

THE VALYERMO  
*Chronicle*

ST. ANDREW'S ABBEY



Nº 227 ✠ LENT 2010



## DEAR FRIENDS,

Not too long ago I ran into an old friend of mine whom I hadn't seen in a long time. I was happy to hear that he was still practicing the faith, going to church, and receiving the sacraments. He let me know that he was thinking about returning to school to earn a master's degree in Business Administration. I could tell he was interiorly conflicted about making this big decision. Not thinking twice about my next question to him, because I figured everyone prays about big decisions, I asked, "What does God say to you, or what do you sense God saying to you, when you pray about it?" He looked somewhat puzzled and confused, and he asked, "*Pray* about it? What do you mean?"

As people who believe in God, we want, and want to do, what we think God wants. But who can always know what God wants from us? Someone might respond, God wants us to do good things. Certainly that is true, but which one(s)? There are plenty of good and noble things to do in the world, but are we asked to do them all? *Can* we do them all? To know and do God's will is the life-long endeavor for the believer.

I am reminded of the passage in Mark's Gospel (1:29-38). Jesus was at the home of Peter. Peter's mother-in-law was sick and Jesus healed her. Before they knew it, the

whole town was at the front door, asking for cures and healings, and Jesus healed them. Early the next morning, Jesus slipped away for some quiet time and prayer. When Peter found Jesus, Jesus basically said to Peter, "we need to leave".

It's strange to think that the kind and merciful Jesus insisted on leaving the town even though there seemingly was more good to be done there and the people were looking for him. He obviously had other (good) things to do, other people to see, and other places to go. And interestingly enough, it was only after spending time in prayer that he made this known.

To seek the will of God in prayer before embarking on any good task is important, perhaps even crucial. Otherwise we might find ourselves running all over creation trying to respond to every legitimate need (and even illegitimate ones). The passage in Mark illustrates that there are plenty of good and worthy things to do, but they are not necessarily all for us. Prayer helps us to discover this. Prayer helps to keep us grounded and focused. It helps to give us direction. It also helps to give us strength to do God's will, because as we all know, *knowing* and *doing* God's will are two totally different matters.

The Church asks us in this holy season of Lent to deliberately spend more time in prayer as well as do other things like fast and give alms. The hope is that each time we do this, a little part of us dies which allows for a little more of God to live in us. So that ultimately it is he who lives in and through us, and it is his will that is accomplished in us.

May this season of Lent be one of great blessing and renewal for us as we prayerfully surrender our complete selves to the Lord so that we can say with him and to him, "not as I will, but as you will."

*Jn. Damien*

## A NOTE FROM FATHER AELRED

As you can see, the *Chronicle* has a new format. Not only is high quality color reproduction a positive addition, but due to advances in technology we are able to save a considerable sum of money by this change. While we are all very attached to our old format, we feel the new format will bring added life to an already interesting series of articles, photos and illustrations. We hope you like it. ❖



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# Repentance

AS

**Hieromonk Maximos**

*Holy Resurrection Monastery*

**I**N MY TEENS AND THROUGH MY early twenties I suffered from a debilitating spiritual condition. The problem was that I couldn't seem to help thinking of myself in categories. I was either "good" or "bad." I'd go to confession and come home feeling light and happy. A few days would go by, I'd fall into some sin that seemed very serious to me at the time and a crippling guilt would set in. So I went on for years, oscillating wildly (so it seemed to me) between alternate states of sin and grace.

In these difficult years I could never really experience repentance as anything except the crushing guilt that I had to go through as the pre-condition to getting to that place of, well, not really *joy* (it was too fleeting, too fragile to be that), but a kind of psychological *relief*, the release of absolution.

No wonder, then, when I discovered the spirituality of Eastern Christianity in my mid-twenties, that I fell so far—and so fast!—in love. One of the things this tradition taught me was to shake free of the debilitating, strobe-light cycle of shame/relief, shame/relief, shame/relief. This is not to say that freedom was not also available to me within the western tradition. It most

certainly was, but for me the path to freedom was hidden under layers of a dry, juridical theology to which I was unfortunately too much exposed in my youth. What I

needed most was to discover that real repentance does not consist in lightning-swift movement from one state to another, a "state of sin" to a "state of grace". I needed to learn to think of repentance as a long, deeply beautiful and joyous process. I needed to think of it as a form of love.

Within the liturgy of the Byzantine Rite, and in the writings of the Greek Fathers, I learned a whole new vocabulary of repentance. I began to appreciate why *metanoia*, the traditional Scriptural and patristic Greek word for what we call in English "repentance," means "change of mind" or "change of heart." This is not the language of shame and anxious sorrow, but of transformation, of coming to see things differently, of new light, new understanding, new wisdom. *Metanoia* belongs not so much to the grammar of guilt, but to that of desire, of yearning for beauty, for truth and for love.

This was the experience of authentic Christian repentance about which the sixth century abbot of Sinai, St. John Climacus, famously wrote in his *Ladder of Divine As-*



cent (a book, incidentally, that monks and nuns of the Byzantine tradition are supposed always to read during Lent). In the seventh chapter (or “step”) of this work, St. Climacus wrote, *peri tou xarapoioy penthous*, of the “joy-making sorrow” which is true repentance:

When I consider the actual nature of sorrow for sin I am amazed at how that which is called mourning and grief should contain joy and gladness interwoven within it like honey in the comb.

This is how the Eastern Churches generally seem to see the repentance: not as a necessary evil, as something to be got through as quickly as possible on the way to a state of relieved happiness. Repentance is seen as itself the transformation of sorrow into joy, a lingering sad sweetness of inestimable beauty; a deep, mature and maturing joy.

The penitential season of Lent, known by many Eastern Christians as the Great Lent, or the Great Fast (to distinguish it from the other fasting periods in the Church year) begins precisely with an invitation to joy. At the Vespers service that, in the Byzantine Rite, inaugurates the new season, we sing:

Let us set out with joy upon the season of the Fast, and prepare ourselves for spiritual combat. Let us purify our soul and cleanse our flesh; and as we fast from food, let us abstain also from every passion. Rejoicing in the virtues of the Spirit may we persevere

with love, and so be counted worthy to see the solemn Passion of Christ our God, and with great gladness of spirit to behold his holy Passover.

The following morning, the day known as “Clean Monday,” as we set our bodies to the work of strict fasting, we sing at Matins:

Let us joyfully begin the all-holy season of abstinence; and let us shine with the bright radiance of the holy commandments of Christ our God, with the brightness of love and the splendour of prayer, with the purity of holiness and the strength of good. So, clothed in raiment of light, let us hasten to the holy third-day Resurrection that shines upon the world with the glory of eternal life.



And again:

O faithful, with joy let us enter upon the beginning of the Fast. Let not our faces be sad, but let us wash them in the water of dispassion; and let us bless and exalt Christ above all forever.

One of the reasons this way of looking at repentance seemed so liberating to me was not that it somehow obscured the reality of sin. This was not a soft option spirituality. Properly understood, the Eastern Churches leave one in no doubt that sin is obscene, its consequences tragic, that its addictive quality endangers everything good, including

life itself. Nothing about this view of repentance made me less repentant. That's exactly the point. It made me *want* to repent. It gave me hope that I *could* repent.

Or perhaps I should rearrange those italics: it made me feel that *I* could repent. My old spiritual anxieties had had the effect of alienating me not only from God, but also from myself. That cycle of shame and relief, shame and relief, seemed to drive my personality under a flashing whirl of circumstances over which I really had very little control. My soul was a battle ground over which fought forces—Sin, Nature, Grace, God and the Devil—far stronger than I. What was my role in this spiritual battle? I was just collateral damage, patched up every month in a confessional field hospital and sent back to be wounded all over again.

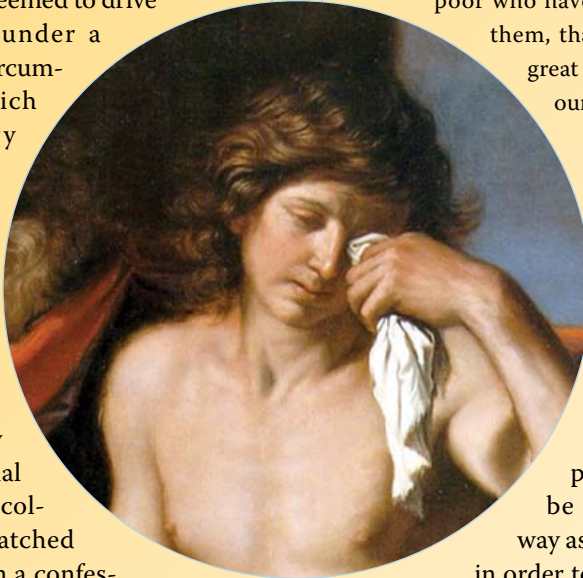
But when I discovered joy in the midst of my repentance it was as though I finally had something to offer. Not much, perhaps, a little grief mixed with hope “as honey in the comb;” not much but *my* not much! And from this little bit of *me* in the process of repentance grew an awareness that I actually had all kinds of resources to offer in the process of changing my heart. Asceticism became, for the first time in my life, not simply another way of punishing myself, but a real expression of new-found hope. Fasting opened up the possibility of real discipline, of the kind of discipleship by which hearts really do change. Prayer became dialogue, not merely a court-marshal. And with prayer and fasting came a new urgency to

show mercy, a mercy flowing from the grace of authentic repentance:

While fasting with the body, brethren, let us also fast in spirit. Let us loose every bond of iniquity; let us undo the knots of every contract made by violence; let us tear up all unjust agreements; let us give bread to the hungry and welcome to our house the poor who have no roof to cover

them, that we may receive great mercy from Christ our God.

—From Byzantine  
Rite Vespers  
for the first  
Wednesday of  
Great Lent



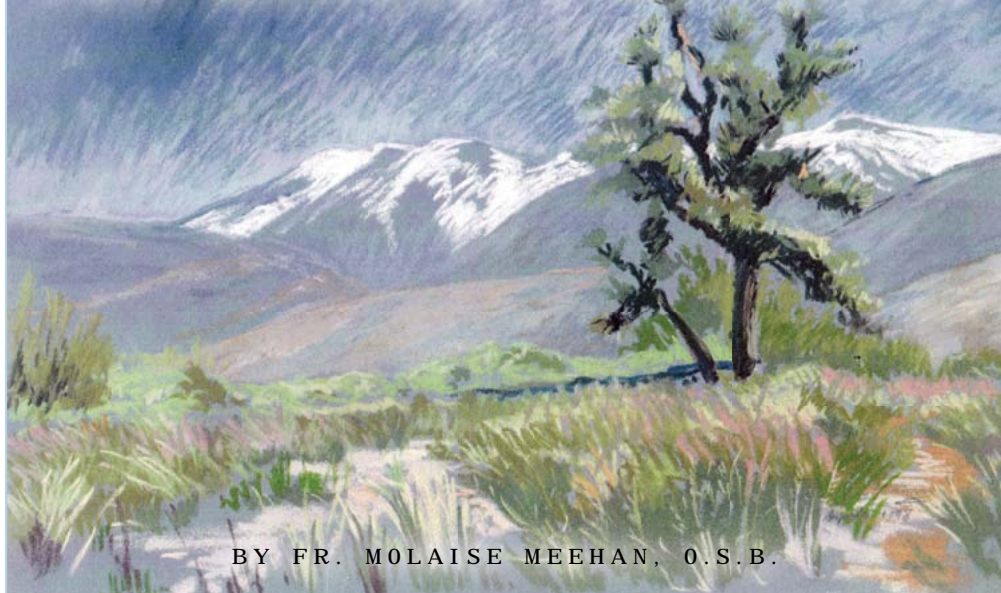
In short, my old way of thinking saw repentance as a messy, painful business to be gotten out of the way as quickly as possible in order to begin living like a Christian. My new way of thinking revealed to me that repentance is precisely the joy-making foundation of any Christian life, one that feeds every other aspect from deep and mystical prayer to authentic and active social justice.

Or as the Lord once said it so much better than I: “*Blessed* are they who mourn, for they shall be comforted” (Matthew 5:4). ✠



*Hieromonk Maximos*

# THE LITTLE MONASTERY



BY FR. MOLAISE MEEHAN, O.S.B.

*When browsing through the monastery archives one often finds items of interest. One of the “finds” is a manuscript entitled “The Little Monastery,” written by Fr. Molaise Meehan, O.S.B. (d. 1994) in 1983, describing his impressions of the Abbey and his life as a monk. Like Fr. Molaise, the manuscript is opinionated, funny, acerbic, and a bit harsh and judgmental, along with being quite witty, insightful and intelligently written. But what it also revealed is Fr. Molaise’s deep love of the Abbey, its history, the land it is built upon, and the founding monks. It is a testament to the depth of the friendship and love he had towards our early community. I decided to excerpt a section of “The Little Monastery” dealing with his reflections on nature: the desert he grew to deeply love, revealing his true Celtic sense of identification with the land he lived upon. Appropriately, it is illustrated with pastels drawn by Fr. Werner.*

—Fr. Aelred, O.S.B.

I really think that I was lured to the Priory by, amongst the usual complex set of considerations, the sheer magic of the high desert. On spiritual considerations I choose to exercise the traditional, but nowadays not much observed, virtue of reticence. The magic of the high desert, to my mind, has been best described by Willa Cather (a much underrated American author) in *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, the only novel, apart from Joyce’s *Ulysses* (if you can call that a novel) that I’ve read twice. I can still quote the paragraph where she describes the feelings that made Jean Latour, as an old man, return from retirement in his native Puy de Dome in Provence to die where he had labored.

“But in the Old World he found himself homesick for the New. It was a feeling he could not explain; a feeling that old age did not weigh so heavily upon a man in New Mexico as in the Puy de Dome.... It was in the early morning that he felt the ache in his breast; it had something to do with wak-



ing in the early morning.... In New Mexico he always awoke a young man; not until he rose and began to shave did he realize he was growing older. His first consciousness was sense of the light dry wind blowing in through the windows, with the fragrance of hot sun and sage brush and sweet clover; a wind that made one's body feel light and one's heart cry "Today, today" like a child's.....

"That air would disappear from the whole earth in time perhaps; but long after his day. He did not know just when it had become so necessary to him, but he had come back to die in exile for the sake of it. Something soft and wild and free, something that whispered to the ear on the pillow, lightened the heart, softly, softly picked the lock and released the prisoned spirit of man into the wind, into the blue and gold, into the morning, into the morning.....



That was the desert of New Mexico of course, around Santa Fe; but our desert round Valyermo is similar; high, pellucidly clear, with a virgin quality as in the Genesis dawn of things, palpitating to the subtle and muted color changes of the sages, with the vicissitudes of weather or season. This desert does not have the stark, raw, terrifying quality of, say, Sahara. Or of Sinai, forty years of which so molded Jewish temperament millennia ago. There is hardness, yes. It is well fleshed with sage, with joshua, with juniper and manzanita, and during the season with those glorious Roman candles – the yucca tree in bloom. And of course when the spring flowers (alleged to depend on the quantity of winter rain) make their appearance almost overnight like manna, our desert becomes

a veritable paradise. It recalls Saint Jerome's ecstatic letter to Heliodorus: "*O desertum Christi floribus venans....*" There is nevertheless a feeling of bone not far beneath the surface. But on the whole it is no hardship to live here. Thus we at Valyermo, however we may in fervent moments draw the comparison, do not have the same austere experience as the first Egyptian anchorites in the Thebaid. Neither for that matter did Jerome.

The monastery itself has little resemblance to the celebrated Benedictine houses of the old world. Monte Cassino or Montserrat, or Maria Lach or Salzburg or Melk or Niederaltaich, or Ampleforth or Buckfast or Downside. Or indeed Beuron or Maredsous or Saint Andre, though it stems from that lineage. If you were looking for parallels you would probably find them in the first dawn of Celtic monasticism in the sixth century, when the romantic fervor flowing from the

east which so captivated people like Jerome and Augustine, was still palpitation. Lindisfarne say, or Iona, or Clonmacnoise, or Devenish, or Nendrum, or Innismurray – the roster is very long, the age of the "little monasteries". The same nearness to nature, the same simplicity in building, the same ardor of beginning. Or perhaps that is merely the fancy of an Irishman, aging, like Jean Latour, in exile. One incomparable boon is that the Belgian founders, in whose veins the blood of the great Flemish masters must still have been running, tempered with supreme good taste all building and decoration ( which goodness knows is modest enough) to blend with the beautiful desert landscape. There is very little to boast of in Valyermo; a converted stable as chapel, a converted cow-





byre as cloister; but the simple good taste is so soothing to the nerves.

Honestly, however, compels one to point out that there is an obverse side to the medal. Feelings, I suppose, depend on temperament. I know that my first reaction to Valyermo desert was euphoric and exhilarating. Yet when an intelligent Dublin priest on a lightening visit to California came to visit me recently, I was intrigued to hear him ruminate as he gazed at the landscape, "You know, for me this is hostile country..." Precisely the contrary reaction. Yet somehow, I could understand him.

I could understand him because during the twenty odd years that I have been a monk here, I've had plenty of opportunity to sample the loneliness, the utter isolation, the defenselessness, the fear, that can sur-

**"The monastery  
itself has little  
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Benedictine  
houses of the  
old world."**

face in low mood. Belloc tells somewhere of the curious *weltschmerz* that overcame him after a day-long visit to the deserted Toman town of Timgad in North Africa. He felt the utter absence of people, returned to his lodgings, fell into a depressed sleep, and was not consoled until he awoke "to the loneliest sound in all the world – the sound of

water boiling in a kettle".

It is something of that nature that must be set down as the negative Valyermo experience. I have for twenty years walked and cycled the desert, always almost alone, rarely seeing a soul. More I think than any other local resident. It might very well seem that the presence of a community should deal with any onslaughts of loneliness and isolation. Isn't that what a community is for

after all? Well — yes and no. While it is true that “no man is an island entire of himself,” it is also true that every man is ultimately alone. Religious communities piously describe themselves as families. But of course that is no more than a figure of speech. Such communes are not families, especially when they are large. Valyermo thank goodness is not large. The members are mutually supportive yes, and have contracted obligation to one another. But it would be naïve to think that intimacy exists all around. Indeed, ties of blood have their limitations too, I daresay. So that there are times when every man is an island, is alone. Alone with God, we like to say. Doubtless in dying, if they are fairly conscious, all mortals know that feeling. And all mortals have to die:

“If only gladiators died,  
Or heroes, death would be our pride.  
But have not little maidens gone,  
And Lesbia’s sparrow, all alone?”

The aloneness which the desert brings may very well be a rehearsal for death? The Platonic Socrates I suppose. ✱



# Saturday Wait

by michael downey



**S**ATURDAY. We are waiting. Dismas is near. The bell is about to ring, summoning the brothers to morning psalmody. But we have already come in drips and drabs to our places in choir, and now we are waiting. A wintry Saturday’s bitter cold does not hinder us from gathering in the abbey church. To keep watch. To wait. Waiting in prayer to begin the prayer of waiting.

I tire of waiting. We have just come through the season of waiting for Christ’s coming in flesh. We now await yet another season of waiting for the triumph of Love over the power of all evil on Easter morn. Waiting and yet more waiting.

We wait for the results of medical tests. We wait for the airplane, delayed again, to leave the runway or to arrive at the gate. We wait in the express line at the grocery counting the minutes as the customer in front of us unloads not ten, not fifteen, but dozens of items before the eyes of a vexed cashier. We wait for the day when that problem child might finally grow up and stop causing the family so much grief. Single mothers wait for the day when they do not have to work the second job so that their children can pay school tuition. The elderly spend much of their time waiting for that one moment when a visitor might let them know that they are not alone. These days many are waiting for the return of a spouse, son, daughter, father or mother from a distant war-torn land.

Waiting on this bleak Saturday, I sense the waiting of the world in my marrow as I

gaze upon the tired bones and bent frames of the senior monks still waiting to pray. And whose prayer is in waiting.

The seventeenth – century English poet John Milton lost his sight toward the end of his life. In his sonnet on blindness he remarks: “God doth not need either man’s work or his own gifts. . . They also serve who only stand and wait.” The halt and lame cannot move. They serve by standing still, iconic of the ceaseless invitation to cease the cycle of our breathless racing. The disfigured serve by reminding the clever and robust what it might mean to be truly human. The homebound and the infirm serve not by giving, but by learning and teaching how to receive the gift of love on offer. Look around. So many standing and waiting, but blind to the gift of serving in the waiting.

Dismas just marked his thirtieth birthday. As in most Trappist Cistercian houses, little is made of birthdays. An alumnus of the University of Notre Dame, he has a superb voice and modest skills as choirmaster. He is a junior, a simply professed monk waiting to make his solemn profession. The next in age are the few of us who are nearly twice Dismas’ age. There are lots of comings, but mostly goings from Mepkin. Life here is what is routinely referred to among Trappists as “precarious.” Come what may, Dismas will be standing and waiting. Near me in choir on this bitter-bleak Saturday, he is waiting for the bell to ring for prayer. But his is a whole way of life in the waiting, standing in the sure conviction that he will continue to serve by waiting, even if no one follows behind him in our house of belonging.

From whence comes the strength to serve by standing and waiting? How do the Saturday people, we who wait and wait and wait – for that telephone call we hope will bring good news, for the computer tech to rid our computer of that virus that has eaten all our documents, for the peaceful end of the terminal illness of our beloved – remain patient

in our waiting and firm in our hope? The way we wait depends in no small measure on that for which – or the one for whom – we are waiting.

For many, life is much like that Saturday after the crucifixion and death of Jesus. Hopes dashed, a surging disappointment, a tendency to do something – anything – to move on, to get on with our lives. But, as Saturday people, it is more often than not our lot to serve by standing amidst the unrelenting agony of our waiting. The secret discipline is found in the quiet confidence that the Sunday is indeed worth waiting for – with the entirety of the one and only life we have to live.

“Today you will be with me in paradise” (Luke 23: 43). The words of the Christ from the cross to the thief. In Christian tradition the one known as the good thief is sometimes named Dismas. He longed for God’s mercy. And in that mercy within mercy there is no measure. In the love without calculation there is no Friday, Saturday, Sunday. God’s coming is constant. To those who only stand and wait. ✠



**Michael Downey** (left) is a lay brother of the Trappist Cistercian community of Mepkin Abbey. He is here pictured with M. Dismas Warner before the 17th century Christ d’Aric hanging in the monastic refectory at Mepkin. Since 1997, Downey has served as the personal theologian of Cardinal Roger Mahony, Archbishop of Los Angeles.



# Scholastica's Tale

## PART III

*Told in pictures by Br. Raphael Salandra, O.S.B.*

*And in words by Br. Bede Hazlet, O.S.B.*



It wasn't long after accepting my first treat from a monk that I finally decided to get up my nerve and go inside the place called the Cloister, where the monks lived. I was getting tired of sleeping on the hard ground, listening to the scary noises of wild animals. One afternoon, full of misgivings, I followed my two dog-friends when they went inside for the night. The monk who called them in seemed very happy to see me—at least, he smiled a lot and made all sorts of silly noises that I couldn't understand! The part of the Cloister where the dogs lived was like nothing I had expected: a peaceful courtyard with grass and a big tree; a deep porch with bowls of food and water, soft beds, and cozy doghouses. Something about the place whispered that I had come home.



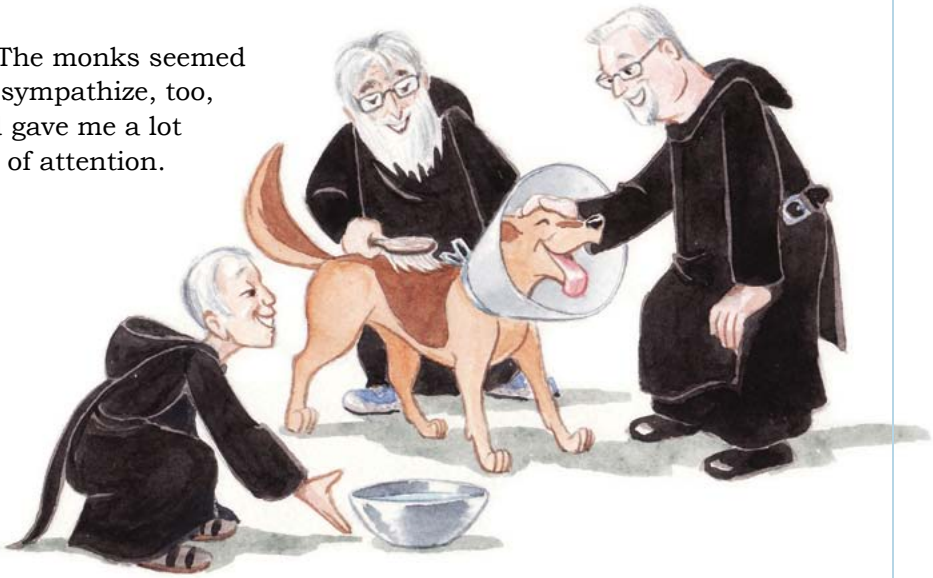


My peace didn't last for long, though! After a few blissful days and restful nights I was bundled into a van and taken to somebody called a "veterinarian" ("vet." for short). I didn't at all enjoy what happened to me at the vet.'s office.



Back at the Abbey I had to stay indoors for weeks and wear a very uncomfortable and very silly cone-shaped collar. Owen and Klondike were sympathetic. They said they had both been to the vet. from time to time and didn't like it either, but that somehow it was good for us.

The monks seemed to sympathize, too, and gave me a lot of attention.



I tried hard to take the collar off until I caught sight of my reflection in the water-bowl and realized that it made me look a little like an Elizabethan lady. Then I decided it might not be so bad.

*To be continued....*

# QUARTERLY BOOK REVIEW

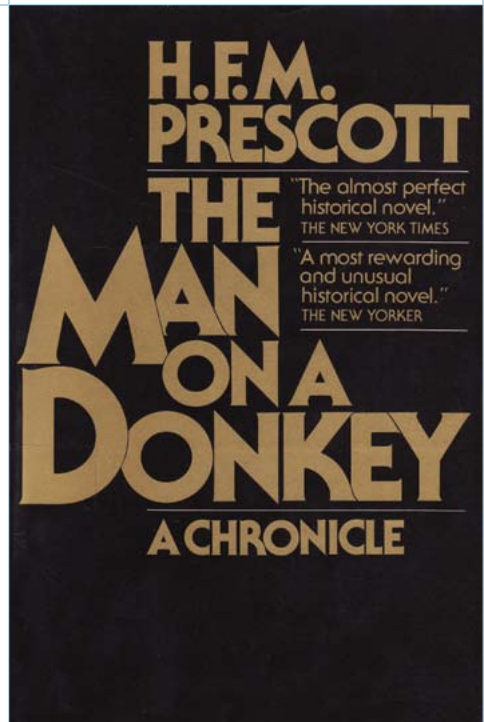
by fr. philip edwards, o.s.b.

WE HAVE BEEN READING IN THE Refectory these past weeks Geoffrey Moorhouse's scholarly description of the despoliation and destruction of the religious houses of England and Wales by the eighth Henry, Tudor tyrant and his toadies, focusing on the greatest and latest to fall under the axe in 1539, Durham Priory: *The Last Divine Office*, published in 2008 in England by Weidenfeld & Nicolson and here in the United States in 2009 by Blue Bridge of United Tribes Media, Inc. According to the dust-jacket blurb, Moorhouse is

the author of nineteen books, which have won prizes and been translated into several languages ... he has recently concentrated on Tudor history, notably with *The Pilgrimage of Grace* and *Great Harry's Navy*. [In] the *Last Divine Office* [he] explores the enormous upheaval caused by the English Reformation and the Dissolution of the Monasteries, drawing for his sources on material that has lain forgotten in the recesses of one of the world's great cathedrals. He re-creates in vivid detail what life was like in a major monastery before the Dissolution began in 1536, and how that life was forever transformed on the orders of the king...

It is resolutely factual and footnoted, a "history" not a "novel" and the "vivid details" down to every pound and pence prove not always to be so "vivid" in the telling, but the book is an absorbing read.

Another scholar in the mid-twentieth century, who had gained her prize for the biography of the Catholic Tudor monarch, Henry's oldest daughter, gave us a luminous novel, a *Chronicle*, which she tells us in her opening note, is a "form which requires



## THE MAN ON A DONKEY: A Chronicle

By Hilda Frances Margaret Prescott  
Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc.  
New York 1952 ISBN 0-02-023830-4  
(Paperback re-issue 1981)

space to develop itself ... to introduce the reader into a world, rather than at first to present him with a narrative. In that world he must for a while move like a stranger, as in real life picking up, from seemingly trifling episodes, understanding of those about him, and learning to know them without knowing that he learns. Only later, when the characters should by this means have become familiar, does the theme of the whole book emerge, as the different stories which it contains run together and are swallowed up in the tragic history of the Pilgrimage of Grace. And throughout, over against the world of sixteenth-century England, is set that other world, whose light is focused, as through a burning glass, in the half crazy mind of Malle, the serving-woman, and in



the three cycles of her visions is brought to bear successively upon the stories of the chief characters of the Chronicle.

Kept by the rigors of wartime restrictions from free access to the sources, (v. Historical Note, pp. 630–31) she must needs stay with the known flow of events and her knowledgeable imagination to en flesh her cast of characters whom she puts before us in a quaintly archaic style evoked by the use of italics:

“The Chronicle is mainly of five: of Christabel Cowper, Prioress; Thomas, Lord Darcy; Julian Savage, Gentlewoman; Robert Aske, Squire; Gilbert Dawe, Priest. There are besides, the King and three who were his Queens, and many others, men and women, gentle and simple, good and bad, false and true, who served God or their own ends, who made prosperous voyage or came to shipwreck. There is also Malle, the Serving-woman.

*Elevaverunt Flumina Fluctos:  
A Vocibus Aquarum Multarum.  
Mirabiles Elationes Maris:  
Mirabilis in Altis Dominus.*

The floods arise, O Lord:  
The floods lift up their noise,  
The floods lift up their waves.  
The waves of the sea are mighty  
and rage horribly; but yet  
The Lord that dwelleth on high is mightier.”

The Psalm cited is, in the Vulgate, ps 92; the translation with its “noise” and horrible rage is wonderfully appropriate, but is not that of any current version, even the King James. A more “upbeat” and serene tone colors our Grail version for Lauds of Sunday and Feast Days. (I must confess that without the excuse of war, I have not sought out Cranmer’s *Book of Common Prayer* nor earlier English versions of the Bible. The Chronicle itself does not follow directly

from this list. There is a sort of enfolding diptych: THE BEGINNING AND THE END (pp. 1–4) and THE END AND THE BEGINNING (pp. 622–27) whose first half shows forth with clear novelistic vision, in the “flare of [the] wintry white gold” of a November sun, the homing place of so many of the Chronicle’s characters, St. Andrew’s Priory of Marrick (in Swalesdale, North Riding, Yorkshire) from which are departing the Prioress and her Nuns and to which are returning, “so strangely come back”, “Sir John’s old priest” and his “servant now”, “the woman Malle”, who herself will evoke and echo an earlier Norfolk Visionary, whose own name graces so many of the women in this Chronicle.—But even after the List we must needs linger in narrative preliminaries concerning the Prioress, Christabel Cowper, who, at the age of eleven, is presented to the Priory and whose thoughts of “supper to look forward to” lead us to turn the page to find at last that “NOW THE CHRONICLE BEGINS.” ✱



Father Philip

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## T W O P O E M S

## Spirituality with Birds

Disgruntled and depressed, I huddle  
 By the pond. A very serious man,  
 I find myself in existential  
 Angst. It rained today and now the ducks,  
 As they step cautiously down the bank  
 To enter the pond, each in order  
 Unceremoniously slips on mud,  
 Bumps its butt and then slides gracelessly,  
 Splashing, into the deeps, looking miffed.  
 They too are serious, are not amused  
 By this indignity and pretend  
 Not to be perturbed by their mishap.  
 Though, it seems, unruffled by th'e'vent,  
 They've wrought in me a small catharsis:  
 Humus, humble, down to earth is best.  
 By earth and water, may God's name be blest.

Too early for leaves, at winter's end  
 A hermit thrush sits on the chair-back  
 Alert and bright-eyed. Each time I pass  
 Through to the ranch-house kitchen to brew  
 A cup of tea, I see him, my friend  
 And totem, silent, awake to God,  
 Outside, sitting upright in his spot.  
 Colleagues in solitude, we are two,  
 Each waiting for his song to brim forth.  
 Then one day I see his weakness. Sad,  
 Poor little creature, he like me, yields,  
 Deluded by his mirrored image  
 In a window – makes himself his own  
 Worst enemy, keeps dashing himself  
 Against the glass. Free us, Lord, release  
 Us from our self-filled dreams and give us peace.

I turned, signaled silence to my friend  
 As I led him up to the terrace  
 To show him the hummingbird's nest, built  
 On th'e'lectric wire for a porch-light,  
 Hard to distinguish from a light-bulb  
 Socket, white bowl made from cottonwood  
 Fluff. And – wonder! – she is in the nest,  
 Sees us, does not flee, faithfully waits,  
 Her silent duty, hour on hour, day  
 On day. She goes sometimes to bicker

And flit with others at the feeder,  
 But soon returns to her job beneath  
 The porch-roof, below noon's pounding sun-  
 Weight and under night's chill, biting wind.  
 Patience, waiting, purpose, poise, so true,  
 She keeps her silent watch till life breaks through.

In all seasons, well concealed, the owl,  
 Huge, horn'd, may perch for hours in plain view,  
 Unseen for stillness and for mottled  
 Plumage. Most never spy him, massive,  
 Cat-like in his gazing at, then through,  
 The one who comes to search his presence.  
 Then he blinks one eye, then feigns repose,  
 Not to be disturbed by such as us.  
 One early dawn I caught him, talons  
 'Round a rabbit's corpse. Glowering at me,  
 Off he flew, weighed down, to feed his brood.  
 Then as dusk falls his deep resounding  
 Hoots, ventriloquized from various posts,  
 Dis-locate him – where has he gone now?  
 Silent of flight, mere stirring of air,  
 He naughts himself until he seems not there.

—December 2009

## Truth

The truth is bright and free  
 as sunlight, as the sound  
 of morning by a desert stream.

My words must not cage her,  
 lest they kill her or crush  
 the fragile brilliance of her wings.

No, let her rather play  
 and dance upon my words  
 as fire dancing in the straw.

And let her then fly on  
 and leave my phrase abandoned  
 like a snail-shell on a reed.



Ben Harrison, M.C.

## FATHER, GIVE ME A WORD

by a monk of valyermo

**Q.** *"Why is there so much suffering...?"*  
—An oblate of St. Andrew's Abbey

**A.** TO ATTEMPT AN ANSWER TO this question would seem almost obscene in view of the very suffering about which you ask—so vast, so deep, so utterly and incommunicably personal in each case, so impossible to address with a mere word. The divine Word himself, when he walked among us, said little about it (although he wept). Job's friends, verbose with self-conferred authority, did no good by their attempts to explain the devastation of Job's life. Surely, in the presence of suffering, one must ultimately be silent. Before falling silent, however, perhaps a few things might after all helpfully be said.

Our first point must be a negative one: although it may be tempting to imagine that suffering befalls people in proportion to their wrongdoing, our Lord insists that this is not the case. When the Tower of Siloam fell, the people crushed beneath it were not being punished for their sins; neither the man born blind nor his parents were to blame for his blindness. The vast spectacle of the world's pain cannot simply be put down to human mischief and its effects.

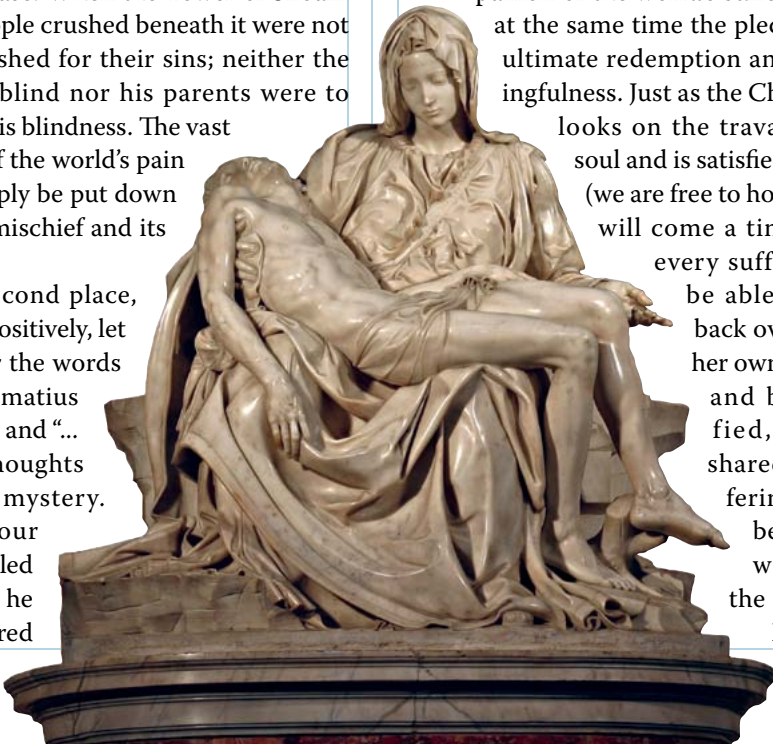
In the second place, and more positively, let us consider the words of St. Chromatius of Aquileia, and "...turn our thoughts to a great mystery. Although our Savior is called a shepherd, he is also referred

to as a sheep or a lamb." Christ may not have much to say about why so much suffering is permitted to take place, but he does a great deal to send bright shafts of hope through the midst of it—or, more accurately, he is himself that hope; his very life and death and triumph over death are a sign of hope for us and for all that he has spoken into being. He is our great Shepherd, guiding us through (not around) valleys of darkness and the shadow of death into the green pastures for which we long, but he is much more than this. He has chosen to become a sheep and to accompany us as one of us on this difficult journey, really sharing in our perplexity and pain. The Apocalypse describes him even now, enthroned in heaven, as a lamb looking as if he had been slain; although his journey may in one sense be complete—his Paschal Mystery seen through to and beyond the end of his life on earth—St. Paul understands that the full measure of Christ's suffering is in another very real sense still being filled up by the suffering of the members of his Body.

In Jesus, then, God becomes the companion of the world's suffering and at the same time the pledge of its ultimate redemption and meaningfulness. Just as the Christ now

looks on the travail of his soul and is satisfied, so also (we are free to hope) there will come a time when every sufferer will

be able to look back over his or her own anguish and be satisfied, having shared as suffering members in the work of the suffering Head for



*"In Jesus, then,  
God becomes the  
companion of the  
world's suffering and  
at the same time  
the pledge of its  
ultimate redemption  
and meaningfulness."*

the salvation of the world.

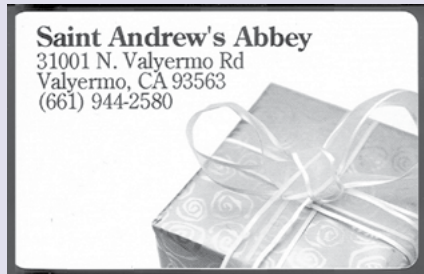
In Michelangelo's *Pietà* we see, with equal radiance and somberness, the combination of suffering, sympathy, and hope that this mystery makes possible. Here is a woman whose youthful willingness to cooperate with God in peculiar intimacy led directly to a life of harrowing difficulty.

At this moment she holds in her lap the dead body of her only child, the cosmic importance of whose life she can scarcely as yet have grasped.

Her face is sorrowful, but her whole demeanor is one of great if understated strength—her feet planted firmly to support the weight of her burden, one arm confidently cradling her son's shoulder, the other hand open in a gesture that seems to combine incomprehension with resolute trust. It is as if she were assuring us that even now, as darkness enfolds her, she does not regret her fiat. May her faith in her Son, the Man of Sorrows, be ours, even as with her we behold and share in the suffering of the world—the birth-pangs of a new heaven and a new earth. ✱

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# Odds & Ends

## MONK NEWS

### MONK'S FEAST DAYS

March	17	Br. Patrick
	19	Fr. Joseph
	21	Br. Benedict
April	25	Br. John Mark
May	1	Br. Joseph
	3	Fr. Philip
	3	Br. James
	10	Fr. Damien
	25	Br. Bede
June	29	Br. Peter

## VOLUNTEER NEWS

The gift of time cannot be measured. The Abbey and the monastic community need you. There are projects and positions available year round and without you we cannot accomplish our goals. Please consider spending time here at the Abbey. We need help in:

Abbey Ceramics • Abbey Gifts & Books  
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YOU MAKE EVERYTHING POSSIBLE!

## OBLATE NEWS

2010 Oblate Meetings at the Abbey are as follows: January 10, February 14, March 14, April 11, May 23, (June, no meeting), July 11, (August, no meeting), September 12, October 10, November 14, and December 12. Conferences begin at 2 p.m. in the new Conference Center. Reserve your place for lunch by calling the Retreat Office or emailing: retreats@valyermo.com or oblatedirector@valyermo.com

## VISIT OUR NEW WEBSITE !

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## THE CHRONICLE IS NOW ONLINE

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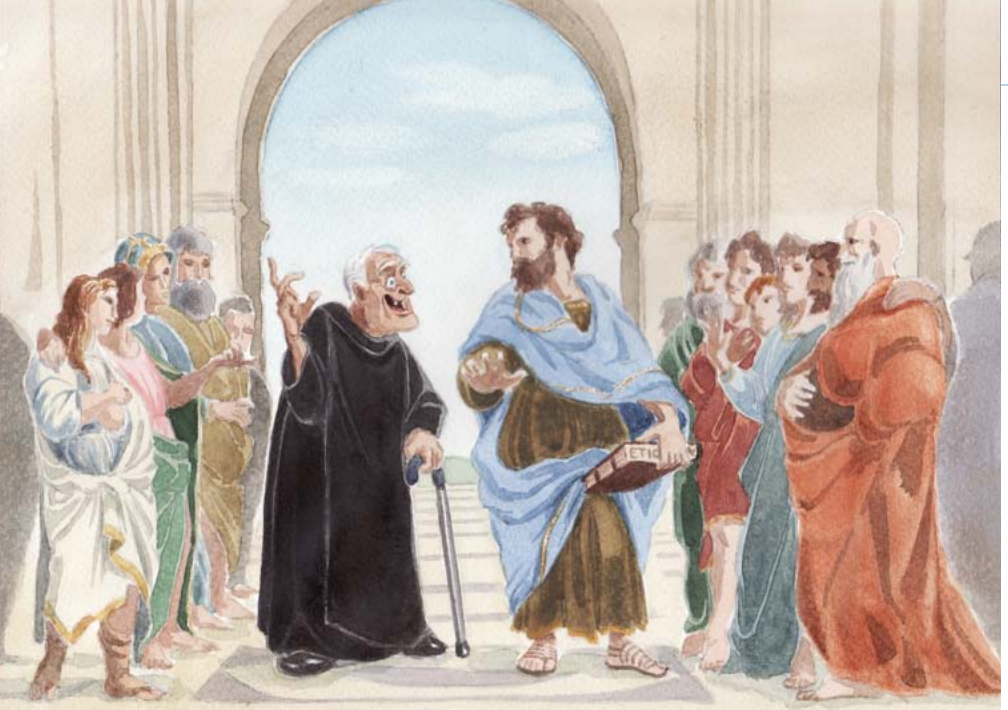
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*This wonderful drawing was inadvertently left out of the tribute to Fr. Eleutherius in the last issue. We still wanted to share Br. Raphael's view of Father in his own school of philosophy. The cartoon is based on Raffaello's famous painting of The School of Athens in the Vatican.*

### ABBEY CERAMICS ONLINE INVENTORY SALE

Visit our online inventory reduction sale. ALL angels, saints, and other plaques are 50% off. This sale runs from January 8th and will end February 28th.

The 50% discount is only available online.  
[www.standrewsabbeyceramics.com](http://www.standrewsabbeyceramics.com)

### ABBEY BOOKS & GIFTS

Angel Plaques are \$10.

All Ceramic plaques over \$36 are 40% off through the month of February.

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**THE NEW RETREAT BROCHURES** are here with the new retreat offerings. You can view them on the website at [www.saintandrews-abbey.com](http://www.saintandrews-abbey.com)

**BEQUESTS AND WILLS** Please remember St. Andrew's Abbey if you are writing or updating your will. A bequest to St. Andrew's Abbey, a non-profit California Corporation located in Valyermo, CA, will help us to continue the retreat and spiritual ministry of the Benedictine monks here. It is a great investment in the future! Thanks.

**MASS AND PRAYER REQUESTS** may be sent to: St. Andrew's Abbey, Br. Dominique Guillen, O.S.B., PO Box 40, Valyermo, CA 93563

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## RETREAT CENTER NEWS



### WINTER-SUMMER, 2010

**P**LEASE call the Retreat Office at 661-944-2178 for availability and to make your reservation. You will be asked to make a \$75 non-refundable/non-transferable deposit, preferably by credit card. We accept Visa, MasterCard, and Discover.

### OVERNIGHT RETREATS

*Monday, February 15 – Friday, February 19*

#### **"LISTEN" A SILENT RETREAT**

Room, board, tuition: Single \$280, Shared \$240

*Monday, February 22 – Friday, February 26*

#### **PRIESTS' RETREAT**

Presenter: Fr. Joseph Brennan, O.S.B.

Room, board, tuition: Single \$380

*Wednesday, March 3 - Friday, March 5*

#### **MY HEART IS NUMB WITHIN ME:**

#### **Prayer and Trust When Things Feel Awful**

Presenter: Br. Jerome Hughes, O.S.B.

Room, board, tuition: Single \$190, Shared \$160

*Friday, March 5 – Sunday, March 7*

#### **LENTEN RETREAT**

Presenters: Monks of Valyermo

Room, board, tuition: Single \$260, Shared \$170

*Monday, March 15 – Friday, March 10*

#### **LEADERSHIP AND COMMUNITY**

Room, board, tuition: Single \$380, Shared \$300

*Friday, March 26 – Sunday, March 28*

#### **CREATION AND FALL**

Presenter: Fr. Aelred Niespolo, O.S.B.

Room, board, tuition: Single \$260, Shared \$170

*Thursday, April 1 – Sunday, April 4*

#### **SACRED TRIDUUM**

Room, board, tuition: Single \$350, shared \$250

*Friday, April 9 – Sunday, April 11*

#### **THE ICON-SACRED IMAGE**

Presenter: Fr. Brendan McAnerney, O.P.

Room, board, tuition: Single \$260, Shared \$170

*Monday, April 12 – Thursday, April 15*

#### **SPRING LANDSCAPE PAINTING**

Presenter: Deloris Haddow

Room, board, tuition: Single \$285, Shared \$225

*Friday, April 16 – Sunday, April 18*

#### **FINDING YOUR STORY**

Presenters: Fr. Joseph Brennan, O.S.B.,

Mary Betten Obl., O.S.B.,

Dr. Patrick Mitchell Obl., O.S.B.

Room, board, tuition: Single \$260, Shared \$170

*Friday, May 7 – Sunday, May 9*

#### **DESERT WISDOM ON THE SPIRITUAL JOURNEY**

Presenter: Fr. Luke Dysinger, O.S.B.

Room, board, tuition: Single \$260, Shared \$170

*Monday, May 17 – Sunday, May 21*

#### **LET'S HAVE A PICNIC**

Presenter: Fr. Isaac Kalina, O.S.B.

Room, board, tuition: Single \$380, Shared \$300

*Friday, May 21 – Sunday, May 23*

#### **PENTECOST RETREAT**

Presenter: Monks of Valyermo

Room, board, tuition: Single \$260, Shared \$170

*Friday, June 4 – Sunday, June 6*

#### **THEOLOGIES OF THE BODY: The Church Fathers in Dialogue with John Paul II**

Presenters: Fr. Maximos Davies and

Br. Cassian Di Rocco, O.S.B.

Room, board, tuition: Single \$260, Shared \$170



## DAY RETREATS

All programs are held in the conference room in the new Welcome Center beginning at 9am and ending at 3:30pm. Hot and cold beverages and fruit are available during the morning and lunch is served following the noon Mass.

Meals and tuition: \$38 per person, or \$100 for three family members.

### SECOND SATURDAY SERIES:

#### Bless the Work of Our Hands

Back by popular demand, this series offers crafters the opportunity to gather as community to pray, reflect, work, and share "the work of our hands".

*Saturday, March 13, 2010*

#### Origami

Hosted by Br. Benedict Dull, O.S.B.

*Saturday, April 10, 2010*

#### Mosaic and "Stained Glass"

Hosted by: Cheryl Evanson, Obl., O.S.B.

*Saturday, May 8, 2010*

#### Dried and Pressed Flowers

Hosted by: Cathie Matranga, Obl., O.S.B.  
and Vivian Costi, Obl., O.S.B.

### MONTAGE SERIES

The many and varied interests and talents of the monks and friends of the Abbey are offered as day long retreats on the occasional 5th Saturday of the Month or midweek upon request.

*Saturday, February 27, 2010*

#### Time's Holiness: The Divine Office at Valyermo

Presenter: Br. Bede Hazlet, O.S.B.

*Saturday, March 27, 2010*

#### "What Did You Come to the Desert to See?" Native Flora of Valyermo

Presenter: Fr. Philip Edwards, O.S.B.

*Saturday, May 1, 2010*

#### Sundancing: A Passive Solar Primer

Presenter: Ken Francis, Obl., O.S.B.

*Saturday, May 29, 2010*

#### The China Connection: A Visit with Br. Peter

Presenter: Br. Peter Zhou Bangjui, O.S.B.  
and Michaela Ludwick, Obl., O.S.B.

*Saturday, June 26, 2010*

#### Heaven on earth: Theology of the Body for Consecrated Life

Presenter: Br. Cassian  
Di Rocco, O.S.B.

*Saturday, July 31, 2010*

#### Wit and Humor in the Bible

Presenter: Br. Patrick  
Sheridan, O.S.B.

### RELATIONSHIPS AND SPIRITUALITY SERIES

*Saturday, February 20, 2010*

#### Assertiveness: A Way to Respect Both Self and Others

Presenter: Dr. Victoria  
Dendinger, Obl., O.S.B.

*Saturday, March 20, 2010*

#### Strengthening Healthy Marriages

Presenter: Dr. Victoria  
Dendinger, Obl., O.S.B.

*Saturday, April 17, 2010*

#### Caregiver Support

Presenter: Dr. Victoria  
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PLEASE CALL THE RETREAT OFFICE AT  
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