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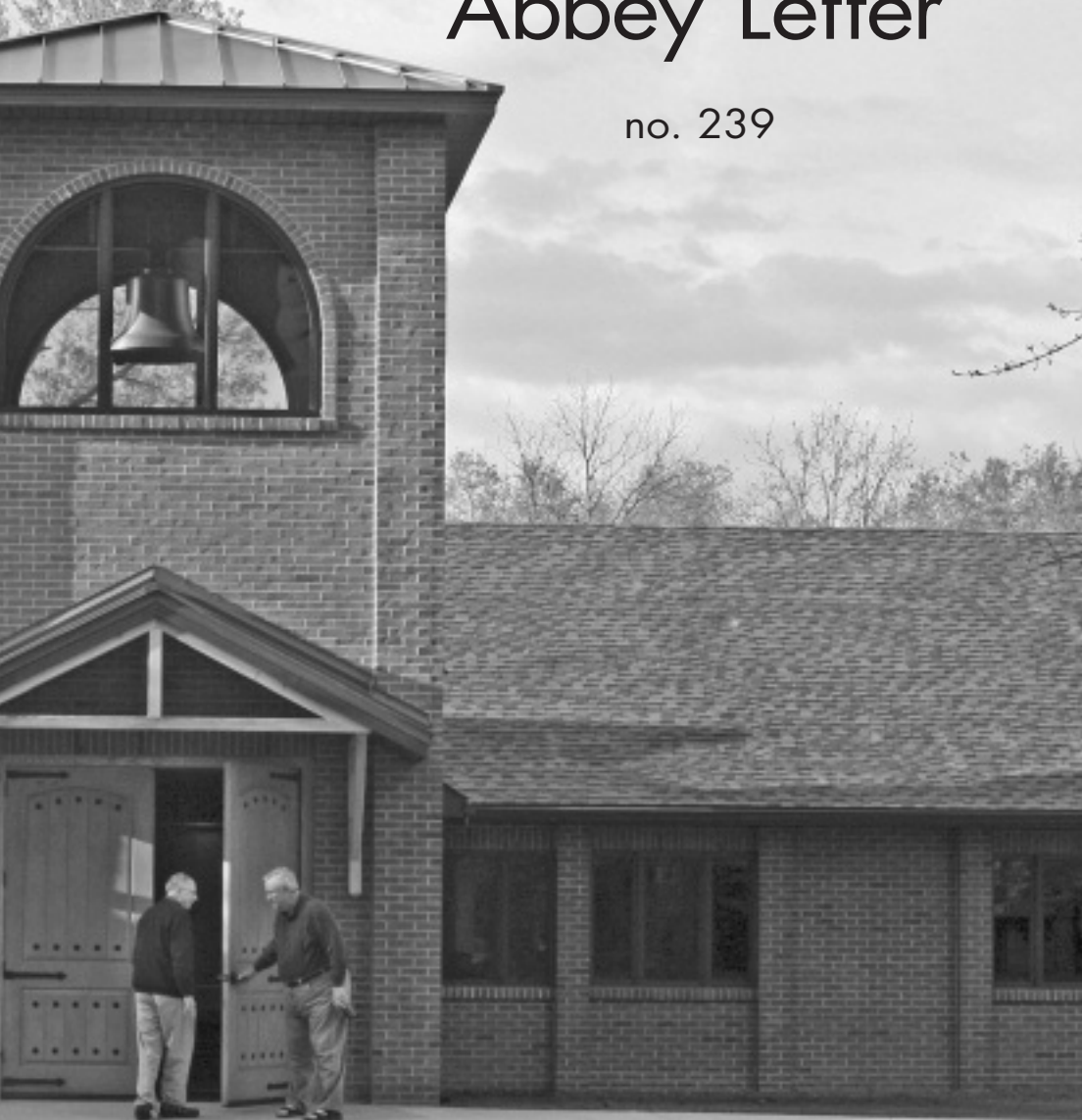
ST. GREGORY'S ABBEY
56500 Abbey Road • Three Rivers, MI 49093-9595

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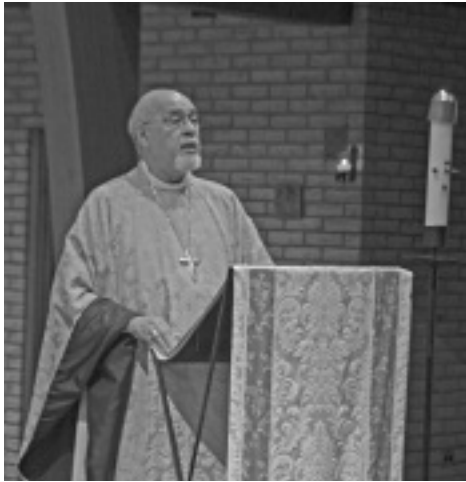
Abbey Letter

no. 239



Fall 2009

Bishop Williams preaching



Fr. Benedict and Dom Simon



Bishop Gepert, Prior Aelred, Bishop Williams, Br. Cuthbert, Abbot Andrew, and Dom Simon at the dedication ceremony



A guest makes a rubbing at the engraved donor wall.

Our new church entrance and bell tower were publicly blessed on May 9th, immediately following a special 11:00 am Eucharist attended by the monastic community and 68 guests. The community's episcopal visitor, The Rt. Rev. Arthur Williams (retired suffragan bishop of the Diocese of Ohio), presided and preached at the Eucharist. He was assisted at the building dedication ceremony by Fr. Benedict Reid (former abbot of St. Gregory's), Dom Simon Jarrett (superior of Elmore Abbey in England), and The Rt. Rev. Robert Gepert (bishop of the Diocese of Western Michigan). Lunch and social time followed the service.

NOTES

Dom Simon Jarrett (superior of Elmore Abbey in England) was with us May 4th through May 18th, and Fr. Benedict Reid (former abbot of St. Gregory's) was with us May 6th through May 11th. The two were here to attend the dedication of the new monastery building, and took the opportunity to make an extended visit.

Although our major building projects are finished, maintenance of our buildings and grounds continues. Projects this summer include new soffits (covering the undersides of the eaves) on the monastery buildings, new walkways, a church roof upgrade, and repair and cleaning of slates covering the church floor.

Abbot Andrew was one of three main speakers at a conference of a new organization named "Theology and Peace" in Chicago May 26th - 28th. This group is dedicated to exploring ways that René Girard's insights about violence and peace can be applied to Christian thought and practice. Abbot Andrew's paper was titled "Living By the Breath of God:

A Spirituality of God's Desire" and is offered on his personal website. andrewmarr.homestead.com/girardspirituality

On October 24th, Abbot Andrew will lead a quiet day at St. Paul's Cathedral in Burlington, Vermont, where he will preach the following day. That Sunday evening he will be the speaker in one of a series of lectures on "The Roots of Mysticism" held at the cathedral. Abbot Andrew's presentation will discuss the contribution of St. Benedict and his monastic tradition to Christian mysticism.

Prior Aelred and Br. Martin traveled to Anaheim, California July 8th - 15th to attend the General Convention of the Episcopal Church.

Now that our building project is finished, thanks to your generosity, we are phasing out our checking account for the building fund at the end of this fiscal year. We still appreciate your gifts for general operation, which includes maintenance of the new buildings.



church roof repairs



soffits

Scenes from this Year's July Vocation Program

Participants in our annual Vocation Program commit to staying at least two weeks at St. Gregory's. While here, they are given a glimpse of monastic life as they pray, work, study, and have social contact with the monks.



working outside the guesthouse



learning to use choirbooks



Independence Day fireworks



in the refectory



in class

Working For The Kingdom

I wish I could say that I *get* the parable of the landowner who goes out at different times during the day to hire laborers to work in his vineyard (Matthew 20: 1-16). I wish I could say that I connect with it, that I appreciate its meaning, and that I fully agree with the point that Jesus is making about the kingdom of heaven. But if I'm honest here, then I have to admit that I have some problems with it. For one, my sense of economic fairness makes me a little uncomfortable with the idea of handing out a full day's pay for only an hour's worth of work. It's not that I identify with the workers who were hired early in the morning — or those who were hired late in the afternoon, for that matter. From as objective a viewpoint as I am able to have, it's merely a sense of economic principle that makes me question the wisdom of paying everyone the same thing. I know that 'God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom,' and that 'human wisdom is foolishness to God,' but on the surface, it just seems a bit odd. And since I'm not theologically astute enough to delve into the whole faith vs. works argument, I just try to meet the parable on its own terms with the capacity I have to understand it, and it sounds kind of unfair.

To look at it another way, elsewhere in the gospels, Jesus talks about how hard it is to enter the kingdom of heaven: 'Strive to enter by the narrow gate for the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life,' and 'those who wish to be my disciples must take up their cross daily and follow me,' and, 'those who put a hand to the plow and look back are not fit for the kingdom of heaven,' and, 'those who persevere to the end will be saved.' From this, it sounds like one has to put forth a real effort if one wants the reward of being admitted to the kingdom of heaven. It sounds like it is not that easy to get there. And this only makes sense from a work-ethic point of view which holds that through hard work and perseverance one will succeed in reaching one's goal — a work ethic I think most people would agree with.



But in the gospel parable, Jesus is saying that even if you put forth a real effort, work as hard as you can to enter the kingdom of heaven and end up getting there, then you might be in the company of those who did not work nearly as much and yet who are enjoying the same reward that you had to strive so hard to attain. And while it would be nice to have a magnanimous attitude of, “Oh, it’s just great that everyone gets to come in no matter what they have or haven’t done,” it still just seems unbalanced to me that this great reward for which so many have struggled and suffered — some even to the point of dying for it — should also be given equally to those who did little or almost nothing to attain it.

And it’s not that I think that those who work harder deserve more than what they set out to achieve. But surely those who *don’t* work as hard don’t *deserve* the same amount that is given to the diligent, right?

Of course, Jesus does make the point in the parable that when it comes to the kingdom of God, it is God’s to give it to whomever he wishes to give it, and it’s not ours to question it, and that’s fair enough. “The Lord does whatever he wills,” but still I can understand the annoyance of the workers who were hired early in the morning and had to bear the heat of the day and who then see a group of latecomers — who do a minimal amount of work — receive the same payment.

Is there, then, anything to suggest that those who work harder to attain the kingdom of God receive a greater reward, or that those who don’t work very hard to attain the kingdom of God receive a lesser reward? Is there anything that might make this situation seem just a bit more economically fair?

At the outset, I will say that I don’t think the kingdom of God has any degrees. If you’re in, you’re in, and it’s the same blessedness, the same joy, the same love that is shared by all who are there. So I don’t think that the ultimate reward — the ‘usual daily wage’ of Jesus’ parable — can be either increased or decreased; regardless of what effort one puts into getting there. But I do think that there is an additional reward for those who work harder to get there, and the reward is the work itself.

Consider what kind of work one has to do to attain the kingdom of God. *The Rule of St. Benedict* has a list of such good works, among which are: “to love the Lord God with the whole heart, the whole soul, the whole strength, to love one’s neighbor as oneself, to relieve the poor, to visit the sick, to help in trouble, not to give way to anger, not to nurse a grudge, to put one’s hope in God, to hate no one, not to be jealous, not to harbor envy, to pray for one’s enemies in the love of Christ, and never despair of God’s mercy.” It seems that the work one must undertake to attain the kingdom of God, while not always easy, surely would make the worker a happier individual because they would know that the work they are doing is making the kingdom of God not something to be had at some point in the future as a reward for a job done, but as a reality right here, right now in the midst of the work that is going on. Those who are standing idle in the marketplace are doing just that — standing idle, so they are missing out on the reward of the work that is being done.

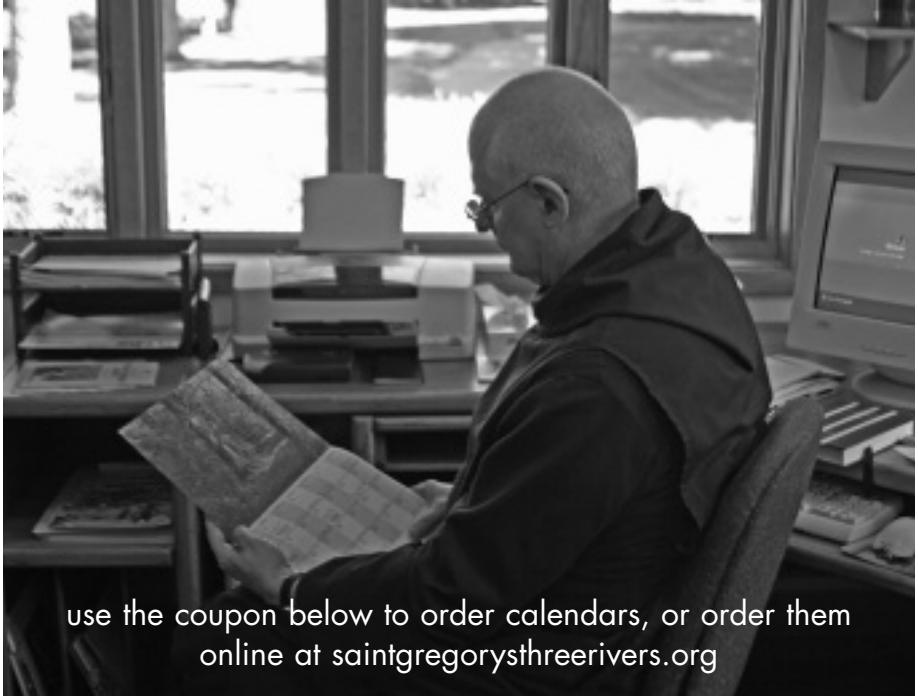
So, yes, the ultimate reward for everyone who works for the kingdom of God is the kingdom of God; it’s salvation; it’s that we get to be with Jesus. And I don’t think that is a prize that can be increased or diminished. But for those who are working hard to win that prize while others stand idle, it seems to me that the work itself is their bonus pay.

— Br. Cuthbert

Available October 21

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

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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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