

Abbey Letter

no. 275

Fall 2018



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.



NOTES

Abbot Andrew attended the Theology & Peace conference held at the American Baptist College in Nashville, Tennessee May 21st – 24th. The topic of the conference was “Accepting the Invitation to the ‘Beloved Community’.” He was also a speaker at the Julianfest weekend June 8th – 10th at the Redemptorist Center in Oconomowoc, Wisconsin. The annual event is a gathering of associates of the Order of Julian of Norwich. In July, he traveled to Denver, Colorado for a meeting of the Colloquium on Violence and Religion (COVR), where he led a practicum workshop on contemplative prayer.

The Rt. Rev. Dorsey McConnell, bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Pittsburgh, was with us May 21st – 25th.

Fr. Chad-Joseph Sundin OSBCn from Tempe, Arizona was with us June 11th – 15th. He is the Superior of the Community of St. Mary of

the Annunciation, a chapter of the Canons of the Order of St. Benedict.

Fr. William and Br. Armand attended a presentation by Sr. Joan Chittester OSB in Kalamazoo, Michigan on June 1st. The event was sponsored by the Sisters of St. Joseph.

Anaphylactic shock caused by blood dye for a CT scan put Fr. Jude in serious medical condition April 13th. With the help of occupational and physical therapists, visiting nurses, and the care of his monastic brothers, he has regained all of his physical and mental abilities, with the exception of long range independent mobility. He is grateful for the prayers and encouragement he has received from many people. (See front and back cover for photos of Fr. Jude’s 90th birthday party in the monastery refectory June 20th.)



The Movie MOTHER!

After watching Darren Aronofsky's film MOTHER!, I find I cannot stop reflecting on it. The film is controversial. It's one of those movies you either love or hate, with not much of a middle ground. Certainly it is not a film for everyone; but for those who don't mind movies that are artistically challenging, I think many of you will appreciate much that is in it. It has a lot to offer, and succeeds in some ways, and fails in others.

My own understanding of the film is that it is telling us two stories at once, both of which are intertwined with each other. The first story is a reflection on God's relationship with creation (including humanity). Related to this is the story (perhaps "theme" is a better word) of humanity's relationship with creation and God.

The movie revolves around a couple living in a large and isolated house surrounded by tall grass, which is surrounded by woods. Mother spends her days restoring the house and trying to make it the ideal home for her and "Him", a famous poet who is dealing with writer's block. Metaphorically she is Mother Nature and he is God the Creator. The house represents Eden, especially the poet's study where he does his writing, his creating. The famous book the Poet wrote years before is apparently the Old Testament.

Then Man appears. The Poet offers him hospitality, even though Mother is uncomfortable with having him in her house. It turns out that Man is a doctor who is dying, and wanted to meet the Poet, for his last book "changed his life". Later we see that Man has a scar where a rib would be. Then Woman shows up, who is Man's wife. Again the Poet offers them hospitality, and Mother becomes increasingly uncomfortable with their presence. While respectful toward the Poet, they are increasingly rude to Mother, treating the house as theirs, going into rooms that are private (particularly the study). While admiring a crystal in the study – the Poet's prized possession – Man and Woman accidentally break it into pieces. The Poet loses his temper and banishes them from the study. It is clear that this is a retelling of the story of Adam and Eve, with the study being Eden, the crystal being the apple, as it were.

I shall gloss over many details in the film and go over the basic outline of the story. The film is drenched in metaphor.

Soon, the two sons of Man and Woman arrive, arguing over their dying father's will. In a fight one brother kills the other brother. The surviving brother eventually leaves. Other people begin to show up for an impromptu wake for the dead brother. These more or less take over the house, and are rude to Mother and start "fixing" the house as they see fit. At one point they break the kitchen sink, severing the water pipes. This causes the house to flood and Mother forces everyone to leave. She then starts to repair the damage done to the house. With all the people gone, peace is restored.

Eventually, the Poet impregnates Mother. She is thrilled at her pregnancy,

and he feels inspired to write his next book (presumably the New Testament). The new book is published and is a best seller. People from all over begin to arrive to meet the Poet, and stay at the house, forming different cults, each taking over a different section of the house. Mother becomes very distressed and takes refuge in the study. She begs the Poet to make all the people leave, but he can't. She then gives birth to her first-born son. The Poet wants to show people his son, but Mother doesn't trust them and refuses to let him. When she falls asleep he takes the baby, and presents him to all the people. The people are ecstatic and take the baby in adoration. They then proceed to break its neck and devour it.

Understandably both Mother and Poet are shocked, and Mother goes on a killing spree until she's overpowered by the people, who begin to brutally beat her. The Poet stops this, and tells Mother they have to forgive them, the people who killed their son. Mother refuses to do so, and goes into the basement and breaks open an oil drum and burns everything and everyone, including herself. This is not the end of the film, but I do not wish to give it away.

I find MOTHER! a very moving film, with real insight into our relationship with God, nature, and each other. It is not for everyone, and the violence depicted is graphic and shocking to say the least. I would suggest it needed to be in order to make its point, to show the enormity of the wrongs we humans have done to each other, to creation, and to God. It is in realizing this that we can come to better know the depths of God's love for us, the depths of God's forgiveness.

The movie is by no means perfect. There are times when it tries too hard to make a point, and times when the point is wrong. At least, it seems to me, a devout Christian. But I love the fact that the movie tried and took real risks in doing so. Again, I warn that this is not for everyone.

— Br. Martin



church youth group from Holland, Michigan

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*

A Symphony of Psalms *choral symphony by Br. Abraham – Latin text of four psalms*

The Kiss *baritone voice and string quartet by Br. Abraham – texts from office readings for Mary Magdalene and the Virgin Mary*

Tuesday Afternoon *chorus and wind octet by Br. Abraham – psalms from Tuesday vespers*

Symphony in c minor *orchestral symphony by Br. Abraham in romantic minimalist style*

Symphony in g minor *orchestral symphony by Br. Abraham in expansive classical style*

Visible Dream *piano and baritone voice by Br. Abraham – poems of Cyrus Cassells*

Week In Review *piano and baritone voice by Br. Abraham – poems of Robert Fruehwirth*

The Hours *tenor, baritone, and bass voices by Br. Abraham – texts from psalms for lauds & vespers*

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

scores and synthesized performances available at

webbermusic.com

For everything but *Life of Benedict*, search for “Newsom, A”; for *Life of Benedict*, search for “Webber, J”. Donations of \$1.00 per look and listen are requested and can be made at the website or sent to St. Gregory's Abbey designated for “music compositions.” Hard copies of scores and orchestral parts are for sale at list price from **webbermusic.com**

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