



# THE VALYERMO Chronicle

SAINT ANDREW'S ABBEY

NUMBER 265  FALL 2020

## LETTER *from the* ABBOT

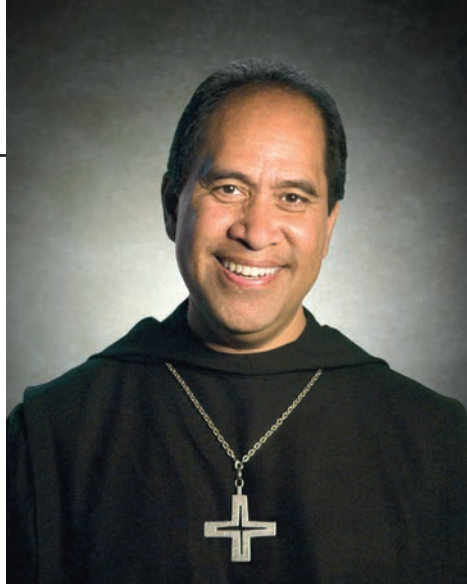
AT THIS WRITING, WE ARE one week into the mandatory evacuation which remains in effect for the Abbey because of the Bobcat Fire.

Several people have asked me the question, ‘What happened?’ This usually means they want ‘the scoop’—the story of our evacuation, how the Abbey survived the fire, and perhaps my own thoughts about it all.

**Wednesday night, September 16.** Sometime between 9:00–10:00 p.m., as we were falling asleep at the monastery, we received through our cell phones the evacuation warning. It was loud blaring alarm. This woke us up, immediately. After the initial shock of it all, we began to pack, not knowing when we would be mandated to evacuate. Most of us were able to go back to sleep between 1:00–2:30 that morning while waiting for the mandatory evacuation notice.

**Thursday afternoon, September 17.** We didn’t have to wait very long. Through a close friend of the Abbey, who is a firefighter, we got the ‘heads up’ that a mandatory evacuation would be announced within 2–3 hours. Thankfully, we packed most things the night before. We celebrated Mass at noon, had lunch, then we headed south to American Martyrs parish in Manhattan Beach, far from the smokey air, the fire and the Abbey. We made arrangements with this parish two weeks prior in the case we would have to be evacuated. Just as we were heading out of the Abbey, we heard the loud blaring alarm coming through our cell phones again. This time announcing that mandatory evacuation was in effect for our area. It was all unreal.

**Friday afternoon, September 18.** I was on my way back to the Antelope Valley to check on one of the monks who evacuated to the home of a friend of the Abbey. While on the freeway, sometime between 2:00 and 3:00, I received a phone call from the



Abbey maintenance person who was at the Abbey. He called to tell me that the Bobcat fire had reached the Abbey property. He said it was not far from the apple orchard by the youth center, about 500 feet from the orchard he told me as he choked back tears. My own heart began to sink to my gut, knowing it was only a matter of time before the Abbey would be engulfed in flames, and our home—and so much more—would be gone. I thanked him for the phone call and for being at the Abbey, and then I told him he should leave the Abbey immediately. I hung up, sighed deeply several times, and just closed my eyes. (I was not driving; another monk was driving). Many questions and memories raced through my mind simultaneously as I pictured the apple trees and the youth center. Tears. Prayers. More deep sighs.

At some point in the mix of emotions and questions, I prayed, “Lord, please help me to want what You want.” That is the prayer that was on my lips for the rest of the day. Before I went to bed that night, a friend who heard that the Abbey was in the direct path of the Bobcat fire, texted me and said, “Please let me know if there is anything I can do for you all.” I responded, “Please pray that we joyfully accept God’s will.” It was a rough night for all of us.



**Saturday morning, September 19.** The next morning we woke up, prayed Vigils and Lauds, though it didn't 'feel' the same. There was a tangible unease and sadness in the air. But our sadness would soon turn to joy.

At about 8:30 that morning, we received word via a Facebook message from an oblate. The oblate had a friend who was a firefighter. This firefighter friend was actually on the Abbey grounds Friday night and early Saturday morning. The firefighter wrote: "The Abbey had some Divine intervention yesterday and is unscathed. I checked it three times and just now at 5:00 a.m. There is still a threat as we have miles of uncontained fire line in the area, yet I think we will be in good shape at the end."

It was literally unbelievable news. How could the Abbey be 'unscathed' if the fire was near the youth center? It can't be true, I told myself. But it came from a reliable source: a firefighter who said he was on the property.

Not long after getting this incredible news, another friend of the Abbey, also a firefighter, sent us word that the Abbey 'survived'. I thought, 'Can it be true?' Then our maintenance man, the same one who saw the flames on the property, made his way back to the Abbey and said the same thing: "Father, the Abbey is alright! *Gracias a Dios!*", while choking back tears once again.

For some reason, I still would not give myself one hundred percent permission to believe this news. I kept telling myself be careful to believe preliminary reports. I wanted to see photos.

It didn't take long for the pictures to start coming in from our firefighter friend and maintenance worker. The images supported the reports. All the buildings were standing and intact, looking much the same as we left them on Thursday, and to top it

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Samuel Palmer,  
*Wheatfield by Moonlight, with  
the Evening Star*, circa 1830

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# Art & Virtue

DR. DONALD P. RICHMOND, OBL.OSB

*"Art is a virtue of the practical intellect."* —JACQUES MARITAIN



**I**N HIS BOOK, *CREATIVE INTUITION IN ART & POETRY*, Jacques Maritain makes a statement that requires both questions and answers. These questions and answers are most especially important for those of us who are Christians engaged in the visual or verbal arts—including liturgical arts. He writes:

“Art is a virtue of the practical intellect.”

With this statement in mind, let us briefly and broadly consider four ideas.

### THE QUESTION OF ART

A number of years ago, an educator placed before me some “art” which, apparently, she had constructed. Setting this on the table between us she asked if this was “art”? Regardless of my answer, the question “what is art?” *is* important. It is not a new question. The question has likely existed as long as people sought to understand, express and evaluate artistic creativity. However, especially since the so-called Enlightenment, the question has become all-the-more pressing. Unshackled reason, eventually succumbing to the tyranny of Scientific Rationalism and Emotive Mysticism, have resulted in numerous socio-psycho-pneumatic problems. At least since the rise of Dada, if not sixty years before, anti-art has become commonplace. But do crudely placed toilet bowls, unmade beds, immersed crucifixes, crass constructions, or angry scratchings, constitute art? If art is to be understood and appreciated as art, as “a virtue of the practical intellect,” Maritain’s assertion needs to be taken seriously. True art must have elements of “virtue,” the “practical,” and the “intellect” attached to it. As well, according to Maritain, “[Art] is immersed in creativity,” which, if we are Christians seeking to be imitators of God, requires discipline, order, purpose, and some conscious and conscientious reliance upon the Creator. The question of art dynamically intersects with questions about God, Man and creativity.

### THE QUALITY OF ART

Maritain refers to art as a “virtue.” Upon making this statement, however, *he is not referring to moral virtue*. Bad people can make great art, Caravaggio being just one of many examples. When Maritain refers to the virtue of art, he is referencing the quality of that which is made and not referencing the character of the maker. As such, good art must have a practiced or perfected quality associated with it. This is evidenced in the Old Testament when God called craftsmen to build (and at times create) the Tabernacle and Temple. These endeavors required creative craftsmanship. Not just anyone was called to this work. The people who were chosen had certain, and clearly identified, skills. Quality craftsmen (or women) were chosen to produce quality work.

Within Maritain’s context, true or good art is true and good because it is truly good—it is, so to speak, well done. If we want an audience (church or culture) to invest in our message, the message must be carefully crafted. It must exhibit a particular “quality.” Public art must exhibit objective quality. And, I might add, art always fits the occasion.

### THE CONTENT OF ART

The Christian artist must always consider content. If we are co-creators with God, albeit in our own limited ways, the content of the creation is important. Take, as an example, the unfolding of the

creation narrative in *Genesis* 1. Each “day” of creation naturally unfolded into the next day. Each one of God’s “let there be” statements resulted in the desired outcome which, upon completion, was declared “good” or “very good.” The creation had a content which was intended to provide a context. As such, the creation of a garden was intended to provide a context within which “Man” could abide and thrive. It was good content, and good context, within which the very good could exist and, ideally, expand.

As Christians, even when communicating difficult subjects, we must always attend to the content of our communication. What we want to “say” must match what we are actually saying. There can be, with good art, no miscommunication. What artists mean to say is what the artist must say. Content must have an internal integrity that is externally communicated and communicable. This is most clearly seen through the Byzantine Iconography that dominated Christian art from the 5<sup>th</sup> to the 15<sup>th</sup> centuries. Within Byzantine Iconography, an art form that is “written” because of its dependence upon the Bible and Theology, there were priorities, principles and practices which guarded and guided both the artist and the faithful. The artist, the iconographer, could not do whatever she wanted. She had to follow a pattern, a process. Because Byzantine Iconography was visual catechesis, visual religious instruction, the “writer” had to ensure that the integrity of God’s message was preserved and provided. As a visual sermon, these artists went to great lengths to make sure that they “spoke” the content of what God and the Church sought to communicate.

We, too, must so-attend to the content of our art. There are at least four

elements of content to which we, as artists, must attend. These are: (1) Content as Confession, (2) Content as Craft, (3) Content as Creation and (4) Content as Context. Each of these will be addressed, very briefly, in the form of a question.

**Does our art directly and decidedly reflect our *confession* of Christ?** This does not mean that every expression of art, visual or verbal, must overtly communicate Jesus or the faith. But, essentially, again using the creation narrative as an illustration, Christian art must in some way bear the imprint of God upon it. The Christian artist must exhibit, through her art, a “natural theology” that communicates the glory of God --- even when communicating the most secular subjects.

**Does our art exhibit impeccable *craftsmanship*?** Maritain suggests that good art is good simply because it is well-executed. Of course, to some degree, this element of the “good” is not always consistent. There are always elements of “good, better, best” in art. Even Byzantine Iconographers exhibit greater or lesser skills. An example can be found in the various *Books of Hours* or Bibles produced in the Middle Ages. Some *Books of Hours* are visual masterpieces. Others are well done. Yet others, are adequate to their purpose. Similarly, using the Bible as a point of reference, not every Bible can be a *Book of Kells* or *Lindisfarne Gospel*. Similarly, while Andrei Rublev’s “Hospitality of Abraham” (Trinity Icon) is the apex of iconographic excellence, it is not the only “hospitality” icon of import or excellence. What is important, nevertheless, is that public art (especially in worship) be well-crafted in spite of the “good, better, best” realities in which we live. There is a practical, or practiced, perfectibility to all good Christian art.



**Does our art communicate *creativity*?**

This is an odd, yet vital, question. And, to make this clear, I will use Christian musical art as a painful illustration. As a broad statement, I do not in any way enjoy the music that is profiled on “Christian” airwaves today. The reason for this is because I

music, by-and-large, is so packaged that it is entirely predictable. It is painfully predictable drivel. You will note that, throughout this subcategory, I have placed the word “Christian” within quotation marks. Why? Because I do not believe that imitative art is Christian art. There is no real creativity



find the vast majority of “Christian” music to be imitative and saccharine. I have actually driven down the highway, flipping channels, trying to discover (within seconds) which radio stations are “Christian” radio stations. I have rarely, in my many years of doing this, been wrong. “Christian”

involved in imitation, and even Byzantine Iconographers, with their fixed guidelines, did not imitate. And, if we are co-creators with God, imitation is a false creation. All suns are not the same. All oceans are not the same. All land-masses are not the same. All beasts of field and stream are not the

same. All people are not the same. Imitative art will not do!

### **Is our art appropriate to the *context*?**

Art, particularly Christian art, is decidedly contextual. Adam and Eve were placed within the context of the Garden. The Law was given in the context of Mount Sinai and a wandering nation. The Temple was constructed within the context of Jerusalem. Gehenna was placed outside of the context of the wall. Gethsemane was placed within the contexts of two Gardens. Christ was baptized and crucified within the context of human sin. Art, too, has a clear context. It exists within that context. It expresses itself within that context. It has particular meaning within that context --- and, possibly, only within that context. Christian artists must attend to the issue of content-in-context and ask and answer the questions Christian art demands of the Christian artist. If content and context do not match, the artist has a real or potential problem.

### **THE CONSIDERATION OF ART**

Finally, Maritain's "intellect" in art must also concern the Christian artist. Art is not just emotive expression. Art is not just intended for personal or social catharsis. If, according to St. Anselm, all study must be "faith seeking understanding," so all Christian art must seek to be faith seeking manifestation. In other words, art must be mindful. Art as concept must have a mind. Art as communication must have a mind. Art as a chosen commitment must have a mind. Christian art does not entirely concern itself with what the viewer or hearer may "feel" about what is presented. It certainly is *a* concern. Historic Christian art always wanted to be emotively evocative. And yet, importantly, Christian artists have a clearly set purpose they seek to communicate.

They do not leave the "interpretation" entirely with the viewer. The words, the pictures, the sounds, the actions — they all mean, and are meant to mean, something. Christian art is not entirely left in the eye or the ear of the beholder.

This means, at least in part, that the Christian artist must be studied and studious. She must know her craft; its history, its content, its context, and its cultures. She must, as with the Bible, "study to show [herself] approved." Some years ago, I was asked to be a liturgical consultant for a church. Asking about the formal training of the "worship leaders," I was shocked to hear that not a single leader had any formal training in worship studies. I guess the Lead Pastor thought that if the "worship leaders" could play and sing, if they had some rudimentary (or even advanced) skills, if their hearts were in the right place, the worship would be properly ordered. He was wrong, and I told him so. Such an orientation leads to a host of biblical, theological and liturgical problems. In this particular church, their refusal to engage the mind (the practical intellect), led to some highly unbiblical Eucharistic practices. Worship, like any other mindful art form, is an art that requires a considered approach. ALL Christian arts require a considered approach. Art is mind made manifest which, for the Christian, means being immersed in the mind of God and the Church. One could say, therefore, that all true Christian art is visual or verbal prayer.

"Art is," indeed, "a virtue of the practical intellect." Maritain was, and remains, right.

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*Until one has loved an animal, a part of one's soul remains unawakened.*

—ANATOLE FRANCE

*Animals are God's creatures. He surrounds them with his providential care. By their mere existence they bless him and give him glory.* —CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH 2416

*The entire material universe speaks of God's love, his boundless affection for us . . . everything is, as it were, a caress of God.*

—LAUDATO SI' 84

MARY FINGAL SCHULTE,  
OBL. OSB

HAVING GROWN UP IN a household with nine siblings, the only pets I ever had were the family parakeets, goldfish or little turtles, all of which seemed to have short life spans. We had a rabbit once, but it got loose and decimated our backyard before hopping off to better pastures. No dogs or cats lived in our 2000 square foot house in San Francisco. Most of my adult life I had an “it’s never happening” view of dog ownership. And certainly, if I ever did own “one”, it would be allowed inside the house rarely, if ever (“animals” belonged *outside*.) It would be banned from sitting on furniture, and would *never ever* sleep on my bed. It would not jump up on people to greet them, it would never bark unnecessarily, nor would it beg for treats. So, if by some quirk of fate I ever had a dog, it would be the model of a well trained, dog, and a paragon of doggie civility that would

know its place and understand who was in charge. Lots of my friends were dog owners, and when the inevitable happened and the dog died, I'd offer sympathy, but think to myself "OK, so get another one, it's just a dog."

As the saying goes, never say never. Even better, make plans, God laughs.

The ice for dog ownership was broken via both of my adult sons. One had two cockapoos, and the other two adopted greyhounds. Visits from my sons and their spouses were a package deal, dogs included.

I came to love these four-legged friends of theirs and even referred to them as my "grand-dogs."

Ten years ago, by a circuitous route, Tom and I inherited a one-year-old 9-pound Maltese poodle mix named Jenny. This little dog



wormed her way very quickly into my heart and became a cherished and greatly loved companion. She quickly gained free rein over sleeping on the sofa privileges, and had zero trouble with staking out sleeping on the bed privileges. Whereas one son's dogs happily watch Animal Planet, *my* dog barked at any TV shows that included even a cameo appearance by any kind of animal. She had the uncanny ability of waking from a sound sleep and dashing to the living room window barking if any other dog dared walk cross the perimeter of our house, which for her, seemed to be an entire city block. She knew when another dog was in the vicinity even before it could be seen.

A year ago early last August, Jenny was

diagnosed with diabetes. A few weeks later, just a couple of days before he died, Tom said, "That dog is going to be a lot of trouble." If you define "trouble" as an extra investment of time, yes, she was some "trouble." But I think Tom would be happy for the special joy and companionship Jenny gave me during her last year of life. For a year, at the vet's direction, I fed her twice a day rather than allow her the grazing she was used to, and I administered an insulin shot twice a day. I regularly cleaned up the "acci-

dents" (fortunately the #1 ones) she'd have around the house (tile floors, thankfully). Within months of her diagnosis, she developed cataracts, and then lost her sight completely. (I discovered the vision loss when she walked out the back door behind

me, as usual, but continued straight into the pool, at the time a nippy 62 degrees).

Jenny died suddenly and quite unexpectedly at age 11 at the end of this past July, less than a year after I also suddenly and unexpectedly lost Tom. I was left during the midst of the pandemic with a very quiet and silent house. I think her little heart and body just gave out, and after a restless night where we both were up all night long, she wandered into the hallway and gave me a few tail thumps and, as the saying goes, crossed the rainbow bridge. I cried for three straight days, thinking "Really God? You've got Tom. Now my sweet little dog? Now? Really?" I think Jenny had owned me as much as I had owned her.

**TWO DOGS AND A PARROT:  
WHAT OUR ANIMAL FRIENDS  
CAN TEACH US ABOUT LIFE**

Seeking something comforting to read in the first week after Jenny died, I read Benedictine Sister Joan Chittister's *Two Dogs and A Parrot: What Our Animal Friends Can Teach Us About Life*. (Blue-Bridge 2015). If you own a pet, or a pet owns you, or you wonder what all the fuss is about, I highly recommend it.

In her Introduction, Sister Joan writes that "... there is something quite spiritually profound in the question of what it means to be entrusted with nature, to live with a pet." How true I found that to be. In her book, she reflects on the two dogs she's owned, first an Irish setter named Danny, followed by a golden retriever named Duffy, and then a parrot named Lady. Each chapter has a lovely reflection, along with a story, about a trait our animal companions teach us. The traits include (Danny) *acceptance, enjoyment, balance*; (Duffy) *presence*; (Lady) *change, play, love, adventure*.

**Acceptance:** For the most part, our pets' lives are lives of acceptance. They eat when we feed them, and enthusiastically take walks when we're of a mind to walk them. Jenny accepted and adapted to her newly restricted diet, the discomfort of daily shots, and the loss of vision with equanimity. Even in her dying, there was a sense of acceptance, as she wandered the house looking for a place to lie down and die. I think somehow she knew it was her time, and as I observed her, I was aware of a great peace in my home. In acceptance, Sister Joan writes, "our souls come to peace with the world." In acceptance, we offer a "sacrament of the present moment."

**Enjoyment and Play:** Jenny showed such joie de vivre. Walking her was a

constant reminder to me to appreciate the simple things in life, such as fresh air and just taking a walk and noticing life around me. Nothing passed that dog's notice: a lizard, a freshly mowed patch of lawn, other dogs, small children. As a younger dog, she'd just run around the living room or bedroom in circles, apparently just for the joy of doing it. After she lost her sight and was reluctant to take walks, I did what I thought only "crazy old ladies" do: I bought a dog stroller. It changed and expanded her horizons; she loved being strolled around the neighborhood, like the Queen of Sheba herself, being fussed over by neighbors, especially the children. She'd sometimes just lift her head up to feel the breeze, or hang it over the side to sniff and listen to life around her. Sister Joan writes that this canine sense of enjoyment reminds us to bring joy to what we do: "... learn to enjoy just being alive." Appreciate the "holiness of uselessness" she advises, and give yourself over "to the joy of life for its own sake..." A red-letter day for Jenny involved company coming, which included just about everyone: the pool guy, gardener, plumber, housekeeper, as well as family and friends. Everyone was a friend to her. She was happy just to be herself.

Sister Joan writes: "The problem with play is that few people take it seriously enough.... And what happens to the blooming of the human soul then?"

**Balance:** As an Oblate, I am called to a simplification of life. Sister Joan cautions against over scheduling the day, of letting life become "a marathon of checkmarks" based on what we get "done." Jenny's day pretty much involved around when the next meal, walk, or nap would occur. God taught me some lessons in balance through Jenny, especially this past pandemic/"stay home" year when much of



my scheduled activities went out the door.

**Presence:** Presence, Sister Joan writes, says "...you are enough just as you are." For her dog Duffy, "life was all about being loved, being present, being wanted, being ready." Duffy's "simple, steady presence" was a gift to her. "Duffy was one of those beautiful pieces of life who could be counted on to be the same tomorrow as he had been yesterday." Jenny's presence was to me an anchor, a comfort, and a solace during the dark hours and days following Tom's death. For six weeks after he died, she refused to get up on the bed. After that, she parked herself as close to me as she could get, whether I was in bed, on the sofa, in the kitchen, or at my desk working. Her faithfulness was an important part of my beginning to heal, as I recalled God's unwavering fidelity. She was content just to be in my presence. Having Jenny as my canine companion also reminded me daily of how God seeks our companionship in silence. Indeed, my prayer life often centers on silence, being still, knowing God hears the cries, petitions and thanksgivings of my silence.

Jenny taught me about the value of a relationship that was not based much words, but on presence. To be sure, smart dog that she was, there were words that caused her to swing into action on a moment's notice, jumping off her spot on the sofa, tail wagging, waiting expectantly for something fun and exciting to happen: words like *car, treat, walk, outside, cheese, peanut butter...* And of course, asking "*Who's a good doggie?*" never failed to get her attention. But mostly, there were large stretches of companionable silence between us.

**Change:** Dogs age more quickly than we humans do, and as I watched Jenny over the 10 year span of her life with me,

I marveled at how well she adapted to change, whether it was in losing the physical speed of "puppy-hood", her needing more naps, her fading vision, and the mandated change in diet and feeding schedule, not to mention the indignity of having to get insulin shots. In her little book, Sister Joan describes change as something that "...calls for gratitude for the past and trust in the future." "It's about sucking the sweetness out of being alive. Just being alive. For its own sake."

**Love:** Caring for Jenny reminded me of God's tenderness of heart toward me. It deepened my sense of compassion. Her utter and unquestioning dependency on me for all her needs was a stark reminder and lesson to me for how I should depend on God for all things. Without her, and our twice-daily walks, I probably would not have come to know as many neighbors as I do now. Jenny touched the lives of all she met. In the days following Jenny's passing, God loved and comforted me through the many kindnesses of family, friends, neighbors, and my two dog sitters: flowers left on my doorstep, cards and emailed notes and texts with photos of her. I received a lovely card from the veterinary clinic where she'd received her grooming services as well as veterinary care. Many members of the staff signed it with personal notes as to how Jenny would be missed.

**Adventure:** Sister Joan writes, "...because of each of my animal companions my own small soul has been awakened to more of life than I could have ever found without them." For Jenny, it seemed as if the simplest things in life, the things her human too often took for granted, were a grand adventure in living. Eating a meal; taking a ride in the car; chewing on an old familiar toy; napping beside me while I read, prayed, watched TV, or visited

with a friend: it was all a grand adventure for her. Seeing the world with the eyes of a dog is not unlike seeing the world with the eyes of a child. In Jenny, I was constantly reminded to see the world with a childlike sense of wonder and adventure.

### CAN WE PRAY FOR OUR ANIMAL FRIENDS? YES!

A beautiful prayer for animals appears at the end of Sister Joan's book. The prayer is also on a little bookmarker type card that can be purchased from [www.bluebridgebooks.com](http://www.bluebridgebooks.com)

In *Laudato Si*, his wonderful encyclical letter "On Care For Our Common Home", Pope Francis writes "When we can see God reflected in all that exists, our hearts are moved to praise the Lord for all his creatures and to worship him in union with them." (87) He quotes from the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Japan: "'To sense each creature singing the hymn of its existence is to live joyfully in God's love and hope.'" (85). He offers two prayers of thanksgiving and praise for God's creatures, God's creation, wherein God also reveals who he is, and tells us that creation in itself is good. The first is *A Prayer for Our Earth*, which contains these moving words: "All-powerful God, you are present in the whole universe, and in the smallest of your creatures. You embrace with your tenderness all that exists." In *A Christian Prayer in Union with Creation*, Pope Francis writes, "Father, we praise you with all your creatures. They came forth from your all-powerful hand; they are yours, filled with your presence and your tender love. Praise be to you!"

We can and should pray for our pets, and give thanks for them. As Jenny grew to occupy space in my heart as well as my

home, I knew her days here would one day come to an end. I prayed she'd pass without a lot of suffering. I prayed that when the time came, it would happen at home, and that I wouldn't have to have her "put down" in some sterile examining room at the pet hospital. She had a good death, as dog deaths go. The day before she died was a good one. She seemed more energetic than usual. On her stroller walk, she kept trying to get out, until I finally relented and let her roam. Though blind, she walked alongside me without fear, sniffing everything around her. I wondered that day what was animating her.

Sister Joan sums up so poignantly what lessons can be learned from our pets, lessons I certainly learned in carrying for Jenny: devotion, patient endurance, faithful presence, love without reason, companionship and protection, stability of commitment, trust, joy. Tom used to roll his eyes when I'd mention that the word dog is God spelled backwards. But, as it turned out, there's something to that observation. *"... my animal friends drew me out of myself and made me aware of another whole level of what it means to be alive... In them, I have seen another face of God."* —SISTER JOAN CHITTISTER



MARY SCHULTE has been an Oblate of Saint Andrew's Abbey since 2010. Her husband Tom Schulte died August 20, 2019, and is buried at Saint Andrew's Abbey. ❄️

## 1. *El Camino de Santiago*

To find *El Camino de Santiago*  
begin wherever light and shadow mingle,  
wherever questions stubbornly stay tangled  
in threads of worn out pieties and the soul  
speaks to a longing for discovery  
of the pilgrim's way, points the heart's compass  
toward healing and offers silent witness  
to that part of you that is solitary.

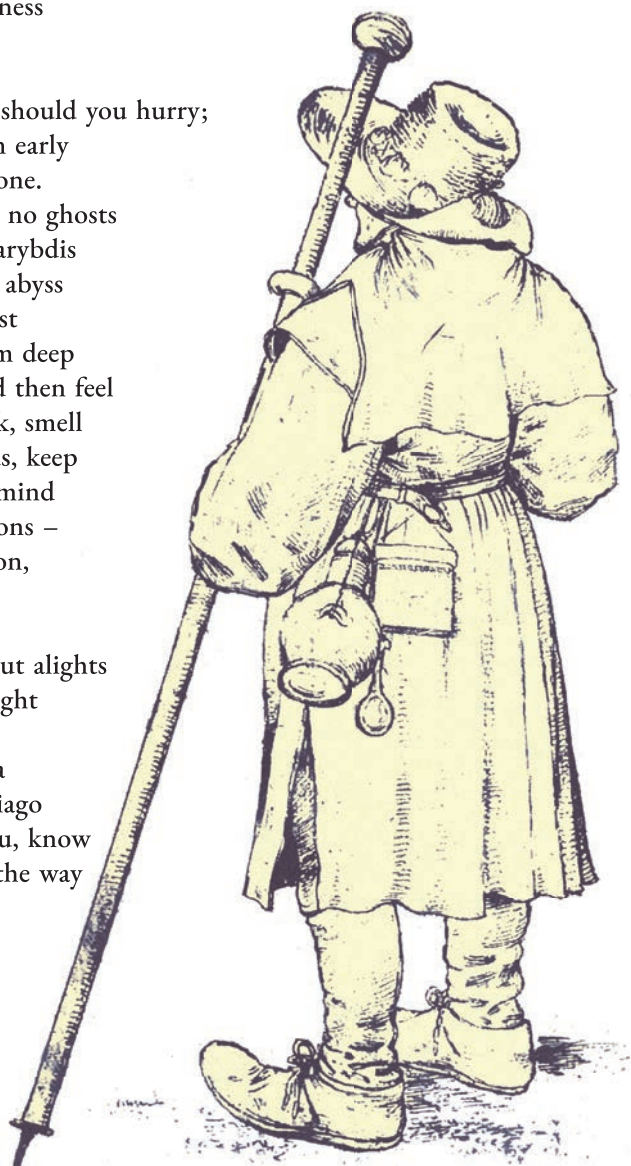
*El Camino de Santiago* is long,  
though do not count the miles nor should you hurry;  
Let time be measured by the way an early  
morning mist arrives, dissolves, is gone.

And do not fear the way: There are no ghosts  
to haunt (except your own), no Charybdis  
and Scylla force the choice between abyss  
or certain wreckage on a craggy coast  
unless you have chosen to keep them deep  
inside your soul. Leave them behind then feel  
the sun warm the nape of your neck, smell  
the fresh cut hay drying in the fields, keep  
your eyes on the horizon and your mind  
at rest, your heart open to new visions –  
a new understanding—of destination,  
of arrival, and along the way find  
those sacred spaces where clarity  
comes not from tortured thought but alights  
as a winged peace in the quiet of night  
or in the still shade of an olive tree.

Finally, when you make Compostela  
and reach to touch the face of Santiago  
worn smooth by all those before you, know  
that what you tried to grasp along the way  
now has hold of you.

## Three Poems

BY JAMES GREEN





## 2. Civil War in Myanmar

### UPDATE 2019

ON AGAIN AND OFF again for over four decades, the civil war in Myanmar continues. The Myanmar army ended a cease fire when it launched an offensive against the Kachin Independence Army in 2011. Since then there have been approximately 3,800 armed clashes between the government's army and the Kachin rebels. According to the Kachin Independence Organization, 311 Christian churches, 24 Buddhist monasteries, 34 childcare centers, 122 schools, and 264 medical clinics have been damaged or destroyed. Caritas Myanmar reports that there are approximately 150,000 civilians displaced since the civil war resumed. Among these, 130,000 live in the 167 camps for internally displaced persons (IDP) located in Kachin State and in the north of Shan State. In 2018 alone, 50 villages were abandoned and residents were forced to find refuge in IDP camps, adding another 6,000 internally displaced persons to the already overflowing camps. In the exodus, many civilians have been killed or injured by landmines scattered by the army throughout Kachinland.

## I THE VILLAGE

For as long as memory this is home:  
a circle of houses surrounding one for the altar,  
vegetable patches on the fringe of the clearing,  
opposite the side where our elephants lounge  
at the end of their day, next to the path  
that leads to the grove, and beyond it the river.  
For as long as memory I hear the stories:  
of tigers in the night, of heroes from old times,  
of serpents and a savior from the new,  
of places a world away and people a world apart,  
of who to trust and of what to fear and where  
to hide,  
stories to make us laugh and cry and wonder.  
For as long as memory I see sunlight filtering  
into our house through the wall of woven bamboo,  
checkered patterns of white light creeping along  
the floor  
as the sun falls, fading into the folds of mosquito  
netting  
draped over a pallet in a corner where the baby  
sleeps,  
shadows tiptoeing across the sky above the forest.  
For as long as memory aromas linger:  
of curry simmering while smoke from a fire  
curls upward, rising like the blessings we give,  
of fresh rain rinsing leaves of grass in the fields,  
purifying the trees where we pick ripe fruit,  
scents seeping into skin as water soaks the earth.  
For as long as memory I feel the heartbeat  
of my mother as I lay on her breast as she cradles  
me;  
I feel the elephant's coarse hide beneath my thighs,  
the hands of my father guiding mine when  
planting,  
my soles sinking into the moist red earth, all  
for as long as memory.

## II FLIGHT

The origin of flight is fear.  
We cannot choose to stay  
at home if home is soon to be  
the muzzles of their guns  
or sounds of soldiers laughing while

our daughters scream, then sob.  
 The scout had said we had two days.  
 Our council met, we packed,  
 we met to pray our rosary,  
 in haste we ate, we fled.  
 The homes we built that soon we knew  
 would be in flames, then ashes,  
 the harvest we would never see  
 weighed heavy on our hearts,  
 a silent grief as palpable,  
 as odorous, as death.  
 I thought of Lot and how he warned  
 his wife to not look back.  
 Although, I did, with hope the salt  
 might cauterize my wounds;  
 Instead they bled.  
 We cannot choose to stay at home  
 if home is soon to be  
 thatched roofs turned into plumes of flames,  
 the muzzles of their guns,  
 the sounds of soldiers laughing while  
 our daughters scream, then sob.  
 One's flight from home is born of fear  
 while knowing that one step,  
 one footfall on a shaded path,  
 might find a landmine from  
 your father's war—a risk you take  
 when leaving home behind.

### III IDP CAMP NEAR MYITKYINA

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We have no measure of time  
 in a place that is not our home,  
 a place where our flesh is not of the dirt,  
 where our bones are not of the trees.  
 Here the sun shines,  
 but leaves no halo over my daughter's face,  
 no longer warms the nape of my neck  
 nor kisses the dragon fruit on the trees.  
 There are no trees, and my daughter left;  
 she said to find work in the city.  
 My son, also. They escape from exhausted  
     hope  
 into the jaws of the tiger.  
 Only women who nurse babies remain,  
 along with children who roam alleys  
 empty of laughter and old women  
 with dull eyes who sit alone in corners,  
 whose men stand in lines—one for  
     bottled water  
 another for food vouchers—or sit on  
     stoops.  
 There are no gardens for weeding, only  
     weeds,  
 there are no chickens pecking at seeds  
     scattered in yards,  
 only silent regrets hiding in the  
     corridors of memory,  
 stirring awake hearts buried far from  
     home,  
 hanging on to the few threads connecting  
 ghost-cries to prayer, faith to hope.

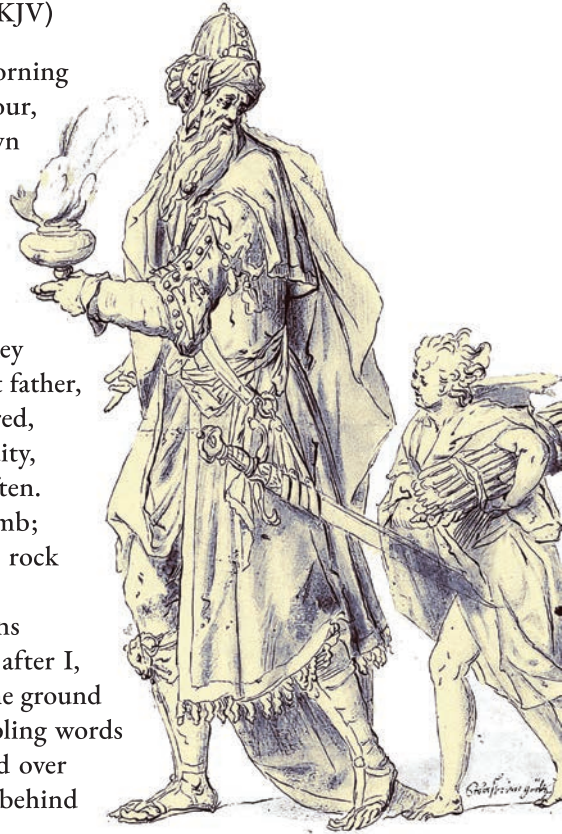
**JAMES GREEN** has worked as a naval officer, deputy sheriff, high school English teacher, professor of education, and administrator in both public schools and universities. His academic publications include three books, as well as scores of articles in professional journals. He has published four poetry chapbooks and individual poems have appeared in literary journals in the USA, UK, and Ireland. Recipient of numerous awards for his poetry, his most recent collection, *Long Journey Home*, was named winner of the 2019 Charles Dickson Chapbook contest sponsored by the Georgia Poetry Society.

### 3. Isaac Returns to the Mountain

*He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. But the angel of the LORD called out to him from heaven, "Abraham! Abraham!"* Genesis 22:10-11 (NIV)

*For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face:  
now I know in part; but then shall I know even as  
also I am known.* 1 Corinthians 13:12 (KJV)

I come here often, always in the cool of morning  
before the clutter of the day invades the hour,  
where the wind whispers and streaks of dawn  
rinse the mountains purple across Moriah.  
They speak to me, this hour and this place,  
arousing memory that is a voiceless prayer  
and bares necessary truths that make  
for a separate hard-won peace.  
Here is the shrub where father tied the donkey  
laden with wood for the fire and I said, "But father,  
you forget the lamb," and where he answered,  
"God provides," evading truth with ambiguity,  
a recourse I have learned myself and use often.  
Over there is where I asked again of the lamb;  
although, by then I knew. And there is the rock  
where he bound me. Yes, it is true.  
Beyond is where he found the ram, its horns  
tangled in the brush, after the angel came, after I,  
breathless with fear, saw the knife drop to the ground  
and father bury his face in his hands mumbling words  
I could not hear, a prayer perhaps, over and over  
while he sobbed and I, my hands still tied behind  
my back,  
still cowering on the altar, waited in stopped time  
as I stared at the knife in the dust.  
All that was long ago; Now the years have dimmed  
my eyesight and the dull ache in my bones make  
the trail a hard one. Yet I come. I come as one  
does to a grave, with flowers, in need of some presence  
beyond memory, to listen again to the comfort  
of my father's voice, to bury any regrets  
that still collect as sediment in my heart,  
to know even as also I am known. ✖







## A MOVING MEDITATION

MARY KAUFFMAN, OBL.OSB

*"Run while you have the light of life..."*

—JOHN 12:35

*"Oh God, who will find rest on your holy mountain? He who walks without fault..."*

—PSALM 15

*"Clothed then with faith and the performance of good works, let us set out on this way...."*

—RB PROLOGUE

*"(T)his rule... the Old and New Testaments... holy writers... Conferences of the early church writers... the Rule of Basil... all these are nothing less than tools for the cultivation of virtues..."*

—RB CH73

*"We shall not cease from exploration, and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time."*

—T.S. ELIOT,  
"LITTLE GIDDING," FOUR QUARTETS

*"In my beginning is my end... In the end is my beginning."*

—T.S. ELIOT,  
"EAST COKER," FOUR QUARTETS

CATHOLICISM HAS A SUP-  
ple ability to incorporate  
non-Christian customs into itself,  
suffusing those customs with new mean-  
ings. We co-opt, adopt, and adapt to  
celebrate Christ's life; we shape and  
infuse those customs with the beauty  
of our faith. Our Christmas celebra-  
tions are timed to coincide with the  
pagan winter solstice, where new  
Light is welcomed into the darkness  
of our world. The pagan yule tree is  
now a triangular fir that signifies the  
Trinity and foreshadows the tree of the  
cross that cannot be separated from our  
joy in the birth of our Savior. The Easter  
celebration of Christ's resurrection over-  
laps with the pre-Christian celebrations of  
spring and new life honoring the Anglo-  
Saxon goddess Eostre, both timed around  
the spring equinox.

Another pre-Christian ritual that can  
have Christian meaning is walking a  
labyrinth. Originally places of fear that  
contained frightening Greek images at  
their centers, labyrinths were later placed  
in churches by Christians in the fourth  
century under the emperor Constantine,  
often with Christian symbols at their  
centers. For example, the earliest known  
Christian labyrinth is in an Algerian  
church; the words "Sancta Ecclesia" are  
at its center. Chartres cathedral contains  
a 13th-century labyrinth that became a  
place of substitute pilgrimage when the  
Crusades made travel to Jerusalem too  
dangerous. Though today labyrinths  
seem to have been usurped by the crystal  
crowd, fraught with the baggage of new  
age-isms, walking a labyrinth can be a  
faith-centered meditation in movement,  
an allegory on life as each part of the walk  
may reveal a one-to-one relationship with  
aspects of our spiritual lives. I invite you



to join me as I recount my personal experience and reflections while I walked the path of a stone labyrinth in the desert of Borrego.

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*“Run while you have the light of life...”*  
—John 12:35

*“Oh God, who will find rest on your holy mountain? He who walks without fault...”*  
—Psalm 15

I begin with a fixed entrance into a particular path, a kind of birth into a finite experience that is an active journey. I keep moving, walking slowly but continually, with only occasional pauses. Even this is a very controlled pace for me. Yet I pass others who stop more often, who deliberate with each step. I do have to be careful when I come to a sudden turn that I saw only as I came close to it. *Is this how I go*

*through life, too rushed and not making those necessary, complete stops? Perhaps I have missed what could have been significant meetings or moments. I reflect that I have made many mistakes because I was in a hurry. Awareness of the present does not come with speed; have I rushed past someone who needed me to listen? Have I not noticed gifts of God, opportunities of the Spirit, because I passed them by too quickly?*

It is unclear where I am going, except for those few feet just ahead. Where I have already been also blends back into indistinctness; it's not a straight and direct look back but is colored by my present position. I do get an idea of the overall pattern when I look forward and back. Yet those perspectives, both of what is behind me and what is ahead of me, continually change, depending on where I presently stand. *As I have moved in life from different stances—from child*



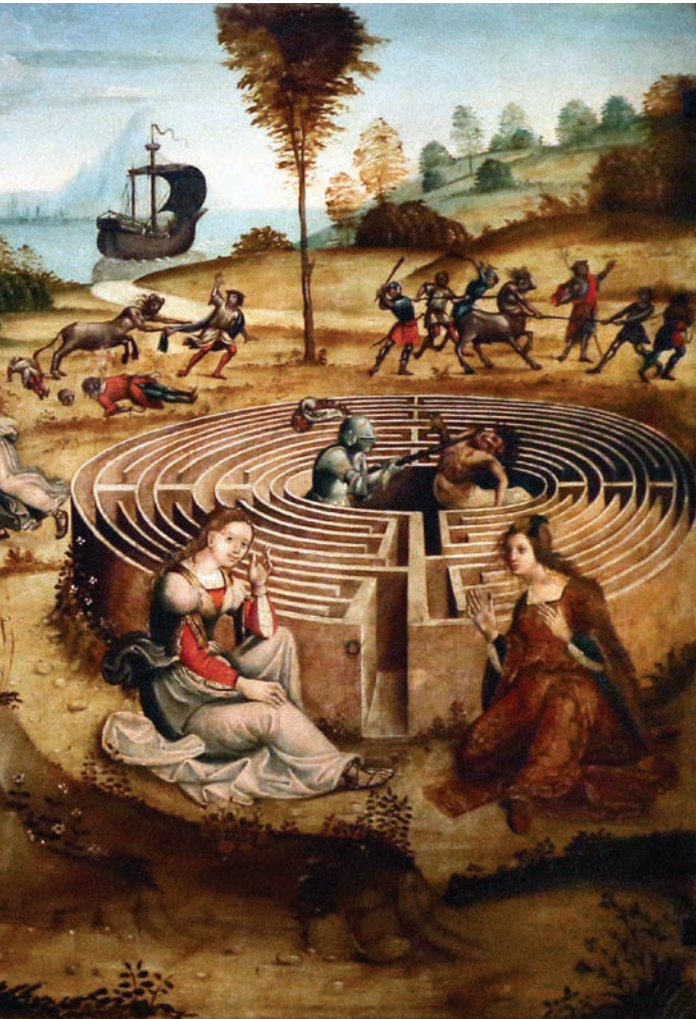
*to student to wife to mother to teacher to grandmother—each position has changed and enhanced my perspective, my values, my ideas. I can look back and see decisions that were good and those that were unwise; I can look forward with the knowledge of experience that I must both plan and prepare while also expecting to be surprised. Our God is the God of surprises, and my position in life allows me to see that as I look back and appreciate the gifts I did not plan for and look forward to the unexpected.*

*“Clothed then with faith and the performance of good works, let us set out on this way....” —RB Prologue*

After walking a bit more, I begin to take notice of my path’s boundaries, grey stones flecked with mica, some more glittering than others. This boundary was determined for me, and much of it is beautiful. I can see past it and realize the immensity outside the confines of my path—can see it, savor it, appreciate it, but must walk my path within these

set stones. *My life also has fixed boundaries that I did not choose but determine much: my genes and my gender, my family background, my culture, my nationality. These are both the confines and shape-givers that make my life walk possible. We are indeed limited, but the Rule and Scripture invite us to walk, to run, to spiritually move within those confines and not let them bind us to our physical limitations.*

I reach the center—a heart-shaped center, holding two heart-shaped rocks. Communion exists at the center, even though I walk alone. Movement ceases for a very brief time; I stop and look outward at the wholeness of the labyrinth, at its multitude of patterns, at the other walkers. I have this still and complete view for only a moment, and then I must continue the journey. *Times come on our life walk to stop, to reflect, to*





*look back and understand. And we must realize we are not alone during that reflection but aided by the Holy Spirit; communion is required for understanding. On this particular walk, there is just one center, one focusing point; on our lives' journeys, we must consciously take time to pause in the midst of the busy-ness of the modern world and reflect on the direction our actions and choices have taken and are taking us. Gifts of our Catholicism: we have the sacrament of Reconciliation as means of reflection and renewal. The gift of the Eucharist creates the communion we need for understanding. With these gifts, I am alone but also in community.*

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*"(T)his rule . . . the Old and New Testaments . . . holy writers . . . Conferences of the early church writers . . . the Rule of Basil . . . all these are nothing less than tools for the cultivation of virtues. . . ."*

—RB ch73

I begin the retracing, but it is a new walk with a different destination: the end. The exit, which was also the entrance, is now my goal. Walking it at the start required trust that even though I could not see far ahead, I was meant to go that way. Now I am repeating the path but in a new way. I trust the One who made the boundary—the One who gave me this particular life with a purpose and meaning. But I see now that the boundary, which initially seemed unchanging, is added to and amended by life choices—Divine Scripture and the Rule are the sparks of mica in the rocks; they illuminate life and guide me on the way. A sudden turn on the path or a glint of sunlight will bring the beauty of the mica on one particular rock to my attention. *Though my life's physical limitations will continue to exist, they are only the*

*base. I now see the boundaries differently; with experience and maturity, only possible when partly through the walk, I have added to that base to make the path more one of my own designing. My faith has been the Truth that has guided me through those sudden turns, those seemingly dead ends, that walk with others. The choices I made of communities and friends, of what is worth bearing and reading to put into my soul, of what to do and what to avoid, create the mica, the glow that illuminates the boundary stones to give them light.*

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*"We shall not cease from exploration, and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time." — T. S. Eliot, "Little Gidding," Four Quartets*

The entrance and exit merge; they are the same!—but I face different directions. I exit the path, an ending, a death of a small kind, and lose the physical boundaries of stone. The labyrinth: a starting in trust, a following in faith, opportunity to pause to appreciate the form and function of the boundaries; all leading to a still center and then a returning to the exit, which is the entrance. (Is this not how we live our lives in faith?) But this time that opening brings a sense of completion and calm, and an exit out of this particular labyrinth is an entrance into something vastly greater. I recall the words of T. S. Eliot: "In my beginning is my end. In my end is my beginning." *I recognize with a small shock that I am completing the walk by going out into the same unbounded area from which I entered the walk, came into my life. I have lost those finite boundaries that were never straight but did flow in a firm direction, leading from infinite back to infinite; I*

*have kept moving and fulfilled a purpose by focusing on the journey, staying in my boundaries, reflecting from the center, walking while having the light of life.*

Much of our beloved Rule of St Benedict uses the images of walking and running to express the movement of the spirit in our lives. Psalms speak of walking without fault as we are deliberate in our actions to move closer to God. Our motion of walking a labyrinth can be an exterior expression of our interior running towards the light of life, towards admittance to God's holy tent. Rather than in Western linear form, time is perceived as a circular re-creating route leading to infinity. This is also a reflection, on a smaller time scale, of the circular rhythm of monastic daily prayer: we arise and enter into morning prayer; we reach the middle of the day and celebrate Mass, our true center; we end the day with night prayer and exit out into the Grand Silence.

T. S. Eliot sees the end as our beginning, as it is when we die and enter a new life in eternity; our beginning is our end, as we are born for a purpose and our fulfillment of that will determine our end. We will all eventually return into the same eternal vastness of God as we do into the unbounded area that envelops the labyrinth. It will be the place where stone boundaries are gone; we will be changed by the walks of life we have taken and return to the infinity from which we were born as people shaped and matured by the roads we followed and the choices we made. This is a vision that may be given us by a prayerful and meditative walk in circles. ✠

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*"In my beginning is my end . . .*

*In the end is my beginning."*

— T. S. Eliot, "East Coker,"

*Four Quartets*



LODEWIJK TOEPUT, "PLEASURE GARDEN WITH A MAZE," CA 1579-84

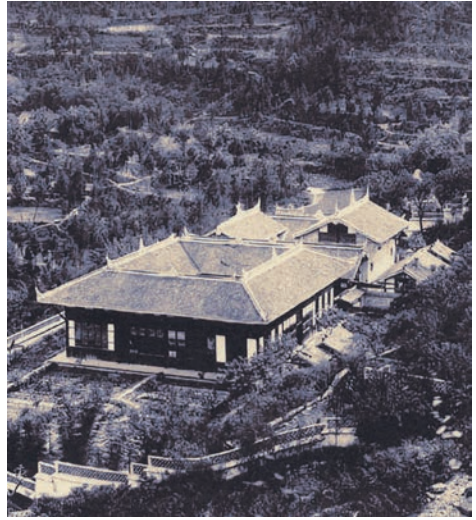
THE FOLLOWING ARTICLE WAS WRITTEN in the form of a letter by the founder of our monastery, Fr. Jehan Joliet, OSB, while he was still a monk of Solesmes, nearly ten years before he was allowed to set out on the mission that established our community in China. In this text he shares his dream of how Benedictine monasticism could benefit an established culture where Christianity is not the dominant ethical or spiritual force.

Two of the “founding fathers” of Valyermo, Fr. Thaddeus Yang and Fr. Vincent Martin, were particularly influenced by Fr. Joliet’s example and theology of mission. In his autobiography, *The Chinese Adventures of an Indonesian Monk*, Fr. Yang praises what he calls Fr. Joliet’s “Riccian” methods, an allusion to Fr. Matteo Ricci, the famous 16th-century Jesuit missionary to China and pioneer of Catholic missiology.

According to both Fr. Ricci and Fr. Joliet, a missionary should never presume to preach to a non-Christian culture without first spending many years immersing one’s self in that culture, studying its philosophy and language, and developing a deep understanding and love for its traditions and people. Fr. Vincent Martin agreed that profound solidarity with the culture one intends to serve is an essential prerequisite; and he personally undertook this during World War II by assisting Fr. Vincent Lebbe in his newly-founded Brothers of St. John the Baptist, a Chinese community that combined contemplation with social service.

In our own increasingly dechristianized era, perhaps Fr. Joliet’s vision can offer us hints as to how the Benedictine monastic tradition may be of help today in the complex task of evangelization.

The article is adapted from Appendix 2 of *Christian Monks on Chinese Soil*, by M. Nicolini-Zani, (Liturgical Press, 2017). This book contains a detailed description of our foundation in China. It is available in the Abbey Gift Shop.



# A PROJECT for a CHINESE MONASTERY (1922)\*

JEHAN JOLIET, OSB

[I]

## [A.] GUIDING IDEAS

The intention is to found a monastery with the Divine Office and prayer and, for work, principally intellectual work.

Apart from the interest in public prayer prayed in China by Chinese, from this follow developments and fruits for the conversion and the christianization of China.

\* Translation of the manuscript *Projet de monastère chinois*, preserved in the archives of the Benedictine Abbey of Sint-Andries in Bruges (ASA, Chine, Joliet 4 [Personalia]). The third and final part of the manuscript (“Historique du projet”) has been left out of the present translation. As stated in the first lines of the manuscript, this is a transcription of Jehan Joliet’s original, dated 30 May 1922. The same text is repeated almost entirely in a letter of J. Joliet to the abbot primate, F. von Stotzingen, dated 30 May 1926, cited in Henri-Philippe Delcourt, *Dom Jehan Joliet (1870–1937). Un projet de monachisme bénédictin chinois* (Paris: Cerf, 1988), 265–67. The expressions in italics in the text are underlined in the manuscript. — Luke Dysinger, OSB, Abbey Archivist



Education is something laborious and long, all the more so that education which is the Christian life, and even more so when it is a matter of an entire people. Of course, God can do everything, but we see always and even at the beginning by the conversion of the Roman Empire that he works slowly, progressively, and as if submitting himself to the natural law of mankind. Christianity, substantially com-

conversion of *pagan Chinese* is to be made by *Christian Europeans*; the result to be obtained is the composite *Chinese Christian*. On both sides there has been a centuries-old association with interpenetration of the natural element with the religious. Because of this there is a great risk of imposing on the Chinese a European Christianity; and then the harmonious coupling will be missing.



plete at the moment of conversion, grows strong and takes root so as to embrace the whole man and all of society.

Then, by a truly divine condescension, God does not despise any man or race; he not only permits but wants the growth of every Christian body to embrace its natural characteristics. For each person or each Christian people there is a harmonious coupling of the natural and the supernatural, and both profit from this.

Let us pass to concrete things: the

On the other hand, there is the opposite danger of pruning European Christianity too much out of excessive respect for the Chinese mentality.

The principal place where these elements can be harmoniously fused is the monastery. Because of its strong discipline and complete Christianity, and because of its solitude and retreat from the masses, Christianity can be grafted in peace and leisure on the old Chinese trunk. With Chinese and European monks living



together in the fraternity of the cloister, Chinese culture will be sifted almost unnoticeably and imperceptibly from its pagan tares, while the seeds providentially deposited in it will come to bloom in Christianity. At the same time Chinese literature will be the object of a long historical and scientific scrutiny so as to bring it closer to Christianity and penetrate it with its influence. The periodical of the Kiangnan [Jiangnan] mission *L'École en Chine* noted with disappointment: Catholic Chinese literature is meager; moreover it is almost exclusively in a style very, indeed excessively, popular. This is an evil of the beginnings, which Greece and Rome have known, but the perfidious efforts of Julian and the resistance of Gregories and Basils show well how important it is that Christianity not remain at the margins of the national culture. In the monastery or under its influence writers will be formed who will not make simple translations or hasty adaptations, but will rethink in Chinese the immutable Christian truths and thus will make them penetrate more deeply among their compatriots.

This [monastery] will be a center of religious life where the best and the most highly educated local Christians will be able to come to strengthen and revive their faith. This will also be a hospitable center for all Chinese, who will find there sincere love and a knowledge of all that makes for the glory and character of their civilization. Christians in China are for the most part déclassé or very insignificant people, but God has also the right, and we have the duty to realize this right, to the worship of the great and the cultured. The monastery will show them Christianity free of all European protection, acting and expanding in a Chinese atmosphere.

With resurgence of nationalism all over

the world and in China, ancient difficulties will become exacerbated. The most reverend father general of the Jesuits, in two letters of 1918 and 1919, has shown very well the special danger for China. The great number of conversions, which has doubled the Christian population in less than twenty years, makes the problem even more urgent. A Chinese monastery will contribute slowly and surely to give legitimate satisfaction to the mounting aspirations of Christians to diminish the foreign portion in their religion before it is carried out by force. It will, at the same time, increase their faith and their union with Rome.

"My joy became even greater and my gratitude to God more lively at reading about the recent encyclical of His Holiness Pius XI on the missions. The precision, insistence, and vigor of the apostolic recommendations fulfill all my desires. And it is not without profound emotion that after more than thirty years of waiting I heard the moving appeal made to the superiors of monastic institutes to establish houses in China, among these populations that God has predisposed as if naturally to the contemplative life."

[*The following paragraphs are not given in Nicolini*]

To realize the foundation of the Monastery in a way that was both prudent and effective, the conviction was made that it was necessary to proceed in two stages. First, the dispatch of a very small mission, two or three monks who, while learning the language and customs and Chinese as best they could, would study men and things, the climatic conditions and others so important for the stability of our lives, the chances of recruitment and

resources, and already would seek to group a few applicants. When the internship was deemed sufficient and the foundation decided, then would come other monks from Europe who would find a Chinese atmosphere and life as soon as they arrived. This delay, so useful for the good establishment and the Chinese character of the monastery, would also greatly facilitate the meeting of candidates, as well as resources.

There are peoples already illuminated maturely by the Gospel, who have reached such a degree of civilization that in the variety of arts and sciences they vaunt eminent men, yet after several centuries of the influence of the Gospel and of the church they still do not have bishops to govern them or priests who may guide efficaciously their fellow-citizens. . . . It is not enough that they have a native clergy of whatever kind, considered to be of an inferior order. . . .

It is not a case of spreading a human empire, but that of Christ, of procuring clients for the human fatherland, but citizens of the heavenly one. . . . Men, however barbarian and savage, understand well what it is that the missionary wants and demands from them, and have an extremely fine sense if he seeks something other than their spiritual good. If the missionary in some way works for terrestrial interests, if he is not exclusively an apostle, but seems to contribute also to the interests of his homeland, very soon all his zeal will give grave offense to the population and will disseminate the opinion

that the Christian religion is limited to a certain foreign nation, so that in embracing it, one has the impression of passing under the protection and dependence of a foreign country, losing thus one's own nationality. . . . One must not be content in any way with a smattering of knowledge of the language, but of knowing it *so* as to be able to speak it correctly and elegantly. Since the missionary is *a* debtor to all, to the illiterate as to the intellectu-



als, . . . by his perfect knowledge of the language he must preserve his own dignity, even when he is asked to deal with high functionaries and *is* invited to the meetings of the learned. \*\*

\*\* Here the author cites in French, and not always literally, some passages of the apostolic letter on missionary activity in the world *Maximum Illud*, promulgated by Pope Benedict XV on 30 November 1919. Cf. the original text in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 11 (1919): 440-55, especially 445-49 for the passages quoted here. In the letter addressed to F. von Stotzingen of 30 May 1926 (cf. *supra*, p. 321, n. 1) immediately after

## B. THE MODE FOR CARRYING THIS OUT

Successive indications of Providence will show the road to follow, but here I will make some basic comments on the stages that quite naturally present themselves.

1) *Recognition*. Since the enterprise is new and difficult, following authoritative and pressing advice, some preliminary steps are indispensable. Before deciding anything, two or three monks would pass six months or more in China, beginning to study the language, making contact with the people and familiarizing themselves with the tasks, examining the conditions of life, the chances of recruitment, and the like. Only after this stage, and with full agreement of the episcopal authority, will it be decided where and in what conditions this foundation will be made.

2) *The first establishment*. This will be made with money and monks from Europe. The low prices in China will mean that it will be possible at once to build a kind of monastery for twelve to twenty monks, so as to be from the beginning in an environment appropriate to our life. The number of recruits from Europe will be what God wants, but in any case, they should be few. First of all, it is to be noted that few will want this kind of life, will want to embrace resolutely all of Chinese

culture, except sin; then, it is desirable that the Chinese monks not feel they are in a milieu too full of foreigners. For recruitment, as for financial resources, after the original establishment, for which help from France and from Europe is counted upon, it will depend on China and especially on Providence.

3) *The development*. This will be as God wants. Authoritative voices, however, lead us prudently to hope for vocations among many young Chinese who have a taste for studies. Missionaries in Cheli [Zhili], in Kiangnan [Jiangnan], in Sechuen [Sichuan] consider recruitment guaranteed. Msgr. de Guébriant, with his vast experience, foretells success. \*\*\* Chinese voices speak similarly. It is to be hoped that there will be gifts of books for the Chinese library, which will be the only luxury, but a necessary one for the monastery. Even as regards money, there are some very generous wealthy Chinese Christians. We hope that the monastery with its prominent Chinese character will especially attract their munificence. Probably there will also be some benefactors among the members of the European colony of the Far East. Thus the monastery, once founded thanks to foreigners, will be, in every aspect, a Chinese house. ❀

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mentioning *Maximum Illud*, Joliet adds: "My joy became even greater and my gratitude to God more lively at reading about the recent encyclical of His Holiness Pius XI on the missions. The precision, insistence, and vigor of the apostolic recommendations fulfill all my desires. And it is not without profound emotion that after more than thirty years of waiting I heard the moving appeal made to the superiors of monastic institutes to establish houses in China, among these populations that God has predisposed as if naturally to the contemplative life." Cited in Delcourt, *Dom Jehan Joliet*, 266.: [*Mais la joie a grandi encore et la reconnaissance à Dieu s'est avivée à la lecture de la récente Encyclique de Sa Sainteté Pie XI sur les missions. La netteté, l'insistance et la vigueur des recommandations apostoliques comblent tous nos désirs. Et ce n'est pas sans une profonde émotion qu'après plus de trente années d'attente, j'entendais l'appel pathétique fait aux Supérieurs des Instituts monastiques d'établir des maisons en Chine, parmi ces populations que Dieu a, comme naturellement, prédisposées à la vie contemplative.*]

\*\*\* Jean-Baptiste Budes de Guébriant (1860–1935) was vicar apostolic of Kientchang (Jianchang) from 1910 to 1916 and of Canton (Guangzhou) from 1916 to 1921. In 1919 he was apostolic visitator in China. In 1921 he became superior general of MEP.

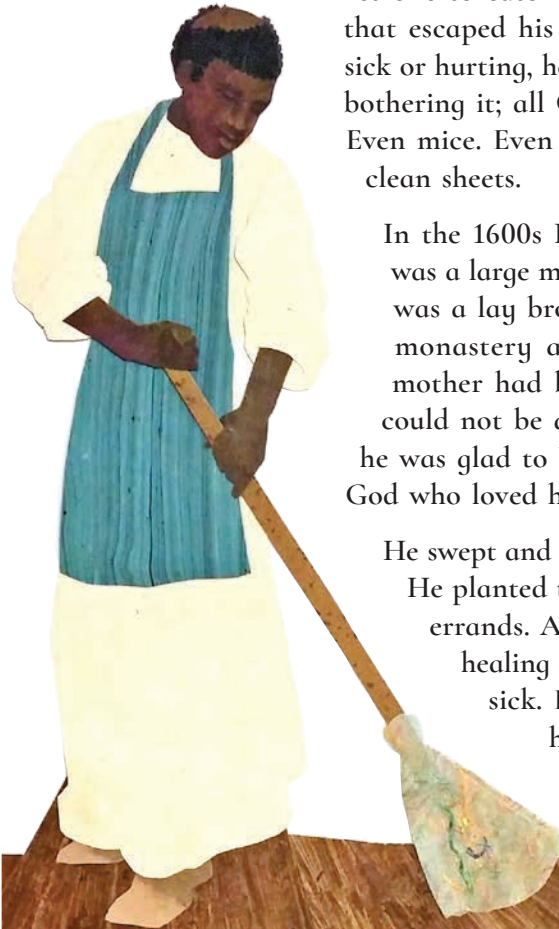
# St. Martín de Porres & THE Monastery Mice



BROTHER MARTÍN WAS PROBABLY THE first one to catch sight of the mice; there was little that escaped his notice. But unless an animal was sick or hurting, he generally let it go its way without bothering it; all God's creatures had a right to live. Even mice. Even mice that made dirty nests in the clean sheets.

In the 1600s Holy Rosary Priory in Lima, Peru was a large monastery with many monks. Martín was a lay brother, which means he lived at the monastery and did heavy labor. Because his mother had been a slave, the law said that he could not be a full monk. Martín did not mind; he was glad to be able to live there and serve the God who loved him.

He swept and scrubbed the floors. He did laundry. He planted trees. He fetched; he served; he did errands. And since, as a boy, he had learned healing arts from a barber, he tended to the sick. Eventually the prior made nursing his primary duty.





All his patients were as Jesus to him. Even an injured dog or cat that showed up at the door he welcomed with tenderness and treated with care.

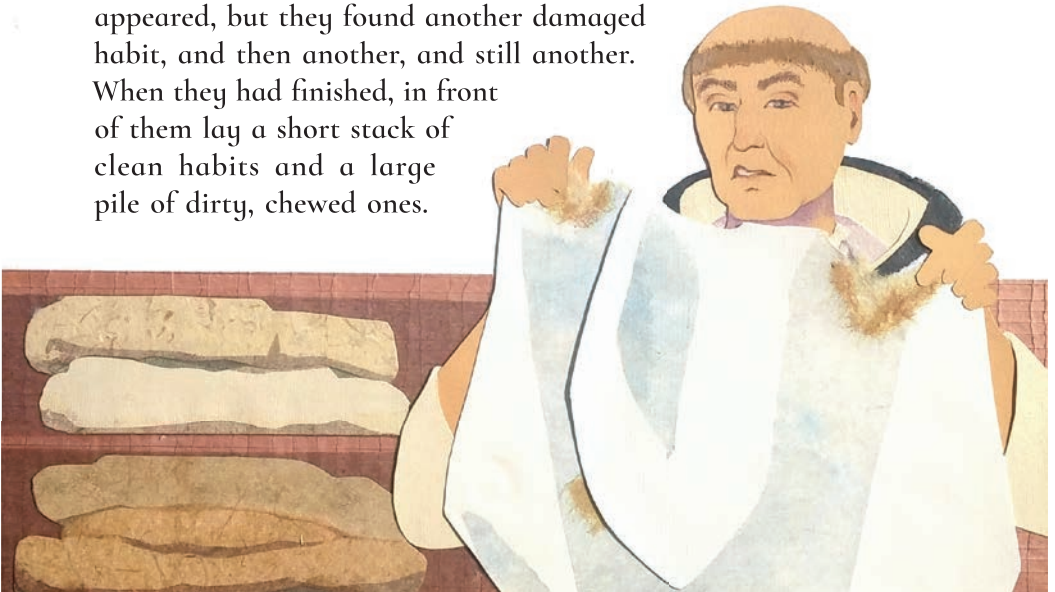
Life was rough in those days; disease was everywhere; people often died from injuries.

The hospital was a busy place for the monks.



ONE MORNING BROTHER FERDINAND, head of the hospital, pulled a fresh, new habit off a shelf in the wardrobe closet. Oddly, it had a bad smell, so he held it up to the light. His thumb went through a ragged hole. "What have we here?" he asked, and then answered his own question, "Mice! And they didn't choose the old, patched clothes; they are chewing up the new ones!" He called Martín. "It looks like we have a mouse problem. We'd better see if the little beasts have done any more damage." Martín reached to the rear of the shelf and brushed out a single terrified mouse that dropped to the floor and careened away out of sight. He and Brother Ferdinand spent the day sweeping shelves. No more mice appeared, but they found another damaged habit, and then another, and still another.

When they had finished, in front of them lay a short stack of clean habits and a large pile of dirty, chewed ones.



To protect the habits the monks started wrapping them all in paper, but mice eventually munched through the paper to burrow into cloth. They put the habits on different shelves, but soon enough mice found the clean shelves and made themselves at home. Sometime later a hospital attendant pulled out a fresh sheet to prepare the bed for a new patient, but on the fold the fabric was shredded and stained through all the layers. He reached into the shelf and found other sheets with holes and brown

Six weeks before Easter, Brother Ferdinand took the lid off a chest where were stored some gorgeous embroidered vestments the monks kept for special masses. He reverently drew out the one on top. But, "oh no," he groaned. "Is there no place safe from mice?" The once splendid robe had become tattered and stained, and smelled awful. He muttered, "We really have to get rid of these mice!" Another brother added, "We had better poison them; that's all there is to it. These are God's vestments."



stains, and then still more. How could such small animals produce so much filth? He brought the damaged sheets to Brother Ferdinand, who examined them and remarked to Martín, "The sick need clean and fresh sheets even more than the rest of the brothers. There must be a way to keep mice out of the hospital sheets."

"I'll wipe down the shelves every morning," offered Martín. "That way the mice can't get established." The next day he began daily wiping of every shelf in the hospital. As long as he kept it up, mice that ventured into the sheets did not stay long.

They heard a voice from the corridor where Martín was mopping, "These are God's mice too."

The others turned to stare at the speaker. Martín rested his mop beside the door. Shyly he touched the once beautiful vestments, and then observed the angry faces around him. "Please don't poison the mice."

"Oh Martín," said one of the brothers, "we have to get rid of the mice. Surely you don't think the wretched mice are more important than the Easter vestments!"

"The vestments are made for the glory of God. But don't mice have

the breath of God in them?" asked Martín warmly. "I will clean the chest, so the mice can't do any more damage to the vestments. Then please allow me one day to pray about this. God may show us another way."

"The poor little beasts," he said as he picked up his pail, "they have to live somehow."

The other monks shook their heads and sighed, but they allowed Martín to do as he asked.

Martín prayed as he finished his mopping. He continued to pray as he emptied the slop buckets. He prayed as he cleaned the kitchen shelves, and he

that belong to those who care for the sick. Bring all your brother and sister mice together here, and listen to what I have to say." He put the mouse back on the floor. Within the hour the squeaking of many mice could be heard as they gathered around Martín. Mice scampered out from shelves, from walls, from the ceiling, from under the floor, so many mice that even Martín was surprised at their number.

Then it was silent.

Martín frowned at the mice. "You may not live in our wardrobe chest and chew up our best robes! You may not make nests in the hospital sheets!



prayed as a cat rubbed its back against his leg. "When the mice are gone, you will be out of a job," said Martín, scratching the cat's head. "But we will make sure you have soup to eat."

The next day Martín crawled around the hospital on his hands and knees until he saw a mouse scurry along the floor next to the wall. He put a bit of bread on his palm and stretched it out to the mouse, which darted into its hiding place. Then, as Martín knelt quietly with his hand still outstretched, the mouse cautiously crept out from the wall and onto Martín's palm.

Slowly, Martín raised his hand—and the mouse—up to his face.

"Little brother, you and your companions have been damaging things

All the linens that you use for nests have important uses for the monks." "But," he bent down close to them, "I have a plan. Leave the monastery sheets and clothing alone. Bring your families and friends together and follow me; I will show you to a new home. The place I have in mind will be comfortable for you, with plenty to eat. If a time comes when there is not enough food, I will bring food for you. God will take care of you, you do not need to worry about anything."

In the next hour there were sounds of scurrying and rustling as mice assembled from the vestment chest (where one or two mice had squeezed in after cleaning), the kitchen, the library, the monks' quarters, and all the other



hidden places in the monastery they had made their own.

Martín led the way, and a disorderly parade of mice followed him through the open door to the vegetable garden, and through the garden to a far corner where at last he stopped and knelt down to show them a sheltered area that would serve as a fine new mouse residence.

“This is the place.”

They scuttled about their prospective home, surveying all its facilities. There was a wall with an overhang for protection, plenty of vegetables to eat, places to hide from cats, and dry leaves for nesting material. When he saw that they were satisfied to stay there, Martín returned to his work and the mice began to build their new home.

Most of the time the food that grew there was plentiful and the mice had



enough to eat. But Martín kept watch, and in the winter when the last of the vegetables had been picked, he carried grain and kitchen scraps outside to feed them.

The mice thrived in their outdoor nest. Martín was glad. The other monks were not so sure. But as weeks went on, Brother Ferdinand found no new mouse nests in the clothing. The shelves in the hospital stayed spotless, so the hospital attendants did not need to

worry about nasty surprises in the clean sheets.

Most of the vestments were repaired by Easter. At their Easter celebration the monks wore the beautiful robes and rejoiced in the goodness of God who loves all his creatures, great and small.

It is said that even now, if you have too many mice in your house, you may call on St. Martín de Porres, and he will help the mice find another home. ❖



#### LETTER FROM THE ABBOT *from page 16*

off, the grass and trees were green. By this time, I allowed myself to believe, BUT I still wanted to see it for myself, in person. I also kept reminding myself (and others) that the fire was not fully contained, and that there was still a chance that spot fires could flare up at the Abbey. The firefighter himself said it: 'there is still a threat'.

While everyone around me was saying, "miracle", I was saying to myself, "not yet". Even though I had heard from reliable sources and saw pictures that the Abbey was indeed left 'unscathed' by the Bobcat fire, I was cautious because miracles just don't happen to me. They happen to other people.

Well, apparently, they DO happen to me! When I saw a map of the path of the

Bobcat fire, it showed that the fire literally went around the Abbey proper, where all the buildings are.

I never thought of myself as a 'doubting Thomas', but these three days have shown me that there are parts of me that are definitely like Thomas.

I pray that the more I reflect on the Bobcat fire 'miracle story', the more I will give the Lord the Thomas-parts of my life so that He can use them to help transform me to be more faithful, more trusting, more believing in a God who still performs miracles in our lives today. May He be praised! ❖

*Abbot Damien*



## UPCOMING PREACHED RETREATS

### NOVEMBER

**CANCELLED 2–5 Autumn Artists' Retreat**

**CANCELLED 9–12 Guess What's Coming For Dinner!: A Cooking Retreat/Workshop**

**9–12 In the Spirit of AA:  
A Twelve-Step Retreat VIA ZOOM**

**CANCELLED 11 Take Charge of Your Life**

**CANCELLED 12–15 Edith Stein: Her Journey from Darkness into Light**

**CANCELLED 16–20 Priests' Retreat:  
Thriving in the Call of God**

**21 God in America: Judeo-Christian Values in American History**

**CANCELLED 25–27  
Thanksgiving at Valyermo**

**27–29 Advent Retreat**

**28 Taller Adviento en Español VIA ZOOM**

### DECEMBER

**CANCELLED 7–11 God is Love at the Heart of All Creation**

**CANCELLED 9 Take Charge of Your Life**

**11–13 Preparing Within Ourselves a Place for the Lord**

**18–20 Augustine & His *Confessions***

**CANCELLED 24–26 Christmas at Valyermo**

**CANCELLED 31–1/2 New Year Retreat:**

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