we read how Jesus changed bread and wine into his own flesh and blood to signify this intimate Eucharistic gift of vulnerability. This type of image or language is often used between lovers or between mother and nursing child. It's almost too intimate to bear and yet this is how God loves us — utterly and completely. God's vulnerable love is expressed in human terms and through human experiences.

The ultimate test of Christ's vulnerable love for us is his willingness to give himself

as a sacrifice for humanity. In John 19:28-30 we hear the final definitive words of Christ's trust in Abba's love and his belief that he had given everything of himself for others: "It is finished." Christ loved unto death; no matter what came his way, he continued to love without any armor or form of "protection". He confronted his pain, suffering, and difficulties with courage and compassion. His generous love reached out to others and invited them to do likewise. We are called to love in the same vulnerable way, with a generous and compassionate heart that reaches out to others, without regard to culture, language, religious belief, or way of life.

The final exclamation point to this gift is found in Mark 16:5-7 as we read that Jesus had been raised from the dead and was not in the place where he had been laid. Rather he was going before the disciples to Galilee where he would be seen again. Christ's vulnerable gift of powerful love, seen and experienced by the disciples, was affirmed by the Father through the Resurrection. This is our path as well. We are to love in ways that are vulnerable and life-giving. Christ goes ahead of us showing us the way and filling us with his own powerful Spirit. How is Jesus inviting you to be vulnerable in your life, your relationships, and your ministry? ✠



With an extensive academic background in the fields of spirituality, adult education, counseling, ritual and depth psychology, **Fr. Jim Clarke** currently serves as Director of Spiritual Formation and Assistant Professor of Spiritual Theology at St. John's Seminary.

He is also the Chair of the Spirituality Commission of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, and is an Associate Spiritual Director at the Cardinal Manning House of Prayer for Priests. He was ordained to the priesthood for the Archdiocese in May, 1981.

Fr. Clarke's experience includes ten years of parish ministry fol-

lowed by ten years coordinating the Adult Religious Education and Evangelization program for the Archdiocese, and subsequently one year co-directing the Archdiocesan Office of Pastoral Ministry. Fr. Clarke, a fluent Spanish speaker, is widely traveled. His work and further education have taken him to Israel, Mexico, Canada, Africa, Europe, Australia, the United Kingdom and the Pacific Islands. He has been involved in Men's work since 1995. His CD/DVD series on "Spirituality for a Modern Individual" and "A Man's Way to God" as well as his published books, *Creating Rituals: A New way of Healing for Everyday Life* and *Soulcentered: Spirituality for People on the Go*, serve to enhance his continuing public ministry of retreats, workshops, and conferences throughout the United States for priests, women religious, seminarians, parish and school staffs as well as parishes at large.



# SOME NOTES ON THE ASCENSION

BY AELRED NIESPOLO, OSB

THE FEAST OF THE ASCENSION HAS LONG

puzzled me. It's the kind of feast I'm tempted to categorize as a "*really*" feast, meaning what is it *really* about? Luke in Acts, in the only New

Testament text that attempts to recount the Ascension, presents it rather matter of factly, concretely yet at the same time still somewhat vague; the Church stresses

its creedal importance, but yet it still seems strangely, scripturally, undefined. Its visual imagery can also be unclear and unsettling, coming across as Jesus as astronaut, or as disappearing magician. So, what is the Ascension *really* about?

This chance to offer some random notes on the Ascension is a welcome one, an opportunity to see if this ancient feast in itself, and not simply as a required transition between Easter and Pentecost, still has something of import to say to all of us, both theologically and personally, something we are able to hear and relate to now, in our own lives, today. Something that makes us better understand our own relationship to God and to one another. Something to help us grow in love.

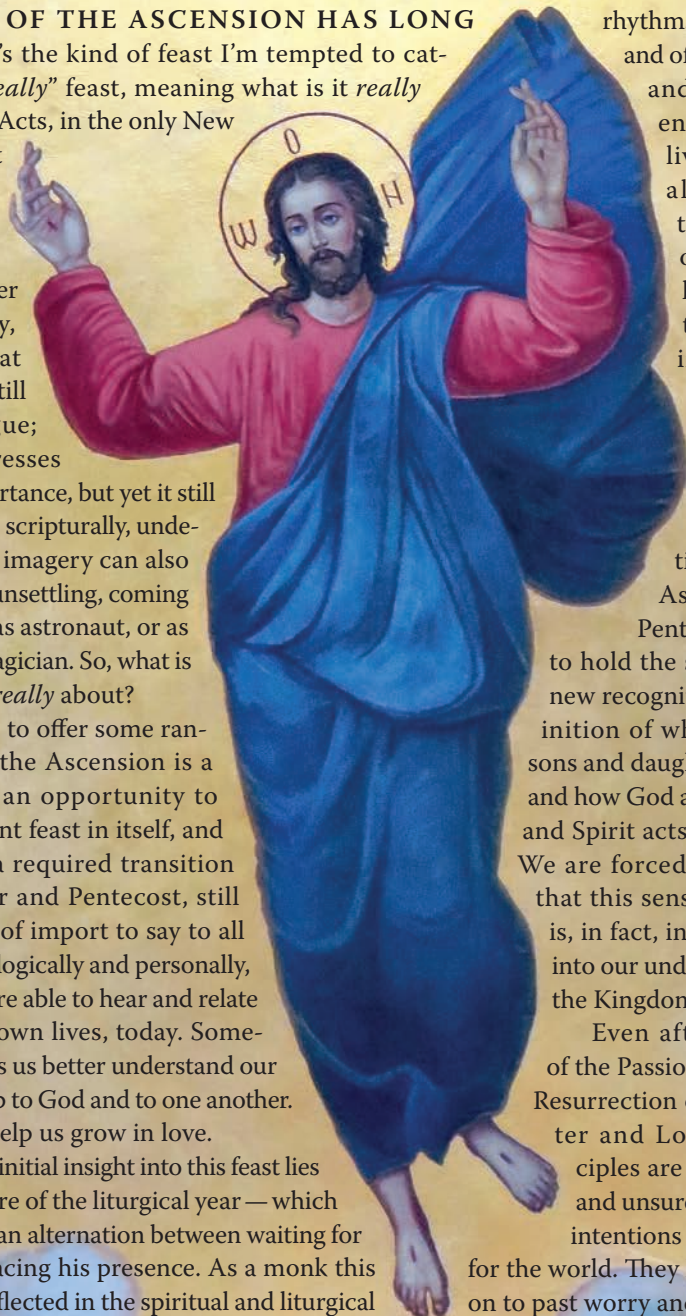
I suspect an initial insight into this feast lies in the very nature of the liturgical year — which seems so much an alternation between waiting for God and embracing his presence. As a monk this alternation is reflected in the spiritual and liturgical

rhythms of each day, and of each season, and within the entirety of our lives. But this also mirrors the rhythms of *all* our lives. Each time of waiting, whether it be Advent, or the Silence of Holy Saturday, or the time between

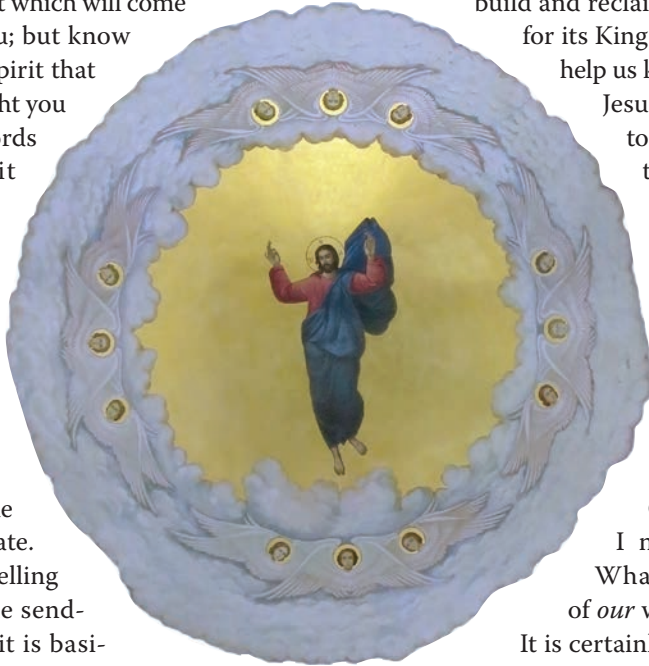
Ascension and Pentecost, seems

to hold the surprise of a new recognition and definition of who we are as sons and daughters of God, and how God as Father, Son and Spirit acts in our lives. We are forced to discover that this sense of waiting is, in fact, intimately tied into our understanding of the Kingdom of God.

Even after the time of the Passion, Death and Resurrection of their master and Lord, the disciples are still hesitant and unsure about Jesus' intentions for them and for the world. They keep holding on to past worry and doubt, past



expectations, they want a surety that takes away uncertainty. Something unambiguous and comforting. And now, Jesus is about to leave them, and has not yet answered, to their satisfaction, the question of when the Kingdom will be restored. They have still not grasped the nature of the Kingdom for which they have been told to pray and to expect. And yet again Jesus tells them: wait and see, and *while* waiting you have a job to do, a mission to accomplish, and you will be helped in this by the Spirit which will come down upon you; but know it is the same spirit that has always taught you through my words and actions, it will give you strength, but it will not tell you anything you do not already know. Wait and see. Wait and pray. This is essential to the feast we celebrate. What Jesus is telling them is that the sending of the Spirit is basically an *amplification* of his own life in theirs. St. Aelred writes, in a homily on the Ascension, that the spirit of the prophet Elijah was doubly bestowed upon his disciple Elisha after Elijah was taken bodily up into heaven, and that this ought to help us understand that the spirit of God, present in Jesus to the apostles before the Ascension, was bestowed doubly upon them after the Ascension, and that they would, with authority, be witnesses to him to the ends of the earth. Little did they then realize that *witnessing itself is* the Kingdom of God which they have been expecting and for which they



have continued to wait, the Kingdom built out of their own lives and blood. They are witnesses to hope by their actions, and witnesses to waiting by their relationship to the world they live in.

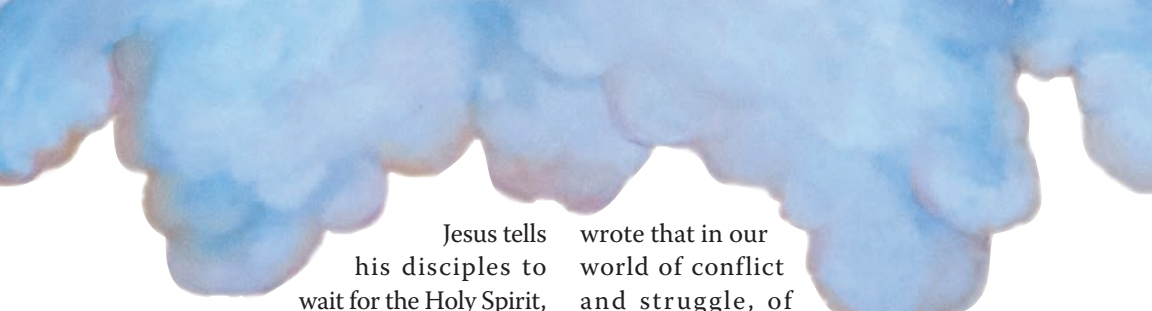
Paul, in his letter to the Ephesians, prays that the spirit of wisdom and insight be given to the membership of the Church, in order that our hearts be open to hope, and that this hope be manifest in our lives. This hope is to

be our strength, as we share in helping to build and reclaim the Kingdom for its King. The Spirit is to help us know the God of Jesus Christ clearly, to help us become the human face of Christ to others.

I think the Ascension tells us that a hallmark of this hope lies in its capacity to wait for, and on, God. What do I mean by this? What is the nature of *our* waiting on God?

It is certainly characterized by being grounded in prayer and silence—and that is the kind of testimony monastic life should offer to the world. Added to this is Dante's profound observation that one of the characteristics of Hell is its incessant noise. But this is not only the noise of random and continual sound, but the noise of our egos, our desire for control, power, authority, our anger and our lies, our manipulation of others, the noise of running from the darkness within our hearts, the noise of running from the light within our hearts. We cannot wait on God when all we hear, or create, is noise.





Jesus tells his disciples to wait for the Holy Spirit, and leaves them, seemingly alone and seemingly abandoned. Obviously, as the feast of Pentecost shows us, they did again experience Christ in their lives, as an experience as new as the fire of the Easter Vigil. But again, what about us today?

What about our waiting for God, on God? It seems in this contemporary world we are again living out the time of uncertain waiting between Ascension and a Pentecost. It seems our time, our century, our life is filled with waiting and running from that for which we wait: a time of anxiety during which we often seek out quack answers from quack doctors, from false idols and sham idolatry, quick fixes for mortal wounds. Nicholas Lash wrote that we live in an age that is no longer confident it has reasons for optimism, yet we continue to accept false hopes and answers. Lash writes: “The *hopefulness* of Jesus, his sustained integrity, was *not* that of a man who could keep going because he knew the answers. The integrity of Jesus’ expectation was the integrity of sustained attention to the silence of God.” We are to wait for God to speak to us, not through our egocentricity, but through our own journey into the silence of the Garden, of the Passion and of Jesus’ death on the Hill.

One of the emblematic writers of our times is an “ecclesially” agnostic Frenchwoman who died in 1943—a woman who, with great integrity, waited patiently on God and I think, in the end, was not disappointed. Simone Weil, to adapt a phrase of hers,

wrote that in our world of conflict and struggle, of confused ideology, and of lack of hope or belief, one must learn to prefer the absence of God to the presence of anything else. This is a profound statement, worthy of a great deal of reflection. She led, like so many of us, a life between the Ascension and Pentecost, of waiting and praying and doing what she understood to be ethically, morally, and spiritually right. She sought the silence that would allow her to wait and listen. In an essay on the Forms of the Implicit Love of God she wrote: “Every human being has probably had some lucid moments in his life when he has definitely acknowledged to himself that there is no final good here below. But as soon as we have seen this truth we cover it up with lies. ... Men feel that there is a mortal danger in facing this truth squarely for any length of time. That is true.... After a time it kills everything within us which constitutes our ego. In order to bear it we have to love truth more than life itself. [But] God himself sets their faces in the right direction. He does not however show himself to them for a long time. It is for them to remain motionless, without averting their eyes, listening ceaselessly, and waiting....”

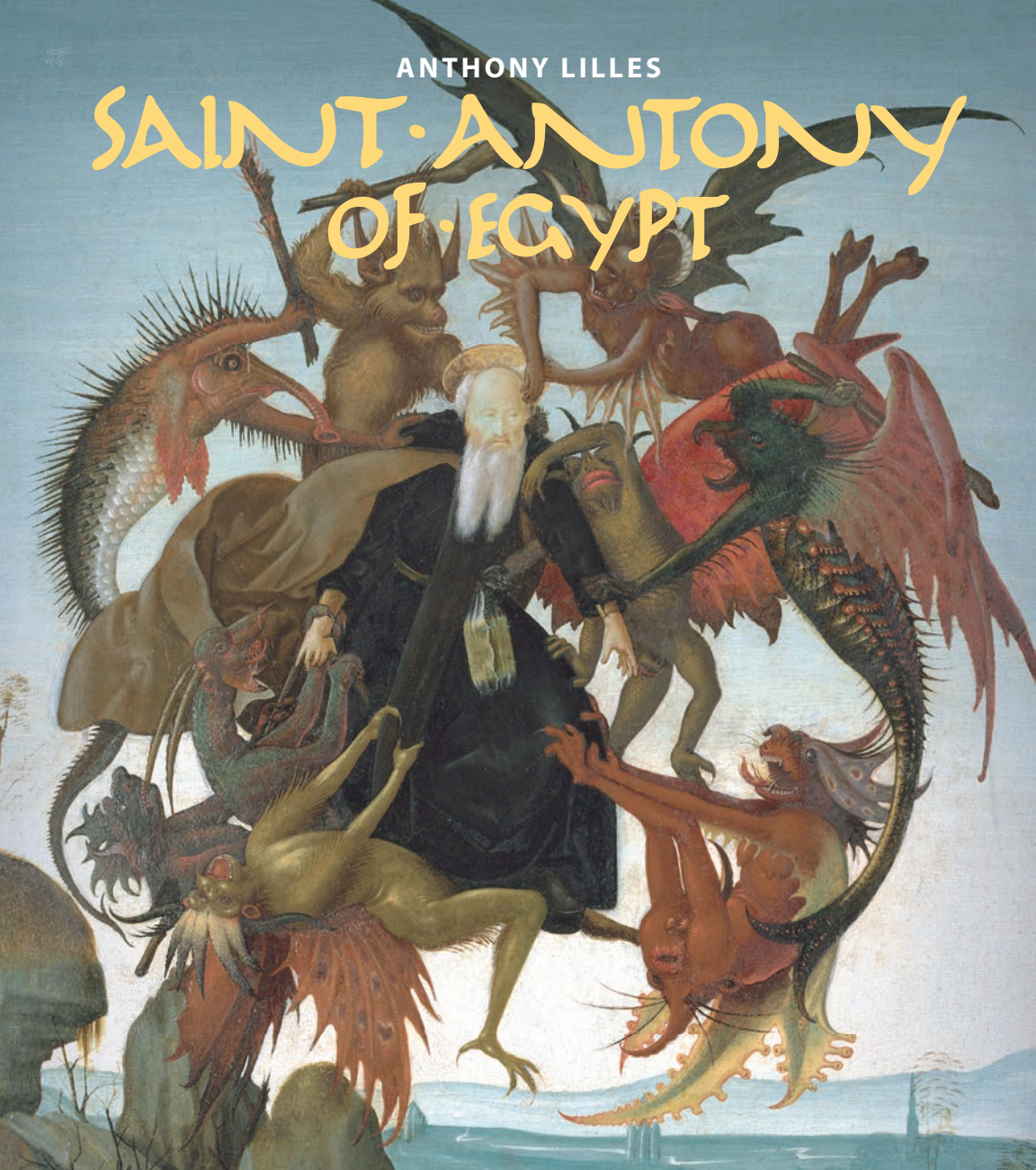
We must always pray for that courage and faith to listen and to wait. ✠

**Fr. Aelred Niespolo, OSB**, a monk of Saint Andrew's Abbey, teaches theology at Saint John's Seminary in Camarillo, California and is also editor of the *Chronicle*.



ANTHONY LILLES

# SAINT·ANTONY OF·EGYPT



**IN** SO FAR AS IT IS A BOOK ABOUT CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER, *The Life of Antony* by Saint Athanasius is filled with many astonishing and profound encounters with the Lord. Antony's journey begins and ends in conversation with God. Homilies are often preached about how he experienced Christ's words in the Gospel as directly and personally addressed to him: "go and sell what you have." Others ponder how the Lord answered Antony's difficult questions personally and with profound reassurance at the end of his severe demonic ordeals. In this reflection, I invite you to consider the unexpected manner in which the Lord invites Antony to seek the inner mountain.

THE TORMENT OF SAINT ANTONY (CA 1487–88), ATTRIBUTED TO MICHELANGELO BUONARROTI; SOURCE: GOOGLE ART PROJECT

Saint Athanasius presents Saint Antony as a witness to the astonishing access to the Lord that our faith opens before us. This friendship comes in the nature of a gift and continually opens up unexpected possibilities that lead to true joy. Antony's testimony reminds us that our lives are meant to be in conversation with the Word of the Father. This means continually re-thinking how we see ourselves before God and how we see God. Even more, it means dedication to prayer marked by a readiness to respond, to say "yes" to the grace of the moment.

In the beginning, God presents Himself in ways that are easy for Antony to recognize. As he progresses, he learns to attend to the Lord's subtle whisper in the midst of the cacophony of lesser voices trying to dominate his heart. Learning to hear the Lord by faith takes years of acquiring virtue and renouncing sin. It is a matter of all kinds of difficult renunciations and spiritual trials, and great effort to live a life where there is space to withdraw into the heart and listen to God. Antony had already journeyed deep into this interior sanctuary of the heart by the time he heard the Lord call him to the "hidden" mountain.

Although uneducated, he found firm footing on the Word of the Father even as he renounced every other form of worldly security. His faith roots his whole psychology in this Word who is personally present to him even in his seeming absence. Through a faith radically grounded in the Word, he emerges from a world dominated with all kinds of irrational spirits, recognizing them for what they are and resisting their attempts to lay hold of his existence.

He is a creature humbly grounded in the truth and, thus, the truth of heaven bears him above all diabolical and psychological powers that torment fallen humanity. He seeks out the solitude he needs to confront discouragement, lust, confusion, deception, anger. Through mental prayer and the discipline of

the Christian life, these are all made subject to him because he confronted them with fresh spiritual understanding, the renewed mind that is gained by knowing Christ Jesus.

He knew the Word of God not merely as an answer to his life's questions, but above all he knew the Word as a "Someone", as an "I" knows a "Thou." Although Athanasius does not state it this way, the saint was drawn because this Divine Someone longed to reveal Himself: divine longing begets human longing. All those who have encountered the Lord should be stirred with this longing, but until Saint Antony no one had entered into the wilderness filled with hope that in the lonely and empty places of the world, God waits for us. Antony was not seeking a psychic state or an achievement, but a relationship, a heart to heart encounter, a conversation with the Lord as with a friend.

This is where we find him making plans and trying to discern where and how to live so that he might be more devoted to the Lord. He is in the desert but he is still distracted. He ponders about where he can go so that his devotion will be uninterrupted. This is also where the Lord interrupts his own ideas and proposes a new idea, something Antony could not have arrived at if left only to his own resources, "Antony, where are you going and why? ... Go to the inner mountain."

In interpreting this, we risk missing deeper truths in Antony's witness if we limit ourselves to geographical considerations. The "inner" mountain or the "hidden" mountain is also spiritual. It is this dimension of the story that offers a word of wonder for those seeking a deeper friendship with the Lord.

God wants to question us and to lead us into places that are not familiar and go beyond the powers of our cleverness to find. Because he longed for the Lord and remained vulnerable to His presence through his faithfulness, Antony entered a threshold where the Lord could question him and direct him. The result of this is that God who is



unfathomable is able to lead Antony into a place that was unknown and hidden. In this place that only faith could find, the Lord initiates an even deeper conversation with Saint Antony.

In Christian contemplation, faith filled with love has a primacy over all other ascetical efforts or human industry employed in our pursuit of God, not just our belief in God or what He has revealed, but our belief for the sake of union with Him. This directional or relational aspect of our faith is foundational to any prayer technique or meditation we might employ, whether new or old, traditional or contemporary.

Faith, like His presence Itself, is in the nature of a gift to be welcomed, not a state of consciousness to be achieved. Methods yield experiences and even enlightenment, faith opens us to saving wonder. Faith enters where God leads: the ascent of a spiritual height to the One who awaits each of us with eager anticipation and tender love.

[*Editor's note: the text of St. Athanasius' Life of Antony can be found online, or even better, in a translation by Carolinne White, in an excellent volume edited by her in the Penguin Classics paperback Early Christian Lives.*] ❧



**Anthony Lilles** is the Academic Dean of Saint John's Seminary in California and a professor for the Avila Institute of Spiritual Formation. The married father of three adult children, he lives

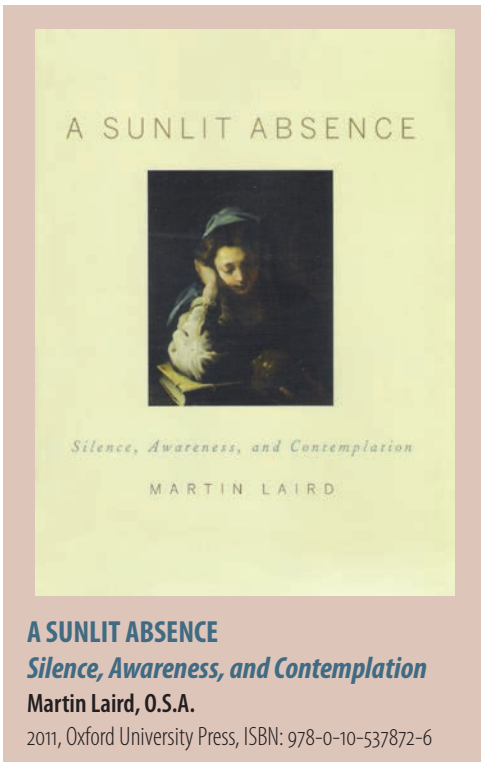
in Oxnard with his wife Agnes and his daughter Marie. He has worked in the field of spiritual theology for over twenty five years and is a specialist in Blessed Elisabeth of the Trinity and the Carmelite Tradition. He has studied in Rome at the Angelicum and at Franciscan University of Steubenville.

## QUARTERLY BOOK REVIEW

by fr. philip edwards, osb

THIS BOOK IS A SEQUEL TO *INTO THE Silent Land: A Guide to the Christian Practice of Contemplation* (2006), a masterful classic and elegant realization of what it claims to be: a guide to practice. If you have read the first book, you may feel that this second one is redundant and superfluous. And if, like this reviewer, you were given the second without knowing the first, you might be impressed by its luminous “sunlit” style but, be frustrated by the constant references to the earlier book and find much that is simply repetitive, such as the image of the gardener who does not make to grow but simply cultivates (*A Sunlit Absence*, p. 171; *Into the Silent Land*, pp. 3–4, 54). Fortunately, Father Martin had a copy of the first which he loaned to me, saying how much he treasured it without the need of a sequel. I would concur, that if you were to have only one of the two, the first is the one to keep. Nevertheless, this luminous afterglow is not without its own worth and encouragement.

The book's title repeats (is drawn from?) that of Chapter Four, “A Sunlit Absence the Light of Awareness,” a phrase the author adapts from a poem by Seamus Heaney (p. 62). The chapter begins in that sunniest spot of sunny Italy and center of sensuous awareness, Florence, with Michelangelo's marbles in the Academy, David and the Slaves (Prisoners, I was wont to call them) — not in the piazza but in an enclosed space, a room, shadowed and skylit, in which we can come and go, seeing and talking, remembering the ancient aesthetic of sculpting, seeing “in the stone the figure waiting to be liberated, the sculptor imposes nothing but only frees what is held captive in stone. The practice of contemplation is something like this. It does not work by means of addition or acquisition, but by release, chiseling away thought-shackled illusions of separation from God. We emerge from the debris of separation and stand up, ‘set free from the snare of



the fowler' (Psalm 91:3)" (p. 60). When the clutter is cleared away one can see that the room (truly with a view) is, as Teresa of Ávila is quoted, "vast, spacious, plentiful ... not some dark corner, but a vast inner space" (p. 62). "This spaciousness describes not only David in his gallery of light but also the inner eye that perceives the gallery of light. Awareness, consciousness, watchfulness is this vast inner space, radiating everywhere ... all objects appear and disappear in this awareness, a 'sunlit absence', to adapt Seamus Heaney. Always luminous but never quite pinned down, this sunlit absence suffuses and embraces all, as open to the Luminous Ground as air to light. 'In your light, Lord, we see light' (Psalm 36:10)." Father Laird then goes on in the company of Saint Hesychios to expound the three moments of expanding awareness: torchlight, moonlight, and sunlight—a reprise of the three doorways of the present moment in (again) Chapter Four of *Into the Silent Land*. One is always where one is, but you must still begin the journey;

now is the day of salvation but you must make the time; you must pray.

In a previous review we encountered Brother David proposing an inclusive way to keep the bridge open to non-Christian practitioners of philosophy and meditation by footing it firmly, step by step, to the rock foundations of the Apostles' Creed. Father Laird, without denigration or prejudice to those others, sees no need to cross the bridge to find the skills and practices of contemplation:

"There are two contemplative practices of fundamental importance in the Christian Tradition: the practice of stillness (also called meditation, contemplative prayer, etc.) and the practice of watchfulness or awareness. These contemplative skills are not imports from other religious traditions, and the Christian contemplative tradition has a lot to say about them. While other religious traditions also have important things to say about each of these, this book will stay within the Christian tradition and address especially those to the Christian tradition for guidance and inspiration along contemplative path." (*Into the Silent Land*, p. 4.)

There are still reasons to keep the bridge open and even to cross over and back both to learn and to share, but it is good to know and to use humbly what one already has. Let the Christian/Catholic always remember the Lord's own words: "I have other sheep that are not of this fold" (John 10:16) and still follow faithfully; He is still Lord and has the words of eternal life for me—and for them as they come like me to hear and to know Him in their own language and thought. What matters is to seek the living God in vigilance, watchfulness, and awareness and in the finding, grow in love. ✧



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

# AROUND & ABOUT THE MONASTERY

*Editor's note: One of the most rewarding things of life at the Abbey are the long-term connections we have with our friends and oblates. Recently an old friend of the Abbey, **Danny Knappman**, visited and then sent this reminiscence of his early days at St. Andrew's. His personal recollection of our founding monks struck a vital note with those of us fortunate enough to know them. Danny writes:*

The question has been asked, "Where are you going?" My mother used to phrase it, "Going to hell in a hand basket if you don't mend your ways!" So here I am in search of heaven or hell. My monastic upbringing has always drawn me back to St. Andrews Abbey like a salmon to its birth place. Hopefully that metaphor will not be fulfilled entirely.

My mentors here have always given me wonderful counsel but when I ask there is a bit of trepidation. The boss man, Fr. Raphael Vinciarelli does not smile when he talks to me. There may be a slight up turn of the mouth when he makes slight of some of our Americanism. You see most of these men are European. Old school European. Californians have as much spiritual credibility as a remote South Pacific islander. I must change my entire outlook on life to get into their good graces. Where was Pope Francis when I needed him? I don't talk much to Fr. Boss-man.

Second in charge is Fr. Yang. Indonesian by birth but European educated. He likes me. He even helped me decline verbs in Latin. He is my go-to man when I have serious conversational needs. I think he even understands me. I don't always like or understand his advice but like wine it always seems to taste better after a year or two.



On the other side of the tracks so to speak is Fr Alberic. He dances to a different tune. He has a reclusive hut near his beehives since he would rather be far away from the boss. He taught me to scramble an egg in a glass of milk and drink it raw for breakfast.

Fr. Gaetan is Alberic's best buddy. He is the kindest man I have ever known. Patience was not a virtue with Gaetan ... it was a way of life.

The money man was Fr. Werner. He had the title of procurator. Recently I looked it up. A fiscal procurator was the chief financial officer of a province during the Principate (30 BC–284 AD) You see that is what I like about this place. They use words I would never think of using. And historical too. I never asked but I think someone told me he was a blue blood. Werner Papeians de Morchoven. Back in the day if you were the second son you became a priest. First son got the inheritance. I learned how to prioritize with Werner. This was a monastery but it had to become self-sufficient. Bucks vs God.

Fr. Wilfrid being from England was the only native English speaker in the bunch. He ran the liturgy side of the house and was a perfectionist. I thought I knew how to be an alter boy. Timing and pace is everything. And try to keep on key with the chants pleeeeee! Are priests allowed to be sarcastic?



I should have started with Fr. Vincent. He found this property and bought it. Just like that...nice and simple. No drama, no arguing. He drives the coolest car. A Citroen DS. That is pronounced *dayess* in French, meaning “goddess.” This car could drive on three wheels with its hydropneumatic self-leveling suspension system. Anybody who would drive something like this, much less a monk, has to be something special.

Fr Bernard was one of the two Chinese monks. He taught me to shoot a .22 gauge rifle much to Fr. Yang’s disapproval. Fr. Yang then put up a sign that says: “No hunting except for peace.”

Fr. Felix was the youngest monk. He would call me Danny-boy. I enjoyed going to Disneyland with Fr. Felix.

Fr. Eleutherius is the resident philosopher. I guess all the monks are philosophers in one way or another but Eleuther is a pro. He taught grad students at Claremont College. We would ride our bikes on the nearby California aqueduct.

So this is where I have been. Conversing with these wonderful mentors about the Big Four: Who am I? Why am I here? What matters most? What matters least? Trying to find clarity in answering these questions in an authentic way. Here we are minus the complexities and contradictions of the world and that helps in getting meaningful answers.

Unfortunately the conversation is kinda one way. You see all these guys died some time ago and left me alone to figure it out on my own. But I think they can hear my questions especially when I walk up to a remote part of the monastery grounds to see them in the

cemetery. They are all there in a nice row. I go to each grave stone. “Knock knock.” Amazingly sometimes I perceive an answer.

This is my last of four days here. I am heading up to the cemetery right now to say goodbye.

5 pm.... I like the sunset in the desert.



## MONK NEWS

**Warren Ermish** entered St. Andrew’s Abbey as an Observer/Postulant on January 13, 2015. Warren has worked for the Sports Divisions of NBC and ABC News. Immediately before coming to the Abbey, Warren worked as a wine consultant (sommelier). Please pray for Warren as he discerns his vocation.

**John Ortega** completed his period of postulancy and entered the Novitiate on March 24. Please pray for him as he continues his journey with the Saint Andrew’s Abbey community. The monastic name given him is Paul.

**Fr. Luke Dysinger**, OSB has been on teaching sabbatical from St. John’s Seminary in Camarillo since early December. He is spending his time in Europe, attending various conferences, visiting monasteries, giving retreats, touring and, hopefully, enjoying a long deserved sabbatical.

## USED BOOKSTORE

After a long delay, work has begun on the Abbey Used Bookstore. The old Gift Shop is being refurbished for this purpose. The shop will be open for business this summer. ✧

### MONKS’ FEAST DAYS

April 25	Br. John Mark
May 1	Br. Joseph
May 5	Br. Angelus
May 3	Fr. Philip
May 10	Abbot Damien
June 29	Br. Peter

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# RETREAT CENTER Calendar SPRING 2015 RETREATS

## APRIL

### WHAT'S HOLY ABOUT IT?: REFLECTIONS ON A TRIP TO THE HOLY LAND

Friday, April 17–Sunday, April 19

Fr. Isaac will spend time sharing photos and reflections about his recent first visit and pilgrimage to the Holy Land of Jesus, and show how these experiences have enriched his understanding of the Holy Scriptures. We will take an in-depth look at Israeli-Palestinian relations and the causes of their turbulent history and conflicts. Special exercises, visual media, socio-economic studies, and journal writing will be included to enliven our time together. Enthusiasm permitting, we may even venture some “brainstorming” avenues for peace among the peoples who share that land.

*Presenter:* Fr. Isaac Kalina, OSB

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

## MAY

### SPRING ARTISTS' RETREAT

Monday, May 4–Thursday, May 7

This retreat is open to artists at all levels, including beginners. Photographers, sculptors, and writers are also welcome to come and experience the colors and beauty of the high desert in the setting of the monastery. Escape the stress of daily life while deepening a spiritual vision in your art. (A materials list will be provided.)

*Presenter:* Deloris Haddow, Obl.OSB

*Room, board, and tuition:* \$300 single; \$262.50 each shared

### PRAYING IN THE CIRCLE OF ST. JOHN

Friday, May 8–Sunday, May 10

The literature bearing the name of John — a Gospel, three letters, and the Book of Revelation — comprises some of the latest New Testament documents to have been written. Disparate in literary style and quality, these texts nevertheless reflect to varying degrees an outlook on the Christian mystery associated with what might be

called the “circle” of Christians influenced by St. John the Apostle. In the course of this retreat, you will be invited to allow themes characteristic of Johanne literature to draw you into prayer as it were in the company of John's circle.

*Presenter:* Fr. Isaac Kalina, OSB

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

### THE FAITHFUL DOVE FLIES AGAINST THE WIND: A VISIT WITH BROTHER PETER

Saturday, May 9, 9:00 AM–3:00 PM

Through the poetry that emerged during his long imprisonment, Br. Peter will share his faith and experiences in Communist China as Michaela sets the stage historically and ideologically.

*Presenters:* Br. Peter Zhou Bangjiu, OSB and Michaela Ludwick, Obl. OSB

*Donation:* \$40 per person includes morning beverages and lunch

### SACRED DANCE WORKSHOP: DANCING WITH THE DIVINE BREATH OF CREATIVITY

Saturday, May 16, 2015, 9:00 AM–4:30 PM

“With loving regard, the divine Artist passes on to the human artist a spark of surpassing wisdom, calling him or her to share in divine creative power.” — Pope St. John Paul II, *Letter to Artists*

Come join in a danced renewal of our role as instruments of the living God in the ongoing work of creation.

*Presenter:* John West, Obl.OSB

*Donation:* \$40 per person includes morning beverages and lunch

### PENTECOST RETREAT

Friday, May 22–Sunday, May 24

This retreat will consider monastic sources on the life of virtue that develops when one lives spiritually the precepts of the Holy Rule and the monastic tradition. The conferences will include the Holy Spirit's presence and action in the soul through prayer — contemplative and liturgical, including hospitality; and through sacred reading.

*Presenter:* Fr. Francis Benedict, OSB

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

## JUNE

### THE SACRED HEART OF TRANSFORMATION: A PRACTICUM FOR HEALING

Friday, June 12–Sunday, June 14

The Sacred Heart icon is a powerful image illuminating the highest expression of Human and Divine Love. This sacred imagery reveals a divine plan for transforming our exterior sufferings by inviting us into a deeper understanding and experience of the interior life. A brief history of this devotion and the associated saints will be explored to set the context for the interior work that will follow. The presenter will guide you through a transformative process — moving from suffering into healing — which is based upon sacred and secular research, adult learning theory and the Catechism of the Catholic Church. Time for prayer and reflection will surround the informative sessions. Please join us for this retreat that will take place during the church's liturgical celebration of the Feasts of the Sacred and Immaculate Hearts, which is the ideal backdrop for exploring this topic as we enter into the Heart of Christ during this very special time. (Various monks will participate in this retreat, which will include spiritual support, sharing, and reconciliation.)

*Presenters:* Kimberly Halperin Hitchcock, MA and Monks of Valyermo  
*Room, board, and tuition:* \$250 single; \$200 each shared (plus \$20 materials fee)

### JOURNEY TOWARD WHOLENESS

Monday, June 15–Wednesday, June 17

Becoming one's true self through reflection & prayer — understanding one's life as both a gift and a mission; receiving and putting into action the inspirations and realizations that God has created each person to become something unique for the human family. Three particular virtues that will be explored together during this retreat — courage, generosity and gratitude. These virtues will be unfolded through spiritual and psychological perspectives so as to enhance our understanding the human person each of us is called to become.

*Presenters:* Fr. Francis Benedict, OSB

Ross Porter, Ph.D; Obl.OSB

*Room, board, and tuition:* \$200 single; \$175 each shared

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## CONTEMPORARY CINEMA AND SPIRITUALITY: SUMMER SESSION

Friday, June 26–Sunday, June 28

The greatest human and spiritual truths are often embodied in stories and narratives. Today much of the burden of storytelling is carried by movies. We will view four mainstream films and have intensive discussions on how spiritual realities are shown through their plots, symbols, acting, etc. These films will be chosen around a theme and are traditionally kept a mystery. This workshop seeks to raise and focus consciousness of the medium and offer ways to use it in the ongoing project of spiritual growth. (The winter session is offered January 23–25.)

*Presenter:* Nikki Tucker, Obl.OSB

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

## SPIRITUALITY AND EDUCATION

Monday, June 29–Wednesday, July 1

Oblates promise to live according to the Rule of Saint Benedict, in keeping with their state in life. We will examine what this means for teachers at all levels, and draw from many rich sources such as the Rule of Benedict and the work of Parker Palmer, Simone Weil, and others. In this interactive retreat/workshop we will examine assumptions and traditional perceptions in order to grow spiritually and intellectually as teachers. Suggested preparatory reading: Palmer's *To Know as We are Known* or his *Courage to Teach*; the *Rule of Benedict*, especially concerning the Abbot.

*Presenters:* Elizabeth Seward, Ph.D; Obl.OSB

*Room, board, and tuition:* \$200 single; \$175 each shared

## JULY

### A POWER GREATER THAN OURSELVES: REFLECTIONS ON TWELVE-STEP SPIRITUALITY

Friday, July 3–Sunday, July 5

Fr. Francis will begin his reflections as usual with his foundational premises on the spiritual life as they interface with the 12 Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous. His particular emphasis this year will be on Step 11: Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, as we understood God, praying only for knowledge of God's will for us and the power to carry it out; and Step 12: Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs. Prayer, meditation and service to others will be explored. (N.B.: There will be a 12 Step meeting during the weekend for those who are members of any fellowship following the 12 Steps.)

*Presenter:* Fr. Francis Benedict, OSB

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



## BENEDICTINE SPIRITUALITY: THE TOOLS OF THE SPIRITUAL ART

**Monday, July 6–Friday, July 10**

Two approaches to “tools” will be explored in these days of reflection. The first will be the role of the cellarer in the Rule, the distribution of goods and the practice of ownership in common — how this can be appreciated and lived out in the world outside the monastery. The other approach will be an overview of Chapter 4 of the Rule, “The Tools of Good Works,” with select passages giving practical assistance to those on this spiritual path. Michael Casey’s book *Seventy-Four Tools for Good Living* is an invaluable resource in preparation for this workshop. *Presenters:* Fr. Francis Benedict, OSB and Audrey Spindler, Ph.D.; Obl.OSB

*Room, board, and tuition:* \$400 single, \$350 each shared

## DISCERNMENT OF SPIRITS

**Friday, July 10–Sunday, July 12**

For the Christian who prays every day, “Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven,” discerning God’s will is an imperative that touches all that we are and all that we seek to do in this life. This retreat does not address the larger question of one’s vocation in life, but rather those everyday realities which engage all of us no matter what our vocation may be. Discernment requires attentive listening to the Spirit of God so that God’s invitation to holiness and the virtuous life may become more a reality for us. Ordinary decisions we make do impact our progress toward communion with God. *Presenter:* Fr. Francis Benedict, OSB

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

## MARRIAGE ENRICHMENT

**Monday, July 17–Friday, July 19**

Practical tools to build and strengthen a life-giving marriage for the couple and, through them, to those whose lives they touch — family and community and society. Theological principles will enhance the presentations and reflections showing marriage as an icon of Incarnate and Trinitarian love.

*Presenters:* Fr. Francis Benedict, OSB

Ross Porter, Ph.D.; Obl.OSB

*Room, board, and tuition:* \$400 per couple

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

**Monday, July 20–Friday, July 24**

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. We will explore Therese’s experience of engaging the spirituality of her time, which led to the formulation of her Little Way. Therese’s texts will be viewed through the lens of contemporary understanding in the fields of spirituality, Scripture studies, anthropology, and psychology and human development, so that fresh understanding comes forth to enrich our lives as we walk the path of love.

*Presenter:* Fr. Stephen Coffey, OSB

*Room, board, and tuition:* \$400 single; \$350 each shared



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