



Spring 2025

The Chronicler's Column



Fr. Joseph Jensen's birthday

Since the time when the previous issue of our abbey newsletter was published, we have celebrated the 100th birthday of our Fr. Joseph Jensen, who was born on November 22, 1924, only two months after the founding members of our monastic community took up residence here in Washington, DC. The monks celebrated his birthday on that very date, but a couple weeks later, on the first Sunday of December, our oblates and other friends of the abbey celebrated with Fr. Joseph at a special reception after that morning's Mass.

Later that month we celebrated Christmas with Masses in a beautifully decorated abbey church and enjoyed a festive meal at midday on that great feast. Some weeks later, early in the New Year, we said farewell to our guest Alfonso Chicharro, a civil engineer who had resided at the abbey while working on the Purple Line light-rail project

that connects two neighboring counties in Maryland. He kindly wrote one of the articles for this newsletter and also arranged for some of us to visit the headquarters of the Purple Line project and so have the chance to walk through some of the cars that were soon to be put into service. Those who live in the Washington area know that this project took much longer to complete and turned out to be much more expensive than originally thought, but as of this writing it is very near to completion. Alfonso has now been assigned by his firm to work on a highway project in Atlanta, while another long-term guest has taken his place here at the abbey: Msgr. Robert Cannon, who recently retired after serving as chancellor for the Archdiocese for the Military Services of our country. He is finishing a doctoral dissertation in canon law, which he will soon defend at the nearby Catholic University of America.

The articles in this issue offer a great variety of topics. The first is Br. Dunstan Robidoux's account of his recent retreat at the village of Garabandal in northern Spain. That village has become a pilgrimage site ever since appearances of Our Lady to four young girls at a grove of pine trees just outside that



Visit to the Purple Line

village, from 1961-1965. As the appearances have not received official approval by the Church, the village has not experienced the commercialization that one finds at some other pilgrimage sites, something that may contribute to the atmosphere of quiet peace that is to be found there.

The next article is by Fr. Ignacio González, whose piece features what he and many others consider the best study Bible available, although he notes that there are many other such Bibles intended for one or another particular age group. On the second weekend of March Fr. Ignacio and our prior, Fr. Samuel Springuel, assisted with our school's annual Kairos retreat. These two monks serve respectively as our school's campus minister and chaplain.

The third article is a homily that Abbot James Wiseman gave on the first Sunday of March. Several persons told him afterward that they appreciated the way he dealt with the challenging topic of what

“judging” others might mean in different contexts. Abbot James also contributed a short article about the annual meeting of the North American Benedictine abbots, held this time at St. Joseph Abbey, about thirty-five miles north of New Orleans.

This issue's final two articles are by lay guests. The first of these is by the engineer mentioned in the second paragraph above. Alfonso Chicharro was an exemplary guest in many ways, and his article offers his reflections on his residence among us for a couple years. The final article is rather different in genre and was written quite a bit earlier: Charles Burk, who later became an oblate of our community, has offered his journal entries for his very first visit as one of our guests way back in 2009.

There will surely be at least one piece in this issue that will be of special interest to one or another of our readers, even as we hope that some will want to read every single one!

JAMES WISEMAN, OSB

Retreat and Pilgrimage: Garabandal, Spain

I am here putting together some reflections about what it was like to go to a small mountain village in the northern part of Spain, in sight of the Bay of Biscay if one looks north from the heights that surround the village. The official name of the village is San Sebastián de Garabandal, though it is commonly known simply as Garabandal. It is located in the Peña Sagra mountain range in the province of Cantabria, 497 meters above sea level and with a population of about 300 persons.

From 1961 to 1965, four young schoolgirls – Mari Loli Mazón, Jacinta González,

Mari Cruz González, and Conchita González – reportedly received apparitions and messages from, first, St. Michael the Archangel and later from the Blessed Virgin Mary under the title of Our Lady of Mount Carmel. The apparitions drew huge crowds, and thousands “witnessed extraordinary phenomena” that were frequently filmed or photographed. “Since that time, conversions associated with Garabandal and cases of instantaneous and lasting healings have multiplied throughout the world.” The village has become a place of pilgrimage. Although the Garabandal

apparitions have not been officially sanctioned or approved by the Church, pilgrimages are permitted by the local bishop. The village church, which is dedicated to St. Michael the Archangel, offers a daily Mass at 11 am, lasting an hour and including a homily in Spanish. On Wednesday evenings, beginning at 9 pm, the Blessed Sacrament is exposed and venerated until 9:00 the next morning. The current parish priest hails from this village and was about 14 years old when the apparitions began. An Irish priest, Fr. Michael, currently assists him, despite the trials of Parkinson's disease. From a resident of Garabandal (originally from Switzerland) who had built a house opposite to the one where I was staying, I received a tiny piece of white stone from a larger block of the same stone upon which St. Michael had allegedly stood when he initiated a series of heavenly visitations that began on June 18, 1961.

While there, I stayed with two friends: Roland Krismer from Austria and our host, Alfonso Chicharro, a Spaniard whose family had purchased and renovated the house a number of years ago for anyone who might want to come and make a retreat. Looking through a window of that house, one can easily see a hillside grove of pine trees some yards away where many of the apparitions allegedly occurred. Walking up to this grove on a winding path, one passes on the left a finely built but not too large stone house that had been built for the late king and queen of Belgium, Baudouin and Fabiola. Queen Fabiola, originally from Spain, had as her full name Fabiola Fernanda María-de las-Victorias Antonia Adelaida de Mora y Aragón. She and her royal husband were known to live faithful, devout lives. A story tells us that the late King Baudouin prepared the current Belgian king, Philippe, for the assumption of his royal duties. The young man would nervously go to the royal



The interior of the village church

palace and meet with his uncle, King Baudouin. They would first both kneel in adoration before the Blessed Sacrament and then, after an hour of silent prayer, would go into a room for a private conversation. The king attempted to impress on his nephew the importance of a life of daily prayer since, without prayer, one cannot properly function as king. Problems and difficulties exist for which no adequate human solution exists, so one must govern and rule through the power and the efficacy of prayer. The house was sold after their deaths. In the latter half of the twentieth century, Baudouin and Fabiola would often come to Garabandal despite its remote location and lack of easy accessibility.

A proper road into the Garandabal was built only about five years ago, and even today there is no grocery store or post office. Standing in front of the church with one's back to its door, a small religious goods shop exists on the right.

Garabandal is largely unchanged from what it was in 1961, which means that one will be going to a place of pilgrimage that has not been commercialized. I was told though that the local people tend to dislike outsiders. An internet

connection is locally available. but when someone erected an aerial to improve the reception, some unknown person tore it down when nobody else was looking. Some of the houses continue to have cattle and horses living on the ground floor, their body heat providing warmth for the rest of the house—certainly an environmentally friendly way of heating a building. The animals are let out in the morning to go up and eat grass on the slopes of the nearby hills and then return to heat the houses at night. This old way is now largely discontinued but is still used by some of the villagers.

As one thinks about Garabandal and tries to understand it, it is helpful to attend to a context that is conditioned by two perspectives and see how these interrelate. A sociological perspective (which is also historical) focuses on the strength and particularities of Spanish Catholicism; the other perspective attends to the question of supernatural, heavenly visitations and how these fit into our Catholic religious life. As much as the human soul exists as the form of the human body, it enjoys a form of transcendence which is attuned to experiences that can transcend our ordinary acts of cognition,



The grove of pine trees where the four girls saw appearances of Our Lady.

whether these be acts of sensing or of understanding.

To begin with Spanish Catholicism, we would have to admit from the start that within the English-speaking world there is a bias against Spanish Catholicism. This bias exists, but let us try not to think too much about it. Adapting words from Kenneth Clark's *Civilization: A Personal View*, we could say that for religious and other related reasons, those of us who live in England and America "have been conditioned [to think]... that no society based on obedience, repression and superstition can be really civilized." And in words that come to us from Oliver Cromwell, as he addressed what was left of the English Parliament in September 1656: "Who are our enemies? Answer: All the wicked men of the world," and these are led by Spain. "Your great enemy is the Spaniard," since "Spaniards have placed themselves in the service of an evil religion." In the popular imagination, Spanish Catholicism is to be associated with acts of cruelty and coercion and the use of force to intimate and coerce the human conscience of many people. So distasteful must be the kind of culture that exists as a derivative. Hence, look the other way.

In preparing his lectures, Clark decided to omit all mention of Spain although, in one place, he does refer to "the gold of America, doled out through Spain" when he spoke about what appeared to be the future of the "Roman Church" in the wake of the 16th-century Protestant Reformation. It seemed so obvious to so many then that the pope could now begin to function only as a client of Spain, as a kind of chaplain to the Spanish monarch. But, as Clark notes, this did not happen. The Church of Rome, the Catholic Church, "became once more a great spiritual force." Clark said that "the mid-sixteenth century was a period of sanctity in the the Roman Church [the Catholic Church]" but in

identifying the principal human agents (who, from our viewpoint, would be functioning as secondary causes), of the four persons that he mentioned, three are Spanish: “St. John of the Cross, the great poet of mysticism; St. Ignatius Loyola, the visionary soldier turned psychologist; [and] St. Theresa of Avila, the great headmistress, with her irresistible combination of mystical experience and common sense.”

In the weight and momentum of Spanish Catholicism, a vigor, a discipline, a dedication existed among Spanish Catholics which others could not fail to notice. Warren Carroll’s history of the Reformation recounts a number of stories that point to a certain kind of steadfastness and also a kind of daring which tended to exist among Catholic Spaniards as they, at times, related to other groups. A group of Spanish soldiers were warming themselves by an open fire in Worms, Germany when, in April 1521, Martin Luther was making his way into the city to meet with the Holy Roman Emperor and the Diet of the Holy Roman Empire in order to explain himself to them and, perhaps, to justify his words and deeds. However, because Luther was coming as an excommunicant (he had been excommunicated the previous December and was coming to the Diet over the protests of the Papal Nuncio), many there were unsure about how to greet and receive him as he entered the town. Not so the Spanish soldiers. “To the flames!” Burn him! Some years later, amid turmoil in Brussels, a lone Spanish soldier, using a spear, fended off a hostile crowd and, alone, managed to save a church from the fury of iconoclastic desecration.

Our history tells us that the Catholicism of Spain was something that was forged through a long period of struggle and conflict, beginning in the 8th century with the Muslim conquest of Spain

and ending in 1492 with Spain’s reconquest (“the *reconquista*”) and the founding of Spain as a newly united kingdom. In a manner that symbolizes the stress and strain of this conflict and the endurance of Spanish Catholicism, accounts tell about the fate of the Sudarium as it was moved to prevent its capture and desecration. Literally a “sweat cloth,” this bloodstained piece of cloth (now in the city of Oviedo) had covered Our Lord’s face when he was taken down from the cross and placed in his tomb. The blood stains are quite visible. For years, it was kept in a cave near Jerusalem but was taken to Alexandria in 614 to escape a Persian invasion, later to be moved to north Africa and then to Spain to escape the Persian onslaught as Alexandria fell in 616. A Spanish bishop, Fulgentius, gave the Sudarium to Leandro, the bishop of Seville, who then took it to Seville. Later, in 657, it was moved to Toledo and then, in 718, to northern Spain to protect it from the invading Moors. Hidden in a mountain cave, it was taken to Oviedo in 840 and there housed in a chapel. In 1075, the Sudarium’s oak chest was covered in silver with the inscription: “The Sacred Sudarium of Our Lord Jesus Christ.” A similar story tells about the Holy Cross of St. Toribio de Liébana and how it was moved and hidden from its possible capture and desecration.

As seen from within this context, a reassertion of Catholic Christian sovereignty distinguishes the Catholicism of Spain from that of other countries, and so in responding to the challenges that arose at the onset of the Reformation, a redirected Spanish militancy exerted itself in ways that, perhaps, we can still feel “in our bones” to this day. To quote the words of a friend: “We drove back the Muslims; we stopped the Protestants;” and after making certain decisions about how to deal with the influence of God’s Chosen People, “we carried the

faith to the New World and to regions beyond.” In my account, certain words, certain things would best be left unsaid. King Philip II of Spain sent Franciscans to Japan to work with the missionary Jesuits, many of them also Spanish, but there were degrees of tension and disagreement about how best to communicate the Catholic faith to the indigenous Japanese.

In conjunction with this resurgence of Spanish Catholicism, an energizing element needs to be identified as this existed as a kind of spur from within. As identified, this takes us from the experience of public revelation to the experience of private revelations. What is the place of the latter? How do they relate to the public revelation which exists through the history and testimony of ancient Israel and through the later history which comes from Christ’s coming into our world? Public and private revelations are clearly different. Public revelation exists as a “self-proposing” kind of thing (see John 10:35 and Luke 24:44). However, if we turn to private revelations and how they have existed in our Christian lives, we find something that varies from person to person and from place to place: here and there, there is a seeing of visions, a hearing of voices, or, somewhat differently, an uplifting of the understanding. All is dependent upon and referenced to public revelation. Apart from this kind of referral and resonance, private revelations enjoy no status. As Catholics, we are not obliged to believe in any teaching which comes to us from sources that refer to a private revelation. However, if we move into a history of private revelations, we find numerous incidents and accounts that have stirred the life of our faith and have, in some way, added to the practice and enhanced the orientation of our faith. On the one hand, through our theological activity and reflection, our faith grows in the kind

of intelligibility that it can have. It becomes more meaningful, however partial and limited is the meaning. A kind of partnership exists if we look at the history of the Church’s doctrinal teaching (see here John Henry Newman’s *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*), a history that also belongs to the history and the development of our theological understanding and reflection. Each acts on the other. Doctrinal development cannot exist apart from theological development.

However, on the other hand, in a way that is mixed in with how we seeking to understand our faith and, in some way, live it out better, private revelations unexpectedly come to different individuals and, at times, with telling effects and consequences. To the Emperor Constantine, a private revelation speaks about a sign that was given to him on October 28, 312 on “the eve of [a] battle that would change the destiny not only of the [Roman] empire but of the entire Church.” In the heavens above, a “dazzling cross” was seen with words “written on it...in *hoc signo vinces* (under this sign – the Cross – you shall be victorious).” Constantine orders his soldiers to “impress this cross on the standards of his legions” and so, when confronting his opponent (Maxentius) at the Milvian Bridge outside Rome, he wins a decisive victory and is able to seize the imperial throne.

Even as we relate this story about a form of divine presentation, we find other stories and accounts that are widely distributed in different contexts and have different results. For example, consider a young Japanese man, age 30, Yasutaro John Baptist Mori (d. 1869). He has been arrested and detained for refusing to renounce his Christian faith. He is locked in a cage and immersed in snow for three nights. A fellow prisoner manages to escape and goes to this man’s cage to check on

him: “I told him I imagined how lonely he must feel locked in that cage. He answered that in reality he was not alone at all because every day, starting at midnight, a woman dressed in a blue dress and with a veil of the same color, whose face resembled that of St. Mary, came to visit him and kept him company with her stories until the early hours of the morning. He asked me not to report these facts to anyone as long as he was alive. Three days later he died in joy.”

Another story from a different context points to a different result. A Ukrainian man, Josyp Terelya, undergoes a near-death experience while a prisoner of the communist Soviets in the 1970s. He is put with very little clothing into a freezing cell in the middle of winter (November 11-12, 1972). No heat. Lying down, he finds himself “freezing to death,” eyes clamping shut. But, “a very powerful light” fills the room. The cell begins to warm up. “Against my eyelids I felt the palm of a woman’s hand and smelled the soft fragrance of milk.” Finally managing to open his eyes, he sees a woman, Our Lady: “You called me and I have come.” She stays the entire night, talking with him, continuing to fill the room with warmth and heat. Among many things, she tells him that the “Ukrainians should also repent [of their sins]. You are an unfortunate people because you love each other so little.” So warm is the cell that, in the morning, after Our Lady has left, Josyp needs to take off his shirt and walk around the cell. “That’s how warm it was. I was sweating.” The guards come into the cell amazed; they had seen a bright light that was coming from his cell. For them however, it is so cold; they were wearing “very warm coats and fur hats...you could see their breath.” They cannot understand why Josyp is still alive and “without a shirt.” They demand an explanation and he tells them: “The Mother of God

was here with me and nothing has happened to me.” The coming of Our Lady, through a private visitation, saved Josyp’s life and in due course, Josyp is released from his lengthy confinement.

The worth or the value of a private revelation is measured by how much it turns ourselves and others toward the truth and the goodness of the public revelation that belongs to the Church’s official teaching. Beyond the truth of the Church’s teaching, it is also measured by the salutary changes and the good that can arise in the lives of religious believers (whether or not these changes actually occur in the life of any given person); hence, an intrusive aspect belongs to the mission and the purpose of private visitations and so, with this, an attendant risk. Private revelations cannot be too well evaded nor can they be too well supervised. They tend to escape any kind of deliberate, conscious control: whether on our part in how we could be receiving a heavenly visitation, or on the part of others, outsiders (whether government officials who could be acting in the name of the State or officials who could be acting in the name of the Church). Messages as received and messages as communicated – these can be dangerous. Perils exist. During the English Reformation, Dame Elizabeth Barton, OSB, the “Holy Maid of Kent” (executed November, 1534) is a case in point. To her, allegedly, an angel had appeared and she was told to go directly to the king: “Warn the king to his face. Change, amend the manner of your living. Raise no hand against the pope and the exercise of his authority. Reject the advice of heretics and all heretical teaching. Remain faithful to your wife. Do not marry Anne Boleyn. God’s vengeance will otherwise fall on you.” The value of such a warning is to be distinguished from any ill consequences and effects that could be predicted but which might not



*Br. Dunstan's
companions
Roland Krismer
and Alfonso
Chicharro,
with a Belgian
woman also on
pilgrimage at
Garabandal*

come to pass exactly or literally as they had been initially predicted.

I would argue that within this general context we can place the story and the events of Garabandal. By attending to Garabandal – its warnings, admonitions, and prophecies – we can be moved and startled from within the kind of maze or the kind of order that exists within our own thoughts and desires. Looking about us, we find that we tend to live within a world that has reduced or deprecates the good of religion – if it has any kind of good at all – with regard to how it can improve our lives within our current world. Many have concluded that a religion is good only if it is useful, if its observance can make things easier for us within our current life circumstances. If we look,

for instance, at the troubled relations that existed between Napoleon and Pope Pius VII, the French emperor saw religion as an essentially good thing. Its observance makes for good, virtuous citizens; it helps maintain the good of public order. Less force would be needed if any troubles arise. If the rule of law is to obtain, habitually, people need to be good; they would need to be law abiding. No problem here, in a way, with the pope. However, if our religion serves higher ends and purposes, then there is a dissonance between Napoleon and the pope. According to our faith, there exists a supernatural orientation acting from within our ordinary, human sense of things. Not so easily can it be put to the side or, in some way, done away with. From within, a larger scheme of things presents itself to us and so, from within this greater context, we find a place and a home for Garabandal and can begin to regard it with a sense of appreciation, seeing it as a kind of leaven. We are reminded of realities that exist in an increasingly transcendent way, however humble our human lot and condition. As Our Lord said to St. Dismas: “This day you will be with me in Paradise.”

DUNSTAN ROBIDOUX, OSB

A Quarter of a Quarter Century in the Making: The Ignatius Catholic Study Bible

If one were to do an internet search for study Bibles, he or she would find a plethora from which to choose. For example, at the christianbook.com website for Protestant publications, under their “Study Bibles” section, one finds three distinct categories — Bibles by translation, by title, and by audience and format.

The translations are like looking at alphabet soup, with acronyms such as: NIV, KJV, NKJV, ELT, NLT, NASB, ESV, RSV, and CJB. And publishers have taken these translations and targeted them with these titles: *ESV Study Bible*, *ESV Women’s Bible*, *NIV Grace and Truth Study Bible*, *NIV Study Bible*, *Life in the Spirit Bible*, *New Spirit Filled Life Bible*, *the Complete Jewish Bible*, *The Jesus Bible*, *The Grace and Truth Study Bible*, *The Scofield Bible*, *The Thompson Chain Reference Bible*, *The Tony Evans Bible* and many, many others!

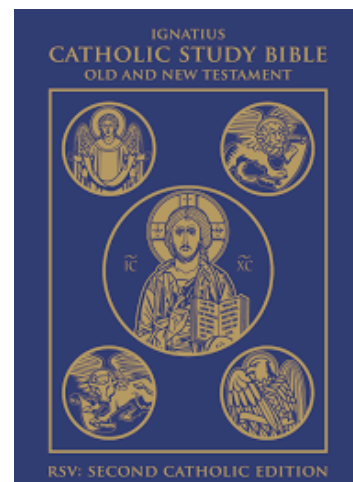
As for the audiences for whom these targeted Bibles are intended, here is a list of the sub-groups of the faithful: children, tweens, teens, teen boys, teen girls, women, men, new believers, students. By and large, Protestants have a corner on the market for Study Bibles because for our brothers and sisters of the Reformed tradition, the Bible is their sole rule of faith.

But the diversity of Bibles is not limited to Protestants. Here are options for Catholics from various Catholic publishers: *The Didache Bible (DB)*, *The New American Bible (NAB)*, *The New American Bible-Revised Edition (NABRE)*, *The Jerusalem Bible (JB)*, *The New Jerusalem Bible (NJB)*, *The St. Joseph Bible (SJB)*, *The Douai Reims Bible (DRB)*, *The Augustinian Bible (AB)*, *The Little*

Rock Bible (LRB), *The Ignatius Bible (IB)*, *The Great Adventure Bible (GAB)*, and the *Navarre Bible (NB)*. With so many Bibles on the market, which would be the best to invest in? I would suggest the newest add to the mix, and that is the *Ignatius Catholic Study Bible (ICSB)*.

There are many videos that have been made about this new Bible, and the bulk of the factual information that follows is from a YouTube video entitled, “26 Years in the Making: The Ignatius Catholic Study Bible.” Its origin was in December of 1997 when Fr. Joseph Fessio, SJ, the founder of Ignatius Press, approached Scott Hahn, who teaches at Franciscan University of Steubenville, asking if he would work on a Study Bible as general editor. Hahn said “yes,” but with one condition — that Fessio hire Curtis Mitch, who had been one of Hahn’s students. According to Hahn, Curtis Mitch was one of the most brilliant scripture scholars that Hahn had taught, so Mitch would be the best to do the “heavy lifting” for the project.

In January, 1998, the project got its start when the two men flew to Nashville to one of the largest Protestant publishers, to talk about what



*The Ignatius Catholic
Study Bible*

they offered: Women’s Study Bible, Cultural Background Study Bible, Apologetic Study Bible, and so on. Hahn and Mitch wanted to find out what lessons they could learn and apply these lessons to a Catholic Study Bible that Ignatius Press would publish, and of which Hahn would be the general editor.

This work became Mitch’s life — he is well-versed in biblical Hebrew and Greek and spent years and years applying himself to approaching the scriptures just like Jesus did on the road to Emmaus after the Resurrection. Jesus opened up the scriptures to show why it was necessary for the Christ to suffer before entering into his glory (Luke 24:26-27). But the scriptures also record how he was made known in the breaking of the bread (Luke 24:30-35), which we know to be the Eucharist. The goal for Hahn and Mitch was to connect the Old Testament with the New through the lens of the earliest apostles — not just in terms of apologetics, but in the divine preparation that went into the prefiguring of Christ’s coming, death and resurrection. But belief in Jesus does not end there; the Holy Spirit was outpoured to enable us to become children of God and grow up to become saints reflecting His divine life within us. In other words, the goal of this new Study Bible was to use the Old Testament (the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings) and the New Testament to make Jesus known to anyone who would “take and read,” as St. Augustine famously did.

That is on the apologetic side, but then there is also the real-world side of things, and in economic terms, they discussed supply-side effect — that supply creates demand. So, when people get a Study Bible — especially one in which Catholics can read *Scripture from the heart of the Church*, with references to both the *Catechism of*

the Catholic Church and informed by the writings of the Church Fathers and Doctors of the Church — we will be equipped to understand the Catholic faith that is rooted in Scripture and explained by the Magisterium. Both Scripture and the Magisterium comprise our Living Tradition that uses the analogy of faith, by employing typology to discover how, as St. Augustine put it, “the New Testament is concealed in the Old, and Old is revealed and fulfilled by Christ in the New.”

Additionally, the *Ignatius Catholic Study Bible* has dozens of word studies, an index of doctrine, and a time-line showing the covenants that detail how the story of salvation history unfolds. The ICSB also has multiple essays by a new generation of Catholic biblical scholars who really know how to combine the best of contemporary biblical scholarship while remaining faithful to the Living Tradition of the Church. As Hahn says in the video, “the more you use it, the more you get out of it, and the more you get out of it, the more you return to it.”

The translation for the ICSB is the Revised Standard Version, 2nd Catholic Edition (RSV-CE2). Of the many English translations, Hahn and the other collaborators felt that this translation “provides a balance between literal precision in translation but at the same time avoids archaisms.” An example of this is the Lord’s Prayer. In Matthew 6, the RSV-CE translation preserves what we get from the King James Version: “*forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us*” (Matthew 6:12). But for the version recorded in Luke 11, the archaisms are updated: “*forgive us our sins, for we forgive everyone who is indebted to us*” (Luke 11:4).

For those who want to know specifics about the Bible, it is in nine-point font, roughly 2,300 pages (which is standard for Study Bibles of its caliber), and more than 17,500 footnotes

providing clarification about the sacraments, doctrine, background, geology, geography, historical and political context. There are also multiple word studies for key biblical concepts, and more than 50 maps to help track salvation history going back to the patriarchs and then into the Acts of the Apostles as the Church began to spread.

All of this helps us not only to read the Bible, but also to gain a deeper sense of our own Catholic faith which emerges from the very pages of the Scriptures. Because of limited space here, for the next newsletter article I will provide a few examples of differences between Protestant and Catholic Study Bibles. For now, though, I will conclude with this: The *Ignatius Catholic Study Bible* is a continued fruit of the Second Vatican Council. In its Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation (#26), the Council Fathers teach us that

editions of the Sacred Scriptures, provided with suitable footnotes, should be prepared also for the use of non-Christians and adapted to their situation. In this way, therefore, through the reading and study of the sacred books “the word of God may spread rapidly and be glorified” (2 Thess. 3:1) and the treasure of revelation, entrusted to the Church, may more and more fill the hearts of men. Just as the life of the Church is strengthened through more frequent celebration of the Eucharistic mystery, similarly we may hope for a new stimulus for the life of the Spirit from a growing reverence for the word of God, which “lasts forever” (Is. 40:8; see 1 Peter 1:23-25).

IGNACIO GONZÁLEZ, OSB

Eighth Sunday of the Year

(This was originally a homily preached on March 2, 2025.)

A central teaching not only of today’s Gospel but of the entire New Testament is summed in the words of Jesus that we dare not say to another person, “Let me remove the splinter in your eye” when we are not even aware of what Jesus calls “the wooden beam” in our own eye. This is one way of concretizing the verses that immediately precede today’s reading and that include the more general admonition, “Judge not and you will not be judged.” It is on this entire topic that I will base today’s homily.

This matter of judging another’s failings and not noticing one’s own is found frequently in the sayings of the Desert Fathers, those early monks who had such an influence on the teaching of St. Benedict and later monastic writers. One of the best-known stories is about a monk named Moses. It took place at the monastic settlement called Scetis in lower Egypt in the fourth century and goes like this:

Once a brother in Scetis had done something wrong. A council took place,



*Abba Moses with
his bag of sand*

and they sent for Abba Moses, but he refused to come. A priest therefore sent for him, saying, “Come, everyone is expecting you.” So Moses got up and went. He had taken with him a basket full of holes, and filling it with sand, carried it [on his back]. Coming out to greet him, the

monks said to him, “What is this, Father?” And the elder replied, “My own sins are flowing out of the basket behind me, and I don’t see them—and yet I’ve come today to judge another person’s sins!” When the others heard this, they didn’t say anything to the brother who had done something wrong, but instead they forgave him.

There are countless sayings in that desert literature along these lines, all of them reflecting those words of Jesus, “Judge not and you will not be judged.” If all we had were these words and stories such as that of Abba Moses, we might well conclude that judging or in some sense condemning others is always and everywhere forbidden by the Scriptures.

But there are also many passages in the Bible, as well as in the Christian tradition, that go in a very different direction. Certainly in the Old Testament there are sayings by one or another of the prophets that clearly judge the wrongs committed

by some of their fellow Israelites, as well as those of other nations. As just a couple pertinent examples, consider these sayings of the prophet Amos. The first was addressed to the women of Samaria:

Hear this word, you cows of Bashan, ... you who oppress the destitute and abuse the needy... The Lord God has sworn by his holiness that the days are coming when they will drag you away with ropes and your children with fishhooks. (Amos 4:1-2)

Or a chapter later, these words of the Lord also spoken through his prophet:

I know how many are your crimes, how grievous your sins: oppressing the just, accepting bribes, turning away the needy at the gate. (Amos 5:12)

There are just as powerful words in other of the prophetic books, and lest one say, “Well, that kind of judging may be found in the Hebrew scriptures, but it’s very different once you get to the New Testament,” that’s simply not so. Jesus himself says that he will judge, as in these lines from the Fourth Gospel: “I cannot do anything on my own. I judge as I hear, and my judgment is just, because I do not seek my own will but the will of the one who sent me” (John 5:30).

And judge he did! Of all the major groups in Israel in his day—the Sadducees, the Essenes, the Zealots, and the Pharisees—Jesus was surely closest in temperament to the Pharisees, but at least many of them were so different from Jesus that he voiced some of his sharpest condemnations against them. The 23rd chapter of Matthew’s Gospel is full of his denunciations, as when he says: “Woe to you,

scribes and Pharisees. You are like whitewashed tombs, which appear beautiful on the outside, but inside are full of dead men's bones and every kind of filth. In the same way, on the outside you appear righteous, but inside you are filled with hypocrisy and evil" (Matt. 23:27-29).

Moreover, lest anyone say, "Of course Jesus, being divine, had the right to judge, but his followers on earth do not," note that there are many places where St. Paul says that not only he but others in the church are called precisely to judge. As just one example, consider what he tells the Corinthians, who were apparently loath to judge one of their number but were instead having civil courts deal with the alleged transgressor. Paul will have none of that, writing:

How can any of you with a case against another dare to bring it to the unjust [that is, to non-Christian civil magistrates] instead of to the holy ones? Do you not know that the holy ones will judge the world? If the world is to be judged by you, are you unqualified for the lowest law courts? Do you not know that you will judge angels? Then why not everyday matters? (1 Cor. 6:1-3)

And Paul reserved some of his harshest condemnations for the Galatians, whom he at one point addresses in these words:

O stupid Galatians! Who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified?... Did you receive the

Spirit from works of the law, or from faith in what you heard? Are you so stupid? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now ending with the flesh? Did you experience so many things in vain? (Gal. 3:1-4)

What we must conclude from all this—and it is something that has a very practical bearing on the way we live—is that there are two quite different meanings of the verb "to judge." On the one hand, it can carry the judicial sense of passing sentence on the guilty, as a courtroom judge condemns criminals to prison terms. As I have been showing, this sense of judging is found throughout Scripture:

- in the words of some of the prophets condemning those who oppressed the just, accepted bribes, and turned away the needy;
- in Jesus' condemnation of the Pharisees for their hypocritical and oppressive behavior;
- and in St. Paul's condemnation of the Galatians for not accepting his teaching about our being justified by faith, as well as in that section of his first letter to the Corinthians where he tells that community to expel from their midst a man guilty of incest. (1 Cor. 5:1-13)

But the word "judge" can also refer simply to forming an opinion about whether or not a person's behavior is in accord with Christian principles. If there is no such accord, the teaching "judge not" here means "do not condemn, but rather forgive." This is what St. Paul means in another letter to the Corinthians, where he clearly states that a member of that community had caused pain and implies that the community has already

taken some appropriate action to right the situation. That having been done, Paul goes on to say that their response to the wrong was sufficient and that the Corinthians are now to “forgive and encourage” the wrong-doer, lest he be “overwhelmed by excessive pain.” Therefore, he writes, “I urge you to reaffirm your love for him” and adds: “Whomever you forgive anything, so do I.” (2 Cor. 2:10)

This word about forgiveness is crucial. It is what was illustrated by the account of that desert father Abba Moses and the community’s decision not even to punish the monk who had done something wrong but instead simply to forgive him. St. Paul himself sees this as one possible reaction that any of us might take when we have been wronged. He writes to the Corinthians, for example, that their going to court against one of their members is actually something of a failure. He writes: “Why do you not rather put up with injustice? Why not rather let yourselves be cheated?” (1 Cor. 6:7)

There is surely no “one-size-fits-all” answer to this kind of problem, for what is called for in many cases is a very difficult process of discernment as to whether a just punishment or a heartfelt forgiveness should take precedence. But even if the former, as in those condemnations that we find throughout the Bible, the aim should always be restoration

of a wrong-doer to the community or society that has been wronged. So when a matter is judged to be so significant that some condemnation is really called for, even then it must be accompanied by recognizing our own inability to judge the mind or heart of another person even if we recognize that the action itself was wrong. Over and over in Scripture we learn that God alone can read another person’s heart, so even if we rightly conclude that such and such behavior is not in accord with Christian principles, or with a basic sense of rightness even apart from explicit Christian teaching, we ought never rule a wrong-doer out of our lives, even though we might well be urging a very different way in which that person should act in the future.

For that reason, our Lord’s teaching “Judge not and you will not be judged” could be called another way of saying “Forgive and you will be forgiven.” And that is exactly the way that story about Abba Moses ended. I repeat the ending: “When the other brothers heard this, they didn’t say anything to the brother who had done something wrong, but instead they forgave him.”

JAMES WISEMAN, OSB

Annual Meeting of North American Abbots

Once again the abbots of Benedictine communities in North America met for their annual workshop, held this year at St. Joseph Abbey in Covington, Louisiana from February 21-25. One of the major advantages of these meetings is that it gives the superiors a chance to meet with one another in a rather informal setting, but this is always balanced by prepared talks by one or more invited speakers. This time the principal speaker was Fr. Frank Donio, a Pallotine priest who is the executive director of the Conference of Major Superiors of Men (CMSM). He proved to be a dynamic speaker as he gave talks about the “Landscape of Religious Life in the United States Today.” On the basis of his knowledge of statistics kept by the CMSM, Fr. Donio discussed on Saturday the 22nd what he considered some of the main challenges facing Benedictine communities in the coming years: the workloads on individuals resulting from a decline in the number of members available for various important tasks, along with the challenges associated with the aging of many members and an overall decline in the number of new vocations. As regards that last-named challenge, he said that what most serious inquirers are seeking centers on the theme of community: communal prayer, communal work, and fraternal life in a loving community.

The next day, Sunday, the newly elected abbot primate Jeremias Schroeder spoke to the group before a late-morning conventual Mass in the abbey’s church. Abbot Jeremias noted that he has been sending a circular letter, titled Nexus, to every Benedictine community about every six weeks, and he briefly discussed several

groups on which he will be taking an active role. One of these is called “The Summit,” including himself as abbot primate, plus one of the presidents of a Benedictine congregation of men and the moderator and deputy moderator of the group of Benedictine women known as the *Communio Internationalis Benedictinarum*. While the Summit is exclusively Benedictine, still another group will bring together leaders of other major monastic orders, including the Trappists and the Cistercians of the Common Observance. Among other topics, this group will discuss matters relating to A.I.M. (the Alliance for International Monasticism) and the Monastic Formators Program, whose aim is to support and enhance the work of formation directors in the various monasteries.

Abbot Jeremias also spoke of remote planning for a major jubilee scheduled to take place in 2029, which will mark the 1500th anniversary of the traditional date of the founding of the monastery of Monte Cassino in the year 529. He spoke of the hope that this jubilee will build connections with other orders and communities. He then concluded his presentation with some updating of activities at the Benedictine athenaeum Sant’Anselmo on the Aventine Hill in Rome: its guest wing is being renovated, solar panels have been added, and planning is underway to have a center for the study and practice of Gregorian chant at the athenaeum.

As always, the last full day of the workshop was an “outing day,” with three options available for sightseeing in New Orleans, including a visit to the city’s well-known World War II Museum. There a visitor could

literally spend days among the many exhibits and films describing every major aspect of that war.

Among those attending this year's workshop were the abbot and another monk from the Abbey of Tepeyac in Mexico. They

offered their abbey as a site for the meeting next year, scheduled to take place early in February.

JAMES WISEMAN, OSB



Abbots' workshop, February 2025

St. Anselm's Abbey: Where Christ's Love Is Life Itself

It was 7 pm on March 13, 2023, when I arrived in Washington, DC, after a long flight from the UK. I stepped into the place that would become my home—at least for as long as God willed it—far from my wife and five children. I had come to the heart of a city that shapes the course of the world, where human decisions alter history. And yet, amidst this whirlwind of power and politics, I found myself in a place of stillness, an island of peace: St. Anselm's Abbey.

I arrived just after Vespers. The monastery was quiet, wrapped in sacred silence. A brother welcomed me and led me to my room, and as

I sat there, the realization struck me: this was a gift I had never planned, but one that had been prepared for me. Having lived among the Franciscans in Assisi and the Carmelites in Ávila, my second arrival in the United States began within the walls of a Benedictine monastery.

The Rule of St. Benedict teaches that the monastery is a “school for the Lord's service,” a place where the soul is shaped through prayer, work, and community. And here, at St. Anselm's Abbey, I found Christ's love truly alive—not as an abstract ideal but as something tangible, something woven into the fabric of daily life.

A Life Anchored in Prayer

Before dawn, at 5:20 am, the monks gather for prayer. There is no rush, no worldly urgency—only the steady rhythm of *Ora et Labora*, prayer and work, the foundation of Benedictine life. How much can one offer to God in those early hours, when the mind is clear and undistracted? The day unfolds in a symphony of worship: Lauds, Mass, Adoration, the Rosary, Midday Prayer, Vespers, Compline. Every moment is an offering.

And in between these moments of prayer, the Eucharist is celebrated, Confessions are heard, and the community lives in an unceasing dialogue with Christ. St. Benedict instructed that “nothing is to be preferred to the Work of God” (Rule of St. Benedict, ch. 43)—and here, I saw that command fulfilled.

A Family Bound by Love and Sacrifice

To the outside world, a monastery might seem quiet, even uneventful. But step inside, and you will discover a world more dynamic than any metropolis. The abbey is alive—not just with prayer, but with service. Every monk has a role, every hand contributes. They teach, they care for the sick, they welcome strangers, they provide for those in need. They dress the undressed, feed the hungry, and bring consolation to the suffering.

Yet what struck me most was not just their service, but their love for one another. The monks are a family—one that knows both joy and suffering, just like any other. There is laughter in their halls, wisdom in their conversations, and forgiveness in their hearts. St. Benedict wrote that monks must “support with the greatest patience one another’s weaknesses of body or behavior” (RB 72:5), and I saw this lived out daily. There is no illusion of perfection—only men striving, failing, rising again, and always choosing to love.

In this monastery, I encountered a hundred-year-old monk still serving his brothers, a father caring for his community with paternal devotion, and novices answering God’s call with youthful courage. I saw the ebb and flow of monastic life—new faces arriving, others departing—but through it all, Christ remained the unchanging center.

A Place of Hidden Power

We often ask ourselves, what can I do to change the world? In a city like Washington, where power is measured in policies and proclamations, the question is deafening. But here, within the cloistered walls of St. Anselm’s Abbey, I found the answer: The world is not changed by force or influence. The world is changed by prayer and love.

Twelve monks—just twelve men, as Christ chose twelve apostles—have transformed countless lives, including mine. Their work is hidden from the headlines, unnoticed by society, yet their prayers sustain souls, and their sacrifices ripple through eternity. We may never see the full impact of their devotion, just as we cannot see the full impact of



St. Anselm’s Abbey in the spring

our own prayers. But one day, in Heaven, we will understand.

Christ's Love is Life Itself

To live at St. Anselm's Abbey is not to escape suffering but to find meaning in it. Life here is not easier than life outside—the struggles, the temptations, the burdens are the same. But the difference is this: they are carried in the presence of Christ.

The world tells us that life is about winning, achieving, taking. The abbey teaches something else entirely: life is about dying to oneself. To die to pride, to ego, to selfishness, so that we may rise again in love. “Prefer nothing to the love of Christ” (RB 4:21), Benedict commands, and in this, he gives the key to true life.

So why do we fear dying to ourselves? Why do we hesitate to let go, to surrender, to give all for Christ? The world deceives us into thinking we have more to gain by holding on. But in reality, we gain everything by letting go. When we live as if Christ's love is life itself, we discover that there is no loss—only the fullness of joy.

I came to St. Anselm's Abbey with an empty space in my heart, a longing left by my separation from my family. But I leave knowing that I have been given a second family, one that will forever be a part of me.

A Prayer for St. Anselm's Abbey

I ask every reader of this humble reflection to pray for St. Anselm's Abbey—for the monks who serve without seeking recognition, for the novices who have answered the call, for the guests who will find peace within its walls. May God sustain this place of grace, where His will is done, and may he continue to call men to this sacred way of life.

Pray also for me, that I may remain faithful to the lessons I have learned here, so that one day we may all be reunited in Heaven—our true home—where the name of Jesus will resound in eternal glory.

To all whom I have met at St. Anselm's Abbey, know that I love you, that I have tried to love you as best I could. Thank you for what you have done for me, for making me a better man, for giving me your time—a time I did not deserve but that you offered selflessly.

And if ever I have caused harm or failed in charity, I ask your forgiveness. Let us never forget that the true enemy is not each other, but the evil that seeks to separate us. And if the enemy wins a battle in our lives, let us ensure he does not win the war. For we have Christ beside us, and in Him, victory is already won.

Christ's love is life itself. I know this now. And at St. Anselm's Abbey, I have lived it. God bless you all.

ALFONSO CHICHARRO

Recollections of My First Monastic Retreat at St. Anselm's (These are the author's journal notes, written more than fifteen years ago. He became an oblate of our community five years later, in 2014.)

Friday, October 16, 2009, 5:19 pm

I am in my room, or cell, here at St. Anselm's Abbey. My first glimpse of monastic life. The guestmaster, Brother Matthew, showed me to my room, explained about the meals, and then took me down to the church. It is a moving place. My room is old, but exceptionally clean and ordered. On the desk sits a large digital clock, a blotter, a lamp, a *New American Bible*, and two booklets about the Abbey, one titled "Winter 2007" and the other titled "Winter 2008". There is also a small pamphlet that is about the schedule for the weekend. Vespers starts at 6:00 pm.

What am I expecting this weekend? I don't know. I remember the emphasis a good friend of mine had placed on my "listening" during the retreat. I had that specifically in mind when I first let myself be led by the Holy Spirit to come here. His encouragement gave "listening" its important prominence in my stay this weekend.

I'm struggling right now with just how "Catholic" I'm supposed to be. I'll just go with the flow and see how God leads. I've been away so very long and so much has happened to me over the past thirty years. I asked Brother Matthew how long he himself had been here. He said he arrived in 1987. He had first been a Trappist monk but found it "too austere and confining." He said he had come late to monastic life.

Speak Lord, I long to listen to your voice.
See, Lord, here I am.

There is a small twin bed, a window with a small air conditioner, a sink and mirror, a chair, and a closet covered by a curtain. The walls are a

combination of block and drywall painted a cream color. A brown Berber carpet covers the floor. There is a crucifix at the head of the bed on the wall and a portrait of Mary on the opposite end.

Friday, 7:09 pm

Vespers was really nice. The monks filed in two-by-two, wearing their black, hooded habits. They sit on either side of the main aisle facing inward. Each seat has sides that sort of cocoon each monk. They bow towards the altar and then bow to each other before taking their seats, one going to the left, the other to the right. Visitors sit in pews which run the last quarter or so of the church in the back. The monks sang some psalms, and the prior read about the life of St. Margaret Mary. Then more psalms were sung, and the service ended with the singing of the Our Father.

Dinner was odd. It is silent. Several monks served. We stood behind our chairs as an opening prayer was read and then we sat. We had homemade chicken soup, like cream of chicken. Pretty good. Salmon, vegetables, rolls, salad, and rice were brought in large bowls. Water was served around in pitchers.

While we ate, a monk read aloud from a book about the Middle East conflict during the Reagan and Bush years. The book took some shots at Reagan, including stating that his Alzheimer's was already beginning to set in during the Iran-Contra affair. The visitors sitting across from me snickered in disbelief and seemed somewhat uncomfortable with what was being read. We had chocolate cake for desert and then we all rose as a scripture reading and prayer was read to end the meal.

Now what? I'm back in my room and will begin to pray for the next half hour or so.

Saturday, 7:29 am

The alarm went off at 5:30 am I had been up several times to go to the bathroom. The quiet here is disconcerting. Everyone is quiet...all the time!

Last night I spent a long time in prayer, reflecting back on some of the difficult times I've had: a failed marriage with all of the pain and angst, ending in an annulment; along with the loss of jobs and the stresses of dealing with people. I told God that I want to be changed—changed to have a clear focus on following Christ, a real man of God. I've also prayed for wisdom.

I feel like such an immature child. It's hard for me to believe I'm fifty-five, almost fifty-six. Where is maturity? Where is self-confidence? Where is the wisdom? That seems to be my focus this weekend: spiritual maturity, a self-confidence that comes from completely resting in Him.

Morning prayers were at 6:20 am At first, I was the lone guest, then two others arrived. The monks chanted psalms and Brother Matthew gave me a book to follow along. I'm becoming a bit more comfortable with the ritual. You bow when we say the "Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit." Then you stand straight as you say, "As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end, amen". You say the word Latin-style, "AH-men."

Last evening I read the Gospel of Mathew. I started where I had left off once before in chapter six and read to chapter thirteen. I pictured in my mind's eye and ear what Jesus was saying and what was taking place. I read about the miracles: the centurion's servant, the little girl who had died and raised, a blind man with his sight restored, the

woman with the bleeding suddenly healed. I read the parable of the seed falling on different grounds and the mustard seed, the tiniest of all seeds, growing to a tree. Jesus is real. He is the Son of God.

I also read a bit in book *The Cloister Walk*. It's funny. The author talks about one of the monks complaining, asking, "How many different kinds of cereal do we need?" This morning, I had to laugh. The monks must have had a dozen different cereals to choose from!

"One of the things we are trying to do when we devote ourselves to Lectio Divina is to give God time and space in our minds to be there for us and for us to give ourselves over to Him in adoration and self-offering." – David Foster, OSB (Lectio Divina – Prayerful Reading)

Sunday, 11:14 am

I took part in Eucharist (the Mass) early this morning. My heart pounded in my chest. I felt light-headed and anxious as I rose to my feet. Christ was so very present. I was meeting Him head-on. I had not practiced my Catholic faith for quite some time. Yes, I was drawn to the enormity and awe of being with Christ at that moment.

The priest handed me a full wafer. On it, I could plainly see the cross embossed. As he handed it to me, he said, "The body of Christ," and I replied, "Amen" and turned to walk to the priest holding the large chalice of consecrated wine. He handed me the cup and said, "The blood of Christ" and I again I replied, "Amen." As I lifted the cup to my lips, I saw the very small piece of the mingled bread that the priest puts into the chalice. I could not help but consume it as it was so close to my lips as I drank. I tasted the fruit of the vine and a slight tinge of alcohol. It was the Body and Blood of Christ that I had known since I was seven years old! It was refreshing and I felt whole. The anxiety

quickly subsided. My heart was calm as I breathed deeply and quietly.

At my pew I knelt and thanked God for all that He is! Jesus, the Messiah, the Christ, the living sacrifice for my sins. Jesus, who gives the grace gift of salvation.

What a melding of my belief systems! It's not complicated. It is truly being. Being in communion with Jesus. It is having my eyes fixed upon Him. It is the reverential awe of being before the throne of God. Allowing the Holy Spirit to guide and have Jesus be my guide, taking his yoke upon myself and walking together.

I wish it would stop raining so I could walk through the gardens outside. But God is in control, and He obviously wants me to stay put in my cell to listen to Him.

Sunday, 1:28 pm

We had Midday Prayer and then lunch. There was meatball soup, which was very good. The main course was chicken, peas, and macaroni and cheese. I just had some chicken and peas. The chicken was not too good and I'm not feeling great in my stomach right now. Afterwards, we had coffee and dessert in the library. We got to talk!

The two fellows who are also guests and that I've been sitting with turn out to be from the Vineyard Church. The one fellow is a pastor! We also discovered in our conversation that the people who bought my parents' house in Baltimore (the house I grew up in) were from the Vineyard. They were planning to plant a Vineyard church in Baltimore, but it never "took." The timelines and descriptions lead me to believe it was them. How unbelievable. (I remember my mother saying that the family buying our house were starting a church).

It's also good to have had time with these two men as they took part as Protestants in the weekend. This was a gift from the Lord who, I

believe, showed me the beauty and genuineness of his Catholic Church and the ability to draw people to it through the monastery.

I'm learning through this process. I hope I'm growing through this process.

Time now for prayer. *Et misericordia ejus timentibus Eum.* (And His mercy to those who fear Him).

Sunday, 3:48 pm

I have read. I have prayed. I have listened. I rested and played Gregorian Chant on my iPod. I feel good. I feel relaxed and I feel fresh. My prayers have been wide-ranging. I prayed for my family. I talked to Jesus extensively about my children. I prayed for patience and asked the Lord to take away the anger in me about all things. I purposely turned off my cell phone and left it in the car. For these two days I've cut myself off from the outside world.

I've thought a lot about the people and events that have shaped my spiritual walk: my childhood, teen years, the college years at St. Michael the Archangel parish. I thought about those priests who were so influential in my life and how, years later, I attended the funeral of one of them at the cathedral of Mary Our Queen in Baltimore.

I remember the early days at Grace Fellowship Church and listening to the scripture teaching there.

I thought about the retreat I attended at Manresa when I was first in college. What a strange time that was for me.

I remember when one of my close buddies from the neighborhood went off to the Franciscans. I went to visit him at the novitiate. I envied him then and even seriously contemplated joining the order myself. Alas, he's now married with kids!

Psalm 16:11 says, "You will make known to me the path of life. In Your presence is fullness of joy. In your right hand there are pleasures forever."

You Will Make Known to Me the Path of Life.

As I have gone through the ups and downs of life, I don't see the path that God is leading me to enter. But, as I go, as I follow Him, He reveals the path to me. I say, "Aha!" because I can see the path that we traveled together. I can also see the paths that I took on my own either before I really knew God or when I ignored Him and set off on my own.

In Your Presence is Fullness of Joy

Just being with Jesus! There is no other joy comparable. I certainly have joy when I'm with my wife. Our love for each other is a joyful love; our time together, a joyful time. I have joy when I'm with family, my children and grandchildren. I have joy when I'm with friends. Friends from church, neighbors, work. I have joy when I make new friends and reacquaint with old friends.

But the fullness of joy is being in the Lord's presence. It is complete joy. It is deep joy. It is overwhelming, gushing joy! Jesus says, "I am here! Be in my presence! See Me in the people you meet; see Me in the tasks you do; find Me in all things and be with Me. Be in my presence and experience the fullness, the completeness, the depth, of joy!"

In your Right Hand There Are Pleasures Forever

Being in the right hand of the Father. He holds me close. He protects me. With His right hand he leads me and guides me. There is comfort and warmth and pleasures forever because He has me.

He gives good things to his children and gives strength and courage with His hand. I am in His grasp and by holding His hand, He leads me to pleasures of life and spiritual comfort and excitement! In His right hand, I am clutched by a loving Father who calls me His son. He doesn't withhold telling me of His love and His love is unconditional. In that right hand is the welcome from my Abba Father!

Sunday, 5:07 pm

I'm learning about balance. These monks have a rhythm. They have a schedule. But oddly... to me...within that schedule, or because of it, there is great freedom. All of my life I've struggled with balance. I've procrastinated. I've been impulsive. I've over-spent and under-spent. At times I've been on fire for Christ, and at other times I've been tepid in my walk with Christ.

I need balance. I need twenty-one days. It may just become a habit! I vow to really use my calendar and live through it. No more spurts. No more starts and stops. I will try for twenty-one days starting Monday to schedule my days as the monks do. I will see if I have found the freedom in it that I believe is there. I will try to achieve balance in my life and see if there is less stress and more joy.

I don't want to clap with one hand.

Sunday, 5:26 pm

The rain continues. It's actually refreshing. God is cleansing me. It's like a Baptism. The old, sinful man dies and there's a new creation.

I watched a squirrel jump from tree limb to tree limb and then tightrope walk across a telephone wire. What's he doing out in the rain?

The leaves are beginning to turn. My thoughts turn to the upcoming holidays. Thanksgiving and Christmas are on the way.

I'm definitely going to the All Souls Mass at St. Michael's. It'll be a way for me to bring closure to my mother's death. I will say goodbye.

Epilogue

I stayed at St. Anselm's through Sunday Mass and Midday Prayer. When I began the drive home, I was stunned by the tremendous noise of the world!

CHARLES BURK, OBL.OSB

ST. ANSELM'S ABBEY

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