



INCARNATION MONASTERY

A Quarterly Newsletter

BREAD OF LIFE

Issue 4 April 2011



LETTER FROM THE PRIOR

Dear Oblates and Friends,

As we approach the most holy liturgical season of Easter, I am meditating on the symbols—and realities—of darkness and light.

Of course when we wake up each morning to the light of the day, we personally come out of the darkness of the night into the “light of consciousness.” Thus every morning is for us a journey from darkness into the light, a prefiguring of death and then resurrection.

At the crucifixion of Jesus “when it was noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon” (Mk. 15:33; see also Mt. 27:45). But Christ then rose into a glorious newness of life. The Transfiguration had prefigured this, when Christ was seen by the three apostles as radiating glorious light.

We celebrate this liturgically in our solemn Easter celebration, when we gather around the fire for the initial prayers, then light the Paschal Candle and our personal tapers, then process into the chapel and rejoice in the Exultet. And so, we rejoice in the risen Christ, who is the light of the world. And we ourselves are called to be children of the light, and light to one another.

Of course we don’t want to demonize all darkness. The comforting dark of night permits us to rest. There can be for some an advanced stage of the spiritual life called “the dark night of the soul,” as we approach closer to God, who is such a superabundance of light that we might be spiritually

blinded, and seem to be in a mysterious darkness for that stage of the journey.

And we don’t want to divinize all light. There is the glitzy, neon lights inside the Los Vegas casinos, which shine on the huge galleries of gamblers 24/7. There is the horrendous flash of light of an atomic bomb (one exploded over Hiroshima on the very feast of the Transfiguration, August 6th, 1945). There were the scary flashes of light from the fires of the compromised nuclear reactors in Japan this last March.

So we have to discern. We need to follow the authentic lights that come to us from the Holy Spirit within our conscience, from the Holy Scriptures, from our faith communities, and from the Paschal proclamation that the Lord has risen, inviting us to enjoy daily glimpses of the luminous Kingdom of God.

**EVERY MORNING IS FOR
US A JOURNEY FROM
DARKNESS INTO LIGHT, A
PREFIGURING OF DEATH
AND THEN
RESURRECTION.**

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



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.

INVITATION TO RELATIONSHIP

We here at Incarnation were privileged to have Sr. Barbara Green as our Lenten Quiet Day facilitator. She is a reknown Scripture professor, Biblical scholar and author who is affiliated with the Dominican School of Philosophy and Theology at the GTU here in Berkeley. She worships regularly with our Incarnation community, and this is the first time we have been the recipients of her knowledge and wisdom. For me, it was a special gift to hear Sr. Barbara because I took two Scripture courses from her as an undergraduate many years ago, and it was these courses that inspired me to pursue further Scripture study both as an undergraduate Theology major and as a graduate student at the Franciscan School of Theology.

Barbara used two passages from Jeremiah to address a question posed in Job 2:10, that being “Should we accept only good from God and not accept evil?” Barbara challenged us to look at our own experiences and reflect on what we think, feel, believe and hope about God’s agency or role in “bad things” that happen to creatures. This challenge touched me intensely as I am dealing with both my brother’s life threatening illness and unethical behavior on the part of my coworkers.

Barbara took us deep into the verses of the prophet Jeremiah, whom I normally have viewed as negative and full of reprimands from God. Through Barbara’s exegesis, I discovered wonderful images of God I had never before considered. God was shown as weeping, grieving, fragile, and regretful in response to human behaviors. These images smash the stereotypical images that I have had of God; He/She is so much more than the all-powerful being that brings misfortune, disease and bad luck as punishment for wrongdoing, and prosperity, good health and great relationships as rewards for good behavior. As I listened to Barbara, I sensed my perceptions of who God is expanding to the realization that God is beyond all perceptions.

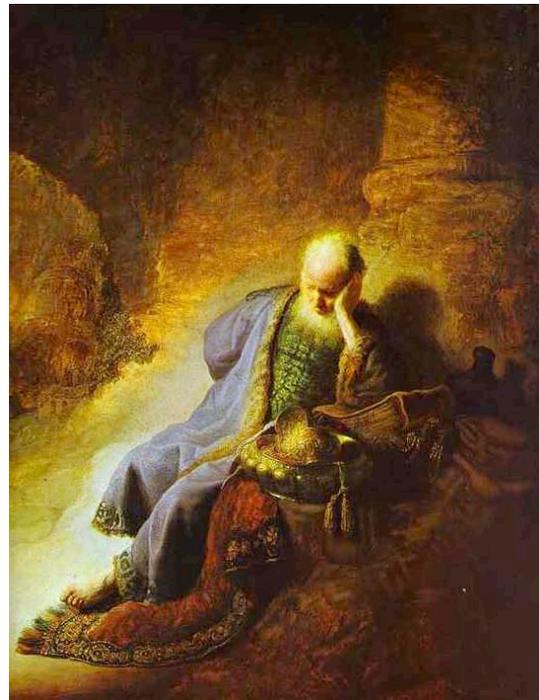
Another reflection that touched me during that presentation was that the emphasis changed from God’s role in and responsibility for our experiences to our response to God’s invitation for relationship as we face the various positive and negative experiences in our lives. I saw God as waiting for me to give up the illusion of my autonomy and inviting me to immerse myself into relationship with both God and others.

For me, a significant part of maintaining and deepening my relationship with God is immersion into Scripture on a regular basis. Barbara showed us how God self-discloses in Scripture, and as Camaldolese,

lectio divina is the primary way we deepen our relationship with God, and learn what God wishes to teach us. The exegetical process and *lectio* are for me the engagement of my mind, heart and soul, and aside from being a mother, nothing else in my life has ever been able to satisfy me in that way.

What did I take from the Quiet Day? I took the revelation that experiences are just that—experiences. God is there loving me through both positive and negative experiences, and what counts is how I respond to God’s invitation for love. What counts is my relationship with God, but also my relationship with others. I can respond to my brother’s illness by following his example and seeing every day as a gift. I can respond to the evil that “splashes” onto me at work by treating every person at work with respect, compassion and love. It’s a wonderful way to travel through Lent. ♦

Theresa Smith, Oblate O.S.B. Cam.



Rembrandt. The Prophet Jeremiah Mourning over the Destruction of Jerusalem. 1630. www.abcgallery.com, accessed April 14, 2011.

OF GODS AND MEN

Of Gods and Men is an eloquent, deeply moving, exquisitely beautiful film that portrays a community of French Trappist monks in strife-torn Algeria in the 1990s as they face the decision to leave or stay after a group of foreign workers is massacred by Islamic fundamentalists. (You may have read their story at the time of their abduction March 27, 1996, fifteen years ago to the very week of the writing of this review.)

The film begins with images of the monks' simple life of prayer, gardening, beekeeping and close, intimate connection with the Muslim villagers they serve through their clinic. One of the opening scenes shows the monks sharing in the Cana-like festivities of a villager's celebration of what appears to be their son's Islamic equivalent of a Bar Mitzvah. Then as reports come of the outbreaks of violence, and under pressure by the government to leave the country, the monks grapple with the choice before them.

The film exquisitely portrays the deeply individual personalities, perspectives and struggles of each monk ... and the unique movement and growth of each in this process of discernment, showing the prior transition from his initial autocratic decision to a more humble openness; a younger monk's struggles with fear and doubt; and the gradual realizations, insights, and comings to deeper understanding of each monk in his own way.

Throughout, the interspersal of scenes of the monks at prayer and chanting draw us into the prayerful, deeply contemplative quality of their lives. (The actors spent a month training in Cistercian and Gregorian chant, and lived for week in a monastery to prepare for their roles; and one, a non-Catholic, prepared himself by praying every day for a month). And the words of the chants, prayers and liturgy readings form an integral element of the movement in the unfolding of the story.

So much is communicated in simple scenes such as one where the prior goes into the asthmatic doctor's cell at night to ever so gently remove his glasses and book from his sleeping hands and turn off the light. Or the scene, towards the end, of old Br. Luc's face against the painting of Christ carrying his cross.

In one of the last scenes, the music of "Swan Lake" plays while the monks share wine and supper: it is the most powerfully expressive and beautifully exquisite filmic scene I have perhaps ever seen, as the camera moves from face to face, capturing the changing expressions and emotions, and deep connection and love among the monks, as the mood of the music moves from the lighter and more joyous, to the coming in of a darker, more somber and foreboding, motif.

In the center of the film, the fundamentalist militants pay a visit to the monastery to get medicine. In a riveting scene the prior quotes a verse from the Quran on the closeness of Muslim and Christian belief to the militant leader, who in turn completes the verse, and proffers his hand. The prior calls after him to tell him that this night is their celebration of the birth of Jesus. In the midnight liturgy which follows, the prior offers his reflections on the Incarnation.

In the end, the monks' choice to be faithful to their love and deep bond of faith—to each other in community as monks; to the God whose call they'd responded to; and to the

villagers with whom their lives were entwined in trust, friendship and service—was the ultimate living out of that centrality of the incarnation of love, that same self-emptying of Christ to live among us that their feast of Noel was celebrating, and the continuing ongoing birth and incarnation of that love in each of their lives that the prior spoke of in his homily that night.

John Kiser, whose book *The Monks of Tibhirine* was heavily drawn upon in the making of the film, replied to the question of why the monks stayed on thus: "They stayed on for the same reason a mother or a nurse exposes herself to danger to take care of a child with TB or cholera. As Trappists, they had taken vows of stability and poverty. Trappists commit themselves to stay with their chosen community. They had developed strong bonds of friendship and trust towards their Muslim neighbors who reciprocated that friendship. That meant sharing in their suffering and insecurity, which was no less than that of the monks..."

The monks had the choice of evacuating, just as, only days ago, the news reported the U.S. was sending planes to Japan to evacuate any Americans there. And Jesus had the choice to not go down into Jerusalem; he'd been reminded, in the temptations in the desert, that he only needed to call on heavenly angels to evacuate him to safety. In a very real way, the monks' presence among the people was an incarnational living out of the spirit of Christ's love, and the same faithfulness to that love to the end. To end by quoting from a couple of reviews:

"*Of Gods and Men* is a profound, immaculately acted movie. Its words are carefully considered, its images eloquent. The subject matter is urgently topical, the themes raised eternal and universal." —the *Guardian*

"It is a masterpiece of such exquisite quality it had me floored. It is probably the best film I have ever seen. And no, I am neither French nor religious." —an individual blogger

Other excellent reviews:

<http://www.observer.com/2011/culture/movie-review-i-of-gods-and-meni-0>

www.guardian.co.uk/film/2010/dec/05/of-gods-and-men-film-review

www.boston.com/ae/movies/articles/2011/03/18/of_gods_and_men_a_spiritual_journey_to_the_unknown

www.csmonitor.com/The-Culture/Movies/2011/0226/Of-Gods-and-Men-movie-review

And if you have seen the film, the following website offers a rich wealth of background about the monks and events portrayed in the movie:

<http://nunraw.blogspot.com/2011/01/reviews-of-atlas-monks-film-award-and.html> ♦

Zoe Newman

“THE LORD GIVES TO HIS BELOVED WHILE THEY SLEEP”

The Bible is all about light, especially the light of day. The God who manifests in creation and in relationship with all peoples comes forth like a bright dawn and floods the Scriptures with light; this is what theologians call “public revelation.”

The exiled prophet confirms this in Isaiah 45:19, where God says, “I did not speak in secret, in a land of darkness; I did not say to the offspring of Jacob, ‘Seek me in chaos.’” The “hidden God” of Israel (Isaiah 45:16) comes out of hiding and becomes, to the eyes of faith, an actor in human history, in the full light of day.

God’s manifestation in Jesus is luminous like noon. The first letter of John opens with these words: “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life, — the life was made manifest, and we saw it.” And later, John says, “God is light, and in God there is no darkness at all” (I John 1:5). In the gospel according to John, Jesus says: “Walk while you have the light, lest the darkness overtake you... While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become children of light.”

All this is beautiful, but actually we do not live in a land of eternal sunshine. Day gives way to night. Creation itself, in the Genesis myth, began at sundown: “There was evening and there was morning, one day” (Genesis 1:5). Humans are not nocturnal creatures; our nature makes us rise with the dawn and go out to do our daily work, and then we go home and sleep.

Sleep has been studied intensely, and still the experts do not know why we sleep. Some creatures can rest half their brain at a time; others simply rest and stay still, but do not sleep. Humans and other day animals go completely under at night, and bears and dormice sleep through the winter. Some sleep scholars think that we sleep in order to dream—personally, this is my favorite reason for going to bed.

God speaks to us beloved while we sleep. Another translation of my favorite Psalm verse (127:2) simply says, “The Lord gives his beloved sleep.” The gift is sleep itself, and the dreams that come with it are the best gift of all. To me, the verse suggests Paul’s doctrine of salvation by grace. We are not saved by the works we do, the works of law, but by the grace that comes through faith, hope, and love.

The Rule of Benedict tells monks to say their last prayers (Compline) while it is still light, so that they will not need a lamp to read the prayers. Then they go to bed and sleep until they have digested all their food (RB 8:2). Romuald also wanted the monks to have uninterrupted sleep from sundown, and then get up for Vigils and stay up for reading and work. So what schedule did the Camaldolese follow, when I joined them in 1962? We went to bed around 8 p.m., and then bells called us to church at 1:30 a.m., for an hour of Psalms in Latin.

I loved it at first—novices love everything at first!—but five and a half hours are not enough sleep for anyone, young or old. Sure, we had permission to go back to bed until 5:30, but quite soon after the novitiate I started having trouble

with this second sleep, and it stayed that way for five years. Ruined for life: I still wake up at 1:30!

Why did we do this to ourselves? Neither Benedict nor Romuald wanted monks to suffer insomnia. But the important thing is that we finally learned our lesson, and now no one is required to get up before 5:30 or so. I am glad we have made a full night’s sleep a regular part of our spiritual practice. It means we have accepted God’s gift to the beloved. Regular sleep also makes us accessible to dreams, from which we can learn so much about ourselves and our relationships.

Sleep experts suggest a remedy for insomnia: make your going to bed a kind of ritual. Keep a strict schedule. No serious reading or answering email after supper. I sleep on a futon; so the chief ritual gesture is unfolding it and spreading out the bedroll on it, with the pillows. Then the simvastatin (cholesterol med), but no sleeping pill. Switch on the night light, turn off the reading light, and get under the covers. That is the time and place for Compline, and usually I doze off in a quarter hour. If I have to get up during the night, I keep my left eye closed—if it works for whales, maybe it will work for me (whales sleep half a brain at a time).

When I was a junior monk at New Camaldoli, having a really bad time with sleep deprivation, someone gave me the prayer of Gertrude the Great (1256-1302) for a good night’s sleep: it did help.

“By your eternal and undisturbed repose in the bosom of God the Father, by your peaceful rest in the womb of the Blessed Virgin, by your ecstatic delight in the hearts of those who love you, I ask, O most loving Lord, that you would mercifully grant me the sleep I need, not for my selfish advantage, but that my tired body may be refreshed to work for your eternal praise and glory. Amen.” ♦

Fr. Thomas Matus, O.S.B. Cam.



Rembrandt. St. Joseph's Dream. 1645. www.abcgallery.com, accessed April 16, 2011.

“THE COMMUNITY THAT PRAYS TOGETHER”

“...stays together.” Yes, that’s a cliché, but also a reality and more!

For years I have gone to retreat centers, where after sharing sweet silence together, the retreatants disperse, never to see one another again.

When oblate Marty Badgett moved to the Bay Area from Texas, he shared how powerful an experience it was for his previous community to “pray together.” My mind agreed—“Okay, that sounds good”—but experientially, what was Marty talking about? After all, at Incarnation Monastery, our community is together for mass, the office, Quiet Days and fellowship. How different could it be to “pray together” even more?

I was not able to attend the inaugural Incarnation Monastery Silent Day of Prayer, held during Advent 2010. Such enthusiasm followed, that immediately two more Days of Prayer were planned. Having no formal training in any style of prayer or meditation and slightly intimidated by this Day of Prayer, I nevertheless felt encouraged hearing a fellow oblate exclaim, “I could do it!”

So in March 2011, for our Lenten Silent Day of Prayer, I arrived with an open heart awaiting this new experience. I found our guides, Marty Badgett and Bill McLennan, relaxed,

gentle, organized and encouraging. There was a natural flow from sitting and walking prayer, silent periods, the meal and video (my first exposure to Fr. Thomas Keating’s energy, similar to our Fr. Michael Fish). Because Marty and Bill were obviously experienced in leading this kind of retreat, I totally trusted they would take care of whatever came up. I let go and sank deeply into prayer.

Being with God is a very “intimate” experience. Sharing this intimacy with people I know, along with new friends, turned out to be a unique experience. Somehow in opening myself to God, I was opened to those around me. There was unity amongst us.

Sharing at the close of Grand Silence, some described feeling “nourished,” “grateful,” “peaceful, in the midst of a frantic life,” “vulnerable” and more.

I simply felt LOVE.

The community that prays together...becomes bound together.

I heard Fr Andrew say our next Silent Day of Prayer would probably be in the summer....June or July.

We have to wait that long? ♦

Jackie Chew, Oblate O.S.B. Cam.

AN INTEGRATED LIFE

At one of our recent Weight Watchers meetings, the leader led a discussion on the theme “Moderation, not deprivation.” Weight Watchers devotees might not realize it, but this theme goes back for ages, and was already articulated in Benedict’s Rule for Monasteries in the 6th century.

Weight Watchers is a program of moderation; it’s not a diet but a way of life. Eschewing denial, the program emphasizes that one can eat pretty much whatever one wishes, but that awareness of what one eats, along with moderation and balance are key to successful weight loss and maintenance.

Benedict long ago developed a prototype for this paradigm of Weight Watchers. He says in the Prologue to his Rule that in establishing a school for the service of the Lord, he does not wish to introduce anything harsh or burdensome. He admits however that there may be a “certain strictness...for the amendment of vices.” Now, how “Weight Watchers” is that?

Moderation and balance are threads woven throughout the Rule, for example, in regard to the measure of food and drink, and the number of psalms to be prayed each day. Benedict was reacting to extremists in his time who wanted to pray the entire Psalter in a day, and who fasted to near-death.

His moderation may not be harsh or burdensome, but it is challenging, in some ways even more so than going the “all or nothing” way. Benedict knew that “all or nothing” leads to failure and eventual abandonment of a program. Whereas moderation allows for ups and downs, for beginning each day with a fresh start. This idea is implicit in his vow of

“conversion of morals,” the continuous, ongoing, sometimes faltering process of renewing oneself.

Weight Watchers promotes moderation in the measure of food. But Benedict’s Rule is comprehensive, urging moderation in all elements of life. When all the elements of one’s life are in balance, in harmony, one lives in peace with oneself, with those around, and with the environment. This is an integrated life, a life well lived.

In his chapter on the observance of Lent, Benedict says that the life of a monastic “ought at all times to have a Lenten character.” His Rule is a guide for all of life, a life that has a certain Lenten flavor that is characterized by moderation and balance rather than by abnegation. Lent then is by definition a time to focus on moderating excesses in either direction. Benedict hastens to add that Lent is a “joyful time of spiritual desire in anticipation of holy Easter,” an Easter that is already now, ongoing, always here. No pinched faces, no groans, no frowns in Benedict’s Lent.

Benedict urges us to get started now, today, with “loins girded” (i.e., to buckle up for the journey) to embrace the monastic way of moderation as “we hasten to do now what will profit us for all of life.” For “it is by being patient [with all that life has to offer, the good as well as the bad] that we share in the sufferings of Christ until one day we share in his glory.” ♦

Tom Nolan, Oblate O.S.B. Cam. and former monk of Collegeville

UPCOMING CELEBRATIONS

Palm Sunday, April 17

Blessing of palms, procession, and Mass, 8 a.m.
Vespers, 5 p.m.

Thursday of Holy Week, April 21

Mass of the Lord's Supper and Washing of Feet, 7 p.m.
Followed by silent adoration

The Paschal Triduum

Good Friday, April 22

Lauds, 7 a.m.
Proclamation of the Passion, Universal Prayer
and Adoration of the Cross, 7 p.m.

Holy Saturday, April 23

Lauds, 8 a.m., with Anointing

The Easter Vigil

Blessing of the fire, procession, proclamation of the
Resurrection of Jesus Christ, Liturgy of Readings, and
Eucharist, 8 p.m.

Easter Sunday, April 24

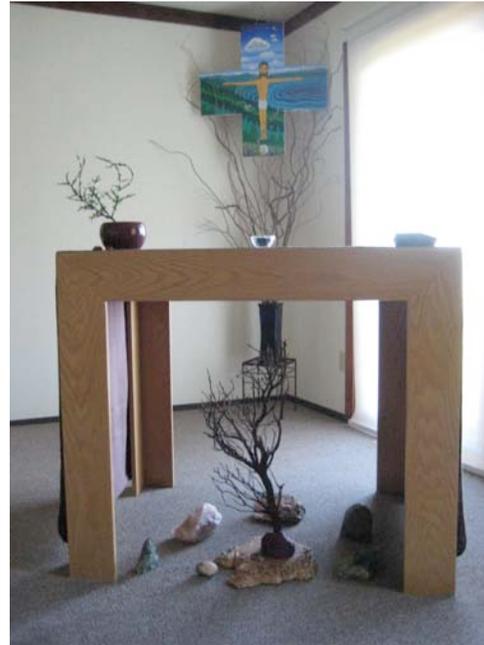
Mass of the Day of Resurrection, 11 a.m.
Vespers of Easter, 5 p.m.

Saturday, May 14

Quiet Day at Incarnation Monastery on
"Meditation and the Virtues"
with Thomas Matus O.S.B. Cam.
9 a.m. to 12 noon

Pentecost Sunday, June 12

Lauds with Mass, 8 a.m.
Vespers, 5 p.m.



Interior of chapel at Incarnation Monastery, Lent 2011.

SO, MEDITATE!

It is a secret, it is mystery,
There is no past, no history,
God is here now in this present moment,
Time is a stream, step out of its current.

Space and time are one and the same,
To struggle in time will make us all lame,
Roll over, surrender, let God be the guide,
Find the deep peace, don't drown in the tide.

The mystery, right now, is here,
Step back and look into Love's mirror,
Stop and watch, you are all-pervasive,
Don't let drama become so persuasive.

Ignore the words, don't give them power,
Truth is a-wash in Love's sweet shower,
All mystery—is inside you,
Step back and watch the Perfect view.

Hollee Farmer

