



INCARNATION MONASTERY

A Quarterly Newsletter

BREAD OF LIFE

Issue 7 April 2012



"Radiant Light" by Fr. Arthur Poulin

This is the night
of which it is written:
The night shall be as bright as day,
dazzling is the night for me,
and full of gladness.

From the Easter Proclamation (Exsultet)

LETTER FROM THE PRIOR

Dear Oblates and Friends,

We are now in this wonderful, culminating season of Easter. It is the fulfillment of our Christian journey through the liturgical year, from Advent through Christmas, Epiphany, and Lent—all those phases. This breaking out of the prison of the tomb, of death by Christ opens up for us this amazing horizon of life without end.

Easter is so important for each of us personally, as we struggle to grasp who we are ultimately. We are journeying in this important earthly life toward a fulfillment of everything good here—love, beauty, achievements—a fulfillment we cannot even imagine.

But beyond its key importance for each of us individually, it is decisive for our family life, our community life, for the whole human family, indeed for all of creation, which, as St. Paul teaches, struggles and groans toward the fulfillment of the children of God. The whole “web of life” of all creation can glimpse the Eternity which Easter calls us all toward.

We Camaldolese are celebrating the 1,000th year of our motherhouse in Tuscany, Camaldoli. We think

of the generation after generation of monks and oblates, each seeking to live the Good News in the light of our charism. Each generation understanding and living their call in their particular time and culture.

We here at Incarnation seek, in the light of Easter, to live the Good News in our history, our place in the vibrant Bay Area. Thanks for being part of this adventure!

Happy Eastertide!

Fr. Andrew Colnaghi, O.S.B. Cam.

**EASTER IS SO
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OF US PERSONALLY,
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DAILY SCHEDULE

Monday and Friday

Lauds, 7 a.m.
Short Vespers with sitting meditation, 5 p.m.

Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday

Lauds, 7 a.m.
Vespers and Eucharist, 5 p.m.

Saturday and Sunday

Lauds and Eucharist, 8 a.m.
Vespers, 5 p.m.

PASSOVER

by Rev. Lynn Ungar

“Then you shall take some of the blood, and put it on the door posts and the lintel of the houses... and when I see the blood, I shall pass over you, and no plague shall fall upon you to destroy you, when I smite the land of Egypt.”

Exodus 12:7 and 13

They thought they were safe
that spring night, when they daubed
the doorways with sacrificial blood.
To be sure, the angel of death
passed them over, but for what?
Forty years in the desert
without a home, without a bed,
following new laws to an unknown land.
Easier to have died in Egypt
or stayed there a slave, pretending
there was safety in the old familiar.

But the promise, from those first
naked days outside the garden,
is that there is no safety,
only the terrible blessing
of the journey. You were born
through a doorway marked in blood.
We are, all of us, passed over,
brushed in the night by terrible wings.

Ask that fierce presence,
whose imagination you hold.
God did not promise that we shall live,
but that we might, at last, glimpse the stars,
brilliant in the desert sky.

They thought they were safe that spring night, says the poet Lynn Ungar, but *there is no safety, only the terrible blessing of the journey*. Participating in the Paschal mystery of Jesus, which happened in a spring night, we realize that he himself was born through a doorway marked with blood.

The heart of our faith embraces a collapse, a broken reality; the extreme vulnerability of God abandoned by God, under the urge of love.

The divine, compassionate love has its own strength and drive, which upsets and widens our cultural containers when they exclude, resist, repress, or dominate.

Every creative, widening step in our life is not painless—it opens us to the unfamiliar, which most of our personal and social egos fear so terribly.

Risking a new path, faith alone holds us like an invisible but unbroken thread.

There is no Passover denying the pain, avoiding the necessary falling through a doorway marked in blood.

Only by going through this doorway, in trust—without knowing—can you graciously emerge in a deeper love, a larger vision, and a scarred joy.

In this Easter season we let the enlivening Blow of the resurrection roll away the stones from the tombs of our personal and social contexts.

We let Her free the wings of our buried imagination for a new, blessed creation.

Br. Ivan Nicoletto, O.S.B. Cam.

THE LENTEN AND EASTER JOURNEY: A REFLECTION OF GRATITUDE

This year as I have journeyed through Lent toward Easter, what has become crystal clear is that dual realities are at play simultaneously: suffering and joy, loss and new opportunity, death and resurrection. The creativity that is springing from the inherent tension in these opposites has been a true gift of the Spirit as She insinuates Herself into my heart and mind. To illustrate this, I want to share some personal stories.

When my husband, Alex, and I learned of his diagnosis of stage 4 colon cancer in October of 2009, I went into control mode. I wanted, needed really, to be present for him in all aspects of his care right through till his death in December of 2010. It was a holy time for us. But in the time after, I found it difficult to let go of those tendencies to want to try to control everything, including my inner life and conversations with God. In my effort to turn away from loss, suffering, and death I found myself unable to experience joy. As the weeks and months rolled on, a mighty fatigue set in. I thank my spiritual director for being the Spirit's mouth to the ear of my heart in planting the notion that so much busy-ness in my life was distracting me from the true work of listening at this critical time of change. I realized I needed to take a sabbatical from the rather heavy responsibilities as choir director, worship committee member, and various other duties at my home congregation. Not a decision made lightly, since I love the work, nevertheless it was necessary to step away for a time of contemplation, a Lenten time. So for the last six months or so, I have set aside many of the active parts of my life to embrace what has been given, what has been taken away, and what may be.

In my contemplation, the Spirit began to whisper to me. She suggested that I begin to walk, and walking became for me an opportunity for listening rather than doing. And as I walked, the Spirit suggested by various means that I could empty and open myself to Her for an extended time by walking the Camino de Santiago in Spain. As this worldly-foolish, Spirit-wise notion took root in me, I also began to understand that this time set aside for rest is also sacred.

So, what is emerging from this quiet time? In suffering a great loss, the sorrow is at times overwhelming and all consuming. But the Spirit came to me again in my garden to teach and comfort. The sense of winter, darkness, and rot was in the garden as the cold set in and I went out to pull up dead or dying tomatoes, basil, squash, and other summer vegetables. But as I began to sweat over those deep roots, loosening them from the damp soil, I began to sense that by extracting them I was opening the ground to allow for new growth. I saw fat earthworms assisting me in the process. I worked in some well-rotted compost to enrich the tired soil, and tossed in a few seeds of some winter-tolerant vegetables. Then I went inside and left the garden to itself. Really, that was all I needed to do. I only had to wait for growth to occur. And grow it did! As I let this grow in my heart, I also began to sense that my inner soil had been loosened by loss, planted with seeds of hope, and started to sprout small seedlings of joy again. The winter rest is a necessary part of the process of death and resurrection, loss and new opportunity.

One more little story is important to this journey. I work with children who have cancer. After Alex's death, when I returned to work, I wasn't certain how I might be able to face them and their suffering. But the Spirit presented another gift. She whispered to me that I could participate in a charity activity to raise funds for research on treatments for childhood cancers. The activity involved having my head shaved. The children in the oncology ward in the hospital are almost all bald, not by choice. Although there is more suffering in those children than I can imagine, there is also incredible child-like joy. And there is actual glee when they see another who has consented to lose a head of hair voluntarily for this cause. They have hope, if not for themselves, then at least for others ahead of them. Letting go of something for the sake of hope, joy, and new opportunity is life-giving.

These somewhat disjointed stories have been working in me as I walk through Lent toward Easter this year. We prepare ourselves to meet the risen Jesus by walking with the Jesus who is willing to give up his life for the sake of new life for us all. We already know the end of the story when we begin at the beginning each year. It is a gift to be able to be in this dual place. We miss the incredible richness of life if we neglect to attend to both sides of this journey. In his incarnation, Jesus put on loss, suffering, and death to walk with us into joy, new opportunity, and resurrection. He is called the Way; in Spanish that is the *Camino*. As I leave my garden in God's hands and begin to walk with my shaven head on the Camino de Santiago this April, I will be walking with Jesus and listening to the Spirit in this beautiful creative tension that is the Lent and Easter story. I pray for each of you a good Easter Camino as well. ♦

Kathryn Garcia-Rivera, Oblate O.S.B. Cam. (since 1996)



Kathryn Garcia-Rivera at San Gregorio State Beach, January 2012.

GOD, PSALMS, VIOLENCE, OURSELVES

This is a summary of a Quiet Day at Incarnation Monastery held in February. Sr. Barbara Green, O.P. was our presenter.

I assume that we all love the psalms, consider it a privilege to recite them, recognize how they link us to our forebears (Christian and Jewish) who also prayed them. Our challenge is to pray them with integrity, finding their language suitable for what we wish to say. Sometimes parts can seem problematic, and so this reflection is to offer and authorize some strategies to assist discomfort we may experience with psalms. Perhaps you haven't noticed these things, or don't mind them. But others who may approach you need your wisdom. Listen here for them as well as yourself. Assumed also is that we trust that God's most basic nature is love, and that God thus approves our efforts to dialog with the psalms to make God's compassion clear and to enhance our participation in it. We will proceed here in three rounds, looking at violent elements in a psalm and suggesting three strategies to counter or transform the language. At the end of our three rounds, we will name a few other things to allow the psalms greater access into our lives.

Round One: Consider Psalm 35/36 (#227 in our "house" prayer book) and some views about our opponents that may trouble us (I assume in the interests of "print space" that you can find these):

- When the psalmist asks God to do terrible things to our opponents,
- When the psalmist rants on about our opponents, enumerates their flaws,
- When we feel really glad to pray these words about our opponents,

we can

- **specify** some opponents for people who are praying these *about us*, that *they will forgive us*.
- **reverse** the language (add a "not") or perhaps omit the verses.
- choose to **incorporate** the qualities as some part of ourselves that we are struggling with (my enemy as my capacity to be jealous).

Round Two: Psalm 80 is not in our prayer book but features as a responsorial psalm:

- When the psalmist includes God in revenge fantasies (God vs. the vineyard),
- When the psalmist talks about God's anger at us over our many failings,
- When the psalmist uses images for God that bother us (e.g., smelter, destroyer),

we can

- ponder the **alternative**: It's good that God doesn't care, say "no problem," "whatever."
- try to **understand why** the psalmist—in big trouble—felt the need to use such strong language for God, the way people suffering trauma "talk powerfully" rather than politely.
- **pray for people** who feel that God is their enemy and may be unable to imagine God's love.

Round Three: Psalm 89/90 (our prayer book #251) may include language we don't want to pray uncritically:

- When the psalmist names things we don't think we would ever do (quake with fear before God),
- When the psalmist sets God up as a sort of Santa, to be pleased by us—a relation we may find unhealthy,
- When the psalmist implies that God withholds good things from us to punish or discipline us,

we can

- consider the possibility of **projection**: we do these things and lay them on God.
- see if we can ride the feeling we are reacting to and see if it can actually show us a **mirror** (when we want to "get" our enemies, it may be that it's our wish, not God's).
- **investigate** honestly whether we think God's main role is to sanction good/bad outcomes or if we can seek out other ways to relate to God.

Finally, a few miscellaneous ways to work with the psalms:

- unpack imagery that we buzz past quickly (e.g., God as a moth)
- look for a small story or plot line in a psalm
- consider how Jesus prayed this psalm at a moment we know from his life
- see how the psalm changes if we assume life after death (which the psalms do not)
- lift out a line and chew on it all day (maybe an antiphon)
- look for the "floor-plan" of a psalm (may make it less rambling)
- re-contextualize a psalm (see how it suits after a good/bad day)
- pray them (as) with a child or a friend who is suffering ♦

Sr. Barbara Green, O.P.

Sister Barbara Green is Professor of Biblical Studies at the Dominican School of Philosophy and Theology. She is a member of the Sisters of St. Dominic, Congregation of the Most Holy Name.

REFLECTING WITH THE PSALMS

I was blessed to participate in the Incarnation Monastery Quiet Day in February where Sr. Barbara Green, O.P. led the day with her talk and reflections on God, Psalms, Violence, Ourselves.”

I first started reading the psalms in my cell (a closet with space for a cot, books, music and a clock) when in my teens. I was excited with a new found experience of the love of God and the forgiveness of Christ’s saving grace.

I would notice how some psalms I reflected on seemed harsher or may not have resonated with where I was in the moment, and it would give me pause as I tried to reconcile those feelings and thoughts. I remember working through my own processes on how the psalms could best speak to me in the moment, knowing a loving and compassionate God was present within me.

I learned to sing some to songs, memorize some, do *lectio divina* along with a concordance, reflect some to my inner struggles, contemplate some as other’s struggles, repent my similar faults, forgive other’s similar actions, pray along with them, shed tears over heart felt words, worship to the glorious praise, believe in their resounding truths, and pray for wisdom and patience where I did not understand.

This early experience is chiefly why St. Romuald’s Brief Rule resonates so dearly to me. It was my truth as well. Without a Psalter or a Rule, I simply read the psalms through then started

over, or went to endearing chapters when I sought refuge or sharing with others. Over the years the psalms have continued to be a source of spiritual nourishment, yet still I have those moments where their words give me pause over a harsh tone or a situation that does not resonate in the moment.

Sr. Barbara provided us with a wonderful opportunity to listen to and reflect on her “violence strategies,” to approach with integrity and wholeheartedness, in how we take the psalms into our lives. Hearing and contemplating on her experience and study of these issues “as a stand alone topic” verse in the moment when one comes across them was both insightful and relevant for me.

I have been implementing many of Sr. Barbara’s suggestions (see page 5) into my practice and have already been enjoying those fruits. For me this Quiet Day provided additional tools and structure to incorporate a particular mindfulness in my reading of the psalms (and other scripture) that is allowing me to more quickly hear and take in the beauty and relevance of all and any of the psalms, whenever they are read. They can more easily resonate for me in the moment, which is a blessing.

Thank you, Sr. Barbara. I pray your work continues to be a blessing for others. ♦

Ranell Winchester, Oblate O.S.B. Cam.

THE SPIRIT MOVES

I was invited to lead a group of people in contemplative dance prayer by Sr. Mary McGann of the Franciscan School of Theology. I wanted to introduce those at the prayer gathering to repetitive movement in the style of Taizé chants. When gestures are repeated over and over, the Spirit seems to fill us, moving us into a realm where our hearts and whole being are united in the mystery of worship. Mary suggested I teach three: one for Holy Thursday, one for Good Friday, and one for Easter. We chose *Ubi Caritas*, *Within Our Darkest Night*, and *Bless the Lord*.

From focused prayer, gently flowing into movement, we begin our dance meditation. It is not the body alone, but the spirit—your spirit, God’s spirit flowing through you, breathing through you. All of life is in motion, and we are tuning into its inward and outward essence and expression. For example, for the chant *Within Our Darkest Night*, the essence of the movement involves shielding a small flame, fingers of one hand drawn together, hidden behind the other hand, gently flaring open and rising, with one hand following the other upward, each hand emerging from behind the other before both sink back downward. The spirit also ignites, rises, descends.

I believe an underlying factor shaping dance meditation is a quest for beauty. As movement begins to flow, a kinesthetic sense of beauty draws one’s soul to follow the unfolding gift that takes place. Urged by beauty, the dancer/meditator, *passive* as a receptacle but *active* as an instrument, accompanies the movement’s journey toward its epiphany. God becomes identified with the journey, with beauty and discovery.

When speaking of Fra Angelico’s painting “Temptation of St. Anthony” Merton writes: “The kind of movement in this

picture, again, is the most perfect movement, because it does not spend itself and vanish, but generates itself over and over by its own stillness and significance.”



Fra Angelico's painting "Temptation of St. Anthony."

The dancer demonstrates through her body a balance of stillness and action. In the course of this the dancer—each one of you—may shift from doing the dance to being the dance. We move from the still point within, and the “still point” becomes the center of the movement. We are a moving center. The dancer and the dance are one.

May the breath of Spirit dance within you this Easter season. ♦

Carla DeSola

Carla DeSola is an instructor of sacred dance at the Graduate Theological Union, founder of Omega Liturgical Dance Company in NYC, and founder/director of Omega West in the Bay Area.

UPCOMING CELEBRATIONS

Pentecost Sunday, May 27

Lauds with Mass, 8 a.m.

Vespers, 5 p.m.

Saturday, June 9

Silent Day facilitated by Marty Badgett, Obl., O.S.B. Cam.

Mass at the Monastery, 8 a.m.

At Easton Hall, C.D.S.P., 9:30 a.m.–4:00 p.m.



Interior of chapel at Incarnation Monastery, Easter 2012.

THANK YOU!

We appreciate and welcome any donations toward our Incarnation Monastery newsletter.

Your contributions help us provide print copies to send to our motherhouse in Italy and to New Camaldoli Hermitage in Big Sur.

LORD OF THE DANCE (I DANCED IN THE MORNING)

I danced in the morning when the world was begun,
and I danced in the moon and the stars and the sun,
and I came down from heaven and I danced on the earth.
At Bethlehem I had my birth.

*Dance, then, wherever you may be;
I am the Lord of the Dance, said he.
And I'll lead you all, wherever you may be,
and I'll lead you all in the Dance, said he.*

I danced for the scribe and the Pharisee,
but they would not dance, and they would not follow me;
I danced for the fishermen, for James and John;
they came with me and the Dance went on.

*Dance, then, wherever you may be;
I am the Lord of the Dance, said he.
And I'll lead you all, wherever you may be,
and I'll lead you all in the Dance, said he.*

I danced on the Sabbath and I cured the lame,
the holy people said it was a shame;
they whipped and they stripped and they hung me high;
and they left me there on a cross to die.

*Dance, then, wherever you may be;
I am the Lord of the Dance, said he.
And I'll lead you all, wherever you may be,
and I'll lead you all in the Dance, said he.*

I danced on a Friday when the sky turned black;
it's hard to dance with the devil on your back;
they buried my body and they thought I'd gone,
but I am the Dance and I still go on.

*Dance, then, wherever you may be;
I am the Lord of the Dance, said he.
And I'll lead you all, wherever you may be,
and I'll lead you all in the Dance, said he.*

They cut me down and I leapt up high,
I am the life, that'll never, never die;
I'll live in you if you'll live in me;
I am the Lord of the Dance, said he.

*Dance, then, wherever you may be;
I am the Lord of the Dance, said he.
And I'll lead you all, wherever you may be,
and I'll lead you all in the Dance, said he.*

Sydney Carter
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