

INCARNATION MONASTERY

An Occasional Newsletter

Bread of Life

Issue 18 October 2015



'Night Symphony,' by Fr. Arthur Poulin, OSB Cam

'Every journey out is a journey in...' Anon.

Letter from the Prior - Wonder

Dear Oblates and Friends,

Every morning we monks gather together to praise and thank God for the grace of a new day - for the amazing gift of life, for the beauty of creation, and for all the wonderful works that God manifests throughout human history.

I imagine that many others like us - small or large faith communities as well as families and individuals, who hold the same or maybe different beliefs, members of our Christian religion or other traditions - are in one way or another doing the same thing: praying, praising, and thanking the God of Many Names. And maybe He or She is the very same one and only God. What a marvelous thing to be united in this way with countless people worshipping God all over this wonderful world!

Why is it that given this great basic unity each faith or religious group sometimes feel that they have an absolute monopoly on the 'Truth' - so that separation and hostilities begin -as each of us is so sure we are worshipping the one true God. Unfortunately we often refuse to accept legitimate diversity in the way we express our prayers in our daily lives. We often see the other as strange and needing to be converted to our way of thinking and praying. It can reach the point where the 'other' becomes our sworn enemy, even to the point of extreme violence and mutual killing. All too often this happens in cases of cultural, racial, and gender differences and identity. Sometimes we are just not able to accept DIVERSITY. We Christians ought to seriously acknowledge that the Holy Spirit is at work sanctifying and inspiring people quite beyond the boundaries of our churches and in very different ways.

Karl Rahner spoke of so many, many 'anonymous Christians' out there. And when a Buddhist, thinking that might be a tad condescending, asked him, 'What if I were to call you an 'anonymous Buddhist?' Rahner immediately responded, 'I would expect you to!' In the end we are all family and somehow a little bit of everything human is in each one of us.

For this reason I thought to reflect a bit with Saint Benedict and his Holy Rule, and particularly on his teaching regarding the virtue of HUMILITY. It seems to me that if we are able to penetrate the core of his teaching on Humility, not in a pious way but as God manifested to us and all creation in Christ, in the Gospel, then we will be able to love our own faith, yes, and also accept the others who seem different from us.

As T. S. Eliot put it:

'The only wisdom we can hope to acquire
Is the wisdom of humility: humility is endless.' ♦

As always, in communion.



Fr. Andrew Colnaghi, OSB Cam

Bread of Life

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Work and Pray

What is it that I want, perhaps we all want? Personally, I want peace and happiness, but so often I find myself drifting along without aim or purpose. In this state, I often find I'm bounced around from one set of feelings and thoughts to another. These states, feelings, or consuming thoughts seem to be induced from outside myself. Some event or person seems to make me feel, think, or behave in this or that way. But why? Why do I allow the exterior world to control my inner world? This makes no sense. Why should I feel unhappy or upset if someone says something unpleasant to me? My teacher in Austin once compared reacting negatively to *any situation* to sitting in mud and filth (our negative emotions). We then of course complain that we are muddy! Along these lines, I would like to share a concept that I will use here.

Maurice Nicoll in the *Psychological Commentaries on the Teachings of Gurdjieff and Ouspensky*, says that 'state equals place'. When I am feeling fine within myself, I am in a particular state or if you will, an interior place. When I am feeling angry, I am in another state or place. Thus peace or happiness can be thought of as an interior place. If I want peace, I must leave the un-peaceful state I am in now. It is just the same as if I want to go to Los Angeles, I must give up being in San Francisco. Notice also, I must keep to my aim of going to LA otherwise I might end up in Petaluma or drifting along as I described above!

So how do I deal with this situation? First, practice, practice, practice - pray as if your life depended upon prayer, and work as if everything depended upon that inner work. For me, I have a daily centering prayer practice, which I aim to enter twice a day for twenty minutes. Prayer opens me to a relationship to something greater than myself and thus opens an inner door to higher influences or help. When I pray and in particular, when I pray for extended periods of time, like a 1 or 10 day retreat, I find I have additional energy. This energy helps me hold to my aim of being more conscious and more open to others. It puts me into a better place. I can use this memory of my more conscious state to avoid going with some typical negative emotions.

The second teaching is about karma yoga or service to that which serves me. For myself, I consider the one day retreats that Bill and I offer at Incarnation and other work we do around the monastery as karma yoga.

These are also unique and very practical opportunities to observe our emotional states. For instance, last Saturday I spent the day cleaning the monastery. Afterwards, I noticed that I had consumed a good deal of time considering a personal situation rather than simply being present to the task at hand. Applying this observation at my day job this past week has helped me stay clear, open, and focused.



After many years of practicing centering prayer and service, I find both these are absolute necessities as the spiritual journey keeps unfolding in my life. They are like, as Thomas Keating states, 'the banks of the river' upon which the journey flows. ♦

Marty Badgett, Oblate OSB Cam

Centering Prayer

Marty Badgett and Bill McLennan

December 12, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Advent Silent Contemplative Retreat

February 6, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Lenten Silent Contemplative Retreat

April 30, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Introduction to Centering Prayer

A four-week course with follow-up classes on

May 7, 14, and 21

9 a.m. to 12 noon

for more information

www.incarnationmonastery.org

The Camino - Walking Into Prayer

'We must train ourselves to see each moment as a sacrament...God comes to us only in the present moment and if we would know Him, we learn to see Him there.' *Richard H. Schmidt, God Seekers*



Having recently come back from Northern Spain and walking the Camino Frances, there is a question that most people ask after they ask, 'How was it?', or 'How did your feet hold up?', which is: 'Are you adjusting back into your life here?' I know what they mean when they ask, I often ask this when a friend or co-worker comes back from an extended vacation or a retreat, but I notice quite specifically that I have no idea what to say. The short answer would be, 'No.' I am only beginning, after almost 2 months, to understand the deep affect of this walk and how it shifted held ideas of myself, creation all around us, and God.

The plans to walk the Camino de Santiago had come slowly over a period of 2 years. Several times I almost talked myself out of it. But over those many months, the internal ordering and surrender to this journey became part of the fabric of my life. There was no turning back. So by summer 2014 I started to plan when I could get enough time off work to walk at least half of the Camino Frances and started to put together a training schedule. In the early days of considering this pilgrimage, I would have trembled at the thought that I would do it on my own. But I arrived in Madrid in mid-May 2015 without my husband, a friend, a walking companion, or a group. That aloneness had a feeling of initiation as I boarded the plane, but even more, the

quiet slow activity of readying for the journey here in the States and the daily walking started to prepare and change me even before I got on the plane.

Upon arrival in Madrid I made arrangements to bus to Burgos, where I would start the Camino. On that first morning standing in front of the albergue (pilgrim dormitory), where I would spend my first night, I met two Frenchmen with whom I would spend several of the first walking days. I think of them still as the guardian angels, seasoned walkers on the Camino. And as the Way would have it, I would run into them again and again. The next morning, after no sleep due to jet lag and excitement and some anxiety from seeing all the road-worn pilgrims (who had started 2 weeks before me) in Saint-Jean and their badly injured and taped feet, ankles, and legs; I began the Camino to Santiago de Compostela. Five hundred kilometers of walking that started with the meseta, a long 3 ½-day flat walk, where at every turn you see miles of road in front of you winding endlessly toward the horizon. Many pilgrims skip this area, busing to a town past this monotonous region. But those very desert-like days turned into the richest foundation of the walk - where the early morning silence became an entryway into the walking and slowly into the prayer of walking.

Each day would begin with, 'Lord, come to our assistance.... make haste to help us.' Then the mind did what it will do - thoughts, at times besieged me. But after a few days I began to notice that the trees would shimmer and send sounds of deep silence, stopping the mind and me to take in the still movement of their message. Water would run through the irrigation troughs, creeks, and gullies and send messages of quieting. I began to contain the silence of these natural messages. Receiving the sounds, sending silence to my ears, thoughts went into the background. Prayer was something felt in the feet, the ears, the muscles of my legs, and throughout the body.

Thoughts that entered and took hold became intense lessons of a sort - like the morning my hearing stopped. Literally! Just prior to this, I had such intense thoughts about a group of pilgrims who came up behind me on the early morn reverie, loudly recounting their previous day's events to each other and the only thought I had



was: ‘Could you please shut up! Can’t you just enjoy this silent and amazing morning!’ Within seconds of this thought I lost the hearing in both my ears. Nothing: no sound, not even the crunch of my feet on the gravel path! I panicked and wondered if I would ever hear again. I went silent. And walked. Within a few minutes, what seemed like an hour, the hearing in one ear came back and then in the other, with such sharpness I felt I could hear sounds that were miles away. Then I noticed again the group of pilgrims behind me and instead of the previous judgment a love engulfed me. The sweet sound of their voices and laughter, filled me. Ahhh, sweet ears to hear, come!

The Camino was full of these graces of seeing oneself clearly and of gazing and being in God’s creation and power.

After weeks of walking the truth of the journey was that God was walking me. To understand something of what it is to be truly and totally dependent on God. And this is why I went on pilgrimage in Spain: to surrender to God’s work in the only way God could show me. One step at a time. ♦

Lisa Bruzzone



Return to Louisville and the Abbey of Gethsemani

Louisville, Kentucky was my destination in June 2015. The ITMS (International Thomas Merton Society) hosting its 14th General Meeting at Bellarmine University presented me the opportunity to not only participate in the centennial celebration of Merton's birth, but also to return to the nearby Abbey of Gethsemani, Merton's monastery, and the community so influential in my spiritual journey.

Upon arrival at the Louisville airport, I drove without delay to the Abbey of Gethsemani. As I entered the church, sounds of Trappist monks chanting Compline reverberated throughout my entire body, bringing me back to the experience of earlier retreats and the closeness I felt with God. The chant was the same, but the faces different. I noticed both the fresh faces of 'junior' Trappist monks and nuns there for a course of study and the absence of older monks who had passed on.

Noticeably gone was Fr. Matthew Kelty, the chaplain to retreatants in 2004. In my year of discerning Camaldolese oblature, I expressed to Fr. Matthew feeling 'lost' in finding a daily practice. He thought for a moment before declaring, 'Sing the psalms. We've been singing them for thousands of years....sing the psalms!' Sing? It sounded too simple, yet worked for me, putting me on a solid path of daily communion with God and confirming my call to oblature.

The days of quiet at Gethsemani readied me for meeting the masses of Merton scholars at Bellarmine University. Walking into the conference hall, I was greeted by 500 chairs in neat, long rows.

Seated in them would be people from twenty countries, including four of us Camaldolese oblates - Matt Fisher (Pennsylvania) and from California, Eleanor Errante, Bobbe Rockoff, and me. Recalling the 2012 visit of the Archbishop of Canterbury to our Monastero di San Gregorio in Rome, we oblates made a point to personally welcome Rowan Williams, one of ITMS's keynote speakers.



Abbey of Gethsemani

Besides Rowan Williams ('Words, War, and Silence: Thomas Merton for the 21st Century'), other keynote speakers were James Finley ('Thomas Merton: Mystic Teacher for Our Age'), Bryan N. Massingale ('Engaging Racism: Thomas Merton and the Unfinished Quest for Justice'), and Christine Bochen ('Striving for Mercy: Envisioning the Church in the 21st Century'). Each

successive speaker built on the previous one, creating a crescendo of intensity, heightened interest, and standing ovations.

Alternating with the keynote speakers were numerous concurrent sessions, each with so many enticing offerings. Deciding which ones to attend was overwhelming! One session choice was made for me as my colleague, Steve Georgiou, and I presented 'Sea &



Jacqueline Chew and Steve Georgiou

Sky,' Robert Lax's poetry interspersed with piano interludes. Together with the audience we journeyed through the hour from the discordant, 'why do the nations groan?,' through, 'if i were a bird, i would fly to the ends of the sea;' to the unitive, 'the sea may reach, the sea may reach, the sky looks down, looks down.' At the conclusion, it was gratifying to hear one listener comment, 'I came

expecting to hear poetry and piano music but what I experienced was prayer.'

Of the numerous people I encountered, of note was Donald Grayston, Anglican priest from Vancouver, B.C. I grabbed the last copy of his new book, *The Camaldoli Correspondence: Thomas Merton and the Noonday Demon*. Previously unpublished letters chronicle the 3-year correspondence between Merton and our Camaldolese motherhouse, Monastero di Camaldoli, to which Merton contemplated moving. Listed in the book's acknowledgements are, 'Very special thanks to Thomas Matus....The book is much stronger for his contributions.'

On the final morning of the conference, a few of us left early (don't tell!) in order to attend Mass at the Abbey of Gethsemani and have a brief visit with Br.

Patrick Hart (Merton's last personal secretary). I stayed for the remaining liturgical hours, concluding with my beloved Compline. Following the column of people up the aisle for the Abbot's evening blessing, imagine my surprise when suddenly I was sprinkled with water by Rowan Williams!

Returning that night to Bellarmine University, a wave of loneliness washed over me as I saw the now empty campus, absent 499 conferees. Early the next morning I nostalgically returned to the conference room, only to shockingly discover the 500 chairs gone, replaced by a sea of red-and-white uniformed Little Leaguers practicing baseball drills!

Time moves on...but the impact of the ITMS conference and my retreat at the Abbey of Gethsemani lives on in my heart. ♦

Jacqueline Chew, Oblate OSB Cam

Musings on an Iona Pilgrimage with John Philip Newell



Pilgrimages always start long before the actual departure and this one began around 14 years ago when our neighbor gave my partner Eleanor and me a copy of John Philip Newell's first prayer book, *Celtic Benediction*. I had just delved into Christianity and Eleanor had just returned to it. John Philip's words accompanied our journey.

'...Show to me this day
amidst life's dark streaks of wrong and suffering
the light that endures in every person.
Dispel the confusions that cling close to my soul
that I may see with eyes washed by your grace...'
John Philip Newell

The prayers have the rhythm and cadences of Celtic prayer and include quotes from the New Testament. John Philip's next prayer book continues that rhythm and reaches back to the Hebrew Bible. This is particularly important for me as my continuing Christian journey begins to take me back to my Jewish roots. The most recent prayer book includes the Koran and the next, in the imagining stage, will include the wisdom of the East.

John Philip's widening spiritual sensibility is part of what draws us to him. All the more with the publication of his most recent book, *The Rebirthing of God: Christianity's Struggle for New Beginnings*.

The actual journey to Iona has its own rhythm and cadences. Beginning for us with some days in Edinburgh, then journeying by train to Oban, the point of departure for the Hebrides Islands. The ferry first to Craignure on the Isle of Mull. A few days in the tiny port of Tobermory and finally another ferry from Fionnphort on the far side of Mull to the Holy Isle of Iona.

The island is small, less than two miles wide and three miles long. The Celtic Christian term 'thin place' originated to describe places like Iona - where the distance between the seen and the unseen disappears, where reality shifts and changes.

Walking from the tiny port the vista is dominated by the old nunnery. Built around 1200 and unrestored, its original walls are surrounded by grass, flowers and the occasional cat - open to what John Philip



The Nunnery

calls the cathedral of sun, sea, and sky. Continuing down the main road we pass a few organic gardens, a craft shop or two, and soon come to our hotel, the St.

Columba. From here it is only a short walk to the old Benedictine Abbey also built around 1200 but restored by George MacLeod, as he founded the ecumenical Iona Community, beginning in the 1930's. The walls enclose the ancient cemetery, the Abbey, and around the other side, a quite small stone chapel where we go to meditate morning and evening. The sea and sky are all around us and the land covered with sheep. Interspersed among the myriad sheep and their lambs are three Highland cows and their calves. Houses are few. More plentiful are beautiful low stone walls built by the early settlers as they cleared the land of rocks so the pastures and sheep would thrive. The walls are everywhere, punctuated by various gates. The combination of walls and gates and the few roads turn the island into a dynamic series of crossroads.

'Thus says the Lord:
Stand at the crossroads, and look,
and ask for the ancient paths,
where the good way lies; and walk in it,
and find rest for your souls.'

Jer 6:16-22

And we do. Our quiet retreat days are spent walking, listening to talks, attending services at the Abbey, and being in community with a diverse international group of pilgrims. We make a mandala on the beach as we consider wholeness. We go to the Bay of New Beginnings and let go of what we must. We climb to the isle's highest point to regain perspective.

'If you came this way,
Taking any route, starting from anywhere,
At any time or at any season,
It would always be the same: you would have to put off
Sense and notion. You are not here to verify,
Instruct yourself, or inform curiosity,
Or carry report. You are here to kneel
Where prayer has been valid...'

T. S. Eliot Four Quartets ♦

Bobbe Rockoff, Oblate OSB Cam