



THE VALYERMO
Chronicle

SAINT ANDREW'S ABBEY
NUMBER 260 ✱ SPRING 2019

LETTER *from the* ABBOT

Dear Friends,

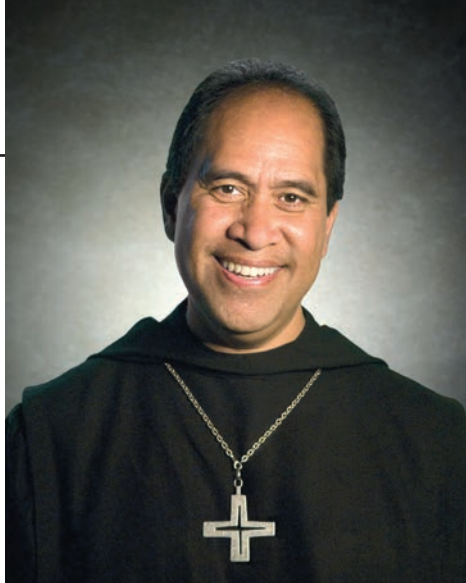
A COUPLE OF MONTHS AGO, I was invited to dinner by my nephew whom I hadn't seen in a few years. We met at a restaurant of his choice in Los Angeles near USC, where he lives. Since I wasn't very familiar with the area, and it was a Friday, I decided to give myself plenty of time to fight traffic, find the place, look for parking, possibly run a few errands, etc.

I found the restaurant much sooner than I anticipated. It was around 4:00. So I took out my phone and searched for the nearest Catholic Church, because I wanted to pray in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament. Fortunately, there was one not far from where I was parked. So I walked about a quarter of a mile, and found it!

It was a typical Catholic church that was built in Los Angeles in the 50s. Big, tall and strong. It was located on the corner of a very busy boulevard, where exhaust fumes from buses and loud music from passing cars seemed part of the natural environment. I could tell that "back in the day" it was a beautiful building, on prime real estate. Today, not so much. It desperately needed paint. Styrofoam cups and plastic wrappers of all sorts littered the sidewalk in front of the church. The parking lot was "protected" by a black iron rod fence with signs posted in three different languages complete with the famous punch line, "violators will be prosecuted."

As I walked up the six steps to the main doors of the church, I passed a sleeping homeless man. Not unusual in these parts of L.A. To my dismay, the doors were locked. Also, not unusual.

So I walked around the church building, going through the iron rod fence, through a maze of walkways and other opened gates,



looking for a side door, knowing that it is more common these days for the side door to be opened. Thankfully, it was. It was actually the front door.

I went in, and found myself in front of the sanctuary and before the Blessed Sacrament. Such an instant feeling of calm, security, gratitude, and familiarity came over me. I immediately felt the presence of God.

There was a group of about 25 school children gathered in the far corner, near the statue of the Blessed Virgin. Some were sitting, some were standing. Their book bags were strewn on pews and on the floor. They were talking quietly and laughing. It brought back wonderful memories of my teaching days in a Catholic school.

There didn't seem to be any particular kind of common activity going on with the children. Perhaps I missed it. Thankfully they were not loud or disrespectful of the sacred space of the church.

Anyway, I genuflected to the Blessed Sacrament, and made my way up a side aisle towards the middle of the empty church, far enough away from the students, but not too far from the sanctuary. As I was putting the kneeler down and giving thanks to God in my heart for allowing me to find this church,

SPRING 2019

I saw a young man, about 18 or 19 years old, rush into the church from the same side door I had just come through.

He reminded me of a seminarian: clean cut, black pants and a tucked in polo shirt with a logo on the breast of the shirt. He probably works in the rectory, I thought. He was walking as fast as possible but being mindful not to run in the church. There must be an emergency somewhere, I thought, because he looked very intense.

To my surprise, he came right up to me. With a very serious and firm look on his face, he said something to me really fast and in Spanish. Although I caught some words, I said, "I don't speak Spanish."

Then he said, "Oh. You can't be here."

Shocked, I asked, "Why? I just came to pray."

"You can't be here," he repeated. "This is a private event." Then he looked sideways to the students.

Surprised that he used the word "private" in a Catholic church, and in disbelief that I was being asked to leave the church, I responded, "Really?"

He said, "Yes."

I said, "I see. Is there another place where I can pray? Is there a Blessed Sacrament chapel?"

He said, "No. I'm sorry sir there's not, but you can't stay here."

So many thoughts and feelings rushed my mind and heart as I made my way back down the aisle, genuflected to the Blessed Sacrament, and then back out of the side door, but the predominant one was sadness.

I was sad because we've come to a point in society and the Church where churches are empty, and the people who want to go in

Continued on page 7

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"The Dormition and Assumption of the Virgin" (1424-1434)

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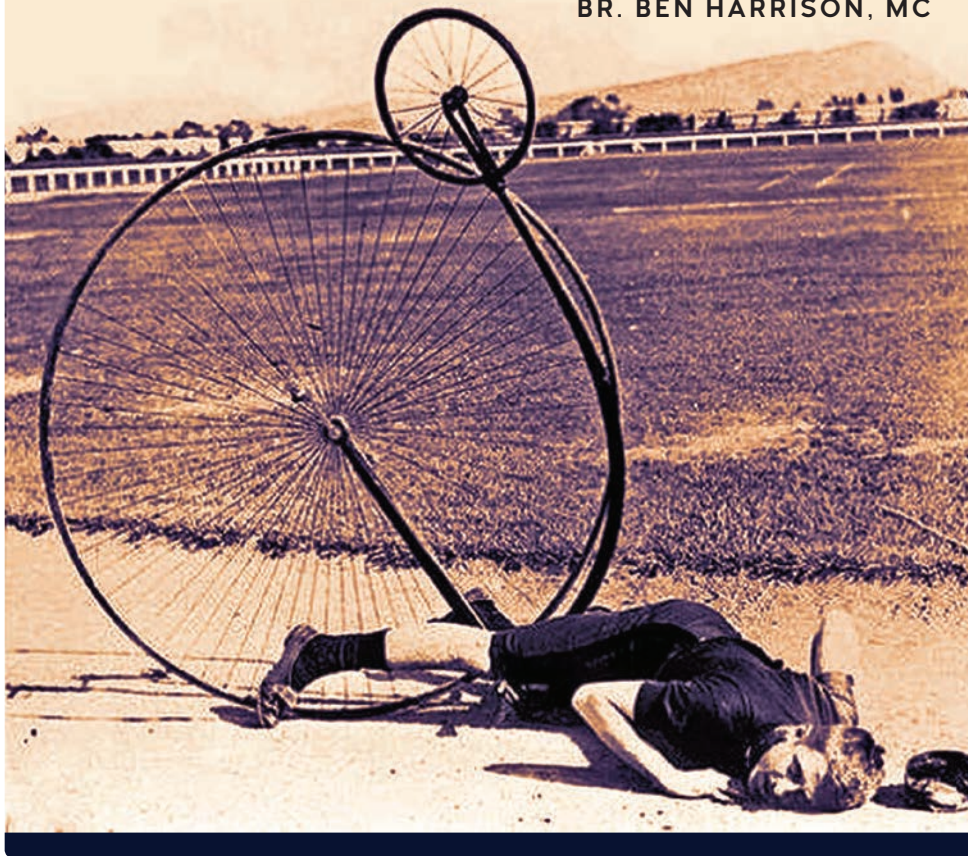
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WE ONLY LEARN BAL-
ance by trial and error. Human nature means that that will usually happen through a certain amount of pain or humiliation, whether that is falling down as a toddler starting to walk, skinning your knees while mastering the bicycle, or embarrassing yourself in front of colleagues at work. Live and learn, that's the motto. Occasionally we may get wise advice from someone who suggests a way we can avoid some of life's pain, but in my experience, I am only willing to listen when I have had a few salutary bumps before the verbal input.

Obviously balance is a very personal thing, dependent on conditions, temperament, and other variables. Bicycling in winter with a heavy coat and icy cross-winds is altogether different from a summer ride in shorts and t-shirt. I remember the relief I felt when, reading about my temperament, I learned that people like me aren't good at heights. We are too top-heavy, too heady and risk-conscious. As a teenager, I stood frozen on a rocky ledge for fifteen minutes after all my companions had jumped because I could imagine shattered shin-bones so vividly. Now I can put that down to temperament not cowardice, and can stop calling myself a wimp.

AS EASY AS FALLING OFF A BIKE

BR. BEN HARRISON, MC



I WANT TO RECOUNT THREE OF THE moments when I learned something about my own sense of balance. In my late twenties I worked for several years at a small charity that was staffed by women religious. I was a resident volunteer, and though I was very responsible regarding my assigned duties, I had a fair amount of free time, which I used to read, to take long walks out in the desert, and to reflect on where my life was heading. Once after I had finished a heavy day of deliveries and lawn mowing, I was chatting with one of the nuns. Commenting on my reflective attitude she said, "You're a natural contemplative."

I said, "Oh, that's nice. I always thought I was just lazy." In fact, no one I had worked for had ever said I was lazy, but as a boy I had always resisted my father's attempts to instill a work-ethic in me, by procrastinating, malingering, or doing a half-hearted job at whatever chores he assigned me. This was put down to laziness. Learning that what had always seemed like a defect could be seen as a gift made a huge difference. Even as a boy, I guess, I needed more time to process my experience than a lot of people. Adult experience has confirmed that need, and I know that if I don't take the time I need, things don't go well for me or anyone who has to deal with me. (I *was* also, I have to confess, a bit lazy and rebellious, no question. My father wasn't totally off the mark.)

Earlier this week I was talking to a friend in the prison where I work, and he was saying how hard it is to adjust from the fast-lane life he was used to "out-side" to the drudgery of same-old days on the wing. And we concluded that one of the few good things about prison is that it does give you time to process what went before (and where you want to go from here). It is like a python that's just swallowed a large rodent, and has to just lie there defenceless and let the digestive juices do their work. But the two of us also

concluded that maybe chasing pleasures less exuberantly and taking life a little slower may make such prison interludes less necessary.

Another lesson I learned at the nuns' was precisely that, slowing down. I used to take the kids for long hikes in the desert, and I noticed that some days I stumbled a lot, repeatedly catching my foot on rocks and snagging my cuffs in bushes. I discovered that walking just a little slower made all the difference.

WHEN I FOLLOWED THROUGH ON THE insights gained during those years, and found my vocation as a brother in active ministry, things went toward the other extreme. It was such a pleasure to have a purpose in life, and to get all the affirmation and satisfaction that I got from my work, that I found it hard to slow down. From being an irresponsible hippie-type I became a hyper-responsible do-it-all. I was wearing so many hats, doing so many different jobs at one point that I had to add another job to my list. I had to generate the additional position of "personal assistant to myself" in order to juggle all my other roles. My to-do-list had three columns, must-do, should-do and could-do. Whenever one task was done I went straight to the next, often without even stopping to think about priorities.

When I complained to my spiritual director, he said, "Right, you are taking on way too much. Talk with your community and decide what you're going to cut, or at least curtail. But two things you absolutely may not cut—your personal prayer time and your running." I had always known that I needed that time each day to process my experiences, so I had never flagged on that hour of quiet in addition to the community prayer times. And, in the year or two before that moment, I had started running about three times a week. My director knew that I absolutely needed those two breaks in my schedule for my sanity—and that therefore

neither I nor my community could afford for me to do without them. I would be simply unliveable.

The running started like this. I had never been athletic as a kid, though I did a lot of walking and swimming. But one of our novices had started running, and he told me how good he felt afterwards, and how peaceful his mind was during meditation times. So I decided to give it a try. "But," he told me, before I started, "never run more than you want to. Never make it a chore. Do it for the pleasure of it, because if you make it into a chore, you'll rebel and you'll quit." He knew me well. I followed his advice, and I ran regularly for more than thirty years. That was a tremendous help to me on many levels — the emotional decompression, the euphoria of good aerobics, long term good health of heart and lungs, time to think, time to enjoy nature (because I always took time to notice the scenery), and even time to strengthen apostolic bonds. How often over the years, during my runs I would providentially come across someone I knew from prison, from a recovery program, from church, or from some other area of my life. Meeting people in such uncharacteristic situations does wonders to fortify bonds of trust and friendship.

WHICH LEADS TO THE THIRD POINT I want to make. The gradual increase, over the years, in my self-acceptance has given me the ability to accept and like a wide variety of other people as well. Precisely because I find so much pleasure in my relationships with people, because the mutual affirmation is so spiritually nourishing, I can get greedy for the buzz of ministry. In my case it isn't so much a co-dependent need to fix problems or a messiah complex to save everybody, it is just the fascination of getting to know people and their journeys—the circumstances

they came from and the possibilities that lie ahead. Jesus said, "Working for God means believing in the one he has sent." As someone following the charism of Mother Teresa, that means for me, believing in the person who stands before me, Jesus in the disguise of my neighbor, and "doing for him what I would like to do for Jesus," whatever simple service that might be. Very often it is not much more than giving my time, being there for people, believing that God has a plan for their lives, and watching respectfully as they seek to find their way and the understanding of truth that will help them follow that way.

But I have learned, through trial and error, that I need to pace myself even in "being there." On the days when I go into the prison and remember to make my first stop the chapel, opening myself to be guided through my day, I have good days, often with happy surprises and unexpected blessings. When I forget to stop in the chapel and go straight into action with my own list of things-to-do, the people I plan to see are often on legal visits, at work, or otherwise unavailable or uninterested. And when I have to miss one of my usual days "inside" because of some community obligation, God seems to compensate my (sometimes grudging) obedience by allowing me a surprise encounter with an old friend, a phone call from someone in early recovery, or an insight that I can share in next week's homily.

As someone who tends to take myself and life a little too seriously, I have also had to learn the value of simple pleasures, of laughing at myself, of accepting an offered cup of coffee (invoking Mark 16:18 if the cup is grubby), of going with the flow and not always being in control, and of accepting help. In fact, when I see that someone seems to mistrust me or have an aversion to me, I have found that it sometimes

helps to show my need, to ask for a little assistance — "What's that guy's name?," "Would you tell your cell-mate Ben stopped by," "Could I borrow your pen a minute?"

Learning by trial and error how to keep a healthy balance in my life is also, strangely, one of the most valuable things I can share with others, whether they be the people I serve in ministry, my brothers in community, my colleagues in work, or friends and family. The beauty of it is that by learning to respect my own needs, by learning to accept my gifts and limitations, and by learning to own all the various factors that make up my humanity, including my tendency to lose my balance, I make myself more available to others and to God.

I can be grateful for my tumbles, I can bandage my skinned knees and laugh at my embarrassing gaffes; and I can say thanks for the wise words that have helped me find the right way of navigating my way through a world that is rich in slippery surfaces, stumbling blocks, and shifting pavements. Balance is not something we achieve and keep. True, once you've learned to ride a bike you never forget, but changing conditions, bad weather, worn tires, pot-holes, broken glass, traffic, pedestrians, dogs and ditches will always keep us vigilant. And if we survive all that, the wobbles of advancing years have a whole new set of challenges in store for us. Balance means, first of all, respect for the law of gravity, and then it means observance of the rule of humility. Acknowledging himself a small human creature, Brother Lawrence wrote, "When I fall, I say to myself, well, what did you expect?" And little St. Therese said that, if we, like toddlers, stay close to the ground, even if we fall we won't hurt ourselves too much. ✖

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.

LETTER FROM THE ABBOT

from page 3

the church to pray are discouraged by locked doors and "private" sessions. Of course, I understand how we got to this point, but the sadness remains.

I was sad because, although he didn't say it, most likely I was asked to leave because I was seen as an "unauthorized person" in the presence of the school children. I understand well the necessary precautions and safeguards the Church has made to protect the children, still the sadness remains.

I was sad because even though he didn't know I was a priest, (since I didn't identify myself as one), I thought that telling him I was a priest might *not* have made things better, but possibly worse. In other words, what is a priest, incognito, doing in a locked church at a "private" event with children? That made me the saddest.

So I went back outside to the main boulevard, to the littered streets and loud music, and I sat on the top step near the sleeping homeless man, and I prayed there.

Thankfully, God is everywhere, and He hears our prayers wherever we happen to be.

Abbot Damien ✖



THE P.A. ANNOUNCEMENT BEGINS: “All seatbelts must be fastened, tray tables in upright locked position, all luggage stowed and put away.” Then the squirming begins. My sister Marty, sitting between my youngest sister, Laura, and me, has to use the bathroom. Can’t she wait? No. She does not understand all the subtleties, all the small pieces that make up the complicated patterns of technologically advanced daily life, as in what is required of passengers during a flight take-off. Because I am in the aisle seat, I am the logical one to disobey all directions and get up to take her to the bathroom. So I do. The flight attendant curtly and loudly directs us to stay seated, but I warn her of the consequences if we do. As Marty lumbers clumsily down the aisle, the plane aborts its lumber down the tarmac. Another P.A. announcement blurts: “Take-off has been disrupted and engines shut down due to passengers out of their seats.” Some glare, some stare, some discretely look away in embarrassment

or empathy as my disabled sister and I lurch our way down the narrow aisle.

I was fifteen years old when Marty was born, and at that age my view of life was narrowed to myself. I was incapable of realizing the future ramifications this tiny premature not-quite-two-pounds infant

might have for me, born with an incompletely developed nervous system, including mental and physical disabilities. Over the years, I got married, had children, finished my education, and worked in a field I loved, all the time moving closer to what would become a new task, a “burden” in the sense of something I must carry, when I became the designated trustee in caring for Marty after the deaths of both my parents.

My sister is afflicted, in that she often suffers because she is physically and mentally challenged; life is difficult for her. The current cultural correctness wants to say “differently abled,” but she is often frustrated, confused, or misunderstood. The “dis” in “disabled” describes something real, an absence of ability to participate in many activities and accomplish many tasks. My role is to make her life as comfortable as possible. But in the process, mine is often made uncomfortable. When she comes to my house, something will be spilled or broken. When I take her out

in public, others — strangers, passers-by on the street, sales clerks in stores — are made uncomfortable by her disability, by her awkward walk, her somewhat odd appearance, her slowed speech and at times inappropriate laugh. Once a relative took her to a Sunday church service; the relative

BURDEN + GIFT

MARY KAUFFMAN

*Monastics may be assigned
a burdensome task...*

*Trusting in God's help,
they must in love obey.*

*The Rule of St Benedict,
Chapter 68*

*“God comforts us in all our
affliction and thus enables
us to comfort those who
are in any trouble, with
the same consolation we
have received from Him.”*

2 Corinthians 1:4

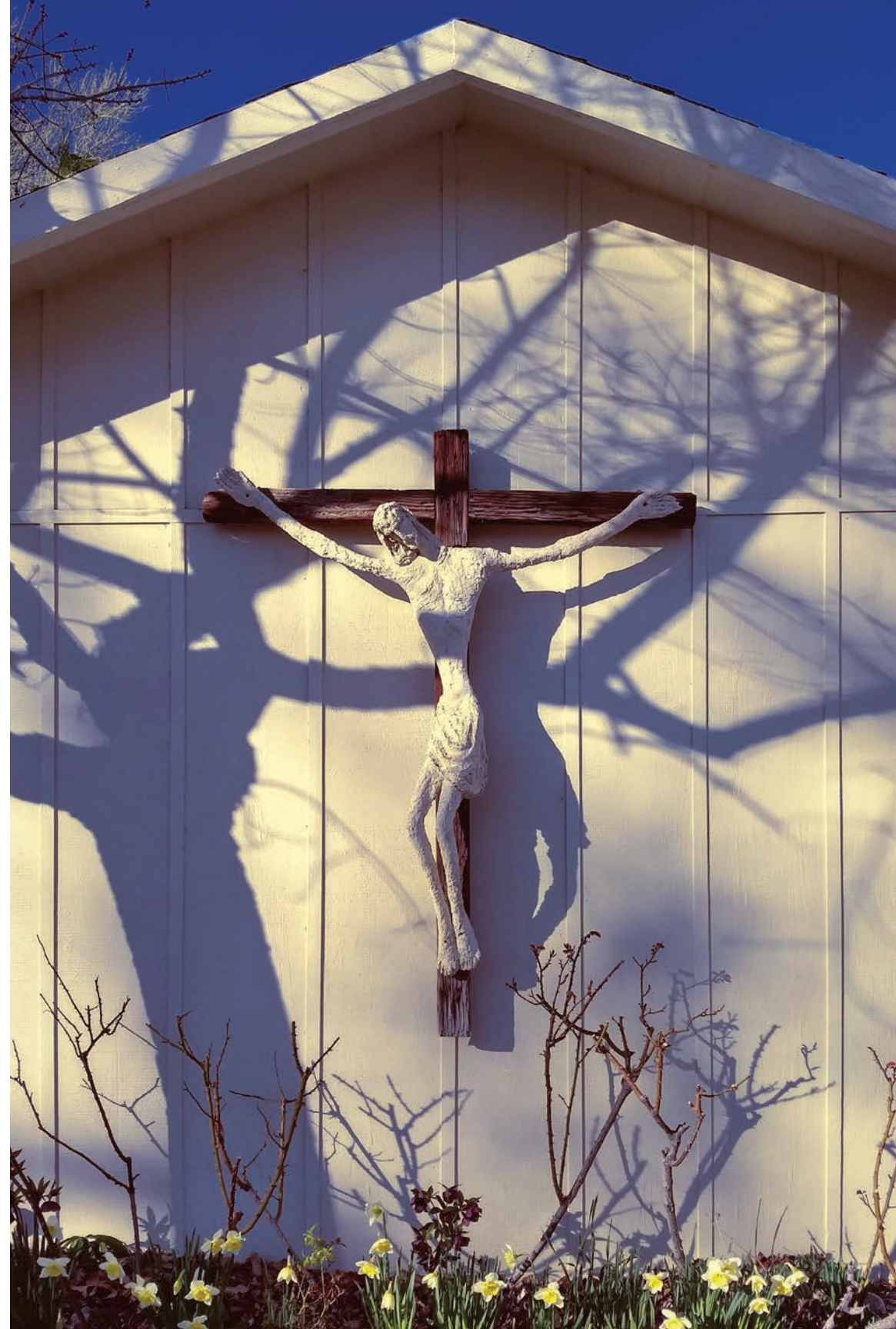


PHOTO: FR. ANGELUS, OSB

was later informed that Marty's presence made some of the congregants "uncomfortable," so could she please not continue to bring her?

But Marty finds comfort in attending church; she loves Mass as it is an attachment to our parents. So when I am feeling brave and caring and willing to handle my own discomfort, she comes with me to Mass. Of course she moves slowly into the pew and sometimes stumbles. As we sit waiting for the service to start, the reverent preparatory quiet is broken by her halting, slow voice: "Hi, Dad" is spoken loudly and clearly into the silence of the sanctuary. "Hi, Mom," always said slowly and loudly with a smile, comes next. Then her "Amen!" is voiced at high volume in response to all the familiar prayers during Mass, but it comes always just a few seconds later than that of the crowd and is heard quite distinctly. She is a lone voice crying out in the serene sanctity of the church. Her attendance at Mass and her responses to liturgy connect her to our parents and the past; they bring her great comfort. But that comfort comes at the cost of discomfort to anyone (probably many) distracted by her behavior.

I overheard a man say that he was very upset by a couple who brought their disabled son to a church service—the son was jumpy, loud, difficult, unable to sit still—the man said he did not go to church to have to "listen to that" and would complain to the pastor. So my question: What *do* we listen to at church? Should I continue to bring comfort to my sister by taking her places where her presence is a disruption and a discomfort to some? Are people listening to the pain and disability and noise of others and finding they just don't want to "listen to that"? Or are they aware that listening to those whose voices are

distorted through no choice of their own, and that accepting and being kind to those whose behavior and presence can be an uncomfortable reminder to us of nature's mistakes and human imperfections, are acts of mercy?

For in the paradoxes of God in our lives, *burden* can also bring *gift*. I have seen beauty come from surprising places as she has evoked unexpected experiences of kindness and generosity of spirit. She used to attend a special camp for the disabled, Camp ReCreation, for one week each summer. Each camper was paired with a personal "buddy," usually a young person who was volunteering time off from school or work to do the physically and emotionally intense work of spending 24/7 with someone who needed their constant care. When my husband and I would attend the closing ceremonies with all the campers and their "buddies," the exuberance, the joy, the attention of these young people—all of whom appeared healthy, attractive, and intelligent—as they accompanied the campers touched our hearts deeply...to see a young man who looks like a football player happily pushing a palsied middle-aged man in a wheel chair and joking with him to make him smile reveals a kind of love that is total generosity. What witnesses these young people were to Christ and their faith! When I attended the last evaluation meeting for Marty at her day-care program, a young man who works there told me that she is a "joy to work with," that she is always in good spirits and never complains, that she is the easiest client they have. I was touched by his perception of her good and simple nature. When I recently needed an attorney so I could amend a provision in the legalities of her care, the one I contacted offered to do the work for free as he has a love of

and appreciation for the disabled and the families who care for them—a true surprise and gift. On our mother's birthday this year, Marty and I stopped in a grocery store to buy flowers for our mother's grave. When the cashier, after a few questions, found out that our mother was dead, she began talking directly to Marty (which rarely happens), asking her gentle questions about our trip to the cemetery and offered a free "Happy Birthday" balloon to go with the flowers.

At the cemetery, Marty always bends over our mother's grave and is very quiet for a few moments; she is listening carefully. She usually utters a "what?" one time and cocks her head as she continues to listen. Then she straightens up and smiles. I ask if she heard something from mom, and yes, she did. What did our mother say to her? "Do the little things." Marty knows how to listen with the ear of her heart.

My children and grandchildren enjoy having Aunt Marty at family events; they

are all at ease with her and don't avoid spending time with her. She is giving especially the grandchildren the gift of knowing and accepting someone who is different, of loving her and seeing her as a normal part of family life.

My parents trusted in God to help them with the burden of a disabled child; those of us in the family who care for Marty have obeyed our parents by continuing her care and trusting in God to help us, also. And He always consoles and comforts us with the gift of amazing moments of human goodness and beauty, true gifts as the wrapping comes in unexpected people and circumstances, gifts open and revealed in surprising moments.

God touches all the deformed, the disabled, the dis-eased through the human warmth and attention we show them. But in His even more mysterious way, He touches me, and those made uncomfortable by Marty's presence, through her. She gives a discomfort and disturbance that we need, to help us get out of our often small and petty places and see a bigger picture, confront and deal with genuine innocence, and remember that we can't fix everything. It is a gift to those of us without a "dis" in our self-descriptions. At times we need to be uncomfortable enough to do something good. ✖

MARY KAUFFMAN is an Oblate of Saint Andrew's Abbey, as is her husband, Curtis. Now retired from teaching, she enjoys sharing her love of reading and writing through participation in different reading and literary groups, particularly those with an emphasis on discovering the transcendent and increasing our Christian awareness through exploration of the written word.





THEIR SPIRITUAL LESSONS TO
be gleaned from *The Lord of the Rings*

A COUPLE OF YEARS AGO, I WAS in Oxford, England with my wife and adult children. We visited the graveside of Mr. and Mrs. Tolkien—their headstone mysteriously inscribed with the elven names: *Beren* and *Luthien*. These are names of a couple that knew adventure and catastrophe, the courage to face the powers of hell and the sorrow that endures painful evils, and they are names that suggest what Tolkien coined as “Eucatastrophe”—a sudden happy ending, hoped for all along, but which comes nonetheless as a joyful surprise just when it is most needed.

My daughter was taking tutorials at New College on the writings of J.R.R. Tolkien and we had, with my mother, decided to visit her for Christmas. She had taken up these studies not only because of her love of literature in general but because of the impact of Tolkien’s fantasy on my family. This involved not only the structure and symbolic content of his fairy stories, but in particular some of the characters that haunted our family life.

A priest friend, Father Raymond Gawronski, S.J. was, in fact, a kind of Gandalf for my Hobbit family from the beginning. The daughter studying Tolkien in fact was, by special permission from his order, his goddaughter. Many a visiting seminarian

On Wizards, Balrogs, & Eucatastrophe

A WORD OF HOPE FROM TOLKIEN ABOUT THE FAILED FELLOWSHIP,
FAMILIES AND FULFILLING THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

DR. ANTHONY LILLES

commented that our home in Colorado reminded them of Bag-End and also joked about the Gandalf figure who touched their lives too. Indeed, our own Gandalf frequented our home more than once to hold secret councils with these dwarves as they plotted new adventures.

Raymond Gawronski was a Jesuit priest and Byzantine Monk from Holy Transfiguration Monastery in Redwood Valley, California. His masterwork is *Word and Silence: Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Spiritual Encounter between East and West*, Second Spring Books, (3rd edition, 2015). He was writing this dissertation while we were students together in Rome and I have used it with countless students through the years to help them begin to ponder the uniqueness of Christian prayer and holiness in relation to the popularity of Eastern practices and emerging spiritual technologies of our time. I collaborated with him and the priests of the Archdiocese of Denver to found the spirituality year for St. John Vianney Theological Seminary, and then again, in helping to launch the spirituality program at St. Patrick’s in Menlo Park.

Fr. Gawronski was an advocate of what he called “contemplative intellectuality.” This great effort took up an approach to prayer rooted in the created beauty discovered through a pursuit of truth in nature and our culture, and, at the same time, a

pursuit of truth in our culture rooted in the uncreated beauty disclosed in prayer. He inspired many contemplatives, intellectuals and priests to go on quests—adventures not unlike those Gandalf invited the hobbits to engage. These adventures were not to magical lands or far away places, though he loved to lead pilgrimages. Neither did he promote elaborate techniques, though he was a student of St. Ignatius’s spiritual exercises. Instead, the journey he helped contemplatives make was into a place of personal encounter, that inner stillness that is vulnerable to the Word of the Father. Rather than mastering methods and promoting states of consciousness, he wanted souls to follow the way of the Desert Fathers through the cultivation of a rugged devotion for Christ fed by daily silent prayer, careful pondering of God’s word, ascetical discipline, and holy friendship.

Such an adventure demanded personal conversion from sin and a discipline of life ordered to the things of God. It meant the courage not only to enter into the difficult silences of loneliness and solitude, but also to patiently search for those deeper and unfamiliar silences in which the heartbreaking joy of the Word made flesh is found. Such a quest also involves facing demons that haunt our hearts, even if only those of one’s own humanity, making each one bow its head and bend its knee before the sovereign majesty

of Love Himself.

While we were in Oxford, Fr. Gawronski was taking seminarians, priests and young adults on an adventure to the lonely mountains of Switzerland. There this fellowship of contemplative intellectuals would celebrate outdoor masses on dramatic alpine ridges, listen to lectures on the Swiss theologian, Hans Urs von Balthasar, and to visit the graves of von Balthasar and, his sister in the spirit, Adrienne von Speyr. Fr. Gawronski tried to connect with us on a stopover in London on his way back to the States, but we would not make that meeting. It saddens me to think of this now because he would die only a few months later — but only after having visited our home one more time and we visiting him for one final Triduum together.

In Tolkien's novel, the wizard Gandalf confronts death in the form of a hellish beast: a Balrog. In the mythology developed by Tolkien for his fantasies, Wizards and Balrogs were the same order of creature — in some way equal in power but not in goodness. One was the keeper of the "Secret Fire", while the other kept in darkness.

In Tolkien's story, Gandalf puts himself between the Balrog and the Fellowship. The fellowship was a seeming ragtag band of men, with an elf, a dwarf and a few hobbits. This company sets out on a desperate journey to destroy a magical ring. The ring provided power that was tempting to seize: invisibility, control, success, long life, and escape from this world. Yet to take advantage of this was to make oneself the slave of an evil foe. Only by destroying the ring do the heroes have any hope of thwarting an inimical plot against humanity by which an overwhelming evil power would bring the whole of "Middle Earth" into slavery.

Stratford Caldecott (a friend of Fr. Gawronski of happy memory) understood that this ring was a kind of symbol for something

that we all must also fight against in this life. This is, namely, sin. To sin is to seize power against God and the beautiful order that He has established for our lives and the world, an order characterized by His generous and gentle solicitude for us. Sin affects us in ways similar to the effect of the ring on those who attempted to wield it — just as the ring rendered its users invisible and weak, use of sin's power always diminishes freedom and overshadows our dignity. To resist this diminishment is to fight for freedom and life — not only for one's own self, but also for all those we love, the fellowship of which we are part. At the same time, to take the side of God in this fight means, as it did for the Fellowship of the Ring, to face monsters and a host of seemingly impossible adventures and battles.

What is most curious about the fellowship of Tolkien's adventure is that the greatest heroes are the most hidden until the end of the adventure — and these are namely the hobbits, creatures no taller than children. At the beginning of the fellowship, the hobbits are more or less a happy go lucky bunch. They would rather live comfortably in the Shire and smoke their pipes than have an adventure. They were the unlikely candidates for taking on dark lords or changing the history of the world. When they meet the Balrog, what little possibility they had for a successful outing was eclipsed by inescapable catastrophe.

This is where Gandalf's last stand illustrates the reason for our hope as Christians. As the Balrog closes in on the company in its vain attempt to cross a dangerous bridge, Gandalf faces the monster down and summoning his magic, commands, "Go back to the Shadow. You cannot pass!" The creature attempts to defy the command to its own peril and suddenly begins to fall into the abyss, but not without pulling Gandalf down with him. Gandalf's last cry to the Fellowship before he

disappears from the story is, "Fly, you fools!"

Raymond Gawronski was dying of esophageal cancer. There were barely two months between his diagnosis and death. My family was privileged to spend his last Easter in this life with him and some of his student-priests. He offered his final Easter vigil homily in a small side chapel at St. Patrick's Seminary. We were in shock and tears even as the joy of being together with this spiritual master lingered through the liturgy. He preached that the Christian life has three syllables — new birth, death, resurrection. He explained that while he was suffering death, death is not the last syllable of the life won for us by Christ: the resurrection still lay ahead.

Death is a Balrog — a monster from the shadows of hell. It would threaten all that is good, noble and true about our existence, everything beautiful about what it means to be a human being. It would devour all that we hold dear and subject our noble but frail fellowship with one another to utter futility. Yet, beyond every fantasy that human invention can manage, a hero has stepped in between this fate and us on the bridge of life. If death attempted to pull the King of Glory into the depths, Christ followed it into the hell of our own hearts to vanquish him there once and for all. This Crucified God rescued us from death's grasp so that we are no longer vulnerable to its sting — if only, instead of fleeing, we will draw close to our Risen Lord.

In Tolkien's story, the tale of Gandalf after his disappearance is told only after the Fellowship has completely fallen apart. The hobbits are all missing or else prisoners. The only evidence left suggests the very worse has befallen them. All the best-laid plans have run amiss. This is when Gandalf re-enters the story and tells his own adventure — a much-needed word of hope that begins to turn the tide of the adventure.

Gandalf the Grey is resurrected as a

dazzling wizard. The other characters do not recognize him at first and he does not at first even remember the name by which they knew him. He radiates a new identity with astonishing new power. He explains that after his disappearance, his battle with the beast had only just begun. They fought into the depths of the underworld until Gandalf cast the beast from a high mountain. It was the ordeal of defeating the beast that caused Gandalf to forget almost everything about his old life. His victory however also conferred a new confidence and wisdom that will be vital for the failed fellowship to fulfill its mission.

I do not know why we need to contend with the evil that we confront in life. I would rather be left, adventure free, to a comfortable existence in the shire, smoking pipes and drinking pints. Adventures are never convenient affairs, filled as they are with all kinds of hidden costs — for who can love except at one's own expense? The ending is rarely happy and unless you persevere to the end, any stories that you have about your own adventure are not worth telling.

Yet the forgetfulness and wisdom that Gandalf acquires because of his brush with death are consistent with what happens when we struggle in the trials and challenges of life with faith. Somehow, through these spiritual battles, we too become forgetful of who we once were while we also become wise with a new identity Christ Himself entrusts to us. This wisdom, the truth about who God sees us to be, we need if we are to persevere to the end of the story that the Lord has entrusted to us.

I love the image of a failed fellowship that, against all odds, fulfills its mission all the same. It speaks to me of the Church today and of our broken families — of all the friendships that we hold most dear and that seem threatened by all kinds of evils. For the Church is a

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THE LETTERS OF SAINT PAUL contain paradoxical statements. These seemingly self-contradictory utterances count among his best-known sayings. In Gal 2:20, for instance, Paul famously states that he is and that he is not: “It is *no longer I* who *live*, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life *I now live* in the flesh *I live* by faith in the Son of God.”* In 2 Cor 12:10, he declares: “Whenever I am weak, then I am strong.” Paradoxical language, for Paul, describes not just his experience of Christian living. Paul applies similarly perplexing statements to the person of Christ. For instance, in Gal 3:13 he says that Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us. In 2 Cor 5:21, he declares: “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin.” Why does Paul use such a language? What is he trying to say? Let us begin by looking closely at likely the most perplexing of his statements, the one about sinless Christ being made sin.

Interpreters of Saint Paul have wondered what it means for the one who knew no sin to become sin. Some have suggested that Paul wants to say that sinless Jesus became sinner. On the cross, the sinless one not only dies a death reserved for criminals, that is, sinners; he does something more. He identifies himself with sinful humanity so much that he in fact becomes a sinner. But why then Paul does not simply say that he who knew no sin became sinner? Perhaps the answer is that calling Christ a sinner is theologically impossible. God cannot make something good into something evil. Making sinless Jesus into an enemy of God, that is, a sinner, would amount to such an impossibility. The phrase — “made him to be sin who knew no sin” — must be understood differently.

One possible way to understand Paul here is to argue that when Paul speaks of

Jesus becoming a sin, he means not a sin but a sin offering: God made him who knew no sin to be a sin offering. Indeed, in ceremonial instructions of the law of Moses, the Hebrew noun *battat* as well as its Greek equivalent *hamartia* refer both to “sin” and to “the sin offering.” Paul would be then employing the Old Testament way of speaking by saying “sin” in the sense of “sin offering.” However, this interpretation too encounters some difficulties. This time they have to do with the Greek diction. Yes, the word “sin” (*hamartia*) can mean “the sin offering,” nevertheless in combination with the verb “to make” (*poieo*) it needs to be accompanied by the Greek preposition *peri* (“concerning”) to unambiguously mean

PAULINE PARADOXES

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“making sin offering,” or in literal translation of Greek, “making concerning sin.” For instance, when in Lev 9:7 Moses says to Aaron: “Draw near to the altar and make offering for your sin,” he literally says: “Draw near to the altar and make (*poieson*) concerning (*peri*) the sin (*hamartias*) of yours.” Paul does not write this way and thus is best understood as saying that him who knew no sin God “made sin” (*hamartian epoiesen*). Still, how can a person be made to be sin?

One way to digest Paul’s strange expression is to see it as metonymy, that is, the figure of speech in which the name of an attribute of a thing is used for that of the thing meant. We use this figure when we speak, for instance, of one city attacking another and mean not so much the city itself as its

citizens or its army. Paul then says “sin” but what he means are the consequences that inevitably result from sin, such as suffering, death, and the experience of alienation from God. One who knew no sin was made to be, that is, to take into himself suffering, death, and godforsakenness that sin produces. We can still ask why does Paul use the word “sin” and not, more correctly, the consequences of sin? The answer is intimated by the second half of Paul’s paradoxical statement: God “made him sin who knew no sin” Paul says, “so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor 5:21). Just as Jesus becomes sin, we become righteousness. For Paul, it is ultimately about the radical confrontation of sin and righteousness. Admittedly, it would have been more correct to say that Jesus took upon himself the consequences of our sins and that we are to become righteous rather than righteousness. But the sense of radicality of salvation would have been then less palpable. For Paul, it is not just about attributes of things, it is the thing itself that is at stake; the reality of sin and the reality of righteousness. Something radical is being said and it needs to be said in a radical way.

Paul’s apocalyptic outlook — a vision of reality in which supra-human forces break in on the human realm — can certainly be discerned in his preference for the language about sin and righteousness. For Paul, we live in the world of powers and principalities, forces bigger than individual self. Two such powers, sin and righteousness, have clashed and Paul wants us to know that their final confrontation has taken place. But even here, in the midst of the cosmic struggle between sin and righteousness, in all its apocalyptic proportions, it is not so much the cosmic forces as the person of the one “who loved me” (Gal 2:20) that emerges clearly as the center of Paul’s thought. The cosmic

categories, so important for Paul, are in final analysis subsumed under the category of the person of Christ. The struggle of cosmic powers takes place in the person of Jesus Christ. It is the person of Jesus, his suffering and dying body and his anguished soul, that is the proper arena for the cosmic confrontation. It is the resurrected body of Jesus that guarantees final victory. Christians can pass from sin to righteousness only in the same arena, that is, in Christ. The passage from sin to righteousness, in its cosmic and apocalyptic proportions, is effected as a relationship with the Son of God “who loved me and gave himself for me” (Gal 2:20). A thoroughgoing personalism permeates Paul’s thinking, not apart from but rather within its cosmic and apocalyptic dimensions.

Ultimately, for Paul, Christ becomes our cosmos, the place where we Christians live. We are his body (1 Cor 12:27); baptized into his death (Rom 6:3); so that we may live with him who “died to sin, once for all” and “lives to God” (Rom 6:1). We no longer live by ourselves, Christ lives in us and we live in him. Our weaknesses — the consequences of our sins — are his; his resurrected life — the fruit of his undying faithfulness to the Father — is ours. Future, opened up by apocalyptic victory, invades the present moment. Undying life sustains bodies destined for death. As we live, “we are always being given up to death for Jesus’ sake, so that the life of Jesus may be made visible in our mortal flesh” (2 Cor 4:11). Where cosmic and personal, future and present, death and life, mine and Christ’s cross, the language retreats to paradoxes. ✠

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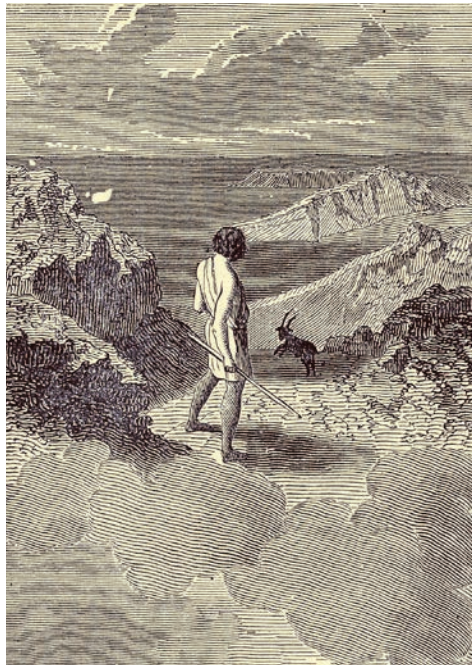
* All scriptural quotations are taken from NRSV

My colleague Dung Tran and I recently wrote a chapter in a textbook on workplace spirituality and we focused on the Rule of Benedict. After reviewing the contents of Benedict's 6th century Rule we reflected on what it offers a 21st century audience, identifying four key dynamics: Community, Hospitality, Humility, and Charity. In early August, Fr. Francis Benedict, O.S.B., and I will explore these in more detail in the week-end retreat "Leadership & the Rule: The Wisdom of Community." This essay is adapted from the chapter on workplace spirituality.

THESE ARE TURBULENT TIMES.

Refugees are pouring out of the Middle-east into Europe and elsewhere, driven by violence between governments and radical Islamic forces. Besides antagonism toward the mostly Muslim refugees, a virulent anti-Semitism is on the rise in Europe, and nationalist political parties are gaining power throughout the West. In Great Britain, citizens voted to exit from the European Union; in the United States, the recent presidential election campaign overturned the traditional values of civility and truthfulness, and a candidate who marginalized immigrants and Muslims was elected. Even in one of the richest countries of the world, the disparity between the rich and poor in the United States is increasing while at the same time, previously created "safety nets" for the marginalized are undone or under attack by politicians who question why the "haves" should help the "have nots," why the healthy should help the sick, and why the wealthy should pay more taxes than the poor and middle-class. A growing sense of disorder, *angst*, and *malaise* is gripping more and more countries, if not the entire world.

Disorder, *angst*, and *malaise* are words that may also be used to describe the social, political, and moral climate of sixth-century Europe, where the order established by the Roman Empire had finally collapsed into political and social chaos. It was within this



Remedies For OUR TIMES

DR. MICHAEL CAREY

fragmented world that a Christian monk named Benedict of Nursia led a small community of men to nurture stability, receptivity, and a commitment to relationship. Although in the sixth century, Benedict entered into an already existing institutional monastic culture that was three hundred years old. In his lifetime, he was able to see how that culture had drifted from the foundations of Christian ascetics who had originally separated themselves from society by withdrawing into the Egyptian desert. These early individuals left society to live in isolated communities in order to disentangle themselves from a society increasingly devoid of respect for human dignity and community: Benedict's insight was that their rejection of society was not

a rejection of living in community, but rather a rejection of what they saw as the systematic oppression of people that made living in authentic community impossible.

The early Christians withdrew from the world and the company of others in order to seek the ultimate purpose of their lives in God's eyes, and their search led them back to each other and into communities of meaning. Benedict understood this dynamic, and knew that the formation of the individual as an instrument of God's will in the world required a community that would both support and challenge the individual to overcome his or her self-embeddedness and the prejudices, resentments, desires, and fears that came with what might be described today as narcissism. The "life alone" that is the definition of a monk described not an escape from the world because it was evil, but rather a solitary search for how to engage the world as an instrument of God's will and by doing so, help to make it the Kingdom of God.

The valuable gift that Benedict gave to the formation of men and women who desired to become agents of positive growth—and even transformation—was his focus on the practical ways in which a community could be formed and maintained that would nurture the balance between the freedom of the autonomous search for self and the responsibilities of the common life lived together. For the early Christians and for Benedict, the true self was to be found, not through separation from the other, but through relationship with the other marked by love, compassion, and care. For Benedict, the false self was constructed by each man or woman based upon fears, desires, resentments, and anger. The creation of a false self was also an attempt to hide from God, who called the individual to surrender his or her need to control, to die to selfishness, and to become an instrument of God's will in the world.

What are the lessons for today to be learned from the experience of 1500 years

of Benedictine monastic life? In the disorder, *angst*, and *malaise* of our current time, how can we create authentic communities that will safeguard the values of service, civility, and civic responsibility that are under attack in an increasingly oppressive world? How can we balance autonomy and the common good in our daily lives in the world? How can we engage the world as instruments of healing, transformation, and love? In applying the wisdom of the *Rule of Benedict* and of 1500 years of its application in a variety of cultures to our turbulent times, four key dynamics of the Benedictine method illustrate what an alternative future might look like: Community, Hospitality, Humility, and Charity.

COMMUNITY

The roots of Benedictine monasticism reach into the early failures of individuals who fled society to live alone in the Egyptian desert. Repulsed by an oppressive culture and longing to live life deliberately, these individuals believed that by living separated from others they could attain a holistic vision. What many of them found, however, was that they were unprepared to see more clearly what God desired of them as their bias, fears, and desires quickly rose to the forefront and overpowered their search for meaning.

What was missing in the formation of these early hermits was another person or community of persons to confront and question their oftentimes confused or self-centered thoughts. In the absence of mentors, counselors, and companions, it is likely that even an individual with the purest intentions can unwittingly confuse delusional thinking for wisdom. The recognition of this danger to spiritual, emotional, and even physical health led to the development of informal communities centered around a man or woman who could act as a guide to learning how to live life deliberately.

This is the *coenobium* that Benedict encounters two centuries later, and his insight

is that spiritual, emotional, and physical health is not only dependent on a wise man or woman—an abbot or abbess—but on the day-to-day relationships that each monk has with others in the community. The *Rule of the Master* that pre-dated Benedict emphasized the influence of the abbot to the point that the measure of successful growth was that a monk was able to beat out the competition to become the next abbot. Benedict removed the language and thinking around competition in the *Rule of the Master*, and emphasized the mutual obedience found in relationships.

The alternative to the oppression created by a competitive view of life are small communities that nurture mutual relationships, both for their own sake and to enable others to grow spiritually, emotionally, and physically. Such small communities both represent and bring about an alternative future in which competition is not the means to and goal of a life lived deliberately.

HOSPITALITY

Throughout the history of Benedictine monasticism may be found the offering of hospitality to the stranger, formalized in the *Rule* as “to receive guests as Christ.” If the guest coming to the community is to be treated as Christ, this requires more from the monks than simple acceptance of the guest’s presence in their lives: serving the guest becomes a way to operationalize what each individual has learned about who he or she is before God. The relationships that are at the heart of the challenge and support provided by the *coenobium* are further integrated in each monk by welcoming the guest, who often may be a complete stranger.

The *Rule* adjusts the normal rhythm of life in the monastery to provide for the needs of the guest. The assignment of a porter or gatekeeper who is available at all times and the provision of special kitchen and dining facilities as well as lodging areas allow meeting the needs of guests based on the guest’s schedules

rather than on the monastic schedule. If the guest is to be seen as Christ, then extraordinary effort must be made to make the guest feel welcomed. Given that strangers can also be threats to the well-being of the monastery, Benedict requires that the guests enter into the authentic relationships of the community as well, thus showing their desire—even for a short time—to join the community in its mission and also add fresh challenges and support to community life through their interaction.

Today the stranger is more often viewed not as a possible threat, but as an actual one, by the very fact of not being a member of the community. The identification of refugees from war-torn countries and *persona non-grata* is not only against the concept of hospitality, but is oppressive and unjust. The monastic community under the *Rule of Benedict* understood that the stranger brought with him or her new opportunities for growth, both for each individual and for the entire community. The same is true today, as immigrants bring with them new opportunities for growth among those who must adapt their lives to their participation in the community.

The lesson of Benedictine hospitality for us is that we must work against the fundamentalism that excludes those who are different than us, or the nationalism that seeks to protect the borders from the entry of anyone not of our race, religion, or ideology.

HUMILITY

Growth in humility is at the heart of the formation Benedict envisions for the individual entering the spiritual workshop of the monastic community. If the “why” of living under the *Rule of Benedict* is the attainment of purity of heart—that is, the ability to see clearly what is happening around you and to respond instinctively to what you are called to do—then the “how” of attaining purity of heart is through the cultivation of humility. For Benedict, humility has nothing to do with humiliation (although humiliation can be

effectively responded to through humility). Humility means that one sees oneself as one is, with both strengths and weaknesses, gifts and limitations; it is through humility that the monk engages reality on reality’s own terms, and can then respond appropriately.

Humility is the exact opposite of narcissism, of twisting reality to fit one’s selfish ends, of acting in ways that protect one’s distorted view of the world.

CHARITY

Benedict understood from his reflection on the first letter of Paul to the Corinthians that charity—what we now call love—was the greatest of the three virtues of faith, hope, and charity. The classic definition of charity skirts the concept of love, usually describing it as a feeling of benevolence or being well-meaning to others. It is from that meaning that charity is defined as giving to others in need.

More than 1500 years of monastic communities living under the *Rule of Benedict* gives proof of their concern with providing for the poor who come to their doors. But the real wisdom of the *Rule* goes beyond charity as donations to charity as love. Benedict constantly urges that the other deserves charity not because the monk is a Christian, but because the other *is* Christ. For Benedict, each person the monk encounters—whether a poor person living outside of the monastery, a pilgrim knocking on the monastery door, or another monk sleeping in the same dormitory room—are Christ in the here and now.

By asking that they see the other as Christ in the here and now, Benedict makes sacred every encounter for the monks. This exhortation to make every encounter an engagement with Christ is directed to the ancient goal of the monastic life, the attainment of purity of heart. If the monk understands that God is present in the other, then the monk is more alert, more open, more willing to respond fully to what he or she is being called to do in each “here and now” moment. ✕

ON WIZARDS, ETC.

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frail band of believers often in retreat—and today it feels as if we are almost running from Jerusalem in the direction of Emmaus—away from the cross, back to our old ways before the Lord invited us out of what we deemed comfortable and familiar. Discouraged disciples who do not recognize the mysterious stranger walking with us on the way, our love for one another and for Christ, though crushed in dismay, remains a sure part of the story, a foothold on which Christ may yet pull us back in the right direction.

Here begins, in love’s foothold, that search for a deeper silence that Father Gawronski invited his students to seek and that drew them to seek his counsel. The battle to be faithful to the task given us by God, even as our fellowship is threatened and seems to fall apart, challenges us to find and enter a deeper silence, the silence where alone the deep dug well of Christ’s love overflows our lives. Such silence is not the nihilistic fall into the dark fire of meaninglessness. Instead, if we listen with ear of our heart, in this silent fullness echoes the first sound of the final syllable of life.

The Secret Fire that burns in this kind of silence can set one’s whole existence ablaze, making it radiant with a power unfamiliar to this old tired world even when our fellowship seems to have utterly failed its purpose. Just when all seems lost and all our plans foiled, Christ enters our story in ways that we do not recognize at first. He reveals the truth. He turns the tide. He swiftly advances with a message and plan of hope. He reveals Himself to be what Tolkien calls the Eucatastrophe—the sudden happy ending for which we hoped all along but that surprises us all the same because when it comes, our sudden salvation is always better than what



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- 26-28 Discernment in Daily Life
- 28-30 In the Spirit of AA:
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- 29 God in America: Judeo-Christian
Values in American History

JULY

- 5-7 Humility
- 8-12 Benedictine Spirituality: Monastic
Virtues in the *Rule* of St. Benedict
- 12-14 Spiritual Gifts Workshop
- 17 Take Charge of Your Life
- 19-21 Summer Dance Workshop: Dancing
the Psalms & Songs of Creation

- 26-28 Contemporary Cinema & Spirituality:
Summer Session
- 29-8/2 Getting to Know You: An Exploration
into the Lives & Teachings of
Lesser Known Benedictines

AUGUST

- 9-11 Leadership & the Rule: The
Wisdom of Community
- 16-18 Praying in the Circle of St. John
- 21 Take Charge of Your Life
- 23-25 Who Am I? Meeting the Self in the
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- 26-30 Sophia/Wisdom in the Writings
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