



Abbey Letter no. 254

Summer 2013

St. Benedict says:

Listen...

**incline the ear
of your heart**



So be a **summertime monk** for two weeks or more at St. Gregory's Abbey, a Benedictine monastery in the Episcopal Church at Three Rivers, Michigan.

...if you are male, 18 to 50, and if you can spend at least two weeks at the abbey during July. The only charge is \$25 for registration.

For more information and an application form, use the envelope bound in this issue of the Abbey Letter or write:

Summer Program Director
St. Gregory's Abbey
56500 Abbey Road
Three Rivers, Michigan 49093-9595
novicemaster@saintgregorysthreerivers.org

NOTES



Br. Mark receives the novice habit



Br. Mark with his parents after the clothing

John David Moore was clothed as a novice after vespers on March 12th (St. Gregory's Day), taking the name Br. Mark.

A recent bequest from a former member of the community has allowed us to purchase new chairs for the guest area in the abbey church.

The Rt. Rev. James Magness, bishop suffragan for the armed forces and federal ministries, was with us February 18th - 22nd.

Sr. Linda, Sr. Margaret, and Sr. Heather of the Community of the Sisters of the Church were with us April 14th - 16th.

Abbot Andrew was at the Church of the Good Shepherd in Rosemont, Pennsylvania March 9th - 10th, leading a quiet day on Saturday and preaching on Sunday. He also attended the Hospitality Initiative Conference, an interfaith meeting at Oakland University in Oakland,

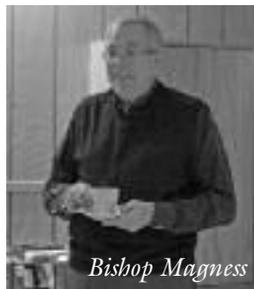
Michigan, May 3rd - 4th, where he led a presentation on "Mimetic Hospitality" using references to The Rule of St. Benedict.

Abbot Andrew will be traveling to Chapel Hill, North Carolina for the Theology and Peace Conference entitled "Lynching, Scapegoating, and Actual Innocence" June 4th - 6th. He will then be at the Colloquium On Violence and Religion Conference July 10th - 14th at the University of Northern Iowa in Cedar Falls. He will be presenting a paper on the Desert Fathers at the conference, whose topic is "Mimetic Theory and Ecojustice"

Br. Abraham is scheduled to be a speaker at the Lion and Lamb Festival August 31st - September 1st. The outdoor festival in Fort Wayne, Indiana will feature speakers and artists from several denominations focusing on the topics of peace and justice, and is sponsored by the Indiana Conference of the United Methodist Church.



old chair, new chair



Bishop Magness



Sr. Linda, Sr. Margaret, Sr. Heather

Want more info about our monastery and monastic life?

See the slide shows at our website

saintgregorysthreerivers.org
choose the "information" tab

Read the sermons and articles at our website

saintgregorysthreerivers.org
choose the "articles" tab

Read the abbot's blog

andrewmarrosb.wordpress.com

St. Gregory's Abbey receives guests from many different Christian denominations. Our common worship is a sign of the true unity of the church, and we are grateful to have been given this ecumenical ministry. The following denominations have been represented recently at St. Gregory's Abbey:

Quaker	Continuing Anglican
Mennonite	non-denominational
Free Methodist	"emerging church"
United Methodist	Missionary Church
Reformed Church in America	Disciples of Christ
Christian Reformed Church	Free Will Baptist
Church of the Brethren	Baptist Alliance
United Church of Christ	Roman Catholic
Presbyterian	Evangelical Covenant Church
Lutheran (Missouri Synod)	Evangelical Free Church
Lutheran (E. L. C. A.)	Christian and Missionary Alliance
Episcopalian	

We also welcome people with no religious affiliation, as well as those from other religions. Non-Christian religions represented recently at St. Gregory's Abbey have included Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, and Islam. We are honored to share the love of Christ with these guests, and to receive their love.



Saint Gregory's Abbey now has an e-mail list for those wishing to receive the ABBEY LETTER electronically. We currently offer the ABBEY LETTER in three formats: PDF, Nook, and Kindle (if you are not sure which format to choose, we suggest PDF).

If you would like to receive the ABBEY LETTER in one of these formats, simply go to our website:

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Click on the "Publications" link on the home page to get a drop-down menu, and then click on either "The Abbey Letter" or "Order Publications (Digital)". A registration form can be found on those pages. Once you fill out the necessary information and submit it, you should receive a welcome letter via e-mail. Enrolling in our e-mail list does not remove you from our hard copy mailing list. If you do want to stop receiving the hard copy once you are on the e-mail list, simply send an e-mail to **office@saintgregorysthreerivers.org** telling us you are now on the e-mail list and want to be removed from the hard copy list. (If you are in the confraternity, please mention that so that we make sure you receive the confraternity letter via e-mail).

To avoid being overwhelmed, we ask that only those readers whose last names begin with the letters H - P switch to the electronic version at this time. We will open the enrollment to other readers in future issues of the ABBEY LETTER.

Thank you for keeping in touch with us through our ABBEY LETTER in whichever format you decide.

Here Be Dragons

The abbey's buildings are in a contemporary style. We don't have Gothic or Romanesque or Colonial buildings. But we do have one very old-fashioned accent: a single gargoyle on the side of the bell tower, to drain off the little bit of water that sometimes gets into the tower. It's made of copper, in the form of a dragon's head. Well, I personally think it's a South Asian water monster, called a *makara*. And a visiting child reported to his mother that, "The monks have a crocodile on their church." But the sculptor's catalog called it a dragon, and that settles the matter, I suppose.

Of course in our tradition, dragons are bad things. The twelfth chapter of Revelation identifies its Red Dragon with the original tempter in the Garden of Eden. *And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.*

It can be interesting to follow the story of that dragon. He really hates everybody and everything. He persecutes the woman clothed with the sun, and wants to eat her child. After he fails to do that, he goes after all the followers of Jesus. He makes war in heaven and he makes war on earth. The Christians fight back with the Blood of the Lamb, and the angels fight him with the power of God. And the leader of the angels fighting him is St. Michael: *And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon: and the dragon fought and his angels, and prevailed not: neither was their place found any more in heaven.*

But a place was found for the dragon on the outside of our bell tower. And occasionally our guests ask why. It's a drainpipe, of course, but a drainpipe with a message. Preachers have their ways of proclaiming the Good News. And architects and sculptors and other creative sorts have ways of their own. The building is the symbol of the body of believers who are the church, and of each Christian, whose body is the temple of the Spirit. And the evil of this world, and the dragon's hatred and resentment of everybody and everything don't belong inside the Kingdom of God. The architects and sculptors make that point by putting monsters on the outside of God's House, pointing away from the holy place. These symbolic monsters tell us other things as well. A gargoyle's practical function is to vomit or drool in public, depending on the amount of rainfall, which illustrates how disgusting our souls' enemies are. And from time to time, our copper dragon reminds me of the tales of the church's dragon fighters.

It's not just the architects and sculptors who get to use symbolic language, of course. It was probably Christian painters who gave St. George his dragon. St. George was a martyr of the early church, most likely a soldier. The dragon artists showed in paintings of him was originally meant as a symbolic depiction of the world, the flesh and the devil, which he overcame by a holy life, and a martyr's death. When the storytellers saw the pictures of an armed soldier saint fighting a dragon, they thought, "Hey, here's something we can work with." So they used their own skills to create the legend of St. George, the champion of the people, fighting the dragon who oppressed the weak. And that tale gives us the moral that not only do we have to fight spiritual enemies in our own lives, but we need to be available and able to aid and rescue others as well.

St. George and St. Michael are fine examples of fighters and conquerors of the dragon. Many orders of knighthood have them for their patron saints, or are named

after them. The United Kingdom has an order of knighthood named after the both of them. But in our daily lives we don't always find ourselves rescued from peril before the enemy gets to us. Indeed, Jesus saved us by redeeming us. That is, he didn't stop the bad stuff from hurting us by turning it aside. He went into the part of our life and society that was bad and suffered our hurts in his own body in order to rescue us from the badness which had already claimed us. There's a dragon story for that too: the legend of St. Margaret of Antioch.

Christian artists like to give the soldierly Michael and George swords and shields and lances, with which they defeat the monster and walk away unharmed. St. Margaret was actually swallowed up by her dragon, fed to it by her persecutors because of her faith in Jesus. That more accurately reflects our own experience of badness, at least some of the time. All swallowed up by the badness, we are, and not a sword or lance in sight. But Margaret had a different weapon, the cross of Christ. Some folks say it was a cross she carried in her hand or wore as a necklace. Others say she made the sign of the cross. But either way, that cross grew and grew. It grew up and down and side to side, and it grew so big it burst that dragon open. Then St. Margaret stepped right out of that dragon, as if its wound were a doorway to the land of light and air. That's how she got to be the patron saint of women in childbirth, even though she was a virgin. The pagan authorities of course had plenty of swords at hand when she emerged. So she won her martyr's crown in spite of her dramatic escape.



All this fighting and slashing and casting down from heaven makes for stirring stories. Truly, spiritual combat is an essential element of the Christian life. But sometimes we get carried away, and instead of hitting the proper target, we just inflict a lot of what the professionals call collateral damage. The storytellers warn us about that, too.

After the Ascension and Pentecost, when the early believers began to scatter across the earth, Christ's friends from Bethany, we are told, sailed to France. Once they landed, Lazarus became the Bishop of Marseille. Mary became a hermit, living in a cave and loving Jesus day and night. It was Martha who had to deal with a dragon.

The evil beast had been troubling the people of Tarascon. When St. Martha arrived on the scene, she didn't cast the scaly man eater down, or chop it up from within or without. She converted it. She preached the Good News of Jesus, and blessed the dragon with holy water, and it promised to amend its ways. So she took off her sash, and used it as a leash to lead the monster back to the city. But when the people of Tarascon saw them coming, they didn't wait to find out the current state of affairs. They set upon St. Martha's domesticated dragon, and killed it, with all the fury you might expect. It was a dumb move. If your enemies are attacking your city and you can loose your pet dragon on them, you definitely have an advantage. But because of their misguided zeal, that's an advantage the people of Tarascon never had.

It's easy for us to think we know who the enemy is, when we don't. It's easy for us to despise someone today because we despised him yesterday. It's easy to decide someone is a "wrong 'un" because she looks like one. And it's easy for us to damage the folks we should befriend. Those are mistakes that can haunt us for a long, long time. We might find ourselves in the position of Tarascon, which holds a town festival every June to give thanks for the deliverance St. Martha brought them and remind themselves to look before they leap next time.

In our Christian struggles we need to be strong and we need to be steadfast. We also need to be prudent and ask the Holy Spirit for the gifts for wisdom and discernment. Our artists and our writers will remind and encourage us, bringing us stories from divine revelation and creative imagination. It's our job to take that inspiration and fight the good fight, and fight it well and wisely.

Martha, Margaret, Michael, George, keep the dragons from our doors!

—Fr. William



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ST. GREGORY'S ABBEY

56500 Abbey Road • *Time Kivus*, MI 49093-0505

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Saint Gregory's Abbey is the home of a community of men living under the Rule of Saint Benedict within the Episcopal Church. The center of the monastery's life is the Abbey Church, where God is worshiped in the daily round of Eucharist, Divine Office, and private prayer. Also offered to God are the monks' daily manual work, study and correspondence, ministry to guests, and occasional outside engagements.

The continuing existence of Saint Gregory's is made possible by the support of those who believe that the contemplative vocation within the Church finds valid expression there.

The monks ask your prayers and will be grateful for your offerings.

<http://saintgregorysthreerivers.org/donate.html> to donate online

Donations may be mailed to:
Saint Gregory's Abbey
56500 Abbey Road
Three Rivers, MI 49093-9595