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Saint
Gregory's
Abbey



Abbey Letter no. 250
Summer 2012

Be a July Monk

Spend two weeks (or more) 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 during July. The only cost is \$25 for registration.



saintgregorysthreerivers.org

For details and an application form write:

July Program Director

St. Gregory's Abbey

56500 Abbey Road

Three Rivers, MI 49093-9595

novicemaster@saintgregorysthreerivers.org

NOTES

After vespers on March 12 (the feast of St. Gregory the Great), Richard Zeikowitz was clothed as a novice, taking the name Br. Cassian.

We have recently hosted groups from seven different area colleges and universities, a not unusual annual occurrence here at St. Gregory's. The groups span a range of denominational affiliations, religious beliefs (or lack thereof), and academic interests. We are grateful to have been given this ministry to students.

On June 5th – 7th, Abbot Andrew attended this year's Theology and Peace Conference at St. Mary's College in Baltimore where he led a mini-workshop on contemplative prayer.

Due to changes in bulk mail distribution, please allow up to eight weeks for future calendar deliveries. As usual, a calendar order form will be included in the Fall and Christmas issues of the *Abbey Letter*.

Br. Cassian receiving the novice habit



Abbot Andrew blesses the newly clothed novice



students from Purdue University Wesley Foundation on retreat

More Reading Options!



Our website now has links to download ebook formats of three of the abbot's books, as well as an information brochure about the monastery and issues of the Abbey Letter. Also included are links to download free Kindle and Nook apps for computers, tablets, and smart phones.

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Return to Prayer

In a previous article (*Abbey Letter* Easter 2011) I discussed some aspects of the Daily Office and its history and mentioned that I was responsible for overseeing the current process of revision of the Daily Office at St. Gregory's Abbey. Since our January Week of Review focused on proceeding with the project (which looks to be quite a long term process), it seemed like an appropriate time to return to the topic.

Toward the end of my previous article I quoted from chapter XVI of St. Benedict's Rule, "The Prophet says: Seven times a day I have praised you. We will fulfill this sacred number of seven if we satisfy our obligations of service at Lauds, Prime, Terce, Sext, None, Vespers and Compline, for it was of these hours that he said: Seven times a day I have praised you. Concerning Vigils, the same Prophet says: At midnight I arose to give you praise. Therefore, we should praise our Creator for his just judgements at these times: Lauds, Prime, Terce, Sext, None, Vespers and Compline; and let us arise at night to give him praise."

Since most scholars agree that in both the monastic and cathedral traditions of the Daily Office the gatherings were in the morning and evening, how do we come with eight different times during the day of praying the Office?

The services known as Terce, Sext and None might be very early indeed. They seem originally to have been times in the day when it was appropriate for individual Christians to take a moment to stop and pray. The names refer to time of day, the Third (Terce), Sixth (Sext) and Ninth (None) hours of the day. These do not refer to the times of our day beginning with midnight with twenty-four equal hours in the course of each day, but a more ancient system of twelve hours of daylight and twelve hours of night where the length of the hour varied with the time of year (an hour in the day being longer than an hour of night during the summer and the reverse in the winter). The counting began with sunrise, so the sixth hour would be when the sun was overhead, the third hour when it was halfway there and the ninth when it was halfway towards setting. In an age before clocks and watches, this was the easiest way of keeping time. The custom developed in monasteries of gathering for prayer as a community for what had originated as times of private prayer.

Some scholars believe that the Vigils service referred to in the Rule originated with the all night vigil that preceded the Easter service and spread to the eve of Sunday (all Sundays being considered in some sense as Easter), but a more recent suggestion is that both Vigils and Lauds were simply the first prayer service of the day, but Vigils was the monastic version and Lauds the cathedral version. Monks simply got up earlier. The natural impulse that

“more is better” led to both services being added to both traditions.

Compline (Completion) and Prime (the First hour) are monastic services. Compline is the final prayer before retiring, something which makes sense for a residential community rather than a group scattered through a city which had to make a greater effort to assemble together for prayer. The origins of Prime are disputed, but one suggestion is that it was added to the schedule to keep monks from going back to bed.

Someone consulting our daily schedule will notice that Prime is not listed. When Pope Paul VI officially dropped Prime from the schedule almost all monastic communities adopted that change. In large measure it was because adding a daily celebration of the Eucharist to the monastic schedule (which had not been the case in early communities) made the early part of the day too crowded.

So what is the current state of the Daily Office at St. Gregory’s? We still do seven offices a day (having omitted Prime but having a daily celebration of the Eucharist following Terce). We still recite all 150 psalms in the course of a week (except when feast days with proper psalms displace the psalms normally assigned to a particular service). We do combine certain services on the Sunday schedule to allow a little more free time and pray Compline privately on Tuesdays and Thursdays for the same reason.

Will any of this be changed by the current proposed revisions? Not at all. For the most part the changes will involve updating the translations used (English is an ever changing language) and reorganizing the books so that it will no longer be necessary to balance so many different books (and sometimes additional sheets of paper) to get through one service. There will be more books total, but only one of them will be needed for a particular service. Having more books has its disadvantages, but it will also mean less wear and tear on each volume.

We also plan to abandon the comb bound books that were so popular at the time our last revision was done. Special equipment is needed to assemble them and replacing pages is a great chore. In addition, the sharp edges of the comb are hard on the pages (producing bits of confetti from time to time). Instead we plan to use three ring binders for half sheets. Thus the cost of the original binding will be higher, but it should last much longer and the problem of maintaining and repairing the books will be greatly simplified.

At this stage there is no way of telling how long this project will take. At each stage of the process new questions will arise and need to be discussed by the community and decisions made, but the intention of the community is to remain true to the vision of daily prayer set forth in the Holy Rule, as it was handed down to us and as we hope to pass it along to future generations.

— Prior Aelred

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



students from Geneva College learn about monastic life

CONTACTING THE ABBEY

Mailing address -

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56500 Abbey Road
Three Rivers, MI 49093

Telephone -

269-244-5893

9:30am - 11:15am or 2:30pm - 4:15pm Eastern Time Monday through Saturday
(please do not telephone at other times or on Sundays or holidays)

E-mail -

Guest reservations and information -

guestmaster@saintgregorysthreerivers.org

Mailing list -

office@saintgregorysthreerivers.org

Abbot Andrew -

abbot@saintgregorysthreerivers.org

Information about becoming a monk or participating in the July Program -

novicemaster@saintgregorysthreerivers.org

Books and calendars may be ordered, prayers requested, and donations made at
our website -

www.saintgregorysthreerivers.org

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:
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