



Abbey Letter

no. 244

Christmas 2010



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

Please send me ___ copy or copies of the

2011 Calendar

Enclosed is \$10.00 for each calendar.

Please allow 6 weeks for delivery.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Any payment in excess of the calendar price will be gratefully accepted as a gift to the abbey.

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

Please send me ___ copy or copies of the

Born In The Darkest Time Of Year

15 Christmas stories by Abbot Andrew

Enclosed is \$16.00 for each book.

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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

Life of Benedict

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

composers' notes and essays

perusal MP3 files of synthesized performances of individual movements

perusal PDF files of full scores and piano reductions

hard copies of scores and orchestral parts

available at

webbermusic.com

type in "Abraham Newsom" in the search box for *Missa Brevis* and *Rumi*

type in "Benedict" in the search box for *Life of Benedict*

all perusal files are free, but donations are welcome and can be made at the website or sent to St.

Gregory's Abbey designated for "music compositions"

hard copies are for sale at list price from webbermusic.com

NOTES

Br. Dunstan of the Order of Julian of Norwich was with us July 31st - August 4th.

Bishop Steven Miller of the Diocese of Milwaukee was with us August 23rd - 25th.

Br. Abraham was at the parish of St. Paul's On The Plains in Lubbock, Texas September 24th - 26th, leading a retreat and preaching. While in Lubbock, he also met with students from the Texas Tech University Canterbury Association.

On October 27th, Abbot Andrew spoke at All Saints Church in East Lansing, Michigan, as part of a series of Wednesday talks on economic issues and Christian stewardship.



Bishop Miller



Q: What's On Our Website?

A: slideshows showing various aspects of the abbey grounds and monastic life, articles from back issues of the *Abbey Letter*, sermons preached by the monks, 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.

saintgregorysthreerivers.org

A Hide and Seek Prayer

The Second Sunday after Christmas is one of those funny Sundays that starts a week that ends up being taken over by some other liturgical observance. In this case, on the sixth of January the Epiphany collect is used and continues to be used for the rest of that week, and the collect for the Second Sunday after Christmas retires until next year. (Accented on the first syllable, a collect is the principal brief prayer summing up the theme of the day or of a liturgical action.)

Actually, that prayer doesn't always stay retired for a whole year. It can pop up again here or there. If your church reads the Creation story as a lesson in the Easter Vigil, you will find the collect following that lesson is our friend, the collect for the Second Sunday after Christmas: *O God, who wonderfully created, and yet more wonderfully restored, the dignity of human nature: Grant that we may share the divine life of him who humbled himself to share our humanity, your Son Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

The prayer itself is old. Our first written copy of it is in the Leonine Sacramentary, a seventh-century collection of prayers offered by the celebrant at various liturgies, where it is the collect for the first Mass of Christmas Day. But in spite of its beauty and antiquity, it only appeared in the Book of Common Prayer in the current, 1979, edition.

That doesn't mean that it didn't sneak into our churches earlier than its official admission, though. Around the eleventh century, this prayer was very slightly modified and became a standard part of the offertory of the Roman Mass. While a bit of water was being added to the wine in the chalice, the priest would pray our prayer, but saying, "Grant that, through the mystery of this water and wine, we may share the divine life of him...." As some Anglican priests began using the private prayers of the Latin liturgy in Anglican services, this became the standard prayer said while water was blessed and added to the chalice in many Episcopal celebrations of the Eucharist. So folks may well have been at lots of services where the prayer was used, but it was used so quietly they didn't know. And for those of us who did know the prayer over the water, finding it as a Christmas collect was like coming across an old friend in her new job. You smile real big and say, "When did you start working here?"

Adding water to the wine at the offertory, "the mixed chalice" as it is called, was quite shocking and controversial when Anglo-Catholic priests labored to bring it back in the nineteenth century, but through the years it has become the standard practice among high church and low alike. The two cruets on the credence shelf were one of the things that impressed me when I first saw a chapel set up for the Holy Communion back when I was a

Presbyterian kid at the Episcopal diocesan church camp in Western North Carolina. I confess I did completely misread the setup. I thought those worldly, sophisticated, Episcopal communicants were being offered their choice of red or white wine. That would have been hospitable, perhaps. But it wouldn't have been as good as water and wine.

No, there are good reasons the mixed chalice won out over a cup of plain wine, or my imagined choice of wines. In the first place, it was the custom of people in our Lord's time and place to add water to the wine they drank. So we suppose Jesus himself did that, and doing what Jesus did can be a way for us to draw closer to him. Also, because wine and blood are so closely linked in the Christian imagination, the mixture also recalls the water and blood that flowed from Christ's heart at the crucifixion. And historically there have been many offertory prayers that emphasize that facet of the mystery of this water and wine. But I think the richest meaning, or meanings, are the ones spoken of in the collect we're considering now.

God "wonderfully created, and yet more wonderfully restored, the dignity of human nature." The mixed chalice recalls this. As we read in that first lesson in the Easter Vigil, there was water in the beginning, when the Spirit of God brooded over the deep. When we were formed from the dust of the earth, a lot of water must have gone into the mix, since our bodies are a bit over half water to this day. But we made a lot of bad choices and didn't treat our nature as the dignified thing it was, so God had to fix a creation gone wrong to restore that dignity. And that was accomplished by the blood of Christ, shed on the cross for our salvation. The water and wine in the cup very naturally proclaim the dual mystery of our creation and redemption. Jesus' blood is the drink of restored humanity. We who failed to live up to the challenge of drinking the plain water of our creation today find ourselves drinking the rich, heavenly wine of our eternal salvation. Water shows where we've come from. Wine shows where we are going.

The one who shed that blood, who died on the cross, and rose again, was not simply God the Son, the eternal Logos, appearing among us as a divine apparition. The deathless one "humbled himself to share our humanity." The divine person assumed our human nature. That's the first of the two Christmas presents the prayer speaks of, the Word made flesh. The Son is the Father's gift to us. But the Father isn't the only one giving us this gift surpassing all others. The Lord became incarnate by the Holy Ghost and the Virgin Mary. So the baby Jesus is a gift to us from them as well.

He is a Christmas gift to the entire human race. But not only does he share our human life, he came to redeem it, and share his eternal divine life with his brothers and sisters. That's the second Christmas present from above. Just as the Father gave us the Son, to be born as one of us, so the Son gives us the

Father, reconciling sinners to their perfectly righteous Creator. And again, that's a gift the very giving of which has been shared. Not only is our share in divine life a gift from Jesus himself, it's a gift from everyone who has ever brought us closer to Jesus. And the same Holy Spirit who worked through others to bring us that gift can work through us to share it with others, bringing them closer to Jesus, who himself brings them into the life of the Holy Trinity.

That can be another meaning of the mystery of water and wine. We add the water of our witness and testimony to the wine of Christ's saving work. What we have to offer is nothing compared to what he has accomplished. But he accepts and commissions us to share the saving work of restoring our sisters and brothers to the glorious dignity meant for us from the beginning, and won for us on Calvary.

— Fr. William



St. Gregory's Abbey July Vocation Program

Spend two weeks (or more) in July with the monks of St. Gregory's Abbey, a Benedictine monastery of the Episcopal Church at Three Rivers, Michigan.

Worship & Pray Work & Learn

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, 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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Three Rivers, MI 49093-9595