

Abbey
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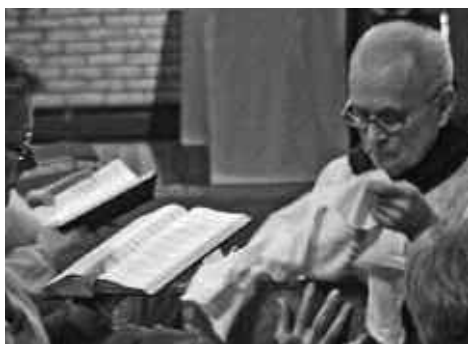
Christmas
2013



Abbot Andrew



Prior Aelred



Fr. Jude



Fr. William

The monks of St. Gregory's Abbey wish you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year, and thank you for your prayers and gifts.



Br. Martin



Br. Abraham

NOTES

Abbot Andrew led a clergy retreat for the Diocese of Alberta November 18th - 21st at the Sanctum Retreat Centre in Caroline, Alberta.

Our website contains slideshows, sermon archives, articles from back issues of the *Abbey Letter*, information about monastic life, the Summer Vocation Program and monastic vocations, and contact links for

the abbot, novice master, guest department, and publications office. Prayer requests and donations can also be made online, as well as calendar and book purchases. Altar bread and refectory bread recipes are available, as well as downloads of digital versions of many of our publications.

saintgregorysthreerivers.org



Daily Schedule at St. Gregory's Abbey

Weekdays

4:00 a.m. MATINS
6:00 a.m. LAUDS
8:15 a.m. TERCE
EUCCHARIST
11:30 a.m. SEXT
2:00 p.m. NONE
5:00 p.m. VESPERS
followed by meditation
7:45 p.m. COMPLINE
(on Tuesdays and Thursdays, COMPLINE
is prayed privately)

Sundays and Major Holidays

5:30 a.m. MATINS & LAUDS
8:30 a.m. TERCE
EUCCHARIST
noon SEXT & NONE
5:00 p.m. VESPERS
followed by meditation
7:45 p.m. COMPLINE

Mary in the Place of Shame and Glory

Advent is the season for anticipating the birth of Jesus and Christmas the season for celebrating that birth. We can do neither without remembering Mary, the mother of Jesus. During Advent we recall the Annunciation to Mary and, of course, at Christmas, she gives birth to Jesus.

For her role in bringing Jesus into the world, Mary has been honored by many liturgical feasts and devotional practices, in tons of art work, and on reams of music paper. Among my favorite musical works are antiphons to Mary written by pre-Reformation English composers such as Thomas Tallis and John Taverner whose music sparkles with dazzling counterpoint exploding all over the musical spectrum.

This sort of extravagant honoring of Mary led to a violent backlash during the Reformation when countless statues were destroyed and numerous music manuscripts shredded. This sort of dynamic is familiar in our own time when every celebrity is subjected to abuse and dragged into the dust. The iconoclastic reformers thought they were honoring Jesus by removing any cause for deflecting honor to any saint at all, but one might think that part of honoring Jesus is honoring his mother. I suspect envy and resentment behind such iconoclastic measures, envy that is projected on Jesus if one implies that Jesus is envious and resentful of honor shown his mother.

Mary did not have to wait until the 16th century to become an object of derision. It happened to her during the months before Jesus was born. Conceiving a child by the Holy Spirit put Mary in an awkward social situation. Since she was betrothed to Joseph, she was expected to be sexually faithful to him as if they were already married. If Mary had been single she would have been in an equally disgraceful position. In short, Mary was in a place of shame. Many medieval mystery plays dramatize Mary's disgrace such as in scenes where she has to drink the water of bitterness in the temple to prove her innocence (cf. Num. 5:19).

Joseph, of course, was placed in an equally disgraceful position. Being a "just man" he resolved to divorce Mary privately. The Greek word *dikaios*, translated as "just," is rich in meanings. It suggests that Joseph was a follower of Torah, which required he divorce a betrothed woman who had proven to be unfaithful, but also that Joseph was "just" in the broader sense of being sensitive to Mary and doing what he could to minimize the embarrassment for all. In a dream, an angel told Joseph the truth of what had happened and Joseph solidified his relationship with Mary and the child-to-come. Joseph also found himself in a place of shame.

Christmas is such a joyful time that we don't usually want to spoil it by casting aspersions on the birth of a child who was technically born out of wedlock. Of course, being in on the secret shared by Matthew and Luke inclines us to extend honor to the child and his parents. At the time of the birth, however, we have a child born in a place of shame, a place that children born out of wedlock have traditionally occupied through no fault of their own. Did this have anything to do with Mary and Joseph not finding a place to stay when the child was due to be born? True, the newborn child was honored by a group of shepherds, but shepherds were automatically, simply by

being shepherds, cast into the place of shame. As for the Magi, they were foreigners who were no better versed in following the Jewish Law than the shepherds.

Although we tend to treat Jesus like a spoiled birthday boy at Christmas, come Holy Week, Jesus is in a much deeper place of shame than his mother ever was. After being vilified by a mob, he is handed over to suffer the death of the lowest of all criminals. This executed criminal has been honored and adored by followers for two thousand years since and many writers and social commentators, like his accusers in Jerusalem, blame him for just about everything that is wrong with the world today.

Praise and shame go together because we are subject to the contagion of other peoples' desires and easily get carried away with the latest conflagration of praise or blame in society as did the people in Jerusalem. The closeness, even the equivalence of praise and blame is captured by the Greek word *doxa* that means both praise and shame or disgrace. We get the word "doxology" from it but I can't think of any shame words in English derived from it. The English theologian James Alison said the word means "reputation" without specifying what kind of reputation. Well, we know that most people who have a reputation have fans and detractors, not least Jesus and Mary.

Mary's voluntarily entering the place of shame at the Annunciation is a foreshadowing of her son's Passion and a foretaste of her own suffering along with that of her son. Mary listened to the Holy Spirit and agreed to give her body for the birth of the Christ Child. The very act of listening put her into the place of shame. Joseph listened to what the Holy Spirit said in a dream and entered the place of shame with his betrothed. Both are honored today by the followers of their child. Mary's son also listened to the Holy Spirit and heard a voice from Heaven say that he was the Son in whom the Father was well pleased. Jesus ended up in the place of shame. What might happen to us if we listen to the Holy Spirit?

None of these considerations make the place of shame attractive. Jesus and Mary and all other saints who have entered this place didn't do it for the fun of it. However, while most of us find ourselves in the place of shame because we have shamefully acted in our own interests rather than the interests of other people, Mary chose to enter that place to bear a son who would also knowingly enter that same place. In doing this, they put our interests infinitely ahead of their own. How do we react to shame, whether that of ourselves or others? Usually, we react in an accusatory way, either to cover up our own shame or out of repulsion at the shame of others. Often it is a combination of both. Mary and Jesus entered this place out of compassion for us. Can we learn to have this same compassion for each other and for ourselves?

After his shameful death, Jesus was raised out of the place of shame into honorable glory at the right hand of the Father. Some people look askance at the idea of Mary being raised in honorable glory by her son, but what son who was born because his mother entered the place of shame wouldn't want her to share his honorable glory? Why should we be envious of Mary? Jesus wishes to raise us all to this same honorable glory. It all started with the birth of a child.

— Abbot Andrew

Music compositions from St. Gregory's Abbey

Missa Brevis choral symphony by Br. Abraham - Latin text from the ordinary of the mass

Rumi choral symphony by Br. Abraham - English translation of the poems of Rumi

A Symphony of Psalms choral symphony by Br. Abraham - Latin text of four psalms

The Kiss baritone voice and string quartet by Br. Abraham - texts from office readings for Mary Magdalene and the Virgin Mary

Tuesday Afternoon chorus and wind octet by Br. Abraham - psalms from Tuesday vespers

Symphony in c minor orchestral symphony by Br. Abraham in romantic minimalist style

Life of Benedict orchestral setting of Gregory the Great's Life of Benedict by John Webber

Composers' notes and essays, MP3 files of synthesized performances of individual movements, PDF files of full scores and piano reductions are available for \$1.00 each at

webbermusic.com

for *Missa Brevis*, *Rumi*, *A Symphony of Psalms*, *The Kiss*, *Tuesday Afternoon*, and *Symphony in c minor*, search for 'Newsom, A'; for *Life of Benedict*, search for 'Webber, J'.

Donations are welcome and can be made at the website or sent to St. Gregory's Abbey designated for "music compositions". Hard copies of scores and orchestral parts are for sale at list price from webbermusic.com



friends and neighbors gather after midnight Christmas Eve Eucharist

St. Gregory's Abbey July Vocation Program

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For males 18 to 50 who can stay for at least two weeks. The only cost is \$25 for registration.

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

July Program Director

St. Gregory's Abbey

56500 Abbey Road

Three Rivers, MI 49093

novicemaster@saintgregorysthreerivers.org

Applications will be accepted after January 1, 2014.

saintgregorysthreerivers.org

2014 St. Gregory's Abbey Calendar

13 months, 15 photos, with the Abbey's liturgical calendar

2014 Calendar Now Available As A PDF Download At Our Website.

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St. Gregory's Abbey, 56500 Abbey Road, Three Rivers, MI 49093-9595

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history of the community, select Abbey Letter articles, photographs

\$20.00 Please send _____ copies. \$ _____

Come Let Us Adore (2011)

*select Abbey Letter Articles from 1999 to 2011 (companion book to **Singing God's Praises**)*

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Tools For Peace (2007)

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Born in the Darkest Time of Year (2004)

15 Christmas stories by Abbot Andrew

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Creatures We Dream of Knowing (2011)

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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

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Saint Gregory's Abbey
56500 Abbey Road
Three Rivers, MI 49093-9595