



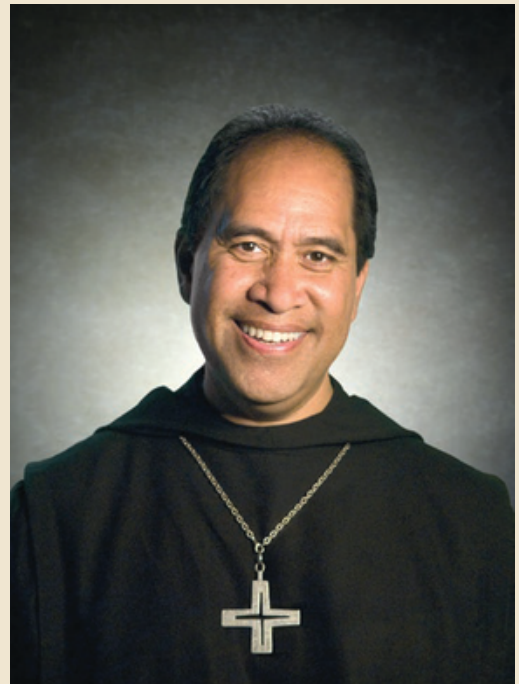
THE VALYERMO CHRONICLE

Number 271

SUMMER 2025

LETTER *From the* ABBOT

One of the beautiful things I like about the Abbey is the wildlife that is found here. We are blessed to have the cunning coyotes, the dreaded rattlesnakes, the pesty ground squirrels, and the cute skittish rabbits. In addition, when we are fortunate to see the graceful deer foraging for apples near the apple trees, or the bobcat stalking her prey, or the great horned owl perched atop a tree or the tripod sprinkler waiting patiently for his next meal to wander into his line of sight, we know we live in a place where God is.



Last month, I was at the pond with two other monks. We had joined Oscar, one of our employees, to watch him feed the koi fish. Feeding the koi is a new hobby he recently picked up since we were able to finally have a professional come out to treat our pea-soup green colored pond (due to algae). Thankfully, they were able to treat it accordingly, and it started to look healthy again. There is still much work to be done at the pond, but it is better than it was before.

As Oscar tossed some koi food in the pond, I was stunned to see dozens of bright-colored koi fish of different sizes, beautifully marked with various patterns of orange, black, and white, coming to the surface to feed, trying to get as much food as they possibly could before the ducks and turtles got to it all. I was surprised because I didn't realize there were so many koi in the pond. I guess they prefer to stay at the bottom, out of sight.

As I stood watching these different water creatures enjoying the food freely given to them, the scripture verse which came to mind was, 'Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? (Mt 6:26).

The truth of the providence of God was evident at that moment as He provided for His creatures. Yet I was also struck by the truth that the ones feeding these water creatures actually delighted in the act. It was a win-win. This is so God! He doesn't work in sections or compartments, but everything and everyone is somehow connected. He keeps all things in mind. "...all things were created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. (Col. 1:16-17)

I walked away from that ‘let’s go watch Oscar feed the fish’ moment, with a heart full of gratitude for God’s blessings, especially in the ordinary and simple acts of daily life here at the Abbey. The more I reflected on how God cares for the wildlife here—at times using human beings who delight in such acts—the more I reflected on how God must care for me, who am made in His image and likeness.

He has purposefully set me in this beautiful place to witness firsthand His beauty and providence, and I am confident that He delights in my delight in living here. What father or mother would not delight in their children’s delight? God brings me closer to Himself each day through the simple acts of observing and being attentive to the beauty and wildlife here at the Abbey.

More importantly, the beautiful things we can see here at the Abbey are mere shadows of the deeper spiritual truths. If His creation is this beautiful, how much more beautiful must He be? If I delight in simply feeding the fish, how much more would I delight in being nourished by the food which is Him?

I suppose it’s easy for me to say all these things because I live in a beautiful place. (Thank you for your faithful support, which allows it to be so!) We all cannot live at the Abbey, and I suppose we all may not want to live at the Abbey. God knows that. But since He is always faithful and true, to witness and delight in His Beauty must be possible wherever we live. In other words, the object of beauty is Him, not us. God, who is beauty itself, is everywhere. It is only a matter of being aware of His presence wherever we are.

Abbot Damien ✠

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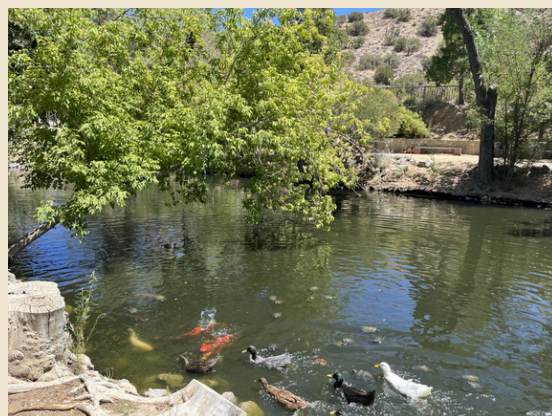
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DEIFICATION IN THE RULE AND LIFE OF SAINT BENEDICT

Fr. Luke Dysinger, OSB



This is the first of a series of articles on theosis (deification) in the Rule of Saint Benedict and the Life of Benedict by Pope Saint Gregory the Great. These articles adapt an essay by the author entitled “Theosis/Deification in Benedict of Nursia and Gregory The Great: Contemplating Christ In The Other And The Self,” chapter 13 in *Deification in the Latin Patristic Tradition*, ed. Jared Ortiz, (Catholic University of America Press, 2019) pp. 253-271. Detailed references to sources mentioned here will be found in the original essay.



Part One: What is Deification?

Anyone who reads Christian spiritual literature today will find the words “divinization” and “deification” appearing with increasing frequency. These terms are the western equivalent of the Greek noun *theosis*, and the verb *theopoeieō*, “to make divine.” In the eastern Christian churches, these words have long been used to describe the sanctifying effects of the sacraments, ascetical practice, prayer, and contemplation. Roman Catholic spiritual writers have historically tended to be more reticent than their Eastern counterparts in describing holiness as “becoming like God.”

Nevertheless, this has always been part of the Western spiritual tradition, and respected Catholic theologians, such as St. John Henry Cardinal Newman and Matthias Scheeben in the nineteenth century and Hans Urs Von Balthasar in the twentieth, recovered and emphasized the importance of theosis as essential for our understanding of spiritual progress and sanctification. In our century, the Catechism of the Catholic Church strongly encourages us to retrieve and use these terms. The concept of deification clarifies our origin and eternal destiny:

“Constituted in a state of holiness, the human being was destined to be fully ‘divinized’ (deificatus) by God in glory” (*Catechism* §398). As Saint Athanasius taught, progress in holiness means participation in the divine nature:

“[God] gave himself to us through his Spirit. By the participation of the Spirit, we become communicants in the divine nature [...] For this reason, those in whom the Spirit dwells are divinized (deificatus). (St. Athanasius, Ep. Serap. 1, 24)” *Catechism*, §1988.

Theosis/deification is attested in sacred scripture and was taught not only by patristic authors, but also by that pillar of Catholic orthodoxy, Saint Thomas Aquinas:

“The Word became flesh to make us “partakers of the divine nature”: (2 Pet 1:4) ”For this is why the Word became man, and the Son of God became the Son of man: so that man, by entering into communion with the Word and thus receiving divine sonship, might become a son of God.” (St. Irenaeus, Adv. haeres. 3, 19, 1: PG 7/1.939) ”For the Son of God became man so that we might become God.” (St. Athanasius, De inc., 54, 3). “The only-begotten Son of God, wanting to make us sharers in his divinity, assumed our nature, so that he, made man, might make human beings gods.” (St. Thomas Aquinas, Opusc. 57: 1-4).” *Catechism*, §460.

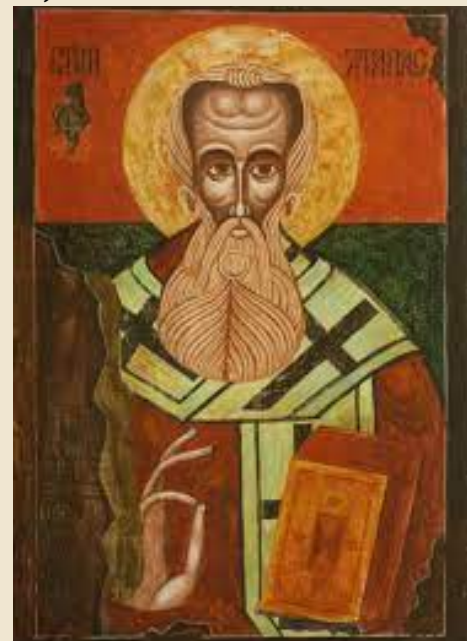
Catholic theology understands the Eastern Christian doctrine of theosis as equivalent to the Latin concept of “sanctifying grace,” *gratia sanctificans*:

“The grace of Christ is the gratuitous gift that God makes to us of his own life, infused by the Holy Spirit into our soul to heal it of sin and to sanctify it. It is the sanctifying or deifying (deificans) grace received in Baptism. It is in us the source of the work of sanctification: (Cf. Jn 4:14; 7:38-39). Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself. (2 Cor 5:17-18),” *Catechism*, §1999.

Deification or theosis is therefore the grace or “gift of God” received in baptism, “a stable and supernatural disposition that perfects the soul itself to enable it to live with God, to act by his love” (*Catechism*, §2000).

- enabling [the baptized] to believe in God, to hope in him, and to love him through the theological virtues;
- giving them the power to live and act under the prompting of the Holy Spirit through the gifts of the Holy Spirit;
- allowing them to grow in goodness through the moral virtues. (*Catechism*, §1266).

When marred or lost by sin, this grace is restored through repentance and the sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation (*Catechism*, §1468), and it is nourished and deepened through reception of the Eucharist (*Catechism*, §1392-1395).



”For the Son of God became man so that we might become God.”

(St. Athanasius, *De inc.*, 54, 3).

image accessed 8/19/25

<https://russianicon.com/saint-athanasius-icon-iconography-and-description/>



Thus, the frequent appearance of the words “theosis” and “deification” in modern spiritual writings is not something new, but is rather the recovery of a traditional way of describing our spiritual journey towards God. Not only Catholic, but also Lutheran, Reformed, Evangelical, and Baptist theologians have recently pointed to elements of their traditions they consider similar or equivalent to the doctrine of theosis. While commendable, such ecumenical eagerness sometimes has the unfortunate effect of

defining deification so broadly as to deprive the word of any meaningful content. The Baptist theologian Roger Olsen has noted,

“It is confusing to find ‘deification’ being used of something that has for a very long time been called ‘sanctification,’ or ‘union with Christ,’ or ‘communion with God,’ or even ‘being filled with God.’” (Theology Today 64, 2007 “Deification in Contemporary Theology,” 192-3)

Olsen recommends that we adopt a more robust understanding of theosis that takes into account the insights of St. Gregory Palamas (1296–1359), who is particularly remembered for his defense of contemplative hesychastic prayer in the Christian East. Those who pray the Jesus Prayer (also known as “hesychasts”) sometimes report an experience of “divine light” within themselves while praying. When challenged that such a claim is heresy since “No one can see God and live” (Ex. 33:20), St. Gregory adapted the theology of St. Irenaeus of Lyon and distinguished between the “essence” and “energies” of God. He agreed that no one can see or comprehend the divine essence (ousia); but those who pray the Jesus Prayer may inwardly perceive God’s “energies” (energeia), that is His activity and grace. To put it another way, there is a distinction between the transcendent and ultimately unknowable divine nature on the one hand, and the divine power to heal and refashion the soul in God’s image on the other. Theosis does not mean that human beings acquire or attain God’s essence; rather, they receive divine healing and are refashioned in the divine image (Gen 1.27, 2Cor 3.18), to share with others the sanctifying grace they have received.

Another insight of St. Gregory Palamas will be important for our reflections on the life and Rule of St. Benedict: namely, the interrelationship between theosis and theoria, between deification and contemplation. In his defense of the Hesychasts against charges of blasphemy and heresy, St. Gregory Palamas explained that what those who pray the Jesus Prayer behold within their nous, their innermost selves, is the “Taboric light” seen by the disciples at the Transfiguration, and that this light represents the divine energies, rather than God’s incomprehensible essence. For Palamas, this contemplation of divine light is both evidence of theosis and one of the sources of divinization. (Gregory Palamas, *The Triads* 1.3,5; 1.3,23; 1.3,27; 2.3,9; 3.1,34; 3.3,13).

In the next article in this series, we will consider the principal instance in The Rule of St. Benedict of a Latin term associated with the doctrine of deification. In the ninth verse of the Prologue, Benedict offers a poetic couplet taken directly from the Rule of the Master. He invites his readers to arise from spiritual sloth and:

Open our eyes to the deifying light (apertis oculis nostris ad deificum lumen)

and attune our ears to hear the divine voice (attentis auribus audiamus, divina ... uox) that admonishes us, daily crying out:

Today, if you hear his voice, harden not your hearts (Ps 95:7-8);

And again, you who have ears to hear, hear what the Spirit says to the churches (Rev. 2:7).

As will be described in the next article in this series, the translation of *deificum lumen* in this passage as “deifying light,” although accepted by many scholars and commentators, is debated by others. Some prefer to translate it as “light that comes from God” or “divine light,” thus emphasizing the light’s origin in God, rather than its transforming effect on the one who contemplates. In the next article, however, the translation “deifying light” will be defended and St. Benedict’s call to “open our eyes to the deifying light” will be seen as an invitation to attend to the transforming presence of God in sacred scripture and in the brothers and sisters with whom we have the privilege of living in community.



Tradition has it that Saint Luke wrote the first icon of Mary the Mother of God

https://orthodoxwiki.org/File:Luke_first_icon.jpg

A MONK'S REFLECTION: RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN HOLINESS AND POWER IN THE LIFE OF ANTONY AND THE MARTYRDOM OF PERPETUA AND FELICITAS



Fr. Matthew Rios, OSB



Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas

image accessed 8/19/25

<https://catholicarboroffaithandmorals.com/St.%20Perpetua%20and%20Felicitas%2002.jpg>

The history of Christian spirituality in the early church is a history of people's search for God and union with God that is marked by the continuing engagement with the gospel of Jesus Christ, along with the political-social-cultural context of the times. The pursuit for holiness is anchored on the continuing revelation of the Spirit as people experienced in their contemporary environment, their ethos, and in how the early Christians received, ruminated, and interpreted the text in the sacred scriptures. This was done according to what was their lived experience, according to what they felt needed, and according to what they expect and aspire in the present and future life. Along this path of holy life,

the question of power is a necessary symbiotic and concurrent issue that the Christian believer/seeker would find. Power in how it is to be defined and how it is to be exercised is an integral element in people's experience of life. It is then inevitable to locate them in their local and particular contexts.

In the understanding of holiness' relationship with power, it is necessary to draw the picture of the early church's socio-cultural locations in two texts by Athanasius, *The Life of Antony*, and *Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas*. I have chosen these two writings to contrast two periods of our times marked by a distinct phenomenon. Both texts were written within the period 202-400s. Athanasius' *Life of Antony* was written at a period of relative peace in Christendom (around 360), and *The Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas* (around 203) was characterized by a period of persecution for the early Christians.

In *The Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas*, it was a period of serious persecution among the Christians, as it was a time before the Edict of Milan

(313) when Constantine ruled the empire, an atmosphere of tolerance was then dominant for the Christians. Perpetua and Felicitas were in Carthage, where there were existing pagan practices and beliefs, and notably, one of them is the cult of Saturnus. Among the characteristics of this pagan cult was the belief in appeasing the gods with an “eye for an eye” or a “life for a life”, and that a worshiper is a slave of the named god. It is also a cult that teaches that the offering of human life to a god is a good virtue and an efficient practice for one’s salvation.

The bond of society is anchored on the family, and, in that time, women were meant to be lower citizens with the sole vocation of giving birth and nursing children. There was also the culture that the project of immortality is anchored on begetting children, as they would say, “I live immortally through my child.” It was also a patriarchal society, whereby the father was unquestionably the dominant ruler of the household. Carthage is ruled by the Roman Empire with its strict and clearly defined laws. Part of those laws was the element of asserting total obedience and loyalty to the emperor. Yet Christians, now and in those times, have that pervading fear and challenge of living their Christian convictions that there is no ruler on earth higher than their God, who is the Father of their Lord Jesus Christ. It is also necessary to mention that Christians value their faith, and the expression and nourishment of that faith in their liturgical consciousness and practices, particularly baptism and the Eucharist.

In the account of *The Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas* we find the drama of a woman raising an infant, a woman who is pregnant, catechumens, and a male leader who were condemned to die for refusing to bow down to a foreign ruler and renounce their Christian faith. We also find the drama of visions and conversations between the main actors and villains (prosecutors, executioners, Perpetua’s father). Here, it is significant to mention how Perpetua’s father persistently asked her to renounce her faith and how she consistently disobeyed. We also find the story of how people were violently put to death by wild animals. Here, it is to be noted how Perpetua, herself, guided the sword to her own neck. She was not overwhelmed and faced her death with dignity, and a wild heifer failed to kill her.



Accessed on 8/22/25

<https://www.christianiconography.info/Edited%20in%202013/Italy/dariaPerpetuaFelicitasArchiepRavenna.html>

The account also speaks of how the protagonists received affirmations of their faith through visions, assurance of victory, and the promise that their martyrdom will reward them in the afterlife. Among the visions, we have Perpetua meet her dead young brother, who needs help. Through her power of prayer, her brother got better. She also had visions of encountering someone who assured her of the goodness of her endeavor, and a vision that she was battling a demon or evil, not just a wild animal. She also had the vision that she is fighting as a “man,” which her gender as a female is of no bearing. Her companion, Saturus, also had a vision of what was to come: heaven. Heaven is made of angels, gardens, and a place of peace.

Visions, brave postures, courageous actions, and firm faith, all these we find in the accounts, which point to what it means to be holy and how much power one has over one's body and soul. It is an account that demonstrates how power is negotiated by women. That power is not solely vested in men. Additionally, the power that is wielded becomes an instrument of the pursuit of holiness and Christian's way of living out their faith and union with God. The account of the martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas also clearly demonstrates how martyrdom equates the balance of power between males and females, and between the elites, the clergy, and ordinary people. The account of their martyrdom established the reality that, through martyrdom, the holy men and women of the early church found a concrete and rewarding expression of their faith. Through their martyrdom, it planted the seeds of faithfulness to Christ and his church, both ways of attaining holiness as an exercise of a strong and solid power.



Saints Antony and Athanasius

image accessed 8/19/25

<https://onevoice4jesusministries.com/2024/02/05/on-st-athanasius-the-life-of-st-antony-and-my-spiritual-journey/>

More than a century later, the bishop Athanasius (born 395) wrote *The Life of Antony*. It was a period that was characterized by a relative freedom among the Christians, and the life of blood martyrdom has receded with the Edict of Milan. However, the Egyptian society where Antony was located was still under the oppressive Roman Empire. It was common to see Egyptians contemplating fleeing from the world due to oppressive taxation and oppressive manual agricultural labor. Christians were looking for relief and meaning in their lives. They were looking for new expressions of an ideal lived experience as Christians.

The story in *The Life of Antony* begins with the call of a young man to respond in a liturgical setting to the gospel call “to renounce everything, give to the poor, and come and follow me.” Antony, as a young man, responded to that call in a literal manner. After a few days, he further heard, “not to be afraid” and to leave everything to God. He thus left the world, including his young sister (to the care of a community of women/virgins), and initially settled in the outer fringes of the village where he was living.

Living outside the normal geographical and social life, Antony decided to go further into solitude. He crossed the river toward the desert, entering and living in a tomb, encountering and wrestling with demons and beasts, going further to his “inner mountain” and practicing a gradual increase in asceticism accompanied by a life of unceasing prayer.

The story tells us that Antony, in seeking his solitude in the desert, became victorious in every form of encounter with demons. He tamed them all by naming them, engaging them, and relying on the help of Christ and His cross. The story tells us that to die in the desert or to renounce the material world for the sake of following Christ is an ideal path for the Christian. It also tells us that the path to holiness is the path of seeking Christ in the desert away from the world of pagans, and that power is vested in anyone who has Christ in his body and spirit.



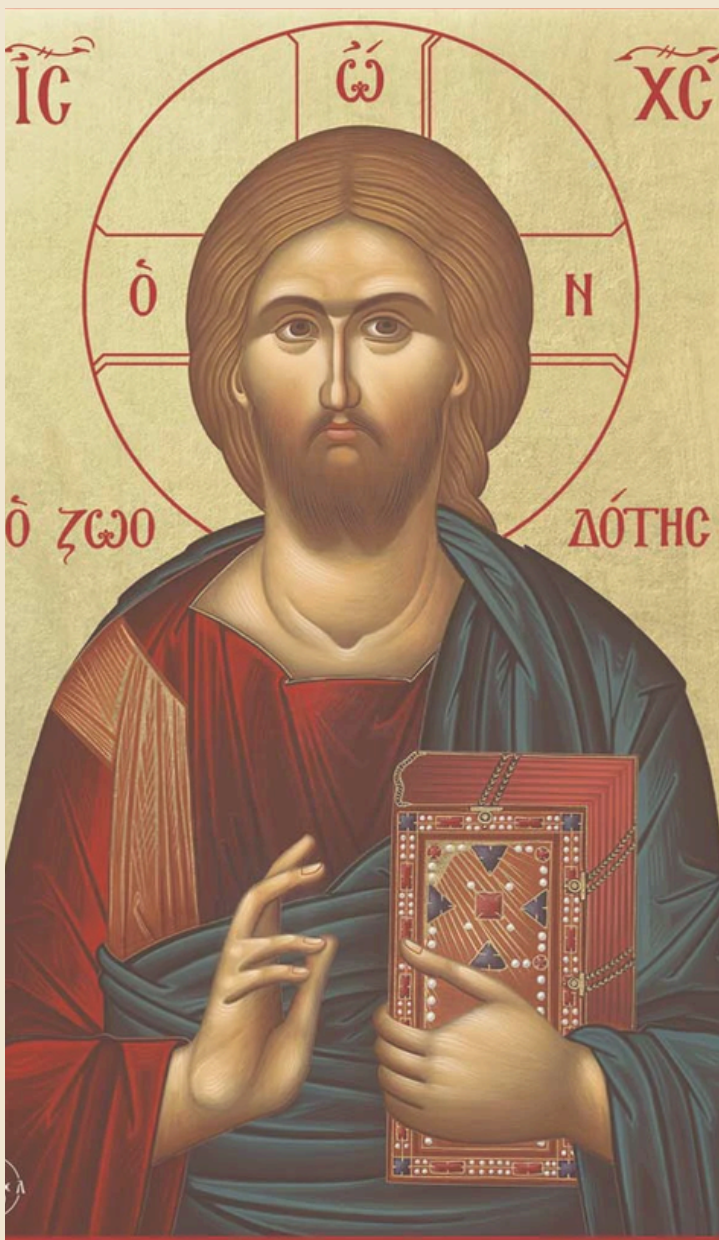
Saint Antony

desertspiritpress.net/2022/03/18/the-desert-mystics-anthony-of-the-desert/

Flight to the desert is a serious battle, and the enemies are powerful and many. However, one can be victorious, as Antony has proven, with the help of Christ who is truly God and truly man.

The story speaks profoundly about how the renunciation of material wealth is a powerful tool for negotiating power and an effective path to holiness. Through the story, the Early Christians found a model in Antony that became a paradigm for many succeeding generations of Christians, including church leaders and theologians in their search for the holy life.

The story also speaks about how the model of Antony of desert monasticism is an expression of imitation of the life of Christ, both in practice and rich in spiritual meaning. As Antony returned to the world, he was made “new” and did not age, and like the resurrected Christ, he found the fullness of life. As Antony imitated Christ in becoming singularly focused on renouncing his own will to the will of God, he has freed himself from bondage from all forms of oppression. First, from oppression that comes from within (through self-knowledge and abandonment to Christ). He also became an instrument in freeing others through his acts of hospitality to those who visited him in the desert, and his visits to leaders when they needed him. As Antony lived the life of solitude with a balance of unceasing prayer and work, he also revealed a paradigm of a path to holiness that is also a path of exercising power. This is the power of a self-sufficient man/woman, and the power of one who will not be dependent to any foreign and oppressive political power, except Christ, who, as God, continues to abide in every man/woman.



The account of the martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas clearly demonstrates how martyrdom equates the balance of power between males and females, and between the elites, the clergy and ordinary people. The account of their martyrdom established the reality that, through martyrdom, the holy men and women of the early church found a concrete and rewarding expression of their faith. Through their martyrdom, it planted the seeds of faithfulness to Christ and his church, both ways of attaining holiness as an exercise of a strong and solid power.

The Life of Antony speaks profoundly about how flight away from the “world,” and the renunciation of material wealth, is a powerful tool for negotiating power and an effective path to holiness in imitation of Christ.

CELL-ULAR STABILITY



Mary Kauffman, OBL OSB



We live amidst constant flux and instability, encouraged by our culture to continually search for the new and different. We change cars, houses, spouses, jobs, and religions; we try new fashions and follow new fads. A 24-hour social media ensures that we can switch our attention from murder and mayhem to freaky and famous in a nanosecond. The earth erupts volcanically, and plate tectonics jar us with quakes. In a world full of nature's whims and aggressive man-made distractions, how can I ground myself in the vow of stability that I took as a St Andrew's Abbey oblate? How do I establish daily monastic space in the hustle and bustle of family, social, and cultural life?

Stability is based on a sense of the permanent, a place of grounding. Monks commit to a specific monastery and community with set rhythms of work and liturgical prayer; how do oblates live the vow of stability in our secular lives, with its constant seduction of glittering change? How do we center ourselves in a place that can fend off the voices inciting restlessness and distraction? I can strive to cultivate my own place of inner grounding, an interior monastic cell, one built with four spiritual walls to create an enclosure of Spirit-centered stability. The materials needed to build these walls have been given by Christ Himself: "You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your being, with all your strength, and with all your mind...; the Rule of Benedict (RB) provides the necessary supporting structures.

My first wall of cell enclosure will be that of the whole heart, the center of emotions. Loving God with my whole heart encompasses love of neighbor, which means listening patiently and responding to the needs of those whom God has placed in my life (RB 55, 56, 1,72). Careful observation outside of my own fleeting feelings can bring growing empathy for others (RB 53). Often the feeling of “love” is not there for some but rather a feeling of annoyance or even anger. To them I can give the most precious gift of all, that of prayer (RB 28).

Next will be the supporting cell wall of the whole soul, which embodies my spiritual being; it is that part which is most strongly connected to the transcendent and eternal. It is the place to practice the presence of God, to be aware of the daily experiences and encounters with people and places as gifts from God for my spiritual growth (RB 7). My soul also grows from contemplating Scripture through the lens of *lectio divina*. Silence and stillness are its modes of spiritual alertness (RB 6,42), allowing space for the Holy Spirit’s guidance to find the true, the good, and the beautiful revealed in the daily, in the sacredness that is all around me waiting for my attention (RB19,32).

*“Go, sit in your cell, and your cell will teach you everything.”
(Sayings of the Desert Fathers, Abba Moses)*

Constructing the cell wall of whole mind requires intellectual discernment. It is an active mental search to grow in my understanding of God and his creation through careful and scholarly reading of the Scriptures and the commentaries of the Church Fathers, through continual learning about the heroes and saints of the church, through my daily study of St Benedict’s Rule (RB 73). The fruits of these studies guide me in my relationships with both God and my neighbor and develop my appreciation for all that my faith reveals to me. Discernment also requires caution about what I feed my intellect; what comes into the mind forms the mind. Mixing in degrading and destructive materials from disturbing movies, books, or websites can damage this wall.

The final wall to complete my cell is that of whole strength. This construction begins on a base of the Rule’s physical disciplines, which advise moderation in food and drink, observance of regular prayer times, and detachment from possessions (RB 16, 39, 40, 43,55). Inner fortitude calls me to treat all with

equal respect (RB 63), not to be silent when speech is called for, not to speak when silence is called for; it fuels the courage to live what is right and good in a secular culture that often contradicts my faith, and to speak what is true despite contempt or ridicule.

My life in the world is full of so much that is good, much that I love and value. I enjoy the variety of travel, the surprise of the new, the times of adventure, even some of the hustle and bustle. I am blessed with a profound faith, a family I love, and amazing friends. But there are also times of heartbreak and emotional turmoil, spiritual crises and loss of family or friends, mental confusion and lack of understanding, and fear and weakness; there are times of overwhelming fatigue due to demanding distractions. This is when I turn inward to my cell of stability, to re-ground myself in the permanent true, good, and beautiful. The Gospel and the Rule anchor my cell and provide the stability to teach me everything.

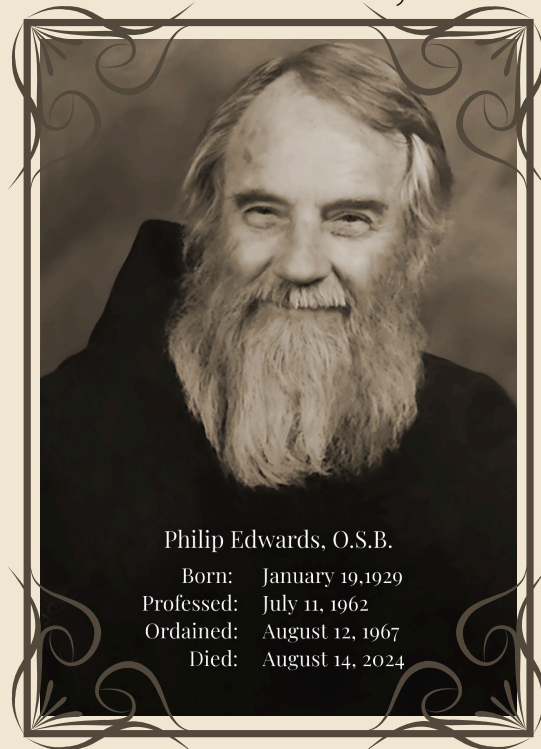


A typical guest room at Saint Andrew's Abbey Retreat Center.

FR. PHILIP EDWARDS, OSB (JANUARY 19, 1929 - AUGUST 14, 2024)



Fr. Isaac Kalina, OSB



When I first came to visit the monastery, which we then were called St Andrew's Priory, Fr. Philip was one of five monks on the vocation committee with whom I was required to speak. Little did I know what I was in for; I was about to go face-to-face with the devil's advocate. Fr. Philip knew already some of my background, that my plans to spend that summer with the Trappist monks in northern California had fallen through. So, naturally, then I thought I would try my chances with the Benedictines at Valyermo. Fr. Philip confronted me with the words, "So we're settling with Valyermo as Second Best, are we? One Order turns you down, so you're accepting Valyermo only because of your unrequited love!" When my mouth hit the floor, I said, "But, Fr. Philip, on the contrary! The Trappists were my idea, but Valyermo was all God's." It was a holy, blessed dialogue, one for which I am truly grateful and will never forget as long as I live!

It was hard not to see in Fr. Philip that noble and venerable, 'Old Man and the Sea'; it was our mutual favorite masterpiece of Ernest Hemingway. Personally, Fr. Philip even reminded me of my Italian grandfather, Aniello, who was a fisherman for 90 years of his life. Only Fr. Philip had this incredible knowledge and wisdom, but my grandfather only knew fish; he never went to school, and he never learned to read. But Fr. Philip spoke Italian and dramatically recited Shakespeare from memory. Fr. Philip was an avid reader; he couldn't get his

hands on enough books to read, even though he belonged to four or five Book Clubs. He read everything from the Book of Genesis to Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*. He thoroughly loved the Agatha Christy murder mysteries and everything connected with Nancy Drew!

Philip's unique face seemed to be wind-carved, not by the sea, but by the scorching sun and sands of the desert, as he could always be found on his hands and knees outdoors pulling weeds or planting something around a corner. He lived a deeply introspective way of life, but whether in wilderness, dry desert, pristine forest, or at the coast, he delighted in all of God's creation! He could give you the name of every tree, bush, plant, and weed on these Abbey grounds in both English and Latin. I believe he had academic studies, among other things, in Botany at UC Berkeley and English from Cal-Poly, and graduate studies in Rome. Philip was a walking encyclopedia.

His vast knowledge of classic world literature went far beyond Tolstoy's finest, like *Anna Karenina* and *War and Peace*. His appreciation for English Literature surpassed his love of Old English and the reading of Beowulf.

Fr. Philip had a deep, genuine love of the Holy Scriptures. He knew them inside out and upside down. He remembered details about kings and patriarchs and prophets from the holy writings that the rest of us would find insignificant. Indeed, Philip was a Scriptural Scholar with a built-in super-duper concordance right here, having studied at Sant' Anselmo, the Gregorian, and the Biblicum in Rome; he was a virtual walking library of the Bible. For more than six decades, he meticulously chose and shared with his monastic brothers the particular readings for the entire Divine Office, until more recently, when Fr. Martin relieved him of that responsibility.

Thanks to those who went before us, Philip became a well-rounded individual-spiritually and culturally. He loved music, especially the Classics, which was surprising because of his strict Calvinist-Presbyterian upbringing. In Philip's mind, there was no problem that a trip to the Opera couldn't take care of in a jiffy! Turandot, La Boheme, and Aida were among his favorite companions! People calling the Abbey by phone would reach an eccentric person in the retreat office with Tchaikovsky, Rachmaninoff, and SansSens blaring in the background! They'd hang up thinking they had the wrong number! Once, he gave directions to a group of teenagers, describing the desert terrain with its landmarks and distinct flora and fauna. He forensically told them to make a right turn at that igneous rock, you know, on the corner, or to make a left at that anemic manzanita tree as if he were speaking to a group of geologists at

Stanford or arborists from UCLA. All the joking aside, our Philip was more precious than gold. He baptized, married, and buried half the people in this Valley for generations, and he did it his own very unique, stubborn, and beautiful way! Clean those ears out, Philip, because you won't believe when you hear that clear voice announcing, "You come hither to, dear Philip, and share in your Lord's joy!"



NOW THAT I'M 90

✱
M. Eileen Prendergast, Obl.OSB

I have been so blessed to be given the gift of a vibrant life, the ability to enjoy studying Teilhard de Chardin, with an expanding understanding of the awesome creative evolutionary process of our cosmos, a gift that I feel God wants me to share.

We live in a world torn apart, our values are degraded in a daily torrent of unimaginable decisions, and even our Catholic Church is divided. We are burned out, anxious, and deeply disconnected. It is difficult to see a path forward. We don't know who to trust. Things are just not holding together.

Benedict wrote his Rule for monks after a period of solitary reflection at Subiaco during a comparable period of world distress. Teilhard wrote his major works as a stretcher bearer in World War I and during the 30s, but they were not published until after he died in 1955, well before today's advances in science and technology.



Observing the Sky

image accessed 8/19/25

<https://griffithobservatory.org/explore/observing-the-sky/>

Comparing the world that Benedict knew with the continually expanding scientific discoveries of today, our understanding of the cosmos and the “Big Bang” is an astronomical feat. Today, the new Rubin Observatory in Chile is expected to find millions of unknown objects in our solar system, totally transforming astronomy as we know it. Our dynamically changing world is a growing manifestation of the enormity of God's creative-evolutionary process.

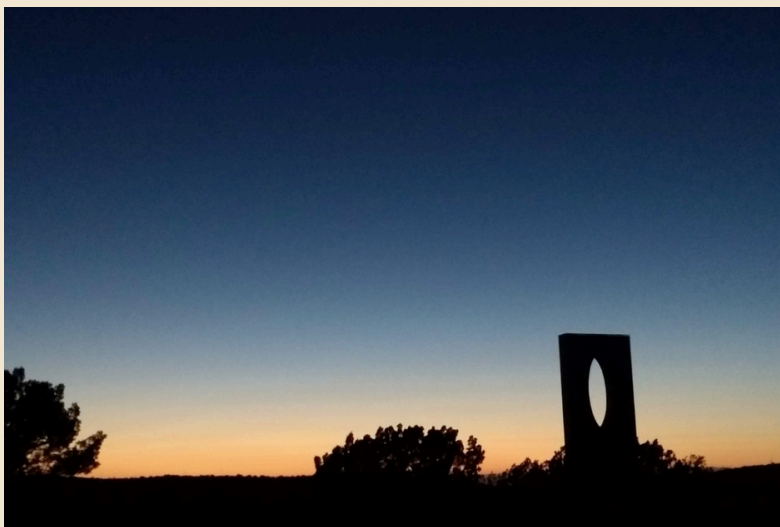
Benedict calls us to “listen with the ear of our heart.” Teilhard invites us “to see with new eyes,” inviting us to reimagine our God, to see God everywhere. Benedict says, “it is now the hour for us to arise from sleep” (Rom 13:11). Teilhard introduces a way of teaching us how to see, to focus the soul's eyes to perceive this magnificent flow of God's energy, “the true God . . . will,

under your gaze, invade the universe.... He will penetrate it as a ray of light does crystal; he will become for you perceptible and active—— very near and very distant at the same time.”

His major works include *The Human Phenomenon* , which records in exacting scientific detail the creation and evolution of life in our Cosmos. *The Divine Milieu* is a dynamic spiritual treatise, a poetic insight into our spiritual journey.

Before reading Teilhard, I had no appreciation for an expanding universe, for the fact that I am an active part of a huge collective consciousness (the Mystical Body). My actions matter because we each influence one another in this beautiful synergy of love.

My consciousness, little by little, developed into an awe-filled sense of God, a new understanding of my relationship with God. The old ideation of a judging God who controlled everything, whom I must please, became obsolete. “God who made man that we might seek him.” (Acts 17:27). That God is as pervasive and perceptible as the atmosphere in which we are bathed. Those words awakened a more dynamic understanding of God.



Benedict used the rhythm of the sun to establish the times for prayer, the hours. Indigenous people integrated their whole lives with nature. We, too, experience the beauty of nature embedded in our souls intoxicating us with its beauty. But, our awareness

of the cosmos, may be limited to looking at the stars, the moon and incredible sunsets, when there is so much more.

While reading *The Divine Milieu* using a Lectio Divina method for engaging with the text, my experience of connection with Christ’s Mystical Body brought me tears of awe. The intensity of God’s love consumed me with an overpowering sense of God’s love enveloping me with all creation, like the love for a newborn child, not a concept but a spiritual flow of energy.

The Human Phenomenon awakened a remnant of my memory for how to read a scientific text. Teilhard explains, in great detail, beginning with the smallest particle of matter, the development and evolution of each phylum, with its connection to the next emerging phylum, an amazing synchrony of creative energy. It is a scientific treatise on the way each tiny unit attracts another, increasing in complexity until ultimately the human we know emerged. He details the emergence of consciousness, the thinking layer, concentrated in the “corona” of ionosphere, a sphere of thought surrounding the biosphere, always advancing, providing the Earth with a soul.



Virgo Supercluster

image accessed 8/19/25 <https://Astronomy.com>

Fortunately, Fr. Stephen Coffey is offering a retreat in November to help explicate this incredible phenomenon.

My knowledge continues to develop as God leads me in ways I may not recognize. Various learned writers, including Ursula King, Sr. Kathleen Duffy, Sr. Ilia Delio, John Haught, Brian Swimme, as well as conversations with many Zoom colleagues, have enriched my developing appreciation for Teilhard. Each of us is a part of this creative evolution. We are created with an inner spirit empowered by God to radiate his love, to change our world.



Eileen and “Maggie” at the center with her fellow Iconography retreat participants, led by Victoria Brennan, S.T.D., shown on the left.

Monks' Update: Ora et Labora





Clockwise 1st page: 1. Newly ordained deacon, Br. Paul with Archbishop Gomez, 2. Simple profession of Brothers Ignacio and Columba, 3. Statue of the Blessed Virgin Mother Mary at the cemetery, 4. Br. Ignacio signing his profession charter. 5. Br. Columba signing his profession charter.

Clockwise 2nd page: 1. Br. Joseph and Br. Ignacio doing dishes, 2. and 3. Br. Columba and the monks viewing icons 4. Br. John Baptist at his favorite spot for his *Lectio Divina*, 5. Fr. Isaac preparing for Solemn Vespers, 6. Fr. Luke and the brothers helping with dinner dishes, 7. (middle picture) monks at a funeral.

Retreats

August

- 25-29 Healing our Wounds
- 29-31 The Spiritual Journey of the Desert Fathers and Mothers

September

- 2-5 Practicing Silence in a Noisy World
- 12-14 Dealing with Death
- 26-28 Silent Retreat (Bilingual)

October

- 4 Entendiendo Los Milagros (Spanish Day Retreat)
- 6-9 Still Full of Sap, Still Green
- 27-31 Autumn Artists' Retreat

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- [Donate Online](#)
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November

- 7-9 Edith Stein
- 8 Angeles y Demonios (Spanish Day Retreat)
- 17-21 Exploring Teilhard's Human Phenomenon
- 21-23 Benedictine Mystics and Contemplatives
- 26-28 Thanksgiving at Valyermo
- 28-30 Advent Retreat
- 29 Retiro de Adviento (Spanish Day Retreat)

December

- 8-12 The Way of Beauty
- 12-14 Essential Pillars of Marriage
- 23-26 Christmas at Valyermo
- 30-2 New Year Retreat

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