

THE VALYERMO
Chronicle

SAINT ANDREW'S ABBEY
NUMBER 261 ✕ SUMMER 2019

J.M.W. Turner

LETTER *from the* ABBOT

Dear Friends,

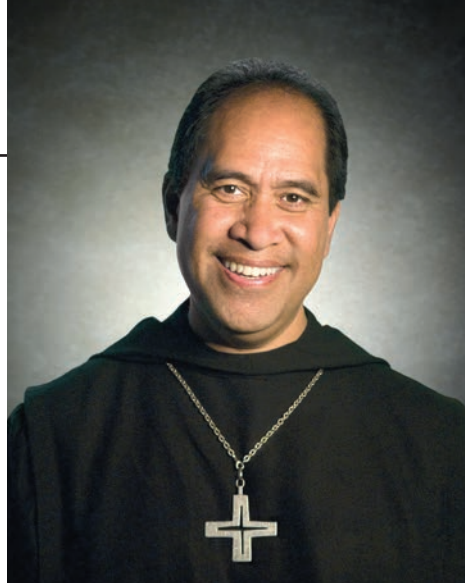
PRAYER IS SUCH AN INTIMATE moment between God and us. It's a time when we speak freely to God about what is in our hearts—especially our burdens, our worries, and our deepest desires. In the Gospels, we actually hear what God Himself longs for. And one of the things Jesus most longs for is unity among His followers.

He didn't pray that we be holy. He didn't pray that we understand the scriptures. He didn't pray that we be nice to each other. He prayed for oneness. This desire and prayer of God is something we need to pay more attention to because unity among the disciples of Christ is the sign of God's presence in the world. It is *this* that will turn the hearts of non-believers to God. Jesus said it Himself: "so that they may all be one [...] that the world may believe that you sent Me."

Oneness among the followers of Christ is not about holding hands and singing Kum-baya and feeling happy and warm inside. It's about imitating God Himself who is three in one, the undivided unity. It's a unity in the one Spirit that makes thousands of believers one body: the Body of Christ, formed and molded in and by the love of God. This oneness of the Spirit strengthens the Body for the work towards the one goal—the fulfillment of the will of the one God!—that all be saved, to seek and save the lost, to make known the love of the Father, to spread the Good News of forgiveness and reconciliation through the sacrifice of Jesus.

The unity of believers is about moving, thinking, and acting as one Body for the one purpose of fulfilling God's will in the world.

We can understand why the prayer of Jesus that all be one is so important. Because just as the sign of unity can turn the hearts



of non-believers to God, so can the sign of disunity and division have the opposite effect of turning hearts *away* from God.

Perhaps living in 2019, we can understand why it was "this" that Jesus prayed for and not something else. Today there are thousands of different Protestant Christian denominations in the world. That's hardly a sign of unity.

Today also, it is no secret that there are very strong disagreements among the Catholic bishops. There are strong differences among Catholic theologians, and blatant challenges to the Magisterium from Catholic institutions of higher learning and from Catholic public leaders. And we will never forget the scandals in the Church that pit bishop against bishop, and priests against bishops, and worse yet, that cause the faithful permanent injury and even to lose their faith. Yes, we can understand why Jesus prayed for unity for His disciples: because a kingdom divided against itself cannot stand.

If Jesus prayed for unity, then we too must pray for unity and work towards it through His commandment to love. It is love alone that will conquer and heal the division in the Body of Christ. As St. Paul writes, "put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity." (Col. 3:14)

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Perhaps we are, in a large part, the answer to the Lord's prayer for unity. Every time we love like Him, every time we think, move, and act together with the Head of the Body, every time we lay down our own will so that the Father's will—to save the lost—can be fulfilled through us, we are responding to the Lord's prayer for unity.

May the Eucharist we receive, Itself the sacrament of unity, encourage us and strengthen us to pray fervently and work diligently for unity in the Body of Christ, as our Lord Himself had prayed.

Abbot Damien ✠

CORRECTION: The last five words of Dr. Lillis' article "On Wizards etc." in the Spring issue were inadvertently left out. Apologies to all, especially Dr. Lillis. The complete final paragraph reads:

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 we could ever have imagined. ✠

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Do *for the* GOOD Love of GOD

FR. PATRICK SHERIDAN

ST PAUL HAD ALMOST HAD IT WITH THE CHRISTIANS IN CORINTH (1 COR 15:12, 16–20).

He had spent the first fourteen chapters of this letter addressing their lax morals and weak Church discipline. Now, as he drew to a close, he took up the even deeper question of doctrine.

The Corinthians were flirting with some fancy new interpretations of Christ's resurrection, and St. Paul had to reel them in, because, as he put it, "If Christ has not been raised...we are the most pitiable people of all."

The Resurrection is the very foundation of our faith. It is what separates Jesus from every other world figure, and gives unique weight to his teachings.

Many great historical figures have led exemplary lives, taught wise doctrines, and even died for the truth. But only one has risen from the dead.

And why exactly is this claim so crucial?

First of all, in Christ's resurrection, goodness and power finally unite. No one was as good as Christ, but what good would his goodness have done if in the end evil had won the day?

Second, in Christ's resurrection, love proves that it is stronger than death. In Christ and in his resurrection, a new—a wildly new—hope dawns for all humankind, the hope that if we stay united to him

through the love that springs from faith and grace, we will rise with him, rise from our tombs and live with him forever.

No one else offers such a victory and such a hope, because no one else has risen from the dead to be able to offer it—only Jesus Christ.

One reason we fail to think about the Resurrection as often as we should may have to do with the 18th-century German philosopher, Immanuel Kant. Kant drew up a new system of philosophy, called Transcendental Idealism, which he hoped would correct the errors of the prevailing philosophies in Europe at the time, Rationalism and Empiricism. It did, but it also introduced some new errors of its own.

One of these regarded happiness and good deeds. He said the only truly good



FRA ANGELICO, THE RESURRECTION AND THE WOMEN AT THE TOMB

deeds are those done with complete indifference — out of a sense of duty. Any desire for satisfaction for having done good or any desire for reward is wrong.

Our culture is still infected with this heresy. Christians are often criticized for doing the right thing “in order to get to heaven,” as if the desire for heaven were a sin.

Peter Singer, Princeton University’s infamous professor of ethics (who happens to accept infanticide as morally permissible in certain circumstances), recently criticized Saint Theresa of Calcutta in this way. He wrote that Bill Gates is much more virtuous, since he donates money to help the poor without caring about whether he gets to heaven.

Professor Singer neglects to mention that Bill Gates is looking for happiness just as much as Saint Theresa was — he’s just looking in a different place.

Have you ever felt just a tad guilty because you find yourself being obedient to God because you desire the rewards He’s promised? Is it selfish to want to receive those things? Shouldn’t you want to do the right thing purely out of a love and desire to please God? These are all questions many Christians have wrestled with at some point. The idea of not being motivated by the rewards He’s promised sounds good, but does it hold up when tested against Scripture? Is it wrong to desire a heavenly reward for doing good?

In Matthew 16:24-27 we read,

Then Jesus told his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his

FRA ANGLICO, “THE BLESSED,”
DETAIL FROM THE LAST JUDGMENT



soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul? For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done.”

Here we see Jesus explaining to his disciples the sacrifices one will need to make in this world to follow Him. The disciples already understood that Christ was worth far more than anything they would be giving up in this life, but Jesus brings the conversation full circle with a promise to repay each person for what they have done. Since this promise of rewards is coming from Jesus, we can automatically conclude that it is not wrong to be motivated by rewards. If it was wrong, that would mean Christ is tempting us, which we know He cannot do.

Rewards are mentioned throughout scripture and we continue to see them being used as motivation for our actions. Here are just a few examples:

Luke 6:35: “But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High....”

Luke 14:13-14: “But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just.”

Galatians 6:9: “And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.”

In the mid-1500s St. Thomas More was condemned to death for refusing to support King Henry VIII’s claim to be the head of the Church, superior even to the Pope. While he was in prison, awaiting his execution, the king sent in Thomas’ wife to convince him to change his mind.

She begged him to obey the king so that his life would be spared. He answered: “And how long, my dear wife, do you think I shall live if I do what you ask me?” She said, “For at least twenty years.”

“Well,” he answered, “if you had said twenty thousand years, that would have been something; but it would, indeed, be a very poor thing to live even that number of years, and run the risk of losing my God in eternity.”

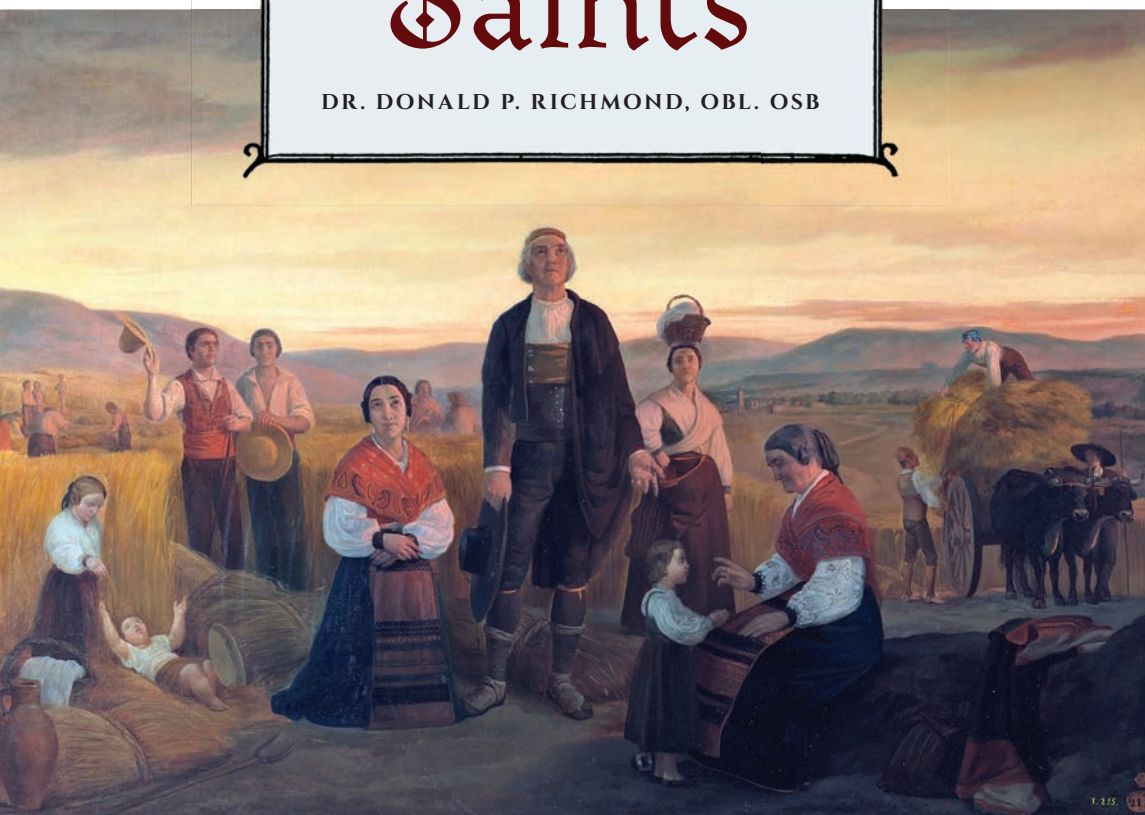
The desire for heaven is not a sin! That’s what we were made for! Heaven, communion with God, everlasting happiness, the resurrection on the last day — this is our natural — or better said, our SUPERNatural — goal in life. We’re supposed to want it! It would be unnatural NOT to desire it.

So do good. Do good for love of God. Do good for love of your neighbor. And don’t feel guilty that God will reward you. He wants to! ❖



RAISING \$aints

DR. DONALD P. RICHMOND, OBL. OSB



THE MISSION OF THE Church, of whatever denomination, is to raise saints. This is a high calling and, if we believe at least some contemporary thinkers, it one of the two principal ways by which effective evangelism occurs. That is, saints communicate Christ's good news *by being good news*.

But how are saints raised? What can be done to nurture holy lives and holy living? If, according to Jacques Maritain, "the greatest sorrow is not to be a saint," how do we more fully become what God has called

us to be? If "the glory of God is a person fully alive," how do we become more alive by being more godlike? There are at least three steps that we must ascend.

First, we must recognize that sanctification is, in large part, God's work. God must change the heart. God must re-orient our head, heart and hands. God, as the Creation Narrative relates, must breathe new life into the promise of the human person. Holiness is not the work of human striving. It is the work of humble surrender. All too often we want to walk with God, but only according

to our own will and our own way. We want, often unconsciously, to justify and sanctify ourselves. But the righteousness of God is not, strictly speaking, our work. God's word to us, as found in the Psalms, is to "be still and know." If there is no stillness there is no sanctity. If there is no "knowing" there is no growing. God must speak and God must act, as he has and he will, if God's people are to be holy people.

Second, we must seek to more perfectly live-out our Baptismal vows and Eucharistic commitments. The process of sanctification, of being made holy, is in many ways an organic process that unfolds through common people with common concerns, praying common prayers as a common community that is punctuated by the sacred. In other words, well-ordered common worship, if we enter most fully into it, empowers holy living. As we live our common life *of* common prayer, extraordinary and uncommon things begin to occur. We begin to be transformed. We begin to be what we pray. This is our work, and it is most clearly emphasized in the *Rule* of Benedict's orientation toward common, coordinated and committed prayer. The Benedictine ideal of actively and intentionally engaging in Morning and Evening Prayer, as a means of shaping our lives, is crucial to developing a holy life. Common worship lived through common lives sanctifies our person, priorities, principles and practices. And, if this is not enough, the Prologue ("to amend faults and safeguard love") and the conclusion ("for those who hasten towards the perfection of holy living") bracket the entire *Rule* with its devotional intention. Holiness and liturgy, that is, liturgy and life, go hand-in-hand.

Finally, albeit not exhaustively, a primary sanctifying agent is found in exercising mercy to our friends, neighbors and enemies. Upon reading the Beatitudes, as found in St.

Matthew 5, we discover a clearly articulated pathway to God, slowly advancing us into the will, way and works of God. The Beatitudes are not simply aphorisms to be learned. They are not, so to speak, spiritual koans to be memorized and mastered. Rather, they are stepping stones into abundant living. They are a pathway to Christian "perfection" (5:48). Beginning with poverty of spirit (5:3), the necessary precondition of the spiritual life, we experience a mourning (5:4). That is, by knowing our need, we experience a godly sorrow that fosters the humility (5:5) which creates within us a "hunger and thirst" for righteousness (5:6). Poverty of spirit leads to mourning which leads to humility which leads to a hunger for being right with God and living right for God.

And here is the "rub" of this process. Now, having lived the process outlined above, having arrived at this "hunger and thirst for righteousness," we might be inclined to think that we have arrived at the "purity of heart" to which we aspire. But between the hunger for holiness (5:6) and the fulfillment of this desire (5:8) we are forced into the real world with real people who have real needs. It is here, and only here, where mercy (5:7) must be consistently exercised. If we want to be saints, we must learn to live lives of mercy. Mercy is the mark of righteousness. The difference between a saint and a Pharisee is, at least in part, found in the exercise of mercy. If saints are to be raised, mercy must be exercised.

Becoming saints is the common calling of every Christian. Let us, therefore, seek to know and live within the sanctifying graces that God provides. ✠

DR. DONALD P. RICHMOND, a widely published author and monastic illustrator, is a professed oblate for Saint Andrew's Abbey.

INTRODUCTION

TO THE STORY OF ST. GERASIMOS AND THE LION

In the Garden of Eden humans interacted freely with animals; there was no mutual fear between them. After the Fall, human interactions with animals became more limited.

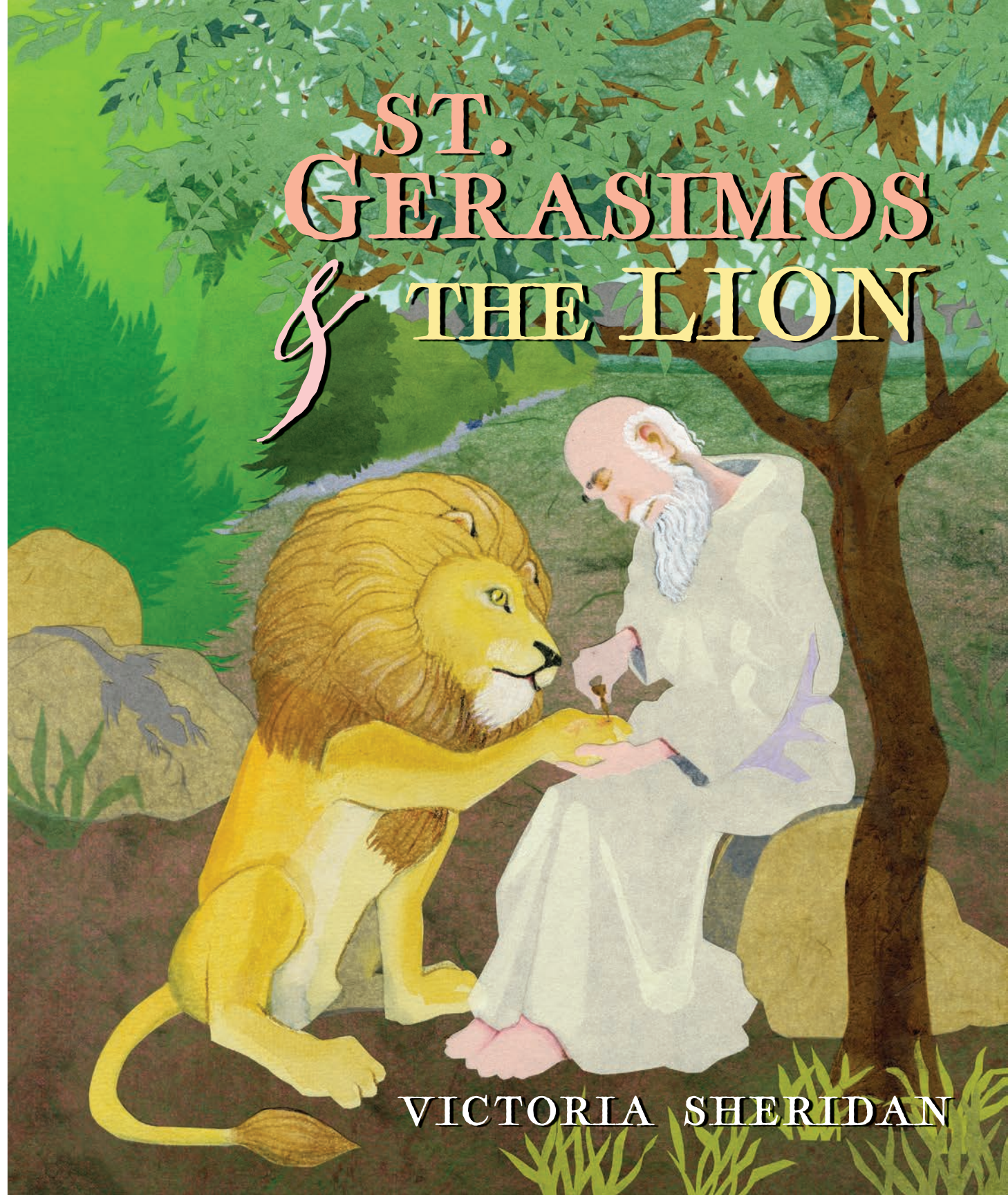
But there are rare occasions when God is in the center of a meeting between a person and an animal. A number of saints have had such encounters. There are also ordinary people to whom God has sent an animal to help when help was needed.

The following is one of nine such stories that I have collected and rewritten and illustrated as children's stories. I accept all of them as true. All of them show God's hand moving in his wondrous way in our lives. The working title of the book is A GLIMMER OF EDEN: Stories of People and Animals and God.

ONE BRIGHT SPRING MORNING, ST. GERASIMOS, the abbot of a small monastery in Palestine, was walking along the Jordan River and praying. Out of the corner of his eye he noticed a large lion moving closer and closer. A lion. Many faithful Christians had been killed by wild beasts. Had God sent this lion to test him? Was this the day he would go home to the Lord? He prayed that he might trust in God up to the end, no matter what happened. But the lion did not seem to be on the hunt; he was holding one forefoot off the ground. He seemed to be in pain. When the abbot stopped, the lion stopped too, and stretched the paw out toward him, and now Gerasimos saw that the paw was sore and swollen. He let out his breath, found a large rock, sat on it, and reached over to inspect the sore paw. A long thorn was stuck in it and yellow pus leaked out from the wound. Left untreated, this injury would make it impossible for the lion to hunt, and the beast would eventually starve. With careful fingers Gerasimos pulled out the thorn. Then he cleansed the wound with water and wrapped the paw in a clean cloth.

"Go home now," advised Gerasimos, but the lion shook his huge head. Instead of returning to the desert, he limped behind the abbot as he prayed, then accompanied him all the way back to the monastery. There the lion stayed while the paw healed, and when it was well he followed the saint like a disciple. Not all the brothers were enthusiastic about having a large predator living among them, but the lion only wanted to be with the abbot. He was willing to eat bread and vegetables as the monks did, as long as he could remain close to Gerasimos.

ST. GERASIMOS & THE LION



VICTORIA SHERIDAN



After two weeks the abbot said to the brothers, "Now that our monastery has acquired a lion, we must find some useful work for him. In a monastery everyone needs to work."

The brothers pondered the right employment for a lion.

"Maybe he could protect the monastery from robbers and murderers," someone suggested.

"But nobody ever threatens us. And God calls us to welcome everyone."

"He could bring us meat to eat," someone else said.

"But we only eat meat twice a year. What would he do the rest of the time?"

After a long discussion they settled on an ideal task. The monastery owned a donkey that made a daily trip to the Jordan River with containers on its back to fetch water for the monastery, and to graze on the grass that grew near the river. They often feared that the donkey would be eaten by a wild beast or stolen by bandits. But if the lion protected the donkey, it would surely be safe.



And so they gave the lion the job of protecting the donkey. Strangely, the donkey did not seem to fear this lion. Every day lion and donkey took the road to the river together and every afternoon they came home with the water.

This arrangement worked well for a long time.



Then one warm summer day as the donkey was grazing, the lion fell asleep in the sun. While the lion slept, the donkey noticed some fresh grass on the next rise. It tugged its rope free from the lion's protection and trotted over to the new grass — and then wandered further and further away. As the donkey was happily munching, an Arabian merchant traveling along the road with his camels saw this healthy donkey that seemed to have strayed from his owners. If someone didn't claim it in time, the donkey would be killed by lions or hyenas. So the merchant tied the donkey's rope to his line of camels and led it away, the donkey braying in dismay as it was pulled along.

But it had wandered too far; its calls did not arouse the sleeping lion.

After a while the lion awoke, stretched, and noticed the lengthening shadows; it was late afternoon, time to be heading home. He looked for his donkey. But the donkey was nowhere to be seen! The lion charged up and down the road, peering behind rocks and bushes in search of his lost donkey. He dashed up and down the river, peering into water and reeds in search of the animal. He shut his eyes and listened hard for the familiar "hee-haw." But though he searched until long after they were expected home, he found no donkey. Eventually he gave up.

He trudged home alone, and sadly presented himself to Gerasimos. The abbot saw the lion hanging his head, and concluded that he had killed and eaten his donkey. "Where is the donkey?" he asked. But the lion only stood in silence.

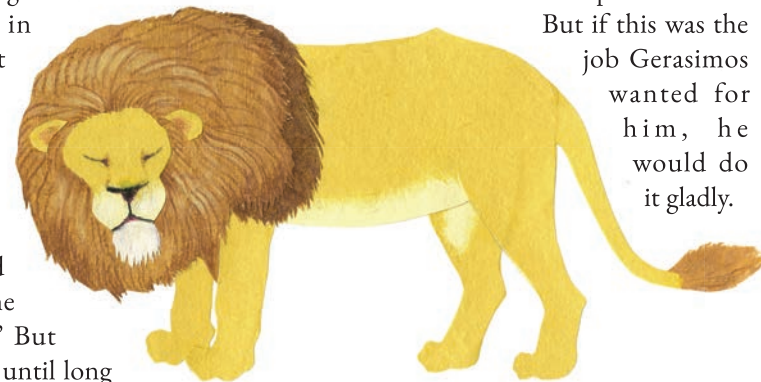
One of the brothers grumbled, "We were fools to trust a lion. We should have known that he would eventually demand meat to eat." Some of the brothers turned away from the lion in anger and disgust. Others muttered, "We let you live with us in our monastery, and this is the thanks we get? You are no better than a hyena!" Except for Gerasimos, all the monks refused him even a shadow of doubt. It was clear to them all that he was a donkey killer.



But Gerasimos merely advised, "Since we no longer have a donkey, let the lion take the donkey's place. Make a harness for him, and load water containers on his back, so

that he can carry water from the river for us." Humbled by his failure to protect the donkey, the lion accepted this menial task. He became water bearer for the monastery. It was not work suitable for the king of beasts; even the despicable hyenas would laugh at him when they saw him carrying water like a common pack animal.

But if this was the job Gerasimos wanted for him, he would do it gladly.



The days and weeks passed.

One day in late fall, when the lion was at the river filling his water bags as usual, a caravan of travelers passed along the road. It was the same Arabian merchant on his way home with his camels and goods. The donkey was still with them. As the caravan came close, the lion peered up from the river to see what sort of herd this might be. He examined the camels, and then in a burst of joy, recognized his donkey friend. With a deafening roar, he bounded over to greet his lost donkey. The merchant and his men ran off in terror, leaving the camels behind. The lion gleefully grasped the donkey's rein in his teeth and galloped back to the monastery with the donkey in tow, and all the camels as well! He came careening into the monastic enclosure splashing water everywhere, pulling a familiar donkey. Even the attached camels had caught the excitement, and ran merrily along with the lion and donkey.



How the brothers laughed and cried when the lion rushed in, leading their donkey and a caravan of camels! They stumbled over one another to get close enough to caress the lion's mane and hug the neck of the donkey.

"Welcome back, donkey! We have missed you!"

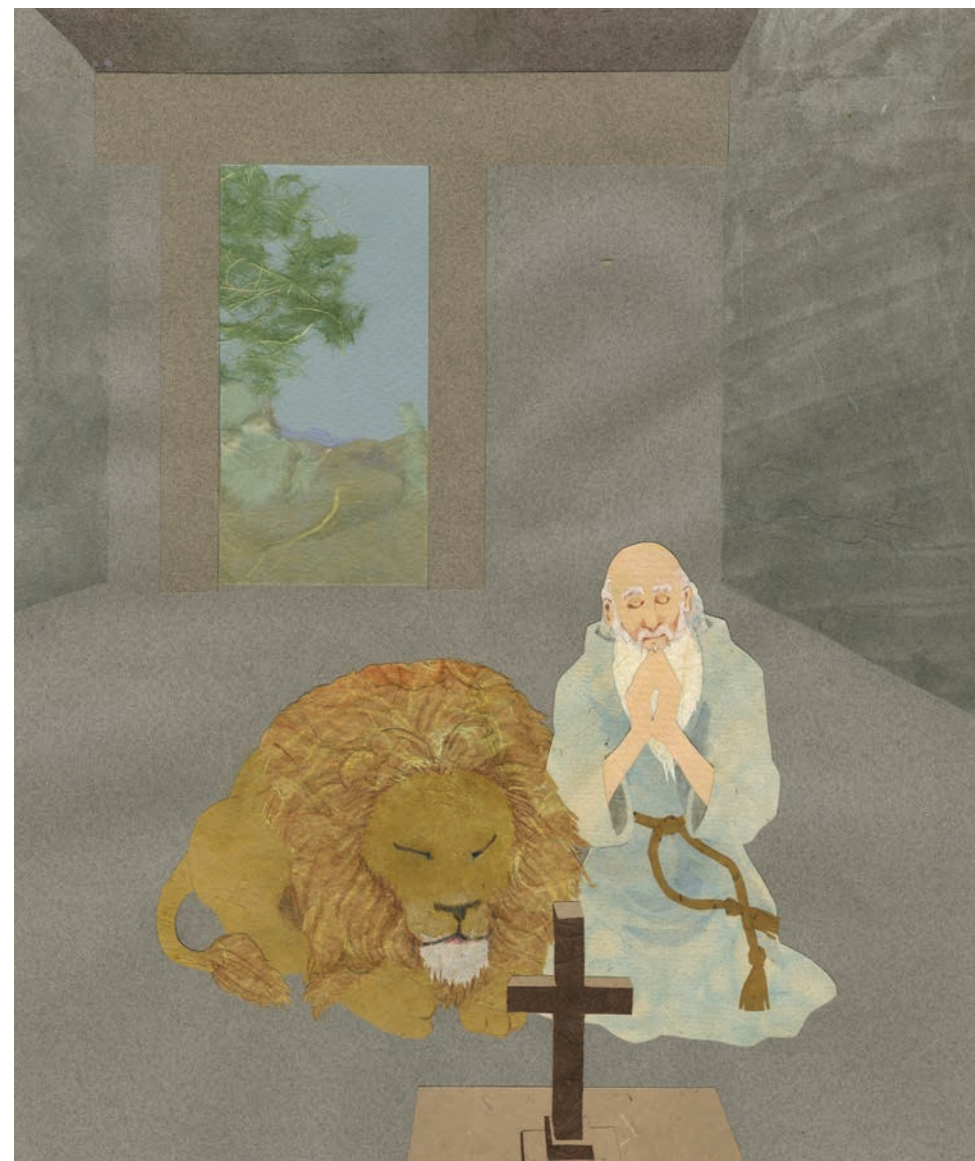
"Look at our good old lion! How could we have thought he would kill his donkey?"

"All along you were a faithful lion, but we thought the worst of you."



The lion rumbled in pleasure, but then pushed between the brothers to find Gerasimos.

Gerasimos knelt down and held his arms out. A low, sweet thunder came from the lion's diaphragm, like a baritone purr. He pushed his face into the chest, the shoulders, and the neck of Gerasimos. Here was his peace. He knelt beside his master until evening prayer.





St. Gerasimos gave the lion the name Jordanes, after the Jordan River.

Jordanes became a devoted disciple. When the monks prayed, he bowed his shaggy head. When they had visitors he stayed out of sight so as not to terrify them. Whatever the monks ate, he ate too. He was even willing to abstain from eating on their fast days. He was still a lion however, and every few months he left the monastery to go out into the wild for a few days.

St. Gerasimos died in the year 475. The sorrowing brothers buried his body in a small cemetery beside the chapel. At the time of Gerasimos' death, Jordanes was away roaming in the wild. When he arrived home, he began searching for his master. One of the monks tried to explain to him why the elder could not be found. "Jordanes," he said, "our elder has left us; he has departed to the Lord."

The lion continued searching for his Gerasimos, moaning low as he went.

Finally the monk said, "Come with me. I will show you where the elder rests." He led Jordanes to the tomb of St. Gerasimos. "We have buried our dear elder here," he said, and fell to his knees in tears. The lion now realized what had happened. He gave one roar and died on the elder's grave.

So, in death as in life, he was faithful to his beloved St. Gerasimos. ✕

A BRIEF BIO OF THE AUTHOR

VICTORIA SHERIDAN is an oblate of St. Andrew's Abbey. She studied art in college, and in the back of her mind always thought she would like to illustrate children's books. But life intervened, and she put her art on the shelf, except for personal or family projects.

Her son Seth Fisher grew up to become a comic book artist, winning high recognition for his art. But in 2006, soon after the publication of a volume that secured his place among great comic book artists, he died in an accidental fall.

Now that Seth would not be producing any more, she was pricked with an insistent notion that it was up to her to use the talent God had given her, and to illustrate the children's books she had thought about since college. She thanks God for the chance to make books that reveal some of the secret corners of God's kingdom.



HAVE A ROSE GARDEN IN WHICH I TAKE GREAT DELIGHT. IT HAS evolved slowly over the past several years. I love to take pictures of each rose in its prime. The roses resonate with my inner self intertwining with the mystery of God's love. There is an undulating current leading me between being a gardener and being in relationship with God. Each rose lifts me into a new dimension. The deep inner beauty of a rose in its prime connects me with God's love.

One rose, called "Brandy" — a deep apricot color — touches my soul with wordless awe. Another rose has a unique lavender color, its edges slowly turning deep pink. I call it "Inner Spirit" because it holds a mystery deep within. Lastly, a prolific pink rose brings me joy with its abundant, radiant display. Because its name was long forgotten I called it "Pink Delight." These roses comprised my first rose garden, laid in what had been the children's sand box.

My amateur status as a rose gardener was totally apparent when an "online" rose company offered a huge selection of



"BRANDY" (top),
"INNER SPIRIT" (bottom)



roses at half price. Such a deal! I imagined an expanded rose garden. More would be so much more fulfilling. In my naiveté, I ordered an abundance of new roses. Alas, they turned out to be very small, with very thin canes. Some died, many produced only a single frail blossom or none at all. I really didn't know what to do. This greatly exceeded my expertise.

A "rosarian," that is, one who cultivates roses, has many skills and techniques to achieve optimal results. I searched for online resources, but none seemed to answer my particular question. I attended workshops, purchased books on rose growing and gradually began to acquire a limited knowledge of what it takes to develop a rose garden. Growing roses is a continuing hands-on experience, on one's knees close to every aspect of the rose. Similarly, the spirit within moves in waves not unlike a rose's growth. My awareness of God's presence in my life, the inner longing, draw me to discover more, to learn the way of the Spirit. I sense interior pathways, heretofore unfamiliar, undiscovered and unimagined.

"I will instruct you and teach you
the way you should go;
I will give you counsel
with my eye upon you."

— Ps 32:18

I felt called to know more, so I signed up for retreats focused on the spiritual lives of Bede Griffiths, Hildegard of Bingen, Thomas Merton, and Edith Stein. Their names were familiar to me, but I did not know very much about them. Each retreat opened new doors of experience. Something began to resonate deeply within. As with the roses, you can read about caring for them, but when you look closely at

each stem and feel the soil in your hand, you begin to know the rose in a completely different way.

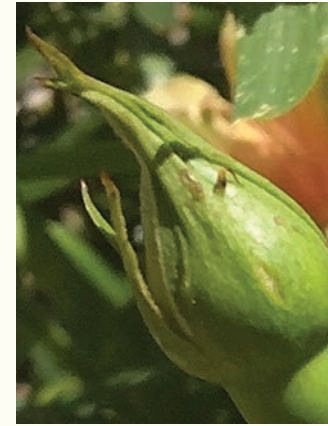
Reading and thinking about living with the Spirit opens a door. The experience of moving from your head to heart, allowing the spirit to move within as it will, invites the mystery. Sitting by the pond at Valyermo, I hear the whisper of the poplar trees: the soft touch of a breeze touches my cheek: tears well from within: words echo in my heart: I am transported into a sacred space. In the same way, I spend Time in my garden just thinking. I am being led on an inner journey with the God who loves and understands me in ways too deep for understanding. He leads me on an invisible pathway guided by His infinite wisdom. I need not be anxious, although my restless spirit can temporarily interrupt my progress.

"In him do our hearts find joy.
We trust in his holy name."

— Ps 33:21

On one retreat we practiced the 'Jesus' prayer, a new experience for me. I was deeply moved. I sat in my garden softly breathing "Jesus, my Lord." I closed my eyes and just sat, being present to the moment, inviting God's grace to fill me. I floated gently into an oblivion. The garden became my transforming place, a place in which to be still, to be present to my "inner spirit" and to invite God to reach deep into the furls of my soul and draw out whatever he will. I cannot say that I have made this a daily practice, but as the subtle smell of a rose draws me into sacred space, deep listening leads to the revelation that God intends.

I have an image of self in which God is constantly pruning away dead stuff and new suckers that try to draw off my life spirit



A TINY BUD

and lead me astray. For me, growth is often imperceptible. I'm impatient and discouraged by my lack of progress. Acceptance of who we are and of where we are on our spiritual journey is a continuing challenge. The lesson for me is that growth and overcoming our fragility is a slowly evolving process with many unexpected twists and turns. My ignorance about growing roses caused them to be stunted and fail to thrive. A frail, inadequate rose is not unlike our interior self. It is starved for nurturing. My puny roses became a lesson for me, to learn to love and nurture my most inadequate self. All of us are called to learn to love our darkest inner places that we most want to reject. I must remind myself that God knows and loves me in this moment. He has a unique plan beyond

WHISPERING POTENTIAL



my imagination. God is leading me to be open to my inner spirit, to follow an invisible pathway guided by His infinite wisdom. God loves and understands me in ways too deep for my understanding.

"I am here and I call,
you will hear me, O God
Turn your ear to me;
hear my words."

— Ps 17:6

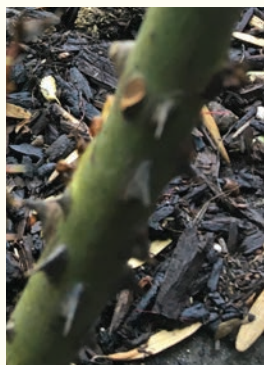
My rose garden has come to be an integral part of my life. I am delighted each morning as I walk about seeing new stems and buds emerging. Not only do I find great pleasure in growing the roses, but my inner spiritual journey is parallel. The rose is a symbol that I equate with my soul. I feel the beauty of God's creation unfolding within the rose as well as in me. Each rose mirrors my inner progress. Roses grow canes that eventually produce

reddish leaves from which soon appears a 'tiny bud' which harbors its exquisite flower. They rest before beginning again. Similarly, my spirit grows in spurts, then fades away hiding its potential deep within, filling me with a grace known only to God. I rest for long intervals in which change is imperceptible. I imagine my soul encased in a thin green cane emerging as a "tiny bud" whispering its potential, waiting to grow into an expression of God's wonder. The inner stirring within is God calling me to a new awareness. When I look deep into the furls of the blossom I see the exquisite unfolding of its deep inner beauty. If there is such beauty in a single bud, how great the immensity of all God's creation.

"There is one thing I ask of the Lord,
only this do I seek:
to gaze on the beauty of the Lord."
— Ps 27:4

One of my roses, a transplant, was really struggling to live. Weeks went by with barely a hint of life. Everyday I looked for the slightest indication of new life. I viewed my soul as equally recalcitrant. I was so aware of my inadequacies. Every time I watered I prayed. I see my soul in the dormant stem, with barely the promise of a bud before me. I consider the spiritual clutter holding the emergence of new life in check.

Months pass by and it seems nothing is happening. I see myself with all my built-in obstacles, but there is little change. One day I notice a little bump, possibly a harbinger of new life bulging from the stem. I watch and I water, hoping against hope. As this little saga continues, my soul connects with this little stick



in the mud, which is so slow to evidence life. I envision my little green stick of a soul in God's hands, He will find a way to generate the movement of all those unseen carriers of life under the green skin and life will begin. My heart moves within.

"Come and hear, all who fear God.
I will tell what he did for my soul:"
— Ps 66:16

The simple truth is that a rose is meant to grow. It cannot choose not to grow, unless neglected to the point of death. It is the gift of the creator's masterful design. I can choose to nurture my rose garden or simply ignore its potential. In the same manner, I can choose to open myself to the mystery of God's unique love for me and be transformed beyond my conscious perception. Roses require a sunny location with good soil, enhanced with amendments. My soul needs a place of solitude and silence in which I can listen for God's whisper, an amendment for my soul. My garden is the sacred place, in which my soul waits for the Lord. How do I make ready this soil for my heart?

"Blest be God, who did not
reject my prayer,
nor withhold from me his
merciful love."

— Ps 66:20

A rose offers a moment of grace. There is a moment when the budding is exquisite. I take it into my heart and breathe in its essence in this sacred space where I commune and open my heart to God's mystery. Sometimes I let my pen lead me into my own personal psalm.



Jesus, my Lord you hold the mystery of life,
my life, in the palm of your hand.
As I look into the whorls of delicate color
my heart is drawn into your mystery.
The magnificence of each petal whispers
your love.
Jesus, my Lord! Guide me this day.
Lord, lead me gently into the rose of
your heart.
I am but a little green stem waiting
for you,
Touch my heart, breathe on its potential,
draw out what is hidden.
Open my eyes in this moment of grace.

A MOMENT OF GRACE

M. EILEEN PRENDERGAST is an Oblate of St Andrew's Abbey and a retired special education teacher. Currently, she is the contact person for the Claremont Oblates, writes a monthly reflection for the group, shared by request. She hosts "Benedictine conversations" at her home, writes, reads and participates in book discussion groups; enjoys swimming, walking with her dog, Reilly, and delights in playing and reflecting in her garden. ❄



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- 9-11 Leadership & the Rule:
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- 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 Prodigal Son
- 26-30 Sophia/Wisdom in the Writings
of John of the Cross
- 30-9/1 My Neighbor's Faith:
*Interfaith Cooperation in an
Age of Religious Diversity*

SEPTEMBER

- 6-8 The Monkhoo of All Believers
- 18 Take Charge of Your Life
- 23-27 Becoming the Praise of His Glory:
*The Spirituality of St.
Elizabeth of the Trinity*

- 27-29 Accepting the Embrace of God:
The Ancient Art of Lectio Divina
- 28 Hearing the Voice of God
- 30-10/4 God is Love at the Heart of Creation

OCTOBER

- 16 Take Charge of Your Life
- 21-24 Still Full of Sap, Still Green:
A Spirituality of Aging

NOVEMBER

- 1-3 Edith Stein:
Her Journey from Darkness into Light
- 4-7 Autumn Artists' Retreat
- 11-15 Priests' Retreat:
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- 20 Take Charge of Your Life
- 22-24 Praying in the Cave of the Heart:
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