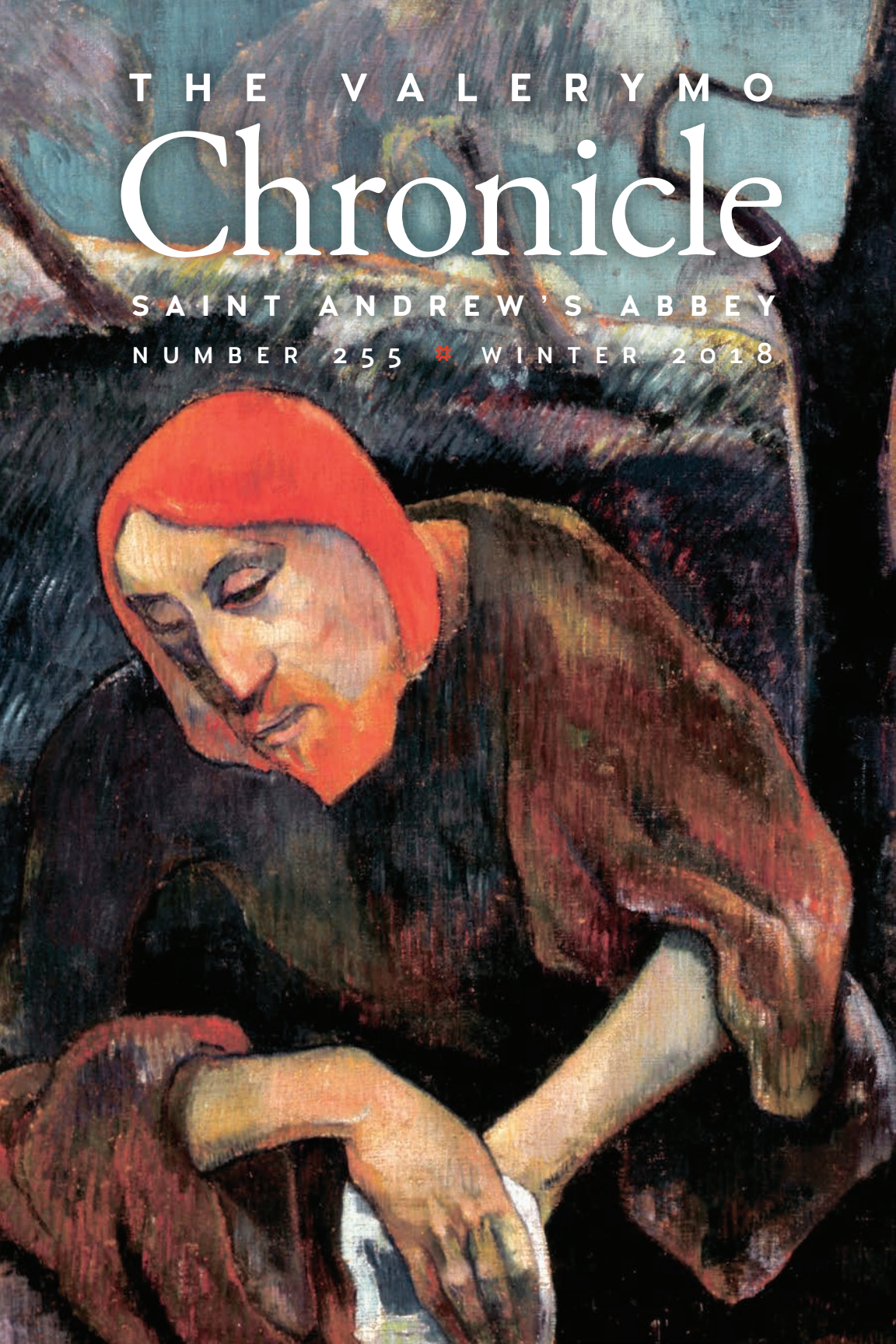
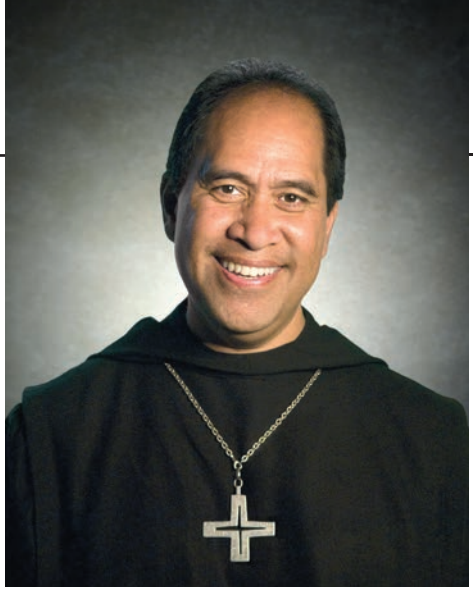
THE VALERYMO Chronicle

SAINT ANDREW'S ABBEY

NUMBER 255 ✠ WINTER 2018



LETTER *from the* ABBOT



Dear Friends,

As Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed pleaded to remain with him.

But Jesus would not permit him but told him instead, "Go home to your family and announce to them all that the Lord in his pity has done for you."

Then the man went off and began to proclaim in the Decapolis what Jesus had done for him; and all were amazed. (Mk 5:18–20)

I WONDER IF THE MAN IN Mark's Gospel was disappointed in Jesus' response. The man from whom Jesus expelled a 'legion' of demons, asked to follow Jesus, but Jesus essentially said, 'No, stay here and tell the people here all the Lord has done for you.'

It's easy to understand why this man only wanted to be near Jesus for the rest of his life. Jesus not only healed him, but saved his life. This man was beyond grateful to Jesus. Yet still Jesus told him 'No. Stay here.' And because this man trusted Jesus with every ounce of his being, he did as Jesus said. Gratitude and love bound this man to Jesus, so much so that he trusted and obeyed.

When we are in those places in life when we are struggling to trust in God, it would be good for us to ask 'what has God done for me?'

Someone once said: I wonder if we would be more grateful and more trusting of God if our memories were a little better.' What if we looked back over our lives and remembered God's faithfulness to us throughout the years? Through the rough, dark, challenging moments with relationships, health, finances, sin?

He went on to say, 'I expect that if we were willing to remember more often, we would be thankful more often, and trust more often, and most likely do His will more willingly more often.

When we are grounded in gratitude, love follows. When we are grounded in

HEALING OF THE DEMON-POSSESSED MAN, SANT' APPOLINARE NUOVO, RAVENNA

love, gratitude follows — and trust is not far behind.

It's interesting to note that Jesus did nothing else while He was in that town of the Geresenes. We don't find Him teaching, or feeding the multitudes, or healing their sick or eating with people. It is obviously because they are Gentiles.

In other words, Jesus came through the storm on the Sea of Galilee (Mk 4:35–41) to reach this lost sinner. (Jesus knows what He is about.) While in the storm on the sea, He had His eye on that one lost, wretched soul, living naked among the tombs, of whom everyone was afraid and therefore avoided and had given up on. This man was no doubt the bane and scourge of the town. We can see the townspeople sneering and saying amongst themselves, "No one can help that man in the graveyard. He's crazy!

This man needed a Savior, and Jesus showed up in his hour of need. THIS is precisely what Jesus does for us too…every day.

Even though we may not have had a legion of demons expelled from our body, Jesus HAS *healed* us, He HAS *transformed* us and HAS *saved* us…through His sacrifice on the cross.

The way we give or show thanks is often determined by what we're grateful for. If someone gave you an all paid four week vacation to Europe for you and your family, your expression of gratitude would be much different than if someone gave you a case of peaches or sent you a birthday card.

But what if someone gave you eternal life? What would you do?

Abbot Damien ✠

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Christ in the Garden of Olives, 1889,
Paul Gauguin
(Source: Wikimedia Commons)

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EDITOR'S NOTE

AELRED NIESPOLO, OSB

So another Lent begins. Perhaps more than ever there is a need to reflect on what it means to be a family. The following is a homily, adapted, given on this past Holy Family Sunday at the end of last year, and hopefully offers some real food for Lenten reflection on how we look on family, and what we can do to make it ever more life-giving. The scripture texts referred to in the homily are for that feast: Sirach 3:2–6, 12–14; Col. 3:12:21; Luke: 2, 22–40.

THE HOLY FAMILY, BEFORE 1686, ANONYMOUS BRITISH PAINTER. SOURCE:WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

LET'S, FOR A MOMENT, REFLECT ON the nature and experience of love. When we truly love, among the many desires that make up that love, is a profound desire to relate, to completely relate, to an "other". Real love does not end in itself, because the very notion of love implies moving out of the self, towards someone else. But not only do we need and desire to love someone, but to love someone to whom we can completely reveal ourselves; thus, to be loved because of, and at times in spite of, who we are; a desire for love without conditions and camouflage; the other person "gets us." We do not love in a vacuum, because it is the nature of love to establish a sense of *mutual* self-definition through the ways we love, the ways we know and re-create each other, always grounded in our own personal truth, a truth of situation, of personality, of temperament, a truth of why we are led by the particular needs we have, or by the way we understand the world. Love is a mystery that gradually, continually, reveals itself within our own interior world: and our families are signs of that very mystery.

We are created for *real* relationships. Honest mirroring relationships. It is in our genes, it is in our hearts, it is imbedded in the very image of God imprinted upon us. And this image is at the heart of the mystery of the family, just as it is at the heart of the mystery of the Trinity. For family is more than a blood tie, beyond just physical generation, but it becomes a means to ultimately embrace and encourage participation in the intimate life of God.

Often, I have found myself telling my students at the seminary that "life is messy," it is not easily classifiable, it is not black and white; even though we really wish it was. It would make things so much simpler. But how do we make our messy family lives mean something? What is required to make a family happy, vital, alive and grateful?

We've all seen or experienced, perhaps too often, that family relationships, or friendships, community relationships, which are also types of family, are frequently based on secrets and half-truths, and are thus, if not totally false, at least severely limited and unsatisfying. They become relationships of facades, of living out superficial, protective, ego-created images, stereotypes that are fostered to *prevent* growth. Or a family life that becomes primarily a matter of adhering to laws, rather than responding to love. You can't

build holy families or life-giving communities or nourishing friendships on robot-obedience, but on a challenging dialogue of mutual love and honesty, which includes mutual self-love and self-honesty built upon a freedom from any fear of personal truth. Certainly Saint Benedict saw this in how he understood the dynamics of creating a monastic family. Just read his Rule.

To build a truthful and nourishing relationship- mutually discovered, and offered, self-knowledge is essential. This kind of open and frank exchange is, I think, at the heart of both the Trinity and the Incarnation — at the heart of a God who is Love, who out of his very nature creates a universe, and enters into it in such a way as to embrace *our* lives of flesh and blood, of choice, of will, of compassion *and* the possibility of rejection. This is at the heart of any genuinely personal and familial relationship, which ideally results in personal and spiritual growth, and creativity, not in mindless rigidity, or cultural stereotype or sexual subordination. It is about Love creating Life, and Life in turn creating love. At the heart of every happy family is the *encouragement* of healthy self-definitions by the "others" in our lives. At the heart of every unhappy family are actions which *promote* negative, secretive self-definitions. Sadly, there are too many times in families when we do not even allow others to recognize their own truths, forcing them to keep even their own self from themselves. The vital family is made up of parents and children, husbands and wives, brothers and sisters, who offer mutual hope and definition. This also applies to those of us whose lives are in community; that messed up monastic group that, for me, becomes my family. This love is not about domination, nor authoritarianism, nor control. Ultimately, the kind of life we live towards, and with, each other must give hope.

I cannot help but think that this is at the core of what it means to celebrate the Holy Family — to celebrate their relationship to and with each other, to and with the Father. It is about a way of being *towards* each other that is not simply defined by cultural actions, but by that from which those actions stem: the desire to create and share mutual growth, life, truth and hope. The unhappy family oppresses, kills and makes hopeless. *All* families are messy. But we have all seen families that are happy, welcoming and life-giving to others, that are rooted in an open hospitality, offering a healing vibrancy to those who have less. And we have also seen the opposite and the sadness one is sucked down into, where life is withdrawn, not given. And this applies to all families, whether biological, communal or those of friendship.

Our first two readings are portraits of caring relationships within family. They stress the virtues behind how we act towards each other: mercy, meekness, patience, forbearance, peace, compassion. The gospel gives us the context within which Jesus grew into maturity. We know from these few short lines of gospel text that the heart of living a Christian life in a profoundly secular world lies in attempting to view each joy, each difficulty or confusion, each grief and each exaltation in our lives within a context of God With Us, which is just another way of saying that no matter what, we are never alone or isolated. And at this time of year especially, we ought to honestly ask ourselves about our own families — *all* of our families — whether biological, or communal, or spiritual, or those rooted in friendship — do we *free* each other from despair, from depression, from a sense of worthlessness, from hopelessness, from anger, from doubt and oppression? Do we give each other courage to be who God made us to be? Or do we cultivate the deep anxieties and uncertainties of anxious and fretful hearts in an anxious and uncertain age? Do we try to live out the freeing, and life-giving Incarnation of God With Us? Do we communicate to each other a God of life or a God of death? Do we give life to those we say we love? ✠

The Oblate & Ecumenism

DR. DONALD P. RICHMOND, OBL.OSB

EVERY CHRISTIAN HAS A VOCATION. This assertion is biblically defensible, theologically reasonable, and eminently practical. God has called and commanded his people to "works of service" for God's glory, ecclesial edification, and redemptive human development. If "the glory of God is a [person] fully alive," as one Church Father has said, then the exercise of our vocation is enlivening.

Saint Paul tells us that there are diversities of gifts, as well as works of service. These are distributed as God sees fit, while keeping in mind our unique creation, character, charism and calling. God appoints and empowers, and we (ideally) humbly respond. Discovering our calling is not, however, always easily discerned. Discernment is a "Ghostly" grace that frequently requires spiritual direction. Personal decision is also essential. It is a journey and a process. The product, which is a personal decision emboldened and empowered by God, has in part been navigated through pastoral counsel, ecclesial affirmation, and mentored training. To some degree, becoming an oblate was the culmination of such discernment and decision. When we made our formal profession, having passed through a process, we also embraced a vocation — or, at least, a form of vocation.

Each vocation, based upon a number of factors, has its unique purpose and tools. These tools are used in order to accomplish God's purpose in, among and through us. The overarching purpose of vocation is the glorification of God and the building of God's kingdom. This requires doing God's work in God's way according to God's will.

ICONS OF SAINTS PETER AND PAUL, CA. 1408. SOURCE:WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

Oblates have such a purpose. Most broadly speaking, we are called to pray and to work. Prayer and work, properly understood and applied, are one-and-the-same vocation — although they are "vocalized" differently. The oblate's prayer of heart, hand, foot, and tongue share in the ministry of other monks and brothers, but with one unique exception: Ecumenism. Although *all* Christians are called to build bridges and not walls — including priests, prelates, monks, brothers, nuns, sisters and religious — oblates have, by our multi-denominational affiliations, a particular and pronounced role in this ministry. The role of the oblate as ecumenical ambassador must be cultivated because, in fact, we are most uniquely positioned to do so. More than our Roman Catholic monks and brothers, not least because oblates share the same "languages" of their respective denominations.

As we know, not all oblates are members of the Roman Catholic Church. Some, like me, are Anglican. Other oblates represent other ecclesial communities, from Baptist and Congregational to Lutheran, Methodist and Reformed. Even many strict Evangelicals are also embracing a Benedictine way of life. Given this, oblates belonging to other denominations are poised and empowered to build bridges of mutual love and cooperation between their unique communities and the Roman Catholic Church. Common prayer (The Hours) and a common life (The Rule) direct us to the common purpose of viable, if not always visible, unity. The Rule of Saint Benedict (RB) outlines several strategies for oblates seeking to be and become ecumenical ambassadors. The RB is a road between one community and another.

A lack of unity implies a lack of spiritual unction. God wants unity. God commands unity. God in Christ died for unity. God in Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit, was raised for unity. God in Christ is ascended for unity. He

sent the Holy Spirit, in part, to empower unity. We all share "one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism, one God and Father who is over all and in all and through all." We are one in the Spirit, we must strive and sweat to become more united as a society of Christians. Oblates are to pray and to work for unity. Our words and works are to be aimed at building bridges. As St. Thomas More has written, we must learn to labor for those things for which we pray.

As well, our oblation requires a pouring-out, an emptying, of our own priorities and perceptions in order to discern and advance the purposes of God in Christ by the Holy Spirit. And, to be sure, we all have a great many priorities, purposes and practices that may not be entirely in keeping with the will and way of God. As St. Benedict has said, "a little strictness" is needed for the sake of charity and community. We must let go of all but God — a terrifying prospect! — capitalizing upon "the instruments of good works" and the "ascending actions" of humility to accomplish this.

Silence ought also be embraced. We cannot always agree on everything. We do not always pronounce "shibboleth" in the same way. I believe it was Luke Timothy Johnson who said that when the Church embraced four gospels, and not just one, we also embraced diversity. We embraced healthy (I hope) disagreement as well! We do not always need to stand up and speak out about every point of disagreement, however. Sometimes ideas can be set aside for the ideal: Unity. To accomplish this, we must cultivate silence and stillness. These, empowered by the Paraclete, pave the way of prayer. Until we hear *Shema*, we should consider silence. Our silence enables God's speech to emerge.

The oblate must try to cultivate a "heart overflowing" with the good theme of reconciliation and redemption. Consequently, making room for mistakes also builds bridges. We all sin. We all fail. We all fall short. No one, except Jesus Christ, is perfect. This is not always easy to understand or appreciate. Orthodox theologian, Alexander Schmemann, has written in his journals that to insist upon ecclesial perfection is to court idolatry. The same is true regarding human perfection — except in, through and by Christ. While "the greatest sorrow is not to be a saint" (Jacques Maritain), we must make room for one another. And, as C. S. Lewis has written in his *Latin Letters*, sometimes we are separated by our *virtues* and not just by our vices. Let us, by God's grace, look for the virtues that separate us — not just the vices.

Time and space do not afford the opportunity to extrapolate upon the RBs applications to ecumenism. This ideal is the subject of books, conversations, and conferences, and not a simple and short article. Nevertheless, as we have just concluded the events surrounding the 500TH Anniversary of the Reformation, a few words from the RB, Chapter 68, are most relevant. We oblates have been assigned an "impossible" task. Reconciliation and potential reunion "exceeds the measure of [our] strength." Too many years have passed. Too many denominations have developed. Too many words have been said, and Confessions written. Too many disagreements and divisions have occurred. All of these, and far more, are true. In spite of this, in spite of "too many," we are called "as far as it is within us" to "be at peace" and "seek peace." It is not the Abbot who expects this, it is our Abba God. Love, which is the hands and feet of holiness and elemental ecumenism, is the truest vocation of every Christian. Loving our Christian family is the mark of the Christian — and the unique vocation of oblates who belong to diverse Ecclesial Communities.

Dr. Donald P. Richmond, a widely published author and monastic illustrator, is an Oblate for Saint Andrew's Abbey.

Our Lady's Two-fold Kenosis

SISTER GERTRUDE GILLETTE

WITH LENT UPON US, OUR thoughts naturally turn to the end and purpose of this season, to the Passion of the Lord. St. Paul speaks of the passion in terms of a self-humbling which Christ undertook on our behalf. Indeed, in the same passage he speaks of two downward movements, the first being the Son of God's plunge into our humanity—leaving aside his divinity so to speak, not clinging to or "grasping" after it in Paul's words—and confining himself to the narrow limits of a finite human nature. The second downward movement took place on the cross, where Christ did not cling to his own human nature, but descended into the abyss of death. Here are St. Paul's words:

> Have this mind among yourselves, which was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but *emptied himself (ekenosen)*, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he *humbled himself* (*etapeinosen*) and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross (Phil 2:5–8).

Both movements are often referred to as Christ's double *kenosis* or self-emptying. We know that Mary had a significant role to play in the passion, participating in her son's redemptive suffering as she stood at the foot of the cross — henceforth becoming a spiritual mother to all believers. I would like to suggest that Our Lady's role in following her Son's path of humility goes deeper, specifically that she underwent a double *kenosis* which — like Christ's own *kenosis* — has transforming power. In both cases, Mary was transformed into a mother.

INCARNATION: MOTHERHOOD ON THE HUMAN LEVEL

In the first instance, Mary became a mother at the Incarnation, when the Son of God became man in her womb. Was the change in Mary simply on the biological and psychological level? We get a hint that something deeper is going on in the passage where Elizabeth, after crying out with joy that the Mother of God should visit her, praises Mary for her faith: "Blessed is *she who believed*" (Lk 1:45). Why is Mary's faith being praised here? If we look closely at the text we see that Luke is contrasting Mary's faith and Zachariah's lack of faith. Both asked questions: Mary asked for clarification on her role — what was she to do in order to accomplish what the angel was asking? On the other hand, Zachariah's questioning expressed doubt that what Gabriel said was going to happen. He lacked total faith and trust in God. Besides there can be in questioning God, an element of pride. A friend of mine told me that after months of asking God why he was asking such and such of her, God responded: "Those who wish to serve, do not ask why."

Mary's *fiat* shows her humble acceptance of God's wish. There was certainly no pride in her question. There are lots of questions that you or I might have asked if we were in her shoes that day: "Why me?" Or "How can you ask me to give up my honor before the rest of the world?" We might have tried to reason with God: "Wouldn't my being pregnant before living with Joseph be a discredit to your message, since others will look on me as a sinner?" and so on. Again, these questions would never arise in a soul as humble as Mary's.

But something even deeper is going on in Mary's faith. When we think of *faith*, we think

of *Abraham*, for he is the Father of those with faith, and yet, I dare to say — Mary's faith is greater. Abraham did not start out a person of great faith . . . he grew in faith slowly. He did in the end achieve total trust. Abraham was asked to surrender his most precious possession and the object of all God's promises: his son, Isaac. So, we can ask: "What was asked of Mary that was greater than this?" Certainly on the cross, she too was asked to accept God's will and to give up her most precious possession, and the Object of all God's promises: her son and the Son of God. But Elizabeth is commending her for her faith at *this moment*, so let's try to discover the root of her faith at the Annunciation. Elizabeth says: "And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord" (v.45).

First of all, she believes in what Gabriel told her "would come to pass." He told her that her Child would be the Son of the Most High. As we know when Jesus began to preach many years later, the idea that he was the Son of God sounded like blasphemy to many who grew up in the orthodox Jewish belief in One God. If God is One, how can He have a Son? And who is this Holy Spirit who is coming down upon her, who will effect the physical conception of the One who is in himself the Son of the Most High? If Gabriel's answer revealed to Mary how she would remain a virgin, it certainly also is the first revelation of the Trinity and would naturally lead to many more questions: "Are you a messenger of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob?" "Are you from the One True God who spoke to Moses in the Burning Bush?"

Although Mary asks for clarification about her own role, she never asks a single question about the two greatest mysteries of our faith: the Trinity and the Incarnation! She therefore takes a flying leap across the chasm between Judaism and Christianity, submitting

THE MADONNA OF THE ROSES (1903), WILLIAM-ADOLPHE BOUGUEREAU.

herself totally to the God who is addressing her through his messenger. The leap demands that she leave behind her Jewish — and in some ways, human — way of perceiving God as One and take the risk of deep faith. If Mary stopped to consider rationally the new belief in GOD that was being presented to her, or if she clung rigidly to the monotheistic faith that she had grown up with, she would never have been able to assent to what was being asked of her. Instead, she pronounced her *fiat*, and the Word was made flesh.

Faith requires by its very nature that we die to a human way of perceiving things. With the aid of grace, faith enables us to transcend our own limits. It does this paradoxically by bringing us along a path of intellectual darkness, of not-understanding. In this impenetrable darkness of faith, a person dies to him/herself in a human way, and moves forward by trust. There is a hint in the text that Mary's act of

PIETÀ (1876), WILLIAM-ADOLPHE BOUGUEREAU.

faith involved a kind of *kenosis*, a self-emptying. The Annunciation scene ends with: "And the angel departed from her" (v.38b). The angel's departure can be seen not only as a fact: namely, that Mary was now left with no visible sign of what just happened, she was suddenly plunged back into the world of earthly reality. But more importantly Gabriel's departure can be seen as a *sign and consequence* of Mary's fiat: saying "yes" to God requires proceeding along the path of *pure faith*, of human *kenosis*, a dying to oneself and to one's own plans and perception of things. This self-emptying is possible for one who is humble. I see Mary, like her Son, emptying herself in faith and humility and then finding herself: when she crosses to the other side, she is a *new creature* — she is the *Mother of God*.

Abraham's faith resulted in a new revelation about the God who had revealed Himself to him: that he is a God of life, and a God that one can trust totally to be faithful to his promises. Mary too believed that God would be totally faithful to his promises, and learned much more than Abraham about this God, namely, that he is Three in One, and is so humble that he would become man and take Isaac's place on the altar, to die for us.

So, to summarize thus far:

Mary's first *kenosis* came when she said yes to Gabriel, and moved from the faith of Israel in One God to the new faith of Christianity in the Triune God. In emptying herself in faith and humility, Mary emerged as a *new creature* — as the *Mother of God*.

MOTHER MARY'S 2ND KENOSIS

Mary's second *kenosis* came at Calvary, when once again she went through a self-emptying, not of her notion of who God is as regards his Personhood — that he was three Persons and not simply one Person — but of who God is *in the way he acts*. That God *acts* in ways that are not always comprehensible to us creatures . . . that he allows his own Son to be humanly destroyed and even to seem to abandon him. Mary's union with her son on Calvary was a total union of hearts and spirit. As Jesus went through his self-emptying, so did Our Lady. Or to put it another way: As Jesus suffered in obedience the annihilation of his humanity — so Mary in obedience went through her own annihilation. She ceased to exist as she was and died with Christ. Listen to Meister Eckhart:

> It is the property of creatures to make something from something, but it belongs to God to make something from nothing. Therefore, if God is to make anything in you or with you, you must first be reduced to nothing.

How was Mary reduced to nothing? First of all, she lived in her son, so watching him

Continued on page 17

THREE VALYERMO POEMS

Garrett Brown

BEHOLD THE CUP

Behold the cup, small, white (some version of porcelain)
filled with coffee and milk (2%).
Behold the cup
filled with coffee and sunlight
See the white wisps, curlicues of
steam, wafting from it —
Hold the cup, warm your fingers,
hold it with both hands,
as if a small bird, or
the shape of the fingers, both hands
holding something —
someone — dear, in prayer.
Hold the days, the cold mornings,
the sunlit desert earth, the beacon'd-lit trees, the whisper
of crunchy frozen leaves —
Oh, hold the slow quiet mid-day
into afternoons, with so many questions.
Hold the night with its Vespers and dinners and last chores.

Hold the cup, dear Life,
drink from it
Drink, oh drink and — rejoice. Be glad in it.

— *gmb*, 12,28,17.

PHOTO BY MARKUS SPISKE; SOURCE: WWW.PEXELS.COM

FEAST

Feast of the morning sun's light
I shall bask in it.
I shall play God and look on all things with delight –

Sun's heat enters my left forearm as it bends
toward this small notebook
dining table,
nearest the kitchen is — awash!
Upside down water glasses
wink and blink — for a moment I can see nothing
but white light
Most paintings make the sun orange
with its streaked crown of yellows, reds, pinks –
O new day — a white sun ablaze!
Heat moves into my
resting hand, catches my left ear, cheek, even my
writing hand, fingers praying over my silver pen –
warmth and good tidings
For unto us is born,
O Lord that is, that was, that is to come
This new day.
— *gmb*, 12,30,17.

HOLY, TOO

New white page is holy, too.
Thin blue lines—I'm on one just now—
So keen in their straightness
A purity
A fierceness

Fr Francis, table's end, in sunlight, huddles
over his French toast
soggy little squares –
They are very important right now.

Attention. Anticipation. Something inevitable,
too.
That succumbs, gives up
not as forsaking but
a kind of broken down relaxation—

The breath beside the great ocean
Luxurious exhale among the mountains
Desire to lie down among sweet green lawns

Marin said he nods to the hills
When the hills nod back, then he
can paint.
I and Thou

The seeing deep within the Seeing
O Holy unholy become holy inside
the Holy.

— *gmb*, 07,29,16.

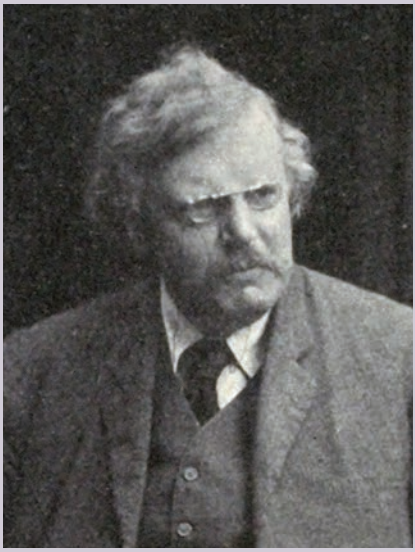
BOOK REVIEW

FR. PHILIP EDWARDS, OSB

WHAT A PLEASURE TO HAVE IN hand a book that appeared in bookstores the year of my father's fifth birthday and is now in the monastery's own stacks! While he definitely did not concur with G.K. Chesterton's (and his second son's) ultimate coming home to Rome, he did share that son's teenage delight in a book of GKC's essays, discovered in the stacks of the old Eagle Rock Library, treasuring and savoring the great-hearted and skillful parrier of the Paradox and champion of the stone-hidden, wing-startled angels, of old-wives' tales, and (later on) of perceptive pastor-detectors. He certainly shared in the childhood experience of the world of the fairy tale, and regaled his own offspring with Andrew Lang's tales of Pantouflia and L. Frank Baum's of Merryland and Oz, as well as standards like those of the Grimm brothers and Hans Christian Andersen, and sometimes those of his own imagining. He was greatly dismayed and disgusted with "Hollywood's" inability to take the Baum tale of Oz "straight" as simply magical and truly over the rainbow—and still less a "modern" morality tale in late nineteenth–early twentieth century style.

All this is simply to say that this moment in Chesterton's personal development, in turning from the rational progressivism of his particular moment in history to a rediscovered tradition of orthodox Christian teaching, expressed in both the Apostle's Creed and liturgical rites, and in the lore and customs of the folk, could as well be taking place today as in the early decades of this century. Names have changed, "Christendom" seems to be crumbling and melting away, and with it a certain kind of "folk," but the issues and wisdom are still the same and as challenging as ever.

In his introductory Chapter I, Chesterton sets forth the focus and limits of the book:



Orthodoxy
Gilbert Keith Chesterton
1909 John Lane (London & New York) (Third Edition: William Clowes & Sons, Ltd., London and Beccles)

> an answer to a challenge [from] Mr. G.S. Street to give his [Chesterton's] philosophy…though Mr. Street has inspired and created this book, he need not read it. If he does read it, he will find that in its pages I have attempted in a vague and personal way, in a set of mental pictures rather than in a series of deductions, to state the philosophy in which I have come to believe. I will not call it my philosophy; for I did not make it. God and humanity made it; and it made me. (pp. 11–12)

It may well be that I have not yet read thoroughly enough this great "combustious" (as they might say in Pooh Corners) thicket of paradoxes to state directly, but while in Chapter VI, The Paradoxes of Christianity, the locus of "orthodox theology" (p. 167) is in the Church of England and the other communities that follow and proclaim the Apostles' Creed, we are never considered post-Christian enough

to be given a clean-cut definition of what *is* Christianity, but in the closing paragraph of Chapter I, we are given

> one purely pedantic note which comes, as a note naturally should, at the beginning of the book. These essays are concerned only to discuss the actual fact that the central Christian theology (sufficiently summarized in the Apostles' Creed) is the root of energy and sound ethics.... When the word "orthodoxy" is used here it means the Apostles' Creed, as understood by everybody calling himself Christian until a very short time ago and the general historic conduct of those who held such a creed. I have been forced by mere space to confine myself to what I have got for myself from this creed; I do not touch the matter much disputed among modern Christians, of where we ourselves got it. This is not an ecclesiastical treatise but a sort of slovenly autobiography. (pp. 18–19)

Chapter VI itself culminates grandly with its evocation of the Teaching Church and introducing the title of Chapter VIII, The Romance of Orthodoxy, in its closing paragraph:

> The Church could not afford to swerve a hair's breadth on some things if she was to continue her great and daring experiment of the irregular equilibrium. Once let one idea become less powerful and some other idea would become too powerful. It was no flock of sheep the Christian shepherd was leading, but a herd of bulls and tigers, of terrible ideals and devouring doctrines, each one of them strong enough to turn to a false religion and lay waste the world. Remember that the Church went in specifically for dangerous ideas; she was a lion tamer. The idea of birth through a Holy Spirit, of the death of a divine being, of the forgiveness of sins, or the fulfilment of prophecies, are ideas which, any one can see, need but a touch to turn them into something blasphemous or ferocious.... Here it is enough to notice that if some small mistake were made in doctrine, huge blunders might be made in human happiness. A sentence phrased wrong about the nature of symbolism would have broken all the best statues in Europe. A slip in the definitions might stop all the dances; might wither all the Christmas trees or break all the Easter eggs. Doctrines had to be defined within strict limits, even in order that man might enjoy general human liberties. The Church had to be careful, if only that the world might be careless.
>
> This is the thrilling romance of Orthodoxy. People have fallen into a foolish habit of speaking of orthodoxy as something heavy, humdrum, and safe. There never was anything so perilous or so exciting as orthodoxy. It was sanity: and to be sane is more dramatic than to be mad. It was the equilibrium of a man behind madly rushing horses, seeming to stoop this way and to sway that, yet in every attitude having the grace of statuary and the accuracy of arithmetic. The Church in the early days went fierce and fast with any warhorse; yet it is utterly unhistoric to say that she merely went mad along one idea, like a vulgar fanaticism. She swerved to left and right, so as exactly to avoid enormous obstacles. . .It is easy to be a madman: it is easy to be a heretic. It is always easy to let the age have its head; the difficult thing is to keep one's own. It is always easy to be a modernist; as it is easy to be a snob.... To have fallen into any one of the fads...would indeed have been obvious and tame. But to have avoided them all has been one whirling adventure; and in my vision the heavenly chariot flies thundering through the ages, dull heresies sprawling and prostrate, the wild truth reeling but erect. (pp. 182–185)

This moment in Chesterton's own pilgrimage in grace, when Peter's rock of faith was not exclusively fixed in the pillared arches of the ancient capital city of the imperial Pax Romanum, but was underlying every "holy and apostolic" community of those days of the early witnesses, with Peter and the Disciple whom Jesus loved and Mary Magdalene, the days of the rolled stone and empty tomb and the fire-burst of Spirit in the upper room, when they were still welcome at Temple worship and building a bread-breaking community at home — this would seem to be this simple, undenominational, uncapitalized "orthodoxy" to which Dreher refers in his book reviewed in the last issue of this *Chronicle*. For Chesterton it would seem to be the unique specificity of the Incarnation that anchors their orthodoxy. "For orthodox theology has specially insisted that Christ was not a being apart from God and man, like an elf, nor yet a being half human and half not, like a centaur, but both things at once and both things thoroughly, very man and very God" (p. 167). In his divinity, coeternal with the Father but as true man. For GKC, an Englishman of the last days of Victoria and then of her son and of his successor, the champion of orthodoxy was still the Church of the West:

> …in history I found that Christianity, so far from belonging to the dark ages, was the one path across the dark ages that was not dark. It was a shining bridge connecting two shining civilizations. If anyone says that the faith arose in ignorance and savagery the answer is simple: it didn't. It arose in the Mediterranean civilization in the full summer of the Roman Empire. The world was swarming with skeptics, and pantheism was as plain as the sun, when Constantine nailed the cross to the mast. It is perfectly true that afterwards the ship sank; but it is far more extraordinary that the ship came up again: it turned a sunken ship into a submarine." (pp. 271)

Constantine and his heirs re-rooted the Empire to the New Rome of Byzantium and the eastern ends of the Mare Nostrum, where the great doctrines of Orthodoxy were hammered out in the language of the New Testament and the Hellenes, leaving to good old SPQR its mother tongue for law and order, in Justinian's attempt to keep the West within the bounds of the Imperial Oecumene. The Chair of Peter never left its final place in the old imperial capital where it had come to rest in the fullness of the Apostolic Age, and its patriarchal authority, epitomized in the great Leo's Tome that stabilized the capstone of Trinitarian orthodoxy in the deliberations of the Council of Chalcedon, would give GKC his own touchstone of orthodoxy in the Gothic West. How he would have responded to the "whirling adventure" of good Papa Giovanni and the Second Vatican Council is a continuing concern and conjecture among those who cherish him and the challenge of Truth. He himself did eventually enter the Roman Church, but kept his particular interpretation of "the universal call to holiness" in championing a more literal "preferential option for the poor" in what has been called "Distributism." What might he make of his beloved Christian Europe's deliberate "*laicite,*" leaving the cathedral of Amiens as empty as the Parthenon, to re-embrace

> the instinct of the Pagan empire [that] would have said, "You shall all be Roman citizens, and grow alike; let the German grow less slow and reverent; the Frenchmen less experimental and swift." But the instinct of Christian Europe says, "Let the German remain slow and reverent, that the Frenchman may the more safely be swift and experimental. We will make an equipoise out of these excesses. The absurdity called Germany shall correct the insanity called France." (pp. 181–182).

Would he have preferred some hefty hurling of anathemas to give more punch to the positive proclamation of the Good News? Probably, but he would still be joyfully singing with the Christmas Angels "Good Tidings of Great Joy":

> Orthodoxy makes us jump by the sudden brink of hell; it is only afterwards that we realize that jumping was an athletic excercise highly beneficial to our health. It is only afterwards that we realize that this danger is the root of all drama and romance. The strongest argument is simply its ungraciousness. The unpopular parts of Christianity turn out when examined to be the very props of the people. The outer ring of Christianity is a rigid guard of ethical abnegations and professional priests; but inside that inhuman guard you will find the old human life dancing like children, and drinking wine like men; for Christianity is the only frame for pagan freedom....
>
> The mass of men have been forced to be gay about the little things, but sad about the big ones. Nevertheless (I offer my last dogma defiantly) it is not native to man to be so. Man is more himself, man is more manlike, when joy is the fundamental thing in him, and grief the superficial. Melancholy should be an innocent interlude, a tender and fugitive frame of mind; praise should be permanent pulsation of the soul. Pessimism is at best an emotional half-holiday; joy is the uproarious labor by which all things live.... Joy, which was the small publicity of the pagan, is the gigantic secret of the Christian..." (pp. 290–296). ✠

OUR LADY'S TWO-FOLD KENOSIS

from page 10

die, was to die herself in him. Secondly, Mary was created to be the mother of Jesus; as He was dying, her very vocation was — or could have seemed to her to be — slipping away. With his death, her *raison d'etre* was over. We can therefore believe that as God reduced Christ to nothing through his *kenosis*, that Mary too was reduced to nothing. But what was the result? As she surrendered everything (herself and her son) into the hands of God, she stepped over another threshold — between life and death — and was reconstituted as a *new mother*, the spiritual mother of all believers, our mother and the most fruitful of mothers of all times.

Does this also have a message for the rest of us? Does following Christ to the cross and undergoing our own *kenosis* bring about a transformation that is also fruitful? Are we all called to follow the same path and become spiritual mothers of others? That is a topic for another article, but certainly it gives us much food for meditation. During this Lenten season, may our Mother Mary teach us to surrender everything to the Lord, trusting that all will be well, and indeed... very well. ✠

Sr. Gertrude is the founder (along with the late Sr. Theresa Scheuren, OSB) of Queen of Peace Monastery in Rutherfordton NC. She holds a Doctorate in Patristics from CUA and has taught at the ITI in Gaming, Austria and at AMU in Ave Maria, FL.

UPCOMING PREACHED RETREATS

FEBRUARY 7–9
The Mark Tradition:
Now You See It, Now You Don't

FEBRUARY 13–16
Lenten Silent Retreat

FEBRUARY 19–23
Priests' Retreat: "God is Always on Time"

FEBRUARY 24
Taller Cuaresmal En Espanol

MARCH 26–28
Holy Week Silent Retreat

MARCH 29–APRIL 1
Sacred Triduum

APRIL 20–22
Praying in the Cave of the Heart:
The Spirituality of Bede Griffiths

APRIL 25–27
The Matthew Tradition:
Moses New & Improved

APRIL 30–MAY 3
Spring Artists' Retreat

MAY 7–11
Priests' Retreat: "God is Always on Time"

MAY 11–13
Mary: "Mystical Rose"—
Reflections on the Virgin Mary
as Meditated by the Mystics

MAY 18–20
Pentecost Retreat

MAY 25–27
Marriage Enrichment Retreat

MAY 28–JUNE 1
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