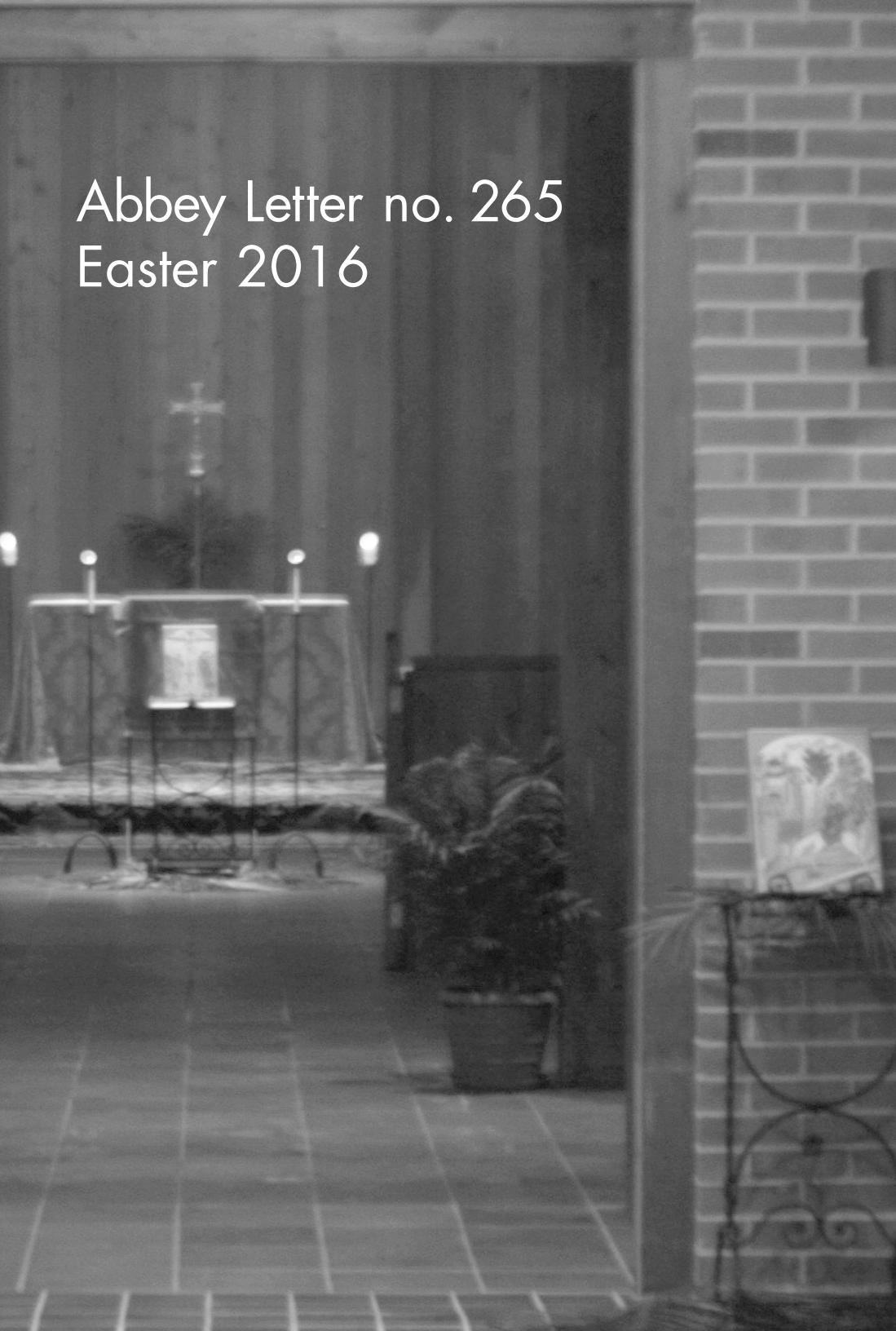


# Abbey Letter no. 265

## Easter 2016



## On Renouncing Self-Centered Renunciation

With Ash Wednesday we begin a season of self-denial featuring prayer and fasting. We also renounce other pleasures to help us curb our desires a bit more than we do the rest of the year.

There is a paradoxical effect of self-denial that we can fall victim to if we are not careful. It is possible for self-denial to focus us upon ourselves in an unhealthy way. It is I who am fasting. I am giving up pleasures I normally indulge in. If we become so fixated on ourselves, we are puffing ourselves up rather than denying ourselves. Isaiah shows how such self-centered fasting leads to quarreling and fighting and striking others with their fists. (Isaiah 58:4) If self-denial has made us so grouchy that we have to make up for what we are giving up by giving ourselves the alternate pleasure of striking out at other people and putting them down, then it is grouchiness and lashing out at others that we must fast from.

Likewise, Jesus warns us against putting on long faces so that others will admire our fasting or blowing trumpets to call attention to our almsgiving (Mt. 6:12). Once again, our self-denial is being compensated for by self-indulgence in other ways. When the admiration of others is filling our egos, then we need to fast from seeking such admiration. We may well find that this renunciation is harder than renouncing food and other pleasures. As we deepen renunciation, we become aware of deeper levels of our desires that need to be turned into a more positive direction.

Given this pitfall, I suggest that we emphasize the needs of other people and renounce ourselves by thinking of them rather than about ourselves. Isaiah suggests that a better fast would be to let the oppressed go free and loosen every yoke. (Is. 58:6). Jesus echoes Isaiah's sentiments at the beginning of

*washing the feet of the guests on Maundy Thursday*



his teaching ministry by proclaiming a Year of Jubilee that would free all people of their imprisonment to debt so as to give all a new start in life. (Luke 4:16-20) Instead of puffing ourselves up, we should build up other people. Perhaps we will find this to be a greater renunciation than cutting back on our eating habits. In any case, renunciations of food and other pleasures will help us grow spiritually only if they are the basis for reaching out to other people. When we really think of others, we have less room in our hearts to think about ourselves.

— Abbot Andrew

This article is an excerpt from Abbot Andrew's forthcoming book *Moving and Resting in God's Desire: A Spirituality of Peace*.

# NOTES

*the prior and abbot place the habit on the novice*

Burton Koss was clothed as a novice after vespers on December 21st, taking the name Br. Armand.

Br. Francis Jonathan Bullock of the Brotherhood of St. Gregory was with us December 13th – 16th.

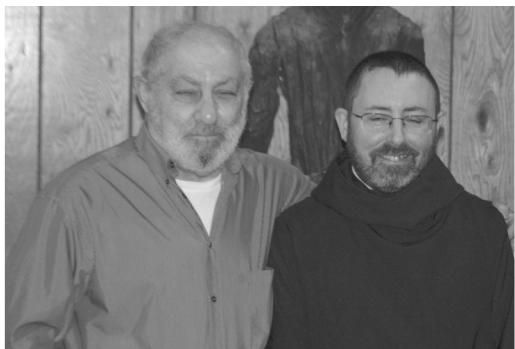
The Rt. Rev. James Magness, Bishop Suffragan for the Armed Forces and Federal Ministries, was with us December 14th – 18th.

Br. Abraham spoke to students in the honors college of Grand Valley State University in Allendale, Michigan on January 20th about the Christian monastic understanding of the relationship between science and religion.

Saint Gregory's Abbey now has an e-mail list for those wishing to receive the ABBEY LETTER electronically. To sign up, simply go to our website: [saintgregorysthreerivers.org](http://saintgregorysthreerivers.org) 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. 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](mailto: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).



*the three then kneel in prayer*



*Br. Armand with his father after the clothing*



*Br. Francis Jonathan BSG*



*Bishop Magness*

## Books read in the refectory during lunch and supper 2015

**A Farewell to Mars: An Evangelical Pastor's Journey Toward the Biblical Gospel of Peace**

by Brian Zahnd

**The Invisible History of the Human Race: How DNA and History Shape Our Identities and Our Futures**

by Christine Kenneally

**The Bible Tells Me So: Why Defending Scripture Has Made Us Unable to Read It**

by Peter Enns

**Empire of the Summer Moon: Quanah Parker and the Rise and Fall of the Comanches, the Most Powerful Indian Tribe in American History**

by S. C. Gwynne

**Searching For Sunday: Loving, Leaving, and Finding the Church**

by Rachel Held Evans

**Liar s and Outliers: Enabling the Trust that Society Needs to Thrive**

by Bruce Schneier

**Being Mortal: Medicine and What Matters in the End**

by Atul Gawande

**Songs My Grandma Sang**

by Michael B. Curry

**Ghosts of Empire: Britain's Legacies in the Modern World**

by Kwasi Kwarteng

**Heirs to Forgotten Kingdoms: Journeys Into the Disappearing Religions of the Middle East**

by Gerard Russell

**Banana: The Fate of the Fruit That Changed the World**

by Dan Koeppl



## Books from St. Gregory's Abbey

Singing God's Praises (1998)

*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)

*Abbot Andrew's reflections on St. Benedict and René Girard*

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Born in the Darkest Time of Year (2004)

*15 Christmas stories by Abbot Andrew*

\$12.00 Please send \_\_\_\_ copies.

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Creatures We Dream of Knowing (2011)

*Fantasy stories by Abbot Andrew*

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From Beyond to Here (2012)

*more stories by Abbot Andrew*

\$15.00 Please send \_\_\_\_ copies.

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The Forest of Windellynn (2015)

*Fantasy novel by Abbot Andrew*

\$10.00 Please send \_\_\_\_ copies.

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Seven Times A Day I Praise You

*Br. Martin's review of personal daily prayer books*

\$3.00 Please send \_\_\_\_ copies.

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The Indwelling God

*Abbot Andrew's thoughts on prayer*

\$4.00 Please send \_\_\_\_ copies.

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St. Gregory's Abbey and Benedictine Monasticism

*A survey of Benedictine monasticism and how it is lived at St. Gregory's*

\$3.00 Please send \_\_\_\_ copies.

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All of the above except for Singing God's Praises, Born in the Darkest Time of Year, Seven Times A Day I Praise You, and St. Gregory's Abbey and Benedictine Monasticism are available in ebook formats. To download and purchase, go to our website, choose the "publications" tab and click "order publications (digital)."

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