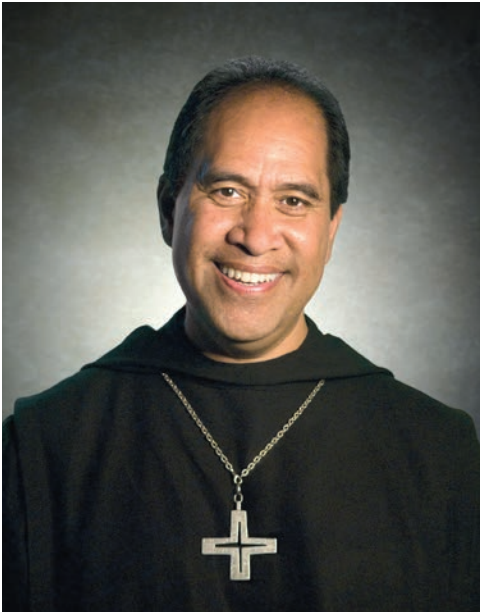




ST. ANDREW'S ABBEY
THE VALYERMO

Chronicle

Nº 249 ✠ SPRING 2016



LETTER from the ABBOT


 DEAR FRIENDS,

JESUS TELLS US IN THE DAILY READINGS of the Easter season that He is the Bread of Life, and that we who believe in Him will never die.

Several weeks ago my 18-year old nephew died. One day last year his father took him into the emergency room with a sore throat. That same day he was taken by helicopter to a hospital 150 miles away from his home where he spent the next (and last) ten months of his life.

As I was reflecting on the Bread of Life discourse of Jesus in the Gospel of John, I wondered to myself, what must Jesus' words 'I am the Bread of Life... you will never die...' mean to his 4th grade sister? Probably very little, or confusing at best, since her brother was an active and practicing Catholic who received Eucharist

regularly — and yet he died, despite the words of Jesus.

Unfortunately, Jesus doesn't guarantee us a happy and stress-free life. He does, however, guarantee us life ... but not until after death; and *that* life of course will be happy and stress-free. This is what we have to remember as Christians: our reward comes later.

God gives us in the here and now only glimpses and hints and indications of our eternal reward; but the fullness of our reward, the fulfillment of our hope, comes later.

The life and death of Jesus, (and my nephew and all others who have gone before us), remind us that we are pilgrims on this earth. We are just passing through. We are not meant to be here forever. The Psalmist says, 'our life is only 70 years or 80 for those who are strong.' (Ps. 90). And some like to add, 'and 90 years for those who are stubborn.'

God wants us here for a time — a limited time — to enjoy to the full the life He's given us; to use to the fullest all that we have and are to help us love and serve Him through loving and serving our neighbor. Our challenge is living in this world, but keeping our eyes on the next. We have to keep our eyes fixed on the goal, otherwise we get lost and confused.

God is our goal, eternal life is the prize, heaven is our reward. Our citizenship is in heaven, not here. (Phil. 3:20). And it is this truth that Jesus is reminding us about in the Bread of Life discourse. He is speaking about *later*.

That's difficult for us to remember and to live by for many different reasons, but primarily because in our society — in our technologically driven, convenience-seeking, instant-gratification-wanting society, we want it *now*. We want our reward *now*.

We don't want to have to wait for it, and we certainly don't want to have to suffer to get it.

We forget sometimes that wheat has first to be crushed to make bread, and grapes have to be crushed to make wine. This is the paradigm Christ left us: through death to life. Only when we are willing to be emptied and crushed like our Lord, can we be refashioned, refilled, renewed, transformed and alive in Him. When are weak He is strong. Power is made perfect in weakness. (II Cor. 12)

Through His death and resurrection, through the Eucharist, Jesus the Bread of Life, gives us an example to follow and provides the strength we need for the journey back to God, to the fullness of life — which comes later.

Abbot Damien ✧



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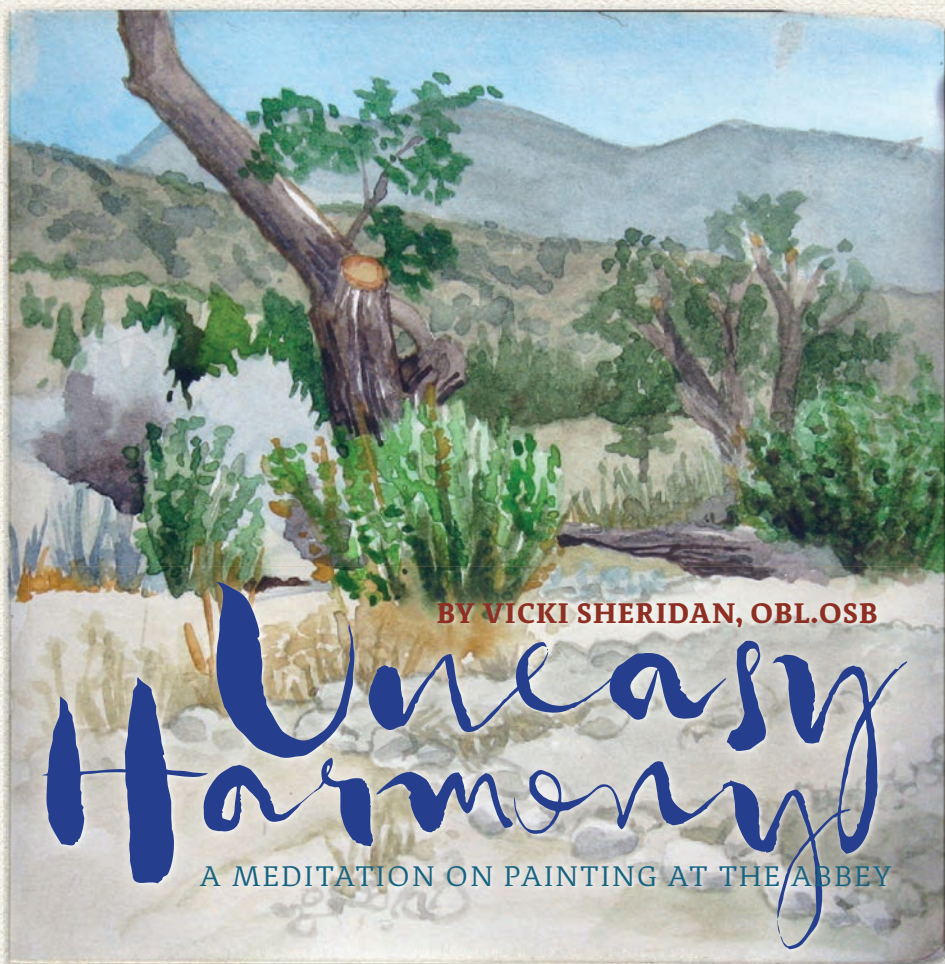
LAYOUT

Michael Schrauzer

COVER IMAGE:

"Come benedetto pregato dai monaci
produce l'acqua dalla cima di un monte,"
after 1505, Il Sodoma,
Abbey of Monte Oliveto Maggiore,
(Source: Wikimedia Commons)

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ING AT THE ABBEY WITHOUT COMPUTER, PHONE, DISHES, LAUNDRY, garden, or any of the many items that distract me at home, there is time to paint. Almost always I bring my tiny watercolor set and 5½" x 5½" book to make watercolor sketches of sites around the grounds. The surroundings here are always new and interesting, and maybe not only because of my attachment to this place.

The juxtaposition of lush greenery with desert is an ongoing fascination; I see it everywhere I turn. It is one of the constants in my sketches: dry streambeds littered with cobbles forming a floor for grey, pointy-leaved desert plants and the sere bleaching remains of fallen trees, next to the magnificent trunks of great trees covered with a profusion of the greenest of green leaves. It doesn't make any sense to my rational mind: a place should be either one or the other, either desert or green. But here both dwell side by side in perhaps an uneasy harmony. The places where one climate/vegetation zone meets another are always curious places with flora and fauna adapted to the abruptness of living on the edge. That the desert oasis that is the abbey is manmade doesn't really alter its strangeness to me. In their wisdom the early Benedictine fathers opted not to make the whole place look like Belgium, but only bring a little of Belgium into the desert.

The coyotes, bobcats, lizards, quail, rabbits, and other animals that hang about are attracted by the prospect of pickings a little easier than what they could find in the drier desert just a little ways away. Fat, healthy coyotes eat the apples that fall to the ground (and probably also some of the rabbits that have come for the apples). Ducks fly in for a respite from their migration and stay year round. The ducks are so loath to leave that rather than seek elsewhere for a mate of their own species, the



mallards have hybridized with white feral domestic ducks. (Reading up on white ducks, however, I find that they were bred from mallards in the first place, so perhaps this mixture is just the whites going back to their roots.) The resulting white and buff colored ducks expand the size of the flock and join the whites and mallards together as a unit. Whatever they were before, they are all family now.

St. Paul said that the whole creation is groaning with birth pains, waiting for the revealing of the children of God. That says to me that we humans are of a



piece with all living things, and I suspect also with rocks and water and air. We humans hold the key. All created things grow together into wholeness as we who are made in God's image become whole through Christ. As we grow in grace, we bring with us into the Kingdom of God creatures that we didn't even know were connected with us.

We see a little of this connection in the lives of some saints. The stories of Francis of Assisi

and animals are well-known. But there are many others. Columban, the sixth century Irish missionary who lived his adult life in France, used to pray in the woods for days at a time, and bears, wolves, and other fierce creatures not only refused to attack him, but they did his bidding when he asked them. Saint Joseph of Cupertino was often visited by a finch who sang with him in praise of God. In more recent times, a nineteenth century Russian Orthodox saint, Seraphim of Sarov, had a hut in the woods where he spent as much time as possible in prayer. A bear came to visit him regularly and receive bread from his hand.

The saints-and-animals stories are the very visible edge of the link that humans have with all of nature when we are connected to God. But even when it is less evident the link exists. People who come to the



abbey slow down from their busy lives under the influence of prayer and peacefulness. They slow down and are able to sit by the pond and feed bread to the ducks, even without the excuse of having children to entertain.

They look for quail mommas leading their file of baby quail. They hike up to the cemetery and take note of the blooming Joshua trees, yuccas, and other strange and beautiful desert plants that grow there. When, toward evening, an owl is heard hooting from the top of a tree, everyone stops and listens, standing underneath to peer upwards and maybe catch a glimpse of the bird.

We long for our link with nature to be mended. Like the rest of the world, somewhere in our hearts we too are groaning in birth pains, waiting for our connectedness with all of God's creation to become a reality. ❄





A Mirror *to* RB 59

BY REBECCA CERLING, PH.D., OBL.OSB

JESUS SAID, “LET THE CHILDREN come to me.” Yes, but — in the monastery?!

One day, about ten years ago, Father Eleutherius Winance and our then two-year-old son, Brendan, could be heard making quite a racket in the little dining room at the Abbey. The sight of Brendan in my arms had stopped Father Eleutherius on his way out and, although perhaps technically a few minutes of the Grand Silence remained, he immediately stuck his index finger inside his cheek and quickly yanked it out — emitting the most amazing, glorious, explosive “POP” imaginable! Brendan stared. Father Eleutherius “popped” again. Brendan chortled. Father Eleutherius “popped.” Brendan broke out in

gales of laughter. The two continued until Brendan also was trying to “pop” and was laughing so hard, I could hardly hold him. At that point, Father Eleutherius looked at me a little sheepishly and admitted that his mother used to reprimand him for getting other children in trouble with his tricks. While Mrs. Winance had surely fulfilled her parental duty with her scolding and — if the proof was in the pudding of Father Eleutherius’s life — had raised a wonderful son, the sight of a Benedictine monk in his nineties entertaining a two-year-old boy almost certainly would have delighted her — as it did all of us gathered around.

This exchange raises the question of the place of children in a monastery. Consider the following scene: A young boy and his

parents make their way to an abbey church. Mass is underway as the family stands waiting to present the gifts at the altar: the wine and the host. But on this day they present an additional gift: the child himself.

That scene took place much more frequently than our 21st-century sensibilities might allow us to imagine. The little boy was an oblate, and a very ordinary oblate at that. For centuries, Benedictine oblates most often were children given by their parents to live their lives in a monastic community—as described in Chapter 59 of the *Rule of Benedict*. The scene at the back of the church might have taken place at any Benedictine monastery between about 600–1200. Children, some as young as three, were donated by their parents to live the remainder of their lives in a monastery. Parents dedicated both boys and girls to religious life, although girls sometimes remained in their homes in a separate part of the house until they were considered old enough to transition to an adult community.

The notion of child oblation is jarring both to our modern sensibilities about childrearing and to our vision of monastic life. Children, however, were a regular feature of monasticism in the Middle Ages, and their presence wove together and strengthened the fabric of medieval society.

Child oblation had its basis in biblical stories. In the New Testament, Jesus himself was presented at the Temple and subsequently invited children to come to him. The preeminent biblical model for child oblation, however, was the story of Hannah in 1 Samuel 1:1–2:21. Hannah was overcome with grief at her inability to bear children. She promised God that, if he blessed her with a son, she would give the boy to the Temple to serve God. Sure enough, when Samuel was weaned, Hannah took the three-year-old Samuel to the temple and left him to serve God for the remainder of his life.

In spite of impressive biblical precedents,

questions immediately arise: why would parents give children to monasteries? And why would monasteries accept them? The answers lie both in ordinary human experience and in the nature of medieval society. Sometimes parents were unable to care for the child. Sometimes they were ashamed of an illegitimate child. Sometimes they needed a place for a child who was handicapped. And sometimes, like Hannah, parents offered a child in gratitude for the miracle of the child's birth or healing.

Once at a monastery, child oblates created tangible connections between their families and the religious communities charged with the spiritual well-being of their society. These familial connections continued throughout the child's life, and even beyond. Families were remembered in the regular prayers of the community, and they remained in touch with their oblate. In fact, the monastery in Abingdon, England, held an annual visiting day for families on September 8, the feast of the Nativity of Mary.

Relationships also continued through the provisions made by the family for the monastery. When a family was able to donate land along with their child, the land provided rent or goods that sustained the community beyond the lifespan of the individual oblate. A story from England illustrates the mutual and enduring nature of a family's connection with a community. After the Norman invasion in 1066, Lanfranc, the archbishop of Canterbury and abbot of the cathedral Benedictine community, gave alms yearly to the mother of one of the monks who had been impoverished by the Norman takeover. Almost certainly the family had given land to the cathedral community along with their son before the Conquest, and almost as certainly they lost that land and their own means of support in the Conquest. However, the relationship between the family and the community remained, and the community then could and did support the family.

Oblates further enriched their communities through their contribution to the liturgy. When they were children, they provided high voices to complement the deeper tones of the adult choir. After they grew up, oblates became the living memory of their communities, and as a result of their long years of experience, many became their communities' historians and cantors.

What if an oblate wanted to quit? Over the course of the Middle Ages, canon law reversed itself several times on the issue. For the most part, however, although some safeguards were put into place to make sure *parents* could not change their minds and take children back, the oblates themselves had no choice. The vow parents made at the altar in the service of oblation was, like baptism, considered a vow made to God that could not be broken.

The practice of child oblation began to wane in the twelfth century for several reasons. Some grown oblates came to have little interior inclination to monastic life. In addition, the Cistercians and others began to reform what they saw as excesses of monastic life — including accretions to the liturgy. These reformers wanted a simpler liturgy and communities made up of adults who had chosen monastic life for themselves. With less need for monks or nuns who had lifelong knowledge of complicated liturgical practices, child oblation finally petered out almost completely.

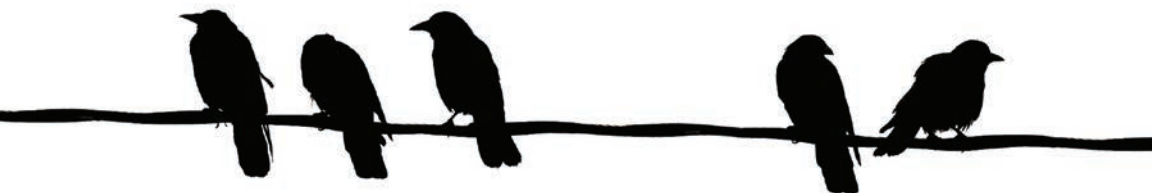
How to think about this practice that seems so remote, if not downright unsettling? Of course, there were abuses from all sides: parents dumped unwanted, and sometimes unwilling and unable, children on

monasteries; adult monastics mistreated the children in their midst; disruptive children drove monks and nuns to distraction. Con-temporaries were as disturbed by these troubles as we are. If we listen carefully, however, we can also hear lovely echoes reverberating between the practice of child oblation and our own lives of faith: parents' deep longing to pass on their faith by bringing their children to the church; the church's true desire to do Jesus' bidding to welcome children to him; and children's ability to contribute their own gifts to the life of the church.

As in the Middle Ages, the relationships between parents, children, and the monastery, can continue to strengthen the fabric of our faith and our society — albeit in different ways. Children and their parents can still be seen at the back of the church at Valyermo, waiting to present the gifts for mass, and chatting with monks afterwards. Our kids, like many others, hold St. Andrew's Abbey as a very special place in their lives. How that relationship will continue remains to be seen. For now though, having monks greet them by name, tell them where to get bread to feed the ducks, or point out special books in the bookstore is helping to form their lives of faith. ✱



Becky Cerling received her Ph.D. in medieval history from USC, and her M.Div. from Fuller Seminary. She and her husband, Lee, have two children, Ella and Brendan, both of whom now POP! to the delight of neighborhood children.





HOLY MARY AND EPHESUS

BY SUZANNE FARLEY, OBL.OSB



I ASKED MYSELF, WHERE DID THE Virgin Mary live after Pentecost, who looked after her, and what could she as an older woman mean to me? Was it possible to find answers as I pondered these questions? Oral history says she lived to an advanced age. Her exact age remains a mystery. Where she lived out her last years is known, documented, and approved by the Vatican as a pilgrimage site. The place is called Ephesus. Christian writings, history, and art have tended to focus on Mary as a fiancée, wife, and mother. In looking at Mary's later years as a widow, I explored what was known and I began with scripture.

Among the last words spoken by Jesus as he was dying he spoke to his mother Mary, and his Apostle John. He said, ..."Woman, behold, your son." ..."Behold, your mother." (John 19:27) Jesus said these words in the presence of witnesses and Roman authorities, thereby giving John control of Mary's assets and the responsibility for her care and safety in accordance with Roman law at the time. Sometime after Pentecost Mary packed up her household and traveled with John, in all probability from the port of Caesarea, to the port city of Ephesus in Asia Minor, which today is known as the Republic of Turkey.

In October of 2015 while on a pilgrimage to Turkey I spent a week in the area, and



visited the magnificent Greek and Roman ruins of Ephesus, where the ship containing Holy Mary and Saint John had docked. Retracing Mary and John's route, I walked the marble-paved Harbor Street, which leads from the docks to the center of the city, and then turning right at the Great Theater, continued walking, and finally exited the city through the Magnesium Gate and head out to Bulbul Mountain and the house John had prepared for Mary. I was amazed I had the energy to walk all the way through this ancient city, for I am a woman of advanced age. Stopping outside the gate, I gazed out and up at the mountain. What was this event like for Mary over 1,900 years ago?

The day after my visit to the ruins, I was driven by car the 5.5 kilometers from Ephesus to a parking lot midway up Bulbul Mountain, the rest of the journey to Mary's house had to be made on foot. (The road up to the house is wide enough for a golf cart or small utility vehicles.) Although in Turkey a lot of people smoke and talk on their cell phones

everywhere, as I climbed higher and higher I observed no one was smoking, or on their cell phones, or engaged in loud conversations. Surprisingly, while a steady stream of people were present, a stillness, one could say a state of reverence, prevailed. I have no explanation for it. Truly these people came as, or became, pilgrims.

The surrounding tree-covered slopes responded to a gentle breeze with a soft sound pleasant to my ears and senses. I walked on and on. Finally, on my left stood the house attributed to Mary. Local folklore says a holy woman lived in this house. I put on a head shawl before entering, out of respect for the Muslim pilgrims who were present. They revere Mary as a pure woman and a holy saint. The mountain is considered sacred to both Christians and Muslims. The foundation, hearth, and size are original, the building a reconstruction. Today the interior functions as a church/prayer space. There are a few chairs for prayer or personal meditation. Despite the presence of tour groups there was silence. Amazing! As I write these words I find myself becoming very still inside. I feel I am once again on the mountain, and tears of joy fill my eyes. How strange and yet, how



wonderful. What a blessing. Holy Mary, the mother of Jesus, the Theotokos the bearer of God, is believed to have completed her life in this locale.

In traveling to Mary's house I wondered if I would feel any of her energy remaining in the area. I was not aware of experiencing

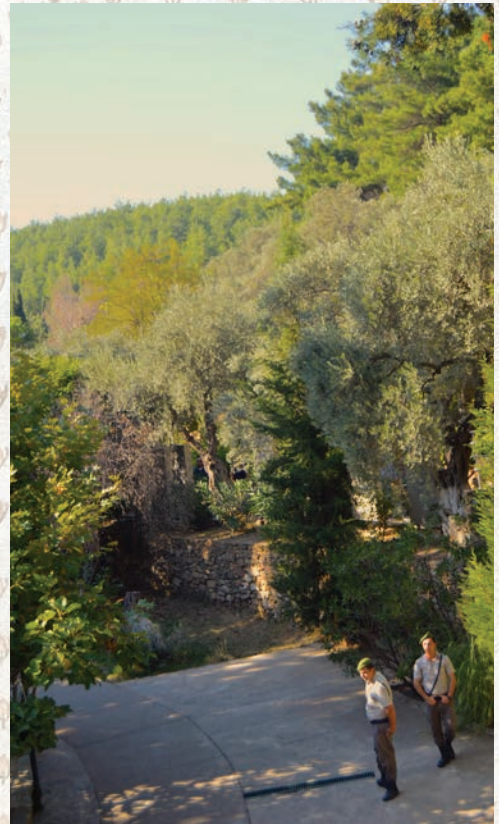


TOP: THE GATE LEADING OUT OF THE CITY, WITH BULBUL MOUNTAIN IN THE DISTANCE.
BOTTOM: PILGRIMS BEGIN THE ASCENT OF BULBUL MOUNTAIN.

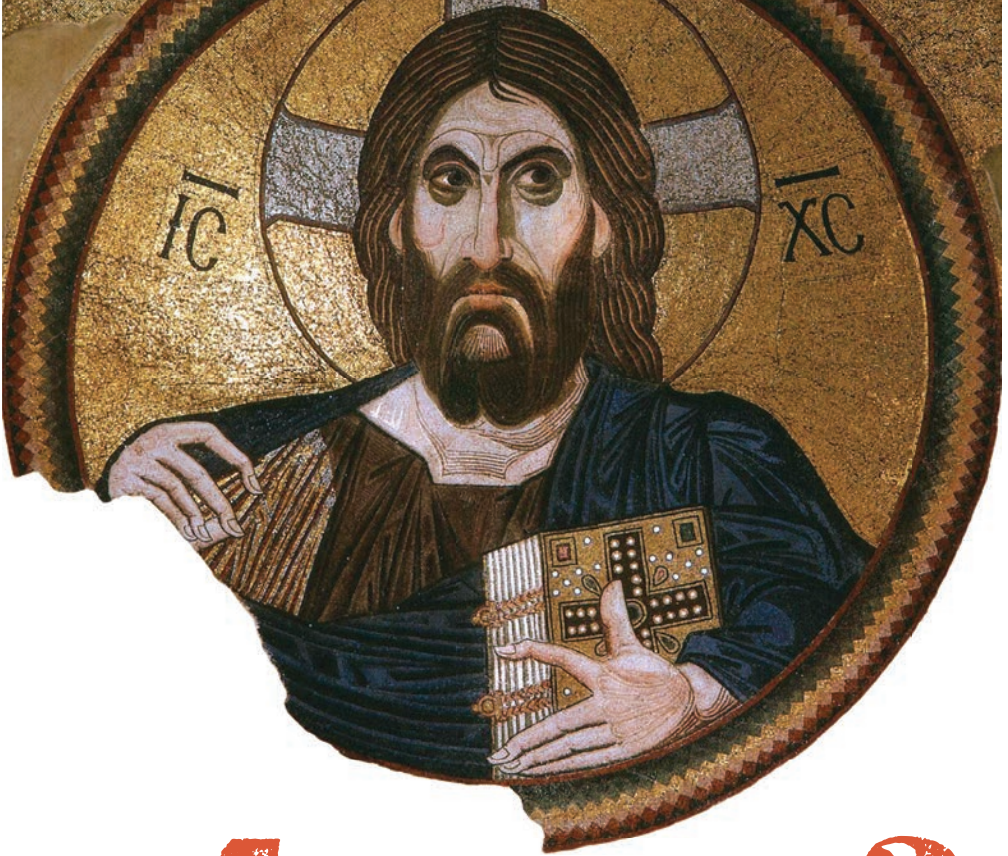


any special feelings. However, after my visit I quietly sat outside the house on a bench for a while. Then I asked a man to take my photo. I was still wearing my shawl. Later, when I viewed the photo, I noticed I was beaming and filled with joy. What happened to me? The energy of the mountain must be subtle. I do have much to ponder from my visit to Mary's house, my time on Bulbul Mountain, and Ephesus. Yes, I have much to ponder and be grateful for.

I must confess that during my lifetime I have not had a devotion to Mary. I did not say the Rosary, do novenas, have statues of her in my home, or wear her medals around my neck. Mary was someone I read about in the Bible. Today she feels real in ways I cannot put into words at this time. The pilgrimage to Ephesus and the site of Mary's last home has sparked in me a deeper interest in this very special holy woman. I set out in search of finding factual information and inspiration. My pilgrimage was fruitful in finding some of both. ✖



DOES God GET



Angry?

BY FR. PATRICK SHERIDAN, OSB

G

OD IS ANGRY ALL THE TIME!

These words jumped out at me from a pamphlet that I was handed in the early 90s, before I entered the monastery, outside the Catholic Church where I was about to attend Sunday Mass. After reading those words, I remarked to the

person who handed me the pamphlet, “My, it must not be very much fun to be God.” I got a funny look from the pamphleteer. I admit that I was being sarcastic, but I believe I had a valid point. Anger is not a pleasant feeling. If God were truly “angry all the time” he would not be happy. If God can’t be happy, what are the odds that we mere mortals can find eternal happiness?

According to the pamphlet I was given, God is angry at depraved humanity. We are so evil and sinful that God can barely restrain himself from sending us to hell. Our only chance is to “accept Jesus Christ as our personal savior.” And we had better be quick about it—the Rapture is coming soon; after that it will be too late. One of the panels in the pamphlet showed a stern faced Jesus pointing to an unsaved person and declaring, “Hell is too good for you!” The pamphlet does not reveal what worse fate Jesus came up with for this hapless sinner.

One reason that some people conceive of God as being angry or vengeful may be that they are projecting their own attitudes onto God. They picture God as acting as they would act if they were God. Thus there is an element in Christianity that attributes such events as the 9/11 attacks or Hurricane Katrina’s devastation of New Orleans to God’s punishment against a nation that has turned its back on God. Never mind that a considerable segment of those killed or injured were most likely practicing Christians. Apparently the Lord accepts collateral damage as a price he is willing to pay in order to punish sinners.

It is true that the Bible speaks of “the wrath of God” and God’s judgment against sinners. It is also true that Jesus Christ told many parables which stress God’s willingness, even eagerness, to forgive repentant sinners. The parable of the Prodigal Son, the Lost Sheep and the Good Shepherd, the Publican and the Sinner are just a few of the many parables which stress a compassionate and merciful God. It is not just the New Testament which speaks of God’s mercy. “Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool” (Isaiah 1:18). “As I live, says the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live” (Ezekiel 33:11). “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord” (Isaiah 55:8).

Pope Francis has declared 2016 the Jubilee Year of Mercy. He wants the Church, and all believers, to be merciful as God is merciful. What exactly does it mean when we say that God is merciful? And how are we to understand Scripture when it speaks of the anger and wrath of God?

Perhaps the best way to start is by defining what God’s anger is not. Holy Scripture and the Catholic Tradition do not mean by God’s “wrath” and “anger” that He has a bad temper that needs to be appeased before He can be merciful to us, or that He “feels” angry with us at times, and needs to be “calmed down” by our repentance.

God does not have changing feelings or attitudes. If there are passages in Scripture that seem to imply that He does, these need to be understood as metaphorical ways of speaking about God’s total opposition to evil and total support of all good. The First Vatican Council stated clearly that God is “almighty, eternal ... infinite in intelligence, in will, and in all perfection ... absolutely simple and immutable ... of supreme beatitude in and from Himself.”

“Immutable” means unchangeable, in that He radiates every “perfection” at every moment, and dwells in infinite “beatitude” or, in other words, infinite joy. This also means that God does not have a strict and vengeful side to His personality that needs to be “bought off” before He can be merciful to us. God has no “sides” to His character at all. Hard as this may be for us (as finite creatures) to understand, God is always infinitely perfect in every way, perfectly merciful AND perfectly just in everything that He does.

Now that we know what God’s anger or wrath is not, let’s try to define what it is; the divine perfection of justice. His justice is such that it permits the destructive results of deliberate sin to run its course.

As one writer put it, “God’s ‘wrath’ means that if we are stubbornly evil and impenitent, He will permit our sins to have their inevitable destructive (and especially self-destructive)

effects upon our bodies and souls. If we insist on going through life doing it 'my way' (apologies to Frank Sinatra) God will respect our free will. He will not force us to abandon sin and be sanctified." If he did that, we would be no better than mindless robots. It is not too much to say that God does not send anyone to hell. If we go to hell we send ourselves there by a refusal to accept God's mercy.

Pope Francis has come to known as the Pope of Mercy. The Pope made some very ordinary comments on God's mercy even towards those who deny his existence ... and the secular media went berserk.

In a letter to the editor to *La Repubblica*, the anticlerical Italian newspaper, Francis wrote: "Given — and this is the fundamental thing — that God's mercy has no limits, if He is approached with a sincere and repentant heart the question for those who do not believe in God is to abide by their own conscience. There is sin, also for those who have no faith, in going against one's conscience. Listening to it and abiding by it means making up one's mind about what is good and evil."

Earlier, the Pope made similar, even more dramatic comments during a sermon:

"The Lord has redeemed all of us, all of us, with the Blood of Christ: all of us, not just Catholics. Everyone! 'Father, the atheists?' Even the atheists. Everyone! And this Blood makes us children of God of the first class! We are created children in the likeness of God and the Blood of Christ has redeemed us all! We must meet one another doing good. 'But I don't believe, Father, I am an atheist!' But do good: we will meet one another there."

There is nothing new or revolutionary about these statements, yet they ignited a controversy among certain Christians. For some Catholics and Protestants, the notion that God can welcome into his Kingdom people who do not explicitly acknowledge or believe in him is upsetting. In this they are rather like the figure of the dutiful brother in Jesus' Parable of the Prodigal Son: Outraged

at the idea that their Father would throw a huge party for skeptics and scoffers, when they, obedient and faithful, spent years doing their duty and playing by the rules.

Following Pope Francis's comments last May, many Catholic theologians were quick to point out that nothing Francis said contradicted traditional Catholic teaching. Fr. Dwight Longenecker, Catholic priest, author, blogger and broadcaster pointed out that there is a difference between universal redemption (which Catholics affirm and most Protestants do not) and universal salvation (which Catholics do not affirm).

"Unfortunately for those who wish to paint Pope Francis as a lovable liberal, in fact, the Pope is simply affirming certain truths that any somewhat knowledgeable Catholic will uphold," Fr. Longenecker wrote. Christ "redeemed the whole world. However, many will reject that saving work. In affirming the universality of Christ's redemptive work we are not universalists. To say that he redeemed the whole world is not to conclude that all will be saved. Redemption means the doors to heaven have been opened. Salvation means walking through them."

What about the Church teaching: *Extra Ecclesiam nulla salus* (Outside the Church there is no salvation)? This statement is true but needs to be properly understood.

In the 1940s Jesuit priest, poet, lyricist, and essayist Fr. Leonard Feeney articulated and defended a strict interpretation of that Roman Catholic doctrine. He took the position that baptism of blood and baptism of desire are unavailing and that therefore no non-Catholics will be saved.

In rejecting Fr. Feeney's interpretation of this dogma of the Church, the Vatican's Holy Office (now called the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith) declared that "this dogma is to be understood as the Church itself understands it."

That understanding, the Holy Office declared, is this:

Please turn to page 19

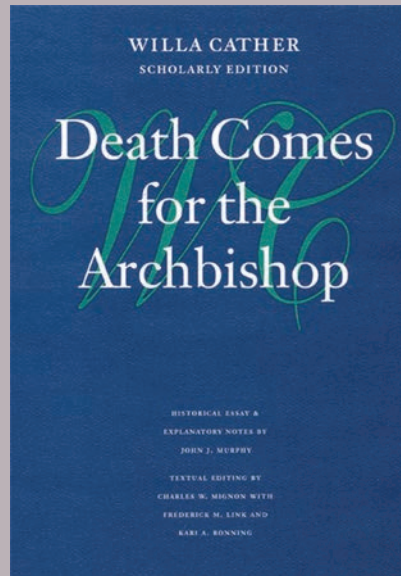
QUARTERLY BOOK REVIEW

by fr. philip edwards, osb

THE BOOK, A RECENT BOOK CLUB OFFERING that I had hoped to review for this time around while the deadline was still comfortably beyond the horizon, proved to be (at least for the nonce) a bit too fussily dense and donnish (the author is a Cambridge professor) for this fussiest-without-being-particular and densest of bourgeois Californiacs to make much headway. It seemed too much like the scratchy post-prandial drone of Professor Adams' spiral recycling of Plato's *Republic* for freshman philosophy majors in the shadowy cavern of the lecture room of California Hall, whose stately strips of clear glass fenestration on the wall behind the podium provided both visual relief and ironic reinforcement as the early afternoon sun shone in and on the caravan of dismantled sections of temporary wartime housing inching slowly up the road from Westgate behind to be reassembled as (again temporary) classrooms for the burgeoning School of Engineering above near Northgate (oof!!!).

And so, in desperation, I pled once more for a last-minute recommendation from our astute (and donnishly-schooled) editor, hoping for something worthy of the Buechner revitalization of medieval hagiography he led us to in the last issue. He had one. We have a great American classic to resavor, as Michael Williams says in his review of the book in *Commonweal*, September 28, 1927:

Her book is a wonderful proof of the power of the true artist to penetrate and understand and to express things not part of the equipment of the artist as a person. Miss Cather is not a Catholic, yet certainly no Catholic American writer that I know of has ever written so many pages so steeped in spiritual knowledge and understanding of Catholic motives and so sympathetically illustrative of the wonder and beauty of Catholic mysteries, as she has done in this book.



DEATH COMES FOR THE ARCHBISHOP

Willa Cather

University of Nebraska Press, 1999

(other editions available)

"Catholic mysteries" — does that mean that Willa must be transported from the "long drawing room" where Mrs. Fields and Miss Jewett sat at tea at 148 Charles Street in Boston (*Not Under Forty*, p. 53) to sit at the high tea table of her transatlantic cousins Agatha, Dorothy, Josephine, Marjory, Ngaio — and even P.D.? Next year will be the ninetieth anniversary of this book's appearance in the Golden Age of English "Cozies," and even today its provocative title must boost its saleability, but it doesn't take an "Ahem" from Miss Marple to set us straight that it isn't that kind of mystery.

It is rather, as a parenthetical remark* in a letter dated November 23, 1927 makes clear, a calling to mind of the ancient refrain in the *Dies Irae*, the Dance of Death, that audible whisper in the conqueror's ear that reminds

* "The title, by the way, which has caused a good deal of comment, was simply taken from Holbein's 'Dance of Death.'"

him — and every Ash Wednesday penitent in the rite as it was celebrated in Miss Cather's time — that he is dust and unto dust he shall return, that despite all his prelatical pomp and finery, whether of pope or pastor, whether by pestilence, pain, or simply the passage of time, he will be pulled away from the sunlit flock and pasture by the grim grip of the skeleton and "after death, the judgement."

It was in the face of the Black Death of plague-stricken mediaeval Europe that the popular practice of the Flagellantes/Penitentes spread and developed, encouraged by the penitential preaching of the great Franciscan saint, Vincent Ferrer — and so it became part of the baggage of the Franciscan missionaries to the New World. In any case, death is only part of the great Eschatological Mystery, its core is the Paschal Mystery — the Life, Death and Resurrection of Our Lord and Savior Jesus, the Anointed One, and the missionary bishop's call is to proclaim (with and without words) Good News of Salvation (healing and wholeness of life) to all nations.

The deliberate change of the protagonists' names (i.e. Lamy becomes Latour, and Machebeuf becomes Valliant) and the acknowledged fiddling with certain dates indicates the intent is to engage our imagination beyond mere historical biography (and wouldn't you prefer to be remembered as being valiant rather than a Beefchewer?). Miss Cather has left us her wonderful letters to Commonweal and other essays and commentaries (especially the two collections, *On Writing* (1949) and *Not Under Forty* (1953)) that explain, expound and enrich more fully our understanding both of herself and her writings.

The November 23, 1927, letter deals directly with "how I happened to write *Death Comes for the Archbishop*." It is, of course, too long to reproduce here (and you should really look it up yourself!) but the gist is that over a gestation of fifteen years of growing personal affection and knowledge of persons, places, and events, she felt led to compose a sort of golden legend:

"...a conjunction of the general and the particular, like most works of the imagination... the essence of such writing is not to hold the note, not to use an incident for all there is in it — but to touch and pass on.... In this kind of writing the mood is the thing — all the little figures and stories are mere improvisations that come out of it. What I got from Father Machebeuf's letters was the mood, the spirit in which they accepted the accidents and hardships of a desert country, the joyful energy that kept them going. To attempt to convey this hardihood of spirit one must use language a little stiff, a little formal, one must not be afraid of the old trite phraseology of the frontier. Some of those time-worn phrases I used as the note from the piano by which the violinist tunes his instrument. Not that there was much difficulty in keeping the pitch. I did not sit down to write the book until the feeling of it had so teased me that I could not get on with other things. The writing of it took only a few months, because the book had all been lived many times before it was written, and the happy mood in which I began it never paled. It was like going back and playing the early composers after a surfeit of modern music...."

Writing this book ... was like a happy vacation from life, a return to childhood, to early memories. As a writer I had the satisfaction of working in a special genre which I had long wished to try. As a human being, I had the pleasure of paying an old debt of gratitude to the valiant men whose life and work had given me so many hours of pleasant reflection in faraway places where certain unavoidable accidents and physical discomforts gave me a feeling of close kinship with them.... I am amused that so many reviews of this book begin with the statement: "This book is hard to classify." Then why bother? Many more assert vehemently that it is not a novel. Myself, I prefer to call it a narrative...."

Our used book store, tentatively dubbed 'The Rookery,' where Benedictine ravens

stash their hoardings, belatedly loaned me a pristine copy of the University of Nebraska Press (Lincoln, 1999) critical edition of this “narrative” with copious notes, illustrations, auxiliary writings, and historical essay — all of which you would better consult than me; certainly there are legitimate issues of dispute, but being of nearly the same age as this golden legend and comfortable with the positive attitudes of what seems to me the treasures of Catholic humanism and artistic sensibility offered here for our remembrance, let us give thanks and love another as we are loved. ✧



Fr. Philip was born the year this monastic community was founded in China. New-man, especially his *Grammar of Assent*, was important in his intellectual formation. He made his monastic profession

at Valyermo in 1962.

AROUND AND ABOUT THE ABBEY

MONKS' FEAST DAYS

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

ABBAY USED BOOK STORE

The Abbey's used book store, as of this writing still unnamed, is now open. Located in the Old Stone House, daily hours are 10 am.–4 pm. Please contact the Guest Office or Fr. Martin for further information.

MONK NEWS

Brother **Paul Ortega** made his triennial vows at the Abbey on April 4.

Brother Angelus will make his solemn profession on May 22, and be ordained to the transitional diaconate on May 29. ✧

DOES GOD GET ANGRY? *from page 16*

“To gain eternal salvation it is not always required that a person be incorporated in reality (reapse) as a member of the Church, but it is required that he belong to it at least in desire and longing.... When a man is invincibly ignorant, God also accepts an implicit desire, so called because it is contained in the good dispositions of soul by which a man wants his will to be conformed to God's will.” *Baptism of desire*. Or to put it as Pope Francis did, even atheists can be saved. *Can be* — not *will be*.

The Second Vatican Council had something to say on this matter. In *Lumen Gentium*, the Decree on the Church in the Modern World, the Council Fathers forever committed the Catholic Church to a belief in the possible salvation of non-Christians — even, apparently, of non-theists.

Notice how the Council speaks explicitly of *salvation*, not merely *redemption*.

“Those also can attain to everlasting salvation who through no fault of their own do not know the Gospel of Christ or his Church, yet, sincerely seek God, and moved by grace, strive by their deeds to do his will as it is known to them through the dictates of conscience,” the Fathers declared. “Nor does divine Providence deny the help necessary for salvation to those who, without blame on their part, have not arrived at an explicit knowledge of God, but who strive to live a good life, thanks to his grace.”

So when (if that is not a presumptuous word to use) we get to heaven, we should not be surprised if we see people we never expected to see: our least favorite Reality-Show star, that politician who is always spouting hateful divisive words, the bully who made our life a living hell in high school. We should rejoice that at some point, they made the decision to step through the open door of Redemption and accept Salvation; accepted the Mercy of God who *desires not the death of a sinner*. After all, if you're going to spend eternity with someone you might as well be friends. ✧



RETREAT CENTER Calendar SPRING/ SUMMER 2016 RETREATS

MAY

PRAYING IN THE CIRCLE OF ST. JOHN

Friday, May 6 – Sunday, May 8, 2016

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 Johannine 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 LITTLE WAY OF ST. THERESE OF LISIEUX:

Discovering the Path of Love

Monday, May 9 – Friday, May 13, 2016

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 reviewed 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

PENTECOST RETREAT

Friday, May 13 – Sunday, May 15, 2016

This preached retreat is for oblates of St. Andrew’s Abbey or anyone interested in Benedictine spirituality. The focus of the retreat is the Rule of St. Benedict and the liturgy of Pentecost.

Presenter: Monks of Valyermo

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

THE FAITHFUL DOVE FLIES AGAINST THE WIND:

A Visit with Brother Peter

Saturday, May 28, 9:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.

Through the poetry that emerged during and after 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, Michaela Ludwick, Obl.OSB

Donation: \$40 per person; includes tuition, morning beverages, and lunch following Mass

JUNE

AUGUSTINE AND HIS CONFESSIONS

Friday, June 3 – Sunday, June 5, 2016

This workshop will explore the major themes covered by St. Augustine in his autobiography, *Confessions*. This spiritual autobiography focuses on his deep struggle with personal conversion to a life in God. Augustine uses history, memory, reflection, and praise in his search for personal peace and sanctification. All participants are required to read, before the workshop, the first ten books of his *Confessions*. The Oxford World Classics paperback translation by Henry Chadwick is preferred version.

Presenter: Fr. Aelred Niespolo, OSB

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

CONTEMPLATING THE FEAST OF THE VISITATION

Saturday, June 11, 9:30 a.m. – 3:30 p.m.

As she processed the angel’s message, Mary found comfort with her kinswomen, Elizabeth. These women encouraged one another and found strength in their mutual struggle to be faithful to what God was calling them to do. The ‘QuietDay’ of Reflection will provide the space to contemplate these two great women, their struggles and their successes. Special attention will be given to the Magnificat and pulling its truths into our daily lives. The morning and afternoon conferences will be followed by one hour of silent directed activity that furthers contemplation on the Visitation.

Presenter: Lisa Marion, Obl.OSB

Donation: \$40 per person; includes tuition, morning beverages, and lunch following Mass

HOSPITALITY:

A Virtue that Becomes a Way of Life

Monday, June 13 – Wednesday, June 15, 2016

St. Benedict encourages hospitality as a 'sacramental' means of loving and serving Christ himself. The rituals of hospitality in the Rule outline one way of understanding and actively living a spirit of welcome toward the guest, the friend, and the stranger. Such a spirit can become a paradigm for personal presence to God in prayer and deeper communion with others: members of our family, our primary faith community, our co-workers, and with the many others we meet along the way.

Presenter: Fr. Francis Benedict, OSB

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

SACRED DANCE WORKSHOP:

Aware of Being Moved

Saturday, June 18, 9:00 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.

We are called on a journey of faith that leads us to recognize landmark experiences along the way. These landmarks help reinforce our belief and hope that we are where we need to be at the right time. We often do not arrive by our own conscious design, but by the silent yet powerful winds of the Spirit. We arrive because we have been moved emotionally, physically, spiritually. Come surrender to the movement through the beauty and power of dance.

Presenters: John West, OSB & Fr. Philip Edwards, OSB

Donation: \$40 per person; includes tuition, continental breakfast, beverages (available throughout the day), lunch following Mass

LIFE IN THE SPIRIT SEMINAR

Friday, June 24 – Sunday, June 26, 2016

This seminar is for those who are open to receiving the Gifts of the Holy Spirit and who wish to learn how to be attentive to His promptings in his/her life. The seminar will culminate in prayers for the participants to receive the Baptism of the Holy Spirit. Exciting and life changing!

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

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

THE SPIRITUALITY OF FRIENDSHIP

RESCHEDULED TO AUGUST 3–5, 2016

JULY

IN THE SPIRIT OF AA: A 12-Step Retreat

Friday, July 1 – Sunday, July 3, 2016

Spend a weekend getting back to the key that unlocks the 12-Steps for those who follow them. 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 to 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



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DISCERNMENT OF SPIRITS

Wednesday, July 6 – Friday, July 8, 2016

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: \$200 single; \$175 each shared

THE HOLINESS OF WORK:

A Spirituality of Full and Creative Engagement

Friday, July 8 – Sunday, July 10, 2016

Work in a necessity in every person’s life. The role of work is a positive engagement in one’s life project including its social and altruistic dimensions. Though work can be burden to carry, it is also a means of supporting self and others in a way that enhances personal dignity and creativity. In the story of creation, God saw that what He had made and done was good. Not only is work necessary, it is good, and it is a path of holiness that ought to be seen as an investment and participation in God’s work of creation, re-creation, and regeneration.

Presenter: Fr. Francis Benedict, OSB

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

BENEDICTINE SPIRITUALITY: The Prologue of the Holy Rule

Monday, July 11 – Friday, July 15, 2016

During this retreat, the main themes of the Prologue of the Rule will be studied and seen in its biblical and patristic richness. There will be ample time for exploring together the depth of St. Benedict’s mystical and incarnational teaching that sets the stage for the practical elements of monastic and spiritual living which he ‘legislates’ for monks, oblates, and contemplatives in the world. Two texts which will be helpful for this week of reflection are: *The Road to Eternal Life: Reflections on the Prologue of Benedict’s Rule* by Michael Casey, OCSO; *A Listening Community: A Commentary on the Prologue and Chapters 1–3 of Benedict’s Rule* by Aquintata Bockmann, OSB and Marianne Burkhard, OSB. (These books may be purchased in advance at the Abbey Bookstore.)

Presenters: Fr. Francis Benedict, OSB & Audrey Spindler, Ph.D; Obl.OSB

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

SISTERS’ RETREAT: WOMEN SINGING MERCY

Monday, July 25 - Friday, July 29, 2016

This retreat, designed for women religious during this Jubilee Year of Mercy, will focus on the spirituality of five women religious whose life and witness offer a perspective on mercy: Benedictine Hildegard of Bingen, Dominican Catherine of Siena, Carmelites Teresa of Avila and Therese of Lisieux, and Mercy foundress Catherine McAuley. The first four women have been declared Doctors of

the Church and speak eloquently of Mercy. Venerable Catherine McAuley founded a form of apostolic religious life combining a strong contemplative dimension that issues in the works of mercy. There will be two conferences each day as well as time devoted to prayer and reflection. Each evening will provide an opportunity for small-group faith sharing.

Presenter: Fr. Stephen Coffey, OSB

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

AUGUST

THE SPIRITUALITY OF FRIENDSHIP

Wednesday, August 3 – Friday, August 5, 2016

This retreat will explore the ways of friendship-human and divine. In the light of God’s offer of creative and redemptive love to us in his Son, we will examine what the human experience of friendship offer us as we progress toward maturity in relationships. Our relationship with God is seen as an I-Thou, and our human relationships as an intimate way of becoming and knowing ourselves by knowing another. Friendship will be seen as the human side of God’s intention that it is “not good for man (or woman) to be alone,” and that deep friendships enhance our relationship with God and vice versa. St. Aelred’s work, *Spiritual Friendship* (Cistercian Studies, available at the Abbey bookstore) is a good resource for exploring this theme.

Presenter: Fr. Francis Benedict, OSB

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

CONTEMPORARY CINEMA AND SPIRITUALITY:

Summer Session

Friday, August 5 - Sunday, August 7, 2016

The greatest human and spiritual truths are often embodied in stories and narratives. Today much of the burden of story-telling is carried by movies. We will view for mainstream films and have intensive discussions on how spiritual realities are shown through their plots, symbols, acting, and so forth. 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.

Presenter: Nikki Tucker, Obl.OSB

Room, board, and tuition: \$250 single; \$200.00 each shared

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

SAINTANDREWSABBEY.COM

(Click the *Guest House* link)

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