

The Servant

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Founders Forum

A visit to the Star of the Caribbean

During the Brotherhood's Annual Convocation, we were privileged to have two members of the Order of St John Baptist from the Diocese of Puerto Rico join us for four days. Br Alberto, abbot, and his assistant, Br Luis, took part in the daily routine of the community to observe and learn, to share



Maurice outside the Trujillo Alto monastery of the Order.

and pray with the assembled community. On August 24, I travelled to Puerto Rico accompanied by novice Br Maurice John Grove to share with the Puerto Rican community in much the same way. We arrived late (which is the norm for flights to Puerto Rico these days) and were met at the airport by a very anxious and happy Alberto. This was to begin four emotional days of sharing totally in the life of his community.

We arrived at the monastery in Trujillo Alto, a suburb of San Juan. In true Benedictine custom, we were invited to wash our hands in prayerful thanksgiving and welcome. Preparations were under way for dinner—cooked by the abbot!—and what a treat it was, with rice and beans as a staple.

The Order of St John Baptist is entirely indigenous, all members being native to the island. It was founded six years ago as a Roman Catholic community, and three years ago entered the Episcopal Church in Puerto Rico. There are now seven members: the abbot and his assistant, Brs Harold, Ramon, and Angel, and Srs Brenda and Betty. These first sisters were admitted to the order during our visit.

Saturday was spent in preparation for the admission of the sisters the next day. I was able to lend my talents to the cut-and-paste of the service bulletin while Maurice John assisted at the rehearsal. Sunday, the big day for the order, began with the eucharist at Iglesia Santa Hilda, where Luis

and Harold provide the music each Sunday: guitar, voice and conga drum. At the afternoon service the retired Bishop of Puerto Rico was present, and the diocesan, Bishop Alvarez, presided. Having the beginnings of the Brotherhood in my mind, Foundation Day being September 14, I knew some of what was going on in Alberto's mind and heart.

Monday was spent visiting Alberto's family in the mountains and seeing some of the other parts



Alberto and Richard Thomas

of the island. We had a wonderful eucharist with their oblate, Fr Olmo, and I will not soon forget the brothers' rendition of "Ven a Spiritu Santo." We were all able to share our thoughts during the sermon time at this service. I was pleased to be the featured "chef" for our last meal in town, providing shepherd's pie, broccoli with cheddar cheese, and salad. Luis prepared "spiders"—grated and fried plantain. Delicious!

There are many parallels in the religious life. The most significant is hospitality. This was certainly evident in our two visits—they with us and us with them. We were and are brothers and sisters in the full spiritual sense of those words. We are all a bit crazy and any religious can tell you

we are often accused of exactly that! While the Order of St John Baptist is much unlike the Brotherhood of St Gregory in our way of everyday living, we are so much alike for all the right reasons. These similarities were clearly evident in the time we spent together. As Alberto put it, "I am glad to know that we are not alone."

Maurice John and I realized that while the lifestyles of our two communities are different, we have at the center the one important person—Jesus Christ. In conversations and in my comments to the brothers during our eucharist Monday evening I said, "We are not simply the Brotherhood of St Gregory and you are not simply the

Order of St John Baptist. We are—all of us—the *Community of Christ*.

As we pray for faithfulness to the God who calls us; as we all pray for each other; let us remember that we are, in fact, the Community of Christ. We are all headed in the same direction albeit in differing ways. We may pray the office in Spanish or we may pray in English. But in the end all that is important is that we pray.

Keep these our brothers and sisters in your prayers and help us and them to remember that God did not call us to be successful, but only asked that we be faithful.

RTB

For Proper 28

Layabouts

To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away.—Matt 25:15

Not long ago, I asked a member of my parish to-serve on my Lay Committee. She responded by saying that she did not have the talent necessary and did not feel competent to be part of the committee. After some prodding and reassuring on my part, she agreed to give it a try. After several meetings I can say that she has done an excellent job. Her unique insights have enhanced our meetings, as well as giving me some much-needed support in my growth as a parish intern. Although she is a person of many talents, she was reluctant to risk using them. Too often we are unwilling to take risks in service to our Lord. We are only comfortable with what is safe and familiar.

Jesus addresses this lack of action on our part in the 25th chapter of Matthew's Gospel. We read about a wealthy man who, before leaving home on a trip, calls his three servants together and puts them in charge of his money. Each servant is given an amount of money according to his ability. After a long time the master returns from his trip and calls them to account. Two of them, through wise investments, have increased the amount of money they were given.

The third servant has simply buried the money returned- the same amount he was given. The wealthy man is angry and the servant is disgraced. What was given him was taken away and given to one of

I was trying to live risk-free. I was reluctant to use my God-given talents because using them required taking chances, and taking chances might cause me to be criticized or look foolish in the eyes of others.

the other servants. The master then says, "For to every person who has something, - even more will be given, and he will have more than enough; but the person who has nothing, even the little that he has will be taken away from him."

Many biblical scholars believe this parable, known as the Parable of the Talents, was directed by Jesus at the scribes and Pharisees and their attitude to the Law of Moses. They wanted to keep the Law exactly as they perceived it. In their own words they wanted "to build a fence around the Law." The scribes and the Pharisees were afraid to take risks and wanted no change or alteration to what they were comfortable with. Because of this intransigence their religion was being paralyzed and for this Jesus condemned them. It is my belief that this parable is also being addressed to those of us who are afraid to use the many gifts we have been given by God in his service or the service of humanity.

My own life is a good example of this inaction. For many years I was guilty of trying to live risk-free. I was reluctant to use my God-given talents because using them required

taking chances, and taking chances might cause me to be criticized or look foolish in the eyes of others. My only thought was to protect myself from these dangers. For many years I was successful. During those years there was no spiritual growth on my part, and my life, although risk-free, was useless.

Finally, about fifteen years ago, because of a crisis in my life, I took the risk of asking God to intervene. He did—and my life has never been the same. My part of the bargain was to be open to challenge for God's sake. Since that time, through the church and the Brotherhood of Saint Gregory, I have been challenged daily. These challenges often have me out on a limb or cause me to risk looking foolish to

others. At times they cause me to risk personal relationships or finances. Never, however, has God abandoned me in these struggles. I have always been given the talent necessary to complete the task God has placed before me.

In this parable Jesus says that if we have the courage to use the skills God has given us, those skills will multiply and our accomplishments will be beyond belief. He is also warning us, however, that by *not* using our God-given talents we will lose them. So I say to all: Do not be afraid; have faith; take a chance; accept the challenge. God is not going to call us to do anything he has not prepared us for, and by accepting his challenge our lives will never be the same.

Br Edward Munro, the Provincial for Province III, serves at Saint Andrew's, Pasadena, MD. He is a postulant in the Diocese of Maryland's Deacon Training Program, and he earns his living as a fire fighter with the Fairfax County (Virginia) Fire Department.

For Advent 2

Going gently

John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.—Mark 1:4

In a 1604 letter to Jane de Chantal, Francis de Sales shared his reflections on which saint was most dead to self-will. He believed that John the Baptist deserved this honor. John did not earn this honor because of his unusual sense of fashion—a garment of camel's hair and a leather girdle. It was not due to his all-natural diet—locusts and wild honey. It was not because of his bravery in confronting the religious leaders of his day and calling them names—"You brood of vipers!"

Francis de Sales decided that John the Baptist was the saint that was the most dead to self-will because John went into the desert at the age of five, even though he was aware that our Savior was born in a place very close by, maybe two or three days' journey away. God only knows how much his heart, which had been moved to love his Savior from his mother's womb, would have wanted to enjoy the Lord's friendship. Yet he spent the next twenty-five years in the desert without once going to see Jesus. Following the desert, John went about teaching and baptizing without once going to see Jesus. He waited for Jesus to come to him when it

was time for Jesus' baptism. Having baptized Jesus, he did not join the disciples, but stayed behind to do his appointed ministry. What mortification! To be so close to his Savior and not go to see him! To have Jesus so near, yet not enjoy friendship with him. John the Baptist gave up his own pleasure of comradeship with Jesus in order to follow his vocation to prepare God's people for the advent of the Lord. It was John's willingness to do anything, no matter how costly to his personal pleasure or desires, that made John such a creditable herald of Christ's arrival and of everyone's need to prepare a way for the Lord.

Advent is the time for us also to hear John's message, "Prepare the way of the Lord." How do we prepare for the Lord in the midst of preparing for Christmas? Doesn't God know that every organization we belong to—including our parishes—is having all sorts of special projects and parties which require all sorts of extra work from us? Doesn't God know that shop-ping in the over-crowded stores would try the patience of a saint? Doesn't God see that the madness goes on even in

parish parking lots, where few are saintly when looking for a place to park.

Surely God understands how hard it is. Yet Advent is our time for preparation for the celebration of the Incarnation: God's willingness to send his Son in human flesh for our salvation. This is an event worthy of celebration. We do not want to be like the man in the parable who came to the wedding feast without a wedding garment. That man was thrown out of the celebration into the darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Not celebrating is not an answer, because we need to celebrate what God has done.

But Advent is also a time of preparation for the Second Coming of the Christ. "Be zealous to be found by him without spot or blemish and at peace." (2 Peter 3:14) It is this spiritual preparation of being "at peace" that seems most elusive in the chaos of Advent responsibilities. It is also this peace which Francis de Sales admired in John the Baptist that we can bring to our own Advent preparations, learning what Francis taught others, that through development of indifference to self-will one can grow in spirituality and be at

peace, without spot or blemish. Keys to Salesian spirituality are indifference to self-will, and gentleness.

Indifference to self-will means accepting reality as it is, and turning to God for strength to live in God's peace. It is the learning to live our lives in God's peace while we do the chores involved with our human existence that prepares us for the Second Coming of Christ.

What better time to learn to live at peace with the demands of life than in Advent! The preparations for the celebration of the Incarnation are really pleasant chores, were we not under pressure to do them. How much of the pressure we feel comes from trying to do too much too quickly; how much less pleasure we receive when we regard pleasant tasks as burdensome chores! Jane de Chantal urged her sisters simply to slow down and be realistic in planning and joyful in doing. If we cannot learn to maintain our inner peace when doing pleasant chores, when will we have time to learn this lesson?

There is a truism that says, "The hurrier I go the behinder I get." Speeding or rushing is a very self-centered activity. It is the total absorption in self that causes "the behinder I get." It is when I am so absorbed in my own need to get a pan into the sink that I don't see the glass sitting next to the sink, and I end up with broken glass to clean up in addition to washing the pots and pans. Suddenly, I am "behinder."

There is a spiritual exercise that is part of learning the Salesian gentleness of spirit. It involves the discipline of using a gentle manner to do everything quietly and in moderation. This is especially practiced when one is doing mundane chores like getting up, eating, walking, etc. This choice to use a slowed-down pace is to be practiced at all times, because it is in our most relaxed moments that we will first develop the habit of peacefulness. Indifference to self and gentleness join together in this discipline in the recognition that one will fail to maintain a slowed, other-centered, peacefulness a thousand times a day.

However, it is possible to grow in peacefulness through practice. It is not a problem if we fail a thousand times or ten thousand times. Each time we become aware of our rushing, frantic behavior, is the time to acknowledge to God our need of peace, and consciously to stop and start again in that slower, more peaceful, other-centered pace.

Be gentle with yourself. This constant acknowledgement of our need and the constant commitment to be in God's peace will result in spiritual growth. Spiritual growth is a path that we make straight for the Lord. This is how we can begin to "prepare in the desert a highway for our God."

Sr Clare Connell is a deacon serving at St Raphael's, Brick NJ. She has had a long career in nursing and social services.

Here and there with the Brotherhood and Companion Sisterhood . . .

Community notes

Province I

Br Roy Tobin, in

his work with the South Shore AIDS Project, helped to raise \$3,500 for this organization. Two hair salons donated their time, talent and love to raise money for S. S.A.P. and its work in AIDS education and client services in the greater Brockton MA area.

Brs Donovan

Aidan Bowley, Stephen Storen, and Ciarán Anthony Della Fera visited the Cistercian community at St Joseph's Abbey, Spencer MA. The monks held a three-hour discussion and slide presentation on the monastic life as lived by Cistercians. The brothers enjoyed dinner at the guest house and noonday services in the abbey church.

Donovan Aidan is currently taking an intensive three-week course in the operation of Geographic Information Systems, as background for his role as GIS program coordinator for

the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection.

Ciarán Anthony

has begun adapting a social awareness and appreciation program, "Valuing Differences,"—which had been developed by Barbara Walker at Digital Equipment Corp.—for use in Episcopal parish settings. The program goal is to enhance the participants' awareness and appreciation for the differences inherent in all human beings. The pilot adaptation is being tested at the parish of St John the Evangelist, Boston.

Province II

On September 3,

Brs William Francis Jones, Kevin James Jensen, and Charles Kramer celebrated the 1400th anniversary of the consecration of our patron, St Gregory the Great, as Bishop of Rome, with the Atonement Friars at Graymoor, joining them for vespers and dinner.

Foundation Day

(September 14, Holy Cross Day) was observed at the Episcopal Church Center, in a eucharist celebrated by the Rev Daniel Darko, grants administrator for the UTO. Br Richard Thomas Biernacki led the prayers of the people, Br James Teets read the lessons and assisted at the altar, and Br Tobias Stanislas Haller preached a sermon on Human Irresponsibility and the Divine Response, tying in Christ's "taking the form of a servant" with the motto of St Gregory: Servant of the servants of God. Also attending were Brs William Francis and George Keith.

On the following

weekend, a community get-together celebrating the 21st anniversary of the foundation was held at the Superior General's home in White Plains.

Novice Br

Maurice John Grove attended a weekend seminar at the Thomfield Diocesan Retreat Center in the Diocese of Central NY. The seminar was "Resource Person



Challenges from a Jesuit: Bernard Bush talks to the community.

Basic Training," and is designed to equip the diocese with a qualified team of consultants to assist parishes with problems. A follow-up is scheduled for February.

Brs Stephen, Kevin James and William Francis attended the 75th anniversary of the founding of the Monastery of St Clare, Throgs Neck, Bronx. They had been invited by Srs Caroline and Dolly, who spent a day with the Brotherhood during its convocation at Graymoor.

Province West

A gathering was hosted by Provincial Br Thomas Joseph Ross and Companion Jerry T Vogt, and other Companions from St Stephen's Parish, Latuna KY. The events began

Bernard Francis signs the instrument of life profession, witnessed by James



with quiet time at St Stephen's, including meditations on Poverty, Chastity and Obedience by the rector, the Rev Robert Hufford. Lunch was provided by the parish Companions. A cook-out was held on Saturday at the home of Companion Jerry. All present had a great time.

Before the meal, the six Companions present were able to meet with Br Bernard Francis LaReau, director of the Companion program.

On Sunday, the eucharist was shared at St Stephen's, followed by lemonade on the parish lawn, and the noon office at Thomas Joseph's home. Then the

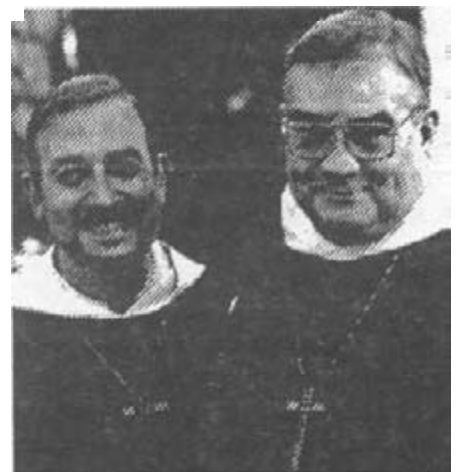
brethren departed for the north country!

Convocation

The Annual Convocation of the Brotherhood and Companion Sisterhood was held at Graymoor this year. The community was blessed by the presence of the new Visitor, Bishop Walter Dennis, who spent a day and a half joining with the community in prayer, serious discussion of the future, and fellowship. During a presentation on the future of the church, the bishop noted that the easy drift toward conformity and



Bishop Dennis offers thoughts for the future



Richard Thomas with Damian-Curtis.

Tobias Stanislas leads the schola in the entrance anthem at the festival eucharist



conservatism needed to be observed with care.

The Brotherhood then went into a two-day self-examination workshop with Fr Bernard Bush, SJ, examining the nature of authority, the

structures of the community, and the significance of the vows.

During the week, Br Bernard Francis LaReau (Wisconsin) made his life profession of vows, and Br Damian-Curtis Kellum (Arkansas) made his first profession. Ronald Augustine

Fox and Michael John Austin (Chicago) and Maurice John Grove (Central NY) were received as novices, and Deacon Charles LeClerc (Rhode Island) and the Rev Mark Harris (Delaware) were admitted as postulants.

For the Feast of the Incarnation

Human Irresponsibility and Divine Response

Lord, look at the nations engaging in war as they ravage, destroy, and slay.

Why is it, O Lord, that you seem to ignore all this violence, day after day?

My beloved, I gave you the power to choose to love one another or not. You have chosen the latter, and now you confuse what I gave you with what you have got.

Lord, look on your people now stricken with AIDS as they perish, waste, and die.

Is it nothing to you that this virus invades as you watch from your throne in the sky?

My beloved, I gave you the cure for this ill in the bark of a tropical tree; but you burned down the forest to fatten the till.

You made that decision, not me.

Lord, look at the peoples divided by race, by language, culture and clan.

Why not give us each the same color and face?

Please tell us, Lord, what was your plan?

My children, I gave you your races and clans that in contrast you might find delight.

Instead you have chosen to counter my plans using race as a reason to fight.

Lord, look at the needy, the starving, the poor who have insufficient to eat.

Why do you in silence and distance ignore them, up there on your heavenly seat?

My beloved, / give you enough food for each, that all might be filled and not die. I have given you freely all that you beseech, Yet you hold it and hoard it, not I.

Whatever we do, Lord, we seem to go wrong; we turn all your good gifts to ill.

Lord, help us and save us —for we are not strong— if your grace is offered still.

My children, / gave you a brother, my Son; the very best thing I could do. I gave you myself: that is what I have done, and I made that decision for you / took flesh, and became one with you.

TSH

