

THE VALYERMO
Chronicle

SAINT ANDREW'S ABBEY
NUMBER 264 ✠ SUMMER 2020

LETTER *from the* ABBOT

**A HOMILY FROM FR. ABBOT
GIVEN ON THE 14TH SUNDAY OF
ORDINARY TIME, JULY 5, 2020
AT THE ABBEY.**

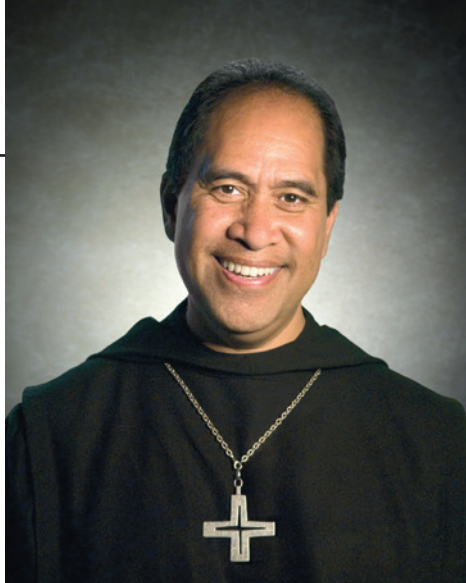
1st Reading: Zechariah 9:9–10

Gospel: Matthew 11:25–30

THE READINGS FOR THIS Sunday are clear: the Lord wants to give us rest and peace. In the first reading we hear: the Lord will come and banish the chariot, the horse, and the warrior's bow, and will proclaim peace. In the Gospel, Jesus says: Come to me all you who labor and I will give you rest.

This is an appropriate message today considering the national unrest, disorder and confusion we are experiencing due to the pandemic, protests, and political climate. But the peace and rest the Lord promises is not an exterior peace and rest. He said, "Do you think I came to bring peace. No, but rather division." (Lk. 12:51). In today's readings, the Lord speaks of a deep *interior* peace, a peace that no civil unrest can disturb, a peace that no social injustice can take away; a peace the world cannot give nor understand. (Jn 14:27; Phil 4:7)

We people of faith know that the disturbances we are witnessing today are not simply about social injustices, but that they have a spiritual component as well. When individuals and groups begin attacking the Church, it is a clear sign that a spiritual battle is going on. And when the Church *Herself* is divided within, there is definitely a spiritual battle going on. This spiritual battle and unrest is remedied, not by laws and government, but only by the Prince of Peace. "This kind can only be driven out by prayer [and fasting]". (Mk. 9:29).



The Lord offers peace to any who would receive it. It is not just for 'them' — the protestors and rioters, or those who are angry with the powers that be — but this offer is also to each one of us. The Gospel challenges *us* to consider that although we may not be out there protesting and toppling over statues of the saints, and although we might feel safe and sound and protected in our homes or monastery, we too might be at unrest.

What is it within our own soul that does not allow us to come to the Lord and receive His peace? What is it that we labor for day in and day out that does not allow Jesus to give us His peace and rest? Sometimes we are moving so fast, busy moving from one project to the other, from one book to the other, from one goal to the other, that we never remain still long enough for the Lord to place His gentle yoke upon us. "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and worried about many things. Only one thing is necessary." (Lk. 10:41)

Do we labor to the point of fatigue to look good in front of people? So that people can see how hard we work? Who are we trying to impress? Is it an attachment to our reputation that causes unrest in our

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soul? "Come to Me," Jesus says, and I will give you rest from that burden.

Do we labor to the point of unrest in our soul because we just can't understand why people don't see things the way I see them? In other words, do we have an attachment to have to always be right, to have to always have the last word, to have to always have things the way I want them? Jesus says, "Come to Me," and I will give you rest from that burden.

From these attachments and heavy burdens — and other similar ones — the Lord wants to give us rest. He does not want us to labor in vain for these things that are passing, but to work for that which is eternal. This is a daunting task for us to do alone, which is why He says, "Come to Me".

We only have to approach Him in faith and remain still in His presence long enough for Him to place His gentle yoke upon us, so that we can experience the peace and rest that only He can give.

Abbot Damien ✠



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ZOOMING OBLATES

Oblates Rethink Community & Spirituality in the Era of COVID-19

BY ELIZABETH SEWARD, OBL. OSB
& VICTORIA MCCARGAR, OBL. OSB



LAGUES AND BENEDICTINES HAVE A LONG HISTORY TOGETHER.

St. Benedict himself died in the middle of the great Plague of Justinian in 547 A.D. A few centuries later Benedictine monasteries provided the only organized healthcare in Europe during the Black Death. Communities regrouped, adapted, changed. But whoever imagined 21st Century Benedictines would be plunged into a pandemic?

The outbreak of the novel coronavirus around the beginning of 2020 A.D. has sent all of us into turmoil, but it's an ancient turmoil with new features. The old features of previous pandemics are there—sickness, death, economic destruction, overwhelmed caregivers, obedient social-distancers and scoffers. But we want to focus on our experience of

the big, new feature, unimaginable to our Benedictine forebears: the online meeting space Zoom, and the role it's playing today in changing what we do.

The fourteen members of the San Fernando Valley oblate group—a self-directed, monkless cell founded in 1999—faced the prospect of an indefinite hiatus after Los Angeles County announced its COVID-19 shelter-at-home order.

On the third Thursday in March of this year, we were planning a celebration in our Oblate group. Cake, special refreshments, perhaps a celebratory-themed “check-in” circle. It was to be a milestone celebration—our 21st anniversary. As March stretched into April and early May with no end in sight, we started to wonder whether the lockdown meant the end of our monthly gatherings for lectio divina, study of the Rule and sung Compline. We have seen each other through job losses, book publications, graduate degrees, illness, deaths, children's marriages, moves, grandchildren's births, and so much more. The *experience* of supportive, prayerful listening and being truly present for each other felt irreplaceable.

Was the only alternative to meet online?

The suggestion was not met with ringing enthusiasm. For one thing, the prospect of being Zoom-bombed—strangers dropping into sessions, a phenomenon then making headlines around the country—deterred those worried about privacy. Gaps in Zoom's security protocols caused consternation for those whose livelihoods live in their computers. Some were more amenable: “No, I don't *LIKE* it, but I wasn't hesitant about *Zooming* our meeting.” “100% eager. No reservations.” “Not that I ‘like’ zoom—but it's a gift as a way of making simultaneous, our separate spaces, in the same moment of time.” Or, “More to the eager side, but not all in.”

A greater concern however, was a sort of hollow feeling about the prospect of convoking a superficial spiritual community when all the participants appear as small boxes and painted pixels. This concern could be overlooked by those of us eager to make it happen, recognizing the value of being together even through a virtual window. But could we still experience a Presence through the electronic veil? Could we find the center point of balance in our lectio time, truly listening, truly “inclining the ear of our hearts” and not be distracted by the technology? If we were unable to be physically together, could we be spiritually together? Would we be able to catch the delicate subtleties of shared lectio? If two or three are gathered in his name online, is Jesus in Zoom?

After some email discussion, members agreed that attempting a meeting in Zoom was preferable to suspending the group altogether. It fell to the two of us to address some of the platform's innate difficulties. Anyone who has attended a Zoom session knows that the core of Benedictine liturgy—unison prayer and music—are nearly impossible because of signal delays and errant internet speeds. Not wanting our beloved Compline to become a painful distraction, we decided to mute all the participants while the two of us recited, rather than sang, the familiar setting of the Abbey's Week I psalms. Members could recite the words with microphones off. This was well received, as familiar words spoken by familiar voices became a highlight of the meeting for each of us.

Ordinarily we divide into two groups for lectio divina. In our first meeting we stayed in one Zoom “room” so as not to confuse our less-experienced members or lose them in cyberspace. At our second meeting, we did use two breakout rooms and all reunited successfully.

So can Zoom Spirituality be Benedictine Spirituality? We asked Father Luke Dysinger, who also made Abbey history in May by conducting the first online retreat workshop in Zoom.

He points out that our Abbey's lineage has demonstrated a steady movement outward, to share the spirituality of St. Benedict with others outside the monastery walls. This has evolved over the centuries, from early forms of what we now call retreats and workshops, to missionary work in China, and now online.

"So what one sees is an almost two-centuries-old trajectory towards widening circles of sharing the spirituality of Benedictine community with persons more and more remote from the cloister," he writes in an email. "I find Zoom to be very compatible with this evolution." He adds, "Nothing can match actually 'being there,' of course; but I think Zoom is as legitimate a mode of communication as goose quills, fountain pens, slide projectors, and PowerPoint have been."

However, as long as the pandemic continues its alarming march, the question of whether an online gathering can be "spiritual" has to be measured against the very real need of the San Fernando Valley oblates to continue as a cell. The comfort and familiarity of the living room where we have met for 21 years must be subordinated to the genuine, physical vulnerability of the majority of our members. So with some caution and further consideration we are planning to continue to meet this way for as long as we need to. There is now tentative agreement to embrace, perhaps welcome, this possibility. One member said "*If three dimensions are not possible, I will take the technological miracle of two dimensions.*"

For any other groups wanting to meet this way, some suggestions. First of all, live in gratitude for the patience, goodwill and

compassion of others. Know that whoever is designated (using the monastic nomenclature) "Zoom Master" or "Zoom Mistress" has to stay on his or her technological toes. Watching the clock, opening and closing breakout rooms and helping others navigate the platform requires a modicum of expertise, and we hope there will eventually be several people in the group to rotate responsibility.

Father Luke makes an observation about online workshop attendees that we think applies to gatherings of oblates. A Zoom meeting "can enter their homes and invite them to reflect on how Benedictine spirituality can actually touch the world in which they are at that moment sitting." Like anything else in these strange times, the virtual oblate meeting requires some getting used to. But adaptation to circumstances, even pandemics, is what the *Rule* of St. Benedict is all about.

Difficulties, danger, and obstacles to overcome can make us even more aware of what could be seen as the heart of Benedictine — oblate — spirituality: persisting together as a stable community to face adversity while honoring and valuing each other's strengths and frailties; listening to each other's needs and overcoming our own hesitations and reluctance; and being willing to change and adjust while remaining true to our core beliefs and practices. ✖

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THE INFANCY NARRATIVES in the Gospels of St. Matthew and St. Luke contain the only biblical references to St. Joseph we possess. In these texts St. Joseph is clearly presented to us as a model of compassion and discernment, and above all else as the protector and defender of the Holy Family. However, if we look carefully at these texts we will find another aspect to the biblical presentation of St. Joseph that should be of great interest to Christians who wish to practice contemplative prayer.

It has long been noted that the infancy narratives, particularly the first and second chapters of St. Luke's gospel, depict the Blessed Virgin Mary as a model of *lectio divina*, the slow, interior, prayerful repetition of sacred scripture that allows the written word of God to become an experience of union with God. In *lectio divina* the biblical text gradually becomes transparent, revealing the One Who originally inspired it: in the same way, in Catholic tradition Mary becomes utterly transparent to the One she bears. In his infancy narrative Saint Luke uses different verbs to portray how the devout Christian, imitating the Blessed Virgin, should ponder the sacred text. In Luke 2:19 and 2:51 the related verbs *suntéreo* and *diatéreo* describe how Mary "treasures up", "remembers" in her heart the words of the shepherds and the events surrounding the child Jesus' visit to the temple. In Luke 2:19 the verb *sumballo* describes the art of meditation as a "stirring together" of impressions and reactions, a "joining together" of words and ideas.

The significance of St. Luke's description of Mary "pondering" the Word "in her heart" was noted by Origen in the third century (*Hom. 20.6 on Luke, 6*), by Bede in the seventh century (*Hom. 1.7 on Christmas*), and by commentators throughout the middle ages. So universal was this identification of



St. Joseph

PATRON OF NATURAL CONTEMPLATION

FR. LUKE DYSINGER, OSB

Mary with the art of biblical meditation that in the Western Church the standard artistic representation of the Annunciation invariably depicts Mary engaged in *lectio divina* as the angel Gabriel approaches. Thus she who will become the Mother of God fittingly prepared herself to receive the Incarnate Word by pondering in her heart the written word of God in the biblical text.

In order to understand the role and, as it were, the “icon” of St. Joseph in the infancy narratives, it is important to recall the place assigned to *lectio divina* in the life of the Christian by early Christian mystical theologians. In the spiritual writings of Evagrius Ponticus, John Cassian, Gregory of Nyssa, and many others, the art of *lectio divina* is understood as a “laboratory” where the Christian learns the great art of *theoria physiké*, natural contemplation, the ability to behold God present in created things and in human history. Discovering God in the texts of sacred scripture encourages the Christian contemplative to gradually look up from the pages of the Bible to the “salvation history” that is concealed within the ordinary events of everyday life. The Christian contemplative learns to “read” and ponder the purposes and presence of God in the often-difficult circumstances and relationships of his or her life. And it is precisely this great art that St. Joseph models for us in the Gospel of Matthew.

In Matthew’s infancy narrative Joseph, presumably joyful in his engagement to Mary, is suddenly confronted with the incomprehensible scandal of Mary’s pregnancy (Mt. 1:18). Joseph, however, is one of the *tsadikim* / *dikaioi*, the “just” or “holy ones” of Israel (Mt. 1:19) who trust in God and act with compassion. His initial reaction is to divorce Mary quietly so as to spare her both public humiliation and also, presumably, the death penalty her condition could entail according to strict Jewish law (Mt. 1:20). But then, Joseph, the

compassionate *tsadik* becomes through the grace of God more than a “just one”; he becomes a contemplative. St. Matthew uses the verb *enthumeomai* to describe Joseph’s prayerful reaction to this seeming catastrophe. Like the verbs St. Luke uses to describe Mary’s pondering, this word also means “to ponder” or “to lay to heart”; but it carries the additional sense of “to consider deeply” (Liddell & Scott, Kittel). Joseph ponders, “considers deeply”, in his heart this seemingly painful event and he is rewarded with perception of the inner meaning—God’s meaning—of these events through the medium of an angelic voice. And this revelation occurs not through any ecstatic frenzy, but rather in the ordinary, mundane experience of refreshing, dream-filled sleep (Mt. 1:20). What appeared at first to mean infidelity and scandal can now be contemplated as the fulfillment of prophecy and the true meaning of Joseph’s own life (Mt. 1:20-24). Joseph has contemplated the inner meaning, the “word”, of God in the most painful event of his life.

This is the contemplative art of which St. Joseph can rightly be regarded as patron. Joseph gazes deeply with the eye of faith into the events of his own life, and with God’s help he perceives the work of salvation in ordinary events, even in the painful experiences that once seemed devoid of God. Modern Christians eager to practice contemplation often imagine that their goal is ecstasy, escape from the confines of ordinary life; or else they strive solely for imageless, wordless prayer that leaves behind the mundane, messy word. St. Joseph teaches us another kind of contemplation, one more in keeping with the Word Who became flesh to redeem and remake the “ordinary” world He so passionately loves. We who, like Mary, ponder the words of God in *lectio divina* can learn from St. Joseph to behold within the events of our ordinary lives the glorious purposes of God. ✕

BULKINGTON REPRISE



BEN HARRISON MC

WHAT DROVE THAT poor, lonely sixteen-year-old kid to brave the vast, stormy literary voyage of *Moby Dick*? Whatever I was seeking in reading Melville’s classic found me first, and then seared me like a lightning-stroke when I read Chapter 23. I read and reread that poetic chapter as a manifesto of my youthful soul. Was it as much as a year later that, when challenged in high school to memorize some poem or piece of literature, I chose that “six-inch chapter”, that “stoneless grave of Bulkington”? At various key points in my life, I have discovered again those galvanizing words and found courage to launch out yet again into whatever unknown expanse confronted me at that time.

In my mid-twenties, in the thrall of my own existential struggles to make sense of life’s absurdities, I rediscovered Chapters 36 and 119, with Captain Ahab’s defiant diatribe shouted in the teeth of his deity.

What is the difference between Bulkington and Ahab and their attitudes toward God or the Absolute? I never felt that *Moby Dick* (unlike *Billy Budd*) had any sort of explicit Christ figure. In fact, when I did some research on the great novel in a university undergraduate course, I was struck by one reviewer’s assessment of *Moby Dick* as a sort of proto-existentialist novel.

However, as I have been thinking recently about Chapter 23, and contrasting it in my mind with Chapter 119, I see these two figures, Bulkington and Ahab, as embodying the attitudes of the two thieves crucified alongside Christ in the Gospel of Luke. The two mariners suffer the same fate—drowning at sea. Bulkington accepts his fate humbly but manfully, and his ocean perishing leads to apotheosis; whereas Ahab’s death is a brutal and enraged descent to the depths, pinned by his own tackle to the side of his nemesis, the white whale.



Bulkington is briefly introduced in Chapter 3, before the Pequod sets sail, at the Spouter Inn and described as a quiet, self-contained man of imposing build and character, but one for whom his ship-mates have both affection and respect. Then he makes his brief but riveting appearance in

Chapter 23 and is not heard from again. He has no role in the drama of Ahab and the white whale. But Bulkington stands solid as a standard against which the reader can measure Ahab's character as it is developed in the story of the chase. Bulkington's calm, determined welcoming of his

fate, the foreseen possible consequences of his choice of a career on the high seas, stands in stark contrast to Ahab's enraged defiance and obsessive pursuit of self-justification, vindicated honour and revenge. Ahab resents as a personal indignity the maiming he long-since suffered from the white whale's random violence. Bulkington courageously faces life's circumstantial danger but displays none of that hubris so powerfully evident in his captain, that toxic pride which is the necessary element in all tragic drama.

What can we say of Bulkington? He is like a "storm-tossed ship that miserably drives along the leeward land." What are the storms that assail him? Were these wounds of his past or matters of temperament? We aren't told. All that we are given to know is that "the land seemed scorching to his feet." He needed the freedom of the open sea. All of the comforts of ordinary life in the port, the harbor, "all that's kind to our mortalities", were for him obstacles, perils against which he might founder. He was, for whatever reason, by nature or experience, one who glimpsed the fact that "all deep earnest thinking is but the intrepid effort of the soul to keep the open independence of her sea while the wildest winds of heaven and earth conspire to cast her on the treacherous, slavish shore."

He was one for whom the spiritual freedom symbolized by the open seas was his greatest need. This was, as Victor Frankl so famously clarified, not just a "freedom from" — from the shackles of self and social convention — but a "freedom for" — but for what? Freedom to give himself to the transcendent, freedom to dedicate himself to the highest truth — "for as in landlessness alone resides the highest truth, shoreless, indefinite as God, so better is it to perish in that howling infinite than be

ingloriously dashed upon the lee, even if that were safety."

In this context, the word *indefinite* does not mean what it has come to mean now, vague or ill-defined, but rather, "without defining limits", in other words, infinite. Bulkington seems to feel within his bones a need to search out a truth that will stand firm against all the shifting shapes of the watery world which is his field of battle, firm against even the sheltering solidity of rocks, land and harbors. He needs to touch, to engage with, to give himself to the ultimate, to deep truth.

And what of this perishing? Is Bulkington's death necessary? Was it inevitable that he meet his end in this way? Could he have found some inner, mystic seas in which to pursue his freedom, his search for Truth? Would old age have delivered him from his need to be free of the tempting comforts of home and hearth? Is his death unprepared? In his last moments does he suffer terror and cold as the icy, briny swells of the North Atlantic foam over him and claim him and his sodden wrappings? Or is his death instantaneous, painless and fearless, from the spray of which his apotheosis leaps straight up?

Is Bulkington a Christ figure? Or is he an Enoch, one who vanishes into oblivion? Is he like the tall, stern nun in Manley Hopkins' masterwork who shouted out Christ's coming as the *Deutschland* foundered and sank. Or is he like Thomas Merton at the end of *Seven Storey Mountain*, with his vision of the burnt men? And what is his apotheosis? Is he god-like? Is he a hero? Is he assumed, like Elijah, though not in chariots of fire, but by the foaming stallions of the deeps? Is his death an absurdity, a martyrdom, a sacrifice, a shout of victory?

Of course, I can't say. I don't know what was in the mind of Melville, or in

that of Ishmael, the raconteur of the story. (I uncomfortably confess, to descend from the sublime to the ridiculous, that Ishmael reminds me a bit of the cockroach, Archy, who envied the moth's exuberant fascination with the flame that would be his death, though Archy himself "would rather have half the happiness and twice the longevity.")

I do not need to know anyone else's interpretation, not even the author's. For me as a teen-aged boy, and again and again through the years since that first reading, Chapter 23 has been like a shrine to which I have made occasional pilgrimages, at times when I needed the courage to confront some new unknown. Bulkington's example invites me to face the ultimate mystery, which you can call God or the Transcendent, the Unknowable, the Ineffable. That *Mysterium Tremendum* can be terrifyingly demanding and yet can prodigally welcome a humble soul (as Hopkins says, "Hast thy dark descending and most art merciful then."). The way that Melville uses the word *apothoeosis* implies that this perishing is not a Lear-like madness nor an Ahab-like act of absurd defiance, but that it achieves its end, which is not obliteration or reincarnation, not annihilation or resurgence, but consummation, or, in the language of the contemplative tradition, union with the Mystery.

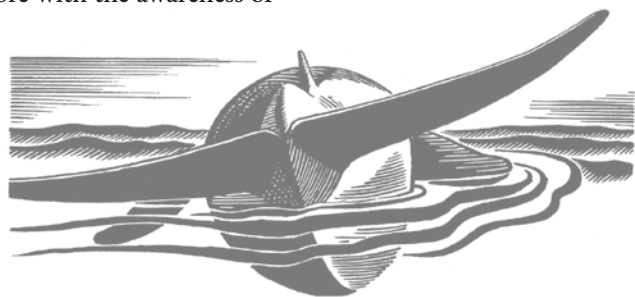
When I started to write this piece a year or two ago, I did not know that Chapter 23 was waiting to invite me to visit it yet again. But in recent months, as I have wrestled more and more with the awareness of

advancing age, I see that Bulkington still speaks to my heart.

What, he asks, if I approach my remaining years, whatever they may hold, not as a denouement but as an adventure, an exploration of another new terrain, full of perils, yes, but also offering exhilarating new challenges? If I welcome each new day like I did as a child, as a garden full of wonders; if I face my finality with as much sincere (though faltering) passion as I did my adolescent yearnings; if I explore the new territories I face now with the same fateful resolve as when I submitted to conscription in a time of war, and after that, recklessly embarked on my youthful travels; if I learn the lessons seniority has for me with the same adventurous spirit as when I strayed into the frightening waters of commitment and self-gift; if I awaken to the days to come with the same openness as I have done at times throughout my past; can I not take heart again from Bulkington and venture into the unknown with steady confidence that the Mystery always remains? The wild, uncharted vastness of Deep Truth calls me still. ❄

References:

- Moby Dick*, Herman Melville.
The Wreck of the Deutschland,
 Gerard Manley Hopkins.
Archy and Mebitabel, Don Marquis.
King Lear, William Shakespeare.
Seven Storey Mountain, Thomas Merton.
Man's Search for Meaning, Viktor Frankl.



Taking Shelter in the Silence

MARY FINGAL SCHULTE, OBL. OSB

You who live in the shelter of the Most High, who abide in the shadow of the Almighty, will say to the Lord, my refuge and my fortress, my God in whom I trust. Ps. 91:1-2, NRSV

For he will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble, he will conceal me under the cover of his tent; he will set me high on a rock. Ps. 27:5, NRSV

Go out and stand on the mountain before the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by. Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake, a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence. 1 Kings 13:19, NRSV

DAILY LIFE HAS BEEN RADICALLY different since mid-March, as we've all faced severe restrictions on our ability to move about outside the confines of our homes. We seem to be far from getting back to "life as usual" or getting back to "normal". For myself these past months that have now stretched into a

third of this year of 2020, I've often wondered what is "normal" anyway, and do I want "life as usual"?

At the start of the "stay home" orders, I thought, probably along with many of you, that it would be just for a few weeks. I made many mental lists for the "productive" use of this time, my "pandemic

bucket list”: books to read, organizing to do, writing, reading more French, learning Spanish, cleaning out the garage, exercising more, and so on. I have so many wonderful spiritual books, blank journals, Bibles galore in French and English, iBreviary in both English and French, rosaries and other worship and prayer aides, availability of live streaming Masses from all over the country and from France. Oh boy, I said to myself, I am going to improve body, mind and soul. Yet as time marched on, and as I tried to “account” for what I “did” during that time, I stumbled over my thoughts and wondered where the time went. How did we go from winter to summer so quickly? I had planned to make a journal entry for each day, to satisfy myself of the “productivity” of that day. I quickly realized that I could fill my daily “bucket” to more than overflowing; it just wasn’t the “pandemic days bucket”. So what did I fill my bucket with? Presence, hospitality, simplicity, gratitude, silence. They are all intertwined and part of a seamless whole for me.

PRESENCE

Everything in my life these past months has been infused with the presence of God: I sense God’s presence when I’m walking my dog in the quiet of the morning or evening; when I’ve received gifts of food and texts of “How are you today?” from many of my neighbors; when I am baking; when I am sitting outside reading the newspaper; when I visit via FaceTime with family members, especially the grandchildren; when I chat with friends by phone or text or email; when I attend daily Mass or Vespers at the Abbey via livestreaming; when I take a siesta in the afternoon; when I do my housework; when I take walks in nearby parks; when I am waving to neighbors or getting in a quick “check in” chat with one

of them on one of my several daily walks.

God is present when I pray. During the slowing down of activity in my life and in the large spaces of quiet and solitude, I have breathed prayers for those who are suffering loss of income or health, young families with small children or teenagers at home, those living alone, those who are in mourning or who’ve lost a loved one during the past few months, healthcare workers, those working in “essential” jobs, those confined at home with an abusive family member, and of course the monks and Oblates of the Abbey, my extended family, my wonderful friends and neighbors. This list could go on.

HOSPITALITY (WHILE LIVING IN A “MONASTERY OF ONE”)

As the days spent mostly at home alone seemed to have no end in sight, I wondered how I could live out Chapter 53 of the *Rule*’s admonition to “Let all guests who arrive be received like Christ.... And to all let due honor be shown” if I couldn’t have people over to my home. Tom and I loved to entertain, and several months after he died, I began having guests for dinner every weekend, usually just another couple and me, sometimes absentmindedly still setting the table for four. I hosted Christmas Eve and another family get-together just a couple of weeks before stay at home orders were made.

I found ways to be hospitable without having people inside my home. I love to bake, so I began leaving cakes, cookies, breads on doorsteps of neighbors, texting them that a treat was on its way. My Meyer lemon tree produced a prodigious amount of lemons; many neighbors, family members, and friends received some of my limoncello for Easter. By April, I moved a small table from my backyard to my front porch, put a

festive tablecloth on it, carefully spaced two comfortable chairs six feet apart, and put a candle on the table. I invited my close friend Mary Kauffman (a fellow oblate) to come sit on my front porch, while I served home-made madeleines and fresh brewed coffee. We’ve enjoyed a couple of morning visits out back as well. I provide the setting and coffee, she brings pastries. Our visits have



nourished both our souls greatly (We’ve now ventured farther afield for some outside dining, with Curtis joining us). As the weather got hotter, I invited my oldest son Jerome and daughter-in-law Janet, who live nearby, and their three children, my grandchildren who are 6½, 5 and 29 months, to come over to swim and enjoy home-made pizza outside. We’ve done this several times now, and on Mother’s Day Jerome cooked my favorite Mother’s Day meal, grilled hamburgers. Hospitality extends to family, friends, and strangers alike.

I have sometimes felt sad not being able to open my home, not to have the hug of another human being, my typical greeting for guests. I have been alone much of the time, but never felt lonely. The week before Easter, during the Triduum, I felt my tears would never cease, as the weather was gloomy, I missed going to the Abbey, and

I was not looking forward to sitting down to Easter dinner for the first time in my entire life, alone. I decided it was time to be hospitable to myself too. I set the table with fine china, the “nice” flatware and crystal, and I lit candles. The risen Lord was my guest; I had take-out Italian from my and Tom’s favorite Italian restaurant, owned by a family in my parish.

SIMPLICITY

As an Oblate, I am called to what is described as “a never-ending process of integration” — to make a consecration of my time, to seek a simplification of life which entails a simplification of schedule, and to ‘clear time for God’. Boy was my calendar cleared: a fall trip to Spain and Portugal with other retired judge friends, two family trips to South Lake Tahoe, my youngest son (37) Jim’s wedding reception in Cincinnati (he and his wife Christa, who live in San Francisco, married three years ago, just a quiet affair, reserving a party for “later”).

During these months, I’ve lived my life more slowly, more mindfully, more deliberately. My house is quiet most of the time. As long as I can remember, I never liked having TV or music on in the “background”. When I have the TV on, it’s to watch a program.

When I play music on my iPod or CD player, it's to listen to it and enjoy it, to focus on it. My daily activities have been quite simple, and in their simplicity they became prayer: walking, baking, gardening, resting, talking with friends and family, doing some reading and writing, and often just sitting out back in my yard listening to the water flowing from my swimming pool's little waterfall. My meditation practiced slowed to almost a grinding halt for four months. I had the option to work remotely, but there wasn't much to be done. As my world and the outside world slowed down and became quieter, I began to feel healed, at peace. Being, simply being, was what I needed. I've been secretly grateful and relieved at the clearing of my schedule, even the canceled vacation plans, work commitments, and social events, all of which I had looked forward to and know I'd have enjoyed.

I've definitely simplified my wardrobe. I've come to realize I have way too many clothes. I eat more simply and try to "make do" with what's on hand rather than make an unnecessary trip to the grocery store. (Tom used to do the cooking, while I was the baker of the household). I've become aware of how often I used to grocery shop out of boredom, or when I just needed "a couple of things".

GRATITUDE

I just can't help being a list maker, so when I started listing things to be grateful for, I could have written a book.

During these quiet days, I've thought often on things for which I am thankful. As I sense God's presence, gratitude wells up in me. There have been, to be sure, many moments of great frustration mostly over things beyond my control, easily solved by getting someone in to repair it or show me the way it works (it all sounds so superficial

now). And these "things" causing me some frustration tell me how privileged I am to have such "frustrations", which in the overall scheme of things are mere inconveniences of a pretty nice lifestyle: sprinklers not going on; alarm system not working; issues with solar panels that heat my pool; minor plumbing problems. I have been grateful for the many talented and honest people who've made the repairs, and in some cases shown me how to operate "the Tom jobs" as I call them. (I've regretted not listening to Tom more carefully when he did things around the house.) I have figured out how to re-set my timers for the lights outside, how to repair my electric floor sweeper, how to unclog the bathroom sinks, how to operate three TV controllers, work the Weber grill, program the solar panels. These too were "Tom jobs". The gratitude for these simple things also were acute reminders of his permanent absence. Joy and sorrow walk together. Gratitude and memories hold hands.

These are some other things I've been grateful for, not in order of importance: the Internet, FaceTime, Zoom, grocery delivery, a morning and evening walk with my 9 pound Maltese dog Jenny and her quiet companionship, good neighbors, my large family, my many friends, continued good health, plenty of food in pantry and fridge and freezer, more time to rest, more time to just be quiet, my sons and their wives, continued good health for my 39 year old son Dan who had cancer treatment four years ago, my grandchildren. I enjoy the peaceful activity of weeding my garden, picking my tomatoes and peppers and lemons, making pesto from the basil I pick, and sharing my abundance. I don't think I will ever again take for granted the quantity and variety of food we have in our grocery stores, when the hoarding of some during the early

days emptied the shelves of basic staples. I won't take a hug for granted, just the simple warmth of human touch, which I long for. I definitely won't take for granted the woman, practically a family member, who cleans my house. I am grateful for the live-streaming of Mass. I miss the Eucharist. How grateful I was to finally get a haircut!

I'm grateful for the dear monks of the Abbey, phone conversations and texts and emails with some of them, Zoom retreats. Their friendship and prayers and silent presence comfort and sustain me.



SILENCE

In Lectio Divina one chooses a word or phrase of the Scriptures to read, ponder, and pray over, the goal being simply to be in God's presence by praying the Scriptures. I've had two Lectio phrases these past months. The first is Psalm 46:10: *Be still* (also translated cease striving) *and know that I am God*. Be still. Know that I am God. Know that I Am who I Am. The second phrase is in French, from a homily I heard at Mass in Paris several years ago, *Dans sa silence, Dieu est là*. In his silence, God is there. Or, God is in the

silence, God dwells in silence. It's a concept found throughout Scripture, along with the image of God as shelter.

I lost Tom, in the blink of an eye, on the morning of August 20, 2019. He died on the feast day of St. Bernard, whose name he took when we professed as Oblates at Pentecost in 2010. His Liturgy of the Hours was open to that date. I had arrived alone at Hoag Hospital in Newport Beach to bring him home after a 2-week course of rehabilitation following spine surgery. Instead, 10 minutes after my arrival, while my back was turned, he suffered a massive pulmonary embolism and was pronounced dead after 35 minutes of CPR and no oxygen to his brain the entire time. As I beheld in semi-shock the lifeless body of this man I so deeply loved, who came into my life relatively late in both our lives, I felt as if I'd been struck dumb. Yet I felt in the deathly silence of that hospital room the louder silence of God. The only prayer I could utter was "Oh dear God, get me through this. I know you will. I just don't know how".

Six months later, as I was just starting to adjust to my unplanned widowhood (to the extent one ever "adjusts" to such a loss) when I found myself "confined to quarters". I've always enjoyed quiet and solitude, but this was a bit much, I thought. It was bad enough to have suffered deep and soul numbing grief, an amputation from my heart, an indescribable sorrow and loss at a future without the one person who knew all my faults and yet loved me through all of them. But now this? Stay home? Don't hug anyone, don't have anyone over who doesn't live there (that narrowed it down to my dog) even family and friends, children and grandchildren? Two of my three sons and two of my grandchildren, 28 month old twins, live in San Francisco. I planned to see them every 6 weeks or so, and had

bought plane tickets for my next visit. The little ones are growing like weeds before my eyes on FaceTime visits.

By the grace of God, this state of “semi-solitary confinement” wrapped in quiet has enabled me to heal in ways not possible otherwise, as I’ve been learning to *rest* in God’s silence, to *hear* God in the silence, and to find there a companionship words can’t describe.

I have come to realize how deeply comforting God’s silence is. It is the silence of a mother holding her child and simply rocking her as she cries, almost inconsolable, until she is spent. It is the silence of a lover or friend offering the simple gift of presence. It is the silence of God in the Garden of Gethsemane, and at Golgotha when Our Lord cried out in his agony my God my God why have you forsaken me? God is never not there.

I attended this year’s New Year’s Eve retreat at the Abbey. Abbott Damien’s homily for New Year’s Day, a day dedicated to Mary, was about how God loves and cares for us “even with the dark moments in life...when things are difficult, and confusing, and don’t seem to make sense...when it hurts too much to think that God would allow this to happen...when it seems that God is nowhere near us...when God is silent.” Mary pondered many things in her heart, in the silence. It was almost as if that message was written just for me. The following month I was able to attend the Ash Wednesday/Lenten silent retreat, just a couple of weeks before the widespread closures. It was a good preparation for the weeks and months ahead.

In his book *The Power of Silence* (subtitled *Against the Dictatorship of Noise*), Cardinal Robert Sarah writes that “in silence, not in the turmoil and noise, God enters into the innermost depths of our being...

Silence is not an absence, on the contrary, it is the manifestation of a presence, the most intense of all presences.” He writes that Christ invites us to the dwelling place of God’s silent tenderness.

The silence of God is unlike the “silent treatment” that an abusive or mean person will inflict on another human being. That is a silence of winter and ice, a punitive and



manipulative silence. The silence of God speaks of a love so deep that words are simply insufficient to describe it. It is a companionship with One closer to me than my own self. In the past ten months, from God’s silence so much grace has flowed forth. I’ve learned to be more tuned into God speaking to me in this way, in his silence, through everyone and everything around me.

In *Silent Hope: Living with the Mystery of God*, John Kirvan wrote “The God for whom we hunger is a silent God who

pursues us silently in a noisy world. We need to know and accept that the mother tongue of this mystery is silence. A burning bush awaits us in the darkness, in the silence. There is no escape from that silence. There is only hope. The God for whom we hunger...escapes our every attempt to confine him to the limits of our mind and soul.” He also wrote “This world is a place of grace for those who choose to find you here.”

In his book *Encounters With Silence* Father Karl Rahner, a Jesuit, wrote that “To be religious is to believe that it is meaningful to speak into the endless desert of

Late have I loved you. Beauty so ancient and so new. Late have I loved you! You were within me, but I was seeking you outside...you called, you cried out, you shattered my deafness; you flashed, you shone, you scattered my blindness. I was hungry and thirsty. You touched me, and I burned for your peace. St. Augustine

God’s silence.... My mind goes into the hushed reaches, which are filled by you alone, the Silent Infinitude.... When I pray, it’s as if my words have disappeared down some deep, dark well, from which no echo ever comes back to reassure me that they have struck the ground of your heart.... I am hopelessly deaf to the eloquent sounds of Your silence...everything will be quiet in death; then I shall have finished with all my learning and suffering. Then I will begin the great silence, in which no other sound will be heard but You, O Word resounding from eternity to eternity.... I know why You are silent: Your silence is the framework of my faith, the boundless space where my love finds the strength to believe in Your Love.... Your Love has hidden itself in silence, so that my love can reveal itself in faith. You have left me, so that I can discover you.”

As long as I knew him (we met in 2001, shortly after his first wife died), Tom found God in presence, hospitality, simplicity, gratitude, and silence. In September of

2006, while on our honeymoon, he wrote a poem for me on gratitude, and on letting go. It was distributed at the Vigil service in our parish, and was re-printed on the Mass program for the funeral Mass the next morning. I’ve submitted it for this issue of the *Chronicle*, to accompany my article.

Those who knew Tom knew what an engaging conversationalist he was, a dynamic speaker who never needed notes. I used to gripe at him for his silence at home, or in the car, usually at the end of a long day when he was tired. I’d often say, “let’s talk.” And his response would sometimes

really aggravate me: “Well what do you want to talk about?” What I’d give for just one evening of sitting in silence together, a companionable and comforting silence that needs no words. He showed his love for me in so many ways that didn’t need words: from making sure my car was filled with gas (his job he said), to making breakfast on weekends, dinner most nights, getting the coffee set up for me to start in the morning, making the bed, taking out the trash and retrieving the bins from the curb on trash day, great love in small things. One day recently when I went to fill my car with gas, by then perilously on empty, I cried all the way home with missing Tom and his quiet gestures of servanthood and love. Love is action. Love is presence. God is love. ✕

MARY SCHULTE is an Oblate of St. Andrew’s Abbey. She sat on the Orange County Superior Court bench from September 5, 1997 to September 5, 2017, and now is a part-time mediator and arbitrator. Her husband Tom Schulte was retired from the bench as well, and was an Oblate. He is buried at St. Andrew’s Abbey.



The water glistens as if sprinkled with tens of thousands of tiny diamonds in the mid-day sun. It draws your attention from the misty beauty of the morning fog and dampens your anticipation of the golden sunset to come. The moment captures your spirit and holds you in the now.

All of life should be this way: the past released with gratitude, the future un-longed for and the present absorbed as if it will last forever, knowing that when it has passed it will be given back to God in a spirit of thankfulness, giving way to the sunset yet to come and new light and life and morning thereafter.

*T. Schulte
September 15, 2006*

The RULE at Work

By Elizabeth Ann
Kissling, OBL. OSB

ONE OF MY EARLY ENCOUNTERS with the Rule of Benedict got me thinking about the office supply cabinet we dozen or so share at my workplace. We take from the cabinet as we find ourselves in need, and periodically someone places a restock order on the Government's dime. I decided I should, in light of Chapters 32–34,* go against the grain and stop doing things like hoarding entire packages of small sticky notes and squirreling away reams (okay, cases) of printer paper, because none of this stuff is mine to stash. The experiment went well: I always had what I needed to run my little office, and the items I'd returned to the cabinet seemed not to put a penny in the gears of the next restock order.

When my husband retired, we began to sort through our stuff toward consolidating in one place. We each owned our own home when we married, so stuff has always abounded; it was time to evaluate and redistribute. We chose one place that would hold the items we'd actually use in retirement, or that we deemed worthy of keeping to pass on to family members, and we began donating duplicate or superfluous



* *The Rule of St. Benedict In Latin and English with Notes* (Ed. Timothy Fry, O.S.B., The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minnesota, 1981).

items. Consolidation was going very well: in this one place were now “the chosen”: family heirlooms, tools, and some of my most treasured possessions (among these, my well-stocked tackle box, a few spinning rods and reels, and lots of art supplies).

Then we learned that on an Easter Sunday our one place had been burgled. Almost all of the precious things I had carefully selected, packed, and stashed were gone! Several of my husband’s things were also gone, but, fortunately, none he deemed critical or irreplaceable. Local law enforcement reinforced my certainty that I’d never again see any of my stolen stuff.

The depth, ferocity, and derangement of my anger shocked me. My imaginary plans for retribution, should the perpetrator reappear on the scene while I lay in wait, were vicious and lethal. In light of my wrath, I dubbed myself unfit to be an oblate and considered rescinding my oblation (“Peace? Bah! Revenge!” “Good? Bah! Never!”). I avoided people, creating situations that enabled me to bow out of commitments without revealing the state of my fury and grief. “Attacked,” I withdrew—seemingly more evidence of my unfitness as an oblate, a person of community. And on and on.

Thanks be to God, a few weeks into my miserableness, while I was mentally arguing with God during my “silent” hour-long drive to work (I know better than to argue out loud with God while driving), I almost audibly heard God ask me, “If you truly believe that none of that stuff was yours, what do you care that I reassigned it?” My reaction was not one of sweetness and light and surrender—rather, I was so taken aback by the question that I shut up (what God had been waiting for?) and continued driving in true silence.

Over the next few days I began to cautiously explore that question, in the way

one would carefully apply pressure to a seedling in order to gauge its accumulating strength and resiliency. What indeed did I believe about stuff? Was it mine or God’s? Could any amount of locks, alarms, or surveillance do anything more than slow God down if He had another purpose for things I “owned”? Had any of my stuff made its way to someone who might actually need or use it, not hoard it for use in coming years (years that I can’t know that I have coming to me)? If I were to find any of it rejected as trash, lying by the side of the road somewhere in the desert, desiccating and deteriorating under the sun; if I were to get out of the car and sift through my rejected stuff with great sadness, would the grand scheme change? Would the sun stop shining, the wind stop blowing, or God stop loving me?

The things I “owned” were of the Earth. The Earth and all that is in it is God’s. Maybe we live atop a grand office-supply cabinet—a “one place” that has all of the stuff—none of it superfluous—that God knows we need to live successfully in His way. Maybe my small-scale, futile grasping and hoarding parallel some of the insidious attitudes and practices we hold and commit toward the natural resources of God’s Earth. Maybe the thief did me a favor. ✖



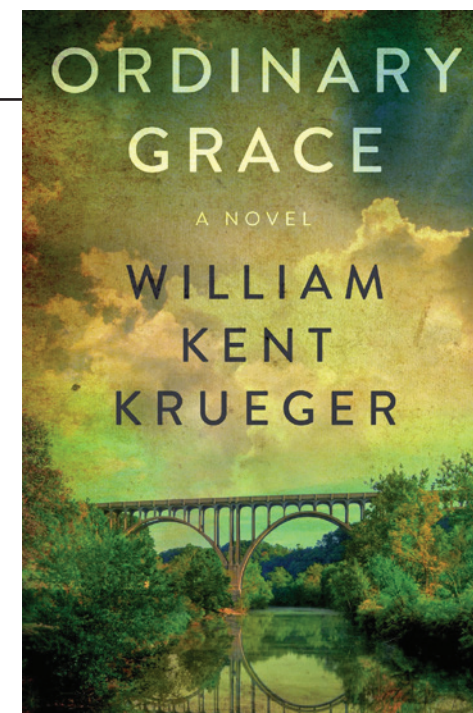
BOOK REVIEW

MARY KAUFFMAN, OBL.OSB

THIS NOVEL IS A MYSTERY ON two levels: level one is the murder mystery: how many of the deaths were murders; who is or who are the murderer(s)? Level two is the holy mystery: what exactly is or are the miracle(s), and how and where does God work His extraordinary wonders in the ordinary fabric of daily life?

Ordinary Grace moves us back into the America of the late 1950s and early 1960s, which, if you grew up during that time as I did, you will immediately recognize through the food—bologna sandwiches, grilled cheese, potato chips, Kool-Aid, ground beef mixed with canned spaghetti—and the television background of Howdy Doody and Ed Sullivan. It paints a picture of life in a small town in the Midwest mindset and mores of Minnesota, and it does not avoid the cultural, social, sexual, and religious conflicts of that particular time and place, which are also universals in human community.

Krueger creates his characters with the complexity and clarity of an author aware of a fallen world: there are men wounded by war; women wounded by abusive men; adults wounded by alcohol; children wounded and damaged by wounded and damaged parents; the prejudiced, the lonely, the socially insecure, the arrogant, and the outsiders. Through this panoply of human frailty, the author shows that again there are two levels of living with the world’s trials and torment: the purely human, reactionary level, that is a secular misshaping by responding in kind to the toughness and sadness of life; and the sacred level, that is shaping by the Gospel message of loving one’s enemies, blessing



ORDINARY GRACE
WILLIAM KENT KRUEGER

one’s persecutors, and going the extra mile with those in need of help.

The gritty, earthy tale of the fictional town of New Bremen is told through the eyes of a 13-year-old boy, Frankie Drum, who has a growing awareness and curiosity about the world around him and wants to pull back the curtain on the mysteries of adult life. It is his coming of age story into the puzzle of guilt and innocence. The Drum family is the focal point of the book, and each family member has a unique part to play as this mystery of life and death unfolds.

When I read fiction, I am always intrigued and interested by the names the author gives his or her characters. Sometimes the names are merely reflections of what was popular in a novel’s setting of time or place, but sometimes the names reveal something deeper about

the characters, an allusion to a greater reality. In *Ordinary Grace*, the names resonate with meaning, often particularly Biblical. Our narrator, Frank, is the middle child of three. He *is* frank; he is open about all he sees and experiences and is willing to honestly express himself to those around him (and to us, the readers). He does not keep his thoughts and feelings closed inside and acts immediately when he thinks it is required. His older sister, the eldest child in the family, is the beautiful and musically talented Ariel, the name of an archangel who is usually portrayed as female, the name of the airy musical spirit in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, the name of Disney's animated little mermaid. The younger, and youngest, is Jake, who is plagued with a stutter, is cruelly teased for it, and cannot speak in public (reminiscent of Moses in Exodus 4:10: "...I am slow of speech and slow of tongue") but has a keen, uncanny insight into those around him and often sees what others don't. He has semi-prophetic dreams of a mystical quality. The namesake of the biblical Jacob, Jake in a gentler and more honest way eventually claims the birthright of an elder son.

Their father, Nathan, is a Methodist minister; their mother, Ruth, is a cold, resentful woman who feels imprisoned in their small, dark house in the "Flats," the lower economic part of town. She feels an outsider to her family, making it clearly known that she had "higher aspirations" than filling the role of a pastor's wife. Her maturity and peace come later in life. Nathan Drum is an echo of the prophetic OT voice of Nathan, who both encouraged and chastised King David in some of the darkest and most emotionally turbulent times of the king's life. Pastor Drum lives his faith and stands out as a Christian

sign to the townspeople. He gives love, forgiveness, counsel and encouragement when needed; he points out errors when necessary and strives to right the wrongs of prejudice and hatred around him.

The beauty of Krueger's prose radiates throughout the book. Have you ever awakened in the middle of a hot summer night? Here are the book's opening lines: "Moonlight pooled on the bedroom floor. Outside the chirr of crickets and other night bugs gave life to the dark." Has someone's

*"Gus turned around and
I heard the dance of his
footsteps down the stairs
and the last of his laughter
and when he was gone
the blessing that had been
the lightness of his spirit
seems to have brightened
Jake's mood...."*

presence left an impression on you after he or she left the room? "Gus turned around and I heard the dance of his footsteps down the stairs and the last of his laughter and when he was gone the blessing that had been the lightness of his spirit seems to have brightened Jake's mood...." Have you ever waited in fraught uncertainty for life-changing news? "Time in the Drum household changed that night. We entered a period in which every moment was weighted with both the absolute necessity of hope and a terrible and almost unbearable anticipation of the worst."

Krueger captures ordinary experiences with extraordinary loveliness of language that gives readers greater awareness of the beauties in their daily lives.

Ordinary Grace highlights the bonds of friendship, the bonds of siblings, the graces of daily life, and the wisdom born of suffering. The title has a double meaning in that it refers to a specific moment in the book when a meal blessing of grace is requested, an ordinary event that becomes an extraordinary grace-filled moment; but it also refers to those moments in the context of "ordinary" daily life that are not blatant, not spectacular, that may cause little surface stir but are truly grace-filled. A moment of grace changes the entire Drum family, but it required awareness of its miraculous nature to bring about the change. A final epilogue is the coming together of father and sons in a future that is the fruit of their joys and sorrows, where they honor their dead and rejoice in their lives despite all their loss and challenges.

Readers come to know the Drum family intimately and share in the depths of their emotional experiences as well as being led to question their own prejudices and awareness of the greater world around them. Nathan Drum stands out as a man who lives his beliefs; he is able to see people as individual wounded souls and live his Christian faith despite the taunts of townspeople and tragic challenges. We are shown that we also have a choice in life: do we give in to the secular culture around us, the culture of a fallen world, and let it shape us? Or do we trust the Divine to be with us always, helping us face life's challenges, and act according to Christ's teachings?

Warning: this book promotes the one-more-chapter syndrome. I read it in two nights.

And followers of Benedict's *Rule* will be well reminded that "the Spirit often reveals what is better to the younger" (chapter 3). ✖



EDITOR'S NOTE

This homily was given on July 11, 2020 at St. John's Seminary.

WE REALLY DO NOT KNOW about Benedict the way we know about Ignatius of Loyola or Francis of Assisi or St. John Vianney. To know Benedict is to know him primarily through his Rule, to try to understand why it has been *lived*, in one form or another for over 1500 years. Why it is *still* vital and alive? The Benedictine Rule is a map for the journey to God in its attempt to create a balanced and flexible Christian community that has clear goals. The Rule is also a self-portrait of the balanced and flexible personality of Benedict himself—and tells us more about what and who he was than the simple, sometimes archetypal, stories of his life related by Pope St. Gregory the Great.

In our gospel Peter asks a rather wrong-headed question, a knuckleheaded question if I really want to be perfectly honest what I think, yet a question perhaps all of us have asked at one time or another: What will there be for us, since we have given everything up? Benedict's Rule of life (and his monasticism) reflects the answer: what matters is not so much what you have given up as how you will transform yourself. To think you have given things up for a reward, earthly or heavenly, can lead only to a sense of entitlement and clericalism, if it is not accompanied by a genuine transformation of who you are; so that you imitate Jesus not only in externals but in mind, soul and heart. Following Jesus is living a life that is healing, compassionate, merciful, and asserts genuine life over a life half-lived in falsity, in self-centeredness, in phony piety or public/ecclesial secular kingdom building. For me,

as a Benedictine, it is through *living out* the words and phrases of the Rule that I attempt to follow Christ. This *vocational* invitation is to live out the truth of who and what I really am. This life in Christ is a truth defined in the Rule, by words such as Good Zeal, humility, *conversatio*, stability, respect, poverty, community, silence, communal and private prayer, offering a true peace to a brother, hospitality, and above all, a genuine desire “to prefer nothing to the love of Christ.” A vocation to Benedict's way of life is a call to live out Christ's incarnation using the same tools Christ used.



The Benedictine monk or nun, as part of a long tradition, must respect the place they have come from, but ought also have a vision of the place they are going towards, in the hope of creating the monastery as a template for the kingdom of heaven. But establishing Christ's kingdom means not dwelling on a sometimes all too real history of failures and grievance in self and in community, but rather sharing in, recounting, focusing on the truer history of grace in both life and community: to both tell and live out this story within the community, the *cenobia*, of our lives. To make oneself new. This is all-encompassing. This action of Christ's life, this making new, is embodied by a Jesus who daily made new his life by listening for, and doing the will of, the Father.

But what happens to us when we do not do this? When we want the kingdom now, instead of when it is truly new? In modern psychology there is a term—cognitive dissonance—that gives us a hint of an answer. The term means, in its broadest sense, the interior confusion and turmoil, the interior pain and emptiness, that is caused *in* those who preach, and even believe in, one thing, yet live in an opposite way. We can also use this term to designate a spiritual state, a spiritual illness, and it is this illness Benedict addresses in his Rule—by providing a cure to the disjunction between our words and our actions, our lives and our hearts, our demands upon others, and the choices we make regarding ourselves. We see this spiritual dissonance everywhere today—grounded in hearts made for God, yet lived out by wills ordered only to themselves. It is part of the great secularizing sickness of our times. It is part of the dread we might feel, even if we are afraid to acknowledge it. It is the fear that wakens us at night,



the vision of inauthenticity, of prevarication, of a selfishness that cannot be a part of the new kingdom of heaven. Of not allowing a prayerful, living truth to enliven the dried bones of preconception, prejudice, exclusion, and entitlement. We excommunicate ourselves, we live with a sense of homelessness.

In our gospel Jesus tells us that we must indeed leave all recrimination, gossip, backbiting, power ploys, and personal arrogance behind. But what does that really mean for us? I suspect, at its very basic, it means properly contextualizing, de-idolizing, all those things and people, opinions and ideas, we hold onto in a selfish, self-preserving, way. The Rule tells us what all the great wisdom literature tells us: listen, discern, *seek* wisdom. And remember the fear of the Lord that Benedict writes of is *not* servile fear nor does it end in *servile* love, but is rather another term in acknowledging the complex relational dynamic we have with God, with each other, and above all with ourselves. And what Benedict understood as the core of a monastic community, we today also offer as a way towards healing the country and the church. Benedict only asks of the monks what Jesus asks of all of us.

— Fr. Aelred Niespolo, OSB ❧



UPCOMING PREACHED RETREATS

AUGUST

- 7-9 Who Am I? Meeting the Self in the Prodigal Son
- 10-14 Hildegard of Bingen: Prophet of the Cosmic Christ
- 14-16 Thomas à Kempis as Spiritual Guide
- 21-23 In the Spirit of AA: A Twelve-Step Retreat
- 28-30 Praying in the Circle of St. John

SEPTEMBER

- 4-6 Henri Nouwen: Master of Soul Care
- 7-11 God is Love at the Heart of All Creation
- 9 Take Charge of Your Life
- 18-20 Christ at the End of Life: Catholic Teaching on Palliative Care and Physician-Assisted Suicide

OCTOBER

- 14 Take Charge of Your Life
- 19-22 Still Full of Sap, Still Green: A Spirituality of Aging
- 30-11/1 Love Was His Meaning: The Spirituality of Julian of Norwich

NOVEMBER

- 2-5 Autumn Artists' Retreat
- 9-12 Guess What's Coming For Dinner!: A Cooking Retreat/Workshop
- 11 Take Charge of Your Life
- 12-15 Edith Stein: Her Journey from Darkness into Light
- 16-20 Priests' Retreat: Thriving in the Call of God
- 21 God in America: Judeo-Christian Values in American History

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FOR RESERVATIONS, CALL THE RETREAT OFFICE: (661) 944-2178

REMINDER: Consider our Monthly Recurring Donation Program Credit Cards, Voided Check Authorization, Personal Checks, or Online Bill Payments Accepted. Each method is safe and simple and you can make changes at any time. Please refer to the adjacent donation form for detailed steps. Call or email the Development Office if you have any questions: (661) 944-8959 or development@valyermo.com. Thank you for your support!

ST. ANDREW'S ABBEY PO BOX 40, VALYERMO, CA 93563-0040 DONATION FORM

YES, I would like to support the monks and their ministry by donating the following amount.

DONATION OPTIONS *Please check one.*

ONE TIME DONATION

☐ \$ _____

RECURRING DONATION

☐ \$1/day (\$30/mo) ☐ \$2/day (\$60/mo) ☐ \$3/day (\$90/mo)

☐ Other (\$ _____ per month)

PAYMENT OPTIONS

CREDIT CARD PAYMENT Charge the amount indicated above to my credit card (one-time or recurring):

☐ VISA ☐ MASTERCARD ☐ DISCOVER ☐ AMERICAN EXPRESS

CARD NUMBER

EXPIRATION DATE

SIGNATURE

CHECK TRANSACTION

- ☐ ENCLOSED IS MY CHECK for the one-time donation amount indicated above.
- ☐ ENCLOSED IS MY VOIDED CHECK. By sending this check, I authorize St. Andrew's Abbey to withdraw the indicated amount from this account each month for my recurring donation.
- ☐ MONTHLY CHECK. I prefer to mail a check for my recurring donation each month.

To change or stop your donation at any time,
simply call St. Andrew's Abbey Development Office at (661) 944-8959.

DONOR INFORMATION

☐ Check here if this is a change of contact information

YOUR NAME

MAILING ADDRESS

MAILING ADDRESS

PHONE NUMBER

E-MAIL ADDRESS

PRAYER REQUEST

Dear ABBOT DAMIEN, please include the following request for the monks to keep in prayer:

Your donation is tax deductible. Thank you for helping us to preserve this house of prayer.
If you wish to remember the Abbey in your estate planning, please call (661) 944-2178.
You do not need to make any donation to ask for our prayers.
Please place this donation form in the return envelope provided.

ROOTED IN CHRIST · SUSTAINED IN PRAYER · ALIVE IN MINISTRY



St. Andrew's Abbey
PO Box 40
Valermo, CA 93563-0040

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

NON-PROFIT
ORGANIZATION
PAID
PERMIT NO. 1
PEARBLOSSOM, CA