

The Servant

Founder's Forum

In-not of-the world

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*The following is the sermon from the
Patronal Convocation eucharist.*

The question we as a community are faced with every day is, What is our relationship to the world? There are two extremes of approach and one is as limiting as the other.

One approach is to withdraw from the world. As religious we become pilgrims, and as such we are separated and must live this way. The world is evil and any compromise with it or its ways will only lead us to disaster and deprive us of our inheritance of the kingdom. The world can only taint us, or at the very least, distract us for a time from things spiritual. We are strangers and pilgrims on earth. However, the result of withdrawal is to restrict our contact with others who are followers of Christ. They, too, are strangers and pilgrims.

The next step of this withdrawal is to single out certain of these believers and have fellowship only with them. Ultimately, even some of those may not be good enough for fellowship with us. One becomes in the end a hermit. I can safely say, I think, there are no hermits here. But there are those here who single out certain members and "dwell" only with those. If you single out certain members of the community and make them your only contacts, the danger of others not being "good enough" is present. Having *community* is having more than a few persons to fellowship with; it is the building of relationships where relationships were not possible. It is the discovery that those around you have so much inside to give, and are waiting for someone to receive the gift.

The opposite choice is to be swamped by the world. We fail to recognize our purpose and we become taken over by the temporal. We lose our identity. We are possessed. Gregory himself told us to use the things of the world which God gives us but not to become owned by them. I see this all the time. Our church bodies are so possessed by budgets and programs and initiatives and, yes, imperatives, that we lose sight of what God really wants us to do. This happens to churches and it happens to religious communities. They become organizations in-stead of communities of faith.

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Somewhere between these two extremes lies the truth. According to the Fourth Evangelist "I pray you not to take them out of the world, but keep them from the evil one." This is the prayer of Jesus for us—for everyone. And seldom are we nearer to hearing his desires expressed than when he prays for his followers in that last opportunity for fellowship before his Passion. Jesus makes it clear that our place is somewhere between the wilderness of the hermit and the worldliness of the socialite.

In doctrinal terms this is an outgrowth of incantational theology. This is what the coming of Jesus was about. It is what we as religious are about: *Holy worldliness rather than otherworldliness*. The *Word* became *flesh*, and in doing so, wiped out all the false distinctions between temporal and eternal, secular and holy, heavenly and worldly. All things in the world are ours. We are in the world and must live in the world which is God's creation. God sent the Son to redeem this world. We and, yes, the church are here as Christ's body.

The life of Christ is within history and yet contains it. The life of Christ is the standard by which everything else is measured. History and the world take meaning from the life of Christ.

Only a deliberate misreading of the life of Jesus would *see* him as one taken away from the world. I believe if Jesus were here now he would applaud those who are involved with the world and its problems. But, I think he would also be very upset at what we've done with the world in our hands.

Holy worldliness acknowledges our life in the world. If we are to be holy it must be *in* the world. Immersion in the world that Jesus loved is the only route to holiness. To walk the pilgrims' way is to be involved in the world, to participate in the world, but to be kept from evil.

—RTB

The Founder's report on his trip to Honduras, and his investiture at the Cathedral of the Good Shepherd, San Pedro Sula, will appear in the next issue of The Servant.

Truth-speaking

Who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is right? But even if you do suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts reverence Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to make a defense to any one who calls you to account for the hope that is in you, yet do it with gentleness and reverence... It is better to suffer for doing right, if that should be God's will, than for doing wrong.—1 Peter 3:13-17

In the First Letter of Peter we are called to a mighty task—one requiring courage, faith, and trust in the God who loves us and calls us each by name. We are exhorted to speak the truth of God who "sets the captives free." We are exhorted to walk into unsafe territory in order to speak that truth, and if we are abused for our witness, if we "suffer for doing right," then keeping Christ in our hearts we will be blessed.

Peter's words are hard. It is never easy to stand up for justice, to be advocates for the oppressed, for the outcast and downtrodden. It is never easy, because in so doing we are not only advocates—voices—for the oppressed, but become a voice of God, who demands love, each for the other; the God who demands justice, and who clearly hates injustice with a fierce passion. We are called to such divine passion in order to become prophets of God. Peter's words about gentleness and reverence do not belie our passion; there is passionate gentleness and passionate reverence in our love of God. We are called to speak from that loving place inside us.

Such work requires great sacrifice. If we really do this great work, the work of incarnational love that is God working in

us, rather than merely speak about it, we place ourselves in precarious positions. We run the risk of losing our jobs, losing our standing in our various communities, losing our vocations, losing our friends, possibly losing everything in which we put so much stock. Contrary to this, however, we gain the strength that comes from conforming our will to God's will. We gain the strength that comes from the bottomless, internal joy we feel when we know deep in the cave of our hearts that we have spoken out and named the Beast—thus removing some of the power any evil has while it remains unnamed. We gain the strength that comes from our passion for God, which is God's love for us as it is incarnate in our very being.

As we name evil, we at the same time invoke the saving name of God. We cannot name the one without the strength of the other. It is dangerous work to name evil, but it is blessed work to name God. In naming God, we are protected in our righteousness. The more we know and believe that there truly is no one to harm us if we are zealous in what is right, and the more we truly know that we need fear for nothing as long as we revere Christ as Lord, then the more we truly know that in the end only God is impor-

tant, and the more we can face the evils of the world and name them. What are their names? Racism, classism, sexism, homophobia, destruction of the environment; these are some of them—manifestations of evil, of anti-Christ, of that which denies the incarnation in each human being and denies God as creator.

In Peter's First Letter we are called to name the darkness that is not God. But, what is more important, Peter calls us to maintain our faith, and to hold Christ in our hearts. That is the faith of the crucifixion. When Jesus exhorted us to take up our crosses and follow him, he meant the cross of maintaining our faith in the face of fear, risk, pain, doubt, abuse, and suffering for righteousness' sake. For Jesus as man, that was much of his cross—maintaining his faith in God and the promise of redemption and resurrection even in the midst of human doubt and suffering. That is the faith of resurrection. In such faith, fear has no place. In such faith prophets dwell. In such faith we will be blessed. *Deo gratias.*

Br Roger-Michael Goodman is a novice in the community; he is currently studying at Seabury Western.

Peace be with you

Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you." And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit." —, John 20:21-22

On the Day of Pentecost we observe the birthday of the church. On this day the gift of the Holy Spirit was bestowed on the Apostles, and passed from them to the church. Pentecost is a time of great rejoicing, the beginning of the church.

The Holy Spirit goes by other names: the Comforter, the Paraclete, the Advocate. The Holy Spirit is depicted by the symbol of a dove, often with an olive

branch, echoing the dove of the covenant with Noah. The olive branch is the symbol of peace, and it is fitting it be connected with the coming of the Spirit: as Jesus had said to the Apostles, "Peace be with you... receive the Holy Spirit."

In two of the readings for Pentecost there is a similar scene: both take place in a house in Jerusalem. In the Gospel it is evening, the end of Easter Day, the

rust day of the week. The disciples are in the upper room. The door is shut "for fear of the Jews." Suddenly, Jesus is in the midst of them, saying that most Jewish of all greetings, *Shalom aleichem*, "Peace be with you!" He shows them his wounds, and they rejoice. And again he says to them, "Peace be with you!" and then, after breathing on them, "Receive the Holy Spirit."

Acts also shows the disciples indoors. They were sent there by the two men in white robes who appeared after Jesus' ascension into heaven. As they had stood gazing up into the sky, the angels had told them to go to Jerusalem and wait. This is what they were waiting for— what happened today: Pentecost.

"When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all gathered together in one place. " It was quiet; the door was shut. Suddenly, there was a sound of a mighty rushing wind and there appeared what looked like tongues of fire, among them and on each of them. They were filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak as the Spirit gave them voice.

The streets were crowded. The people heard the strange sounds from the house. They moved closer as curiosity got the better of them. For a moment it was strange murmurings, but then they could understand the words that came forth from the house. They could understand in their native languages: these voices spoke to each homesick heart. And after Peter's sermon, they came forward to be baptized, and the church began!

How can we relate this to ourselves, now, near the end of the 20th century. Does the Holy Spirit still work in the church? In our lives? *You bet he does!*

How can we describe the Spirit? I'm not sure we can answer that. The Holy Spirit is the least understood Person in the Godhead. We try to give descriptions that will satisfy us, but find we really still don't understand. It is too much for us.

What we can say is this. The Holy Spirit is God working in us, through us, and around us. Through the gift of the Spirit we see Jesus, and through him the Father. There are times we feel boxed in: like the disciples in the upper room, with the door closed. We find ourselves in situations of despair; we don't know what to do. The disciples had lost a dear friend, someone they'd known for three years. Now he was gone. They gathered together to seek a way out of their dilemma, to find a solution. Where would they go? What would their lives be like now without the Master?

How often we face situations like that. I'm sure we all get that feeling—the down-in-the-dumps syndrome, when

things do not go right, at least not the way we would like.

But what happened then happens now. Jesus promised to send them a Comforter, an advocate, someone to walk beside them and help them. We receive the same message today, "Peace be with you! Receive the Holy Spirit."

The Holy Spirit comes to us in baptism. We are baptized in the name of the Trinity as water is poured over our heads. The priest takes oil and makes the sign of the cross on our foreheads and says, "You are sealed by the Holy Spirit in baptism and marked as Christ's own forever." We may forget those words after the service, but the Spirit is there, working in us and through us.

That Spirit of God is at work in us; in each one differently, but the same Spirit in each. We can talk with God through the Spirit as in our prayers. The Holy Spirit is with us, as Jesus is: the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God.

This sermon was preached by Br William Bunting in June of 1987, at St George's Church, Maple Valley WA. William died in 1988.

St Gregory and the Way of the Cross

Patronal Convocation

Patronal Convocation took place at Mount Alverno, the retreat house of the Franciscan Sisters of the Poor, in Warwick NY. The community explored evangelism, and the role of religious in the evangelistic process. The week began with workshops on "Evangelism, Prayer, and the Friar Movement," and "Personal Encounter with God." The first began with a historical survey by Br Tobias Stanislas Haller, and a look at the need for the evangelist to hold a plumbline up to society. A role-play exercise allowed some members to be "Prophets" *versus* others playing "Keepers of the Sacred or Secular Temple." In the afternoon, Br Kevin James Jensen invited each brother to share personal experience of God—this freedom to share one's own faith being an essential element of evangelism.

On the second retreat day, the need for personal and communal rebirth was explored in presentations by Br William



The community returns from the gazebo in which meditations on the Way of the Cross took place



Br William Francis (right) discusses a point with postulant Michael Austin (left) and novice Br Richard John

Francis Jones and Br Richard Thomas Biernacki. Both emphasized that each new member to the community changes its dynamics. Richard Thomas gave historical perspective—as only a Founder can—on how the community has changed over the years.

The third day brought moving testimony from Br William Edward Orce, who spoke of the Holy Spirit working in his life, and how joyfully he bears the

good news to others. Bringing people to Christ (rather than just getting more people in the Episcopal Church!) was lifted up as the true focus of evangelism. Br Donovan Aidan Bowley presented a reflection on "Brothers and the Crucial Point." He emphasized that one who "bears Christ" can alter the world.

Friday was a time of meditation on the Cross itself. In the morning, Br Edward Ramón Riley led meditations and discussions on the Passion narrative, and in the afternoon officiated at a traditional "Way of the

Cross." This was followed by a musical meditation on the *via dolorosa*, with readings and choral settings of music from Holy Week.

Changes came to the community during the week. Four were admitted to postulancy: Ronald A Fox (Chicago), Maurice J P Grove (Central New York), Michael L Austin (Chicago), and Fred R Fosseck (Oregon). Three postulants became novices: Christopher Thomas Con-



Br William Edward speaks on evangelism

nell, Ronald Silas MacGregor, and Richard John Lorino. The Brotherhood Council approved the release from annual vows of Alan Andrew Speer, who was in his first year of profession.

The community left Mount Alverno, with a fond farewell to the Franciscan Sisters of the Poor. Two of the sisters attended the Patronal eucharist, and enjoyed seeing some Episcopalians at work in the liturgy! On the last day of convocation, Sr Anita presented the Superior General with a replica of the San Damiano Cross, inscribed, "To the Brothers of St Gregory, from the Francis-can Sisters of the Poor."



The community gathers around the icon of St Gregory the Great