

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 246 ✨ SUMMER 2015



LETTER *from the* ABBOT



EAR FRIENDS,

THERE ARE THREE WORDS THAT CAN spoil a child's birthday or cause grown men to lose their temper. And what are these three words? "Batteries Not Included." If we buy something electronic and overlook these words, the results can be devastating and frustrating.

However, the Gospel always reminds us that everything we could ever possibly need to get to heaven, everything we could ever possibly need to fulfill God's will in our lives has already been given to us. It's included, but it is in seed form. We have to plant the seed, water it, give it light, and then just go to bed like the farmer. When the time is right, the plant grows, the tree bears fruit at the right time, in the proper season. The way we water the seed and give it light of course is by praying, receiving the Sacraments, doing good works, being charitable to our neighbor; all the things we know to be good and beautiful is how we water the seed. This process of course takes time — and that's the hard part.

We live in such a fast-paced culture:

microwaves, express lines at the grocery store, the fast lane on the freeway, faster internet, direct flights. I came across a website that advertised: Get your 4-year degree in 6 months!

In our society today we want everything now because time is money, as we've heard so many times. However, with God it's not like that because God is outside of time. For God, time is not a problem; time is not an obstacle or an impediment. And that's what we have to remember.

Like the farmer, we can't rush the process of planting, but we *do* have to be diligent about watering and watching. It is God who actually causes the growth. Even though God is outside of time, God has perfect timing. He knows exactly *when* we need the fruit, and He knows the *kind* of fruit we need. So we can't get impatient.

When we finally do see the plant coming out of the earth, or the fruit beginning to grow on the branches, we can't pluck it off the tree right away because it's not ripe. And that's the frustrating part. We've waited so long for the reward that we want it now. The image of the seed reminds us that patience is required. All things good and beautiful are worth waiting for.

The seed also reminds us that the Kingdom of God grows quietly, unnoticed, and undetected. We don't hear it. We don't see it. We don't feel it, which is just like God who is a gentle, quiet, modest God. We see that very clearly in how Jesus Himself was born into the world. He was born in a stable, and nobody really saw it. Or like His resurrection, nobody really saw it. It's interesting to note that our God who knows everything, who sees and hears everything, and who has the power to do anything has likened His invincible and eternal Kingdom to a simple tiny seed. Why not like loud thunder and flashes of lightning? Why not like a 9.7 earthquake or a category 5 hurricane? He said it's like a mustard seed, very small. It is the kind of a kingdom that

understands humble beginnings, and littleness, and simplicity because that's the kind of God we have.

God is simple. He is not flashy or flamboyant or complicated. He is not won over by our long list of credentials. God is not very interested or impressed with our accomplishments. After all, He is the One who allows them. He is not really interested or impressed with our intelligence or our artistic or leadership gifts. After all, He is the one who gave them to us.

What God IS very much interested in, however, is you. Just plain old you, and plain old me — without all the frills and accessories. No matter how old we are, whether 8 or 80, no matter how much money we have, no matter if we can speak English or not, no matter what sins we've committed or how many times we've committed them, God is only interested in the unadulterated, us — the unretouched, unmodified, original and authentic us. We don't need to put on our make-up or comb our hair. God does really and truly and genuinely care about us and love us, whether sinful or not. And if we ever doubt His love for us, all we have to do is look at the cross. A person doesn't do something like that for the fun of it. He did it for love. I believe it was St. Catherine of Siena who said, "It was not the nails that kept our Lord on the cross. It was His love." That's how we can be sure of His care for us. We are reminded of His love for us at every Mass when we remember that very sacrifice, when we receive Himself in the Eucharist. This Sacrament we receive, who is God Himself, is the best way we can water the tiny seed of faith that God Himself has planted in our hearts.

So it is true. God *has* indeed given us everything we need. He has given us His very self.

Abbot Damien ❖

THE VALYERMO *Chronicle*

NUMBER 246 ❖ SUMMER 2015

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The Valyermo Chronicle

is published quarterly.

Credits:

EDITOR

Aelred Niespolo, OSB

LAYOUT

Michael Schrauzer

COVER IMAGE:

"The Sower" (detail), 1888, Vincent van Gogh
(Source: Wikimedia Commons)

Printed on chlorine-free,
FSC-certified paper.

From Spring to Summer

A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR



THE SEASON OF SPRING, LIKE THE time of the Resurrection, is one of planting deep into the earth, leading to birth. This recently-past Paschal and Pentecostal time leads into the Summer of our “Ordinary” time, during which we are urged to allow grace to help us grow into the fullness of the life which Christ has promised.

In Spring, the seeds are sown, and now in Summer, they must be allowed to mature. As Christians we are called in this common time of our liturgical year to mutual nourishment and growth. We are called to a vital

evangelization of each other, and by each other.

Our Summer issue of the *Chronicle* deals with some important aspects of this sowing and growth implied in the liturgical year.

Pope Francis in his encyclical *Laudato Si* stresses an important aspect of how Christ’s life in us, and the world we live in, either lives or dies by our own hands, by hands that help and reach out to others, to each other, and by our willingness to confront the evils of a fallen world constantly struggling to heal itself.

In his introduction to *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis writes:

I do not want to write this Encyclical without turning to that attractive and compelling figure, whose name I took as my guide and inspiration when I was elected Bishop of Rome. I believe that Saint Francis is the example par excellence of care for the vulnerable and of an integral ecology lived out joyfully and authentically. He is the patron saint of all who study and work in the area of ecology, and he is also much loved by non-Christians. He was particularly concerned for God's creation and for the poor and outcast. He loved, and was deeply loved for his joy, his generous self-giving, his openheartedness. He was a mystic and a pilgrim who lived in simplicity and in wonderful harmony with God, with others, with nature and with himself. He shows us just how inseparable the bond is between concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society, and interior peace.

Francis helps us to see that an integral ecology calls for openness to categories which transcend the language of mathematics and biology, and take us to the heart of what it is to be human. Just as happens when we fall in love with someone, whenever he would gaze at the sun, the moon or the smallest of animals, he burst into song, drawing all other creatures into his praise. He communed with all creation, even preaching to the flowers, inviting them "to praise the Lord, just as if they were endowed with reason." His response to the world around him was so much more than intellectual appreciation or economic calculus, for to him each and every creature was a sister united to him by bonds of affection. That is why he felt called to care for all that exists. His disciple Saint Bonaventure tells us that, "from a reflection on the primary source of all things, filled with even

more abundant piety, he would call creatures, no matter how small, by the name of 'brother' or 'sister.'" Such a conviction cannot be written off as naive romanticism, for it affects the choices which determine our behavior. If we approach nature and the environment without this openness to awe and wonder, if we no longer speak the language of fraternity and beauty in our relationship with the world, our attitude will be that of masters, consumers, ruthless exploiters, unable to set limits on their immediate needs. By contrast, if we feel intimately united with all that exists, then sobriety and care will well up spontaneously. The poverty and austerity of Saint Francis were no mere veneer of asceticism, but something much more radical: a refusal to turn reality into an object simply to be used and controlled.



The urgent challenge to protect our common home includes a concern to bring the whole human family together to seek a sustainable and integral development, for we know that things can change. The Creator does not abandon us; he never forsakes his loving plan or repents of having created us. Humanity still has the ability to work together in building our common home. Here I want to recognize, encourage and thank all those striving in countless ways to guarantee the protection of the home which we share. Particular appreciation is owed to those who tirelessly seek to resolve the tragic effects of environmental degradation on the lives of the world's poorest. Young people demand change. They wonder how anyone can claim to be building a better future without thinking of the environmental crisis and the sufferings of the excluded.

These introductory words of Pope Francis indeed are embedded in his urging of a New Evangelization concerning the entirety of our world. The seeds of grace are sown in us; and now it is time in this Summer of our lives to

mature, to care for, to nourish and to both forgive and ask forgiveness of each other, to truly realize the stewardship of service we are called to practice and encourage in our ordinary, our daily, lives. ✧



Mustard Seed Missions

BY DONALD P. RICHMOND

BETWEEN 1769 AND 1823, TWENTY-ONE missions were planted in California between San Diego and Sonoma. But as the missionaries traveled up the coast, they also planted two other crops. The first “crop” they sought to establish in the New World was Christianity. These missionaries, exemplified by Blessed Junipero Serra (whose life of suffering and sacrifice on behalf of the aboriginal peoples cannot be denied), sought to share Christ and his Church. If there is any doubt about their Catholic commitment, it should swiftly be silenced by the fact that the second “crop” they sowed was mustard seed — a direct reference to a parable from the Gospels. By planting mustard seed, these missionaries were making a dynamic theological statement about their purpose.

Having traveled the *Camino Real*, the “Kings Way,” on many occasions, I have seen this mustard seed. Originally intended to guide followers of these Catholic missionaries from mission to mission, the golden-flowered mustard seed has now spread all over coastal California and into the rest of the state: today, three hundred years after the first missionaries, there is no “Royal Road” to follow because the seed is everywhere.

In St. Matthew 13:31-33, Jesus tells his disciples a parable about the mustard seed. It is an unusual story in that it recounts the planting of a very small seed. Miraculously, this smallest of seeds became “greater than any garden herb” and eventually became a “tree” in which “all the birds come and settle in its branches” (Knox translation from the Latin Vulgate, 1956). That which was the smallest eventually became the largest within which many could find a home, much as the faith of Jesus Christ has spread well beyond its original planting in an obscure Middle Eastern country 2000 years ago.

And this is God’s intention for us and the world today. He wants the good news of His love to spread throughout the earth, very much as the mustard seed in St. Matthew 13 grew well beyond what its capacity seemed to be. The “New Evangelization” therefore, given these facts, is not entirely new. Christians have always been called upon to share their faith with other people. The Catholic faith is a shared faith that must be spoken and lived. Sharing our faith by word and deed is the Great Commission (St. Matthew 28) to which our Lord has called *every* disciple.

Many of us, however, assume that being a missionary is a calling reserved exclusively for

those with a unique apostolate or who have a profound spiritual gifting. And to some degree, this cannot be entirely denied: some people do have unique gifts and graces for missionary purposes. Nevertheless, every Catholic must attend to at least four missionary activities.

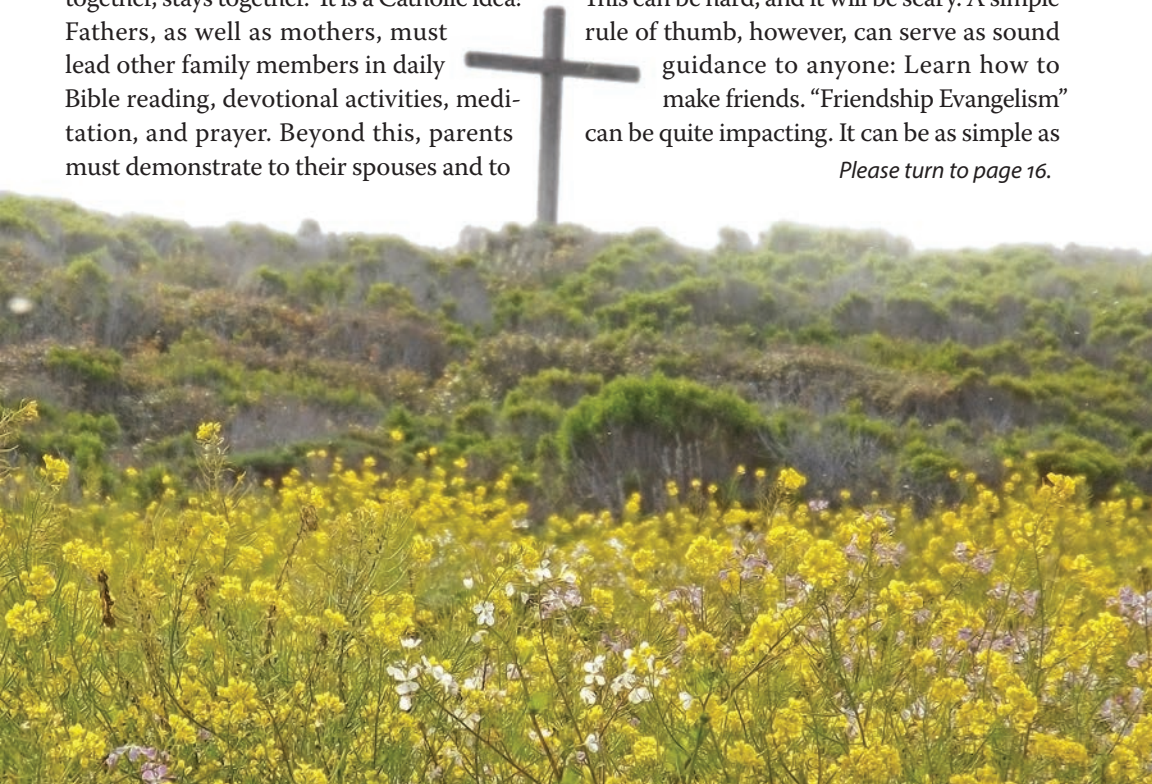
First, as strange as it may sound, every Christian must be a missionary to him- or herself. That is, every Catholic is commanded to examine their own conscience, to uproot vices and plant virtues, and to thoroughly nourish their life with the water of God's word (Ephesians 5:26), proper confession, full and functional participation in the liturgy, and a commitment to enter into the world with the purpose of loving God and neighbor. These must have both private and public applications. In other words, in order to avoid hypocrisy, we must preach God's word to ourselves before we can dare to share Christ's good news with others. This is our first responsibility, and it also is forcefully discussed by Jesus in St. Matthew 13.

Second, we must strive to be missionaries to our own family. I am sure that many of us have heard the phrase, "the family that prays together, stays together." It is a Catholic idea! Fathers, as well as mothers, must lead other family members in daily Bible reading, devotional activities, meditation, and prayer. Beyond this, parents must demonstrate to their spouses and to

their children, as well as other extended family members, what it means to be a faithful Catholic Christian. Many years ago, when I was a boy, this seemed to be a regular practice. Each night before bed the family would gather in the living room to pray the rosary and share. It was a time for the fellowship of faith. In this way the family could grow in God, their faith, and in relationship with each other. Today, of course, in our highly visual culture, other forms of gathered and consistent family prayer can be used. A recent resource is by David Clayton and Leila Lawler, *The Little Oratory: A Beginners Guide to Praying in the Home*. Raising Christians, which means Catholic missionaries, begins at home.

Third, as uncomfortable as we might feel, we are called to be missionaries to our "neighbor." This includes anyone who is in our immediate sphere of influence, such as the people who live next door, the postal worker, people at the grocery store, colleagues, friends, and yes, at times, enemies. Having evangelized ourselves and our family, we begin to move beyond our "comfort zone" and into unfamiliar territory. This can be hard, and it will be scary. A simple rule of thumb, however, can serve as sound guidance to anyone: Learn how to make friends. "Friendship Evangelism" can be quite impacting. It can be as simple as

Please turn to page 16.



The background of the page is a painting. It depicts a man in a long red robe and a black hat, standing in a dark, misty landscape. He is looking towards the left. The landscape features large, gnarled trees on the left and large, dark rocks on the right. The sky is a pale, hazy blue. The overall mood is somber and contemplative.

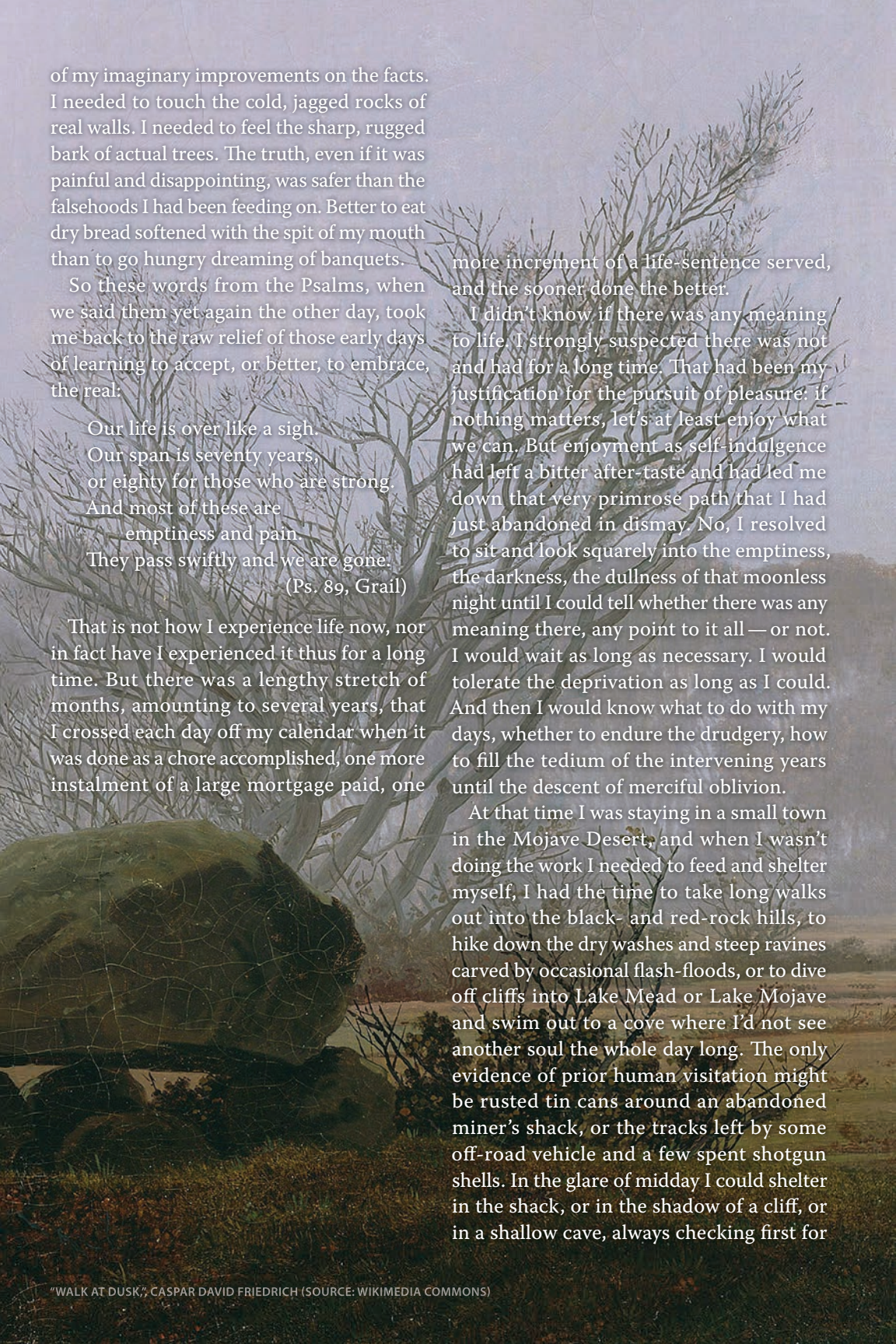
Gazing into Night

BROTHER BEN HARRISON

*First published in Spirituality, Dominican
Publications, Dublin, Nov/Dec 2014.*

READING CERTAIN WORDS THE OTHER DAY ABRUPTLY re-constellated for me the feelings of a very dark period of my life. It was when I was just emerging from a time of youthful searching, of trying to orchestrate experiences that would make my life endurable. In that pursuit I had fallen into moral traps, addictions and depression, and I was just at the point of realizing that I was chasing fantasies, that my illusions were leading me into dangerous waters, and that as long as I continued to pursue beguiling dreams, I would have to navigate veritable nightmares.

Though I always had a philosophical bent, I had little idea of what the truth was, scant understanding of reality. The whole vast human social enterprise seemed to be based on deceptions and pretenses as transparent as my own. Yet I knew that I wanted to live in reality, whatever it was, and not to lose myself irretrievably in the pursuit



of my imaginary improvements on the facts. I needed to touch the cold, jagged rocks of real walls. I needed to feel the sharp, rugged bark of actual trees. The truth, even if it was painful and disappointing, was safer than the falsehoods I had been feeding on. Better to eat dry bread softened with the spit of my mouth than to go hungry dreaming of banquets.

So these words from the Psalms, when we said them yet again the other day, took me back to the raw relief of those early days of learning to accept, or better, to embrace, the real:

Our life is over like a sigh.
Our span is seventy years,
or eighty for those who are strong.
And most of these are
emptiness and pain.
They pass swiftly and we are gone.
(Ps. 89, Grail)

That is not how I experience life now, nor in fact have I experienced it thus for a long time. But there was a lengthy stretch of months, amounting to several years, that I crossed each day off my calendar when it was done as a chore accomplished, one more instalment of a large mortgage paid, one

more increment of a life-sentence served, and the sooner done the better.

I didn't know if there was any meaning to life. I strongly suspected there was not and had for a long time. That had been my justification for the pursuit of pleasure: if nothing matters, let's at least enjoy what we can. But enjoyment as self-indulgence had left a bitter after-taste and had led me down that very primrose path that I had just abandoned in dismay. No, I resolved to sit and look squarely into the emptiness, the darkness, the dullness of that moonless night until I could tell whether there was any meaning there, any point to it all — or not. I would wait as long as necessary. I would tolerate the deprivation as long as I could. And then I would know what to do with my days, whether to endure the drudgery, how to fill the tedium of the intervening years until the descent of merciful oblivion.

At that time I was staying in a small town in the Mojave Desert, and when I wasn't doing the work I needed to feed and shelter myself, I had the time to take long walks out into the black- and red-rock hills, to hike down the dry washes and steep ravines carved by occasional flash-floods, or to dive off cliffs into Lake Mead or Lake Mojave and swim out to a cove where I'd not see another soul the whole day long. The only evidence of prior human visitation might be rusted tin cans around an abandoned miner's shack, or the tracks left by some off-road vehicle and a few spent shotgun shells. In the glare of midday I could shelter in the shack, or in the shadow of a cliff, or in a shallow cave, always checking first for



scorpions and rattlesnakes. And at night there was usually a vast, clear sky in its silent array, but with the sounds of small movements close by and, in the middle distance, the periodic yelping of coyotes.

It was as though I sat and gazed into metaphysical nothingness, like an astronomer at this telescope on a foggy night, waiting for the clouds to lift. And at one point I see a flash of light and realize it is low lamplight reflected in the telescopic lens from my own eye. But as I sit and my heart grows still and my breath grows long—I speak here not of moments but of months—I begin, not to see, but to know—that there is a reciprocating stillness and another waiting that is alert to mine.

It is not a mere projection, a reflection of my “I.” It is vast and quiet. It is as close to me as my breath, and, at the same time, as the clouds disperse, it is farther than the farthest points of light at the lead edge of the cosmic tsunami. And though this desert night is cold, and though the interstellar night is far colder still—I feel warmth. I can’t focus on anything sure, I can’t hear any single sound, but I discern a presence, and I know that one is there—one that speaks by silence and sees eyeless from within—one who—oh, what’s the use? I can’t describe it. It is an “I.” And it is a “You.” And it is Love. And it unleashes in my soul a whirling dance of pure, free joy. And it causes to surge up in me a song that splits my heart into splinters of gladness. And what’s the use? I can’t describe it.

I would like, once for all, to fight past the darkness of my own blinding self-absorption, beyond the tides of my deluded dreams and my despair. I long to surge through the hauling riptides of our futile human complacencies, past the kelp-beds of society’s narcissistic snaring ropes of thrall. I still hope to



lose myself in the immensity of that night sky, travel out beyond the breakers that heave against the invisible sandbars of our Milky Way, on into the vast open sea of space to distant stellar reefs and atolls, toward ultimate horizons, beyond which that One also abides who, I know, is with me here and now.

In the daytime you can see things meters or miles away, but in this night you can see light-years. And as dawn rises, I discern my empty coffee cup and my dusty glasses case and the breviary open to Psalm 89. “And most of these are emptiness and pain.” Ah, but what an emptiness! An emptiness full, if only I could see, of You! And pain, sweet heart-break, that delivers me from me.

Is there a meaning to my life? Only one. You. Oh, and yes, there’s also the joyful love that you release in us like cold, clear water from a desert spring. What more is there to say? Nothing, really. Nothing. Let it be. ❄



Ben Harrison is a Missionary of Charity brother currently based in Manchester, England. He has been in brothers’ communities for 35 years, and has been visiting St. Andrew’s since 1972.





LOVE AND DEATH.

For a moment, hold these two concepts in your imagination, in your body, in your heart. Hold them in your spirit. Where do love and death intersect for you? How do they lead you toward or away from Christ who is Love, but who also “died for us”?

These two concepts for me are closely related, and they speak to me from my faith tradition. There are so many elements of this Catholic, sacramental tradition that help to make sense of love and death in our lives. In the liturgy the Paschal Mystery of Christ's life, death and resurrection is played out moment by moment everyday throughout the world both on the altar and in the lives of the faithful. This mystery is most powerfully and elegantly represented in the Holy Week liturgies that remind us that nothing we experience is not held lovingly by the Living God. The crucifixion is the exquisite place of intersection: love and death. St. John the Baptist paved the way with his words, “I must decrease that he may increase.” Every act of love contains a death to self for the sake of the beloved. Love is sacrificial on some level. We know for what we are willing to live when we know for what or whom we are willing to die. Every parent knows this exquisite love-pain on a deep level.

Even before we know Christ, we are aware of our mortality, the limitedness of the human being yearning for so much more than we can ask or imagine. This yearning for transcendence is an expression of the need to pour oneself out, to be seen and acknowledged, but also to spend oneself for something or someone greater

than oneself. As humans we desire greatly, insatiably, often for we know not what. Our hearts are restless. This is God's mercy, God's homing device that brings us back, even to the point of death. God meets us more than halfway. St. Athanasius reminds us that God became human that humanity could become divine. By becoming like us, God touched *everything*

human, even our mortality, even death. The most moving reminder of this mystery for me comes from a story by Elie Wiesel in *Night* where he describes a boy struggling for breath, dangling from a scaffold. One of the despairing onlookers asks where God is. Another replies, “on the scaffold.”

God became a mere mortal, emptying himself even to death, death on a cross (Phil. 2:7). This emptying is not just about emptying himself of divinity, but also about pouring himself out in love. Surely, the excruciating (a word that comes from the *crux*, or cross) death began in the emptying of his divinity, and the intimate relationship with the Father, love beyond measure. Imagine what that yearning for the infinite must have been for the one who had once known the fullness of that reality! God became a vulnerable human infant, able to feel our emotional, physical and spiritual pain of separation, as well as the frustration of death, knowing there is so much more. He knew the pain of loving deeply. He wept.

Before he left us in his humanity, Jesus poured himself out again in the Eucharist, promising to be with us in this other

SR. MARY LEANNE HUBBARD, SND



vulnerable form of simple bread. Martyrs have died to protect God in the Blessed Sacrament, such is the faith of humankind in this reality of God-present. God allows himself to be ground down, consumed, and remade in us every day around the world. What does this look like in my life? Do I mirror his vulnerability, his self-emptying love? How do love and death lead me toward or away from Christ? I turn to my own witness here.

It is hard for me to surrender to God's love for me, to anyone's love for me. As a spiritual director of others, I know I am not alone in this. This is the work of most spiritual direction sessions. It is hard for me to show up to prayer because God's love, as manifest in the mysteries mentioned above, is so big that it makes me cry. Most of the time I do not want to be that vulnerable. This invitation and reality feels overwhelming, and I feel unworthy. God and I are working on this stumbling block, as I am also accompanying others on their similar journeys.

When it is difficult for me to find myself or God, I can always find him at the cross... always. But I hesitate to go there because it brings me so close to the stories like that of Elie Wiesel, the suffering of my brothers and sisters whom he loves so much more than I do. When I do surrender, however,

and give in to these graces it is always good and healing and not burdensome. The anticipation is much worse than the reality. But my own fears still make me skittish. The best I can do is surrender the fears one at a time as they rise within me.

Christ said he came that we might have life, and life to the full (John 10:10). But our limited vision constricts us so that what needs to die is what separates us from the truth of who we truly are, beloved sons and daughters of the Living God, even before we try to be "worthy." We do not need to seek death, but to surrender to the myriad ways that death confronts us. Most of these opportunities come in the form of our everyday humanity in the gifts of love and mortality. ✘



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QUARTERLY BOOK REVIEW

by fr. philip edwards, osb

THIS BOOK, IN ITS SECOND EDITION, was published in November 2014. It is an easy read, very personal and has been well received by the public at large, judged by the statistics of its sales on Amazon — ranking #1 among religious memoirs within weeks of its publication.

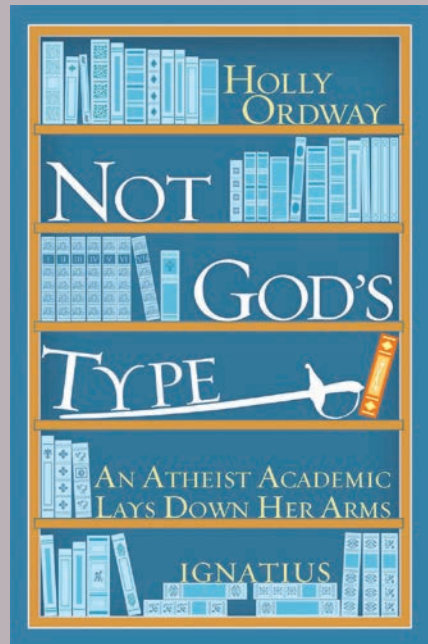
In a recent interview conducted by Brandon Vogt on Fr. Robert Barron's blog, "Word on Fire," we learn that Holly Ordway

was convinced that God was little more than a superstition, completely unsupported by evidence or reason But, one day a smart and respected friend surprisingly revealed that he was a Christian. That sent Holly on a search for the truth about God, one that weaved through literature, aesthetics, imagination, and history. It culminated in 2012 when she entered the Catholic Church.

Last year's Lenten *Chronicle* (#241) presented a review of a book for which my own enthusiasm has not at all faded away: *My Bright Abyss* by Christian Wiman. This is a modern poet's pilgrimage of grace through suffering to (re)discover the truth of Christ — and of Christianity — while still unmoored from a "church home" within the larger faith community.

Both Ordway and Wiman are schooled in academic English literature. She is a budding (probably by now already blooming) professor with a PhD in English Literature from Amherst (p. 39) and he a retired editor of *Poetry Magazine* and seasoned practitioner of the art itself. The seventeenth century "Metaphysicals" (Donne, Herbert, Vaughn, *et al.*) as well as the more recent Eliot and (pre-eminently) Hopkins, are significant light posts along their respective pilgrim ways.

The focus of her academic work on imagination in apologetics served her well as she came to understand that the literature she loved so much was so firmly rooted in Christian and Catholic tradition.



NOT GOD'S TYPE

An Atheist Academic Lays Down Her Arms

Holly Ordway

© 2014 Ignatius Press, San Francisco

ISBN: 978-1-5861777-999-1 (cloth)

I wrote my doctoral dissertation on fantasy literature, with Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* as the center point of the argument. This was a very peculiar thing for me to do. I chose the topic of my dissertation precisely at the time I consciously accepted and fully embraced the philosophy of atheism. And *Lord of the Rings* is, in Tolkien's own words: "a fundamentally religious and Catholic work; unconsciously so at first, but consciously in the revision." I was an atheist at odds with myself; I experienced a dissonance in my understanding of the world. This dissonance was significant; it kept me from pulling the curtains on the outer world of grace completely [p. 39].

Both of these writers are very American and their first encounter with Christian faith and practice is in the context of evangelical Protestantism. As Wiman comes back to his Christian faith, he recognizes that he needs community, but it seems to remain secondary

for him. For Catholics, the body of Christ, which is the Church, is of equal importance because it *is* His body, realized in Word and Sacrament handed over and down by the hands of the Apostles, especially in the celebration of the Eucharist. For Ordway, what is primary is truth. She comes to accept the Catholic position while following through an introspective intellectual process that produced a result that her soul could not deny.

“My conversion had been to what C.S. Lewis called ‘mere Christianity,’ but I could not stay there, reading the Bible in a corner by myself. As Lewis explained: “‘Mere’ Christianity ... is more like a hall out of which doors open into several rooms. If I can bring anyone into that hall I shall have done what I attempted. But it is in the rooms, not in the hall, that there are fires and chairs and meals... of course, even in the hall you must begin trying to obey the rules which are common to the whole house. And above all you must be asking which door is the true one; not which pleases you best by its paint and paneling. In plain language, the question should never be: “Do I like that kind of service?” but “Are these doctrines true: Is holiness here?” [p. 151].

Ordway’s account is a cogent, step-by-step narrative of her conversion process — interspersed at regular intervals by passages titled as “Interludes.” Chapter by chapter she asks hard questions of herself and of her thinking, faces truths she discovers, and then takes action in response to what she discovers. It is a rigorous methodology that can serve as an example for anyone wanting to clarify their thinking, challenge their assumptions, and open their minds and spirits to something new, something more, something to fill what’s missing.

“The Theist says that God created us so that we would be completed in Him. The atheist says that we create ‘god’ to fill the hole that was an unintended by-product of our evolution. What both sides agree on is that we have a hole ... an unfulfilled desire” [p. 93].

One of the appeals of the Catholic tradition is this apologetic approach — not only

to tell the Good News (with every Christian) rather than keeping it to oneself, but also to provide a firm foundational rock of doctrine and practice, an ample, well-built and vented ingle in which the Word can continue to burn and give heat and light to the banquet hall.

One of the appealing factors of this book’s structure is the in-breaking of the “Interludes” into the straightforward chronology of the overall narrative, a reflective reminiscence, looking both backward and forward, giving more light and breadth to the immediate experience — a sort of *lectio divina* focusing on a word or phrase or experience — that speaks to your heart, drawing you out and in. This book itself, as an amplified second edition of the first (and pre-Catholic) edition, is rather like an extended “Interlude” itself, but firmly cadenced on the tonic cord.

The meaning of my journey to faith has unfolded further as time has gone on. I have come to see aspects of my experiences that I did not notice and indeed could not have noticed at the time. I have begun to recognize the way that grace had been infusing my imagination for many years without my realizing it, like a river that ran deep below the surface of a desert, until one day, to the great surprise of the weary traveler, it bubbled to the surface, clear and sweet and cool.

So then, this is the account of a glorious defeat, an unsought but desperately needed relinquishing of my cherished independence — an unconditional surrender in which I was brought from death to life, from trying to live without God to being led fully into his Body, the Church. And as I first knew Christ as my sovereign Lord, this is also a sketch of how I later to love him as my Savior.

Lastly, this is not, at the heart of it, a story of what I was clever enough to do, but rather of what I was weak enough to have done to me and for me. It is an account of God’s work, a tale of grace acting in and through human beings but always issuing from him and leading back to him. And it is the story of my being brought home [pp. 3–4]. ✠

AROUND & ABOUT THE MONASTERY



FATHER LUKE'S SABBATICAL

During the past seven months I have had the great joy of spending a sabbatical in England where, thirty years ago, St. Andrew's Abbey made it possible for me to study theology for ordination at Oxford; and where, twenty years ago, the monastic community allowed me to return to Oxford to research and complete a doctorate in theology on Evagrius Ponticus, one of the Desert Fathers. This year Abbot Damien and the administrators of St. John's Seminary permitted me to spend the spring semester and summer in England, with occasional visits to monasteries and universities on the continent. It has been a rich and blessed time; and I am deeply grateful to my brothers at the Abbey and my employers at the seminary for making it possible.

In December I participated in seminars and gave presentations at Lund University in Sweden under the auspices of Prof. Samuel Rubenson, whose research group on the desert fathers visited Valgermo in 2013. I then enjoyed the gracious hospitality of the monastic community at Downside Abbey

in England for Christmas, and was then offered the opportunity to give conferences and serve as Holy Week and Easter Chaplain to the Benedictine nuns of Minster Abbey in Thanet, near Canterbury. I was also able to spend several weeks at Farnborough Abbey in Hampshire, where the hospitality and liturgy are unsurpassed, and at Belmont Abbey near the Welsh border. At the midpoint of the sabbatical I spent Trinity Term (eight weeks, from April to June) in Oxford as a visiting scholar in residence at my (and Fr. Aelred's) old college, St. Benet's Hall. This sabbatical has also allowed me time and access to libraries that enabled me to complete two articles: one on "The Genre of Exegetical Sentences" for the soon-to-be-published *Oxford Handbook of*

MONKS' FEAST DAYS

| | |
|--------------|----------------|
| August 8 | Bro. Dominique |
| September 3 | Father Gregory |
| September 21 | Father Matthew |
| October 4 | Father Francis |



Early Christian Exegesis; and the other on the doctrine of *theosis* (divinization) in the Rule of St. Benedict and the writings of Gregory the Great. This second article will serve as both a lecture at the upcoming International Patristics Conference in Oxford, to be held in August, as well as a chapter in a book on “The Doctrine of *Theosis* in the Christian West”, scheduled to be published next year.

My reaction to this sabbatical so far can be summarized in a single word, “gratitude”. As I mentioned above, I am deeply grateful to everyone at the Abbey and seminary who made it possible for me to spend this time in research, travel, and spiritual refreshment. And I am deeply grateful to God for having enabled me to renew my own spiritual life through participation in the different kinds of liturgy and community life that my visits to different Benedictine communities and my stay in Oxford have made possible. But the gratitude of which I am most constantly aware is gratitude for Valyermo itself — a sense of gratefulness for our high-desert Benedictine oasis of prayer and silence that God allows us to share with our guests, oblates and friends. We have no idea how fortunate we are. At a point in history when many monastic communities the world over are agonizing over their identity, work, membership, and future we quietly continue to be and do what we have been for more than half a century. I look eagerly forward to being home again. ✠

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

baking something for your neighbor, offering to help them shovel their sidewalk after a storm, or just being a bit friendlier. Although all personalities are not the same, some being more outgoing and others more reclusive, everyone can still take the initiative to make and find opportunities to share Christ’s good gospel with others.

Finally, apart from these three actions, Catholics are called to move beyond local considerations into global contexts. Sharing Christ is not just about “me and mine,” it includes “they,” “them,” “we,” and “us.” God loved (as we are told in St. John 3:16) “*the world*.” This love prompted sacrificial action. God loved, and, as a result, he gave. He entered into the mission field of our humanity. Similarly, we too must find ways to enter into the larger field of evangelism, to “connect” and share. Even if we cannot go to another country, we can pray for those who do. We can give money to people and projects needing assistance. We can write to missionaries and publicize their ministries in our parishes. As well, some might even be led to be part of a parish team that spends a few weeks in another culture or country, helping others with their unique and often debilitating needs.

Like the first missionaries to California, we also are called and challenged to plant a mustard seed faith wherever we travel through life. If we do so, by word and by deed, we may find that the small seed of our faithful effort may exceed our wildest expectations. Evangelism is a “Royal Road” upon which every Catholic Christian is called to travel. Godspeed! ✠



Dr. Donald P. Richmond, a widely published author and illustrator, is an oblate of Saint Benedict with Saint Andrew’s Abbey in California.



RETREAT CENTER Calendar SUMMER 2015 RETREATS

JULY 2015

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 relate to the 12 Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous. His particular emphasis this year will be 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, and how this can be appreciated and lived out in the world outside the monastery. The other approach will draw from 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.; OBI.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 us all 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 couples and, through them, 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.

Presenter: Fr. Francis Benedict, 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 examine 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 may come 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

MARY IN SCRIPTURE AND TRADITION Friday, July 31–Sunday, August 2

This retreat will focus on Our Lady as our model in the spiritual

life. We will ground our discussion on Scripture passages which speak of Mary and then draw on insights from Tradition, both ancient and modern.

Presenter: Sr. Gertrude Gillette, OSB; Ph.D

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

AUGUST 2015

INTERIOR CASTLE: St. Teresa of Avila

Monday, August 3–Thursday, August 6

The lively and insightful St. Teresa mapped out the soul's interior journey through the diverse "mansions" to its center, where Christ lives and invites us to deeper levels of divine intimacy. This retreat will outline the steps she presents in our journey in Christ and the different characteristics of each mansion. Proceeding from mansion to mansion, we will examine the hazards we encounter which tempt us to slide back to a previous mansion or remain stuck in one we are in.

Presenter: Sr. Gertrude Gillette, OSB; Ph.D

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

PRIESTS' RETREAT:

Priestly Spirituality In a Changing World

Monday, August 10–Friday, August 14

Priests are stewards of God's mysteries. They teach these mysteries as merciful revelation, celebrate them in the liturgy, invoke them as healing and pardon, and above all, live them as the deepest meaning of their own lives. But it is one mystery — the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ — that shapes and sustains priests' spiritual lives. This retreat will consider how priests participate in the dying and rising of their Lord through challenges and joys that are rooted in our changing culture, in the growing diversity of our Catholic world, and in the demands of their own ministry.

Presenter: Fr. Stephen Coffey, OSB

Room, board, and tuition: \$400 single

DEPARTURES: The Mysteries of Holy Saturday and Ascension in the Life of a Disciple

Friday, August 14–Sunday, August 16

This retreat will explore the experiences of loss, death, emptiness, bewilderment, and major life transition, finding ways to embrace the Divine Presence in times of felt absence. The biblical and liturgical themes of Holy Saturday and Ascension will assist in making sense of these deep realities of the soul in its journey to God.

Presenters: Fr. Francis Benedict, OSB

Audrey Spindler, Ph.D; Obl.OSB

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

HENRI NOUWEN ON THE SACRAMENT OF PRESENCE AND ABSENCE

Friday, August 21–Sunday, August 23

Henri Nouwen's ministry was characterized by strong, incarnational presence. But he also employed the ministry of absence, believing that sometimes "we need to learn how to leave so the Spirit

can come." This retreat/workshop will help us, through Nouwen's insightful guidance, to creatively navigate the tensional realities of both presence and absence as we seek to minister to others more effectively.

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

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

LECTIO DIVINA:

The Monastic Art of Praying the Scriptures

Friday, August 28–Sunday, August 30

Lectio divina, the ancient Christian art of praying the scriptures, is a way of allowing the Bible, the Word of God, to become a means of union with God: in other words, through *lectio divina*, the reading of sacred scripture becomes the gateway to contemplative prayer. In this workshop ancient and modern approaches to the practice of *lectio divina* will be studied and practiced.

Presenter: Fr. Luke Dysinger, OSB, Ph.D

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

SEPTEMBER 2015

IN THE SPIRIT OF AA

Friday, September 4–Sunday, September 6

Spend a weekend getting back to the key that unlocks the 12-Steps. We will take a slightly different approach to these conventional steps and traditions. Recovery can be a traumatic shock to the system, as are all experiences of God. We find God in adversity and weakness; in our common disease will be found our common strength and courage.

Presenter: Fr. Isaac Kalina, OSB

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

IMAGES OF THE DIVINE ASCENT

Friday, September 11–Sunday, September 13

The Christian's spiritual journey is often depicted as one of spiritual ascent — climbing a ladder, ascending a mountain, etc. Using both literary and pictorial depictions, this retreat will examine conceptions of the spiritual and their usefulness in conceptualizing our own spiritual journeys.

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

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

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

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