



Abbey Letter
no. 255

Fall 2013

on the cover: participants from the first two weeks of the July Vocation Program

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.



lunch in the refectory



picking berries



working in the refectory



proofreading



beanbag game at Sunday buffet supper



helping in the kitchen



homemade ice cream and fireworks on the 4th of July



NOTES

Fr. Aelred visited the Community of St. John Baptist in Medham, New Jersey for the 100th anniversary celebration of the laying of their convent's cornerstone April 27th.

Fr. William continues his ministry to the Formation Group of the Diocese of Northern Indiana. This group of people preparing locally for ordination meets every few months for mutual exchange, discussion, and presentations concerning practical issues pertaining to ordained ministry. Fr. William is in charge of the spiritual life part of the program.

Br. Abraham's Symphony in c minor is



Mother Hilary OJN

now available at webbermusic.com. It may be found on the website by searching for "Newsom, A". PDF files of the score and MP3 files of individual movements may be downloaded for \$1.00 each.

Mother Hilary Crupi, OJN from Julian House Monastery in Waukesha, Wisconsin was with us May 2nd - 5th.

Br. Cassian Russell, OCSO from the Monastery of the Holy Spirit in Conyers, Georgia was with us May 7th - 14th.

Br. Mark has withdrawn from the novitiate.



Br. Cassian OCSO

Abbot Andrew's booklet on prayer, **The Indwelling God** (along with the essay **Resting In God's Desire**), is now available in three electronic formats for \$1.00: e-pub (Nook), Kindle, and PDF. To download the booklet, go to our website saintgregorysthreerivers.org. Choose the "Publications" tab on top for a dropdown menu and go to "Order Publications (Digital)". Click on the desired format to download the booklet. Then click on the PayPal button at the top of the list of formats to make your payment.

Saint Gregory's Abbey now has an e-mail list for those wishing to receive the ABBEY LETTER electronically. We currently offer the ABBEY LETTER in three formats: PDF, Nook, and Kindle (if you are not sure which format to choose, we suggest PDF).

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To avoid being overwhelmed, we ask that only those readers whose last names begin with the letters Q - Z switch to the electronic version at this time. We will open the enrollment to other readers in future issues of the ABBEY LETTER.

Thank you for keeping in touch with us through our ABBEY LETTER in whichever format you decide.

more scenes from this year's July Vocation Program

learning to use choir books



Sunday supper on the deck



class time



coffee and cookies before vespers



cards at recreation time



daily chapter meeting

Why Do We Have a New Testament?

The inscription on the picture of our Holy Father Benedict which hangs in St. Anthony's guest house here at the monastery says:

The drawing of *St. Mark and St. Benedict* by Peter Paul Rubens (ca. 1605), shows Benedict carrying his crozier and displaying a large open Bible. It was sketched by Rubens after the right hand panel of a triptych by Bellini, 1488, which is in the Venetian church of the Frari. This copy of the Rubens drawing is an enlargement of a print that appeared in the volume *Saint Benedict: Father of Western Civilization*, published in 1981 by the Alpine Fine Arts Collection, Ltd. The book was produced under the direction of Dom Pieter Batelier, O.S.B., and under the patronage of the Council of Europe. It honored the fifteenth centenary of the birth of St. Benedict of Nursia (480-547).

The inscription cleared up the oddity of St. Benedict appearing with St. Mark, the patron saint of Venice, for there is no traditional connection of the two, but annoyed me with the reference to “a large open Bible,” because everyone knows that the book that St. Benedict almost always is shown holding is his *Rule* for monasteries. Except in this case, it isn't. It so happens that the monastery has a copy *Saint Benedict: Father of Western Civilization*, which also includes a reproduction of the original of the right hand panel of the triptych by Bellini. It is so detailed that the individual letters of the writing can be seen. Although it is difficult to read the reproduction, even with a magnifying glass, fortunately the text explains, “Benedict is shown holding not his own *Rule* to the spectators, but one of the books of the Bible, *Ecclesiasticus*, of which the moralizing character must have pleased him and which he frequently quotes in his own *Rule*.”

Ecclesiasticus is a sort of nickname for the Book of Sirach, which Protestants generally don't count as actually being part of the Bible, but it was in the Septuagint, the translation of the Hebrew Scriptures made by Jewish scholars in Alexandria over a century before the time of our Lord. There were so many Jews in the diaspora who spoke Greek rather than Hebrew, that there was a market for a Greek version of their sacred writings. “*Ecclesiasticus*” means “the Church's book” and it acquired that name because it was used in the earliest days of the Church as the main source of teaching what it meant to live a good and holy life. You might wonder why the Church would use something from the Old Testament, or a book that is Apocryphal, to teach. Why wouldn't it use the New Testament? Well, in the earliest days of the Church, there wasn't one. Their Bible was the Septuagint. Whenever one of the writers of the New Testament quotes Scripture, it is always the Septuagint. The earliest writings of our New Testament date from a generation after the time of Christ. Why is that?

Well, one of the reasons is probably something that is a major topic of the earliest writing to survive, Paul's letter to the church in Thessalonica: Why hasn't Jesus come back yet? Probably if you expected Jesus to return any day now, making sure you had everything down in writing might not have seemed that important.

There were many writings, to be sure, some of which claimed apostolic authorship. But there was no general agreement as to which writings were authentic or authoritative. Until the rise of Marcion, the bishop of Sinope, forced the church's hand. Study of the Hebrew Scriptures led Marcion to conclude that many of the teachings of Jesus were incompatible with the actions of the God of the Old Testament. Marcion developed instead a dualist system of belief — perhaps around the year 145. This dual-god notion allowed him to

reconcile what he saw as contradictions between Old Covenant theology and the Gospel message proclaimed by Jesus.

Marcion affirmed Jesus to be the savior sent by the Heavenly Father, and Paul as his chief apostle. In contrast to teaching of the early Church, Marcion declared that Christianity was in complete discontinuity with Judaism and entirely opposed to the teaching of the Hebrew Scriptures. He did not claim that the Hebrew Scriptures were false, but insisted the violent God of Judaism could not possibly be the same God the Father spoken of by Jesus. He saw the jealous tribal deity of the Jews as a God who created the physical universe, a God of rules and regulations who punishes people for their sins through suffering and death. But the Father that Jesus preached is an altogether different being, a universal God of compassion and love who looks upon humanity with benevolence and mercy.

Marcion taught that Jesus was the son of the Heavenly Father, but didn't believe in the Incarnation—after all, physical creation is from the evil God of the Jews. He believed that Jesus' body was only an imitation of a physical body, therefore denying the reality not only of Jesus' birth, but of his death and Resurrection, because only the spiritual can be good and the physical must be evil. He selected and edited the books that he believed taught the truth, creating the first New Testament. He saw St. Paul as the true apostle of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and included ten epistles of St. Paul and one Gospel. Since Luke was the associate of St. Paul, this was Luke's Gospel, but with the infancy narrative and accounts of the Resurrection removed, along with anything in the Gospel or the epistles that didn't fit with his dualistic teachings. By creating a list of officially sanctioned religious books, Marcion prompted the Church to form its own canon of books that were recognized as divinely inspired and authoritative, books that taught that creation and the physical are good and that the spiritual has the potential to be evil. Ironically, an excommunicated heretic was the impetus for the creation of the New Testament.

But to return to that drawing by Rubens, the provenance of Venice explained the appearance of St. Mark, not normally associated with St. Benedict, but the patron saint of Venice ever since Venetian pirates stole the relics from Egypt, where St. Mark is revered as the founder of the Egyptian Church. Mark is also identified as a companion of St. Paul in his missionary journeys, although they had a falling out about something and Mark left him. Mark is also traditionally the companion and secretary of St. Peter and the Gospel that now bears Mark's name, the earliest of the Gospels to be written according to contemporary scholars, was based on his recollections of what St. Peter told him about Jesus.

And that is one of the interesting things about our New Testament. Marcion, by using only Pauline material was able to claim that Jesus was not like us. Peter's understanding could never have been like that. He ate and drank with him. He knew his family. He was his traveling companion for several years. And so the New Testament is important for preserving both of these important truths—Jesus was one of us and not like us at all.

Paul and Mark had a falling out. And Peter and Paul had a falling out, as Paul vehemently reminds the Galatians. So we know that St. Peter and St. Paul disagreed strongly in their missionary work. The tradition of the Church insists that they were reconciled before the end, but we are never told this in Scripture. For all we know, they disagreed to the end of their lives. In one sense, I rather hope that is true. For it means that sincere Christians can disagree with one another and still be one in Christ—one in following Christ—one in living for Christ—one in being willing to die for Christ, as did Peter and Paul.

—Prior Aelred

Available October 15

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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.

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