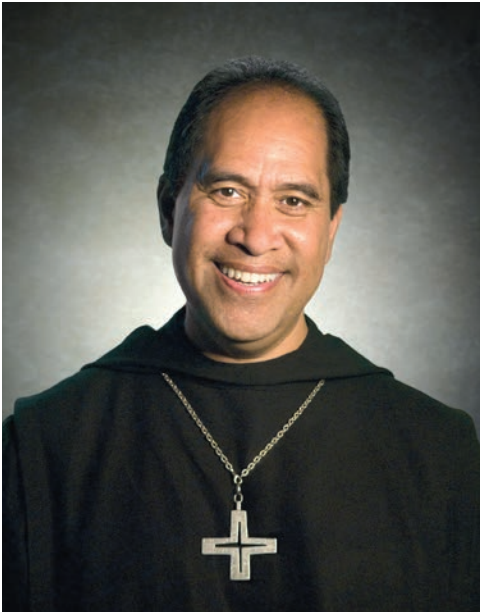


Nº 253 ✠ SUMMER 2017

S T . A N D R E W ' S A B B E Y



THE VALYERMO
Chronicle



LETTER from the ABBOT

The following column is taken from a homily given this past June by Abbot Damien on the Feast of Saint's Peter and Paul.



EAR FRIENDS,

WHO DO YOU SAY THAT I AM? WHO IS Christ to you? How we answer this question will determine how we live our lives. It will determine the values we hold, and how we treat others.

I used to work for a big company where I never met or saw my boss. I just knew that at the end of the 2-week pay period, I always received my paycheck. Do we sometimes see Jesus as that? As the big boss of the Church we work for but whom we never really see? From Whom at the end of my 'work period' I will receive my just 'reward'?

For Saints Peter and Paul, Jesus was not a distant God, but a real, living, breathing, loving Person.

It's this personal experience/relationship with Jesus that had the greatest impact in

their lives and on the world. We can read all the books and commentaries about Jesus. We can study all the ancient Greek and Latin manuscripts, but if Jesus is not a real, live Person to us, then we are only kidding our self. Then we've deceived our self and have fallen in love with a *lifestyle* and not a Person.

It's easy for Christian people to do that, including us monks—to fall in love with a lifestyle. We love monastic life, we love *lectio*, we love silence, we love prayer, we love liturgy, we love doing good things. But do we love Jesus? We say, of course we do. That's why we do all these things in the first place.

One sure way of knowing whether we have a close, healthy, loving relationship with Jesus the Person is by how we treat the people in our lives. Do we imitate Jesus' compassion and forgiveness and understanding? Or do we just quote what He said in the scriptures? How do we love the people in our lives: family, friends, strangers, enemies?

Immature love wants to get things, just like children. They want things for themselves, to have things their own way. They want to have 'dibs' or first choice at everything: from desserts, to clothes, to cars, to places at banquets, to status. Immature love doesn't like to share. It is exclusive and selfish. It seeks only to stroke and feed the ego. If we are more worried about our image and reputation than how we treat the people in our lives, then we need to examine our relationship with the Lord.

Mature love, on the other hand, seeks to give. It gives of itself, meaning self-sacrifice—just like Jesus, "who although He existed in the form of God, did not deem equality with God something to be grasped, but rather emptied himself."

When our love for Christ is mature, we are willing to empty our self for His sake. We are prepared to suffer for His sake like saints Peter and Paul and other great saints, who gave their blood for Jesus—not for a principle or an idea—but for a Person.

The reason Peter and Paul were such

effective witnesses for Christ is because they knew Jesus, the Person. They loved, appreciated and trusted Jesus, the Person. They realized that God, as Bishop Robert Barron writes, is a God, “who comes after us with a reckless abandon, breaking open his own heart in love in order to include us in the rhythm of his own life. God died in order that we might be his friends.” (The Strangest Way). This is who we are to God.

This is the Jesus whom Saints Peter and Paul died for; a personal God, who wants our friendship, who wants only to draw us deeper and closer to Himself.

The Eucharist we are about to receive is a sign of that singular love of God, that desire of Jesus to be one with us, living in us and transforming us to be more and more like Himself.

Abbot Damien ✧

THE EDITOR'S NOTE

THIS ISSUE OF THE *VALYERMO CHRONICLE* features several articles and reflections on Mary, the mother of Jesus. So appropriate for a time of year marked by the glory of her Assumption. A few personal thoughts about her:

It is pretty much a given that in reflecting on Mary every statement we make about her is really a statement about Jesus. But I would also add that everything we say about Mary is also a statement about *how we are to relate to Jesus*. In a sense, her life becomes the model, or template, of how we both accept and struggle with the experience of Jesus on own journey to a life in God: our reflection on Our Lady highlights the way we need to encounter Jesus in our own lives and pondering the role of Jesus in our hearts, understanding how God unfolds before us in time and space and spirit.

From the moment of the Annunciation to the moment of her death Mary's destiny

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The Death and Assumption of the Virgin

Fra Angelico

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was shaped by her son: from the initial grief and misunderstanding that seems to step in between herself and Joseph; in the difficult journey to Bethlehem; the birth and danger of cold and poverty; the flight in fear from Herod and its attendant exile, the loss of a child in a crowded city, and parental confusion worry, relief and concern on finding him, and above all the ordinary, daily life at Nazareth. The great journey Mary set out upon with the Yes of the Annunciation, followed by years of silence, years of reflection, years of growth in the ordinariness of daily family life, until the moment when Jesus leaves his home to begin his mission. And there the silence only deepens, her concerns only heighten, her search for understanding always trying to hold itself open to faith and belief in the message Gabriel brought to her.

Mary is not frequently mentioned in the gospels that tell of Christ's public life, but we certainly gather from the few incidents recorded, that her presence is always near—whether at that festive beginning of his ministry as bringer of the New Wine at Cana when her role as intercessor already begins, or when she searches for him as he preaches, as he incurs both cries of wonder and cries of disdain as he goes from town to town, or until at last she stands at the foot of his cross, and is named the mother of us all. Jesus' life is enfolded by the silent nearness and pondering of his mother.

As many scriptural writers have commented, it sometimes seems that the strongest part of

the relationship between Mary and Jesus lies in her meditative silence: a silence in search of understanding, a silence of acceptance; silence of the heart in attempting to understand her child: the bearing of a burden of seeing a child grow and develop only in order to outgrow the everyday relationship one has built up, to allow the child to go on his own way. And it is here that Mary transcends her own loving motherhood, moving beyond a maternal understanding, to a *belief* in her son, to acceptance of the Mystery that is Jesus: to be

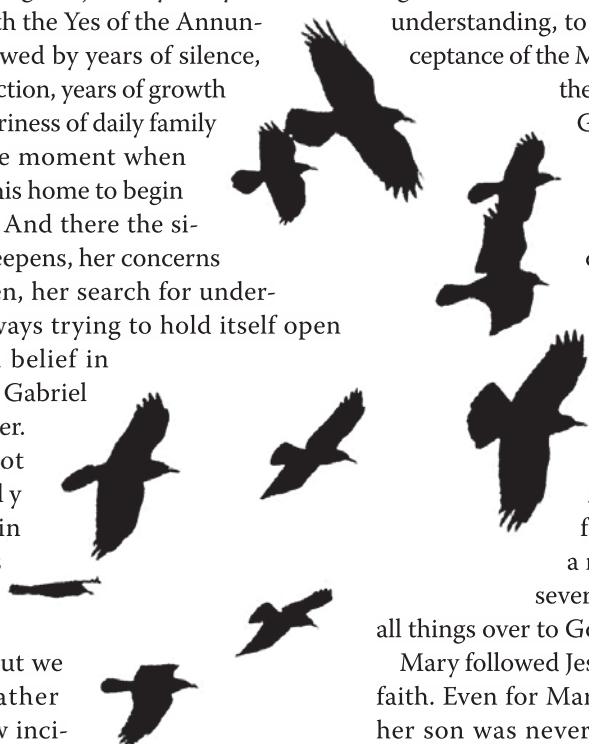
the one who truly believes in God's mysterious actions in her life. To believe *wholeheartedly*, even blindly, to continually confirm her belief, each time though with perhaps more and growing pain and difficulty. Perseverance in belief even to the cross—this is her greatness.

And it is here she enters fully into our own lives as a model for reflection, perseverance, trust, and handing

all things over to God and his plan.

Mary followed Jesus in reflective and bare faith. Even for Mary her relationship with her son was never less than the complex relationship of a mother to a child. Only at Pentecost did she begin to fully understand all those things she had so long stored in her heart. She had been asked to accept all things, which she did; to rejoice in God's will, which she did. She was asked never to lose heart, nor to fall behind, to inwardly accompany her son on his journey, wherever it led, to no matter what dark place; all this she did and this is her simple and ordinary greatness. She lived her life fully in grace and acceptance, and in pondering her son's life in her heart, she sets the pattern for our way to her Son.

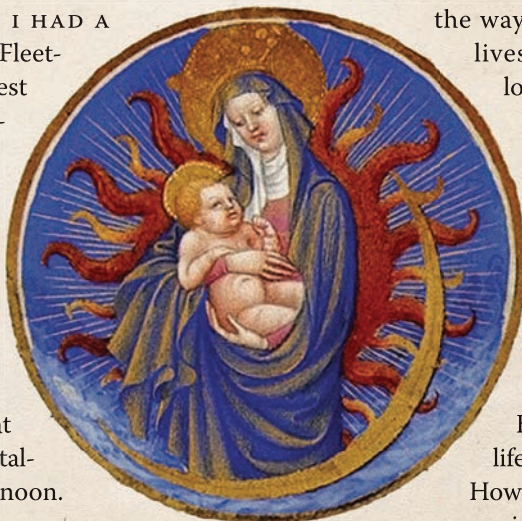
—Fr. Aelred Niespolo, OSB



MARY & THE MOON



A FEW YEARS AGO I HAD A week's quiet break in Fleetwood, in the Northwest of England. It was October and the season was changing. Each evening before Vespers and tea, I took a walk along the harbor and estuary, and sometimes a bit further, along the sea front. It struck me that the whole scene felt totally different each afternoon. This was not only because of the usual changes in wind and weather, but also because of the influence of



BROTHER BEN HARRISON, MC

sun and moon. As the earth's axis tilted toward winter, the sun set a little earlier each day, and it was getting noticeably cooler. Not only was the moon swelling from a bare crescent toward half-full, but it was rising a little later each day, which meant that the high and low tides were a little different each day. All these variations and syncopations made each evening a unique experience — sometimes peaceful, sometimes threatening, sometimes stormy, sometimes dramatic almost to the point of garish.

And it occurred to me how less varied and interesting it would be if earth had no moon. Imagine that! What would it be like if our earth had no moon? No moon! Imagine all

the ways it would affect our lives! How would young lovers find each other in the dark? What would they gaze at while whispering their secret longings? How would shepherds see the new-born lambs, or spot the wolves advancing toward their flocks? How would sailors find life-rafts adrift in the sea? How would camel caravans navigate the dunes? How would night-watchmen spot thieves, or soldiers discern movement in the grass?

Would owls and night hunters be bereft? Would fish lurk deeper in their lakes? Would newly sewn grains of wheat be hesitant to germinate if they did not feel the gentle caress of moonlight, the subtle warmth of its glow? Children would not stand rapt at windows amazed at moon-shadows on the snow. Sleepless prisoners would find no peaceful night-scape spread before them through their cell-bars.

And what about those early morning faint full moons that pale as the sun advances up its course? And what about the moment in the indigo hour, the darkening dusk when the Evening Star pairs its sharp glint with the bare sliver of that clear, bright crescent.

Pictures of Mary often show her standing on the moon, and I like that image because it says something about Mary's connection with Jesus. We know, of course, that Mary is his mother, and we have all those classical Madonna and child paintings in our minds.

But it was at a very different moment that Mary became *our* mother. When Jesus was dying on the cross, one of his last acts was to entrust Mary to his beloved disciple, and him to her. "Behold your mother." "Behold your son." He was bequeathing one of his most precious gifts to his beloved disciple.

We generally assume that "the beloved disciple" was the writer of the Gospel, John, but each of us is also one of his beloved disciples. The Church has always understood this passage as Jesus entrusting Mary to all Christians and all of us to her. Some Christians feel that we Catholic and Orthodox Christians give too much importance to Mary, but this image of sun and moon helps us see it in perspective. Christianity without the sight of Mary would be like the earth without its moon!

There is no question that Jesus is our "sun of justice" — he is our savior, our teacher, our healer, our rescuer — the super-hero that leaps into the middle of the mess we've made of our lives and our world with his machete of truth to hack the fetters, his belt of weapons to defeat everything that's trying to destroy us, his tools to set things straight and his kit of healing medicines to salve our wounds.

He is our sun, and the sun is more than a million times larger than our little earth and its little moon put together. And even

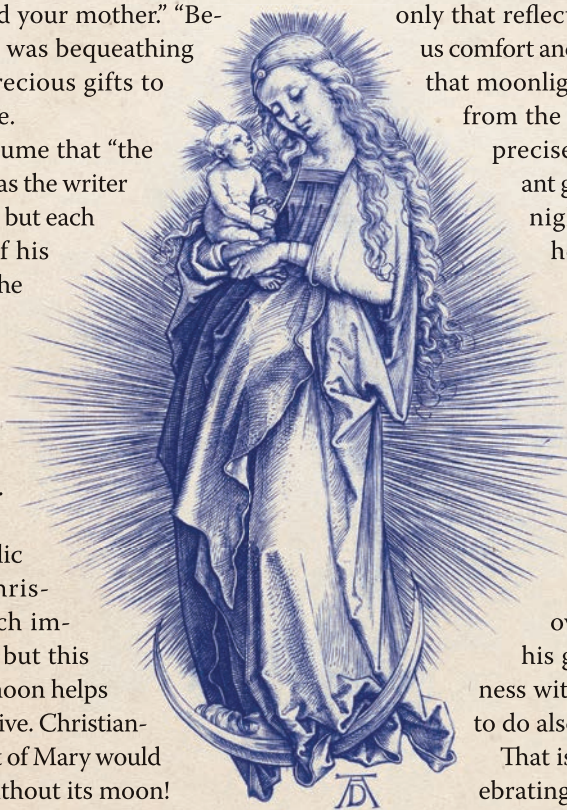
though sun and moon seem an equal pair from our perspective, we know that that is because the moon is so much closer to us. And we also know that all the light from the moon is reflected sun-light, so that when the angle of the sun varies, we see more or less of the moon.

In a similar way we can say that Mary's glory is the reflection of Christ's glory. Sometimes in our dark and lonely nights, it is only that reflected light that brings us comfort and calms our fears, but that moonlight ultimately comes from the sun. And was it not precisely to bring his radiant glory into our darkest night that Jesus chose her to bear him into our midst?

It was Mary who gave Jesus, the eternal word of God, his humanity — he had his very manhood from her. But when he rose from the dead and won his victory over death, he shared his glory and his brightness with her — as he wants to do also with us.

That is the feast we are celebrating today, the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The ancient Eastern churches call it the "Dormition", the falling asleep of Mary. What we are celebrating is the moment when Mary's earthly life ended. We say that, because she was free from sin she didn't die, she fell asleep, and then she was raised to share the glory of Christ. But she is still our mother, and she is praying that we also navigate that difficult journey of life, that we let Jesus triumph over our enemies and our self-destructive

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John O'Brien

Stoked

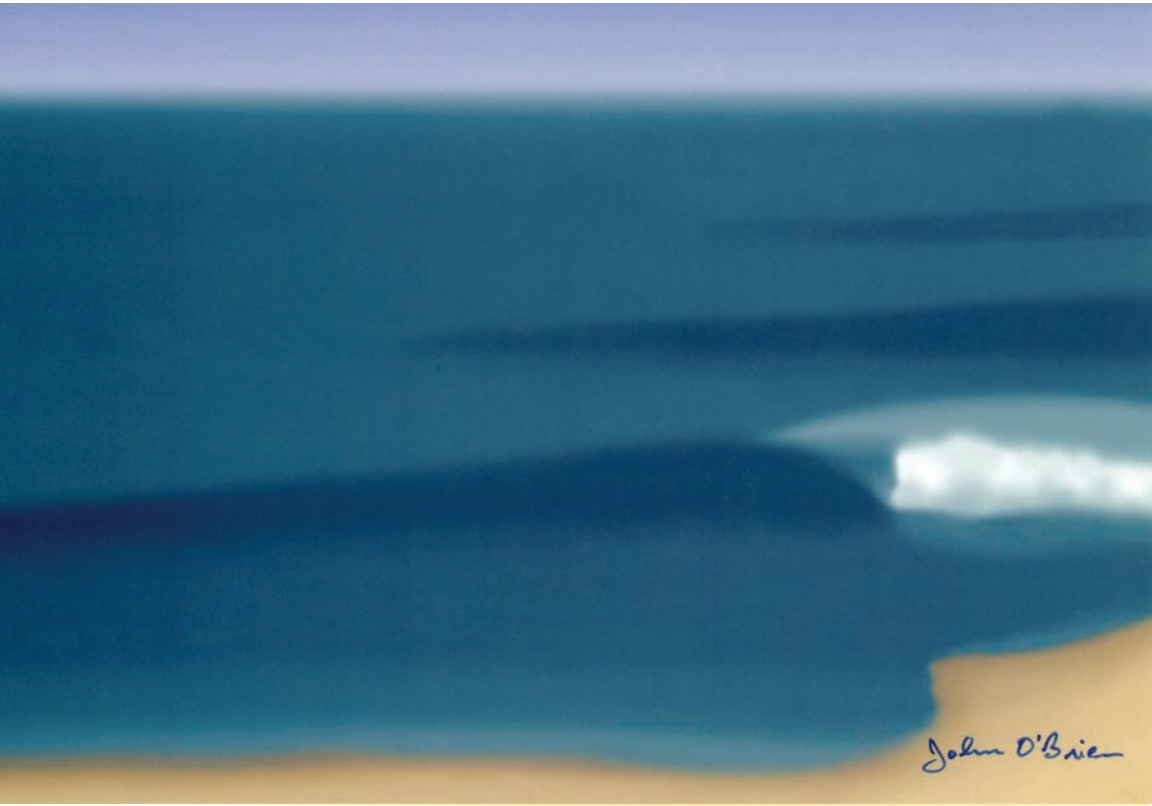
JOHN O'BRIEN

EVERY WAVE HAS A LIFE AND A DEATH. They are born of winds, gravity, and earthquakes, and live a life of travel until that fateful day when a reef, point, or sandbar is met and their lives expire in one final crashing breath. As in any system, energy is not lost. When caught, their life is transferred to the surfers who ride them. In that moment the surfer becomes one with the wave. This drama of life is played out differently each time. It ends in a previously unforeseen liquid reward or tragedy: a graceful glide, exhilarating tube ride, or horrific wipeout. When all goes well,

surfers experience incredible bursts of euphoria, happiness, and excitement called stoke.

The word stoke isn't limited to the surfing world. A patient could say, "Caitlin, my cancer disappeared miraculously. I'm stoked!" A golfer could say: "Mary, I got a hole in one today. I was so stoked. I still am."

Etymologically stoke comes from the Dutch word *stoken* and the Middle Dutch word *stuken*, meaning to push. In the English language we traditionally use the word stoke when we poke or stir up something, like a fire, or give fuel to something. It also means to feed abundantly.



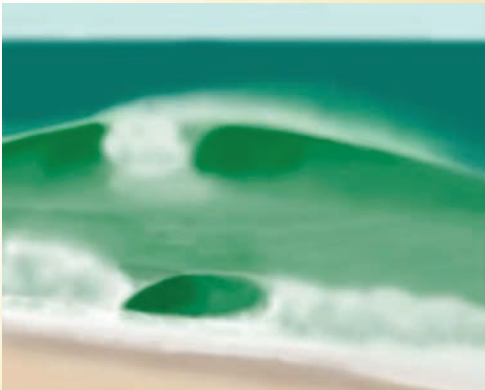
So storms stoke swells and swells stoke surfers. Once stoked, surfers continually seek to experience the feeling of being propelled by something so powerful. Stoke has many forms. It can also come from remembering and observing perfect waves. They beckon every aspiring surfer and leave people who don't surf in awe too. As a surfer, I am drawn

to the cycle of surfing, one of many life forces that sustain me.

Most of all, God stokes me.

I love and believe in the Holy Trinity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

As much as I know and believe waves are lifted up, broken, and poured out for us all over our globe every day because of nature, so too do I believe the Eucharist — the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Jesus — is lifted up, broken, and poured out for us all over the world every day because of the priesthood that Christ founded during the Last Supper. ✧



"LAGUNA," JOHN O'BRIEN, © 2001

John O'Brien is a transitional deacon finishing up his last year at St. John's Seminary. The *Chronicle* is happy to present both his reflection and paintings. To see further examples of his artwork go to surferdreams.com

"BAJA," JOHN O'BRIEN, © 2003

THE JEWISH AND ROMAN CATHOLIC TRADITIONS UNDERSTAND THAT PEOPLE ARE BORN WITH FREE WILL. AND WHEN REFLECTING ON MARY we hold onto the fact that she was born with free will. In the Annunciation narrative the angel Gabriel appears to Mary and informs her "...you have found favor with God." When the angel mentions the subject of having a child she immediately asks him questions. "How can this be," and so forth? After listening to his answers Mary finally agrees and says, "Yes." Interestingly, she does not discuss the meeting with her parents, or Joseph, or the learned men in the temple in Jerusalem or at the nearby synagogue. She and she alone made the decision to say yes to having Jesus, not knowing where the path would lead, what dangers she might face,



Holy Mary's Vocation

SUZANNE FARLEY, OBL. OSB

or how long her service to God would last. For me, the Annunciation marks the beginning of her *vocation*. The word vocation has multiple meanings that do not involve vowed religious life and do apply to Mary. Did her vocation ever end, and if so when?

As I pondered Holy Mary's life and read through the New Testament I felt I could

reasonably say her vocation ended at the Resurrection at the earliest, or at the Ascension at the latest. During the 2017 Easter season, I spent an extended period of time between Easter and Pentecost reading and rereading scripture, focusing in particular on Luke's Acts of the Apostles, Chapters 1 and 2. Then I changed my mind about Mary's vocation.

Acts 1 and 2 the Pentecost event, provided the clues.

Prior to his Ascension Jesus instructed his followers to remain in Jerusalem and wait for the arrival of the Holy Spirit. When I can, I try to imagine the location, the surroundings, what is the event that is taking place, and finally how does it all relate to me? Acts 1 and 2 takes place in Jerusalem, the holiest of all cities in Jesus' time. The Old City remains sacred ground to this day. The locale is Holy Mount

roughly 120 people present, Luke mentions some by name including the remaining eleven apostles, two men one of whom will become the twelfth apostle, and he adds "...together with some women and Mary the mother of Jesus..." I asked myself why did Luke want the reader to know Mary was there? Mary had already received the Holy Spirit at the Annunciation. She knew the power of this experience. What was she to receive from the Pentecost event? Did Mary have a vocation role to play



Zion, which continues to dominate the skyline of the Old City. The event took place in an Essene neighborhood, although neither Jesus nor his apostles were adherents of this Jewish sect. The Essenes however, were very prayerful and devout people. Pentecost took place before 9:00 AM according to Acts 2:15. Therefore, in a building that may have been an inn, in a neighborhood mostly populated by devout people, located on a holy mountain, in a holy city, early in the morning, an event, Pentecost, the descent of the Holy Spirit, took place.

In Acts 1:13-14 a group of men and women have assembled in an upper room. Among the

on that day, and possibly even into the future?

Preparing around 120 people to be receptive to something they had never experienced, or had knowledge of, would under normal circumstances be a challenge. Did Jesus give them instructions on how to prepare? Scripture does not reveal any answers. My experience of having a large number of people in a room is, they talk to each other and the noise level grows, unless someone directs them otherwise. Did Mary light special olive oil lamps and gather them together to pray, for Luke says, "All these devoted themselves with one accord to prayer..." Devote is a powerful

word, it has gravitas. I do believe Holy Mary's very presence with her radiating love, prayer energy, and deep love for God added "something" to that room. Maybe that is why Luke mentions Mary by name. Moreover, such actions would have been consistent with her vocation of service. Mary knew Jesus wanted his teachings to live on, and she would have wanted to help in every way possible. There would be no "retirement" from her vocation.

If Mary's vocation had ended earlier, she would not have been mentioned by name in Acts of the Apostles. Given her age at the time of Pentecost, Mary's courage in continuing to say yes is worth noting. In addition, religious artworks created by thousands of artists throughout the centuries depict Mary in a prominent place in the Pentecost scene. I find it comforting to see art that mirrors my thoughts.

As a teenager Mary possessed an abundance of love, so much so she found favor with God. Out of her love for God she embraced her vocation. As a mature woman seeped in years of prayer and service her spiritual wisdom would have been felt and noticed. Out of her love for her neighbor she shared her love with the world and continues to do so by her loving inspiration present today. I am grateful for this amazing woman. Now I will sit in the silence of Mary's presence, and marvel at her impact on humanity for almost 2000 years. ✧

Suzanne Farley's photographs have been published in various forms by St. Andrew's Abbey since 1994, the Archdiocese of Los Angeles *Catholic Directory*, *The Tidings* newspaper, and the *Chaska Herald* newspaper in Chaska, Minnesota. She lives in Santa Monica, California. This is the third article on Mary Suzanne has offered the *Chronicle*, along with her photographic work.

MARY AND THE MOON *from page 6*

tendencies, that we let him free us from all that holds us captive so that we too can stand in his light and shine with his glory.

In the religious icons of the Greek and Russian Christians, there is an interesting tradition. You know, at Christmas, we see Mary holding the baby Jesus, wrapped in the white "swaddling clothes"; the sort of sheets that traditionally held and protected newborn babies. But in the icons of this feast, we see Jesus holding the sleeping Mary, who is like a little baby wrapped in a white shroud, and he is carrying her up to heaven. This is a poetic way of showing that just as Mary carefully and lovingly gave Jesus his humanity, so he carefully and lovingly shares his divine glory with her. As she bore him to mankind, so he bears her to his Father's realm.

We are grateful that Jesus shares the dazzling, sun-like glory of his resurrection with us in all the many ways he does so, including the moon-like glory of Mary!

O monk, O prisoner, O lonely lover — as you look out from your cell in the middle of a moonlit night, as you feel the faint warmth of the lunar light that calms you like a mother's lullaby, thank God for earth, moon, sun and stars — and for the vast silent sea of love which is their home and ours. ✧



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.



AROUND & ABOUT THE ABBEY



Bishop Gerald Wilkerson ordained our brother Angelus Echeverry to the order of priesthood on June 24th. This is the homily he delivered.

TODAY'S FEAST OF THE BIRTH OF St. John the Baptist is beautifully apropos for the ordination, the bringing to birth of a new priest. Though he will soon be a priest, like John the Baptist Brother Angelus must always remember that he is not the Messiah. Rather he is to prepare the way for the one whose sandals none of us is worthy to unfasten.

Together with Brother Angelus, all of us must understand that he is not choosing a career as a monk and a priest. Rather, he is responding to the personal call that God has addressed to him. Brother Angelus has journeyed through life, walked various paths, done many things and now, after much prayer, spiritual formation and testing, he makes his own the words of Isaiah the Prophet in our first reading: "Though I thought I had toiled in vain, and for nothing, uselessly, spent my

strength, yet my reward is with the Lord, my recompense is with my God. For now the Lord has spoken, who formed me as his servant from the womb..."

Brother Angelus, remember that you are chosen, you are dear to the Lord! God looks at you with the tenderness of a Father, and, having made your heart full of love, He will not let your steps hesitate. You are important in his eyes and he has confidence that you will be up to the mission to which he has called you.

We are only authentic priests when we preach Jesus Christ and not ourselves. St. Paul makes this very clear in our second Scripture from the Acts of the Apostles. We are not members of a personal cult but members of the Body of Christ. What we must discover once again (and over and over again throughout our lives) is passion — a profound and overwhelming desire to touch people's lives

with the person of Jesus Christ. Our burning passion and thirst must be for this mission. The very essence of leadership is that you have a vision. You can't blow an uncertain trumpet. Sometimes we too easily settle for the common, the ordinary, those things that are only superficially related to the mission of Jesus Christ. We have to know who we are and what we are about, and never lose sight of Jesus who is the center and moving force of our existence.

Part of every ordination ceremony is the prostration, in which the candidate lies flat on the floor before the altar. It is a profoundly moving and meaningful gesture. For it says that the candidate is willing to follow Jesus in laying down his life out of love for others, as Jesus himself did. Brother Angelus, may you go gladly and readily to whomever God sends you. May you bring light out of darkness by preaching not yourself but Jesus Christ.

Brother Angelus, remember that it is in service to the Body and Blood of the Lord that you are ordained a priest today, whether that Body and Blood be found here at the altar or



whether it be found in human flesh. If you indeed become the Body and Blood of Jesus, then you must feed others; you must bring Jesus to them, especially the poor, the oppressed, the immigrant, the last, the littlest and the least. St. Teresa of Calcutta says that "...we are called upon to minister to Christ himself in the distressing disguise of the poor and the suffering. We are called upon every day to exercise our priestly ministry of handling the Body and Blood of Christ in the form of suffering humanity and of giving Holy Communion to all those we come in contact with by spreading the fragrance of his love wherever we go."

But there is one more hunger that I want to note. This is a powerful hunger, one that is highly dangerous, one that each of us is exposed to and reminded of every time we come to the altar. You and I are exposed to the hunger of God. And that terrifies us. God is, in the imageries of many stories, the Hound

ABOVE: FR. ANGELUS ECHEVERRY AND HIS BROTHER DEACON CHARLES ECHEVERRY. DEACON CHARLES WAS ORDAINED TO THE PERMANENT DIACONATE TWO WEEKS EARLIER.



of Heaven, the Stalker, the Shepherd, the Seeker, who for some reason which escapes us, is madly in love with us and is hungry for our companionship. You are not choosing a career here today. You are rather responding to the mysterious call of God to oneness with Him. You are responding to God's hunger for you. Let him love you!

So, God has called you, he hungers for you. And today he breathes his Spirit upon you, conforming you ever more closely to his Son, Jesus Christ.

The new document on priestly formation, coming out of Rome, speaks of the priest as a missionary disciple in permanent formation. Pope Francis commented on this by recommending a couple of things to us priests.

First of all, he said, that we must pray without tiring, because we can only be fishers of men if we first realize that we have been "caught" by the Lord's tenderness. Our vocation began when, having abandoned the land of our individualism and our personal projects, we give ourselves over to that Love that sought us in the night and to that Voice that made our heart vibrate. Thus we have left our nets to grip

those that the Master has given us. If we do not remain closely bound to Him, our fishing will not be successful. So we must pray always!

Secondly, Pope Francis said, walk always, because a priest has never "arrived." He always remains a disciple, a pilgrim on the roads of the Gospel and of life, overlooking the threshold of the mystery of God and of the sacred land of the people entrusted to him. In fact, the Pope said, in every realm of priestly life it is important to progress in faith, in love and in pastoral charity, without becoming rigid in one's acquisitions or being fixed in one's own desires.

Priests, the Pope said, are called to share with the heart because our people need one who respects them and listens to them with love. Priests are to have a heart full of passion and compassion.

Although it is not celebrated this year, today is also the feast of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. We should recall that, as a babe in the womb, Jesus was dependent on Mary: he was absolutely helpless; he could go nowhere but where Mary chose to take him; he could not speak; her breathing was his breath; his heart beat in the beating of her heart. Today Christ

is dependent on each one of us. We must carry him in our hearts wherever he wants to go, and there are many places to which he may never go unless we take him.

Given his call, perhaps John should have been named Angelus. I don't know if that would have given Zacharias his voice back but it too is a name with a mission. The gospel says that the child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the desert until the day of his manifestation in Israel.

Father Angelus, today and always may you be an icon of love and service, a light in human darkness. For those who hunger for God may you be not just a sign of God, but may you be the living presence of the Lord. May Jesus always help you to be someone who prepares the way of the Lord. May he be for you a burning and shining lamp giving light to your path and courage to your heart. May you be someone who leaps with joy before the presence of the Lord. ✕

BR. COLUMBA'S SIMPLE PROFESSION

ANOTHER JOYFUL OCCASION for the Abbey occurred on July 11th, the Feast of St. Benedict: **Brother Columba Corrie OSB**, made his simple triennial profession of vows. The joyful event was attended by many, including family from Scotland.



Our prayers are for both Father Angelus and Brother Columba. May they grow in holiness, peace and joy.

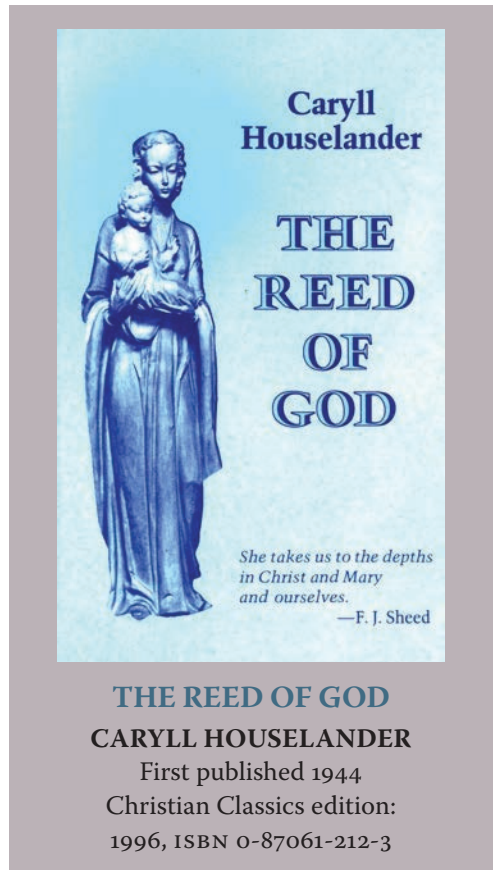
QUARTERLY BOOK REVIEW

by fr. philip edwards, osb

DESPITE THEIR DIVINE MASTER'S EXPLICIT "new" commandment, Christians are a querulous lot, and, when in full heat of absolute conviction, quarrelsome to the point of violence and purgative slaughter — along with their fellow "Believers in the Book" (be it Tanach, Testament, or Quran) whose one and only Jealous God brooks no other gods before Him nor deviation to right or left in practice and loyalties. The Tanach and Quran folk are particularly put off by their New Testament siblings-in-Abraham who insist on the Trinitarian nature of the One True God — and, of course, there are those within the (sociologically) Christian branch of the family who diverge from the Nicene Creed with various unitarian understandings of the Divine Mystery — but somehow in the thick of our logomachian controversies, there is a sense of a Word spoken that must be heard and responded to in order really to live and to grow in "fullness of life."

We are all "a work in progress" in understanding both ourselves and the complex of "the world around us" in "which we live and move and have our being." As a Christian of Roman Catholic persuasion, I hear and revere what are the Scriptures of the Apostles and first followers in the Way as understood and handed down along with "New" writings of their own that are ultimately united with the Old to form the Canon ("list") of Scripture accepted by the Church as the uniquely inspired written Word of God, received and to be handed down as such in accordance with Deuteronomy 4:1-8; 6:1-9 and Hebrews 1:1-4. The (Nicene) Christian believes that the Word became flesh and dwelt among us (Jn 1:14), and that the true disciple hears the word and keeps it (Lk 8:21).

This last reference to the true disciple puts Mary "in her place," as the one *par excellence* who, when God spoke, listened and heeded,



kept in her heart to ponder and to act upon. Her principal feast day in mid-August honors her perfect oneness with her Lord and Son, body, soul and spirit in Heaven. All stages of her earthly life, from conception onward, are celebrated throughout the year, but the great inbursting of heavenly light as the Word becomes flesh to dwell among us at the Annunciation and coming to term at Christmastide is at the heart of our devotion.

Caryll Houselander's *The Reed of God* has been a classic staple for vigil readings, especially in Advent, for many years. I must confess that when the Editor proposed it for this issue's Review, I hastily scanned a borrowed copy, but then was all too easily distracted in trying to catch up with some of her other books, such as her autobiography, *Rocking Horse Catholic*, and especially her friend and publisher Maisie

Ward's genial biography, *Caryll Houselander That Divine Eccentric*. Having been raised in the Reformed tradition to be leery of Roman Mariolatry (and Ecclesiolatry), [Caryll was] puzzled by what seemed to be a warped and fearful fixation on sexuality that insisted on perpetual virginity for the maternal God-bearer, and so depriving the Incarnate Son — and His Mother and her spouse — of a fully human experience of family and the natural good that survived the Fall from Eden. Nevertheless it seems to have seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to the Magisterium that she be ever-virgin, and so we pray.

Caryll's gift is to see and present Mary as both Virgin (her book does bear an *imprimatur*) and down-to-earth Woman: "She is not only human; she is humanity. The one thing that she did and does is the one thing we all have to do, namely, to bear Christ into the world ... nothing but things essential for us are revealed to us about the Mother of God: the fact that she was wed to the Holy Spirit and bore Christ into the world. Our crowning joy is that she did this as a lay person and through the ordinary daily life that we all live; through natural love made supernatural, as the water was, at her request, turned into wine" (Introduction, pp. xi–xii).

She was highly-thought of in her time as a gifted counselor and mystic and affectionately admired and remembered by many, but seems not to be "up" for formal sainthood. Pope St. John Paul II despaired of what seems to be a phlegmatic lack of zeal for miracles for English canonizations when he visited there; it would seem that John Henry Newman had done all he could to escape it, wishing only to be remembered as a valiant defender and teacher of the faith; it would be in the best British tradition — despite all the sainted abbots and monks circling around him in his time, our holy scholar monk Bede was contented simply being Venerable for centuries.

As a Benedictine, I come together with my community at regular moments of time

to hear the word proclaimed and to sing its psalms of praise, petition, and prophecy in order both to ponder and to practice — and apart to speak (and hopefully to listen!) to the Father in accordance with Jesus' teaching (Matt 6:6). The high point of this communal Work-of-God-to-which-nothing-is-to-be-preferred is Sunday Lauds (so aptly named by Anglicans "Morning Praise"). For this moment, Fr. Wilfrid's choice of hymn is right on, especially the two opening verses:

On this day, the first of days,
God the Father's name we praise,
Who , creation's Lord and Spring,
did the world from darkness bring.

On this day, th' eternal Son
over death His triumph won;
on this day, the Spirit came
with His gifts of living flame.

As the text from Hebrews says, and as the Fourth Book of the Good News proclaims, this moment of inbreaking of heavenly light as the Word-made-flesh-to-dwell-among-us, revealing to us the glory of the only Son coming from the Father, is the cornerstone of the New Covenant understanding of salvation history whose believers come to be called Christian. Their Scriptural focus was on the prophetic and wisdom texts — and, like St. Benedict much later, especially the psalms. I read recently (or possibly just heard — I cannot at the moment recall source or name) a citation of a respectable commentator of Scripture who said that the oldest bit of the New Testament text is the famous "Cantus Christi" that St. Paul incorporates (with one line of his own) into his Letter to the Philippians (2:5-11). (We are often told that the great Love Chapter of I Corinthians 13 is also an adoption of a well-known but anonymous text already in circulation.) Although the public ministry culminating in the crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth during the governance of Rome through Pontius Pilate

is currently accepted as historical “fact,” it is the mind-blowing conviction of those who “have seen the Lord” risen from the dead and experienced the Pentecostal outpouring of the Spirit that the same light shines at the moment of Creation and its culminating moments of Incarnation (Annunciation and Nativity) remembered for us in the four Gospels. The fourth and latest of these Books of Good News purports to be written “that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and thus have life in his Name” (Jn 20:31).

Rabbi Neusner in his book *A Rabbi Talks With Jesus* (see “Book Review” in the Fall, 2007 *Chronicle*) begrudges a spot in the low-class prophets’ corner of his Torah-centered Rabbi’s Village for a poorly deluded young man from Nazareth who will sadly suffer and die for his delusions; since the book itself limits the conversation only to the written words as recorded in Matthew’s Gospel to determine his (that is, the young man’s) orthodox compliance with contemporary rabbinic teaching (uncontaminated by subsequent controversy embedded in Mishnaic-Talmudic collections), no heed is taken of the supranatural affirmative word of miracle, punctuated by the Resurrection and its valedictory affirmation of trinitarian divinity (Mt 28) — nor were any coterminous-with-Matthew writings provided (available?) for any really comparative conversation, but the ‘you have heard it said but I say unto you’ sort of talk obviously is offensive to a Torah scholar. ✠



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



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