

Abbey Letter no. 277

Easter 2019



For the past several years, Br. Martin has made Palm Sunday bouquets by gathering palms from fair-trade vendors and bundling them with dried flowers, leaves, and grasses from the woods surrounding the monastery. These arrangements are used by the monks and guests during the Palm Sunday Liturgy. They are kept by the monks and guests after the service and many guests gather the unused ones to take home to give to others. The photos on this page, as well as on the front and back covers, show scenes from the production and use of these beautiful and meaningful bouquets.



On Living the Resurrected Life

After the self-examination and penitence of Lent and following Jesus in his sufferings during Passontide, the cry “Christ is risen!” rings out and we celebrate the resurrected life of Jesus. But what is the resurrected life? How might we live what seems so exalted as to be beyond us? I have three challenging suggestions that can give us a sense of direction.

1) The resurrected life is a crucified life. There is much joy in Jesus’ resurrection and the life he lives, but the wounds from the crucifixion remain with him. The apostle Thomas touched the wound in Jesus’ side to assuage his doubts. I wonder if the wounds hurt Jesus even now.

The wounds of Jesus remind us that Jesus was and always will be the kind of person who will voluntarily suffer pain rather than inflict violence in self-defense. Much as we admire Jesus for this trait, we must avoid glorifying the violence that was inflicted on him. The actual crucifixion of Jesus was not a pretty ivory cross one uses to decorate a room; it was a slow death of agony and shame. Uglier still was the human rage that led to the crucifixion, a rage mixed with cowardly rationalizations and outright lies. Added to all this was the desertion of his closest disciples.

The French thinker René Girard has argued that the Passion narratives definitively reveal the human tendency to solve social tensions through a scapegoating mechanism where one person is blamed for a crisis and exiled or put to death. The Gospel narratives fit this profile with great clarity as the social groups in Palestine who usually hated each other banded together for the brief time it took to nail Jesus to the cross. This scenario shows us that the resurrected life entails resisting persecutory crowds which are legion in today’s world and being willing to move into the place of the victim, if opportunity and need should present themselves. At the very least, we need to carry the suffering of others while doing what we can to alleviate it. When Jesus told Paul that Paul was persecuting *him* when he was persecuting his followers, he was also telling us that we are persecuting Jesus when we continue to persecute others in the here and now. The wounds of Jesus are not merely physical; they are emotional as Jesus weeps with those who weep. In sharing Jesus’ resurrected life, we also weep with those who weep and seek for ways to give others less cause for weeping.

2) The resurrected life is a forgiving life. When Jesus rose from the dead, he did not exact vengeance on his persecutors. Instead, the first word he greeted his followers with was “peace” and he admonished them not to be afraid. They would likely have been afraid of seeing someone they thought was dead but would also have been apprehensive about meeting the man they forsook. Jesus did ask Peter three times if he loved him to give Peter the chance to undo the three-fold denial in the court of the high priest.

We see the forgiveness of the risen Christ most clearly in the apostolic preaching in Jerusalem. When Peter recounted the events regarding Jesus of Nazareth, how the people had reviled Jesus and killed him, they were “cut to the heart” and asked what they could do. The answer was simple: Repent and believe and be baptized. Then they would receive the Holy Spirit who was speaking through the apostles. (Acts 2: 37 - 38) Rather than send fire and brimstone on the people, Jesus sent forgiveness through the apostles. A few years later, Paul, a persecutor of the church, experienced Jesus as one who forgives, freeing him to become the most important apostle of the early church. The truth of collective violence revealed by Jesus through the Gospels and apostolic preaching would actually have revealed very little if Jesus had not risen from the dead as the forgiving victim, thus offering a way out of the continuous cycle of violence and vengeance.

Forgiveness is much more than cheaply letting bygones be bygones. For Jesus, forgiveness

is costly because of the violent rejection and torture inflicted on him. Most of us think we're doing pretty good in the forgiveness department if we forgive small slights we receive from others. Much harder yet for Jesus is the pain that is inflicted on him when people today are tortured, driven out of their homes, and refused entry to other countries that once offered sanctuary. It is this deep level of costly forgiveness that we also are called to offer in the resurrected life of Jesus. It is a huge challenge to forgive what seems unforgivable. It is a greater challenge to discern our personal weaknesses regarding forgiveness. For my part, I need to realize that I am easily tempted to seek vengeance against persecutors, who "obviously deserve" it. The greatest challenge might be to forgive ourselves and accept Jesus' forgiveness of us.

The Prodigal father's party is going full blast right now. (Luke 15: 22 - 24) We are called to join the Forgiving Victim who anxiously waits for all who have not yet come to make the party complete. We should help him encourage and welcome all comers.

3) The resurrected life is a life lived in the Three Persons of the Trinity. Jesus promised his disciples that he would dwell within them, along with the Father and the Holy Spirit. As branches abide in the vine, so all of us will abide in Jesus as Jesus abides in the Father and the Holy Spirit. (John 15)

Paul also experienced Christ dwelling within him and he prayed that we "may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that [we] may be filled with all the fullness of God." (Ephesians 3: 18)

All three elements of the resurrected life come together when Stephen sees the heavens opened and the Son of Man at the right hand of God and then forgives those who are stoning him. (Acts 7: 56 - 60)

The indwelling of the Trinity makes it possible for us to take our first baby steps in living the resurrection through the crucifixion and forgiveness. The vortexes of collective persecution are otherwise too strong and the pain of the crucified forgiveness that Jesus bears is otherwise too great. Paul expresses the heart of the resurrected life filled with the indwelling of the Trinity with these words: "neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 8: 38 - 39)

— Abbot Andrew



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NOTES

Two novices of the Order of Lutheran Franciscans were with us October 26th - 28th.

The roof of St. Denys Guest House was reshingled in November.

The Great Lakes Chapter of the Society of Catholic Priests was with us December 10th - 11th.



Sr. Beth n/OLF & Br. Ian n/OLF



roof crew on St. Denys guesthouse



*members of the Society of Catholic Priests
in the kitchen of St. Denys guesthouse*

Books read in the Refectory during Lunch and Supper 2018

The Fragmentation of A Sect: Schism in The Worldwide Church Of God by David Barrett

1177 B.C.: The Year Civilization Collapsed by Eric H. Cline

Religious Freedom: The Contested History of an American Ideal by Tisa Wenger

Charlemagne: Father of a Continent by Alessandro Barbero translated by Allan Cameron

Strangers Drowning: Grappling with Impossible Idealism, Drastic Choices, and the Overpowering Urge to Help by Larissa MacFarquhar

Arab Christians in British Mandate Palestine: Communalism and Nationalism, 1917-1948 by Noah Haiduc-Dale

To the Edges of the Earth: 1909, The Race for the Three Poles and the Climax of the Age of Exploration by Edward J. Larson

Bartholomew: Apostle and Visionary, Twenty-five Years Guiding the Christian East by John Chryssavgis

The Bone and Sinew of the Land: America's Forgotten Black Pioneers & the Struggle for Equality by Anna-Lisa Cox

An Explorer's Guide to Julian of Norwich by Veronica Mary Rolf

Political Tribes: Group Instinct and the Fate of Nations by Amy Chua

What Patients Say, What Doctors Hear by Danielle Ofri, MD

Books from St. Gregory's Abbey

Singing God's Praises (1998)

history of the community, select Abbey Letter articles, photographs

\$20.00 Please send ____ copies.

\$ ____

Come Let Us Adore (2011)

select Abbey Letter Articles from 1999 to 2011 (companion book to Singing God's Praises)

\$12.00 Please send ____ copies.

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Tools For Peace (2007)

Abbot Andrew's reflections on St. Benedict and René Girard

\$24.00 Please send ____ copies.

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Born in the Darkest Time of Year (2004)

15 Christmas stories by Abbot Andrew

\$12.00 Please send ____ copies.

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Creatures We Dream of Knowing (2011)

fantasy stories by Abbot Andrew

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From Beyond to Here (2012)

more stories by Abbot Andrew

\$15.00 Please send ____ copies.

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The Forest of Windellynn (2015)

fantasy novel by Abbot Andrew

\$10.00 Please send ____ copies.

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Moving and Resting in God's Desire: A Spirituality of Peace (2016)

Abbot Andrew's thoughts on cultivating peace using Christian practices

and the ideas of René Girard

\$20.00 Please send ____ copies.

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Seven Times A Day I Praise You

Br. Martin's review of personal daily prayer books

\$3.00 Please send ____ copies.

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St. Gregory's Abbey and Benedictine Monasticism

A survey of Benedictine monasticism and how it is lived at St. Gregory's

\$3.00 Please send ____ copies.

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All of the above except for **Singing God's Praises**, **Born in the Darkest Time of Year**, **Seven Times A Day I Praise You**, and **St. Gregory's Abbey and Benedictine Monasticism** are available in ebook formats. To download, go to our website:

saintgregorysthreerivers.org and look for publications (digital).

All books may be purchased as hard copies from our website or by using this order form.

Enclosed is \$ _____ in full payment. Please allow 4-6 weeks for delivery.

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

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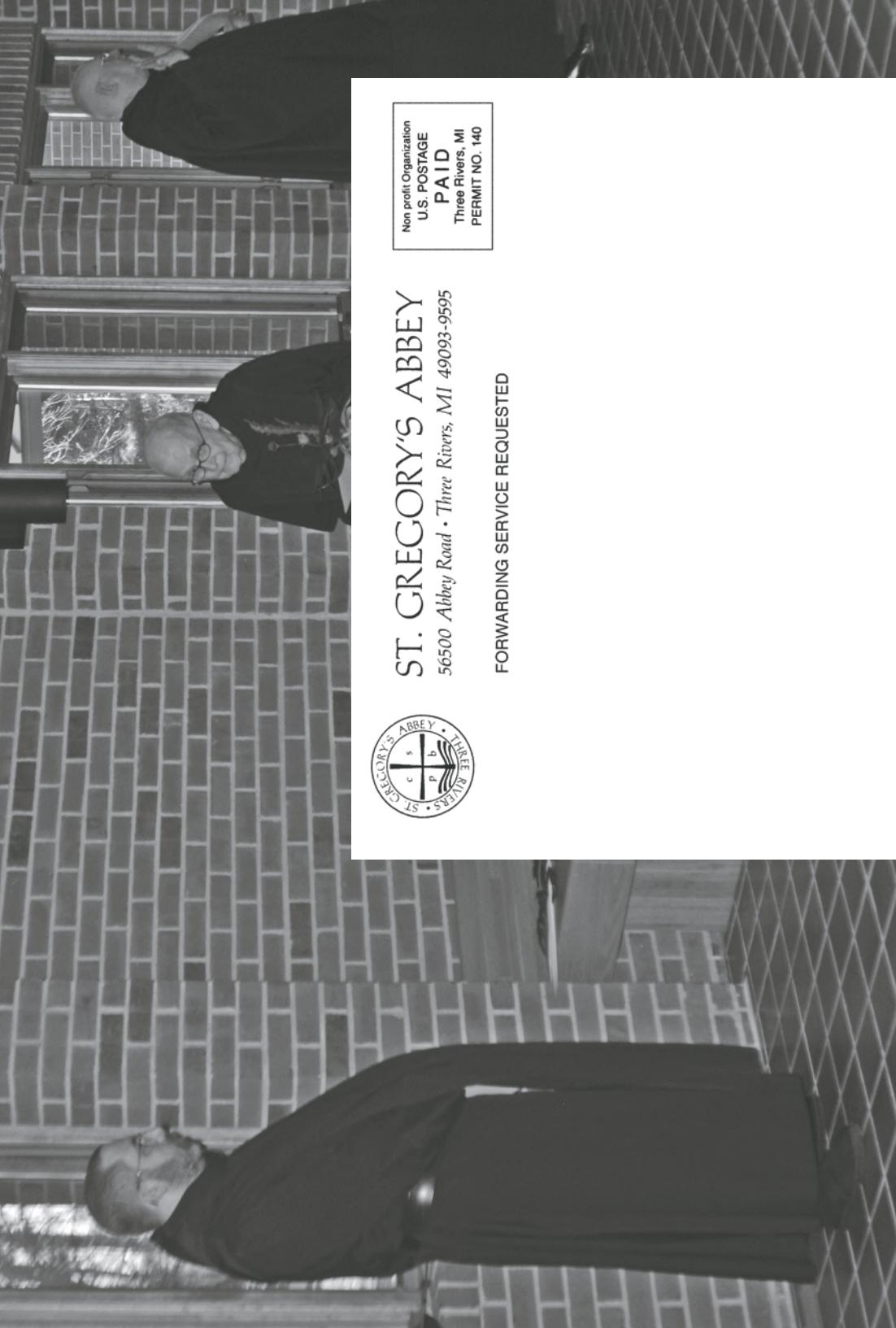
with the monks at St. Gregory's Abbey — a monastery
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