

VALYERMO CHRONICLE
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1) A LETTER *from the* ABBOT

THE ABBOT'S LETTER
Abbot Francis Benedict, O.S.B.

DEAR FRIENDS,

The closer we draw to God and to the knowledge of spiritual things, the more we touch our own giftedness as well as our own mortality. God's gift of life is the foundation of everything that is meaningful to us. The gift of faith and the relationship it creates between God and us is a fragile gift: our human limitations and weakness struggle to contain all that God desires for us and promises to us. This gift is a dynamic, ever-unfolding reality within our inmost self, which expresses itself concretely in our consciousness, our

actions, and our relationships. In fact, this life each of us has received is not only a *gift of* but a *calling toward*, a vocation.

In the season of the Incarnation, we reflected on the mystery of God-with-us. God in Christ has embraced, in time and for all time, our humanity with all its struggles, in all its strivings, in all its fragility, weakness and sin. The Word became a human Person so that, through and in His sacred humanity, we might be lifted up and drawn into the very life of God. This communion of divine & human life, initiated by the God-Man in His very Person, becomes henceforth the essence of our human existence and of our spiritual destiny. Because of Jesus, our hope is not limited only to what belongs to this short life (its loves, achievements, and longings) but is oriented toward a future which is well beyond our present vision or our highest aspirations. As we progress through this life, we are introduced more and more consciously through our faith to the God who is not only Creator and Sustainer, but who reveals Himself as the Divine Lover. In God, Gift and Giver, Love and Lover are one and the same. God is ever offering us the fullness of love--divine intimacy that can be tasted in this life but is eschatologically oriented to unimpeded divine-human intimacy in the life without end, the kingdom of heaven.

During the season of Lent, the whole Church is on retreat. Its focus is toward conversion, transformation and communion. Catechumens and candidates are preparing for the Easter sacraments and we journey with them. Together as Church, we reflect on the catechesis of the liturgical readings to renew within us the grace of our own faith and baptism. The faith memory of the Church calls forth in us our personal faith in the Risen Christ, the conqueror of sin and death. All believers, now and future, are ravished by Divine Love that is willing undertake the full restoration of our humanity to God. Jesus was obedient, doing only what the Father willed, and therefore He was willing to be misunderstood, to be denied and betrayed, to be mocked and beaten, even to die a most cruel death for love of us. Jesus is "Love Divine, all loves excelling." Jesus is the outpouring of the Love of the Father. From Jesus' side flowed blood and water, the sacramental life of the Church. Because of Jesus, we too are impelled to participate in the drama of this life as God always intended it to be: the now (even in its present longing or suffering) is seen as the preparation or the threshold for life on high—unhindered and eternal communion with the Blessed Trinity.

As we progress year by year in this mortal existence, each of us is burdened and battered by the disappointments and difficulties that inevitably happen to every human being. We are overwhelmed by human misery in and around us. We are beleaguered by the limitations of our understanding that might make sense out of such negative realities. We experience great incompleteness in our search for a happy life toward which we believe we are created. We become convinced that we are unable to reach the goal by ourselves.

Jesus, the Incarnate One, has embraced all of life, including these negative, death-dealing 'life' experiences *for our sake*, for our salvation. Today, perhaps more than ever, we are saddened and overwhelmed by the reality of violence and war, of terrorism and hatred, of prejudice and misunderstanding, of poverty and destitution, of human greed and indifference. Jesus comes in the now of our life, as He did in history, to restore us to God, to our true selves in God, and to one another as brothers and sisters.

We long for purity of heart, which once imbued human existence before our lost innocence or the advent of sin. Our spiritual vision has become impaired, and what we most desire is hidden from our sight. Our human weakness too often devolves into radical separation from God and neighbor. Enduring the pain and sin of the world in the concrete circumstances mentioned above, humankind either turns toward God or is afflicted with forgetfulness and spiritual lethargy. In this spiritual vacuum, the many attractions, attachments and addictions that promise relief actually draw us away from God and lead us toward values that never fully satisfy.

Lent challenges us to look deeply at our lives, our motives, and our relationships. It provides a time of serious reflection and prayer to see how the choices in our lives have nurtured the eternal values of the Gospel, how they have reflected the love of God rather than the love of transient things for their own sake. Lent invites us to place the love of God and neighbor above our own self-interest or our own accumulation of material goods. Lent is a time of renewal just as Spring is a time of new life after the cold of Winter. It is a season for returning again to the things that really matter, letting the Spirit of God till the soil of our hearts to make them receptive to the seed, the Word of God, and fruitful in the Spirit. Through the spiritual

practices of Lent, we clear away the stones of false attachment and the weeds of falsehood or half-truths and fertilize the ground of our being to be all that God has intended for us.

The traditional ascetical practices of Lent are prayer, fasting and almsgiving. In some senses these practices include every spiritual practice because they move the person through a 'letting go' of what is not perfect love or desire toward the embrace of what is the highest and what, toward the pure love of Love and toward purity of heart in our concrete life with others.

One must not reduce the Lenten observance to mere external practices which are engaged in for 40 days of the year and abandoned with the Easter *Alleluias*. These practices are meant to become a way of life, a style of discipleship, a means toward spiritual enlightenment and communion with God and neighbor. They are disciplines for us as disciples, making us docile and teachable in the course of this life so as to direct us in the ways of God and in the pursuit of spiritual happiness. As St. Benedict calls the monastery "a school for the Lord's service" (RB: Prol 45), so the season of Lent is a school of spirituality leading us to freedom and the order of beatitude. St. Benedict reminds us that our practice is to be motivated by "the joy of the Holy Spirit" (RB 49:6) and that this season enables us to "look forward to holy Easter with joy and spiritual longing" (RB 49:7).

It is my prayer for you and for all that this season of Lent, this now of our life, become a source of inspiration, blessing and renewal so that we may more fully love the lovable God and by that love be made more lovable ourselves--ambassadors of Divine Love in this troubled world.

In God's unfailing love,
Abbot Francis, O.S.B.



ABBEY DEVELOPMENT: *Our Future Strategies, Revised*

[Abbot Francis Benedict, O.S.B.](#)

St. Andrew's Abbey

IN the first third of 2006, there is much hope on the horizon and several challenges to overcome to reestablish our financial base for the future. In the last Valyermo Chronicle I mentioned the Abbey's increasing operational deficit and our strategies to restore financial balance to the Abbey as we move forward to accomplish the Master Plan that has been described in previous issues over the past few years.

IN many personal meetings with advisors and benefactors, I have insisted that the Abbey maintain its good faith toward those who have been good to us through their designated gifts toward specific projects such as the Youth Center Chapel, the Gate House/Welcome Center, the 'Adopt a Student Monk' program and the fulfillment of the Master Plan through the Capital Campaign One Eleven.

The Arts & Crafts Center is completed and our Ceramics staff has been moving into the new building for several weeks. The phones and computers are yet to be installed. The new kiln is in place and will be utilized as soon as we can get the safety hood installed. Basic landscaping needs to be planted to contain the earth around the building and to beautify the setting. Monies for this project are still available to complete what is necessary for housing St. Andrew's Abbey Ceramics and the other cottage industries that support the operations of the monastery. We hope to be fully moved into the Arts & Crafts Center by the end of February and to have a dedication ceremony sometime later in the Spring.

Thanks to the recent sale of several land parcels donated to the Abbey over the years and to the great generosity of our friends over the Christmas

season, the operational deficit anticipated for the first six months of the fiscal year has been avoided. This does not mean that we have the same comfort level for the next six months. The cutbacks are still in place, we have marketing strategies begun to improve the income of the Abbey Ceramics and our other products. We hope to increase significantly our sale of Abbey Olive Oil and are negotiating to produce a new Abbey coffee product line of Fair Trade, organic and shade grown coffee blends. This should be available no later than the Summer.

After much study and consultation regarding the Gate House/Welcome Center, the monastic chapter has approved the construction of a prefabricated building to house much but not all of what we hoped to accomplish for the proposed facility. Yankee Barn Homes has a building which can be constructed at the entrance of the Abbey in the present apple orchard for \$1,500,000. This is within the range of our financial ability from the cash at hand, pledges and the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation matching grant. We hope to begin constructing the foundation in the early Summer awaiting the arrival of the building components in late July or early August, with the structure erected and weather tight by the Valyermo Fall Festival in September. God willing, the new facility with its enlarged Abbey Art & Books store, offices, adequate restrooms and two conference rooms will be in operation by December of this year. This will facilitate the availability of day group meetings as well as expanded hours and sales potential for the Abbey products in the new Abbey Art & Books store. This Gate House/Welcome Center will be dedicated in memory *Barney & Jean Evans*, friends of the first hour of our monastic foundation in California, thanks to the generosity of their son, Berne Evans.

We are still awaiting bids to finish the longest planned building project of the Abbey—the Youth Center Chapel. This building will be dedicated to the memory of *Pascuale & Anna Iarrobino*, the parents of our Brother Joseph, O.S.B. If the funds raised over the past 14 years prove sufficient, we will begin construction of the Chapel within the next few months. Ernest Adams of Newport Beach, the architect of our master plan, has designed a Chapel which will improve the quality of our Youth retreatants' worship in a setting that is simple, dignified and transcendent.

When these two buildings are completed with the designated donations and pledges intact, then the Abbey can work in earnest with the help of advisors

and benefactors to create an untouchable endowment for the monastery which will produce revenue for the operations and the vital, non-profit ministries of the Abbey community. The moratorium on future capital expenditures is then projected to last approximately two years. In the meantime we hope to create a strategy for future buildings that will be within our financial reach.

Even though these have been tough times for us at Valyermo, we have found God's grace to sustain us and God's wisdom to encourage and guide us. Our projections for the master plan and our short term dreams will be accomplished in simpler, humbler ways according to our present financial limitations. You, our Oblates and friends, have stood beside us and have shared in the spiritual and corporal ministries of Valyermo by enabling us to serve more and more people who come to Valyermo for peace, prayer and discernment. Without you we would never have reached this positive point in our development of the future. Thank you! God bless you abundantly!

3) AN URGENT APPEAL

AN URGENT APPEAL *from the* ABBOT

AS you know, over the past 3 years, the operational reserve funds of the monastery have been seriously depleted due to rising costs of living, unexpected expenditures, etc.—everything I wrote about in the previous *Valyermo Chronicle*. In October 2005, we were projecting that the remaining reserve funds would probably be spent by May or June 2006 unless something dramatic happened. By God's providence, we have turned a corner and made more than positive headway toward restoring the financial balance of our current yearly budget. This has been almost miraculous. We are now prepared to construct new buildings, a simpler Gate House/Welcome Center and the new Youth Center Chapel, toward which our benefactors' designated gifts have been directed.

BUT, we are in serious need of your help now to replenish our reserve funds. The Abbey's operating budget is \$2,000,000 a year and we are striving to hold it at this level. We need your generous assistance in the first six months of 2006 to build up our reserves so as to assure the financial stability and have the time necessary to strategize new sources of operational

income and to set in place an endowment for the Abbey's future. We have 9,000 people who receive this Valyermo Chronicle quarterly. Many of you are already giving generously to the Abbey through designated gifts for various funds. If all or most of you could find a way to give \$100 or more toward the Abbey's general needs, it would replenish a large portion of our recommended level of reserve funds and assure our future stability. Some of you will receive a letter from the Abbot asking for a larger gift in which case you can ignore this appeal and the envelope enclosed in this Chronicle. Our goal is \$500,000. We pray that you will help the Abbey and its specific need for operational reserves, all according to your ability. You are a blessing to us and we count on you, your prayers and your support.

4) ST. AELRED of RIEVAULX



ST. AELRED of RIEVAULX,
A FEASTDAY HOMILY,
January 12, 2006

by [Fr. Aelred Niespolo](#), O.S.B.

St. Aelred,
Medieval Illum. MS.

(Eph: 3:14-19, John: 15:9-17)

ST. AELRED writes in the prologue to his best known work, the *Treatise on Spiritual Friendship*, that: “When I was still just a lad at school, and the charm of my companions pleased me very much, I gave my whole soul to affection and devoted myself to love amid the ways and vices with which that age is wont to be threatened, so that nothing seemed to me more

sweet, nothing more agreeable, nothing more practical, than to love.” He also writes in a dialogue with his dear friend Ivo that immediately follows that prologue: “Here we are then, you and I, and I hope a third, Christ, is in our midst.”

At the core of both statements is a profound sense of what he experienced as delightful in being a human person, and also of the deeper sense that an incarnate Christ is With Us, at the core of our humanity and central to the delight we take in others. Initially this dual perception of need and desire seemed to him a tension, a struggle, but he was ultimately able to use it as a basis for his theology and spirituality. His teachings are a genuine expression of his own personal experience. While this is not unique in earlier spiritual literature as a methodology of finding God, (St. Augustine’s *Confessions* were an important model for him) he extensively employed the dynamics of personal friendship and love within own life in order to distil a theology of friendship, as well as love, that spoke deeply to those of his own 12th Century England, a time that was changing its perception of what it meant to be a human being. And once Aelred was rediscovered after years of neglect, or even suspicion, he again speaks deeply to our own day and age.

In today’s first reading St, Paul prays that our hidden, interior, our inner, selves be strengthened by the Spirit and that it is through this strengthening that Christ lives in our hearts. In today’s gospel, Jesus exhorts his disciples: that as the Father loves him, so does he love them; but in order to remain in this love, that he may continually dwell with them, be present to them, the disciples, in other words we ourselves, must love one another as he himself loves. And if we do this we are no longer servants, we are his friends. The act of loving each other brings us into friendship with Christ, making Christ present in our lives. Both readings are essential to understanding how St. Aelred perceived his own struggles as a sometimes agonized seeker who *needs* to love and to be loved, and as a Cistercian monk and an Abbot who *needs* to love and to be loved.

We all know that love causes great joy, yet often enough great confusion, often enough great pain, even great indiscretions. But it also gives us a sense of vital life. What I think that sense of life is, is a freeing perception into who we truly are in our “hidden” selves, our interior selves. Aelred wrote: “How much does a man know if he does not know himself.” And the primary way he grew in self-knowledge was through his personal loves and

friendships, and the corresponding desire for Christ they incarnate between friends. The impetus behind his own monastic conversion and spirituality is that drive to know oneself, who one really is, by listening to how our hearts love. The monastic life became for him a true interior journey into self-discovery—but not a discovery that was self-centered. It became that most archetypal of journeys, the monastic quest to find the hidden self created by God, the self that calls out to God, even when it does not know His name.

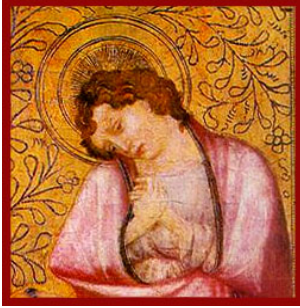
St. Aelred recognized that the primary person we hide from in life is ourselves; that we have forgotten, lost, the sense of who we are in forging our own protective egos. He knew that the primary monastic goal is to know and love Christ, and that the best way he had discovered through his own experiences to achieve this love and knowledge, lie in the rediscovery of who we truly are. He discusses in his work how one moves from the personally defined need to love and to be loved, that which is ultimately both universal and unique to each of us, which defines who we are, to ever closer union with God. He intertwines, as does Jesus in today's gospel, self-knowledge with the two great commandments of love that are enjoined upon us as Christians. Any *real* love is a fundamental inclination towards God. But Aelred knew that the problem lay in learning to love properly, because there is always the danger of thinking we love someone, when we really only love the image we have built of ourselves.

He distinguishes spiritual friendship from the Christian duty to love all one's neighbours, even one's enemies, because loving all does not mean *enjoying* all. And there are those one has to will to love. As we all know, from our families, and our communities. Aelred understood the enjoyment in true friendship as a foretaste of heaven. Friendship springs directly from a God who created humanity; who created them to share his love with each other. Love one another as I have loved you. The human heart has impressed upon it the desire for friendship. In a very real way this desire is another aspect of the God of Genesis decreeing that it is not good for man to be alone. True spiritual friendship, friendship that incarnates Christ among us, perfects love. It perfects creation.

St. Aelred of Rievaulx asks us to carry on the ever-dynamic mission of the incarnation. The creator God of Genesis is John's God who is love. And Aelred takes a further significant step when he moves from affirming that God is love to his most famous dictum: "God is friendship." For in all true

spiritual friendship there is a mutuality that allows one to love others, but as importantly to know that *one is loved* by others. Aelred discovered in his own life with and in Christ that to love and to be loved is the way of defining who we truly are.

5) TEARS



St. John at the Cross,
Beaumetz, 1392

TEARS

by [Fr. Damien Toilolo, OSB](#)

THE Desert Fathers, forerunners to modern day monks, believed tears were a gift from the Holy Spirit, hence, the phrase "gift of tears". When the Fathers experienced tears as part of their prayer, the tears were not viewed as an expression of sentimentality or moments of being overwhelmed with emotion; rather they saw tears as a sign of nearness to God, a way to avert sin and advance in the spiritual life.

The Fathers of the Desert encouraged their spiritual sons and others to pray for the gift of tears. Saint Evagrius of Pontus admonished his disciples to, "first of all pray to receive tears, so that by sorrowing you may be able to calm the wildness that there is in your soul and obtain forgiveness from the Lord by confessing your offences to him."

The notion of *penthos* helps one to understand the relationship between tears and sin. *Penthos* is a concept that enabled the Fathers to nurture and develop a deeper relationship with God. The Greek word, *penthos*, is used to explain the sorrow one experiences as a consequence of sins committed. *Penthos* can be likened to heartfelt compunction or sorrow for sin. Saint Gregory of Nyssa is known to have said, "*penthos* is a sorrowful disposition of the soul" which is caused by being deprived of something desirable. For the Christian, there is nothing more desirable than salvation; hence, the thought of losing salvation through sin constitutes deprivation of what is most desirable. If our soul were to truly comprehend her fallen state and estrangement from God, she could not help but weep bitter tears.

Penthos then can be thought of more specifically in terms of intense sorrow for the loss of salvation and the separation from God due to one's sins. It is godly sorrow accompanied by sadness, tears, and suffering because of the privation of what gives joy. For the Fathers of the Desert, the notion of *penthos*, or sorrow for sin, is an essential component to conversion and the advancement in the spiritual way of life.

It is important to realize that the beginning of *penthos* is to know oneself. It is only through honest self-examination that sinfulness and the need for God become apparent. The Desert Fathers emphasized the importance of recognizing one's own sinfulness as a way to grow in the spiritual life. Yet, sinfulness is not recognizable without personal reflection or soul searching.

The Fathers believed that through the heartfelt compunction for sins and weeping for sins, one is more open to conversion, and more likely to progress in prayerful contemplation and union with God. St. Benedict himself mentions tears in his rule four times, each time in the context of prayer.

It was a familiar belief among the Fathers that tears washed away sins. This image easily calls to mind the cleansing waters of baptism, which is a common image in patristic literature. The seventh century, Byzantine monk, St. John Climacus purports that “the tears that come after baptism are greater than baptism itself.” He then profoundly remarks, “if God in His love for the human race had not given us tears, those being saved would be few indeed and hard to find.” This quote from St. John Climacus, reiterates the truth of what the Fathers have always believed: tears are a gift.

The season of Lent is an opportune time to experience the gift of tears since Lent is a time for personal reflection. It is a time when the Church encourages self-examination through the readings at the liturgies and the traditional Lenten observances. When done honestly, this self-examination necessarily leads one into the darkness of personal sin and imperfection towards an experience of *penthos*, ultimately yielding to the Light and Life of the Resurrection.

GOD & PAIN

The following is a reflection written by St. Andrew's Oblate Anne Bremser. It stems from her personal experience in dealing with serious illness.

WHY DOES GOD ALLOW PAIN?

This is a question that can never be fully answered by anyone but God. We know some things that God said about pain from scripture, and we know something from our personal experience of pain. We as human beings are limited in our ability to understand God's reasons for what he does because his ways are so far above our ways. We can't possibly see the big picture as God does. When Job asked God about suffering, God's answered out of the whirlwind "I will question you, and you shall declare to me... Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me if you have understanding....Have you commanded the morning... and caused the dawn to know its place?...(Job 38:1-41:34)

Suffering and pain has many sources. There is the suffering and death that results from natural disasters. When there is tsunami or hurricane, we ask why God allows such things to happen. These events are the results of the laws of physics, laws that God wrote before the universe began. He knows that the universe has to be ordered the way it is for it to function and for life to exist. That sometimes the result is a rockslide when you are driving Hwy 18 is very sad, but somehow necessary in the very large scheme of things. We think in terms of our personal experience and from the point of view of a very short lived creature; God sees how everything works together throughout all of time; and knows how and why those rocks must fall at that moment.

There is pain inflicted by others. War, violence of any kind, physical or emotional abuse, hard words, all are acts committed by individuals or societies that Christians define as sin. God gave us free will. We can choose to harm or help. When suffering is caused by a free choice, God did not cause the suffering to occur. The pain was the result of the actions of others. Jesus walks with us in our suffering; he himself was the victim of physical abuse and painful death at the hands of others.

Pain is a gift. It signals us that something is wrong, and we need to take action. Without pain I wouldn't have known that my hand was burning, and taken it off the hot iron before I was seriously hurt the other day. It tells us when we have injured ourselves and need to rest to heal. When we are sick it forces us to stay in bed so that our bodies' defenses can fight off infection. There is also pain related to illness that seems pointless and cruel- the suffering of a cancer patient, or of chronic conditions. This pain can destroy us if we let it, or lead us into a deeper appreciation of what is important in life. We can live our pain in anger or denial, or bargain with God to take it away, which leads to more suffering. Besides the bad feelings in us, it pushes away our friends and family and isolates us just when we need them most. If we abandon ourselves to Divine Providence, and accept our reality, which is pain, it offers us the opportunity to appreciate the small things, and reflect more deeply on what is important in our lives. It can cause us to reach out and tell people we love them. It can help put things in perspective and allow us to have more compassion for others, more understanding for other's weaknesses, and allow us to forgive when we couldn't forgive before. In this way, it makes us more mature emotionally and spiritually. People who have lived charmed lives with little pain or worry to overcome tend to be much more shallow and intolerant than those who have had to overcome adversity.

Pain provides contrast. If we don't know pain, can we really know joy or gratitude? At Easter, Catholics pray in thanksgiving for the "necessary sin of Adam", because without sin and death we wouldn't know how great God's love for us is; he wouldn't have sent his Son to suffer pain and die for the forgiveness of sin. God does not abandon us in our suffering. He sent his Son, Jesus, to live as one of us, fully human, experiencing every kind of pain that human being experience, emotional and physical. What an amazing thing, that the Lord of the Universe made himself so small that he knows, from experience, what it is to suffer as a human being. He shares our pain with us. As members of the body of Christ, we can unite our pain with his, and it becomes redemptive.

There is no complete answer to the problem of pain. What is important is how we live it. The more we accept our reality, live as well as we can within the limits of that reality, and have gratitude for the small things, the experience of pain can be what makes us fully human and an inspiration to others.

HANDS TO WORK

Elizabeth Seward, OBI, O.S.B.

FOR a week in January, 14 knitters from around the country met at St Andrew's Abbey to learn how to self-publish their knitting books. The workshop was led by Cat Bordhi, a successful knitting author and self-publisher. The week was informative, and more: the conversations moved rapidly to the deeper aspects of knitting. Our hands were at work, and our hearts and minds were freed. We gathered a lot of information, but most of the time was spent listening to each other: two hours per person was set aside to describe our book project(s), and for others to ask questions or offer suggestions. As we heard others' stories, we recognized ourselves in them, and stitched their experiences into our own knitting. The retreat was more than informative: it was an opportunity to listen more deeply to ourselves, echoed through others.

Listening with the ear of our heart

The participants were men and women spanning an age range of around 40 years; techies, teachers, lawyers, students and others. Several own and operate their own yarn-related business. Most of these highly respected knitting designers and teachers worked on at least three museum-quality projects each during the week, and some brought a spare suitcase full of yarn, or had it delivered directly to the Abbey. Potential book projects ranged from a manual of copyright laws for fiber artists to a compendium on how to fix mistakes; from a family business case study to scholarly research on antique knitted mittens, and more.

Most participants were stepping for the first time into the unknown world of the Catholic Church, and a Benedictine monastery, and many simply did not believe that internet access and phones would not be available and that silence would reign overnight and at certain meals. However, by the end of the week, the silence proved to be especially important, and the moment of breaking silence after breakfast never passed without explicit acknowledgment in one form or another. Keeping silent helped sharpen our ability to listen when others spoke.

Finding a common thread

Despite the common ground of knitting and writing, the narrow focus of our individual specializations could have separated us. However, when we listened to each other we discovered a deeper common thread: because we had gone into such depth with our own topic, we shared experiences of awe, wonder, reverence, excitement, a desire to draw from the past and give to the future. Speaking of the ‘classics’ in knitting literature, we agreed that it is the quality of timelessness that inspires us; some books or authors are able to provide us with tools, techniques or ideas, and then set us free to create on our own. We found a meeting place by stepping aside from everyday thinking where differences separate people and into the intangible, invisible realm where we stood in the stream of co-creation.

It became clear that each one of us was aware of a more important dimension to knitting than just winding yarn around a couple of sticks. Describing the legacy we want to leave through our books, we heard of comfort, empowerment, creative alternatives for teenagers, joy, self-worth, connection with the continuum of history, and other heartfelt and lofty goals. We could all endorse each person’s goals and recognize our own strivings in others’ work.

Three projects spoke most directly to the spiritual dimension of knitting: Lorna’s chronicle of her work as knitting evangelist; Kevin’s singing sweaters into creation; and Erica and Michael’s look at the ‘dark side’ of knitting. Lorna broached the spiritual dimension of knitting first as she affirmed all her work is guided by the hand of God: her knitting is a ministry of evangelization, and her calling is to bear testimony that God’s glory is found in all things. We heard from Kevin that he assigns pattern values to sacred music or passages from scripture. He sings or prays and walks as he knits the designs into the sweaters. He showed us a breathtakingly, carefully, finely knitted shawl he had made in memory of a friend. It was beautiful, mystical, fragile, made from one strand of wool yarn, one stitch at a time, combined together until the overall unique lace pattern was complete. The shawl expressed love, beauty, and deep pain. We recognized immediately the healing redemptive force of working unwaveringly with our hands, and the hard work of manifesting in the physical world truths that exist in a realm beyond words. Working with your hands can be a safe harbor in a

storm, but in contrast, as every bright light casts a shadow, Erica's and Michael's book will explore the addictive, shadow side of knitting that draws us away from family and friends, a way to escape and anesthetize. Knitting can become obsessive or be a 'positive addiction'; it can lead us to great heights and can plunge us into the depths.

Coming from very different backgrounds, with different goals in our future, we stepped aside from our everyday lives and found common threads. Specialized in our own particular area, we came to recognize the depth of our roots, and how they met and intertwined in places and ways that had been invisible before. The initial disequilibrium of being in an unfamiliar setting, and the fact that we came from such different backgrounds, made sure we took nothing for granted. The common ground was our avocation to knitting, and the devotion with which this was practiced. Thanks to the hospitality of hand, heart and mind at the Abbey, we had the opportunity to listen deeply to each other, and to approach a profound sense of unity through our diversity.

8) PILGRIM PEOPLE

PILGRIM PEOPLE

A Book Review by Fr. Philip Edwards, O.S.B.

I HAVE never been much taken with shrines and hoked-up holy places, although a pilgrimage in itself has its appeal, and memories entwined with all the senses: sight, smell, touch & texture and all – yes, but the pious impulse to smother beyond recognition with piles of precious stones and metals and brazen pots of incense and banks of smoking candles seems to be an evasion of the encounter with the holy; one can understand the preference for Gordon's Garden Tomb and the caves of Shepherds' Field to the probably authentic locations of the Holy Sepulcher and the Grotto of the Nativity to "feel" more closely the stark reality of Birth and Resurrection. My own belief is that all that is beautiful and good find rest in the Word-Made-Flesh and in His house. But, all things in their proper place and in focus so that *God* may be glorified. For this writer, the real holy land is wherever one is to hear the Word and keep it.

Nevertheless, I remember the “breakthrough” that happened to me in Belgium when Dom Jacques Dupont returned from a trip to Galilee with slides to share with the home-bound brethren before returning to Rome where he was an exegetical peritus at the Council. I had been a year or so away from home and seeing those brown and rounded hills and rocks that could so well have been anywhere in the coastal and inland valleys of California, the fact of the Incarnation, that God-With-Us, The Word Made Flesh That Dwelt Among Us, walked the dusty roads of *my* land, yes, it would be well to walk there myself. There was a popular “coffee-table” book at that time with the title, *The Fifth Gospel*, that made the point that the land itself could speak and evangelize. I am grateful to have had twice the opportunity to walk those hills and feel the stones of both Galilee and Judea; I still shun Holy Sepulcher but relish the rocks that *might* have felt the feet of the one being led from Gethsemane to the house of Caiphas, or the gnarled olives of Gethsemane themselves and “Old City” despite the fact that what the conquerors built over what had previously been thrown down and buried is only of historically recent times and olive trees, venerable as they can be, do not live 2000 years like a Limber Pine of Mt. Baden Powell!

All this by way of saying that the community has just taken up to read in the Refectory Bruce Feiler’s best-seller of five years ago, *Walking the Bible, a Journey by Land through the Five Books of Moses*. There have been two more books *Abraham* and *Where God Was Born*, which have continued Mr. Feiler’s own interior journey to find within himself who he is in all this experience of the streams flowing from this Book, but it is refreshing to hear again the initial account when he is simply an average secular American who had separated himself from the practices of family religion who “woke up one morning and realized I had no connection to the Bible. It was a book to me now, one that sat on the shelf above my TV, gathering dust on its gilded pages.” He had made a name for himself as a writer who would tell from an immersion experience in a particular milieu something of Japan or Oxbridge or the Circus! As his reawakening interest in the Bible “wanted these words to have meaning again. I wanted to understand them ...” and his professional means of experiential understanding led him “to walk along these lines myself. I would take this ancient book, the embodiment of old-fashioned knowledge, and approach it with contemporary methods of learning – traveling, talking, experiencing. In other words, I would enter the Bible as if it were any other world and seek to become a part of it. Once inside, I would walk in its footsteps, live in its canyons, meet its character’s, and ask its questions in an effort to understand why its stories had become so timeless and despite years of neglect, once again so vitally important to me.”

---and so he does, physically present like one on a dig, sifting shards in the dust and extreme temperatures, coping with all sorts of personalities and situations, honestly asking and listening and recording and sharing – and stimulating reflection and response within the reader. A most engaging and fruitful experience. Read it!

This is the first in a series of book reviews by Fr. Philip. *Walking the Bible* is now available at the Abbey Gift and Book Shop, as well as in other book stores.

9) ODDS AND ENDS

ODDS AND ENDS

(News of the Monks and Monastery Departments)

NEWS of the MONKS

Fr. Aelred has returned from Oxford, and is now keeping busy with monastic matters, publications, and conferences.

New appointments at the monastery include **Fr. Damien** as Sub-Prior and Vocations Director, **Fr. Matthew** as Novice Master, **Fr. Aelred** as Junior Master.

Fr. Carlos is not only busy running the Art and Book Shop, he is also running for the Abbey in the Los Angeles Marathon in March. He is collecting sponsorship funds for the monastery through this 27 mile run which is set for March 19, 2006.

Brother James took an end of exam break in February and came back home for eight days. He returned to Rome to continue his studies.

At the end of January, **Fr. John Bosco** was invited to join in a retired Navy chaplain's retreat in West Palm Beach. For those who don't know, he was a navy chaplain for 22 ½ years, retiring from the service with the rank of captain.

Fr. Simon is busy up in the north of the state working on his book dealing with the relationship between the Benedictine Rule and work. It is about half completed.

Fr. Gregory has returned to the monastery from Villa Scalabrini.

Fr. Eleutherius' new book on Philosophy is soon to be published. It is his third volume in four years.

Fr. Werner continues to regularly go out into the desert to sketch and draw, producing new pastels for the Festival and for the Art and Book Shop.

Br. Peter's book *Dawn Breaks in the East*, has been published in Taiwan in an original Chinese edition.

As part of his seminary formation at St. John's, Camarillo, **Br. Vincent** has begun to work once a week at a rescue mission in Oxnard.

Kitchen Master, **Fr. Isaac**, has, with a grant obtained for the monastery through Sr. Karen, purchased new stoves that have replaced the 17 year old, wheezing stoves formerly in the kitchen.

RETREAT CENTER AND YOUTH CENTER NEWS

The Fall Festival provided the Retreat Center and the Youth Center much visibility in God's Court. We had people who had been here many times for retreats there with Fr. Philip and Br. Benedict speaking to visitors about our retreat programs both at both retreat facilities. It was encouraging to see the response they received from visitors and we are most appreciative for their gift of time and talent.

The new brochure and webpage for the Retreat Center is now ready, listing all of the retreats/workshops and their descriptions through the end of August. You will notice that the process of registering has changed slightly. We are trying to streamline this process and ask your patience and assistance in the transition.

The retreats fill quickly, so please do not wait until the last minute to register lest you be disappointed.

The Youth Center continues to attract groups. Rita Jones, the on-site coordinator, keeps things organized and is most efficient in returning calls and scheduling groups. Please think of us as you hear of youth groups wanting a place to retreat.

HELP WANTED *in the* ABBEY GIFT SHOP!

HELP STILL WANTED: Join the Team and volunteer for year-round ministry at the Abbey Books and Gifts shop. If you have some point-of-sale experience, or are willing to be trained, please consider offering your help to our Book and Gift Shop. Organizational abilities? We need help cataloguing and shelving merchandise in our constantly expanding shop. Contact Father Carlos at artshop@valyermo.com .

FESTIVAL DONATIONS

The **ABBEY ATTIC** is counting on your antiques, collectibles, and vintage items for this years booth.

THAT'S ENTERTAINMENT can use your books, tapes, cd's to fill the popular booth. These booths are both great fund raisers each year. Call Development at 661-944-8959 or email development@valyermo.com.