

THE VALYERMO

Chronicle

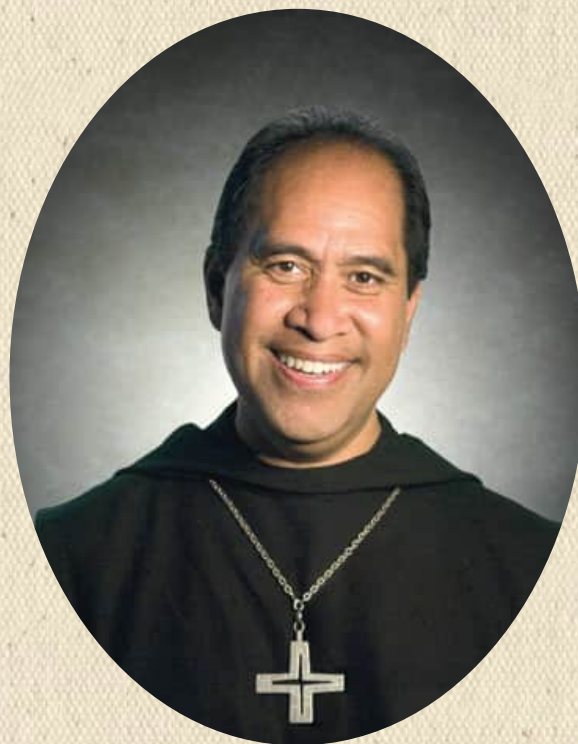
SAINT ANDREW'S ABBEY



LETTER From the ABBOT

Several years ago, I presided over the funeral services for my cousin. It was a different Samoan funeral than I have ever attended. When I walked into the mortuary chapel to lead the vigil service, I expected to see the body of my cousin. But what I saw was an urn on a pedestal. Her family cremated the body, which I had never seen at a Samoan funeral, and apparently, I wasn't alone in this. A lot of the (extended) family were talking about it and sharing their displeasure with it, asking aloud, "Why did the family decide to do that - to cremate the body of their sister?" The reason was: that is what their sister wanted. Even though the family fulfilled the desire of their deceased sister, it put them in a difficult position. They had to explain and defend their decision to their extended family.

Although they knew it was unusual for a Samoan funeral, it didn't matter to them. It didn't matter to them that their own relatives were talking negatively about them and their decision, or that it made them 'look bad' in front of the family. All that mattered to them at that point in time was fulfilling the wishes of their sister. Knowing that they were doing what she asked, gave them strength to do it and peace and satisfaction when they did it. In the end, people began to come around' to the idea and even admired them for their courage and love for their sister.



It reminds me of the joy that Jesus speaks about in John's gospel (15:9-11). We will experience the joy of the Lord only when we fulfill the wishes of God: when we love others as God loves us; when we speak and act towards others as God would; when we do as God wills. Then we will experience that deep peace and joy the world cannot give or take away. Joy comes from fulfilling the will of God.

In the spiritual life, we need to always have the attitude of: "all that matters is that I fulfill God's wishes, that I do God's will."

The more we are able to say this and do this, the more we will experience the deep satisfaction and peace-and joy of the Lord-that comes from Him.

If we recall, in the setting of John 15: 9-11, Jesus is talking about 'joy' during the Last Supper. He is talking about joy even though He knows that He will soon suffer tremendously and die a violent death. Strange. He speaks of joy to the apostles knowing that ten of them will be killed because of their

faith in Him. And in this same chapter in which He speaks about joy to His disciples, He also says “the world will hate you.” What does all this mean?

Obviously, it means that joy is not about being happy, nor in a good mood, or always smiling. That is not joy. I don’t know that Jesus was in a good mood and smiling at the Last Supper, or when He was overturning the tables, or when He was standing before Pilate, or when He was being nailed to the cross. But I do believe He was very much at peace and fulfilled in doing God’s will. This is what brings joy: the knowing and the doing of God’s will in our life.

If we ever wonder why we are not experiencing joy in our life, perhaps we need to look at how we—or whether we—take time to discern God’s will in our life and/or have the desire to fulfill it.

St. Bernadette Soubirous said: “Jesus does not want us to be attached to possessions, to human honors, to creatures. Nothing else matters to me anymore, nothing has any value for me but Jesus; no place, no thing, no person, no idea, no feeling, no honor, no suffering, nothing that can turn me away from Jesus. For me, Jesus Himself is my honor, my delight, my heart, my spirit, He whom I love, what I love, my home, heaven here on earth. Jesus is my treasure and my love and Jesus crucified is my only happiness.”

All St. Bernadette wanted was God—and to please Him. Nothing else in life mattered to her. Are we able to say this?

Abbot Damien ✠



THE VALYERMO Chronicle

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A Monk's Reflections: Pentecost, 'Selah', and the Unfinished Symphony of Our Lives

Fr. Matthew Rios, OSB

There are seasons in history when humanity feels particularly unfinished.

We live in such a time. Wars continue without a clear resolution. Technology advances faster than wisdom. Many people quietly carry anxieties about the future: social instability, loneliness, ecological fears, political division, and uncertainty about what kind of world awaits the next generation. Even within the Church and monastic life, we sometimes wonder what lies ahead.

And yet Pentecost arrives every year not as a celebration of certainty, but as a revelation of Presence.

The disciples who gathered in the upper room after the Ascension possessed no strategic plan for the future. What they had was waiting, prayer, fear, hope, and the promise of the Holy Spirit.

Perhaps that is where we find ourselves today.

The great Jesuit theologian Karl Rahner once described human life as an "unfinished symphony." It is a striking image. A symphony contains beauty and tension, silence and crescendo, longing and movement toward resolution. Yet while living it, we rarely hear the completed composition. We hear only fragments.

Most of us want closure. God often gives accompaniment instead.

The spirituality of St. Benedict teaches us how to live faithfully within incompleteness.

Benedict wrote his Rule during the collapse of the Roman empire, an age marked by violence and uncertainty. Yet he did not respond with panic. Instead, he created communities rooted in prayer, humility, stability, and hope.



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spirit-magisterium-saints-poets/
<https://opusdei.org/en/article/the-coming-of-the-holy-spirit>
The Coming of the Holy Spirit: Magisterium, Saints, Poets



The Rule begins with a single word: "Listen."

"Listen carefully, my son, to the master's instructions, and attend to them with the ear of your heart" (Rule of Benedict, Prologue).

That sentence alone feels like medicine for our age.

The Holy Spirit at Pentecost does not erase uncertainty; the Holy Spirit transforms how we inhabit it. The disciples who received tongues of fire were still imperfect, confused, and fragile. Pentecost gave them courage to move forward without seeing the entire path.

That is one of the great gifts of the Holy Spirit: not complete explanation but faithful direction.



The traditional gifts of the Spirit—wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord—are not abstract ideas. They are survival graces for uncertain times.

Wisdom teaches us not to confuse noise with truth.

Counsel helps us discern amid competing voices.

Fortitude gives endurance when hope grows tired.

And fear of the Lord restores humility before the mystery of God.

In Benedictine spirituality, these gifts are cultivated slowly through rhythm: prayer, work, silence, lectio divina, and community life. The monastery does not promise escape from uncertainty; it teaches stability within it.

"Prefer nothing whatsoever to Christ," Benedict writes (RB 72). Stability is not stubborn resistance to change. It is rootedness in Christ when everything else shifts.

This is where the biblical word 'Selah' becomes deeply important. I was struck by one of our contributors in this issue by how she ended her poetry. (Please see related article/poetry "*The Splendor of His Name Reaches Far Beyond Heaven and Earth*" by Lori Pike Uebersax Obl. O.S.B. pages 15-16)

Appearing throughout the Psalms, 'Selah' is often understood as a sacred pause a moment to stop, breathe, and listen. Scripture itself seems to say: "Do not rush past this."

We move from headline to headline and distraction to distraction. We fear silence because silence exposes our vulnerability. Yet without silence, the soul loses its capacity to hear God.

The Desert Fathers understood this well. Anthony the Great once said, "Whoever sits in solitude and is quiet has escaped from three wars: hearing, speaking, and seeing." The monastic tradition has always known that silence is not emptiness; it is space for encounter.

Pentecost itself contains the kind of Selah. Before the fire, there was waiting. Before proclamation, there was silence. Before mission, there was prayer.

The Rule of Benedict preserves this sacred rhythm. The monastery bell interrupts activity to remind the monk that

he is first a listener for God. Benedict even teaches that "all guests who present themselves are to be welcomed as Christ"

(RB 53). Such attentiveness can only grow in a heart trained to pause.

Perhaps the deepest crisis of our age is not uncertainty itself, but forgetfulness—forgetfulness that God still speaks within unfinished lives.

Rahner's image of the 'unfinished symphony' reminds us that we are not the composers of history. We are participants within a larger divine music whose final resolution belongs to God. Sometimes we hear unresolved chords. Sometimes the music sounds painfully dissonant. Yet faith trusts that the Divine Composer has not abandoned the work.

Bernard of Clairvaux once wrote, "Learn the lesson that, if you are to do the work of a prophet, what you need is not a scepter but a hoe." The monastic way has always resisted grandiosity. Holiness grows quietly: prayer after prayer, Psalm after Psalm, act after act of fidelity.

To practice Selah. To allow silence to heal our fragmented attention. To trust that incompleteness is not failure. To believe that the Spirit still descends upon anxious hearts.

Every Christian life remains unfinished until it rests in God. Yet Pentecost reminds us that God does not wait for perfection before pouring out the Spirit.

The fire falls even on trembling disciples.

And perhaps that is enough for now.

In uncertain times, the Benedictine way quietly witnesses that stability is not found in controlling the future, but in remaining rooted in the presence of God.

Selah.

Pause.

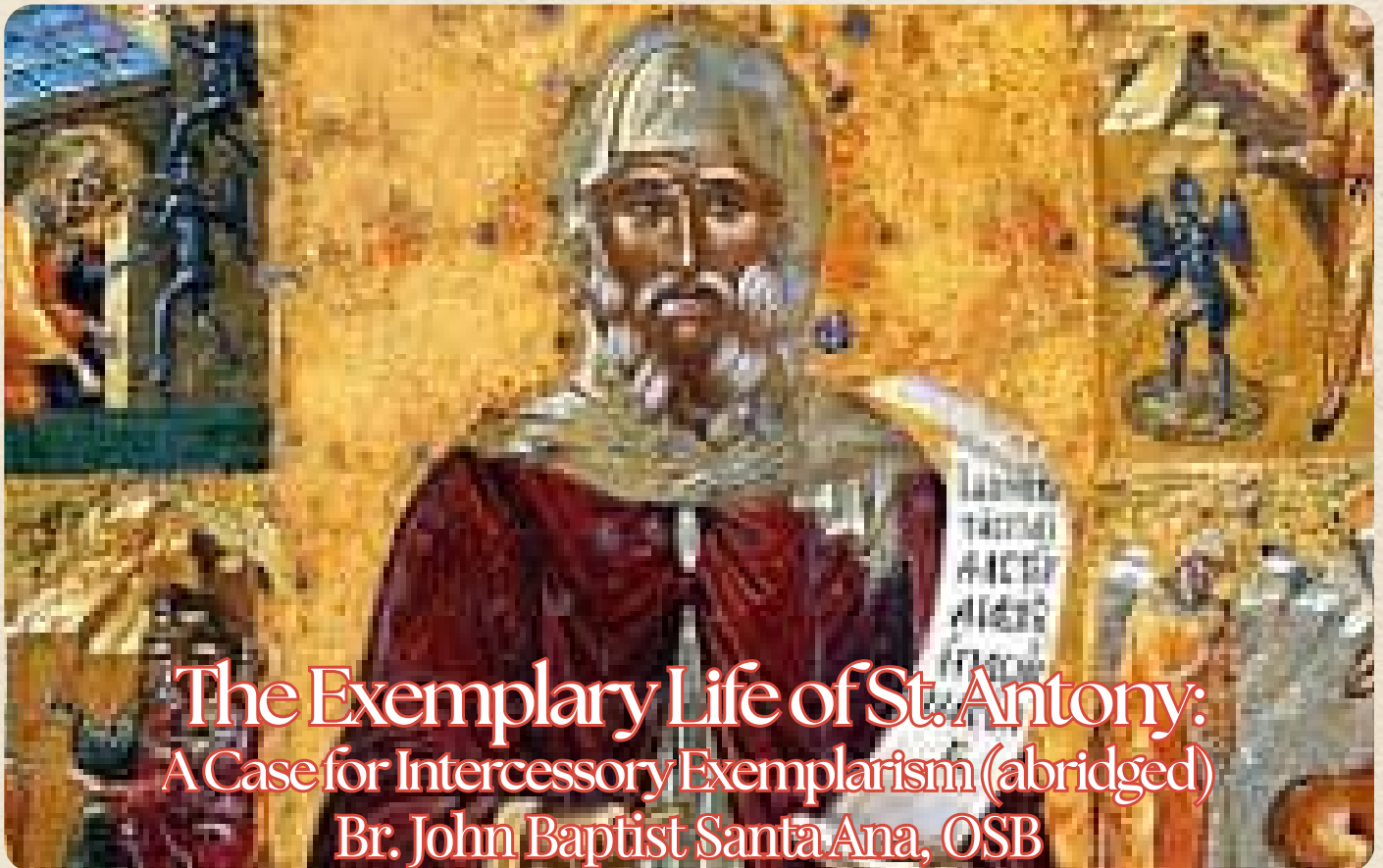
And listen for the fire.



St. Anthony of the Desert, Father of the Church

http://www.ldysinger.com/@texts2/1130_hugh-vic/01_hugh-intr.htm Accessed 5/8/26





The Exemplary Life of St. Antony: A Case for Intercessory Exemplarism (abridged) Br. John Baptist Santa Ana, OSB

The complete version of this article is published by Routledge in a chapter from *Exemplars, Imitations, and Character Formation: A Philosophical, Psychological, and Christian Inquiry*. Copies are soon available for purchase at St. Andrew's Abbey Bookstore.

Most major religions have a primary moral exemplar. Jesus Christ is looked to as the moral exemplar of Christianity; Muhammed is the exemplar of Islam; Siddhartha Gautama is the exemplar of Buddhism; etc. Some religions focus on a primary exemplar in addition to numerous subsidiary exemplars, while other religions prefer to focus exclusively on imitating the singular and primary exemplar. This is where things become complicated for Christian exemplarism. On the one hand, Christ is the ultimate and sole exemplar. Unlike Muhammed or Siddhartha, Jesus is God incarnate, thus containing everything worth imitating and lacking nothing whatsoever. Thus, some Christians may worry that veneration of other (inferior) exemplars may distract and deter from proper emulation of Jesus. However, Paul writes, "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ"

(1 Cor 11:1, ESV). The context of this passage suggests that Paul is elevating himself to the level of an exemplar for the church of Corinth to imitate—a church that is morally depraved and in need of serious instruction. This raises the question of why it is not only permissible but advantageous for Christians to imitate exemplars other than Christ for the purpose of achieving moral perfection when Christ is the moral exemplar par excellence.

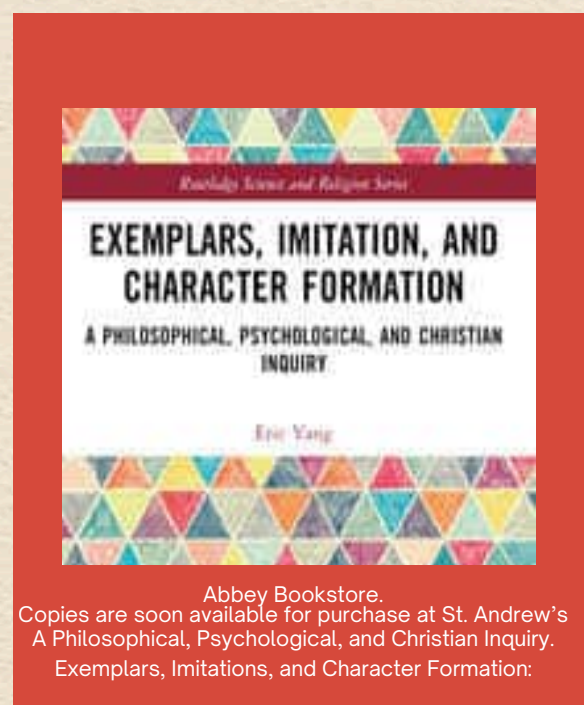
To answer this question, I will take a historical-theological approach, drawing and expounding on the early Christian hagiography: *The Life of Saint Antony*. I will discuss how this text was received in antiquity and was instrumental in the conversion of St. Augustine. The example of St. Antony and the influence he had on Augustine will serve to illustrate how effective exemplarism often involves some measure of commonality between the exemplar and imitator—especially commonality in weakness or disadvantage. I will conclude by demonstrating

how apparent weakness or disadvantage of the saints may render them more effective exemplars for certain individuals, as in the case of Antony and Augustine. Although Jesus Christ is the moral exemplar par excellence of the Christian religion, inferior exemplars such as Antony and the saints remain effective for achieving moral perfection because their apparent weakness or disadvantage inclines individuals who share the same weakness or disadvantage to emulate them in their moral perfection.

Although several factors contribute to Augustine's conversion to Christianity in 386 CE, the catalyst that compels him to become a Christian is the story of St. Antony. Augustine's narrative is laid out with a series of signposts, pointing him toward the Christian faith, yet his will remains obstinate. Neither the eloquence of Ambrose, nor the affectionate pleas of his mother, nor the arguments asserted by Simplicianus and other Christian Neoplatonists suffice to convert Augustine. His conversion appears more impulsive than deductive—something that happens by way of intervention rather than sheer effort. What finally subdues his stubbornness is simply hearing a stranger recount the popular tale of an Egyptian monk. Something about Antony's life is so compelling for Augustine that he immediately imitates Antony by heeding to God's word in Scripture, forsaking his former ways, and living exclusively for Jesus Christ. What is it that makes Antony an effective exemplar for Augustine?

Augustine has an abundance of excellent exemplars to choose from. Ambrose is a righteous and accomplished bishop whom Augustine greatly admires. Additionally, they both share a passion for rhetoric. However, Augustine remains reluctant to imitate his celibacy. His mother Monica shows the highest level of prayerful patience and love for Augustine. He is definitely a mommy's boy, and even himself says, "my life and hers had been as one." And yet, Augustine pays no heed to his mother's pleas. The unforeseen exemplar by whom Augustine is moved is St. Antony. One reason for this is Antony's excellence in moral perfection. But more importantly, Augustine recognizes a quality he shares with Antony, namely, fleshly temptation. Both possess this quality in the same way that Augustine and Ambrose possess the quality of rhetoric. However, Augustine is moved to imitate the celibacy of Antony, but not Ambrose. Therefore, there must be something particularly significant to Augustine about Antony as someone who understands what it is like to be tempted by the same vice—to experience the same weakness.

Likeness in weakness can be highly significant. Many individuals who struggle with addiction regularly attend 12-step programs where they meet with others who share the same addiction. Similarly, individuals with social disadvantages often convene to support and encourage one another. Shared weakness and/or disadvantage can be a cause for love and imitation. For example, recovering alcoholics will be inclined to imitate an individual who possesses 25 years of sobriety. What makes 25 years of sobriety significant is the fact that a particular weakness has been overcome. Recovering alcoholics will not be inclined to imitate an individual who possesses 25 years of sobriety if that individual never



struggled with alcohol in the first place. Whereas a recovering alcoholic with 25 years of sobriety is worthy of imitation precisely because she has attained mastery over her will by overcoming weakness, which gives hope to those who strive to achieve the same goal.

For all Christians, Jesus is the moral exemplar par excellence. There is no one who surpasses Jesus in virtue, since Jesus is fully God. Furthermore, by taking on human nature, Jesus subjects himself to disadvantage, weakness, temptation, and death. Therefore, everyone, insofar as they are human, may identify some quality they share in common with Jesus, and so be inclined to love and imitate Him. For these reasons, it may seem foolish for a Christian to imitate any exemplar other than Christ since all exemplars pale in comparison to Him. However, Christians have always imitated other moral exemplars, as in the case of Antony, and Augustine, or Paul and the church of Corinth. Obviously, Antony and Paul do not surpass Jesus in virtue, but they do surpass Jesus in weakness. If weakness can be a cause for solidarity, in the same way that AA groups gather on account Christians who share the same weakness may be more inclined to imitate exemplars who are weaker than Jesus.

Augustine was certainly familiar with Jesus from the Gospels. However, Augustine was not inclined to imitate Jesus in the same way he was inclined to imitate Antony. This is not because Jesus is an insufficient exemplar, but because Augustine's perception of Jesus is insufficient to be moved by Him as an exemplar. Nowhere in the Gospels does Jesus appear to struggle with fleshly desire. Furthermore, Jesus was confined to the limitations of a human body, and therefore could not have experienced every possible variant of human weakness and disadvantage. Jesus did not experience what it is like to be addicted to methamphetamine, nor to suffer from cancer. Therefore, individuals with these particular disadvantages or weaknesses may struggle to perceive likeness with Jesus, opting to imitate an exemplar whose likeness is more apparent. However, this does not render Jesus as an unrelatable exemplar, but one who, through divine omniscience, perfectly understands every instance of human weakness and disadvantage without firsthand experience. The author of Hebrews writes, "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin" (Heb. 4:15). Although numerous instances of human weakness and temptation are unaccounted for in the Gospels, Jesus is nonetheless intimately cognizant of every aspect of human frailty, and therefore an exemplar who sympathizes with our weakness, though we do not perceive these qualities in Him.



In conclusion, those who have any kind of weakness or disadvantage should not preclude themselves from becoming exemplars. In fact, being weak or disadvantaged can make someone more effective as an exemplar. The best details in the lives of the saints are not their triumphs but their shortcomings, or perhaps their triumphs in light of their shortcomings. This, at least, is how Augustine felt when he heard the life of St. Antony. This is also what inspires Paul to tell the church of Corinth, “Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”
(2 Cor. 9b-10)



Sharing The Love of Christ
<https://www.ccjhc.org/love-without-limits-following-jesus-example-in-caring-for-the-needy/>
Accessed: 5/12/26

MONASTIC SPIRITUALITY FOR LAITY

Dr. Norvene Vest, Obl. OSB

I have been teaching and writing on monastic (especially Benedictine) spirituality for lay persons for many years. In the beginning, the topic itself caused confusion: surely that is a contradiction in terms! How can lay persons benefit from a spirituality for monastics? Surely, even by definition, monastic spirituality is intended for those who are decisively separated from the world!

The regularity of this confusion or exasperation suggests that an important conceptual misunderstanding is at issue. I have come to see this misunderstanding as a window into a new creative synthesis. So far from being an impossibility, the paradoxical truth is that monastic spirituality is directly helpful to modern lay Christians in revitalizing their spiritual lives, and perhaps vice versa.

In general, we tend to assume that the fundamental characteristic of monastic spirituality is either the cloister or the vows (or both). If the cloister, then monastic spirituality is centered on the decision to withdraw from the world, living in an environment where everything is designed to facilitate deepened communication with God. If the vows, then monastic spirituality is centered on a life of poverty, chastity and obedience, thereby committing oneself to separation from the normal "goods" of human experience in order to focus on God alone. In either case, by definition, a lay Christian active in the world is largely excluded from full participation in such a spirituality. Both of these so-called "essential characteristics" capture important elements of monastic spirituality, but the question which faces us is whether they focus on the central facets of monastic spirituality. Can the essential spirit of monastic spirituality be lived apart from the cloister and the vows, and if so, what does in fact define that essential spirit?

Reading and studying the Rule of St. Benedict, I have long felt the great appeal of his vision in the midst of the domestic and vocational environments in which I find myself as a lay Christian. And yet I have often wondered and pondered how to find the "center" of emphasis for Benedictine spirituality. What is it that particularly marks the spirituality known as monastic, distinguishing it from other Christian spiritualities? What is it that somehow causes me to experience Benedict reaching out to me across the centuries as friend and support, as I struggle to be a Christian in the world?



Image: Benedict Goes To The Entreaties of Some Hermits To Become Her Abbot
<https://www.gettyimages.com/detail/news-photo/italy-the-abbey-of-monte-oliveto-abbazia-di-monti-oliveto-news-photo/846007478?adppopup=true>
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In light of the startling and consistent relevance of Benedict's Rule which I experience for my life in the world, I have come to see the vows and the cloister as particular fruits of the essential characteristics of monastic spirituality rather than the essential conditions themselves. Following the lead of Fr. Raymond Panikkar, I propose we reconsider the essential characteristics of monastic/Benedictine spirituality in two dimensions:

- (1) hearing and responding to an urgent personal call for union/communion with the Divine; and
- (2) experiencing essential conversion, that is, engaging in a definitive break with everything that presents a barrier to such union.

The baptismal birthright of every Christian is a deep longing for union with God. There is in our hearts an urgency, a dissatisfaction, a lack of completion which calls to us. We do not always recognize this call as a positive invitation to union with God. In fact, we often misinterpret it and seek to assuage this discomfort with many things. Sometimes we cover over or deny our longing. Many times we do not know whether or how the longing might be met, and there is much acting out or drudging up in a frantic effort to satisfy ourselves with substitutes. It is the monastic insight that this longing is not to be hidden, or ignored, or filled up; rather it is the most valuable thing we "have," and is to be listened to above all else. Our longing is a reminder that we are made for love, for intimate relationship. Our deep need is in fact the sign that we belong to God, the true indicator of who we really are. Indeed, it is monastic spirituality that reminds the Christian to honor this inner longing, particularly in times when Christianity becomes so "normal" that such inner urgency tends to be diluted or minimized, as was a common experience in the early centuries of Christian monasticism. I have found the first essential characteristic of monastic spirituality in this recognition and celebration of the call to communion with the One Thing Necessary.

The second characteristic, conversion, is an essential corollary to the first. If this longing is the most valuable thing we have, then our lives must reflect that priority. We must learn how to respond in love with the One who calls us. So, I find the second essential element of monastic spirituality to be metanoia or conversion. Monasticism reminds us that Christian life in its fullness evokes a radical break with everything which prevents or dilutes human response to God. There may be (and often is) some initial break or conversion experience which situates one's life newly in response to God, but conversion is necessarily an ongoing experience. Ongoing conversion is intended to deepen throughout life. This is partly what Cassian and Evagrius mean by the "active life" of ongoing movement toward virtue and away from vice. It may also be that this is the secret to what Benedict means by his ambiguous third vow of *conversio morum* (translated "fidelity to monastic life" in RB 58:17).





Catholic Converts, Then and Now
<https://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2026/04/100859/>
Accessed 5/5/26

It is important to acknowledge that metanoia or radical conversion does not necessarily require renunciation of the physical and material world. While some ²are indeed called to that renunciation, lay people may find conversion takes a different form -- something like finding oneself so changed interiorly that the world is seen with new eyes. A marvelous example of such conversion is given in the gospel of Luke's account of the prodigal son: after a period of radical break is completed by returning to the old setting as a new person, the son is now able to see the blessedness in what previously was only boredom (Lk.15:11f). Conversion may involve a kind of breaking involved in staying put, allowing God to wean us from private idols or vested interests, until we are able to see the gracefulness of what has been present all along, and to share the joy of that. Conversion may also involve finding the courage and support to challenge "the way things have always been," thereby causing a disequilibrium which may be the new element necessary to inaugurate true reconciliation, justice, and unity. Above all, conversion involves deep listening in one's life setting, in the expectancy that somehow Christ is present in the midst, bringing all things together for good.

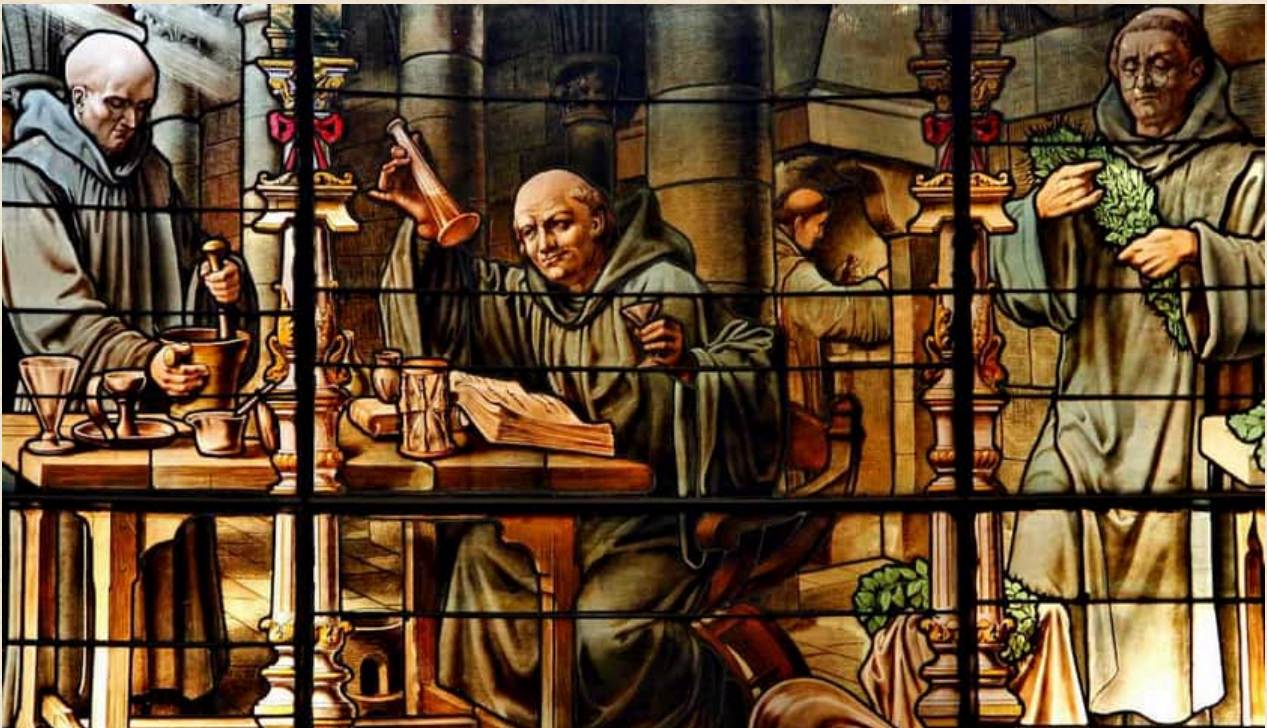
Fr. Panikkar points out that conversion may occur through transformation equally as well as through renunciation. For Christians, both through creation and Incarnation, there is a sense that the world is blessed. The blessing is given in and through the active presence of God in Christ. Conversion leads to transformation when Christ is met within life experiences. This is, in fact, a pattern taught by St. Benedict, that a life centered in prayer helps us be radically attentive to see the One we have met in prayer within the various "disguises" of creation. The Rule punctuates the day with the prayer offices, and then shows Christ met in the querulous sick patient, the unreasonable boss, the friendly clerk, the sister's need at table, and even the tools and equipment we use. It takes persistence and gentle humility to receive Christ's strength as well as to serve him in these daily encounters, but as we learn to do so, it will transform the nature of all we touch.

Through this sacramental mystery of preferring Christ in everything, God seems to invite us humans to be co-creators in transformation, somehow waiting for our loving attention and reverence to release a new element into any situation. The discipline of attention to Christ gradually changes the nature of the world we experience and love. A full conversion is experienced both inwardly and outwardly. Our attention and God's Spirit combine to create a graceful energy which gradually but definitively draws the world more fully into God's loving embrace, transforming it from the center.

Monastic spirituality can bless lay Christians through its commitment to and shared practices of hearing God's call to relationship and learning the daily attentiveness that prefers Christ in everything. Thanks be to God!

1. See Raimundo Panikkar's *Blessed Simplicity: the Monk as Universal Archetype* (New York: Seabury Press, 1982), especially pages 10-11. "By monk, monachos, I understand that person who aspires to reach the ultimate goal of life with all his being by renouncing all that is not necessary to it... The monk ultimately becomes monk ... as the result of an urge, the fruit of an experience that eventually leads him to change and ... break something in his life (*conversio, metanoia*)."

2. Panikkar, *ibid*, p.34: "The modern monk does not want to renounce, except what is plainly sinful or negative; rather he wishes to transform all things."



The Splendor of His Name Reaches Far Beyond Heaven and Earth

BY LORI PIKE UEBERSAX OBL. O.S.B.

Disquiet from the City can smear the soul.
Numb and wary, tired and guarded
We wend the backroads to the Abbey.

Yes, God is always near. But now feels far.
And so a time to seek and beseech.
The silence, in paradox, speaks.
“Make space in your heart. Attune. Open.
Come.”

Now, exit from ennui.
Now, slaking thirst from the living spring.
Now, hearty food and nourishing
conversation.
Now, cheerful fire in the hearth.

Each Psalm chanted in the humble chapel
Scrapes away a bit of the city silt.
United in the rhythm of the hours
Community makes lonely hearts known.
Prayer now reaches up and up
Where before it seemed to
Lack wings.

With every scripture, song, homily—
Monk wisdom distilled in eloquent brevity
— Self becomes ever more
The True Self Jesus gifted before our
birth.

The chapel bell tolls. Eucharist,
consumed. And then again, day after day.
Reformation through repetition.
Transformation through the crucifixion
Holy Spirit, Selah.

Continued



Road to Emmaus
https://dia.pitts.emory.edu/image_details.cfm?ID=17248
Accessed 5/5/26

The dear desert tutors our beings in beauty. Hawks sky-wheel, butterflies flutter. Delightful creatures abound ground us. Help us to revel in the world around us.

And always the poplars point the way, slender fingers in the sky.
“Look up!” they cry, reaching into the endless blue.
“Know that God is always with you!”

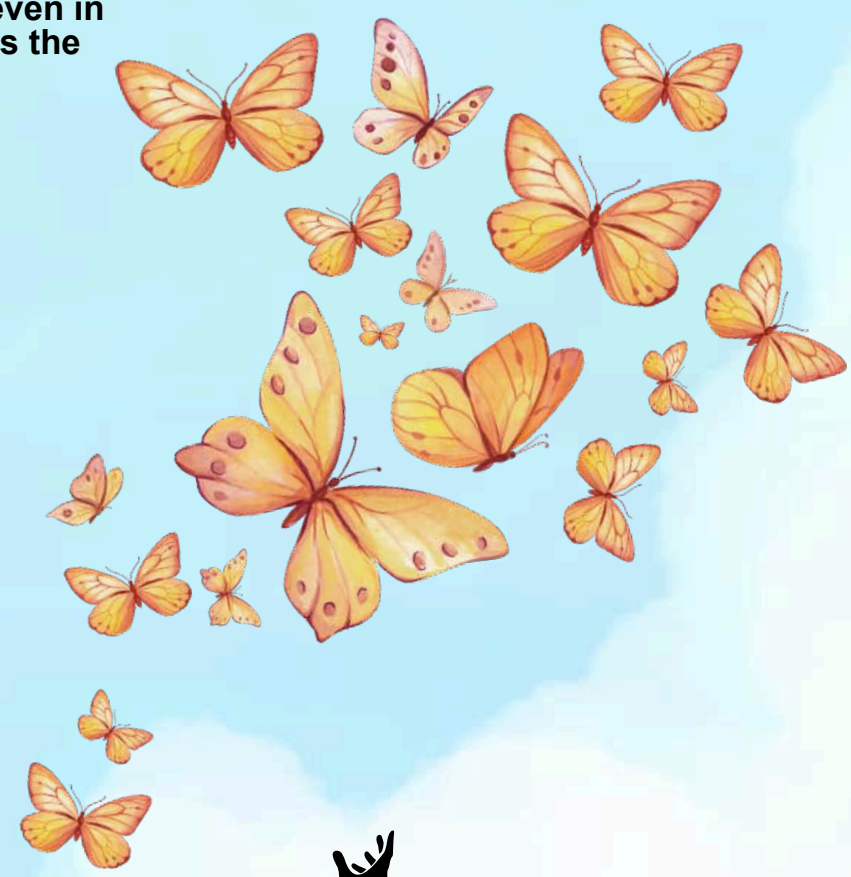
We are ever on the Emmaus road—
Oft blind to the Christ standing right beside
Until we see, and be
And cry out in wonder-revelation, as our holy hearts burn.

Too soon, time to leave this sacred oasis.
One last linger in the garden with friends.
Poplars listen as words stretch to capture
The delight and mystery—souls finding their way
In this liminal space.

Then we wind down the hill toward the City. No longer numb, empty, fatigued.
Fortified with Hope. Humility. Joy.

We see that the pilgrims we are at the Abbey, In idyllic refreshment, sweet respite—
Stay true to our course even in the City. The sacred always infuses the profane.

We are ready for it all
As You guide, loving Father.
Shepherd of our way each day. Ever with us. Selah.



Things Visible and Invisible

For Fr. Francis

BY GARRET BROWN

A Russian monk once said, Pause a moment
and quietly take in all of the room—
There is God.

After silent breakfast, the refectory is filled
with delicious sunlight and quiet.

Intimations:
How the glasses in rows, the simple white
cups silently extol their dignities.

For a few moments, no words
(though I search for them).

The rim-rod ruptures of
chatter, banter,
the chick-chock pappy-doo—
Gone.



The words beneath the words.
The weather inside the weather.
O thunder and lightening of our souls.
O holy stones and sticks,
O brokenness that is the Way.
O horizons with no end.
O seas that go deep, go deeper.

I pause. I bow. I see, and then,
I see that I do not see.

Garrett Brown is an actor, writer, and visual artist who has been visiting St. Andrew's Abbey since 1997. His "Memoir Gone Rogue", Tin Sea, was published by Lagoon House Press in 2024. He is married to the writer and poet, Marie Pal-Brown, an Oblate of the monastery. They make their home in Long Beach, California.

The Great and Holy Voids of the Triduum at Valyermo 2026: Antiphonies of Emptiness and Fullness

By Mary Kauffman, Obl. OSB

an·tiph·o·ny

n. pl. an·tiph·o·nies

1. Responsive or antiphonal singing or chanting.
2. A composition that is sung responsively; an antiphon.
3. A responsive or reciprocal interchange, as of ideas or opinions.

Once again, I am blessed to experience the wholeness of Triduum, from the celebration of Holy Thursday and the sorrow of Good Friday to the bright exultation of Easter Sunday. The days of this concentrated time ring with back-and-forth antiphonal rhythms, responses to emptiness by divine fulfillment.

The Rhythmic Antiphons of Hunger and Satiety

Joel 2: 12: *“But now, declares Yahweh, come back to me with all your heart, fasting, weeping, and mourning.”*

Luke 1: 53: *“The hungry he has filled with good things...”*

RB 49: *“...let each one deny themselves some food, drink, sleep, needless talking, and idle jesting, and look forward to holy Easter with joy and spiritual longing.”*

Lent is a season of fasting; as it draws to an end, the good monks provide a communal feast on Holy Thursday evening that leads to the long fasting of Good Friday. In the monastic Good Friday, morning hunger spurs to action



as the birds awake, singing as they search for food; the lizards dart out from the bushes to catch their meal of insects. Hunger teaches us need. We fast to prepare for filling; we fast before the Eucharist partly to create awareness of our need to be filled. We fast not only from food during Lent and on Good Friday, but also from the pleasures that go with eating- the companionship of good friends at a meal, the beauty of a nicely set table, the smells of a well-cooked dinner – a deprivation that creates greater hunger. Fasting from other human activities – television, conversation, shopping, social media, news, and other sources of satiation – leaves voids in our physical world that can create the hunger to be spiritually filled. A mood of expectant emptiness pervades the monastery on Good Friday, a day of complete abstinence from all these pursuits to allow space for feeling the ache of sorrow for Christ’s suffering. In the same way that we abstain from food to create hunger for the Eucharist, the Good Friday fast may be a taste of preparation for the heavenly banquet of the Lamb, where our great human voids will be filled with a holy meal; the feast that will be the ultimate antiphon to the hunger of our earthly fasting.

Psalm 63: 6: “My soul shall be filled as with a banquet...”

Matthew 8:11: “...many will come from the east and from the west, and will recline ...at the banquet in the kingdom of heaven...”

John 6:35: “Jesus said to them, ‘I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger... ‘ ”

The Rhythmic Antiphons of Silence and Speech

Psalm 19: “The heavens declare the glory of God...Day unto day pours forth speech; night unto night whispers knowledge. There is no speech, no words; their voice is not heard; (yet a) report goes forth through all the earth...”

RB 6: “Speaking and teaching are the teacher’s task; the disciple is to be silent and listen. “

The sacred silence of Holy Thursday night to Holy Saturday morning is void of human chatter and cluttering noise. A somber and silent Good Friday throng weaves its way with uncanny quiet to pray the Stations of the Cross in the mute hills above the monastery. Even the Valyermo bells hold their tongues as clacking wood announces



Silence/sound
Photo by: Mary Kauffman

the times for liturgies. This is a silence that allows greater listening; I hear the whisper of wind in the stillness of the air, the speech of the gently rustling tree leaves; wind chimes moved by the spirit-all is the sound of the Pentecost to come. I listen to the birds asking to be heard beneath all human bustling; I hear the life of the speechless silent stars and the flickering flames of the Easter Vigil fire. This great absence of noise paradoxically leads to the Word, which waits for the quiet of mind and soul. What appears to be empty is truly full, full of anticipation, of peace, of interior silent conversation of soul with Spirit, waiting for the antiphonal Alleluia of Easter song and rejoicing. No song can be heard without the silence

that creates the space for music. Spring color is bursting from the quiet earth during this Triduum time at the abbey, a paean of praise to God. Revelation 8:1: "When he broke open the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour."

Matthew 27:14: "But (Jesus) did not answer him one word, so that (Pilate) was greatly amazed."

John 1:14: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us."

The Rhythmic Antiphons of Darkness and Light

Genesis 1: 2-3: "...the earth was a formless wasteland, and darkness covered the abyss... Then God said, 'Let there be light...'"

Luke 1: 78-79: "...the dawn from on high will break upon us, to shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death..."



Darkness and Light
Photo by: Mary Kauffman

When I first awake early Holy Saturday morning and look out the glass door, I see only the end of night's deep darkness covering all. As I watch, light gradually pierces the dark, and I begin to discern outlines and shapes. I see the early fringes of light, but they are visible only because they are outlined in the dark shroud of night. I am seeing the antiphonal chant of darkness and light. I get up and go to the chapel for prayer and there are no altar candles; darkness will surround the altar until the Easter Vigil, when the great Paschal candle of our faith is lit, illuminating shapes in the deep black of the unlit monastic grounds. This darkness has created a space for illumination. We also await the light of awareness of our own sins; the only way I begin to glimpse this light, to create the space within myself where perhaps a flicker of flame can live, is to sense the darkness of my human frailty that will allow the Light of Christ to shine within.

The Son had to enter into humanity's deepest darkness through his suffering and passion to reveal the bright resurrection light of His divinity; the darkness of an eclipsed sun covered the earth at His crucifixion to prepare for the explosion of light three days later. Human eyes are unable to look at total, unshaded brightness; we must have the blindness of shadow in order to discern the vision of light. My morning prayer at home reveals this to me every day: I light a candle to begin prayer, and the candle burns brightly and vividly in the morning dark; when I turn on the lamp to read and pray the psalms, the candle dims to insignificance. Christ's radiant and powerful Resurrectional light is a foretaste of the heaven where the full brightness of light will be visible with no need for the gloom of shadow.

John 1: 5: "[T]he light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."

Revelation 22: 5: "Night will be no more, nor will they need light from lamp or sun, for the Lord God will give them light..."

John 8:12: "Again Jesus spoke to them, saying: I am the light of the world."

The Empty Tomb

Isaiah 26: 19: "Your dead shall live; their bodies shall rise. You who dwell in the dust, awake and sing for joy! For your dew is a dew of light, and the earth will give birth to the dead." Luke 24: 1-5: But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared. And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel. And as they were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, "Why do you seek the living among the dead?"



Photo by: Mary Kauffman

At the abbey, Easter is welcomed with celebratory feasting, sounds of singing and bells ringing out in joyful praise; and light from a multitude of candles glowing in the chapel. Ultimate, unrelieved fasting, silence, and darkness exist only in our earthly tombs, where there is no food, no sound, and no light, a culmination of emptiness. But the Easter Empty Tomb of the risen Christ is the antiphonal fulfillment response to the voids of this world's graves; it is the promise of heavenly feast, angelic music, and divine eternal light. The emptiness of the Easter tomb reveals what is unseen as death becomes life, the ultimate antiphonal call and response: the human call to death is answered by the divine call to eternal life. The Empty Tomb is a great and holy void.

An empty promise? Yes, thank God.

Around & About The Monastery



Fr. Angelus and Fr. Carlos counting votes.



Abbot President Justin Brown, O.S.B (Swiss-American Congregation), Abbot-Delegate of Abbot President of the Annunciation Congregation, Maksymilian Nawara, OSB presiding.

THE CELEBRATION OF THE ELECTION OF AN ABBOT

Vesting with the Pectoral Cross to the Abbot-Elect



Bestowing the Abbatial Insignia: the Abbatial Ring

Monks gathering at the Chapel for the Te Deum



THE CELEBRATION OF THE ELECTION OF AN ABBOT

RENEWAL OF MONASTIC PROFESSION PRAYER

The professed monks renew their monastic profession before the new Abbot.

Prayer: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Today, I renew my vows of stability, monastic conversion, and obedience according to the Rule of Saint Benedict and the Constitutions of the Congregation of the Annunciation, in the monastery of Saint Andrew, Valyermo, California, before God and His saints.

Abbot President: Let us pray.

God our Father, we were as scattered sheep, and your Son Jesus as Shepherd and Guardian of our flock. We have been gathered by His grace, and we are now gathered in the name of Jesus and the grace He bestows, for the sake of the world by His words. May He love, may He bestow, may He surround us with His Holy Spirit, always bestowing mercy above the brothers and he will receive, on the last appointed to the faithful across by the Precious Jesus Christ, your Son and our Lord and Giver with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

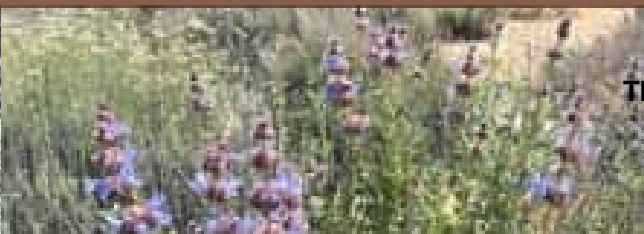
SUSCIPE

Around & About The Monastery

Community after Election



**Br. Joseph de la Fuente, OSB
transferred his vows to Valyermo on March 15, 2026 during
Sunday Vespers.**



Upcoming Summer Retreats

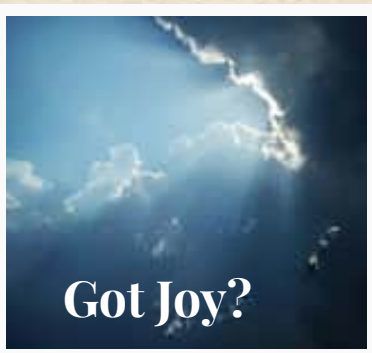


The Way of Beauty June 22-26, 2026

Presenter: Dr. Nancy Wallis

Benedictine Spirituality Retreat: Reading and Living the Rule of Saint Benedict Today (Zoom Option) July 10-12, 2026

Presenter: Fr. Luke Dysinger MD, DPhil

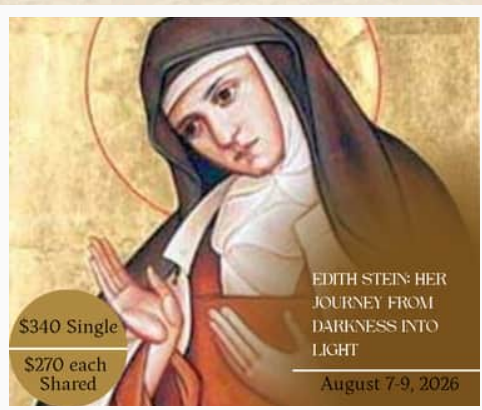


Got Joy? July 25, 2026 9am-3pm

Presenter: Fr. Angelus Echeverry, OSB

The Transformative Power of Story July 27-31, 2026

Presenter: Mary Kauffman Obl.OSB &
Michael Mullard Obl OSB; Ph.D



EDITH STEIN: Her Journey from Darkness into Light August 7-9, 2026

Presenter: Fr. Joseph Brennan, OSB

The Spirituality of Medieval Monks and Nuns
August 14-16, 2026

Presenter: Rev. Dr. Greg Peters, Obl. OSB



Obl OSB; Ph.D
Presenter: Mary Kauffman Obl.OSB & Michael Mullard
July 31-August 2, 2026

Retiro de Silencio



**HEALING OUR WOUNDS:
Forgiveness in the Spiritual Life**
August 24-28, 2026

Presenter: Dr. Nancy Wallis



**ANCIENT AND MODERN
BENEDICTINE SPIRITUALITY:
Contemplative Practices For Today
(ZOOM Option)**
August 28-30, 2026

Presenter: Fr. Luke Dysinger MD, DPhil



**Purity of Heart through the Hearts of
Jesus and Mary**
August 29, 2026 9am-3:30pm

Presenter: Fr. Angelus Echeverry, OSB



For complete descriptions of Retreats
visit:

Saintandrewsabbey.com
or Call the Retreat Office:
661-944-2178.