

Abbey Letter

no. 259

Fall

2014



on the cover: participants in the vocation program weeding the garden

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.



class time



picking berries



working in the refectory



proofreading



study in the library



helping in the kitchen



homemade ice cream and hot dogs on the 4th of July



NOTES

Prior Aelred and Fr. William attended the consecration of Matthew Gunter as Bishop of the Diocese of Fond du Lac on April 26th in Appleton, Wisconsin.

Br. Abraham is scheduled to lead a Saturday quiet day at All Saints Church in Western Springs, Illinois November 15th and preach at the Eucharist the next day.

A mechanical failure the last week of May necessitated the drilling of a new water well for

St. Denys' guesthouse and St. Anthony's guesthouse. During the two weeks without water, guests had to be rescheduled or grouped together at St. Benedict's guesthouse. All three guesthouses are now back in operation.

The harsh winter killed many trees on the monastery grounds, and several of them posing hazards to buildings were removed over the course of the summer.

drilling the new well



more scenes from this year's July Vocation Program

learning to use choir books



scripture reading



lunch and free-range bocce on St. Benedict's Day



Humbly I Adore Thee, Verity Unseen

One of the great benefits of living in the monastery, or even of visiting here, is that the church is open around the clock for private prayer and meditation. Like many Christians, I like to spend some of that time praying before the Blessed Sacrament, reserved in a veiled box, called a tabernacle, located over the Lady altar on the north side of the church. Through the years, I've found two qualities to prayer before the tabernacle that make these visits especially dear to me. The first is that I can find quiet more easily there.

In the tabernacle the Bread of Life waits to be shared by those who can't be at the celebration of the Mass itself. It's as though someone hit the "pause" button during the liturgy after the Great Thanksgiving and the Lord's Prayer. During the pause, the reserved portion of the Sacrament waits for the service to be resumed at the bedside of an unwell Christian. It waits in the silence I so love to share. Interestingly enough, the rubrics of the Prayer Book actually require a time of silence after the Lord's Prayer and breaking of the bread.

I don't know why I find it easy to recreate and extend that liturgical silence when I make a visit to the reserved Sacrament. But I do. For me it's one of those times when the best response to God's self-manifestation is an awe-filled and deep quiet. As one of the sentences for opening Morning Prayer says: *The Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him.* (Habakkuk 2:20).

Certainly words are important. God has revealed himself to us again and again through the ages, and most especially in his Son, Jesus Christ. And our faith is largely embodied in words from, and about, and frequently to Jesus. We need those words. For love to have meaning and to survive, the lovers have to talk to each other, and listen to each other.

But in addition to the exchange of words and the mutual understanding they build, love cries out for mutual presence, for intimacy, for time spent together. In the Holy Eucharist, Jesus himself is present: mysteriously, silently, sacramentally. That means the Eucharist is where heaven and earth, eternity and time, grace and nature, touch. They not only touch, they work together for our salvation and union with God. Earth does the work of heaven; time, the work of eternity; nature, the work of grace. Or rather, God, working through these creatures achieves the divine work of our salvation and sanctification. That is what a sacrament is.

In the face of this holiness, we can be moved to prayer, many sorts of prayer. There may be adoration and words of praise and thanksgiving, an awareness of our unworthiness and words of confession, or there can be words of petition and intercession. But simply being quiet in the presence of the Lord is a form of prayer, too. And it can be a powerful and spirit-filled kind of prayer. In prayerful silence, we aren't like the couple talking about what's happened during the day, and how we are concerned about our kith and kin and the

world around us. We're not like the couple talking over the things in their shared life that need attention and adjustment. The prayer of quiet is like the couple sitting on the porch side by side in the evening who are sharing the time by being together at that time and place, not needing words at all just then. That quiet time together, when we share it with our Lord, is a great blessing and time when God can work powerfully on our souls.

In this quiet I find the other quality I so value in my prayer before the tabernacle. That is the experience of *waiting on the Lord*.

When I'm out shopping, I've sometimes had to go to a cloth store, or one specializing in supplies for scrapbooks or rubber stamp art. Often such stores have a chair just inside the main entrance, sometimes with a table and a few magazines. And often that chair will be occupied by a retired looking gentleman. I've come to think of it as the "husband chair." The husband sits there, waiting while his wife is deep in the store and a world that is alien territory to him. He's waiting in love for the time when she reappears and they resume their shopping trip together.

I'm doing something like that when I'm sitting or kneeling in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament. I often experience the time as waiting while my Savior, present yet hidden, is going about his divine work: ruling the universe, saving souls, and preparing me for the next time I will be able to join with him as I receive Holy Communion. But eating and drinking the Lord's Body and Blood isn't the only way to be intimate with him. Hearing and understanding his word is another way, an essential and exalted way. And the time spent waiting on him in silence is a special kind of intimacy as well.

I'm grateful for that intimacy, and for the silence that begets it. I hope that from time to time you too will seek out those experiences in the presence of our Eucharistic Lord, and will find them. Let us pray for the grace to live lives worthy of those who have enjoyed such blessings. And let us give thanks to our Lord for the privilege of waiting on him in the quiet of his presence. It is meet and right so to do.

— Fr. William



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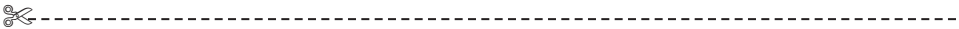
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The continuing existence of Saint Gregory's is made possible by the support of those who believe that the contemplative vocation within the Church finds valid expression there.

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