

THE SERVANT



*I will go to the
altar of God...*

*The Founder
prepares to make his
first vows,
September 14, 1969.*

#253
Fall 2019



Thomas SSF makes his first vows in the Society of Saint Francis as members of the communities gathered for the celebration of the Society's 100th anniversary of foundation offer a blessing (photo by Lydia Kelsey Bucklin)

The Servant

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Minister General, Richard Thomas Biernacki

Editor, Tobias Stanislas Haller

Community Notes Editor, James Teets

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Snail mail to: 305 West Lafayette Avenue
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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.

Restoration of Anticipation

Restore us, O God of hosts; show the light of your countenance, and we shall be saved — Psalm 80

How many sermons and homilies have been written about Advent, the great time of waiting? But do we wait? We can joke and say, as we see people putting up Christmas decorations, that they should remember that Mary hasn't even told Joseph that she is pregnant! It's a joke, yes — but it makes the point. We just can't wait. We are an impatient people.

We are in a world of “instant” — a daily whirl of internet and email, of Facebook and Instagram. I have to admit that I stayed away from Facebook for years — but most of the Brotherhood is on there and I finally gave in — and now I am caught! I find that I am there a great deal!

I remember something that happened in a church where I served as Music Director. It was the First Sunday of Advent, and when I came into the pastor's office, he said, “You better prepare yourself when you go into the church.” I went in to the sanctuary and it was Christmas everywhere: trees, wreaths, greens — yikes! Such is the rush and the anxiety in which we find ourselves in this age. We are in an age of being unable to wait, rushing to Christmas without any Advent.

So, this Advent, let's all try to wait for new insights into the rich blessings that our all-loving God showers on all of creation. Let's cultivate, as religious traditions so often have done, a teachable spirit. Let's open our hearts and minds to God to be nourished. And — as we wait — let's help others whom we meet and spend time with do the same. The Taizé hymn, “Wait for the Lord, whose day is near,” can give us pause — to remind us that Advent leads us into the midst of wonder — the wonder that the Lord is near.

Wait — for the Lord is near!

RTB

Here and there with the Brothers

COMMUNITY NOTES

Province 1

In late September, William Francis Jones moved to Providence, Rhode Island. He is living in an apartment on the cathedral close just upstairs from Christopher Stephen Jenks, and is attending the Church of the Redeemer. He is retired, and he will be looking at opportunities for ministry in this new setting. (See more on the new life of the Brotherhood in Providence, on page 11.)

Province 2

The Society of Saint Francis was founded September 14, 1919, which makes it exactly fifty years older than our own community, founded on Holy Cross Day in 1969. Thomas Bushnell represented the Brotherhood at the centennial celebration at the Church of Saint Luke in the Fields in New York City. At the celebration, Presiding Bishop Michael Curry preached, the two bishop guardians of the men's and women's parts of SSF were present, together with a host of religious from around the world.

Two new novices were clothed during the service, and Br Thomas SSF (who is resident at the Church of Saint Mary the Virgin in Manhattan) made his first profession of vows. As a part of their ritual, all the gathered religious stood around him after his profession and raised a hand in gesture of blessing as the superior spoke the words. (See the photo on the inner front cover of this issue.)

† Minister General Richard Thomas Biernacki, a member of the Sovereign Military Order of the Temple at Jerusalem (the modern Knights Templar) has been elected Chancellor and Chief of Protocol, on Saturday, September 21st, promoted to the rank of Knight Commander.



Outgoing Prior Dame Marilyn Kinelski, Priory Chaplin Dr David Henritz, and Chancellor Richard Thomas

Province 3

Members of Province 3 gathered in Philadelphia on September 14–15 for a retreat centered on the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Brotherhood. Minister Provincial Edward Munro, together with James Teets, Tobias Stanislas Haller, and Christopher Werth traveled up from Bowie and Baltimore to the campus of Saint Luke's Episcopal Church, Germantown, where Jason Seta arranged for everyone to stay at Saint Margaret's House. Jason serves at Saint Luke's and is a member of the vestry. All were grateful for his hospitality, and that of the parish's rector, the Rev David Morris. Tobias Stanislas led the retreat on Holy Cross Day, using four selections from Saint Gregory's *Moralia* on the book of Job, which referred to Jesus and the Holy Cross, drawing together the feast with thoughts from the Brotherhood's patron saint.



Edward and Jason

At the Sunday liturgy, the guest celebrant was the Brotherhood's Episcopal Visitor, Bishop Rodney R Michel, and Tobias Stanislas, was guest preacher (see page 8). The 24th Presiding Bishop of The Episcopal Church, Frank T Griswold, Bishop in Residence at Saint Luke's, and his wife, Phoebe, were

also present, and this provided an opportunity to renew friendships and associations; James served at the Episcopal Church Center in New York City throughout Bishop Griswold's tenure as Primate, and Tobias Stanislas has been a contributor and curator for Episcopal Church and the Visual Arts, of which Phoebe Griswold was a principal founder.



*Rector David Morris, Bishop Michel, Jason
(photo C Broome)*

Province 5

Province 5 brothers and one inquirer gathered in Chicago on the eve of Holy Cross Day and on the day itself to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the community. They were at Church of the Atonement for Evening Prayer on the Eve of Holy Cross Day, followed by dinner at Moody's Pub in the Edgewater neighborhood of Chicago. On Holy Cross Day itself they gathered at Saint Scholastica Monastery, the home of the Roman Catholic Benedictine Sisters of Chicago.



Brothers of Province 5 and inquirer Dabbs Woodfin on retreat

Retreat leader was the Rev Juan Reed, an Episcopal priest and spiritual director. His talks focused on the Cross and Resurrection. Fr Reed allowed time for self-reflection on the beautiful grounds of the monastery. They met in the Oasis Room, literally an oasis from the city while being in the heart of Chicago's Rogers Park neighborhood. Lunch was served in the sisters' dining area, and a tour of the chapel was conducted by Prioress Judith Murphy. Nathanael Deward, Minister Provincial of Province 5, was pleased to play the chapel organ. The day ended with a celebration of the Holy Eucharist in the monastery's Saint Joseph's Chapel.



*Minister Provincial Nathanael
Deward Rahm, Gordon John
Stanley, Joseph Basil Gauss, and
Ronald Augustine Fox
(photo Cindy Cheski)*

f On September 29th, brothers in the Chicago area attended an organ re-dedication recital by

David Schrader, and Evensong and Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, at Chicago’s Church of the Ascension. Bishop Jeffrey Lee was the Officiant. During the service, Schrader was named Organist Emeritus. He served Ascension as organist from 1980 through 2015.

Province 7

Scott Michael Pomerenk attended the Diocese of Colorado’s Diocesan Convention on October 5, where his wife Erica was elected a Deputy to General Convention; Scott Michael himself was elected First Alternate. An amusing technical twist involved a PowerPoint slide with his name and photo that went up during the nominations procedure, reading, “Scott-Michael Pomerenk, BIG” — an auto-correct fail for “BSG,” — which led one priest to refer to him as “Notorious B.I.G.” for the rest of the convention.

James Patrick Hall and Br Nick Patrick Pijoan FOCD operated a booth at the same convention, raising awareness of Episcopal religious communities. The booth received a good amount of attention and James Patrick reports time well spent.

Province 8

Saturday, October 5, began with a 3.8 magnitude earthquake a few miles south of San Francisco. Later that day Grace Cathedral, San Francisco, observed the centennial celebration of the founding of the Society of Saint Francis, and Francis Sebastian Medina was there to represent the Brotherhood. The chief celebrant was the Rt Rev Robert L Fitzpatrick, Bishop of the Diocese of Hawai’i and Bishop Protector of the Society of Saint Francis; the Very Rev Alan Jones, Dean Emeritus of the cathedral, delivered a powerful sermon. Francis Sebastian mentioned that the Franciscan brothers were very welcoming, and this is surely in keeping with the long and productive relationship the Brotherhood has had with the Society of Saint Francis over the past fifty years, when Gregorian Friars would visit the Little Portion Friary and their houses in Yonkers and Brooklyn, New York, as well as the San Damiano Friary in San Francisco. We look forward to seeing Franciscan faces at the Centenary Celebration of the Brotherhood, 50 years from now!



Francis Jonathan Bullock and Joseph Basil Gauss attended worship at Atonement, Chicago, on the Sunday following Holy Cross Day.



Damien Joseph and Columba SSF with Francis Sebastian

Transit and transition

Moments ago I crossed from California to Nevada through the gorgeous Sierra Nevada. At that line, I am no longer a California resident.

Eighteen and a half years ago I came from Boston to Los Angeles; now I return to the Northeast, heading from Los Angeles' rival city (San Francisco) to Boston's (New York).

I'm inclined to reflect on everything that's happened in that interim. Many wonderful friends. Graduate school. A year away in Virginia, where I found the toughest abuse I've ever suffered. Discovering inner strength I didn't know I lacked. The loss of my father and my aunt. My nephews growing from very young children to fine adults, men of integrity and courage each in their individual way.

In 1985 I had a one-year sojourn in Pittsburgh for an educational program that didn't work out. And in 2007 another one-year in Virginia that didn't work out, for wildly different reasons. If we consider those blips as ignorable from a geographic perspective, then I lived in Albuquerque from 1967 to 1990, Boston from 1990 to 2000, and California from 2000 to 2019. In each of these periods I grew inestimably, and I can bracket what that growth was in some fairly concrete ways.

Each move was for reasons that I didn't really understand when I made it. I had reasons, which were largely realized, but I was not aware of the deeper learning, the real discovery, the growth that was attached to that place, even though it was the underlying true reason for the move.

In Boston I took with me what I had learned in Albuquerque (including the year in Pittsburgh). How to read and write, how to program a computer with skill and artistry, how to convince people of my ideas, how to drive, how to cook a reasonable meal.

Then I used those skills in Boston as the foundation for a very different kind of learning. How to be a friend, the importance of personal loyalty and reliability, how to pay bills more or less reliably, how to live independently, how to be an adult in a parish, how to pray, how to finish a college class, how to decide when to convince people of my ideas and when not to.

And then to California, those skills from Boston became critical as I navigated harder work. How to complete a very large intellectual project. The difference between responding to difficulty and reacting to it, and how to adopt the former. How to choose a friend rather than simply take what lands in my lap. How to weather abuse with grace. How to lead others effectively. How to deal with people not worthy of my trust. How to conserve resources and make deliberate decisions and stick to them.

All of this I take with me into New York, full of awareness perhaps this time as never before how much I am unfinished, how much is uncertain. When I moved to Boston I was unaware of what I took with me or its importance. When I moved to California I was aware of what I had learned and accomplished in Boston, but I

was not conscious that anything important was lacking. Now with this third transition, I am very much aware that I am lacking much, even though I cannot say what it is. I simply know it is there, waiting for me, in God’s grace, to see what will come.

Thomas Bushnell

A sermon from St Luke’s Philadelphia

Half Empty

Jeremiah 4:11–12, 22–28; Psalm 14; 1 Timothy 1:12–17; Luke 15:1–10
For thus says the Lord: The whole land shall be a desolation, yet I will not make a full end.

You have likely heard of the difference between an optimist and a pessimist, and how they see a glass as being either half-full or half-empty. I actually have such a glass at home, a wine glass with a line marked on the side half-way up (or down, depending on your point of view) with the words Optimist and Pessimist etched in the appropriate places above and below the line. Well, today’s passage from the prophet Jeremiah should leave us with no doubt on which side of the line he places himself. It is a good reminder of why he is thought of as a prophet of doom. No, Jeremiah clearly never got the memo, “Don’t be bringing me no bad news.”

What he speaks of in this morning’s passage is a hot blast of wind that sweeps everything away, not just to “winnow or cleanse,” no, but too strong for that, too strong for a mere dusting; this is a real grab it by the end and shake it out the window kind of wind. This is a knock it all down and start it all over kind of wind; if the Middle East had hurricanes, this would be category 5. Jerusalem then would look worse than the Bahamas does now.

The prophet looks, and in the aftermath of this terrific blast of wind, he sees nothing but a waste and void below, and nothing but darkness in the heavens above — Jeremiah quotes the words of Genesis, recalling the time before creation itself, before God filled the dark and empty void, before God called forth the light of heaven; this is the desolation of primeval un-creation.

Yet into this desolation, the prophet gives one hopeful word he has received from the Lord, one brief phrase of promise, one little shred of hope, like the still small voice that came after the winds and tempests and earthquakes that shattered the mountains: “Yet I will not make a full end.”

This little glimmer of hope, this whisper of a still, small voice with the shred of a promise, is a common theme in the words not just of Jeremiah, but of many of the prophets. Even when everything seems lost, when it seems all have turned bad and we are tempted to join the Psalmist in declaring that “there is none who does good, no not one” — there is still some remnant, some little portion, some crack in the drought-stricken soil into which a hopeful seed has found its way to bide its time until the rains come.

God had assured the despondent exile Elijah in that still, small voice, that there were more than a few left in Israel who had not bent their knee to Baal, that he was not alone in his struggle to remain faithful; Isaiah had received the promise that a remnant would return from exile in far Babylon; and Ezekiel would celebrate the promise that God would return to the once-forsaken, once-abandoned Temple. These prophets bear witness to this promise: However bad it gets, however dark the night and desolate the prospect, a slim, small hope for dawn abides. A portion, however small, remains. The handful of meal and teaspoon of oil will somehow last for three years; the glass that didn't even seem so much as half-empty, the cup with just a few drops left in the bottom, turns out after all to be full to the brim.

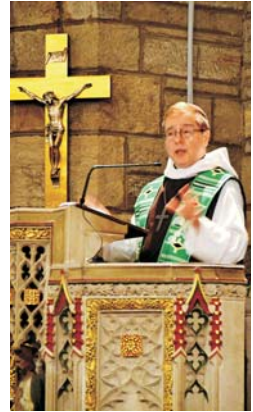
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This seems to have been Saint Paul's personal experience as well, though he applies it universally to the whole human condition. Like the desolation of the land described by Jeremiah, Paul's condition — when he was still the unconverted Saul, before the light shined on him on the Damascus Road — was about as bad as bad can be: a blasphemer, a persecutor, a man of violence, foremost among sinners. And yet, in the midst of that parched, dry wilderness of anger, hatred, and self-righteousness, God was able to find the little shred of salvageable goodness that is still present in even the worst sinner, and make the most of it, stretching that little bit out to serve God's purposes. Like the surprise of water in the desert suddenly welling up to overflow, God poured out mercy and grace upon one almost—but not completely — empty of any good, and made him into an instrument for the spread of God's good word of promise.

+ + +

So much for the pessimists! Today's Gospel looks at things more from the glass-half-full side. Just as half-empty (or even less than that) is not God's ultimate will, so too even half-full isn't good enough for God. Even almost full isn't good enough for God. Jesus attests that he is not one to deal in acceptable losses, to say, "What's one sheep lost when I've still got ninety-nine; what's one dime out of a dollar lost under the sofa-cushion?" No, our God is not a God of acceptable losses; God wants it all. God will not suffer anything to be lost.

Now, I know it's that time of year, and as tempting as the ten-percent proportion of one dime from a dollar might be, this is not going to be a sermon about tithing... Except... to remind us that the tithe is not all that God wants. God wants it all — all of us, in both senses of that phrase: every last one of us, and everything that each of us is and has, our whole heart and mind and soul and strength, all those faculties of ourselves the full extent of which we are called and challenged to apply to our love of God, as strongly and completely as our God loves each and all of us.



Tobias Stanislas in the pulpit at Saint Luke's Germantown (photo C Broome)

For in the end, it is not about proportion, about acceptable losses, but about the perfection of all in all. It isn't about a glass half-empty or half-full, but completely full, abundance piled up and packed down, full to the brim and then to overflowing. God did not rest, at the first, at the beginning Jeremiah recalls for us, God did not rest until the days of creation were fulfilled and the Sabbath of completion was come.



(l to r) Bishop Rodney Michel, Tobias Stanislas, Presiding Bishop Frank Griswold, Edward Munro, Rector David Morris, Jason Seta, James Teets, and Christopher Werth (photo C Broome)

Nor will God rest in the work of the new creation in Christ until all is well, and every manner of thing is well, and complete, and full to overflowing, brought to perfection by him, and in him, and through him.

As today's collect prays, we seek for the Holy Spirit's direction and rule "in all things" — and the aid the Holy Spirit provides is not that desolating wind that levels the mountains but the powerful yet persuasive guidance of the Spirit as in the beginning, when the Spirit hovered over the uncreated deep. This is not a wind of desolation, but of creation, the new creation of all things — we seek this, the Holy Spirit's aid, guiding and directing us so that our hearts may be completely given to God, vessels open to receive God's gift of grace, that we might be filled — not just a bit, not just halfway, but to overflowing completion. Whether we find ourselves rescued by the skin of our teeth when we are almost entirely bereft and empty, or content to think ourselves satisfied with the half-measure we already have; whether we feel we are running on fumes or cruising along on half a tank; whether desolated by the blast of an ill wind, or mistakenly satisfied with the good-enough compromise for which we might be tempted to settle; God will surprise us with amazing grace, and shower us with blessings. Rejoice, then, my friends, for the lost has been found, and filled, and blessed; and join Saint Paul in his joyful acclamation: to the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever.

Tobias Stanislas Haller



Life as Community

Since the end of ministry at Fessenden House in Yonkers, I have been thinking and praying over what to do next. Through a fortuitous series of events, I ended up in Providence, Rhode Island, as Clerk of the Works for the Cathedral of Saint John. Two weeks ago, William Francis joined me here, moving into an apartment just upstairs. This lets us share in the common life of the diocese at daily Morning and Evening Prayer, and dinner with each other. This is very much in line with ideas that have been percolating in my own mind and heart for many years now.

During most of my time in the Brotherhood, and for some years before, I have done best when living in community with at least one other brother, or at least in a community of prayer, as I did before I joined BSG. Even in situations that didn't work out for me, having at least one other brother with me sustained me through good times and bad. Since Fessenden House closed, I have missed this terribly.

I have also always done best in a household that welcomes all sorts of people as extended community, particularly those on the periphery of the larger society. My father served as a priest at Saint Peter's Chelsea in New York City. The vicarage where I grew up was very much an open-house for all who showed up, from the high-and-mighty to local street people. We never knew who would be at dinner on any given night. The same was true of the rectory of my parish in Boston, where I lived before joining BSG, and of Fessenden House, both when a home for men with HIV/AIDS and later for men dealing with substance abuse and mental illness. Members of my family who visited always remarked on how much it reminded them of Saint Peter's. This kind of environment feels like home to me.

Some years ago, in conversation with my Minister Provincial, I brought up the possibility of community living for members of BSG who were living alone. This was around the time we had experienced several brothers' deaths within just a few years. Patrick Ignatius lived with me at Fessenden House, and I was with him through his final illness and death. I remember what a profound privilege it was to be in the presence of this holy man when he took his last breath. When Charles died, just over a year later, I remember the sadness I felt that he had died alone and unattended in his apartment. We may have members of the community now, including me, who might want to be in such a community household.

William Francis Jones has now joined me here in Providence. He and I have lived with each other several times before at House of the Redeemer in Manhattan and then at Fessenden House. We drive each other up the wall sometimes, but we also love each other dearly and share a life of prayer in community.

Could this be expanded to include more brothers in similar situations? I am hopeful that it can. These are just the beginnings of an idea — a “pragmatic ideal,” as one of the brothers so aptly put it. We will see where God leads us.

Christopher Stephen Jenks