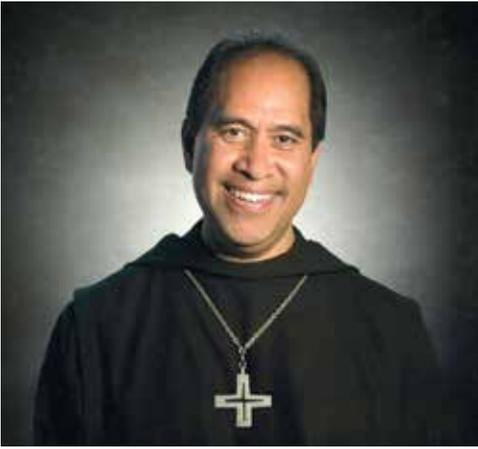
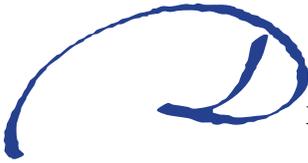


THE VALYERMO  
*Chronicle*

ST. ANDREW'S ABBEY



*Lent, 2014*



EAR FRIENDS,

LAST WEEK I WAS HAVING ONE OF THOSE days. Things were just not working out the way I was hoping. There were the typical things: I woke up late because I forgot to set my alarm; I locked myself out of my office; I was not able to access my email because of a virus. I also attempted to give an inexpensive gift to someone as a sign of encouragement, but before I could give the gift, I dropped it and it broke! What really put me over the edge that day however was when I tried to offer a word of encouragement to someone. The person misunderstood what I was trying to do, and he actually became annoyed with me. I was in a daze. I couldn't believe all this was happening in one day. In frustration I threw my hands up in the air, glared toward the heavens and asked, "Why do I even try?"

When I finally calmed down and made time for myself, I went to the chapel

to pray and reflect. As I looked at the crucifix hanging behind the altar, I was reminded of the fact that even though Jesus performed many good works, He was ridiculed by family and friends; even though He loved, He was hated; even though He gave life, He was put to death.

I realized that I was too absorbed in what I was trying to accomplish; I was so focused on my personal goals for the day that I had lost sight of God. Living in a performance-based culture, the tendency is to place a lot of emphasis on results. Thankfully God is not like that. He is not concerned with results. Results are irrelevant to Him, since He is capable of creating any kind of results He wants. He is more concerned with faithfulness, whether or not we will do what He asks.

I walked away from the chapel that day with the thought that God was helping me to understand the importance of detachment; detachment from the things like pride, ego, 'success,' self-centeredness; detachment from the things that make me angry and frustrated, lest they control me.

The season of Lent gives us an opportunity to practice detachment, not simply to give up candy, coffee and coke, but to surrender to God all those unnecessary interior things that fill our heart so that He alone is our heart's desire. When God alone fills our heart there is room for nothing else, yet we have everything.

*Abbot Damien ✧*

**NOTE FROM THE EDITOR**

This issue of the *Chronicle* focusses on Lent as a time of reflection, recollection, repentance and ultimately renewal in the Risen Christ. We look to Our Lady as she who unties the knots of sin in our hearts; towards our tears for failures and the recognition of God's love always filling the emptiness that we create for and in ourselves. We affirm in this season of Lent that there is in fact Light that is born out of Darkness, and Life that is given despite that Darkness. We look at a Christ crucified again and again in the struggles, pains, needs and wants of our own hearts, and those of others who struggle to survive.

In a real way that is why the cover image for this *Chronicle* is Caravaggio's strange, dark altarpiece *The Seven Acts of Mercy*. Housed in a backstreet church in Naples this painting depicts, like lightning flashes, the corporal acts of mercy that dispel a world of shadow and night. Caravaggio's grim and desperate world is indeed in need of redemption. His world is not as antiseptic and ordered as our own might appear, but it nevertheless reflects the eternal struggle we all face when we face the dark. Each act of Mercy depicted is taken from Matthew 25:36–7. There is also the act of mercy added by the medieval Church: the burial of the dead. It is an overcrowded and roiling painting of life at its most fragile, and of mankind at its most needy. One commentator on the painting describes it as collapsing "time and space, drawing the whole world and all the world's history into its dark center.... This one dark street, this scene of desperation and pain and death, is the painter's microcosm for the brutality of existence itself. Briefly, it has been blessed and transfigured ... Here, the thirsty drink, the homeless are given shelter, and a sword is used not to kill a man but to put clothing on his back" (Graham Dixon, *Caravaggio*, p. 344). I invite you to meditate on this painting during Lent.

—*The Editor*

# THE VALYERMO *Chronicle*

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*The Seven Acts of Mercy* (detail)  
Michelangelo Merisi da  
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**M**OST OF THE PRISONERS WERE ON visits or at work, but as I walked along the fourth floor landing on chaplaincy rounds, James emerged from his cell and said, “Hiya, Brother Ben, how’s things?” James was a tall young man, a good four inches taller than me, with a shaved head and big biceps. When he was not in prison he struggled with addiction and with the consequences of not taking the medicines prescribed for his mental health problems.

I’m not very good at pretending, so I answered, “To tell the truth, James, things aren’t that great at the moment.”

“Why? You should be happy, monn!” he said, playing on his Jamaican roots. “You can go home in a couple of hours. You can go to the pub. You can see women. You’re free! Why aren’t you happy?”

With a trace of exasperation I found myself over-ruling my censor and responding, “James, you have no idea what a burden it is to be me!”

He blinked, surprised. Then slowly he reached his hand out and rested it on my shoulder, then gripped it and looked me steady in the eye with such tenderness and affection that I understood that, in fact, he knew exactly what I meant. We held our eyes locked for about three seconds, then he let go of my shoulder, we grinned a bit sheepishly at the intimacy of the moment and went our separate ways. Of such little shared passions tiny Easters are made, the miniature seismic shifts that reduce the need of earthquakes as our personal tectonic plates slowly move, reconfiguring inner continents. I had felt that sense of burden many times before, but had never expressed it out loud. The truth of it continued to ring in my memory.

I have thought often, since that day, of the recognition we shared in that moment, James and I. “The burden of self.” Is that the daily cross Our Lord tells us we must carry (Luke 9:23)? Analysing the thought doesn’t help—if my self is my cross, who is crucified on it and who drives the nails? No, let’s not get into a



# *The* **BURDEN** *of* **SELF**

BEN HARRISON, MC

discussion of Freudian, Jungian, transactional or other modes of compartmentalizing the psyche. That isn't the point. The point is that I sometimes experience myself as a lump, a blob, an awkward, shifting bulk of muscles, nerves, thoughts, cravings, terrors, memories, aspirations, needs and sensations all kneaded together into one big ball of pitch like Br'er Rabbit's tar-baby. And it *is* a burden, no question. And I *don't* know what to do with it or about it.

I know that this bundle of tangled energies and inertias is not simply my physical body; I am not so polarized as to fall for the old Manichaeian body-spirit split. Maybe the sense of burden is what St. Paul calls the flesh, that is, the whole struggling self: the body and mind with all their urges, pains and spasms, euphorias and ecstasies, weaknesses, handicaps, defects and dreams. Whatever it is, this onus of self, I can feel the heaviness of it, the viscosity, the amorphousness. And I don't seem to be able to get rid of it.

Jesus said that, if we want to follow him, we have to take up our cross daily and carry it, following him, so the obvious thing to do is to carry it. I've heard lots of meditations and homilies on the theme. Some preachers say we don't need to manufacture our own crosses, life supplies enough. Others say we only have to carry the crosses that God wills for us and not those we ourselves or others impose on us, but how do we know which ones those are? The fact is, I'm stuck with this self – I'm stuck *to* this self, so I may as well accept the fact that it's there and that it's burdensome and get on with it.

## Acceptance

Acceptance helps by reducing the friction, the drag—my inner resistance, my rebelliousness, my resentment at being lumbered with this specific load of self. Acceptance of what, though? Acceptance at least of the fact that I have a burden, this particular burden, and that it is my lot to carry it the best I can. I can accept the fact that I belong to a species that tends to get tangled, snarled and mired in

messes, that tends to produce confusion and to need a lot of help resolving its problems.

Two people in very different situations once, independently, shared the same insight with me. One was a prison officer who had to retire early because he had a terminal degenerative illness. The other was the fraught mother of five whose youngest was seriously disabled. Both confessed that in anger and frustration they had initially cried out, "Why me?" But as time passed and acceptance settled in, they both changed that response to, "Why not me?" In effect they saw that many people had difficulties as great as theirs or greater and still managed to soldier on more or less graciously. In fact, I would say both of these people discovered that they were quite adept at carrying their particular cross and that doing so helped them to grow spiritually.

Perhaps for some people the sequence matures one step further, from "why me?" to "why not me?" to "*what* me?" They discover that their struggle with the burden of self clarifies things for them. They see that much of what they thought was of the essence of their personal identity is in fact superficial, accidental or expendable, and that their deep self is something finer, stronger, simpler and more subtle—a mystery held in pledge by the *Mysterium Tremendum*, to be revealed in the fullness of time.

Thus acceptance eases the process of carrying my burden of self by diminishing what impedes smooth forward movement. Radical acceptance can sometimes seem as revolutionary as putting wheels on luggage or sled-runners on an arctic cargo.

## Lightening the Load—Drying

I may not be able to get rid of the burden of self, but I can lighten it. When I imagine my self as a burden, the flotsam and litter of my being seem to be held together by a sort of thick, clayey mud. Other times the load seems like a mass of sodden, tangled rags. So, one way to lighten the load is to dry it out.

That means exposing it to air and sunlight. People in recovery from addictions learn that “we are only as sick as our secrets.” It helps immeasurably to find someone whom we trust with whom we can talk through our shameful secrets and our private terrors. We usually discover that our best-guarded treasures of guilt and weakness are not as shocking or as original as we imagined. Another result of this process is that we learn to take ourselves less seriously— even, with God’s grace, to laugh at ourselves. The reluctant chuckle, the hesitant sigh are palpable signs of healing.

The muck that binds our mud-ball of detritus is kept moist by our tears of self-pity, our spiteful spittle and our lustful drooling. As we expose all that phlegm and saliva to the light of day, bit by bit the clay dries, cracks and falls away, sometimes taking with it chunks of the debris embedded in it.

### **Lightening the Load— Dropping and Chopping**

One of the first times I visited St. Andrew’s, I was just beginning to discover the joys and consolations of a relationship with God. With the fervour of a novice I wanted to engage my whole being in that prayerful self-offering. My mind was popping with brilliant insights, my psyche was soaring with lofty inspirations, but my poor old body was feeling lonely and left out. Consequently, it was either sulking miserably out behind the kitchen, or plotting mayhem and rebellion in some dark corner. When I tried to please or appease my senses in the usual way, by indulging their desires, they took over and hijacked the whole operation. By trial and error I discovered that the best way for the body to participate in the spiritual life is not by letting it feel full but by letting it feel a certain salutary emptiness, unchaining it from its slavery to comfort and satiety. Lying in bed munching sweets isn’t the most effective spiritual practice.

Part of the program our Lord outlined for us to follow him was denying ourselves. In our

soft age that can sound very primitive and masochistic. We tend to want to bargain with ourselves, or with God. We say, “Well, I’ll give up tobacco, but you’ll have to make up for it by giving me dark chocolate.” Or, “If I can’t comfort myself with whiskey, let me at least have wine.” Sometimes I have to recognize that it is good just to say no to myself. That’s what denying myself means—simply saying no to that insatiable, needy, demanding part of myself that always wants more.

For many years I went running three or four times a week. First, let me make it clear that I didn’t do it because it was good for me. I did it because a friend made it look enjoyable and said it helped him feel more centered. That same friend advised me never to turn running into an obligation but to do it for the pleasure and only for as long as I enjoyed it. He knew that if it became a regime I would rebel. And for more than thirty years I continued to enjoy that exercise. Now that my knees no longer allow it, I sometimes have dreams that I am able to run again, and it is such a feeling of freedom, almost as good as my youthful dreams of flying. When I ran I wore shorts and a tee-shirt, or as little as colder weather would permit. When I swam I wore even less. We strip off all that impedes the flow of air or water around us. What the spiritual masters of old called asceticism is not primarily a way of subduing or punishing the body, but a way of lightening the load. It is a liberating discipline that allows us to chop off the snags and snarls that hook us, lets us drop the ballast that weighs us down, spiritually as well as physically. We can say no to heavy food and lying around on couches, but we can also say no to grumpiness and criticism of self and others.

To deny oneself can sometimes mean more than saying no to oneself. It can also mean disputing the self’s illusion of being the center of the universe. The earthy humour of humility allows us to see the absurdity of our own self-importance. Paul says (Gal 6:3) “If anyone thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself.” This is not nihilistic self-loathing but

the fresh, liberating air of truth. We are little creatures and we are sinners. We are not expected to control anything other than ourselves, and that imperfectly. We are not obliged to understand everything that's going on around us, and there is no commandment that we must be right at all costs. We are weak, fragile, fallible, easily hurt, subject to sickness and injury, often tempted, sorely tested and neither water-

germ- nor bullet-proof. And despite all that we can still conjure up delusions of grandeur! We are truly a marvel in our own eyes! The fact is, as spiritual giants go, I am definitely in the midget league, and in a contest of sinners I wouldn't win any prizes for style or competence.

### Sharing the Load

Just before Paul said what I quoted above about thinking ourselves something, he said something else, (Gal 6:2), "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ." And Christ himself said (Matt 11:28-30), "Come to me, all who labour and are heavily burdened and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble of heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden light."

A yoke is an instrument that allows a single load to be hauled by two oxen. So how is it that by taking up *his* burden as well as my own things will be easier and lighter? Strange math, that. Mind-boggling physics. But the fact is, when James and I linked eyes that day on the fours landing, we both felt free and we both continued our day lighter and more grateful. Was James my Simon of Cyrene that day, helping me carry my cross, my burden of self? And did I, somehow, revealing my own human weakness, help James carry his cross that day? Were we yoked together? Was Jesus himself the yoke?

It is a truism that sharing sorrows halves them and sharing joys doubles them. So it is not surprising that when we find a companion who is willing to help us carry our woes, our own burden becomes lighter. That is only reasonable. But the odd thing is when the position changes and it is I who help my friend carry his burden, her load. Then the true magic occurs. Because in doing so I experience a glorious lightness of spirit. At least for that moment I forget my own load because I am concentrating on my friend's. And I don't even experience my full share of my friend's burden because it is not invested with that whole onerous ponderousness of being *my* burden of self.



For is it not precisely the “my-ness” of my burden that magnifies the weight of it? Maybe that is the hidden wisdom of Peter’s advice (1 Peter 5:7): “Cast all your worries on [the Lord], for he cares about you.” By divesting ourselves of our anxieties, by signing ownership over to him, we shed the onus of possession. Our proprietorship of our burden of self adds to it the weight of shame, guilt and responsibility. “Left luggage” and unclaimed mail are not actually a burden for anyone. They just occupy space, and the Lord has plenty of that.

### Release

The way of the cross, the valley of the burden, is our way home. As I have said too many times in this article, life often seems like a burden. It is only fair to say as well, however, that there are days when it is not a burden at all. There are times when I feel free and unencumbered, like a mountaineer on a long trek when he has taken off his backpack for the night. There are even rarer days when I have felt like a kite dancing in the air, flown by the one who made the wind. Those are the foretastes of what it means to be released from the burden of self. Jesus had his Transfiguration on the mountain, when the three disciples got a glimpse of the glory that would be his when his long haul was ended. Perhaps those moments of exultation are our own little flashes of the transformation, tastes of the metamorphosis to come.

When I was a boy in elementary school, Miss Olive Clark used to come in once a week for a Bible class with the Protestant children (of whom I was one). She gave us an image of the new life in Christ which I still remember. Two little dragon-fly larvae that lived in the muck at the bottom of the pond were talking, and they observed that some of their peers would crawl up the stem of a reed and disappear above the water-line. One of them said, “I hope I never do that. I don’t like the idea of disappearing like that.”

The other one said, “But maybe there’s something up there, beyond that flat roof.

Myself, I sometimes feel an urge to climb one of those reeds myself.”

“Well,” said the other, “if you ever do, promise me that you’ll come back and tell me if there’s anything up there.”

“I swear I will,” he responded. And so one day in fact he did crawl up the stem, settled quietly on his reed and felt the sunlight warming his grubby little form. In time he emerged from the dried up crust of his former self, unable to believe the transformation. The wet, wiggly little slug had become a creature all delicate wings and air and sunlight. But he remembered his promise to his friend. That is why you see the dragonfly fluttering at the surface of the pond, trying to tell his friend the good news that all is well.

Yes, it is true that we often experience ourselves as a burden. It is true that I am my own cross, and will continue to be. I can make the burden more bearable, lighter in various ways, as we have seen. But it seems there is no way to avoid the pattern. If we want to follow the Lord we have to take up that cross and die to ourselves each day, trudging along the difficult path that leads to freedom and light-heartedness and joy. Perhaps the very burden that we bear so wearily now is what will be transformed into the sprinting legs and swimming arms and soaring wings that will turn us into creatures for whom gravity will no longer be our task master but our playmate. For the gravity of earth weighs us down, but the gravity of Christ draws us toward the heights. ✧



**Ben Harrison** is a *Missionaries of Charity* brother based in Manchester, England. He has been in brothers’ communities in Europe and the U.S. for twenty years. St.

*Andrew’s* has been an important anchor-point for his spiritual journey since his first visit in 1972.

CAN IT BE JUST ONE year since Pope Benedict gave such a gift to the church by reminding us that bishops can retire —

even the Bishop of Rome?

So many have remarked that in the smile of Pope Francis they see the smile of Blessed John XXIII and John Paul II. I know I do. I can't have been the only one to sob openly when Francis stepped onto the Vatican balcony and bowed for the blessing by the people in the piazza.

Something wonderful about Pope Francis may not be as evident as the change in tone he has brought to the office of bishop of Rome—his passionate devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Because of his Grandma Rosa (Rosa Margherita Vassallo Bergoglio, from the best book about him: Paul Vallely's *Pope Francis*, Bloomsbury, 2013), the Woman in Pope Francis's life is Our Lady.

Grandma Rosa's catechesis prepared our pope for the pivotal encounter he had with the Blessed Virgin Mary through two Austrian images he discovered in 1986 after almost two decades of leadership among his fellow Argentinian Jesuits, as master of novices, professor of theology, provincial, and rector.

All the biographers—but especially Vallely—tell the story of Father Bergoglio's anguished term (1973–1979) as Jesuit provincial during Argentina's "Dirty War" and his term as rector (1980–1986) of the seminary where he had trained for the priesthood. Wanting to finish a doctorate in theology,

he spent several months in 1986 in Germany trying to find a dissertation topic (which he never finished, by the way).

It was then that he visited the shrine of the icon of *Salus Populi Romani* (*Protector of the Roman People*, also known as Our Lady of the Snows), a 1570 copy commissioned by

Saint Francis Borgia and sent to his friend Saint Peter Canisius in Ingolstadt, Germany.

Father Bergoglio learned that it was in front of this painting that the seventeenth-century Marian mystic, Father Jakob Rem, S.J., prayed in for the fraying marriage of his friend, Wolfgang Langemantel. On "The Mary Page" (the most reliable internet source of things Marian) Richard Lenar, a graduate student in the International Marian Research Institute at the University of Dayton, says:

Over a period of 28 days, Wolfgang visited Father Rem four times and received advice from the holy priest, who was honored for his wisdom, piety and extraordinary intelligence....

During their meetings, Wolfgang and Father Rem would pray together and venerate the Virgin Mary. On the day of their last visit together, September 28th, 1615, Father Rem had been praying in the chapel of the monastery before an image of the Virgin Mary under the title of "Our Lady of the Snows." When the two men met, Wolfgang gave his wedding ribbon to Father Rem. (In the marriage ceremony of that time and place, the maid of honor joined together the arms of the bride and groom with a ribbon in order to represent their invisible union for the rest of their lives.) In a solemn ritual act, Father

"Mary,  
Untier  
of Knots,  
Pray  
for Us"

PAUL F. FORD, OBL. OSB



Rem took Wolfgang's wedding ribbon and lifted it up, while at the same time untying the knots of the ribbon one by one. As Father Rem smoothed out the ribbon, it became intensely white. Because of this happening, Wolfgang and Sophie were able to avoid a divorce and continue their marriage.\*

Their grandson decided to donate a shrine in their honor to their parish church, St. Peter am Perlach Church. For this shrine, the grandson commissioned a painting of Our Lady of Good Counsel in 1700.

The shrine was quickly nicknamed Kapelle Maria Knotenlöserin, the Chapel of Mary, Untier of Knots.

Hearing this story, Father Bergoglio

\* <http://campus.udayton.edu/mary/resources/MaryUntierKnots/UntierKnots.html>

visited the Langenmantel shrine and fell in love with the image and the devotion to "Mary, Untier of Knots." It's not hard to imagine that he presented Mary with the knots he needed untying (and has been doing so ever since). He brought back a picture postcard to Argentina and began to foster the devotion there. Richard Lenar continues:

Because of the spread of the devotion, thousands of followers of the Virgin Mary Untier of Knots now come to the St. Peter am Perlach Church to ask for her intercession regarding all their problems (knots). Besides marriage difficulties, these so-called knots include a range of other problems of unusual diversity. People come to Mary for assistance regarding health, work, disputes, family complications, personal problems, and conflicts both in the community and internationally. Many government officials, business people, Catholic groups and individual pilgrims have already placed themselves under the protection of the Virgin Mary Untier of Knots.



THE KAPELLE MARIA KNOTENLÖSERIN, TREGIST,  
AUSTRIA, DECORATED BY FRANZ WEISS.

One such new shrine, Kapelle Maria Knotenlöserin, was built in Tregist, Austria, and decorated by the great Catholic artist, Franz Weiss (b. 1921). The chapel, illustrated on this page, is dedicated to Our Lady, the Untier of the Knot of the 1986 Chernobyl disaster.

Mary, Untier of Knots, is not a new theme in Marian devotion; in fact it is one of the oldest. Saint Irenaeus (†202), the spiritual grandson of Saint John the Evangelist, tells us, “The knot of Eve’s disobedience was loosed by the obedience of Mary” (*Against Heresies*, Book III, Chapter 22).

I would never have made a good sailor and wasn’t even a good Boy Scout. Knots have never been my ‘thing.’ I remember the complications I made when I was first learning to tie my shoes and how I would need to take them to my mother or my grandmother to undo them. As a man in my seventh decade of life, the knots I have tied are much more complicated. Thanks to Pope Francis, I now have a mother who can undo them. ✠



**Paul F. Ford, Ph.D.**, Professor of Systematic Theology and Liturgy, St. John’s Seminary, Camarillo, California (1988–present). He is the first Roman Catholic to receive a doctorate in

theology from Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, California (1987). His doctoral dissertation was “C. S. Lewis: Ecumenical Spiritual Director: A Study of His Experience and Theology of Prayer and Discernment in the Process of Becoming a Self.” He is married to Janice Daurio, Ph.D., an oblate since 1972.

IMAGE © 2013 LANCIA E. SMITH - WWW.LANCIAESMITH



IN THE FINAL SUNDAY OF Lent, Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion, the Passion Story according to Matthew will be proclaimed. One way of conceiving the structure of Matthew's Passion Narrative is to consider it as a triptych, with the Last Supper and Jesus' crucifixion and death as the two side panels, and the events of Gethsemane followed by his arrest and trial as the central panel.

Before considering the narrative flow that this conception describes, a look at the original audience of Matthew's gospel is in order. Matthew wrote for a Jewish Christian community, most probably resident in Antioch in the 80s, suffering from the extreme dislocation occasioned by the destruction of the Jewish Temple in 70 A.D. Furthermore this Jewish Christian community most probably was one of several Jewish communities that fled Jerusalem, but the only one that professed belief in Jesus as Messiah. For this reason their relationship with Pharisaic Jews was precarious and synagogue worship with fellow Jews was no longer allowed. Thus the Matthean community was experiencing deep grief on several fronts, as they felt keenly torn from their Jewish roots. What was uppermost in their consciousness was a sense of betrayal by their fellow countrymen in exile from their homeland precisely because of their Christian faith in Jesus as the Lord's Anointed. Matthew's passion narrative emphasizes the theme that at the heart of the Passion of the Messiah was the explicit action of meeting betrayal with friendship.

As we look at the triptych's first panel of the Last Supper, the betrayal theme is introduced. Here Jesus states: "The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me." The careful reader will discern that this statement does not

# Matthew's Pas

FR. STEPHEN

apply to Judas alone, but to everyone at table that night would betray him. Their marked absence at the crucifixion scene is proof of the validity of this interpretation. However, Judas does distinguish his unique betrayal from that of the other disciples. While the others respond to Jesus' assertion of betrayal with the question, "Surely not I, Lord?," Judas' response minimizes Jesus' standing in his refusal to acknowledge him as Lord. He simply replies: "Surely not I, Rabbi?"

In the central panel of the triptych, the Gethsemane prayer of Jesus can be interpreted within the framework of betrayal, a theme not found so explicitly in Matthew's primary source, the Gospel of Mark, nor in the other two Gospels.

Drawing on his Markan source, the "cup" from which he prays to be delivered literally refers to his imminent death. But in the Matthean atmosphere where betrayal is rampant, the cup of bitterness is also equally metaphorical, caused by the desertion of his intimate friends and disciples. This desertion begins at the very time of Jesus' prayer in the garden as Peter, James, and John cannot stay awake in union with his prayer, but drift into a sleep that disregards his plight.

The following scene of Jesus' arrest continues the theme. Again, Judas refuses to acknowledge Jesus as Lord and addresses him as "Rabbi" and proceeds to kiss him. While Jesus is fully aware of Judas' intentions, he does not return the greeting with the same style of minimalism but calls the traitor "Friend." Jesus in Gethsemane lives out the ethic of the Sermon on the Mount that has characterized his teaching throughout Matthew's gospel.

# Passion Triptych

LENT 2014

COFFEY, OSB

What a dramatic example for the divided community of expatriate Jews living in Antioch, and in particular, for those professing faith in Jesus as Messiah. The story proclaims that responding to betrayal with equanimity and compassion really is an option.

Betrays abound in Matthew's passion narrative. Peter's denial is next. But despite his threefold denial which can be construed as a betrayal equivalent to that of Judas, Peter experienced not only remorse, but more significantly self-knowledge. "Peter remembered ... and he went out and wept bitterly." Thus, he remained disciple and witness throughout the remainder of the narrative. This lesson was not lost on Matthew's community. Facing weakness with honesty and mercy leads to greater strength and becomes a great gift for the rest of the community.

Judas, too, felt remorse, but lacked the inner resources to see beyond his own misery. In a scene unique to Matthew's gospel, he took the first step by returning the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, but when they rebuffed his gesture, his remorse turned to despair and he hanged himself. Matthew's message is clear: forgiveness is always available for one who believes that Jesus is the Christ. The door to forgiveness is closed by our own lack of understanding and self-compassion. The words of the high priests carry a hidden irony: "See to it yourself."

Jesus' crucifixion and death is the subject of the last panel of Matthew's passion triptych. "They offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall; but when he tasted it, he would not drink it." Unlike his source Mark, Matthew does not emphasize Jesus'

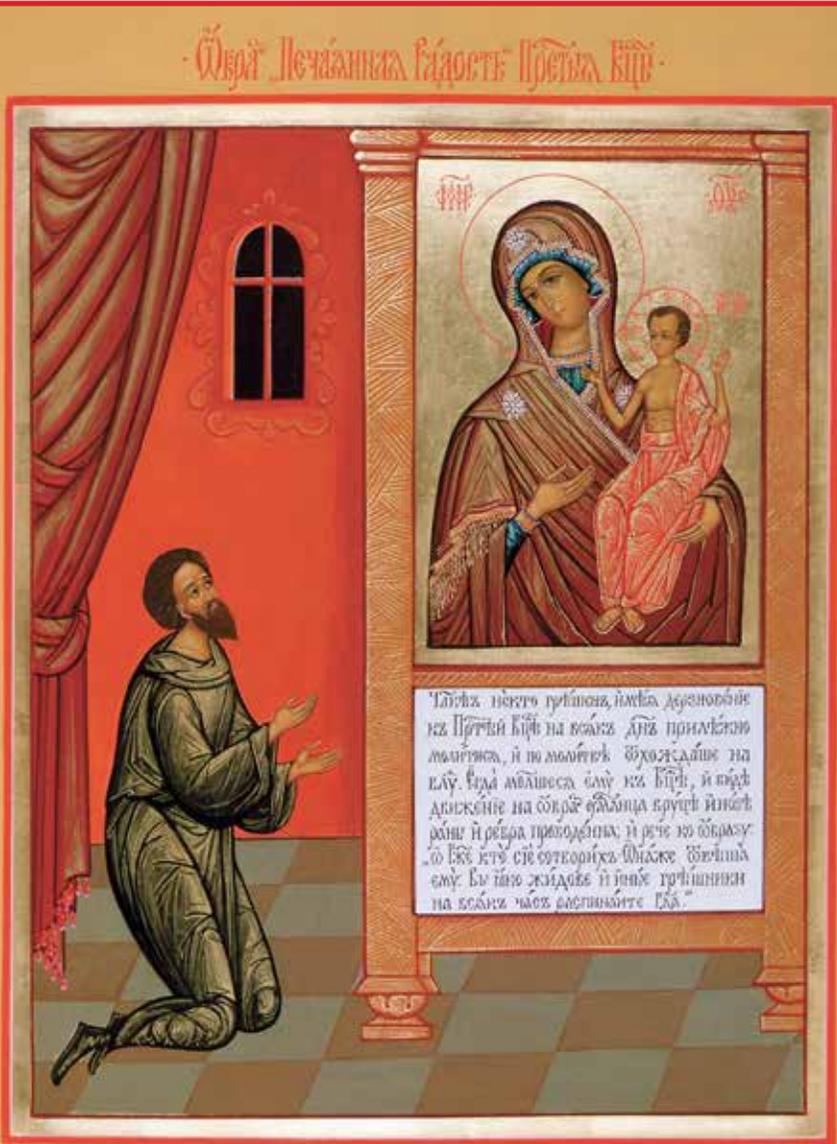
sufferings to the same degree, but what he shows in Jesus' refusal of the narcotic is that unlike the disciples in the garden, on the cross Jesus chose to stay awake and not to resist pain in its various forms. To his community at Antioch Matthew's message is clear. Because suffering is of value, stay present and awake to the experience because you will be sustained as was Jesus.

Simultaneous with the death of Jesus is a great earthquake and the tearing of the curtain of the temple. No earthquake appears in Matthew's source because this symbol is for his own Jewish community as since 70 AD every aspect of their lives was being shaken.

The treasures once kept behind the curtain were now accessible at any time to believers everywhere. The Messiah had come in Jesus and they could now reach God, know God and see God without the Temple.

The message of Matthew's Passion story, first addressed to his community in Antioch has meaning for readers of all generations. We will choose to set out, even if others do not. We will choose to be awake, even when others sleep. We will choose to confront fears, even in the most uncompassionate corners of our hidden psyches. We will choose kindness for ourselves, so that we like Jesus can become genuinely kind to others. And beyond the passion narrative together with Peter who "remembered," we too remember that Jesus Emmanuel is with us always to the end of the age. ✠

**Fr. Stephen Coffey, OSB**, a Massachusetts native, has lived monastic life in Olivetan monasteries in Pecos, NM, Waialua, HI, and San Luis Obispo, CA. He has ministered in several retreat centers and been involved in formation ministries. Besides serving as novice director, he has taught candidates for priestly and diaconal formation, and has trained spiritual directors. He is a candidate for the Doctor of Ministry degree through Washington Theological Union.



# Repentance *and* Joy

**HIEROMONK MAXIMOS  
HOLY RESURRECTION MONASTERY**

**O**NE OF THE BIG MISTAKES WE MAKE IN THE SPIRITUAL AND MORAL LIFE IS THINKING THAT THE WORK of repentance happens mostly in the brain or in the emotions.

All that leads to, I think, is repression or, what Anthony De Mello, calls renunciation.

Anytime you're practicing renunciation, you're deluded. How about that! You're deluded. What are you renouncing? Anytime you renounce something, you are tied forever to the thing you renounce. There's a guru in India who says, "Every time a prostitute comes to me, she's talking about nothing but God. She says I 'm sick of this life that I'm living. I want God. But every time a priest comes to me he's talking about nothing but sex". Very well, when you renounce something, you're stuck to it forever.<sup>7</sup>

Personally I'd rather use the word "repression" for the attitude De Mello's guru friend was describing. But whichever of these two "r" words you prefer both "repression" and "renunciation" (in the sense in which I'm using it here) are radically different from, and vastly inferior to, a third word with the same initial: repentance.

Repentance might well begin with an act of renunciation. It may even require a certain amount of forceful repression of impulses, especially temptations to destructive behaviour and addictions. But by themselves these are fairly feeble strategies for moral transformation. Their roots only reach down as far as the human will, a rocky field of thoughts and feelings where the seed of the Word is most vulnerable to dry winds and hungry crows.

If you want the seed of real repentance to take deep root and produce first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear (Matt 4:28), the seed needs to fall on deep soil. It must be grounded in something more substantial than the mere will. It has to grow deeply in the heart.

This is where joy comes in.

Joy is the indispensable condition for real repentance. I don't just mean once the nasty work of apologizing to God and neighbour

\* Anthony de Mello, *Awareness*, p. 15.

has been done we can begin to get on with the nice part of the spiritual life. Penance first, pleasure later? No. Joy is not a kind of spiritual dessert, something we get if we eat all our vegetables. Joy is the *condition without which no repentance can take place*. Joy is the whole meal.

If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may abide in you and that your joy may be complete. (John 15:10-11.)

Joy is the only context within which we can speak with any coherence of the Lord's commandments. Christianity is not merely belief in the existence of God. Any deist can manage that. Christianity is the conviction of the *abiding presence* of God, a presence we can name with the name of Jesus. We, quite literally, *en-joy* God's presence within us through Christ by sharing his Holy Spirit.

The commandments make sense only because they give practical shape to this intimacy with the Trinity. Without that intimacy, which we could just as easily call "grace", without that grace-filled intimacy the commandments belong to the realm of law and legalism. They're about servitude, not sonship. Only within that relationship of love and joy, mercy and peace, do the commandments assume their proper meaning.

Sometimes a rather strange notion can hit us. We think that sin robs us of joy. No. Sin and its attendant guilt, at their worst, can only take from us the *experience* of joy. Joy remains in us because its roots go far deeper than the mere will, they reach beneath the brain and its movements down into the deep places of the heart.

That may seem like a strange distinction. If I can't experience joy, what good is it? I think it makes all the difference in the world.

I sin. I want to stop sinning. If I'm not careful all the work I call "repentance"

happens in the joyless place of determined repression. Inevitably I fail. In fact, not only do I fail to stop from sinning again, I even find myself thinking all the time about my sin. This is the co-morbidity between repression and obsession that De Mello's guru noticed in his priests and prostitutes.

In my experience it's often far more effective to spend more of that repentant energy ignoring sin altogether, to put out into the deeps of the heart and search for the lost experience of joy. Yes, of course, that's a voyage that requires some practical steps. Confession, penance, firm desire to amend and so forth. But these are not the journey. They are the equipping of the ship. The voyage is a setting forth in search for joy, which is to say a search for the Christ within.

I'm not talking about the superficial manufacture of some counterfeit pleasure. I'm not talking about artificially repressing the waves of sorrow that come from not yet enjoying God's abiding presence. No, it's not about repressing those waves. The ship can only move forward upon those waves. And the energy it needs to move at all comes from outside itself: from the current come to life in those waves and in the Spirit who "blows where it pleases" (John 3:8).

In other words, repentance is both about joy and fuelled by the longing for joy. Joy fills repentance, to use a lovely metaphor by Saint John Climacus (d. 606) "like honey in the honey-comb." The opposite of spiritual joy is not sorrow. The two go together. The opposite of spiritual joy is the grinding pain of despair. A sweet, quiet sorrow that flows out of a longing for joy is something else altogether. Something else and something better.

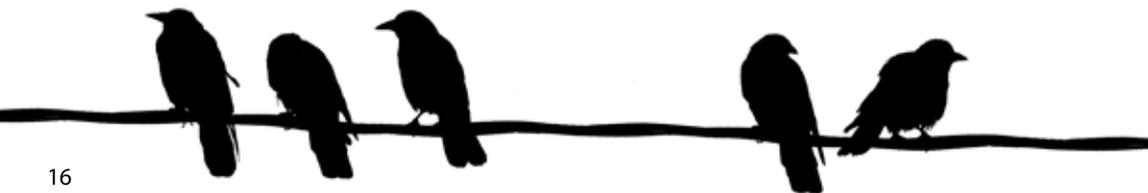
Lent in the Byzantine Rite begins with joy. At one of the early Lenten services we sing this hymn:

Let us joyfully begin the all-holy season of abstinence; and let us shine with the bright radiance of the holy commandments of Christ our God, with the brightness of love and the splendour of prayer, with the purity of holiness and the strength of good. So, clothed in raiment of light, let us hasten to the holy third-day Resurrection that shines upon the world with the glory of eternal life.

That metaphor of the journey is found often in the hymns of the season. The Great Fast itself is sometimes described as a "salt-sea" across which we must sail to reach the far shore of Paschal joy. Whatever image you like, the scriptural and patristic wisdom here distilled is that asceticism, prayer, fasting and other acts of penance, make sense only when they are motivated by and directed toward joy.

Lent, then, is the time for repentance. It is a season of bright sadness, of what St. Climacus described as the "joy-making sorrow." Fasting and other penances won't be much use if they're just about repressing temptations or renouncing pleasures. Those are thin soils and rocky ground. But planted in the deep soil of God-given joy, Lenten penances are simply outward signs of an inner search for the Source of life, the well-spring of joy Who abides in us. ✠

**Fr. Maximos Davies** is a priest-monk of the Romanian Byzantine Catholic monks of Holy Resurrection Monastery in St. Nazianz, Wisconsin. He is a graduate of the University of Sydney, Australia and of the Patriarch Athenagoras Orthodox Institute attached to the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, CA.



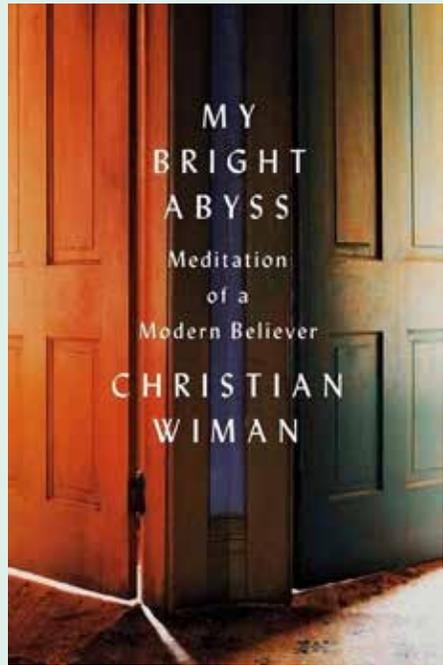
## QUARTERLY BOOK REVIEW

by fr. philip edwards, osb

**T**HIS IS ANOTHER BOOK THRUST into my empty hands by enthusiastic readers among whom I have become—take and read!!—*Augustinus redivivus* in our time. It may be that our enthusiasm will fade away with the Emperor's new clothes, but the author's unflinching openness to self and to "reality" keeps one continually "en garde".

He is a child of his (our?) time, birthed into a West Texas Baptist family and experiencing a "saved" experience as a young boy during an altar call – but which paradoxically drove him into the bowels of the building's boiler basement (all right, he simply said 'basement') where his father found him "incoherently ecstatic" instead of into the open arms of preacher and praising congregation (pp. 4–5)—and then in his twenties off to an East Coast "college and knocking about in various countries ... falling away from my childhood faith and transferring that entire searching intensity into literature" (p. 33), for the next two decades I would be so consumed with poetry that I would damn near forget the world" (p. 41).

As he tells us at the beginning in the preface, "I am a poet"—and, let us say, more than a poet, for he is editor of the prestigious *Poetry* magazine and magnanimously aware and appreciative of other poets past and present in the academic canon—"To be a poet in contemporary America is to be accustomed to, let us say, muted reactions to one's work. It is also—and this, I suspect, is not limited to America—to learn to write without much concern for audience, not because you don't want your poems to be read, but because in order for poems to honor the voice that creates them, a voice that, as even the most secular poets acknowledge, seems to come from 'somewhere else'—in order, that is, for the poems to BE poems—you have to acquire a monkish devotion to their



### MY BRIGHT ABYSS

*Meditation of a Modern Believer*

Christian Wiman

Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York © 2013

ISBN 978 0-374-21678-8

source, and to the silence within you that enables that source to speak.

"I'll never give up poetry—I wouldn't even know how—but ... I wanted to write a book that might help someone who is at once as confused and certain about the source of life and consciousness as I am.... When my life broke open seven years ago, I knew very well that I believed in something. Exactly WHAT I believed, however, was considerably less clear. So I set out to answer that question, though I have come to realize that the real question—the real difficulty—is how, not what. How do you answer that burn of being? What might it mean for your life—and for your death—to acknowledge that insistent, persistent ghost?"

His "creedal roots", then, are in the American experience of forging freedom from the restrictive oppression of monarchy, class and

inquisitorial hierarchy—set aside for the moment that these inevitable(?) factors seem to be inherent in any human society’s development, even here in the land of the Free—this brash and self-assured resolution that continually exasperates and annoys the inheritors, politically and ecclesiastically, of the established order of the Old Country. This is not a Newman nor a Hopkins courageously reconfirming and accepting what so often proves to be the crushing and smothering embrace of the holy mother Church of Rome. Here is rather an ally of the “low Church” voice of *Mere Christianity*, C.S. Lewis, companionable and appreciative but critically independent.

In his chapter, “God Is Not Beyond,” he follows an appreciative allusion to St. Teresa with a head on confrontation with a supercilious bit of early Mertoniana (p. 111):

“The reason why Catholic tradition is a tradition is because there is only one living doctrine in Christianity: there is nothing new to be discovered.’ A little bit of death from a thinker who brought the world so much life. Nothing new to be discovered? The minute any human or human institution arrogates to itself a singular knowledge of God, there comes into that knowledge a kind of strychnine pride, and it is as if the most animated and vital creature were instantaneously transformed into corpse. Any belief that does not recognize and adapt to its own erosions rots from within. Only when doctrine itself is understood to be provisional does doctrine begin to take on a more than provisional significance. Truth inheres not in doctrine itself, but in the spirit with which it is engaged, for the spirit of God is always seeking and creating new forms. (To be fair, Merton himself certainly realized this later in his life, when he became interested in merging ideas from Christianity with Buddhism.)” (p. 111).

This is the Bridegroom’s friend, crying in the wilderness, pointing out the Lamb, rejoicing to hear the Bridegroom’s voice, greeting the true seekers with words of fairness—and the religious circumscribers with words of fiery

condemnation! But what of the voice of the Bridegroom Himself? While not shrinking from affirming “the fires of Hell” and condemning harshly “scribes, Pharisees, ye hypocrites,” He looks with love at the true-hearted seeker, affirming the authority of “Moses’ seat” and the life-saving value of keeping the established order of custom and commandment, yet “loving unto the end,” invites into the mystery of “perfection,” of dispossession and sacrificial “thanksgiving” for the Other. As one American birthed into a (Calvinist rather than Anabaptist or Pentecostal) Evangelical tradition, who has tried to follow in the footsteps of Newman or Hopkins rather than Lewis and those confreres who when asked, “Where was the Church between Nicea and Geneva?” would sneer and ask, “Where was your face before it was washed?,” I still find what Newman called “the fullness of catholic faith” in both creed and communion that nurtures and sends forth both prophet and shepherd, a home and haven, where the Word is learned and handed on, pondered and acted on, hands joined in prayer and around the Eucharistic Table and reaching out to serve. This is not intended as an inquisitorial condemnation or proselytizing ploy, only an attempt to recognize limits and differences of expectation of what it may be to be a Christian. If the big-bang cosmologist and the introspective, ghost-haunted word master can both cry out with Hopkins that the Cosmos “is charged with the grandeur of God, which will flash forth like shining from shook foil,” let us rejoice and be glad, concurring with charismatic fervor “Amen! Hallelujah!! (or Alleluia for the more sedate Romans). The Holy Ghost will set your feet adancing—and set your heart adancing too...!”

I think it wonderful that the author, despite the tradition of his childhood denomination’s tradition of deferred baptism, has borne since birth the name of Christian, already a sort of indelible mark of personal DNA no matter how Gnostic or Antinomian he may have become. One would hope and imagine that he would discover a kindred heartfellow in the

present Pope (no strychnine here!). Especially apt would be the homily preached last May, Build Bridges, not Walls, used by the January issue of *Magnificat* (pp. 424–25):

“...the truth does not enter into an encyclopedia. The truth is an encounter—it is a meeting with Supreme Truth: Jesus the great truth. No one owns the truth.... [The Church] does not grow by means of proselytizing [but] by attraction, by witnessing, by preaching ... Christians who are afraid to build bridges and prefer to build walls are Christians who are not sure of their faith, not sure of Jesus Christ. When the Church loses this apostolic courage, she becomes a stalled Church, a tiny Church, a tidy Church, a Church that is nice to look at, but that is without fertility, because she has lost the courage to go to the outskirts, where there are so many ... victims ... of so many things.... Those who do not walk in order not to err, make the more serious mistakes.”

Enough of this errant effusion, as the Old Possum TSE was wont to say, “words slip, slide into imprecision,” and as this Euphuistic Poetaster concurred in a moment of youthful despair: “Words worth only what the heart’s frustration or mind’s meticolation may find ruth or truth in, are at their best perhaps but baggy shrouds, concealing what was true then not quite now”—but the Word has become/became, continues to become and always will become Flesh to pitch His tent among us to behold the glory of the only-begotten of the Father full of grace and truth. Open your heart to hear Christian’s heart—and hear what the Spirit says to the churches: Maranatha! ✘



**Fr. Philip** was born the year this monastic community was founded in China. Newman — especially his *Grammar of Assent* — was important in his own

intellectual formation. He made his monastic profession at Valyermo in 1962.



## A Meditation

BY BLESSED JOHN  
HENRY NEWMAN

**G**od has created me to do Him some definite service; He has committed some work to me which He has not committed to another. I have my mission—I never may know it in this life, but I shall be told it in the next.... I have a part in a great work; I am a link in a chain, a bond of connexion between persons. He has not created me for naught. I shall do good, I shall do His work; I shall be an angel of peace, a preacher of truth in my own place, while not intending it, if I do but keep His commandments and serve Him in my calling.

Therefore I will trust Him. Whatever, wherever I am, I can never be thrown away. If I am in sickness, my sickness may serve Him; in perplexity, my perplexity may serve Him; if I am in sorrow, my sorrow may serve Him. My sickness, or perplexity, or sorrow may be necessary causes of some great end, which is quite beyond us. He does nothing in vain; He may prolong my life, He may shorten it; He knows what He is about. He may take away my friends, He may throw me among strangers, He may make me feel desolate, make my spirits sink, hide the future from me—still He knows what He is about.

—From *Meditations and Devotions*, 400–1.

# AROUND & ABOUT THE MONASTERY

† **Father John Bosco Stoner, OSB**, died on February 1, 2014, at 70 years of age. He had been struggling with severe diabetes for a number of years. In the latter part of December Fr. John Bosco suffered a stroke and was hospitalized. He was born on April 12, 1943. He made his profession as a monk of Saint Andrew's Abbey, on August 5, 1967 and was ordained to the priesthood on July 7, 1976. A singular and important aspect of his apostolic work was his over twenty years as a Navy Chaplain. He retired from the Navy in 1995 with the rank of Captain. An article on Fr. John will appear in the next issue of the *Chronicle*. Please pray for him. Rest in Peace, John.

Away from San Anselmo, where he is completing his graduate studies, in Rome, **Father Cassian Di Rocco** spent his Christmas as chaplain to the Missionary of Charity Sisters in Armenia.

Two of the monastic community will be leading pilgrimages during the next months. The first is a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, from March 11–22, under the spiritual direction of Father Patrick, OSB. The second is a pilgrimage to Rome, from April 24 to May 5, led by Fr. Francis, OSB, to attend the canonizations of Blessed Pope John XXIII and Blessed John Paul II. This trip will also include visits to Assisi, Florence and Venice.

## MONKS' FEAST DAYS

- March 17 Father Patrick
- 19 Father Joseph
- 21 Brother Benedict
  
- April 25 Brother John Mark
  
- May 1 Brother Joseph
- 3 Father Philip
- 10 Abbot Damien
  
- June 29 Brother Peter

## A NOTE FROM FATHER MARTIN YSLAS, OSB:

The abbey is planning to renovate the lower level of the old stone building. The former site of the monastery gift shop and bookstore (for many years known as The Art Shop) will become a place for selling used books. The project will probably begin in the early summer, with the hope of opening the store in the Fall. Donations of books to the future store will be most welcome, but we ask that you hold on to your books until we are ready to receive them. Keep an eye on future issues of the *Valyermo Chronicle* for information on donations to the used book store. ✧

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# RETREAT CENTER *Calendar* WINTER-SPRING 2014

## MARCH 2014

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### LENTEN SILENT RETREAT

*Tuesday March 4–Friday, March 7*

Fr. Francis Benedict, OSB

### DESERT FATHERS

*Friday, March 7–Sunday March 9*

Fr. Luke Dysinger, OSB

### “CUARESMA”: EL TIEMPO

LITURGICA DE CONVERSION

*Sabado solamente, 29 de marzo*

Carlos Obando

## APRIL 2014

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### SPINNING A YARN

*Saturday, April 5*

Elizabeth Seward, Obl.OSB

### SACRED TRIDUUM

*Thursday, April 17–Sunday, April 20*

### MY LIFE—RIDDLE OR PARABLE? A MYSTERY TO BE UNFOLDED.

*Friday, April 25–Sunday, April 27*

Mary Rose Betten, Obl.OSB

Fr. Joseph Brennan, OSB

### PRIEST’S RETREAT: PRIESTLY SPIRITUALITY IN A CHANGING WORLD

*Monday, April 28–Friday, May 2*

Fr. Stephen Coffey, OSB

## MAY 2014

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### ARTIST’S RETREAT

*Monday, May 5–Thursday, May 8*

Deloris Hadow, Obl.OSB

### CULTURE AND LITURGY: WHY THEY MATTER

*Friday, May 9–Sunday, May 11*

Fr. Matthew Rios, OSB

### PRIEST’S RETREAT: LIVING MORE CONTEMPLATIVELY

*Monday, May 12–Friday, May 16*

Fr. Francis Benedict, OSB

### SACRED DANCE WORKSHOP: DANCING IN STEP WITH THE PAST INTO THE FUTURE

*Saturday, May 17*

John West, Obl.OSB

### THE FAITHFUL DOVE FLIES AGAINST THE WIND: A VISIT WITH BROTHER PETER

*Saturday, May 24*

Br. Peter Zhou Bangjiu, OSB

Michaela Ludwick, Obl. OSB

For complete details about retreat offerings, including descriptions and presenter information, please visit our website:

[SAINTANDREWSABBEY.COM](http://SAINTANDREWSABBEY.COM)

and click the Guest House link.

FOR RESERVATIONS,  
CALL THE RETREAT OFFICE:

(661) 944-2178

**JUNE 2014**

**PENTECOST RETREAT**

*Friday, June 6–Sunday, June 8*  
Fr. Francis Benedict, OSB

**DISCERNMENT OF SPIRITS**

*Monday, June 16–Friday, June 20*  
Fr. Aelred Niespolo, OSB

**CONTEMPORARY CINEMA AND SPIRITUALITY: SUMMER SESSION**

*Friday, June 20–Sunday, June 22*  
Nikki Tucker, Obl.OSB

**THE SACRED HEART OF TRANSFORMATION: A PERSONAL JOURNEY INTO WHOLENESS**

*Thursday, June 26–Friday, June 27*  
Kimberly Halperin Hitchcock, MA

**LACE KNITTING**

*Saturday, June 28, 9:00 am–3:30pm*  
Elizabeth Seward, Obl.OSB

**THE SACRED HEART OF TRANSFORMATION: A PRACTICUM FOR HEALING**

*Friday, June 27–Sunday, June 29*  
Kimberly Halperin Hitchcock, MA  
Fr. Carlos Lopez, OSB

**SPIRITUALITY AND EDUCATION**

*Monday, June 30–Wednesday, July 2*  
Elizabeth Seward, Ph.D., Obl.OSB  
Fr. Stephen Coffey, OSB

**JULY 2014 (partial)**

**A POWER GREATER THAN OURSELVES: REFLECTIONS ON TWELVE-STEP SPIRITUALITY**

*Friday, July 4–Sunday, July 6*  
Fr. Francis Benedict, OSB

**BENEDICTINE SPIRITUALITY: PURITY OF HEART**

*Monday, July 7–Friday, July 11*  
Fr. Francis Benedict, OSB  
Audrey Spindler, Ph.D., Obl.OSB

**INTERIOR CASTLE: ST. TERESA OF AVILA**

*Friday, July 11–Sunday, July 13*  
Sr. Gertrude Gillette, OSB, PhD

**A JOURNEY INTO GOD WITH ST. BONEVENTURE THE FRANCISCAN**

*Monday, July 14 – Friday, July 18*  
Fr. Stephen Coffey, OSB

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*If you wish to remember the Abbey in your estate planning, please call (661) 944-2178.*

*You do not need to make any donation to ask for our prayers.*

*Please place this donation form in the return envelope provided.*



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