

# HE SERVANT



*Behold the Lamb of  
God...*

*Crucifix on the grounds  
of Mt Alvernia,  
Wappingers Falls, New  
York*



## #249

*4th Quarter 2018*





*The Community gathered at Mt Alvernia — August 2018*



*(l to r) James Patrick Hall, with members of the Community of Saint John Cassian: Aidan, Julian, Brendan, Eckart, and Miriam Matta (photo, Bob Hall). See the story on page 12.*

### *The Servant*

*Copyright © 2018 The Brotherhood of Saint Gregory, an Episcopal religious community.*

*Published quarterly. Address all inquiries concerning this publication to the Editor.*

*Minister General, Richard Thomas Biernacki*

*Editor, Tobias Stanislas Haller*

*Community Notes Editor, James Teets*

*Unless otherwise noted, contents may be reprinted by anyone desiring to do so. Please let us know. Inquiries may be sent to the address below. Visit BSG website at [gregorians.org](http://gregorians.org)*

*Snail mail to: 305 West Lafayette Avenue  
Baltimore MD 21217 USA*

*Like to receive notice of posting? Send snail mail or email to [servant \[at\] gregorians \[dot\] org](mailto:servant@gregorians.org).*

## **WHERE THERE'S A WILL**

You can assist and further the ministries of the Brotherhood of Saint Gregory by remembering the community in your will. If you choose to do so, the following form of wording is appropriate: I hereby give, devise, and bequeath to The Brotherhood of Saint Gregory, Inc., a New York State not-for-profit corporation and its successors for ever \$ \_\_\_\_\_ and/or \_\_\_\_\_ percent of my estate to be used in such a manner as determined by its Directors.

## ARE YOU ABLE?

*It made me glad to hear them say, let us go to the house of the Lord... O Jerusalem, we are standing inside your gates.*

We are standing inside the gates. Today — in a few minutes — the gates will be swung open fully — to embrace and welcome Angel Gabriel and David Benedict as they step into the fullness of the vowed life of the Brotherhood of Saint Gregory. When I take your hands in mine you will be joined with the long line of those in this room in dedicating yourself fully to the Rule of the Brotherhood.

Taking on the Rule in the profession of annual vows brings much opportunity. In Romans we are counseled to use good sense and measure yourself by the amount of faith that God has given you; and that a body is made up of many parts, and each of those has its own use. This implies an admonition: There are many of us, but we are part of the body of Christ, as well as part of one another. So, in every work that you do — in all your ministries — remember that what you do and say and demonstrate is really all of us because we are connected through those vows.

In the reading from Mark there is a lot of significance in the question *Are you able?* All of us are in some way posed that question. When James and John tell Jesus, “Teacher, we will do whatever you ask,” Jesus reacts with “You don’t know what you are asking.” I think in many ways and at many times we, brothers of Saint Gregory and of each other, ask the same thing. *We ask* — and we then expect the *answer* to match *our* desires. If we examine our prayers we will, I think, find much that parallels what these two brothers ask. Is the emphasis of our prayers adoration and praise? Thanksgiving? Confession? Our prayers are not so different from those of James and John.

*Are you able?* Those words are at the root of our prayers — because it is important that we realize that we need the ability to accept *the result of our prayer*. Our prayer carries with it, at the back of each prayer, the implied question, “Are you



*Richard Thomas Biernacki delivers the sermon at the Convocation profession liturgy. Gordon John Stanley serves as deacon, and David John Battrick as celebrant, joining the assembled brothers in choir.*



*Sponsors present the brothers about to make first vows.*

because I speak to you not just as your Minister General and Founder, but as your brother who is bound to the same Rule as you; as a brother who has followed this Rule for over 49 years of my life and who has found myself enriched by it, frustrated by it, and challenged by it.

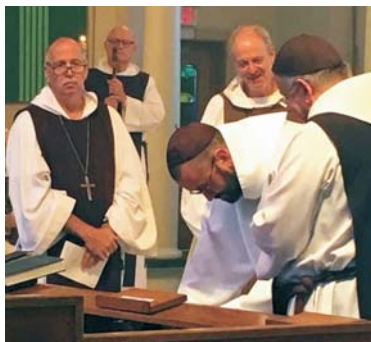
Firstly, the Rule of the Brotherhood is not about personal piety. Our Rule is constructed to allow each brother to live it according to the circumstances of his life and the demands of living in the world — fully; as if one could live anywhere else! But we must never fail to remember that the Rule is about *community!* It governs our life *as a community.* We are not free to discard the obligations of the Rule or its requirements. We are accountable to our brothers for the ways in which we live it. That is the very function of religious community.

We undertake the obligations of the Rule, not just for our own sakes, but for the sake of a community that witnesses to the world through the grace, joy, and freedom that comes in Jesus Christ. We take up the obligations of a Rule *and* of a community, and obligations they are. Not always easy, certainly challenging — but we take them up because we have acknowledged that — on our own — we need the help, support, and structure of community to help us live fully into our lives as Christian people. We believe that the Rule will help us fulfill our deepest desire to offer to God our gratitude for what God has done for us so freely.

So, let me say this to each of you. The Rule of this community is intended to help you live more fully into your relationship with God in Jesus Christ. At the point when you took it up, you believed that the Rule would do exactly that — *and* that

able?” So here, now — today — in the presence of these your brothers, you will take on the Rule. Now is the time to embody the words of the Rule in every part of life, in every facet of your being.

I would like to speak with you all today about our beloved Rule and its role in this community. I want you all to listen very carefully to what I am about to say, be-



*David Benedict signs the instrument of profession as brothers look on.*



*David Benedict and Angel Gabriel*

you needed a community of like-minded people to help you do what you could not do by yourself. Otherwise, none of us would be here.

So — now — Angel Gabriel and David Benedict — you are about to make your first profession of vows to God under the Rule of this community. You have both knocked at the door in postulancy; we did not shut it on you. You got your foot in as you entered the novitiate. We helped you, in your work with your mentors, provincials and others in the community, to be and live and grow as Gregorians. We know you have answered the question, “Is there anything holding you back from pursuing the Lord and his will for your life?”

Ignatius Loyola said: “Take, O Lord, and receive my entire liberty, my memory, my understanding, and my whole will. Give me only your love and grace — and with these I will be rich enough and will desire nothing more.”

Ignatius had it spot on. And while our life as Gregorians is different from monastics — we still do give it all up — because our patron Gregory admonishes us to be in the world but not of it. Through our vows we give up and take on and move on. We let go and let God!

So when you hear the words “Are you able?” — with the support of this community of your brothers and the Rule, you can say Yes and be sure. If your call to this community is real — you cannot turn back. Forge on and learn; make mistakes and fall. God is always there, supporting and caring. Bless you both as your move forward with our love and support. As I look around this chapel and realize that I have personally held every one of you by your hands — I know what the love and support of this community feels like. Take it in and treasure it. You are about to join the lifeline of so many present here and those with God this day. Bless you — and God bless all of us!

*RTB*



*Prior to making vows, the brothers lie prostrate during the litany.*



## COMMUNITY NOTES

### *Robert James McLaughlin BSG*



Our beloved brother, Robert James McLaughlin, died suddenly on August 30, 2018, after a brief battle with kidney failure and related conditions. He had been taken to a local emergency room near to his home in Haddon Township, New Jersey, where the doctors attempted to stabilize his condition. Over the next day and a half dialysis was attempted but failed, and doctors transferred him to Our Lady

of Lourdes Hospital in Camden, where he was placed on palliative care. His rector, the Rev Sean E Mullen of Saint Mark's Philadelphia, administered last rites and was with Robert James as he slipped quietly away.

Robert James' funeral took place at Saint Mark's on September 7, where he was again surrounded by the love and care of many of his family and friends. Nine of his brothers were able to attend, from across the country. Robert James was a long-time server at the liturgy, both for the Brotherhood and for his parish, and it was a great honor and a privilege for our brothers to stand with his mortal remains for the blessing, the committal and his final procession to the columbarium.



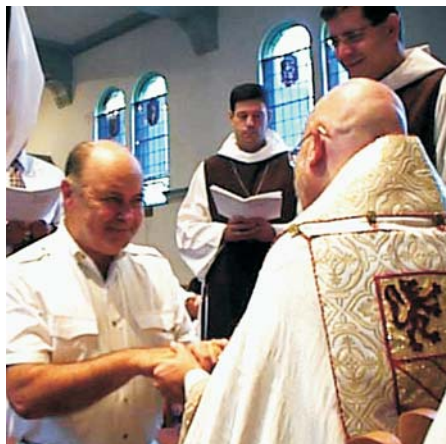
Almost from the moment Robert James was admitted to the postulancy of the Brotherhood, he wanted to be of service to his brothers in practical ways. He



*Robert James with his beloved dachshund, Hildie.*

served for some years as cellarer for our convocations, as administrator for the community's housing and retreat arrangements, and as vice president of its corporation. In community liturgies he was a regular subdeacon, thurifer and acolyte at annual and regional gatherings. His service easily extended to his parish ministries, as well. But it was his broad and open sense of humor that caught each of us and held us in his orbit throughout all of his years as a Gregorian Friar.

Everyone knew Robert James' life partner, Bob Matey, whose health had



*Robert James at his admission to the postulancy*

been deteriorating over the last years of their time together. Bob had gone into the hospital a short time prior to Robert James' last visit to the emergency room and he died six days after Robert James. He too was a faithful member of Saint Mark's. This is the announcement the parish released on September 6th, which links the two 'Bobs' together forever:

It is with sadness and faith that we announce the death of Robert Matey, beloved parishioner of Saint Mark's. Bob died yesterday evening, less than a week after the death of his partner of 49 years, Bob McLaughlin. Bob

Matey's funeral Mass will be sung at Saint Mark's... Rest eternal grant unto him, O Lord, and let light perpetual shine upon him.

As with the custom in the Brotherhood, this is the epitaph of Robert James McLaughlin BSG:

Born: September 28, 1943

Professed: August 19, 2000

Died: August 30, 2018

He entered into rest in the 18th year of his profession of vows as a Gregorian friar. May he rise into glory at the end of time!

### *Annual Convocation*



*Brothers converse about ministry on the margins.*

Brothers gathered this August in Wappingers Falls, New York, for Annual Convocation and Chapter in August. The week was spent in reflection, worship, and fellowship, with a dollop of legislation — including amendments to the community's Rule and Constitution.

Reflection included workshops exploring gender identity, ministry with marginalized communities, and a panel discussion on the preceding General Convention session in which several brothers took part.

Ciarán Anthony DellaFera began the sessions with a talk based on his extensive experience as a physician working with members of the trans community, and led



*Scott Michael Pomerenk, Angel Gabriel Roque, Kevin-Antonio Smallwood, Logan Rimel, and Joey Bishop lead a panel discussion.*

the gathering in an exercise exploring the dynamic interplay between gender, sex, and sexuality. Guest speakers Joey Bishop, Logan Rimel, and Kevin-Antonio Smallwood joined community members Angel Gabriel Roque and Scott Michael Pomerenk for a panel discussion that led to further insights. The following day began with a conversation in which the guest panelists joined Angel Gabriel, Karekin Madteos Yarian, James Patrick Hall and Bo Alexander Armstrong, testifying to their experiences of ministry with disenfranchised and marginalized individuals and groups. Later in the day, Scott Michael joined a panel consisting of



Ronald Augustine Fox, Richard Edward Helmer, David Luke Henton, and Mark Andrew Jones to share experiences of the 79th General Convention, both on the legislative floor and in the exhibit space.

Worship always forms a central backbone for our week together, and the Daily Office and Holy Eucharist provided rich food for spiritual reflection; all of the sermons preached at the eucharistic celebrations appear elsewhere in this issue. Two of the liturgies involved the rites of the community: at Evening Prayer on Friday Christopher Werth and Thomas Burnham entered the postulancy, and



*Brothers shared their experiences of the recent session of General Convention.*



William Crockett the novitiate. Several brothers were commissioned to serve in positions and ministries within the community. At the Eucharist on Saturday, Angel Gabriel Roque and David Benedict Hedges made their first profession of vows.

Chapter held its annual meeting, and took action to amend the Brotherhood Rule by the addition of a Preamble, which has for many years served as the

exhortation at the opening of Brotherhood rites. Chapter also amended the article mentioning the Book of Common Prayer, recognizing that a number of our



*Gordon John Stanley proclaims the Gospel.*

brothers serve in other churches of the Anglican Communion, and use the liturgical formularies of their own church. A number of amendments to the Constitution were aimed at streamlining the application and interview process, and the size and composition of the community's Council, as well as restoring the possible celebration of rites of the community at times other than at Annual Convocation.



*Virgilio Fortuna prepares to receive a blessing from Richard Nash Smith, prior to the proclamation of the Gospel. Joseph Basil Gauss is subdeacon.*

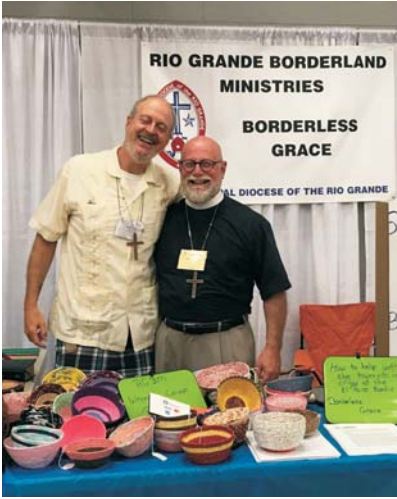
## General Convention



*Ronald Augustine at the Bexley-Seabury exhibit, with Chuck Robertson and Lynn Bowers*

As noted above, several of our brothers attended or participated in the 79th General Convention of the Episcopal Church in Austin, Texas. For a number of decades our brothers have been a presence at these triennial gatherings, particularly when several of our members served on committees and commissions of the General Convention, as staff for various ministries at the Episcopal Church Center in New York City, or

as deputies elected by their dioceses. This year Ronald Augustine Fox staffed the Bexley-Seabury exhibit for that Chicago-based theological institution where he is



*David Luke and Mark Andrew Jones at the Borderland Ministries display*



*Erica Pomerenk with Beatrice and Scott Michael, on the floor of Convention (Photo: ENS/Schjonberg)*

assistant to the president and faculty secretary; David Luke Henton staffed the exhibit for Rio Grande Borderland Ministries, his program in the Diocese of the Rio Grande on behalf of the poor and needy in New Mexico.

In the House of Deputies, Richard Edward Helmer served as secretary of the House Resolutions Review Committee, tracking legislation and working with a team trying to keep the legislative committees and the House itself out of parliamentary tangles. Along with those responsibilities, Richard Edward was on the floor as a clerical deputy for the Diocese of California. Scott Michael Pomerenk attended as an alternate deputy from the Diocese of Colorado, as well as volunteering in support of the Secretariat's technical audio/visual crew; his wife, Erica Hein Pomerenk, was a deputy from the Colorado diocese. And their brand new daughter, Beatrice — a/k/a Trixie, was present for her very first General Convention, too — at three months, one of the youngest people on the floor. (In an historic move, this session of General Convention amended the Rules of Order of the House of Deputies to allow deputies to bring infant children in their care onto the floor.)



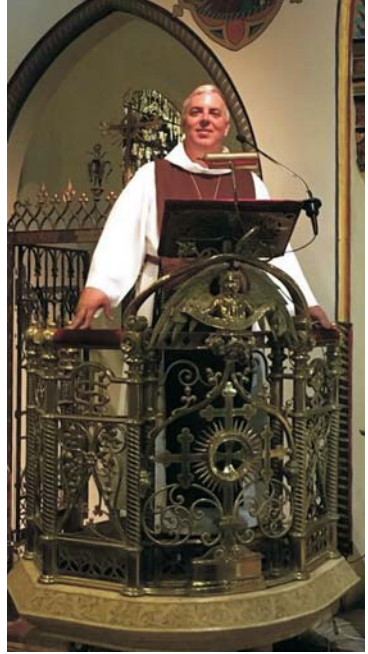
*Members of religious communities gathered for conversation during General Convention.*

### Province 2

On the Sunday following Annual Convocation, Thomas Bushnell was guest preacher at Church of the Transfiguration in Manhattan, also known as The Little Church Around the Corner.

### Province 3

The July 6 edition of *The Gazette* — the official public record in England — announced, “The Queen has graciously pleased to sanction the following Promotions in, and Appointments to, the Most Venerable Order of the Hospital of St John of Jerusalem.” Among those listed appears our own Tobias Stanislas Haller, promoted to the rank of Commander. We give our thanks for the Order, especially the English branch (with its American priory) that with its German, Dutch and Swedish sisters, and the Sovereign Military Order of Malta, continues to carry on a tradition of service to human need as an expression of faith.



*Thomas Bushnell preaches at Church of the Transfiguration.*



*Robert James McLaughlin's burial liturgy took place at Saint Mark's Church, Philadelphia; brothers present gathered for a photograph after the liturgy.*



† Tobias Stanislas’ sermon, “The God of Always More,” appears in the Autumn edition of *The Anglican Digest*.

### Province 5

Church of the Atonement, Chicago, welcomed the Rev Erika Takacs as 11th Rector, and Gregorian Friars were on hand to celebrate that liturgy, during which they presented the new rector with the symbolic gift of oil at her induction. Those present included Nathanael Deward Rahm, Ronald Augustine Fox (who served as MC), Gordon John Stanley (as deacon), and Joseph Basil Gauss (as chorister).



(l to r) Ronald Augustine, Gordon John, Erika Takacs, Joseph Basil, Nathanael Deward (photo Jason Elliott)

### Province 7

In early August James Patrick Hall attended the novicing of three members of the Community of Saint John Cassian, at Grace and Saint Stephen’s Episcopal Church in Colorado Springs. The Rev Brendan Williams CSIC, prior of the community and curate at the parish, officiated, welcoming Aidan, Julian, and Miriam Matta as novices. (Photo, page 2).

† William Henry Benefield traveled to his hometown parish, Epiphany in Guntersville, Alabama, to perform an organ recital of 17th-20th century French organ music commemorating the 350th Anniversary of Francois Couperin. His mother, Kay McCormick Benefield, is organist/choirmaster there, and joined in the concert.



William Henry and Kay McCormick Benefield



## SURPRISING WINE

*The Apostle wrote to the Ephesians, Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit.*

I want to speak to you today about surprising wine. And to begin I wish to recall — of all things in this hot weather — a Christmas movie, one of my favorites, *The Bishop's Wife*. It dates from the 1950s, the heyday of heartwarming, and along with the other heart-warmers *Miracle on 34th Street*, *It's a Wonderful Life*, and Alastair Sim's *Christmas Carol*, forms a collection that every year (starting with *Miracle on 34th Street* on Thanksgiving Day) James and I start to watch in sequence on through to Christmas, sentimental old farts that we are.

Speaking theologically, though, all of these movies tell of transformation, as so many Christmas movies do. And doesn't that make sense, given that Christmas is about the greatest essence reassignment transition of all, when the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us — a trans-man in every sense of the word? And since this hot summer weather makes thoughts of Christmas welcome, let's reflect for a moment on this well-beloved Christmas movie; giving thanks that warming the heart need produce no sweat.

*The Bishop's Wife*, as you can guess even if you've never seen it, is about an Episcopal bishop and his wife, their friends and acquaintances, and an angel who comes in answer to the bishop's prayers, but answers them in unexpected ways. "No spoilers" is my rule, so in case you haven't seen the film, I will limit myself to an observation about one minor character, introduced as screenwriter's crutch for exposition. He is an old professor who lost his post at the college for tangling with the domineering Mrs Gotrocks who runs the school's board of trustees with her purse-strings — and is doing the same to the poor bishop.

The grumpy old professor is a historian, a specialist in the Roman Republic and Empire. He is a rationalist, who put away his faith — and most of his joy — when he grew from childhood to the supposed maturity of adulthood. Even though he has lost his position at the college, he longs to exercise his mental muscles. But in spite of the longing he is a victim of that Latinate failing, procrastination, and has put off work on his great history of Rome for nine-years' worth of tomorrows, and is yet to put pen to paper!

When the bishop's wife and the angel visit one day, the old professor offers them a glass of sherry, and the angel performs a surreptitious miracle, transforming the almost empty sherry bottle into the local wine-shop's nightmare. For as with the widow's jar of meal and cruse of oil, no matter how many glasses of sherry the old professor pours from the bottle, it never empties! And the truly miraculous thing about this wine, as the professor discovers, is this: "This wine never dulls the senses. However much you drink, it never inebriates; it only inspires and invigorates." So much so that the old man finally sets to work on his history, and even recovers his long-lost faith. Awww.

+ + +

The Apostle warns the Ephesians not to get drunk with wine, but to be filled with the Spirit. Wine in moderation can warm the heart and soothe the stomach, and can have medicinal, if not miraculous, qualities.

But we also have been taught that a special kind of wine — the wine of which we sip the tiniest amount when we come to the altar — this wine is more than heart-warming, more than medicine. This wine is the means by which we share in the blood of Christ, and it can not only warm our hearts, but save our souls unto eternal life.

The fictional professor's fictional sherry became *more* than sherry when the fictional angel blessed the bottle. But the wine of our communion *truly* becomes more than wine in *reality* right here upon our altar, when the Holy Spirit descends upon us and upon these gifts, and they are transformed and we are transformed, and we enter the real presence of Jesus Christ, in the flesh and in the blood, his true Flesh and his true Blood — as we re-member him, members united into one Body — *his* Body. Through these gifts, offered here, then taken and eaten, taken and tasted, we participate in the great miracle, next to which a never-ending bottle of sherry, or jar of flour or cruse of oil, must rank as mere parlor tricks. For the bread and wine of our communion, true food and true drink, is also truly the means by which we share in the flesh and blood of the one who came down from heaven, the Word made Flesh who came down at Christmas and rose at Easter and abides with us still, as we recapitulate his Incarnation as much as his Passion and Resurrection, Christ our Christmas born for us, as much as Christ our Passover sacrificed for us — and so we celebrate the feasts.

+ + +

But do we *really* believe that; do we believe it *real*? Think for a moment what is commonly meant by, “I saw him, flesh and blood!” That means *for real, in person!* Do we *really* mean it when we say we partake of the flesh and blood of Jesus when we come to this altar? And if this is hard for *us*, think about what it must have been like for those in the Capernaum synagogue who first heard these claims.

For there can be no escaping Jesus' meaning. He is not talking about some kind of memorial banquet to be held in his honor. He is not planning a philosophers' cocktail party like Plato's *Symposium*, where people discuss the meaning of life, the universe, and everything over their wine goblets, slowly getting more philosophical along with their inebriation. He is not even talking about a pagan mystery rite in which the participants symbolically partake of their god's essence as they eat a sacrificial meal. *They* are all, to quote another favorite Christmas story, “but shadows of the things that were.”

But what we encounter in the Eucharist is not a shadow of things that were, nor a spoiler for things to come, but a reality from before time and for ever, from before the foundation of the world. This is not like the bread our ancestors ate or the rites they celebrated in the time before the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, as guest and host — and offering — in the feast that leads to life.



Robert James McLaughlin with Thomas Joseph Ross, who died in 2001.

For it *is* of Christ's own body and blood, his *flesh and blood*, that he speaks when he says he is true food and true drink. He knows that before long he will go to Jerusalem, where he will be nailed to a cross, his very real flesh torn by very real nails. His blood will be poured out, his very real blood will sweat from his brow, and flow from his pierced hands, his feet, and mix with water from his side. When he speaks of eating his flesh and drinking his blood, he says, "*This* is the bread that came down from heaven... whoever eats *this* bread will live forever" — and there can be little doubt that as he twice says "*this*" *he points to himself*, so that no mistake can be made as to his meaning. And *that* is why the crowd of doubters say, "How can he do that!?"

And we might be tempted to say the same, except that we are fortunate enough to live *after* — to know the spoilers and to have told this our favorite story to each other and

to others dozens and dozens of times — we know the ending! For we live *after* the crucifixion, and more importantly the resurrection; we know that Jesus is speaking of *his own* saving death, the real death of the real Jesus, the real man from the real town of Nazareth. From our after-the-fact vantage we know that the man standing there talking to them in flesh and blood, talking *about* his flesh and blood is who he claims to be: bread from heaven to raise up them — and us — on the last day, as raised in a resurrection like his.

This is hard to understand, but it is what Jesus said. And I believe we ought to take him at his word, as the church has done for nigh on two thousand years — this church that comes after, that has imbibed the wine mixed by the wisdom of experience and hindsight. What Jesus said and the church has taught, is that the bread we eat and the wine we drink — while not enough to satisfy an earthly hunger or make us even slightly tipsy — is sufficient, through the Holy Spirit, to unite us to his saving death and resurrection. This truly is food and drink to make us wise — wise not with human wisdom, but divine. Our Holy Communion is no spoiler, but neither is it a mere memory; it is not just a reminder, but *participation* — in which we do not simply recall but *partake* of our Lord's blessed Body and precious Blood. This is truly wisdom's banquet, Christ's sacrifice of his own Body and Blood. This is the festival meal in which God's Holy Spirit comes to us and warms our hearts so that we cannot help but sing, as we join the apostles and prophets, the blessed martyrs and confessors, the saints in glory and the saints who walk and work among us still; the brothers gathered here and those we re-

member in our hearts, especially Max and Luke Anthony who were with us in this very place just a year ago but now rest in expectation of the great anamnesis that will recall us all to life eternal, life as real as Christ's life — new, risen life spent forever as we spend it now: in giving thanks to God the Father through the Spirit, at all times and in all places, in the Name, and by the means, and in the presence of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.



*Robert James with Patrick Ignatius Dickson, who died in 2005.*

*Tobias Stanislas Haller*

*Convocation Sermon: Rite of Healing*

## **FREEDOM FROM BONDAGE**

*Our help comes from the Lord; the maker of Heaven and Earth.*



*David Luke Henton*

In today's Old Testament lesson, Naaman, the commander of the armies of the king of Aram, is healed of his leprosy after being directed by the prophet Elisha to wash seven times in the River Jordan. Naaman is healed in at least four ways: physically; ritually; emotionally; and spiritually.

Physically, Naaman is healed of his leprosy, and his flesh is restored like the flesh of a young boy. Ritually, he is cleansed, purified, and his restored flesh is *clean*. The ritual, symbolic act of washing seven times in the Jordan has cleansed him even beyond the miraculous physical healing of his leprosy. Emotionally and spiritually, he is healed of his anger, his arrogance, his sense of entitlement, and he comes to know God. Initially Naaman is furious with Elisha. Naaman, a man

of power and privilege, has traveled a great distance to demand a cure from the prophet. Like other figures in the Books of Kings, Naaman seems to believe that prophets are in control of their gifts — able to say and do as they please, and responsible for heeding the commands of their superiors. Naaman sees Elisha only as a means to an end, and he is angry with Elisha that instead of laying hands upon him and curing his leprosy, Elisha has sent a messenger to instruct Naaman to





*David Luke preaching to the gathered assembly*

wash in the Jordan. Not even meeting face-to-face, he has sent a *messenger!* And the message is, “Go wash yourself.” Naaman’s response is that he could have, he should have, stayed in Aram and washed himself there, and saved the time and effort and expense of the trip to Samaria to see Elisha. But the wisdom — the spiritual and emotional wisdom — of Naaman’s servants leads him to reconsider. So, he washes seven times in the Jordan and his flesh is cured—restored like the flesh of a young boy. But it is not only his flesh that is healed and restored. His spirit also is healed and restored. And he realizes in the very next verse (which we did not hear today) that the healing comes not from Elisha, the prophet, but from God. Naaman tells Elisha directly, “Now I know that there is no God in all the earth except the God of Israel.” Naaman is healed of his leprosy, but he is also healed in his relationship with Elisha, and even more importantly he is healed in his relationship with and understanding of God. He realizes that his healing is from God, and his anger toward Elisha is replaced with gratitude.

+++

I suspect we have all seen and experienced powerful signs of healing: physical, ritual, emotional and spiritual. I got a call just last week from my friend, a seasonal parishioner of our little Church of the Ascension in Cloudcroft. Eighteen years ago, her husband was diagnosed with a rare and untreatable illness and given a likely prognosis of increased debilitating incapacity, culminating in death within two years. That was 18 years ago. And for the last eighteen years he has flourished in health, ability, independence and a zest for life. His wife called to share that he has taken a downturn now at the age of 89, and he may in fact be dying. As Paul says of the creation itself in today’s reading from Romans, we too wait with eager longing to be set free from our bondage to decay. But the nature of this life and of our human condition as mortal beings is that our bodies do in fact decay, and eventually we return to the earth. But miraculous and real physical healing often occurs even in the midst of death and dying.

As with physical and mental health, emotional healing and spiritual healing are inextricably linked. Throughout most of my career as a clinical social worker and social work educator, I worked closely with both psychologists and psychiatrists. I believe in both psychotherapy and psychopharmacology, having seen many people healed both by medicine and by talk therapy.

But I also believe deeply in the power of prayer, of community, and of love for emotional and spiritual healing. I recently completed psychological evaluation as part of postulancy for holy orders in my diocese. I both like and respect the evaluating psychologist, whom I had met early on in my interview process. A consum-

mate and compassionate clinician, he put me immediately at ease, establishing rapport quickly, and warmly inviting me to engage with him in gentle, candid conversation about a range of topics.

However, almost immediately upon leaving his office, as I reflected upon our time together, I became deeply bothered by my inability to answer a simple but profoundly existential question he had asked: “What are you afraid of? Tell me about your fears.” I struggled to answer this question at all, only eventually managing to share some of the *many things* of which I have been fearful *in the past*. He did not push me further, and we moved on to other subjects.

I can be my own worst enemy, and as I reflected upon this question and my inability to respond to it, I became more and more disturbed. Am I really so clueless as not to have any fears? Or am I in such deep denial that I can’t even admit them to myself, let alone articulate them to another human being? Is my self-awareness really so shallow and superficial?

My self-engagement eventually bore fruit, and I sent him an addendum for his consideration about two weeks after our interview: Upon careful and prayerful reflection, I am afraid of widowhood, which there is a good possibility of my experiencing at some point, given the differences between me and my spouse in family history, chronic illness, and overall health. And I am afraid of disability restricting my *ability to serve and to minister*. And I need to be clear about this: I am not afraid of *disability per se*: I have lived with degenerative disability for twenty-five years. Though my body decays, it does so incrementally, and I adjust. But I do fear disability impacting, or God forbid, preventing me from serving in ministry. Those are my fears.

The real gift of my self-engagement with his good question was the realization that I have been gradually healed of much fear and anxiety over the past fourteen years through prayer, through love, and through this community—you, my brothers. Fear simply is not a major factor in my life today. And I thank God for that. And I thank you for that.

I have no idea whether or how prayer impacts health outcomes or other intentions.

But I do know in my own experience that prayer changes the pray-er. And over time, a vowed life of intentional prayer can lead to such remarkable, even miraculous changes in the pray-er that even deep fears and anxieties may disappear. I know psychotherapy *can* work; I know medicine *can* work; and I also know prayer *can* work, and especially when rooted in love and in community.



*David Luke with Angel M Roque  
and his son Angel Gabriel.*

It is a truism that courage is fear that has said its prayers. This week we have been blessed as Joey, Kevin-Antonio, and Logan have graciously shared their stories of extraordinary courage with us. We are blessed within our community to also journey with many brothers who similarly exemplify courage, and few more than our beloved Karekin. And we exist today *at all* because our Founder courageously realized that a time had come for new wineskins for new wine, and guided by the Holy Spirit, he spoke truth to power within the church and its ossifying religious institutions and structures. In thanking God for these dear ones and for their courage, how can we all not prayerfully grow in our own?! That is spiritual and emotional healing.

Like Naaman the Aramean, we brothers of Saint Gregory have known physical healing, spiritual healing, and emotional healing. And we know ritual healing as well ... We will shortly undertake together a powerful rite: Our brothers Edward and David Benedict will lay their hands upon us and pray for us. And then our Founder & Minister General Richard Thomas, who is even now himself experiencing and witnessing profound physical healing, will anoint us with oil in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. And each of us and every one of us will pray as each of us and every one of us receives the laying on of hands and the anointing with oil. And then this ritual healing will continue as we celebrate the Eucharist together. And at least some of us who are weary and heavy laden will find rest for our souls in the ritual healing we will experience here, today, now; in this place and with this community. And even we ourselves, as we groan inwardly, longing to be free from our bondage to decay, will experience a small foretaste of adoption, the redemption of our bodies. Thanks be to God!

*David Luke Henton*

*Convocation Sermon: Votive of the Holy Spirit*

## **MADE IN GOD'S IMAGE**

*Come, Holy Spirit, come, and kindle in us the fire of your love.  
Amen.*



*William Henry Benefield*

I noticed at the beginning of my sermon preparation for today that I was struggling for direction. I thought: This is worse than having to preach on Trinity Sunday! However, thinking about the Holy Spirit always led me back to the Holy Trinity. Perhaps this is the correct response as our ancient hymn *Veni Creator* states: Teach us to know that Father, Son, and thee of both to be but one.

In our eucharistic liturgy on Sundays and Major Feasts, we profess that the Holy Spirit is the Lord, the giver of life. We also dare to call the Spirit of God down to sanctify the water during baptisms and call upon this Spirit

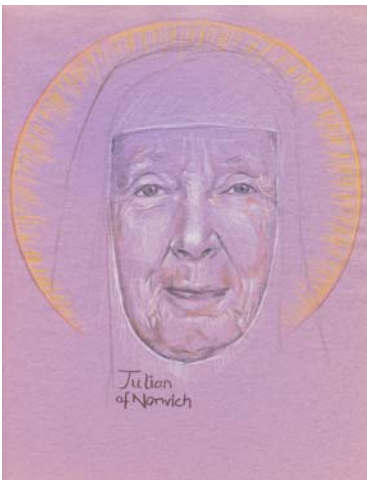
during confirmations and ordinations. We will dare to call this Spirit down in just a few minutes upon ordinary gifts of bread and wine so that those gifts are mystically and truly transformed for us into the living and glorified Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. We will call the Spirit down upon us too in that same moment, mystically Christ's Body and recipients of divine grace.

We first encounter the Spirit of God in the Hebrew Bible in the creation narrative in Genesis when God's Spirit hovers over the waters of chaos and finally brings at least some order to the universe. God's breath or *ruach* is present again when humankind is created. We encounter the Spirit again in the Lukan birth narrative — almost a parallel story — in which, with Mary's consent, the Holy Spirit overshadows her just as in the Hebrew creation narrative and this God of ours becomes one of us — a human being. And if we weren't totally made in the image of God at the dawn of creation, through the Incarnation we now share in that divine image in its fullness.

The Holy Spirit has often been described as wind in scripture: In Ezekiel's valley of dry bones, in the Book of Acts as it filled the whole house and created a noise like a violent rushing wind, and through Jesus's own breath in the Gospel of John: "Receive the Holy Spirit...and then he breathed on them." And let us not forget that verse in that same Gospel that says: "The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit." I think that is what creates the problem for us within the church sometimes. We do not know where the Spirit has been and we have no idea where the Spirit is going.

At this year's General Convention, the church gathered and considered a new Book of Common Prayer. While wholesale revision was deferred at this time, several Eucharistic Prayers were authorized to be updated to include broader language to describe the Holy One. I know some people that I respect very much

were upset by the thought of a new Prayer Book or with these updates. Imagery, symbolism, the way we talk about God, the ancient ways we address God — to have those challenged or altered or reinterpreted can be scary. It can even make us angry. God's *gender*, however, and/or the pronouns we historically have given to God, including the Holy Spirit, have not always been masculine. Saint Augustine said that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit were metaphors. Gregory of Nazianzus said the same, and this position is still held in the official Catechism of the Roman Catholic Church. Julian of Norwich, you remember, even calls Jesus our Mother.



*Julian of Norwich*



Humankind — both male and female — are made in the image of God. And the Hebrew text says male *and* female — not male *or* female. Hold on to that thought for a moment. We are born in God’s own image — each of us within the spectrum of male and female. We are made in the image and likeness of God — in the image of the most glorious and undivided Trinity.

In the Jewish mystical tradition, Kabbalah, God has ten aspects, some of which are feminine. Out of this sacred tradition comes the concept of Shekhinah, the divine Presence which has always been described as female. In both Hebrew and Aramaic, the word for Spirit is also grammatically feminine. In scripture we hear of God giving birth to Israel in Deuteronomy. The prophet Isaiah describes God as a woman in labor and comforting her children. The Book of Proverbs maintains that the feminine figure of Holy Wisdom, Sophia, assisted God in the creation of the world. The church fathers and mothers understood Sophia to be the Logos or Word of God. Jewish rabbis equate the Torah — the Law of God — with Sophia. Feminine wisdom was with God from the very beginning of time. God’s own personal name, Yahweh is a remarkable combination of Yah — which is feminine, and Weh — which is masculine. In Exodus, when Moses first encounters the Divine Presence on Mount Sinai, God’s other name is revealed as “I am who I am” — being verbs. The most common translation is “I am who I am.” Hebrew verbs don’t have tenses, but relationships to action, completed and incomplete. The form of the verb in God’s name is incomplete action so we could translate it as, “I am,” or “I am becoming who I am becoming.” To say that God is a verb is not a new idea, and again it finds its roots in mystical Jewish Kabbalah.

In Christian iconography, the Holy Spirit is most often represented as a dove. There is a rarer tradition of depicting the Holy Spirit in human form, usually as male. Andrei Rublev’s Trinity icon comes to mind, representing the Trinity as three men who visit Abraham. However, in at least one medieval fresco, in the Saint Jakobus Church in a little Bavarian village an hour’s drive from Munich, we see an unusual depiction of the Holy Trinity: the Holy Spirit as a woman flanked by Father and Son.

William P Young’s popular novel *The Shack* and the film based on it have enjoyed enormous success and popularity. The main character, Mack, encounters the Trinity over a weekend visit after the murder of his daughter on a camping trip. God the Father is portrayed as an African–American woman named Papa; God the Son is a Middle Eastern man who is a carpenter; and God the Holy Spirit is an Asian woman named Sarayu. She is the most mysterious of the three and has a shimmering appearance that makes it easier to see her when you are not looking directly at her. She is defined by Papa as follows:

She is creativity; she is action; she is the breathing of life; she is much more. She is my Spirit. I am...I am a verb. I am that I am. I will be who I will be. I am alive, dynamic, ever active, and moving. I am a being verb...my very essence is a verb.

Sarayuu tells Mack,

You might see me in a piece of art, or music, or silence, or through people, or in creation, or in your joy and sorrow. God, who is the ground of all being, dwells in, around, and through all things.

With the diverse imagery of our God having both masculine and feminine characteristics found in scripture, in the writings of church fathers and mothers, in our sacred art and hymns, and in our modern Hollywood movies, this Holy Trinity of ours makes a wonderful model for being nonbinary: God having characteristics of both genders or none. We have been blessed to have heard the sacred stories during this Convocation from several of our guests who have been a part of the church in the margins while being a part of the trans and nonbinary community.

Science teaches us that even as human beings are usually born with two X or an X and Y chromosome and can be genetically classified as male or female, some are XXY, some of us possess characteristics of both genders, including the genitalia. Let's not forget we all start out as female embryos with female genitalia during gestation, before those with a Y chromosome experience it begin to work to form male genitals. As our gradual psalm appointed for today reminds us: "My body was not hidden from you, while I was being made in secret and woven in the depths of the earth. Your eyes beheld my limbs, yet unfinished in the womb..."

Being created in the image of God can mean different things. Some say it is because we have the capability to create or to love or have free will. I have always taken this more broadly due to my medical training, perhaps even to a mystical understanding: Everything that is innate to human beings — our skin color, our sexuality, our gender, every cell in our body — is made in that Divine Image. And as I said before, if we weren't made fully in the image of God when the Holy Spirit moved in creation and breathed human life into us, we certainly were made in God's image when the Holy Spirit shows up again to Mary and God became a human zygote implanted on her uterine wall, then an embryo, first with female genitalia, and then a fetus with male genitalia, and then the moment not recorded in scripture when Mary first felt God kick inside.

The 5th-century Fourth Ecumenical Council of the church developed the Chalcedonian formulation of the divine and human natures of Jesus Christ. They defined the union of Christ's two natures, divine and human, in one person. The Council proclaimed Jesus Christ as consubstantial with the Father, but the same word is used again to affirm that Jesus Christ is also consubstantial with us in the fullness of his humanity: consubstantial, of the same substance. All of the earth's elements that make human life — carbon, oxygen, hydrogen, and so on — became God with Mary's Yes. Our human amino acids became God; our neurotransmitters such as dopamine, epinephrine, acetylcholine became God; our sex hormones of estrogen, progesterone, and testosterone became God. In the Incarnation, human beings finally are made fully in the divine image of God and recapitulated in these substances, just as in some mystical way, upon the cross at Golgotha, every human disease and sin was recapitulated by Christ to complete our salvation: "Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our diseases."

Therefore, when someone degrades another child of God because of their skin color, or where in the spectrum they might fall within human sexuality or gender, one is degrading this God of ours in whose image — in these same human substances and human diversity — we are made. The pseudepigraphal Second Book of Enoch records this sentiment:

The Lord with his own two hands created humankind; and in a facsimile of his own face. Small and great the Lord created. Whoever insults a person's face insults the face of the Lord; whoever treats a person's face with repugnance treats the face of the Lord with repugnance. Whoever treats with contempt the face of any person treats the face of the Lord with contempt. (2 Enoch 44:1-3)

Humanity is holy. It is sacred. It is God-made, and God-redeemed. In the Athanasian Creed we hear: “And in this Trinity none is before or after other; none is greater or less than another.” What if we truly believed that about ourselves as well, in our communities, in our churches, in our world? Our sins about gender that rebel against God — misogyny, transphobia, and homophobia — they are all rooted in the sin of patriarchy, the fear of the feminine or disgust with the feminine. It is the sin that rebels against God and this sacred creation of gender and says, How dare a man who is privileged enough to be born a man to act or look like a woman! And then the church hears the hymn *Veni Creator* again in that moment of rebellion: “Thy blessed unction from above, is comfort, life, and fire of love. Enable with perpetual light, the blindness of our mortal sight.”

Can we be open to the Holy Spirit? Can we not fear where this holy wind comes and where it might be going? Can we not fear what this Spirit might be saying to the church in the 21st century? Can we allow the Holy Spirit to shine perpetual light upon the blindness of our mortal sight as it has down through the ages? Can we get beyond all our human fears and the fact that we don't have to understand everything by the spectrum of human gender in order to see another image of God that might differ from our own? A divine Image that might even embarrass us or make us uncomfortable or cause us to question everything we were taught due to these sins of patriarchy and sexism.

I'll let you all in on something right now — and all of us gathered here today know this already. We heard about the church on the margin — those who are marginalized — those who are not understood, are hated, and are ostracized because of their gender identity. We have heard in the news this week about the horrible treatment one trans human being is enduring in an Oklahoma school at this very moment. If God is anywhere to be found, that is where God is. No matter what others think, or how uncomfortable we might feel, we all know where God is to be found. And it is not in the powerful or in those who have it all together or think they have it all together, or in the most masculine cisgender among us. “I am becoming who I am becoming” — the Presence once said to Moses on Mount Sinai. May we recognize God's Presence in each of us — even in those that might differ from us or in those that are still becoming who they truly are.

“Teach us to know the Father, Son, and thee, of both, to be but one, that through the ages all along, this may be our endless song: praise to thine eternal merit, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.”

*William Henry Benefield*

*Convocation Sermon: Saint Bartholomew*

## THE EGG SALAD CHURCH



*David Benedict Hedges*

What do we know about Saint Bartholomew? We know that he was an Apostle, that he was an Israelite in whom there was no guile. We know he didn't think much of Nazareth. Saint John's Gospel tells us that he was from Cana. There are of course many things passed down to us from pious tradition, about whether he evangelized the Parthians or the Armenians, but if we stick to what is given to us with the assurance of Holy Writ, it's not much to go on. We are even singing at today's Mass, not one but two proper hymns for this feast which go out of their way to state that we do not know very much at all about this blessed Apostle. Bartholomew — let's face it — was no Peter or James or John; he was not even a Philip or

a Thomas. He was and is not famous.

Now, if you go to Cana, Bartholomew's home town, you will see this acted out in two churches there. The first is the Wedding Church, which commemorates Christ's first miracle of the water into wine. It is a lovely church, and many pilgrims go there — many of whom are married couples of many years who take the time to renew their wedding vows. Above the high altar there is a retablo on which there have been placed six large plaster amphoras, in reference to the six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification in the story. They have plastic grapes spilling out from the tops of them — it's a little hokey, but the intent is earnest and genuine, and on the whole, the church is lovely. It is the place everyone goes in Cana. And then they go to the souvenir stalls across the street, where you can buy little souvenir bottles of “Cana Wedding Wine,” which is apparently pretty terrible. Our very pious pilgrimage guide, Ghassan, told us “When Jesus comes back, my prayer is that he comes to Cana and turns all of that wine back into water!”

If you leave the Wedding Church and turn right, you will go down a little street, and about a hundred yards down, if you are paying attention, you will see another church, with the inscription, DOM SANCTIS NATHANAELIS BARTHOLOMAEI APOSTOLI, the Church of Saint Nathanael Bartholomew the Apostle. Near as I can tell, no one visits this church — it is kept locked, and I later



found out that if you want to go inside, you actually have to go back to the Wedding Church and ask for the key in the sacristy! It is just like Saint Bartholomew himself — standing there, without guile, not impressing anyone, not being famous.

I want to tell you about two more churches. One is the church I serve — a decent-sized parish, but not especially large or well-resourced. And across town, another church — the big church in town, perhaps the oldest parish — and in fact the parish from which my church was a parochial mission. The big church is large, has several curates on staff, is in the wealthiest part of town. It has a full-time music director and an organist, a large choir, and hosts concerts and exhibitions and the like. To be quite clear: this church is a wonderful and faithful place which does many good things for the community. I am not here to talk smack about it — but over on the other side of town it is often hard not to feel as if our little church sits perpetually in the shadow of the large and well-known church.

Now, every four weeks, the people of my parish come together and make a thousand sandwiches, and pack them into lunch bags with fruit and cookies, and take them down to Casa Maria, a Catholic Worker site in South Tucson. We make ham sandwiches and baloney sandwiches, and we also have folks bring hard-boiled eggs and make egg salad sandwiches.

Churches all over town do this on a four-week cycle. And one day, I decided I would go down to Casa Maria on a weekday morning to see for myself what they do, and help out. I got there and was immediately put to work doling out soup to hungry people. I had my clericals on, and one of the leaders said to me, “Now, what church are you from, Father?” And I said “Saint Michael’s on Wilmot Road,” and he smiled and said, “Oh, yeah — that’s the egg salad church!”

Little did I know that Saint Michael’s is apparently the only church that bothers to make egg salad sandwiches — and little did I know that the people who come to Casa Maria really love our egg salad sandwiches.

We may not be the biggest church or the richest church, but we are the egg salad church — and that is a title I am proud to own. I always tell the congregation when announcing sandwich night, that we are the egg salad church.

Saint Paul testifies to what it is to be an apostle — it is to be a spectacle to the world. It’s not much of a spectacle in worldly terms, though: apostles are to be fools, to be weak, to be held in disrepute. “We are hungry and thirsty, we are poorly clothed and beaten and homeless, and we grow weary... We have become like the rubbish of the world, the dregs of all things, to this very day.”

Brothers, we have heard testimony this week of ministry on the margins — among people the world has written off as weak, disreputable, dregs, and rubbish. And this is where we are to be. We are to be Bartholomews — without guile, and little-known. Or rather, perhaps the question is not about being well or little known — but about to whom are we known? To whom should we be well known? To the wealthy and powerful, or to the weak and homeless and powerless? Are we to be known as the strong church, or the egg salad church?

Are we to be the church held in honor, or the egg salad church? Are we to be the church of the powerful, or the egg salad church?

Are we to be filling our pews with the wealthy and well-known, or should we be on the street with the homeless, at the grave with mourners for those gunned down, in the Tenderloins and Castro districts, sharing the love of God with trans and gay kids driven from their homes?

Our collect today asks God to help us to love what Bartholomew believed, and to preach what he taught — it is in making ourselves the egg salad brothers — the egg salad church — that we will be able to do this, for it is in putting ourselves out in the suffering world that we will love what Bartholomew and his Lord believed — and how we will preach what he taught — but not only preach it, but do it. And that will be fame enough.

*David Benedict Hedges*



*Angel Gabriel makes his first vows of profession to the Minister General.*



*(l to r) Peter, David John, James, Eric, John Henry, Gordon John, and Joseph Basil*