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#147

Founder's Forum

HOMECOMING SUNDAY

*The sparrow has found her a house, and the swallow a nest where she may lay her young, *
by the side of your altars, O Lord of hosts, my King and my God.*

—Psalm 84

I wonder why it's necessary to have "homecoming Sunday?" Examine the reasons we go to church. There are four basic ones:

We go to church to meet God. Worship is keeping our appointment with the living God. Worship is taking time out from the busy lives we lead and centering on God's presence.

We go to church to listen to God. God speaks through the scriptures; God speaks through the singing of hymns

and spiritual songs; God speaks and we are there to listen.

We go to church to receive God. As we open our lives and hearts to the Spirit we receive benefits through the sermons and homilies, the prayers, litanies, and petitions. We receive God as we praise and confess; receive the sacrament and sing the psalms. We receive God in the form of direction, support, love, and joy—these are the results of God's grace.

We go to church to give ourselves to God.
Being at the liturgy on Sunday is appro-

priate. For many this is a sacrifice—but in view of the sacrifice made by Christ for us, can we do less? Spiritual gifts and material gifts are offered and are acceptable as tokens of our self-giving.

To meet, to listen, to receive, and to give: these are the reasons to go to church. If we continue to do this "in remembrance" there is no need for "homecoming Sunday." We *are* home.

Richard Thomas

Advent reflections

WHO IS AND IS TO COME

Advent the word means "coming," the season means "watching," watching for a God who comes in love to people who wait in joyful hope. In this season of preparation for the Feast of the Nativity of our Lord, the church asks us to focus on what it means that Jesus—God's only-begotten Son—came to dwell among us in humility and will come again at the end of time to bring to fulfillment his plan of salvation.

Four times Revelation refers to the God "who was, and is, and is to come." It is this paradox of "here and not yet here" that provides the creative tension for the Advent Season and our kingdom life. We rejoice as we prepare to celebrate that mercy of God which was made manifest when the eternal Word of God took flesh and

was born of the Virgin Mary, a truly human person in whom God offered to the human race a share in his own life. Yet this coming is, for all its mystery and beauty, a prelude to the final, the "second" coming of Jesus Christ, who "shall judge the world with righteousness and the peoples with his truth." (Psalm 96:13)

By emphasizing both comings of the Lord, the church holds before us a way to escape the sentimentality and commercialism that threaten to overwhelm the real meaning of our celebration of Christmas. We are reminded that to dwell perpetually on the darling child lying in a feeding trough, attended by gentle animals and wide-eyed shepherds, is to miss the full significance of God's entrance into human life and his-

tory. The child grew up and was rejected by those to whom he had come; he suffered death at the hands of the religious and civil authorities; he rose triumphant from the dead, victorious over sin, and ascended to the right hand of the Father. It is this grown-up, wounded healer who is our Savior. And it is as such that he dwells in us by the Holy Spirit, giving us "power to become children of God . . . born not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God." (John 1:126-13) This wonderful double focus is beautifully summed up in the collect for the First Sunday of Advent:

Almighty God, give us grace to cast away the works of darkness, and put on the armor of light, now in the time of this

mortal life in which your Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last **day**, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the living and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who lives and

reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

During Advent, **perhaps** no other prayer could better serve as a daily reminder or meditation on the God who was and is and is to come, and the people who await his coming.

This essay by Francis Andrew is reprinted from the newsletter of All Saints' (Beverly Hills).

Convocation sermon

VOWS TODAY AND FOR EVER

Today we are renewing our vows. Today all of us—from the most senior member of this community, to the newest postulant, to the visitors among us—all of us are re-newing our *vows of baptism*. Today one of us will be making his vows of life profes-sion. Today one of us will vow to be poor, chaste, and obedient for the remainder of his natural life. And all of us will vow to support this our brother in Christ in the commitment he is making.

What have these actions to do with each other? What do the magnificent vows of our baptism—vows that have been made, are being made, and always will be made by Christians in one form or another— have to do with the vows of a small relig-i-ous community occupying one particular corner of the church? The answer is *every-thing*. Our vows of profession are the living out of our vows of baptism. They are based on and are extensions of our baptismal vows. And they make no sense unless they are seen within the context of those vows.

Paul says to the Romans that we die with Christ in the waters of baptism in order to be raised with him. In a few moments we will get a vivid reminder of this when Michael David, prostrate under a funeral pall, prepares to make his profession.

The death of baptism refers to more than the death of our physical bodies. It is the ultimate surrender—the letting go—of our "self-will run riot" into the hands of God—into God's loving will for us. When we die to self, we hand over our will—our most precious dreams and visions—into God's hands. We do. this not to denigrate or de-value our will, our dreams, or our visions. Rather we hand them over to God in the trust and sure confidence that God's only desire for us is to grow to our full stature in Christ. All that is worth keeping will be refined in the fire of God's love, and all that keeps us from attaining our full personhood in Christ will be burned away.

The vows we take and the Rule we follow are tools to help us do this. Like fuller's soap, they scrub away the dragon scales of our false selves—the armor that we have so carefully designed to protect our tender egos from the harsh reality of a cruel and sinful world. This scrubbing is sometimes vigorous and painful. But out of it we will emerge from the dead carcass of our false selves into our true identity in Christ.

Everybody here knows that ours is an unusual religious community. Like many religious communities we take vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, but we

interpret these vows differently from others. We do this not for the sake of novelty, but rather to discover what these vows mean for us, today, in this time and place. How are these vows the living out of our baptism? How do these tools work?

We have all seen how they don'twork, how they can lead one to be *less* than one was meant to be: poverty that holds title to nothing personal, yet lives in a cocoon of security with all material needs provided for by an impersonal institution; chastity that denies itself the beauty—and terror—of erotic love, and then dies without ever having allowed itself to be truly vulnerable to anyone, including its truest self; and obedience that blindly follows the orders given by superiors, yet never takes responsibility for its own actions and decisions. I would like to look at each of our vows now, to see how we *can* use them as tools to fulfill our baptismal vows.

Poverty

We live in a world where there is never enough to go around. Our economic system encourages this. The lower the supply, the higher the demand, and the higher the demand, the higher the price. Day by day we are bombarded by words and images

en-



Clare, assisted by James, celebrates the closing eucharist of the 1992 Annual Convocation, in the meeting room at Graymoor.



The community and the Visitor, after the main convocation eucharist

couraging us to buy, buy, buy. *This* will make you happy. *This* will make you powerful. *This* will make you popular. Our government fights a war on drugs because of the horrors of drug addiction—yet we are everywhere encouraged to enter into addictive relationships with *things*—*things* that can never fulfill us—things that can never bring us any ultimate joy or happiness.

In taking the vow of poverty, we acknowledge that all our possessions are gifts of God, and hand over the first fruits of those possessions as we measure them in our society—namely our money—to the service of God and the church. This is, in many ways, a small, symbolic gesture, but it is also an act of faith—faith that the abundance and extravagance of God that is immeasurably greater than the parsimonious frugality of our own imagined wants and needs. Listen again to Jeremiah's words:

Blessed are you who trust in the Lord, and rest your confidence upon him. You shall be like a tree planted by the waterside, stretching forth your roots along the stream. When the heat comes you have nothing to fear; your spreading foliage stays green. In the year of drought you feel no care, and you do not cease to bear fruit.

That stream of living water is the water of our baptism. It is that everlasting stream "flowing from the right side of the temple." It never dries up. It is always there to

feed and nurture us. In baptism we are rooted and grounded in Christ and Christ's promises to us. We are given strength through that living water. This is the generosity, the abundance, and the extravagance of God. God will always provide us with what we need, when we need it. All we need do is ask in faith, act with courage, and expect miracles!

Chastity

Chastity is our vow to love others, without trying to possess or control. It corresponds directly to the baptismal vows to "seek and serve Christ in all persons—loving our neighbors as ourselves" and "to strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being."

In taking the vow of chastity, we vow not to use people addictively. Just as possessions cannot fulfill us, neither can people. However, we establish people, or rather our relationships with them, as gods in our lives, assigning them places of honor in the temples of our hearts. Our society tempts us to this idolatry: popular songs proclaim, "I can't live without you," and "I am hopelessly addicted to you." So we search for Mr. or Ms. "Right"—who will completely fulfill us, who will fill the aching loneliness in our hearts—and wander from relationship to relationship, marriage to marriage, wondering why we never get it right.

Yet society still tempts us. Politicians and religious leaders tout so-called "traditional family values" as if key to the moral fabric of our society—as if it were impossible to be a moral person outside a family—while thousands remain in addictive and abusive marriages, preferring that nightmare to the horror of being alone. The press and television present us with heartwarming stories about the beauty and innocence of children. Yet thousands of children are physically and sexually abused in their own homes by parents or caretakers who use children to vent their deep-rooted anger or fulfill their unmet emotional needs.

Christ calls us to something different. We each stand as an individual in the presence of God, perfect, whole, and complete in every way. Of course, we need human relationship, human companionship in order to survive. Yet in order to truly love another person, we must have clear boundaries. We have to know where we end and the next person begins. We have to know who we are, what we think, and what our values are. We cannot be intimate with another person—we cannot truly love another person with the love of God—unless we ourselves are intimate with God and with ourselves. Otherwise, we will try to use other people to fulfill us in ways that no person *can* fulfill us.

In order to love without trying to possess or control, we must be God-possessed, and God-controlled. In our Rule we are required to pray, meditate, and do spiritual reading—to take active steps to develop our spiritual lives. This is absolutely necessary to the exercise of the vow of chastity. We cannot be chaste by our own power. We must open ourselves up to the power of God as completely and thoroughly as we can. We cannot love others unless we allow God to love them through us.

Obedience

Obedience, as we all know, is the "hard one." It is the vow that most challenges our willfulness, our desire to go it on our own, without God or anyone else getting in our way. Today's gospel has a lot to say to us about obedience. We hear James and John asking to sit at Jesus' left hand and right hand. Jesus, with his typical irony, asks them if they are willing to endure the same sufferings that he is to endure. They both answer yes, probably hoping that this means *they* will get what they're asking for. But Jesus turns this around:

The cup that I drink you shall drink, and the baptism I am baptized with shall be your baptism; but to sit at my right hand or left is not for me to grant; it is for those to whom it has already been assigned.

James and John must have been disappointed. It sounds as if they will get all of the suffering and none of the glory. But Jesus is making a very important point. Greatness is not measured in our authority, but in our service and humility. We, as brothers and sisters of St Gregory, pray each day to become "servants of the servants of God" like him. We are called to help the maid who was hired to clean the house, and more likely than not will end up doing the dirtiest and hardest work. We are religious not to be set above the every-day, ordinary, run-of-the mill Christian—but to be a slave of all.

Beside being the hardest vow, obedience is also the most dangerous of our vows. It can either form the basis of our entire life in Christ, or it can destroy us. Wrongly interpreted, obedience can become *a way* to abstain from being adult—capable of decisions and responsibilities. Wrongly interpreted, obedience can become an excuse to abdicate responsibility for our lives, for our choices and decisions, and "just follow or-



Richard Thomas, Michael David, and Bishop Dennis

ders" as we lead millions to their deaths in the concentration camps. Wrongly interpreted, we can react against obedience and become "rebels living in dry places," questioning everything, taking offense at everything, continually proclaiming our freedom in Christ, but fighting anything that conflicts with the gratification of our immediate and ill-considered desires. Wrongly interpreted, obedience can become a drug we use to feed our pride and grandiosity. We can become pompous and arrogant, making others feel the weight of our authority. We can issue directives, promulgate decrees, and conduct inquisitions, using the fear inspired by our authority as a weapon to bend others to our will, all in futile attempts to remove the pain of our own fear and insecurity.

At our baptism, and every time we renew our baptismal vows, we vow to follow Christ as Lord. In our Rule, our first obedience is *to Jesus Christ as our only Lord and Savior*. These are not throwaway lines intended to give a suitably Christian flavor, with no practical application to the way we live. *They are* the foundation of obedience. It is this vow to follow Christ as Lord that prevents our obedience from becoming an instrument of our damnation rather than an instrument of our salvation.

How do we live this out? How are we obedient to Christ? Jesus issues very few direct orders, although those he does give are a good place to start. "Take up your cross

and follow me ... " "Do unto the least of these my brothers and sisters ..." "If you would be great, you must be a slave of all .. " To be obedient to Christ as Lord and Savior, we must conform ourselves to Christ. We must be renewed in the spirit of our minds.

Last Advent we held a "Quaker meeting" of sorts as part of our embertide retreat. For one hour we sat on folding chairs in a circle, waiting on God—listening. Few spoke. Most of the time was spent in stillness—waiting—listening. This is what obedience is about. It is waiting on God—seeking knowledge of God's will for us as individuals, and for our community, the church, and the world—and the power to carry that out, in obedience.

The major way we in the Brotherhood and Companion Sisterhood experience obedience is through the institutional life of our community. Did I turn in my reading assignment on time? Is my tithe up to date? Did I attend the last provincial retreat? Am I meditating and praying the offices diligently? Am I observing the Rule faithfully? This may sound mundane, yet all of it is extremely important.

In vowing obedience to the discipline of the Episcopal Church, to the Rule, and to the Superior General and other pastoral officials, we are vowing to seek out the will of Christ working in and through the institutional structures of the church and the community. By being obedient, we are put-

ting our faith in the promise of God that we are not left comfortless—that the Holy Spirit is working in and through us and our human institutions.

In a few minutes we will be renewing our vows. In a few minutes all of us—from the most senior member of this community to the newest postulant, to the visitors among us—all of us will be renewing our vows of

baptism. In a few minutes Michael David will make his vows of life profession in the Brotherhood of St Gregory. In a few minutes Michael David will vow to be poor, chaste, and obedient for the remainder of his natural life. Let us join with him. May we also be poor, that we may be partakers of the riches of Christ. May we also be chaste, that we may be filled with the love of Christ. May we also be obedient, that

God's loving purposes for us *may* be fulfilled. Amen.

Christopher Stephen is a specialist in architectural history and building conservation, and serves at St Peter's, Manhattan.

Here and there with the Brotherhood and Companion Sisterhood **COMMUNITY NOTES**

Annual Convocation

"World Without End: Creation Spirituality and Environmental Stewardship" was the theme of this year's annual gathering, and Graymoor proved a most appropriate place to convene. The week began with a morning meditation with Brother Joseph Marie Zakia of the Society of the Atonement, who shared some of the rich Franciscan heritage of Christian ecology with the Gregorians. The retreat week continued with scriptural meditations on the seven days of creation by **Tobias Stanislas, Donovan Aidan, Clare, Christopher Stephen, and Roger**; also included were exercises based on *the lavabo* of the eucharistic rite, and the *Havdalah*, the Jewish end-of-Sabbath service.

There was also time for business during the week, and both Chapter and Council met with Visitor Bishop Walter Dennis, who shared some reflections on last year's General Convention. Council met with Mark Harris, who has decided to withdraw from the novitiate, and approved the release from vows of **George Keith**. The Superior General appointed **Ronald Augustine** as director of vocations, James as councilor, and Ciarán Anthony as convener of the pastoral care team.

New commitments were made at services throughout the week. Adrienne was admitted to the postulancy, and **Elizabeth Mary** to the novitiate of the Companion Sisterhood. In the Brotherhood, **Gustavo** became a postulant, and **William Chad** and **Gordon John** novices. At the main convocation eucharist, the focus was on "the vows in the context of baptism"—from the use of the anthem *Vidi aquam* at the begin-



Franciscan friar Joseph Marie Zakia shares the lively spirituality of St Francis.

ning through the sermon by Christopher Stephen and the reaffirmation of baptismal vows, culminating in Michael David's life profession of vows.

shared in the Divine Liturgy, dinner and fellowship.

Province I

Roy and Donovan Aidan visited with the monks of New Skete (Orthodox) and

Province II
Provincial Richard John was featured in a *Lewisboro Ledger* lead article and editorial on his ministry with people with AIDS, centered on his hospital chaplaincy, and the



(Left to right) Elizabeth Mary, Gordon John, Richard Thomas, William Chad, and Adrienne

Agapé Fund he founded. The fund assists PWAs in dealing with the economic devastation that often accompanies the shattering physical toll taken by this disease. Donations may be sent to

The Agapé Fund
 St John's Episcopal Church
 South Salem NY 10590

Several community members attended and participated in the silver jubilee service for Brother **Nicholas DeGruccio**, SA, at St Francis de Paola Church, Brooklyn.

Tobias Stanislas has recently published **computer-based** versions of the *Book of Common Prayer*, *Lesser Feasts and Fasts*, and the *Book of Occasional Services*. He is now working on the *Constitution and Canons*. He said, "The *Book of Occasional Services* in particular has many wonderful things in it; but it doesn't get much use because it isn't in the pews, and people don't always have time to deal with all the photocopying, cutting and pasting, or retyping. I hope these computer tools will encourage people in the church to make more use of these liturgical resources."

Province III

Edward has been appointed the honorary Missions to Seamen chaplain in Baltimore. The Missions to Seamen is the world-wide Anglican ministry to merchant seafarers

and has chaplains in over 300 ports. In September he was assigned to the Church of the Redemption, Locust Point, and is working to establish an ecumenical ministry of Christian witness and hospitality to the seafarers who pass through the Port of Baltimore. + + + He also took part in the meeting of Maryland, Washington and Eastern diocesan clergy with **Archbishop of Canterbury George Carey**, and attended the service celebrating the 300th anniversary of the Anglican church in Maryland, at which **Presiding Bishop Edmond Browning** was celebrant.

During the Baltimore House of Bishops meeting, **Bishop Dennis** managed to get part of an afternoon off and visited the B&O Railroad Museum with Edward and his wife, **Barbara**.

Gustavo has been appointed to the nominating committee screening candidates for the two suffragan bishop positions requested by **Bishop Lee** of the Diocese of Virginia. The election will be held next May. + + + He attended the Baltimore Convocation held at Old St Paul's Church, Baltimore. Theologians of various Christian denominations gave presentations on topics including the nature of the Trinity and the uniqueness of Jesus Christ. + + + In August he took a group of Hispanic senior citizens who meet regularly at St Paul's



Tobias Stanislas describes God's word of peace—shalom—at the heart of creation.

Church, Bailey's Crossroads, Virginia, on a day trip to Tangier Island, in the middle of the Chesapeake Bay.

The Vesting Drawer

Last year the Brotherhood Vestment Exchange received donations of used vestments from the dioceses of Hawaii and Southwest Florida, the Society of the Atonement (RC), Trinity (Tilton NH), Good Shepherd (Athens OH), and Hill-side UMC (Grassmere NH). Vestments were sent to the Episcopal Franciscan Order of the Divine Compassion, the Bishop of New Hampshire and the Suffragan Bishop of Liberia, the Iglesia Todos Los Santos (Dominican Republic), and numerous parishes in the US.

We are pleased to acknowledge the most recent donations from the Sisters of St John Baptist and St David's-by-the-Sea (Cocoa Beach FL).

Donations and requests may be sent to

The Brotherhood Vestment
 Exchange St Gregory's House
 25 Allen St
 Manchester NH 03102-5112



Associate Sheila Gould, Luke Anthony, and Elizabeth Mary participate in the "lavabo" portion of the creation spirituality workshop.