

The Servant



*Relics of Saints Benedict
and Gregory the Great*

#261

Autumn 2021

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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.

The State of the Brotherhood

"Come, labor on. Who dares stand idle on the harvest plain...."

To my recollection and memory, this is about the fiftieth of my annual State of the Brotherhood addresses. They have from time to time been memorable, controversial, serious, and inspirational. This one is to be short and direct, thankful and filled with love.



All of you have, in these very troubled times, remained steadfast and serving, working and praying, and flexible as a rubber band. While the world around us crumbled under the threat of COVID-19, you carried on and in many instances expanded your ministries. You served as "servants of the servants of God." While some were unable to have Communion for many weeks and months, spirits remained strong and vital; and you kept in contact with your brothers.

Then the Friday evening BSG "Happy Hour" arrived. As silly and amusing as the name may seem, it has been a great way to be in contact with one another. We realized that, through the miracle of Zoom, we could *see* each other's faces! We could actually peek into each other's world — in many cases, thanks to the wonder of virtual backgrounds, brothers were sitting in ancient cathedrals and cloisters! Many thanks to David Benedict for starting us on this, and to Richard Edward, Tobias Stanislas, and Ronald Augustine for sharing the load of hosting these very happy hours.

That is our world. That is our reality — that is BSG — my children.

We remain strong and vital. We remain servants like none other. In every place that one of us serves and lives there is hope and the reality of service — of servant-hood. You know that for many years I resisted Facebook like the plague. Now you can't get me away from it! Not only do I share with many of you in this virtual world, but we as a community continue to be seen by everyone who accesses our "group" page. That page is in constant view and we are seen and known. Our publicity is out there — we are, as I said many years ago — "dancing on the edge of time."

And now this year something new. Our regular meeting place for the last twenty years, Mount Alvernia, was not available for us, closed for lack of staff. With no further comment on that, I will say that we have been given the edge on which to dance! — we are now made, I believe by God's grace and the moving of the Holy Spirit — to look for other pastures, for a new place to meet.

So — here we are — in Baltimore in a secular conference center, probably the

least holy place we could imagine. But by being here we will make it holy. We have *already* made it holy and, I believe, when we leave this place will be different than when we came. We created a chapel, a sacred space — and because we are, indeed, flexible, we had “church” — we *are* church: walls and windows do not a church make — we do, the gathered people of God! Brothers — dance on — go to the edge as we have done this week. Dance in the light of the Spirit that enlivens and directs our steps. Dance on and Live Jesus — Soli Deo Gloria!

RTB

Here and there with the Brothers

Community Notes

Annual Convocation 2021



The last major Brotherhood gathering had been for Winter Convocation 2020, which took place at Mount Alvernia Retreat Center from January 27th to 31st of last year. Shortly after that convocation, the beginnings of the COVID-19 pandemic began to take shape, and from that time until July of 2021 no large gatherings of our members had been possible. So we welcomed Annual Convocation 2021 with open arms, though the first disappointment was that Mount Alvernia was unable to host our gathering due to loss of kitchen and housekeeping staff. This last-minute revelation did not dampen our zeal for gathering, and very soon we were able to issue a Call to Annual Convocation to all fully-vaccinated members for July 26th to 31st — though the convocation site turned out to be quite different than the accustomed beautiful Franciscan monastery in upstate New York. AnnuConv’21 was to take place at the Maritime Conference Center in Linthicum, Maryland, a suburb of Baltimore. The grounds were quite different than those we had become used to, including the large monastic chapel which held our Daily Offices and daily Holy Eucharist; instead there were two large conference rooms and a central gathering space, all on the 7th floor of one of the two housing towers — and our brothers made it work!

The Brotherhood has been familiar with the Maritime Center several years — the twice-a-year meetings of the community’s Council have taken place there — and the Center was very willing to welcome us once again in a larger

gathering. That being said, our brothers had to transform both conference rooms into a Chapel and a Chapter Room for meetings and retreat programs during our visit there, with the help of the facility's staff, of course. A number of brothers willingly brought along the makings for our daily masses and our Sacristans for this convocation — Scott Michael Pomerenk (the Diocese of Colorado), with the assistance of David Luke Henton (New Mexico) — worked wonders to accommodate the daily liturgies that needed to take place in that space. The larger of the two rooms became our Chapter Room, where most of the rest of the daily events took place. Both spaces were set up for Zoom participation for those unable to attend, thanks to the efforts of Tobias Stanislas Haller (Maryland).



Gordon John, Richard Edward, and Eric at the Holy Eucharist



Mark Andrew at the makeshift altar

smoothly, and the community's Administrator Eric Shelley (Southwestern Virginia) provided a solid list of members' arrivals and departures, together with constant interfacing with the facility's staff. All of the Officiants of the Daily Office were assigned in advance, and the rota of celebrants, deacons, and preachers at the daily Holy Eucharist led excellent liturgies: The celebrants for the week were Tobias Stanislas, Mark Andrew Jones (Southeast Florida), David Benedict Hedges (Arizona), and Richard Edward Helmer (California); the deacons were

As always, our Director of Convocation Liturgy and Music — Nathanael Deward Rahm (Chicago), assisted by Director of Education Thomas Bushnell (New York), and the community's Master of Ceremonies James Teets (Maryland) — worked for the preceding month to prepare a daily schedule of prayer and retreat program which worked quite



David Benedict and David Luke administer communion.

Edward Munro (Maryland), Virgilio Fortuna (Massachusetts), David Luke, and Gordon John Stanley (Chicago); and the week's preachers were Richard Edward, Joseph Basil Gauss (Chicago), William Henry Benefield (West Texas), David Benedict, and Thomas. Acolytes for the week included James, Eric, and Joseph Basil, and the cantors for the week were William Henry, Richard Edward, Jason Peter Seta (Pennsylvania), Tommy Mandri (Southeast Florida), and David Benedict. As there was no organ or other means of leading the music for the Daily Office or the Holy Eucharist, our group of cantors provided excellent leadership throughout the week. Heartfelt thanks to one and all!



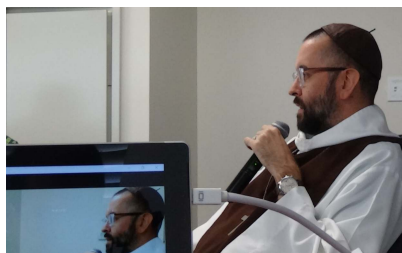
The roundtable workshop on the Daily Office

The reflection program consisted of two sessions on the Tuesday on the subject of the Daily Office, and two sessions on Wednesday and Thursday in viewing and discussing a classic film in a format that might be called *video divina*. On Tuesday, Thomas, our Director of Education and Chair of the Education and Retreat Planning Committee, thoughtfully prepared the structure of two panels of brothers, each individually providing insights from his own experiences with the Daily Office and structured prayer over the decades; in the morning session the first panel consisted of Tobias Stanislas, Donovan Aidan Bowley (Maine) and David



Enoch John reflects on the Office

Luke, and the afternoon session provided the second panel of David Benedict, James Patrick Hall (Colorado) and Jason Peter. While it may seem obvious to some that a religious order would understand prayer in a certain way, the Brotherhood's reality of life as a dispersed community means that the central function of religious life — prayer — is accomplished individually and throughout the church and the world, almost never at the same time of day or night, and seldom in the traditional way, seated in a monastic choir of a vast church or cathedral. This reality creates many differences and stresses to the accomplishment of prayer,



David Benedict (and his broadcast Zoom likeness) on the Daily Office

either private intercession or the Daily Office, and it is helpful to all to air and discuss these differences and hopefully to gain new insights into the value and accomplishment of this ongoing conversation with God.



Peter shares his experiences with the Office.

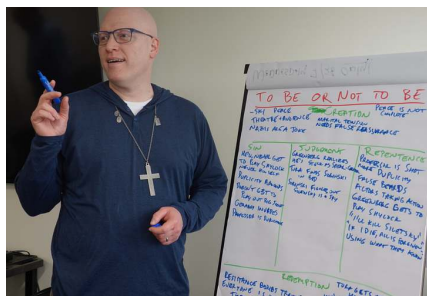


David Luke on the role of the Office in his life

On Wednesday afternoon, Scott Michael presented the 1942 film, *To Be or Not To Be*, starring Carole Lombard, Jack Benny, and Robert Stack in a tour-de-force about a theater troupe in Nazi-occupied Poland, full of mistaken and counterfeit identities. On Thursday morning the community had the opportunity to discuss and dissect

the elements of this film from theological points of view.

Of course, when such a large group of people meet together so seldom, there is much to be accomplished during this short period of time, and the week of Annual Convocation is certainly no exception. During this week the Renewal of Annual Vows took place, providing time and space for David Benedict, Scott Michael, Richard Edward and Tommy each to meet with Minister General Richard Thomas Biernacki (New Jersey), William Henry, and Nathanael Deward representing the Minister Provincial of each brother's province, and for each one to state again his desire to live the life of a Gregorian Friar for another year, under the discipline and structure provided by the Rule of the Brotherhood. This is both a serious and a joyful occasion and it provides opportunity for each renewing brother personally to speak with the Minister General and his Minister Provincial about any subject on his mind — and vice versa.



*Scott Michael facilitates a discussion of the wealth of insights in *To Be or Not to Be*.*

Wednesday morning included the annual meetings of the six Provinces of the Brotherhood, to discuss ideas for program involving the members of each Province for the coming year. These meetings also included elections of

Ministers Provincial whose current three-year terms of office were coming to a close at this convocation. Provinces 2, 3, and 5 each re-elected their current Minister Provincial to continue for another term — John Henry Ernestine (Newark), Edward, and Nathanael Deward.

On Wednesday evening the Council gathered for a brief meeting to receive the results of the provincial elections and to endorse those elected for another three-year term. (Each Minister Provincial is also a member of Council, and Council has the responsibility to ratify each election.) Council also appointed a Site Committee to seek out locations for future Annual and Winter Conventions; those appointed to that committee were James, Tobias Stanislas, Ronald Augustine Fox (Chicago), Thomas, and Eric.

Thursday afternoon was the annual Chapter Meeting, at which those members who could not be present were facilitated on Zoom. Annual reports from all of the elected and appointed officials of the community were presented. Chapter amended the Constitution to return the minimum period of the novitiate to one year, as it had been prior to 1990. This motion carried unanimously.

Friday was a special event, as the Rt Rev Robert Ihloff, Assisting Bishop of Maryland, visited with the community for conversation and lunch. It is always a special joy to receive a bishop from the diocese in which we meet, and this was the first time in at least three decades that a convocation of the Brotherhood has taken place outside of the Diocese of New York. and we have always enjoyed the visits from the bishops of that diocese, together with our own Episcopal Visitor, Bishop Rodney Michel. (Bishop Rodney's schedule did not permit him to be with us at this convocation.) Bishop Ihloff brought greetings from Bishop of Maryland Eugene Taylor Sutton, who was away on his annual holiday at this time. Bishop Robert knows our Edward Munro very well, as Edward served as deacon when Bishop Robert was Diocesan (1995-2007). James also knew Bishop Robert from James' time serving as National Coordinator of Companion Diocese Relationships, one of the many interests Bishop Robert still holds. The bishop arrived in time to participate in Noonday Prayer, after which he sat with the Minister General and the brothers for lunch,



Carlos Roberto makes his promise.

and then he gave a short welcome address to the Brotherhood. This was followed by a Q&A period, where Bishop Robert stated that he is a long-time supporter of encouraging religious vocation in his diocese — and that made all of us very happy!

Thanks for stopping by, Bishop Robert — you're welcome at any time!

The Rites of the Brotherhood on Friday at Evening Prayer held special significance for postulant Carlos R Fernandez (Southeast Florida), as he was received as a novice in the

Brotherhood. Tobias Stanislas, Director of Postulants and Novices, and David Luke Henton, mentor to the new novice, presented Carlos to Minister General Richard Thomas, who asked him: “What is your desire, my son?” To which he responded: “It is my desire to become a novice in the Brotherhood of Saint Gregory.”

With that accomplished, Carlos Roberto was clothed in the novice habit, blessed by the Minister General, and rose up to the welcoming applause of the entire chapel! Next came the commissioning of officials — brothers who had been elected to new offices and had not previously been commissioned to those offices — namely William Henry as Minister Provincial of Province West, and Thomas as Director of Education — and the chapel’s applause also greeted them both!

With those Rites accomplished, the Minister General continued with Evening Prayer, after which the customary “Family Photograph” was arranged by Tobias Stanislas, at the front entrance of the Maritime Conference Center, on a hot and humid Baltimore summer’s evening!

Our final day of Annual Convocation 2021 began with John Henry officiating at Morning Prayer, and Tobias Stanislas celebrating the Holy Eucharist later that morning, followed by the final Rite of our gathering: The Mission Service, officiated by our Founder and Minister General.



This is always a very emotional liturgy — saying “so long for now” to each of our members, in the hope and trust that we shall all meet again soon, and also a “thank you” to Richard Thomas for his

commitment in founding the Brotherhood fifty-two years ago, and for his ongoing leadership through all of the years since then. Soli Deo Gloria — To God Alone the Glory!



Carlos Roberto is presented, clothed, and given his cross.

Province 1

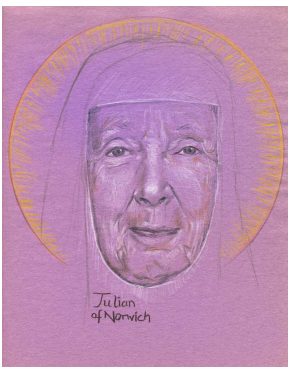
Tobias Stanislas Haller and James Teets traveled north from Baltimore to Boston for the annual investiture ceremony of the Most Venerable Order of the Hospital of Saint John of Jerusalem, at which Nigel Heath KStJ invested Tobias Stanislas as a Commander in the Order. While in town, the brothers shared several meals with Ciarán Anthony DellaFera, as well as joining him in worship at his parish, Church of the Advent.



Province 2

A long-time pastor, confessor and personal friend of several Gregorian Friars died in June of this year — The Rev Canon Edgar Fisher Wells Jr, sometime Rector of the Church of Saint Mary the Virgin, Manhattan. Due to the effects of the pandemic, the public expression of thanksgiving for a lifetime of prayer and service to his beloved Episcopal Church had to wait until Saturday, August 21st. On that day, the people of Saint Mary's gathered at their parish church, with Bishop Andrew ML Dietsche and the current rector of the parish, the Rev Stephen Gerth, as preacher, for The Burial of the Dead, at which our Thomas Bushnell provided the Prayers of the People (as well as representing the Brotherhood in thanksgiving for decades of ministry offered by Father Wells in that holy place), and then to the Cathedral Church of Saint John the Divine for the Commendation in the Columbarium there, officiated by Bishop Allen K Shin. May Our Lord grant Edgar a peaceful rest, in gratitude for a lifetime of love and service.

Province 3



The June edition of “Julian’s Window,” newsletter of the Order of Julian of Norwich, included an article by Sr Therese OJN, “The Image of Julian,” an overview of various portraits of Mother Julian as depicted over the centuries by numerous iconographers and artists. Sr Therese noted: “A quite original image by Tobias Stanislas Haller BSG, shows Julian as a wise crone in a plain, inconspicuous guimpe and veil — the most elderly Julian.” Over these last two years, Tobias Stanislas has produced a portrait image of each of the commemorations authorized for inclusion on the

Episcopal Church’s calendar. Three of these are included in the most recent exhibition of The Episcopal Church and the Visual Arts, “In the Silence of our Hearts: The Quarantine Artwork of the Artists of ECVA.” A number of his other “quick icons” executed in colored pencil appear elsewhere in this issue.

Province 4

In March, Angel Gabriel Roque responded to a request from the rector of Christ the King Episcopal Church, Orlando, Florida to help in the COVID vaccination effort in Orlando's Latino Community, especially with regard to displaced Puerto Rican families. The rector needed someone good at crowd control, and he helped facilitate more than 200 with their vaccination through the course of the day. In the meantime, he gave some interviews to local channels in Florida, as well as a few newspapers, and ended up in The Living Church. He was very happy to provide this service, as well as having the chance to introduce the religious life to many people.

Province 5

While its origin remains a mystery, the case of relics of Saint Benedict of Nursia, Founder of the Benedictine Order, and of our own patron, Saint Gregory the Great, shown on the cover of this issue, came into Ronald Augustine Fox's possession by way of his parish, Church of the Atonement in Chicago. Br Stephen Wetmore CMJ, Guardian of the Community of the Mother of Jesus and Atonement's archivist, found what's shown in his mailbox at Atonement. Due to health reasons, Br Stephen has been absent from the parish for the past several months, so it's not known where the relics came from or the identity of the person who dropped them off at Atonement. Br Stephen thought the Brotherhood of Saint Gregory was the proper place for the relics, and turned them over to Ronald Augustine. The certificate that came with the relics indicates that the relics are a second class relic of Saint Benedict (*ex idumentis*, from his clothing) and a first class relic from Saint Gregory — a bone fragment similar to the relic the Brotherhood has had present at every convocation for decades. We are most grateful to receive these physical mementos of saints important to our history.

⌚ Province 5 brothers made good use of the Zoom platform at their Foundation Day province gathering in Chicago on September 11 by inviting brothers from around the country to present reflections on our Vows of Poverty, Chastity, and Obedience.

Richard Matthias (New York) offered reflections on Poverty; Thomas Bushnell (New York) on Chastity; and Richard John Lorino (Central Florida) on Obedience.



Our vow of poverty reads, “A brother makes the vow of poverty by dedicating a major portion of the fruit of his labor to the Church and to the Brotherhood.” Richard told the brothers we all understand this aspect of the vow, but he also noted, quoting Gregorian Foundations,

Stewardship of skills and talents is an important aspect of the vow of poverty as the brothers express it in their work and ministry — individually and, especially, together.



Our vow of chastity reads, “A brother makes the vow of chastity as follows: Chastity is the decision to live with all in love, with respect for each person’s integrity. It is not a denial of one’s sexuality and capacity for love, but a dedication of the whole self to God: free from indecency or offensiveness and restrained from all excess, in order to be free to love others without trying to possess or control.” Thomas expanded beyond the “free from” portions and spoke about our commitment to love others freely, avoiding narcissistic ways of thinking and acting.



Our vow of obedience reads, “A brother makes the vow of obedience to Jesus Christ as his only Lord and Savior, to the discipline of the Episcopal Church, the provisions of the Rule of the Brotherhood, and to the Minister General and other pastoral officials as appropriate.” Richard

John stressed the need for humility in thinking about this vow. He explained that the word “obedience” comes from the Latin *obaudire*, to listen hard or carefully. Richard John offered quotes from Benedict, Gregory the Great, and Richard Rohr as he guided the brothers through this vow.

The brothers in Chicago began their day with a “coffee and catch up” at the Church of the Atonement, followed by Morning Prayer. The brothers attended the parish Rosary and the 10 am healing Mass, celebrated by Atonement’s Rector, the Very Rev Erika Takacs.



The Mass was a Votive for Peace, commemorating the terrorist attack of



September 11, 2001. Following Mass, Mother Erika warmly greeted the brothers, and thanked them for their dedication and work in the parish and in churches throughout the country. After Noonday Prayer, the brothers went to a local restaurant, Moody’s, for lunch and then returned to the church for the remaining session. Brothers present in person were Minister Provincial Nathanael Deward Rahm, Ronald Augustine Fox, Gordon John Stanley, Joseph Basil Gauss, and Francis Jonathan Bullock. Nathanael Deward reported that all of the presentations were outstanding, and the brothers had a prayerful day, along with fun and fellowship.

A Convocation sermon

On not being afraid

Jesus said, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid." Then he got into the boat with them and the wind ceased. And they were utterly astounded, for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened.

It's hard to understand this passage from Mark's Gospel without knowing more about what came before, or in the entire sixth chapter for that matter.

I am not a pulpit preacher by trade, or by habit. I do not have a theological degree save my minor in religion from (what is now) Augsburg University in Minneapolis, Minnesota. (To quote Nathanael Deward Rahm — a small Christian college for small Christians). I do try to put myself forward for preaching every five years or so because it forces me to re-discover my relationship with particular Scriptures — which in the preparation stage is often a wrestling match.

I jumped on preaching today — because of my affinity for the Gospel of Mark. If there were an online quiz that would reveal "Which Gospel are you?" the answer for me is Mark. (My least favorite is John. The first 5 verses give me a headache.) All four Gospels are at the heart of Christianity — the life and times and meaning of Jesus; however, I am here to tell you that I've had a troubled relationship with Jesus and Jesus-ness my whole life.



Joseph Basil

I did *not* grow up with altar calls. I did *not* know that "accepting Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior" was a thing until I was an adult and it still seems strange to me. I grew up in the Roman church in the 1960s and 70s right when Vatican II changes were happening, such as ceramic chalices and guitar Masses. I grew up learning about the faith through the lens of the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine or CCD. In retrospect there may have been more emphasis on the Doctrine part than on the Christian part.

For those of us who grew up Roman Catholic, it's safe to say that the powers that be did not necessarily want us to be digging deep into Scripture — that should be left to the experts. For me there was a lot of good being imbued in CCD — learning about Mass; learning that one's faith is more than just Scripture.

When I was younger what I learned was pretty much the Gospel of Mark, in a nutshell: Here's a guy — Jesus — perhaps he's the Messiah — not sure because John the Baptist is around at the beginning of the story — or maybe he's Elijah. Maybe he is just Jesus, Mary's son; Jesus, the Carpenter; or even Jesus the hometown boy, who really doesn't impress us that much. Who the hell is this guy?

Mark's Jesus is a man of particular actions: of parables, of miracles. In CCD

I learned about the miracles, especially the feeding of the five thousand with the five loaves and the two fishes. As I prepared to speak on today's gospel, a long submerged memory came back for me: a CCD activity of coloring five ovals with brown crayons; they, of course, were loaves, and there were also some multicolored fish. What it made me realize is that I can't really remember a time when I didn't know Jesus was all about miracles. I suppose I drew Jesus walking on water as well, but I can't recall that specifically.

As a child I never questioned the miracles — but then adolescence and adulthood came. My adolescence and early adulthood were tumultuous partly because of my sexuality; partly because of substance abuse issues in my family. The Roman church declared me intrinsically disordered; I did not know this to be the truth, and I left. I questioned my faith. I questioned Christianity. I explored other traditions.

I attended Augsburg College when the American Lutheran Church was becoming part of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and I was required to take religion classes — classes I liked so much that religion became my minor.

Thirty years ago I moved to Chicago for work — and soon thereafter serendipitously found Church of the Atonement and have been there ever since. It wasn't until Augsburg and becoming an Episcopalian that I started to have a deeper relationship with Christian Scripture, and eventually with Jesus.

Which brings us to today. Here. There was so much to preach on in all three readings. Even though the gospel is the shortest of today's readings it is densely packed.

First of all Jesus takes a break; to pray — after the feeding of the 5,000. Perhaps that is an important example for those of us with ministries — to have not only the discipline to pray, but also the discipline to take a break. Convocation for me has often been “going up on the mountain to pray.”

We know the story of the disciples and the boat, and the hour being very late and Jesus walking out on the sea. Seemingly in the Mark text Jesus' intent is not to go out and save the disciples — rather his intent was to get to the other side of the Sea of Galilee. I have been wrestling with that line — “He intended to pass them by.” Not that I've come to any great conclusion on this but a number of scholars note that Mark is not writing from Jesus' point of view, but from the point of view of those around Jesus. The disciples could see Jesus and it seemed his intention was to pass them by — making their situation and anxiety worse. The scene comes to a climax when the disciples can take no more and cry out. Jesus replies, “Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.” It is then that Jesus gets into the boat and stills the storm.

Childhood CCD me recognizes and understands all of this and even finds comfort in it as a familiar story. Late adolescent / early adult me thinks, “How could that actually happen? He was probably walking on a sand bar.” Later adulthood me sees so much more. Scholars note that Jesus saying, “Take heart it is I,” is actually Jesus expressing his divinity to the disciples in *words*. When

Jesus gets into the boat with them and the wind ceases it is Jesus expressing his divinity to the disciples in *action*. It was too early in Jesus' ministry for the disciples fully to understand the breadth and depth of who Jesus was.

For me, sometimes it takes me awhile to recognize my own storms and my own miracles. Is my heart hardened like the disciples? For me, and those around me there is the storm of political divisiveness and threats to democracy in the United States. There is the storm of obscene income disparity among people. There is the storm of accelerated climate change. There is the storm of very real gun violence on the streets (especially in Chicago where I live). There is the storm of COVID and infectious disease threatening humanity. For the last several months we have been living different versions of these horrors day in and day out.

While there are often times I want to cry out like the disciples, perhaps there are also times when I am not recognizing miracles in front of me. Two things come to mind. First, I was among the first in the United States to receive a COVID vaccine, my first dose in 2020 and then millions after me, allowing us to be able to meet cautiously in person here today. Second, my two main faith groups — my own congregation and my religious community — have persevered through the current storms. My congregation immediately went virtual when we could not meet in person, and we now broadcast Morning Prayer on Facebook Live every morning. Ron Fox and I are two of the people that officiate Morning Prayer. Gordon John is faithful in attending nearly every day. Through the Brotherhood of Saint Gregory's *dailyoffice.app* we have been able to teach people about disciplined prayer they would have not known about otherwise. Moreover, our religious community was able to share significant financial resources through our outreach grants with several brothers' ministries and very diverse manners of building up God's Kingdom. To me, these are nothing short of miracles — the actions of the body of the Christ. Like the disciples, I am utterly astounded.

No matter what the storm, we can become more aware of Jesus' message: "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid."

Joseph Basil Gauss

A Convocation sermon

Choosing the better part

Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her.

So let me set the stage for you. The Lucan narrative appointed for today states that Jesus and his followers came to a village. This is Bethany, of course, which is located on the southeastern slope of the Mount of Olives, less than two miles from Jerusalem. Today it is known locally at Al-Azariya which is Arabic for "Place of Lazarus." Dr Brian Capper, who teaches at Canterbury Christ Church

University, suggests that ancient Bethany was the site of an almshouse for the poor and a place of care for the sick. He also suggests that Bethany in the time of Jesus was settled by people from Galilee who had come to live by Jerusalem. This would explain why Jesus and the disciples, as Galileans, would find it convenient to stay here when visiting Jerusalem. As Capper writes,

Galilean pilgrims avoided potential conflict with Samaritans by traveling south on the eastern side of the Jordan. Bethany was the last station on their route to Jerusalem after crossing the river and taking the road through Jericho up into the highlands. A respectful distance from the city and Temple, and on the pilgrim route, Bethany was a most suitable location for a charitable institution. It is not surprising that an Essene hospice had been established at Bethany to intercept and care for pilgrims at the end of the long and potentially arduous journey from Galilee.

Today's feast of Mary and Martha has also evolved. Originally it was only the feast of Saint Martha because — you guessed it — the church was unsure of whether her sister Mary was also Mary Magdalene. And I want to ask what about Lazarus? Why does he get left out? Rome this last February finally added Mary and Lazarus to today's feast. The Lutherans also include all three in today's commemoration. I think they both got it right. And despite today's gospel reading from Luke as the appointed lectionary, I also want to draw on Mary, Martha, and Lazarus from the Gospel of John.



William Henry

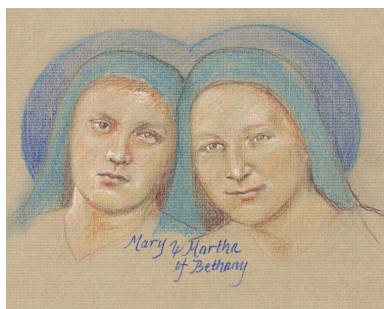
Traditionally, it seems Martha always gets the bad rap on this feast. I am not convinced that is right. I may suggest to you a more Anglican *via media* as I make my way through this sermon. I know there are Marthas in this room. God knows the church couldn't function without our Marthas. And God knows there are a lot of Marys in this room right now too! Perhaps we all had a chance to be more like Mary of Bethany during the pandemic. So I am going to make a proposal: I think we must strive for a balance. We need the gifts of both Mary and Martha while always having our priorities straight. We also need to possess the gifts of Lazarus.

Poor Martha — she seems to be misunderstood. She tries to get Jesus to get her sister to help her. After all, she is feeding the whole gang that has stopped by her home. There is Mary — looking like she is doing nothing but sitting there enjoying herself. Does she not realize the table needs to be set, the water glasses filled, the food laid out in an orderly fashion? And then Jesus somehow takes Mary's side. I feel sorry for Martha.

In the Gospel of John, Martha and Mary appear in connection with two incidents: the raising of their dead brother Lazarus (John 11) and the anointing of Jesus in Bethany (John 12). In the account of the raising of Lazarus, Jesus

meets with the sisters in turn: Martha followed by Mary. Martha goes immediately to meet Jesus as he arrives, while Mary waits until she is called. In speaking with Jesus, both sisters lament that he did not arrive in time to prevent their brother's death: "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." But where Jesus' response to Mary is more emotional, his response to Martha is one of teaching, calling her to hope and faith: When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home.

Martha also makes a theological assertion, a statement of faith: "I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world. You realize of course that Peter makes his confession in the Gospels of Luke and Matthew. But why does Peter get his own feast day for his confession that Jesus is the Christ, the son of the living God, but Martha does not?"



The church has usually viewed the contemplative life as something "better." Our very own Saint Gregory the Great, for example, wrote, "Martha's concern is not reproved, but that of Mary is even commended... For the merits of the active life are great, but of the contemplative, far better." Perhaps we just need to see this narrative in proper context. Mary at this particular time, in this context, chose the better part. Mary, in sitting at Jesus' feet,

showed her submission to him. She literally "listened to his word"; that is, she listened to the logos of the Logos. She was completely and wholly present to the Incarnate Word; there was no practical end to this being present, for it was simply an act of love and worship. "To cling to God and to the things of God," wrote Saint John Cassian, "this must be our major effort, this must be the road that the heart follows unswervingly. Any diversion, however impressive, must be regarded as secondary, low-grade and certainly dangerous." And Saint Ambrose sums it up perfectly: "Do not let service divert the knowledge of the heavenly Word."

But is that what is happening here? Some biblical scholars point out that the Parable of the Good Samaritan comes just before this narrative in Luke. Jesus has just told the lawyer to "Go and do likewise" right before we come to Bethany and the encounter with Mary and Martha. Perhaps this is a lesson about choices. We are constantly having to make choices in life. Too often we equate the choice we make, and its subsequent approval or rejection, with our goodness, our worthiness, our acceptableness, our faithfulness, our loveliness. That's what most of history has done with Mary and Martha. Mary made the better choice, Jesus says, and we quickly conclude that we should be like Mary, not Martha. We are to sit and listen rather than be active and busy. Is Mary necessarily better, more holy, more loved, more acceptable to Jesus?


Jesus is making an observation, not a judgment. Jesus is saying that choices matter. In this particular context Mary made the better choice but it was a choice for that time, that place, and those circumstances. Change the setting and Martha's choice might have been the better part. We can see this dynamic in Jesus' own life. Sometimes Jesus went off by himself to be alone, silent, still, to pray, to sit and listen, to be present to his Father. At those times he was like Mary. Other times Jesus was active, on the move, in the midst of people, and busy teaching, healing, feeding the thousands. On those days he was more like Martha. While we might distinguish between Mary and Martha, there is a common theme of presence. Mary and Martha are two ways of being present. Both ways are necessary, faithful, and holy. There is not simply one choice that is to be made for ever and always. We are always to be discerning the one thing needed in this time, this place, these circumstances. What is the better part given our particular situation? How can we be present to the divine presence that is already and always before us? That's the question. Some days Mary will be our guide and other days Martha will be our guide. Either way we must choose.

Some days that choice may mean sitting quietly and listening to the heartbeat of God deep within us, reading and studying, watching a sunset with our spouse, or praying for the world. Other days it may mean speaking words of hope and encouragement, offering actions of compassion and hospitality, seeking forgiveness, making amends, or playing with our children or our pets. We must always ask ourselves what is the one thing needed right now, in this moment? Just for now. What is the one thing needed that will keep you awake, aware, open, receptive, and present to Christ? Choose that. That is the better part — but hold your choice lightly because there will be another choice to be made after that, and another after that one. We choose our way into life, love, relationships, faith, and even salvation, and we know the choices matter.

And so may we strive to be like Martha and the Good Samaritan, putting our love for God and our faith into action towards helping and serving others. May we strive to be like Mary too. She was completely and wholly present to the Incarnate Word; there was no practical end to this being present, for it was simply an act of extravagant love and worship. And may we also strive to be like their brother Lazarus. When we find ourselves in our own tomb throughout our own life, sometimes due to our own actions but other times not, let our friend Jesus weep for us, and then raise us back into a life of perfect service.

Martha, Mary, and Lazarus, pray for us.

William Henry Benefield



The choice

William Wilberforce had everything. He was a rich kid; he had a good education; he had a life of ease and plenty of beer to drink and plenty of cards to play. When he was a teenager, his father and grandfather and uncle all died and so he had plenty of money — enough to buy himself a seat in parliament. He had everything; and one of the things he had was the choice to be a rich-kid playboy and show up and sit in Parliament when he wanted, and leave town when he wanted; to play cards all night, entertain people with jokes. The Prince of Wales said, “I would travel any distance to hear William Wilberforce sing,” so he must’ve been a good singer, and entertaining.

While he was traveling in Europe, reading some books he had been given by a traveling companion, he went through a conversion experience and began to question what he was going to do with his life, what he was going to do with his wealth, what he was going to do with his seat in Parliament, what would be demanded of him.

So with the influence of a few other people, he became a parliamentary leader of the effort to abolish the slave trade. He started this by drafting a bill he introduced in 1788. It did not pass, so he introduced it again the next year and it did not pass. Eighteen years it took to get this bill passed, and twenty until it came into effect: eighteen years of perseverance, eighteen years of coming back like that widow knocking on the door at midnight; eighteen years of dealing with parliamentarians who either were opposed to abolishing slavery or just thought it was not politically the convenient time to get that bill passed because they had bigger fish to fry.

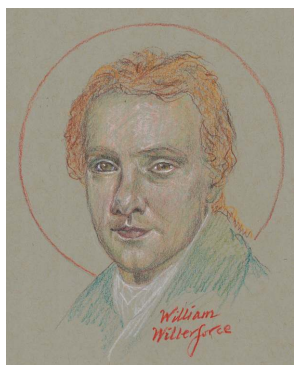


David Benedict

We might look at his work as some have and say why did he only go for the slave *trade*, and not for slavery itself? As with most people who did things one or two hundred years ago we look at them with modern eyes and don’t find perfection in all their positions. But he was there to be a part of the process, and he did it specifically because of his Christian conviction. It was right down to the fact that his conversion experience urged him to do something important. He heard the voice of the Holy Ghost, saying, “Make something important happen and see it to completion.” I’m quite sure he was familiar with the 25th chapter of Matthew’s Gospel, quite sure he had this in mind much of the time, quite sure he had an understanding of himself before the king’s throne, wondering whether he would end up as a sheep or a goat.

Few of us like that billboard or that bumper sticker, “If you died tonight,

where would you end up.” It’s been used to beat people up and used to tear people down — but let’s face it, there’s something to it. That’s why they keep



using it. There are stakes to the lives we live: will you be a sheep, will you be a goat, will you be one who welcomed or one who ignored. I know he had this in mind, and the reason I know it is because of what he said in his first major parliamentary speech about his bill to end the slave trade, a speech that took him three hours to deliver. He ended: “When we think of eternity and the future consequence of all human conduct, what is there in this life that will make any man contradict the dictates of his conscience, the principles of justice, and the law of God?” And then he was seated.

That’s not someone who’s just thinking of what’s convenient or expedient; that’s someone who is asking a parliament and a nation, “If you die tonight, where will you end up?” This stuff is important; it has stakes; and most of us as white Caucasian folks barely know the stakes, barely have any sense of the stakes, but our neighbors do all the time. The stakes are plainly obvious to them every moment of every day.

When we look at the Letter to the Galatians we get that beloved verse, “There is no Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.” This is a verse that has given us a powerful message of liberation, unity, and equality — but there’s a trap here too, because it’s very easy to read this and then step to that place that so many people go: “I don’t really see color. There is no longer Jew or Greek or slave or free; I don’t see that stuff.”

The apostle is not talking about that; he is not talking about ignoring our differences, and in fact if we do, then we go down a very difficult road. We do not have unity because we are all the same; we have unity in spite of and enriched by our differences. That’s the whole point of the Letter to the Galatians. Paul is writing to a gentile church who has been sold on the idea that to follow Jesus they’ve got to change who they are. They have to be circumcised. They have to keep the kosher laws and all the Law of Moses; they’ve got to stop being who they are and start being Jews so they can then move on to be Christians.

Paul says, “Get real! You Galatians! Who has bewitched you?” Paul gets kind of exercised easily, but this is important, right? The point of being a Christian; the point of being an American; the point of being a human being isn’t that there is some singular norm — God help us all, least of all whiteness or straightness or maleness. There is not some singular norm to which we all must adhere in order to follow Jesus. Jesus wants us to follow Jesus as who we are, and if we get into not seeing color, or not seeing sexuality or gender or race, we are ignoring the greatness, the goodness, the beautiful diversity with

which God has created us. There is nothing you have to become other than yourself. Jesus wants you because he wants you; he wants *you*; he chose *you*. “You did not choose me, I chose *you*.” Jesus doesn’t want anybody but you, to be who you are. That old T-shirt says, “Be yourself; everyone else is already taken.”

One of our jobs is not to erect and worship idols. Least of all should we be erecting one kind of human being as an idol to which all others must bow down and worship; or convert themselves or change themselves into. Be who you are — the only person you’ve got to be. Be who you are; follow the voice of Jesus. Know that there are stakes; know as William Wilberforce did, that we will be asked what we have done, and what we have left undone.

David Benedict Hedges

A Convocation sermon

The everlasting kingdom

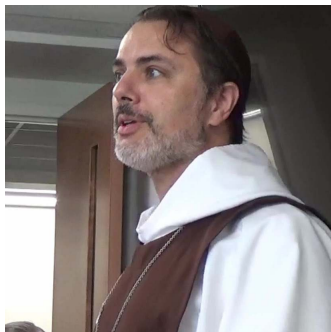
Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom; your dominion endures throughout all ages. — Psalm 145:13

Nothing is as it was. And yet things are very much the same. We look around this day as an apostolic community regathered in unfamiliar surroundings, with a pandemic still determining the shape of our lives, knit together by familiar prayers and voices offered in the unfamiliar acoustics of a closed-in conference room.

I have now been around this community long enough to feel fully a part of it — in the muddled middle, we might say! — and yet young enough not to remember this community gathering for Convocation anywhere other than Mount Alvernia in Wappingers Falls. So now it is a little strange to me for the life of the Brotherhood gathered for a time in this place at this time with prayers and patterns that seem like home in a place that doesn’t at all feel like home; and yet this is again a home away from home, with the company that we keep in these sultry end-of-July days in Baltimore.

Our world is like this right now, isn’t it? A strange blend of familiarity and the strangely unfamiliar; of brokenness and the newness that comes of the efforts at healing and putting things back together. The pandemic, ongoing political churn, and growing climate calamities unseat every mark of what we thought was constant, and yet we bring familiar tools to bear for ourselves and others: the prayers, psalms, Scripture, hymns, greetings, and faith that forms the thread — no matter how slender it may be — of grace in our lives.

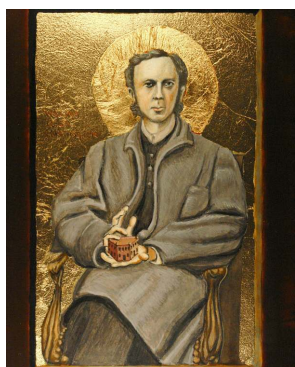
Six hundred thousand of our fellow citizens are dead, and yet the world



Richard Edward

around us struggles diligently to move forward. Millions are dead worldwide, and yet the familiar patterns of domination and control remain center stage. But then, so too is compassion and heroic effort as the forests of the American West burn, the South, and Europe and the Far East are flooded, and the headlines fill with gloom. Our church struggles for purpose and keeps pointing in various directions for a way forward. The parishes we serve are slowly piecing our common life in sacrament and prayer back together — knitting new and old, and trying to find our footing in a world that is inexorably altered and constantly shifting. And none of us is fully convinced what we are doing is on the right track, or whether we will be church in a way that is recognizable in five, ten, let alone fifty years.

In this sense, our world — and our church — is not so very different from the world and church that William Reed Huntington and his colleagues in ministry inherited in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The nation was



recovering from a devastating Civil War that had claimed the lives of three quarters of a million souls, nearly swallowed whole the political life of a young country, left entire cities in smoking ruins, and thrown a fractious nation into a state of multi-generational trauma. Millions of freed slaves were hard up against the dreadful truth that they were simultaneously emancipated and yet they and their children were left bearing the yoke of rampant bigotry and racism. Families were divided and scarred beyond recognition. Carpetbaggers, robber barons, and the seeds of the Gilded Age were

already knocking at the door for their limelight in the annals of American history, while the ancient plight of the poor and indigenous peoples ground on and even deepened. The Episcopal Church, following its now infamous attempt to sidestep the rift between the North and the South by not taking a clear moral stand against slavery, now found itself roiled in the first substantive schism of its story. The clash between the growing Oxford Movement's restoration of catholic practice and the low church Protestant leanings of Episcopal evangelicals finally, in 1877, erupted in the highly publicized departure of a significant body of Episcopal leaders, who set out to found the Reformed Episcopal Church.

William Reed Huntington, in the face of this turbulence, moral failing, and uncertainty, came to be remembered as the “First Presbyter of the Church” — first and foremost, perhaps, by remaining a steady presence in the two parishes he served during his public ministry — All Saints, Worcester, Massachusetts, and then at Grace Church, New York City — each of which he served faithfully for over two decades. And through the no fewer than thirteen General Conventions Huntington attended during his long tenures, he emerged as a de facto leader of the House of Deputies.

His preaching, scholarly plumbing of the Anglican tradition, and eloquent writing and wit looked unflinchingly into the reality of rifts and chasms of his time and posited — as Jesus posits in our almost otherworldly reading today from John’s gospel — a bold vision of unity and hope. Where the world and the church shouted division, Huntington pointed to reconciliation. Where the world emphasized difference, Huntington sought out commonality of cause and communion. He was the quintessential priest of his generation by offering to an anxious time a faithful, non-anxious presence, a reconciling vision of clarity and union where murk and conflict were all that many could see.

Among his accomplishments, including his instrumental role in the 1892 Prayer Book revision, was his bold, steady help pushing into reality a new order of deaconesses, rooted in ancient tradition: a significant stepping stone on the long road for the ordination of women. Huntington was not one to sit on legislative accomplishments alone. He knew that legislation, like all Christian endeavors, meant nothing if it wasn’t embodied. The moment this hard-won new order was established by General Convention in 1889, he and his parish, Grace Church, New York City, opened Huntington House as a center of training for the new deaconesses and women leaders more broadly for the church.

But Huntington’s even greater legacy may have been his vision for unity among all Christians. In *The Church Idea* of 1870, Huntington offered a counterpoint to the schismatic impulses of his day and the ashes of Civil War by distilling and articulating the essentials of Christian unity out of the depths of the tradition. His writing would form the basis for ecumenical principles adopted by the House of Bishops in Chicago in 1886 and then by the bishops of the Anglican Communion at Lambeth two years later. The resulting Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral would become an historic foundation for the life of the worldwide Communion and the restoration of formal and sacramental ties with several Christian churches well into the twentieth century.

We can argue now just how successful the project of the Anglican Communion centered on the essential elements of the quadrilateral — Scripture, the creeds, the sacraments, and ordained ministry — has or hasn’t been. As twenty-first century Christians and Episcopalians, we all bear the hopes and scars of the project that Huntington’s vision helped initiate. Christian unity, he would probably agree, is hard. Union is hard. Vowed life, marriage, community life, family life, living together with neighbors across difference has always been hard. It was hard for John’s community to which our gospel this morning was written. It was hard for Jesus’ first followers: Jew and Greek, slave and free. It was in this hardship that Christ suffered betrayal and the cross. Unity always demands self-offering: that true and living sacrifice.

Yet Huntington’s vision for a church and world reunited is still very much part of who we are, gathered from our various corners of the church, bearing our ministries, stresses, and triumphs with us, meeting as we must again by God’s call, renewed as “flexible friars” in a new and ever-transient home, called to serve a church and a world broken open by rift and calamity.

As in Huntington's time, in our own time the call of Christ is to bear witness by offering ourselves where the brokenness of the world meets the dream of God. My brothers, our vocation and the vocation of all whom we serve is not to look away from the pains, rifts, and catastrophes that now consume so much of what we thought we knew and understood — nor ever to turn from reality itself. Our many ministries of compassion demand we take the reality of the present moment with the utmost seriousness and dedication. This is the world that not only we serve, but the world for which Christ offered his life, the cross that we bear with him; the cross that he bears for us.

For this fragile, strife- and calamity-ridden world is the same world that God saw from the beginning and, out of love, called good. This is also the same world that God in Christ dreams of being united and whole again, made new in the grace that has been there from the beginning. Our reconciling work, like Huntington's, is to see the world and the church as God sees them: a reality of broken hearts, struggling creatures, and lives in need of healing, and then to dream of what these can become together in the love of Christ: that kingdom — as Jesus called it — already among us yet not fully realized; and then to roll up our sleeves, and get to work with our Savior on that heavenly home for all.

With this in mind, it's worth closing with a prayer that Huntington himself crafted for the 1892 revision of the Book of Common Prayer, drawing on several earlier prayers of the tradition. It's now an indelible part of our inheritance as a collect for Fridays at Morning Prayer:

Almighty God, whose dear Son went not up to joy but first he suffered pain, and entered not into glory before he was crucified: Mercifully grant that we, walking in the way of the cross, may find it none other than the way of life and peace; through the same thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord.

Richard Edward Helmer

A reflection on the Daily Office

The day thou givest

The heavens declare the glory of God.... without voices they speak to the ends of the world. The sun comes forth from its chamber and runs about from one end of heaven to the other...

Well, Psalm 19 notwithstanding, we know that the sun doesn't do the running, but that the earth rotates to "sun" itself on all sides. From the space station, you can watch the shadow of night pass into day from east to west, a band of dawn from north to south. The late physicist Richard Feynman, who proved what caused the Challenger disaster with a glass of ice-water, once observed — in his quirky fashion — that wherever that band of dawn passes over a populated area, you can find a stripe of human activity, moving like a stadium wave from east to west: a wave of tooth-brushing, sweeping around the globe, leaving behind the faint odor of mint.

But there is another cycle; something else that happens with dawn and noonday, and evening, and night; something else besides sunlight and peppermint sweeps around the globe. Once upon a time, not just four but eight such bands swept around the world: Matins, lauds, prime, tierce, sext, nones, vespers, and compline skimmed the surface of the earth by day and night, coating it with prayer, with singing, with tales of God's glory in many languages imparting knowledge to each other, their voice gone out to all lands.



This is just one way the church is intimately involved with the cosmos, echoing its revolutions in our worship. For it's not just the *daily* round. The church engages with many cosmic cycles, such as the one that comes from the earth's rotation rather than its revolution, the annual pivot around a moveable Easter: that feast still determined by the three body problem of the sun, earth, and moon — following rules for an ancient people's spring festival of deliverance, in which we share by grace.

At a smaller scale we take part in the monthly cycle of the Psalter, Thomas Cranmer's simplification of the old monastic arrangement, to avoid unnecessary page flipping. The modern prayer book's seven-week cycle avoids or deletes many parts of the Psalms that curse or complain. And it *can* feel odd to have such sentiments upon our lips, while not in our hearts. But Cranmer's monthly cycle is a reminder that "it's not about me" but us, the big Us not even of just the church, but a shared humanity prone to failings. When those words of cursing and recrimination appear on our lips in this cycle of poetry, it is therapeutic to place ourselves not in the position of the righteous doing the cursing, but to imagine ourselves as the object of those curses — that we may be purged and washed with hyssop. We are invited to face rather than to avoid those hard nuggets of human reality that make the psalms a challenge.

We may also make good use of sometimes dissonant intersections of joyous feasts with penitential psalms — much as one can enjoy the dissonance of passing notes yearning for resolution in a Bach chorale. The rough spots we encounter in this orderly reading — like those of life itself — serve as reminders that at the heavenly scale, the orderly laws of gravitation, as they work upon the substance of the cosmos, will sometimes have the effect of wiping out the dinosaurs.

Then there is our weekly cycle, inherited from an ancient tradition that mirrors the act of creation itself, and stuck with it all these years in spite of the fact that seven doesn't go very well into 30 or 12 or 365.

And finally, we return to the fastest spinning wheel in this cosmic mechanism: the day God gives us day by day, and which we bless and sanctify with prayer, with daily breaking of daily bread, and most especially with the Daily Office, called since the time of Benedict by the astounding name, the Work of God.



Brothers gather in the big circle...



...to discuss experience of the Daily Office

Now, while the Office has become more popular, some people, even in the church, just don't get it. Years ago, at Graymoor, a priest attended one of our big liturgies — hours long, with several professions. Towards the end of the meal that followed in the refectory, it was time for Evening Prayer, and the brothers began to excuse themselves. I sat across from this visiting priest, who asked where we were going. When I told him it was time for Evening Prayer, he looked at me in astonishment and said, "You're going to pray again!?" A bit surprised, I simply said, "Why, yes; it's what we do."

Now, you have to understand, this guy was a "secular" priest. Odd turn of phrase, isn't it? Odd and ironic, in that the "secular" are not so worldly in the sense of being in touch with the worldly movements of the cosmos, as are the "religious" whose life of ordered prayer reflects that cosmos in miniature. It seems that secular clergy, as Kenneth Leech wrote some years ago, spend far too much time in the wrong kind of office. They, with many in the church, forget that the BCP's Catechism responds to the question, "How does the Church pursue its mission?" by starting with, "as it prays and worships..." The prayer of the church is the work of the church as much as it is the work of God, the first tool to carry out the church's mission and God's mission: "to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ." It is the first thing the church is *for*.

Not just the religious, not just the clergy, not just those who pray for those who think they don't have the time — though thank God that some do pray for others, to help hold the prayer-free, carefree world together. Thank God for all the pray-ers and their prayers — the monks and nuns, sisters and brothers, clergy and laity who preserve the practice of this *opus Dei*, many of them doing it on our Gregorian app! — who do this humble daily work of God, to lay down fresh coats of prayer upon a spinning world.

We are, Galileo notwithstanding, at the middle of it all, on this fragile earth, our island home, on which God chose to be incarnate, scandalously particular in our smallness, lowly handmaids graced by that visitation and exalted from our humble place on the outer arm of the Milky Way, and given an awesome task, another Way... for us, a *Gregorian* Way. To paraphrase the old hymn, we give thanks that the church, unsleeping while earth rolls onward into light, is keeping watch, by day and night. As the dawn roles over each continent and

island into day, the voice of prayer and praise is never silent, and never dies away.

This daily prayer, ordered and repeating and mirroring the rhythms of God's cosmos, is the work of God and our work too. It's what we do.

Tobias Stanislas Haller, a presentation to open the workshop on the Daily Office, adapted from a chapter of his Re-membering God: Human Hope and Divine Desire.

A reflection on our time of trial

COVID and God's call to us

The emerging situation with COVID-19 and the many news reports around us are creating anxiety and worry for the future and our well-being. In this time of crisis, each of God's people might ask themselves, "How is God calling me to serve?" There will be many tangible needs in our communities. Prior to this outbreak, loneliness and isolation were serious problems in our nation. Social distancing, so very important now, will exacerbate these feelings. As Christians, we need to reach out in tangible ways to let our neighbors know that they are not alone.

As you are able, consider how God might be calling you to listen to others or speak a comforting word, to help provide food or necessities to those who are lacking, or to share other blessings with those who are struggling. A phone call can be very encouraging to those who are isolated. Consider writing letters and placing them in your neighbor's mailboxes with your contact information.

The Lord of life invites our prayers. Please pray for those suffering from the coronavirus, those caring for the ill, those seeking a vaccine, and all others who serve in these times. Pray for those experiencing anxiety.

There will be many inconveniences, challenges, and frustrations in times like these. Let us pray that God grant each of us a spirit to see these as avenues of service to others. God is at work in each of us we just need to be open to God's possibilities.

Christopher Robert Werth

Sermon for the feast of Saint Bernard

The choice for the Gregorian Way

As we sit in our chapel — once the dining hall of a medieval monastery built for French Cistercian monks in northern Spain — I want to remind you that on August 20th we celebrated the life of Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, its founder, namesake, and our patron.

In year 1111, at the age of 20, Bernard convinced his five brothers, two uncles, and 30 friends to leave their home and to serve God and the Church by joining the Benedictine monastic community of Cîteaux (that is where we get

the word *Cistercian*). Within four years, Bernard revitalized that community and was sent to open a new monastery as abbot of Clairvaux. He is known for reforming the Cistercian Order, for being a biblical scholar, theologian, preacher, and mystic. Because of his fame he was asked to become an adviser to several popes, princes, the preacher of the Second Crusade, and asked to settle church disputes that were causing major schisms. Under his influence new monasteries were opened across Western Europe, including the one from which this dining hall came. Bernard died on August 20, 1153. Shortly thereafter, that monastery was renamed after him.

Saint Bernard was one of three theologians I researched for my master's thesis in seminary. I reviewed and analyzed the works of Saint Anselm of Canterbury, Peter Abelard, and Saint Bernard on their understanding of the salvific work of Jesus's incarnation and crucifixion. It was the early days of my research that I first visited our monastery while on Christmas vacation. It was while writing my thesis that I first started discerning a call to a vocation in religious life that began to unravel my perceived goal of ordained ministry. I still felt called to serve God and the church but not necessarily as a preacher. I was drawn to a life of study, contemplation, prayer, meditation, and service.

Fast forward thirteen years later, to July 30, 2021, I became engaged to Jesus as I became a novice in the Brotherhood of Saint Gregory! Saint Bernard wrote that when men take religious vows, they become the Brides of Christ. That was and still is a radical title to give to men, but then Bernard once wrote to the Christian Queen of Jerusalem in 1143 advising her to be a man and rule as a king and not a queen. He was a pretty radical monk telling women to be like men and telling men to be like women. In his writings, religious men were Christ's brides by setting aside our own desires to do the will of Christ, thus becoming subservient to him as women were once taught to be subservient to their husbands.

So last month I made my promise of obedience in the Brotherhood of Saint Gregory, living my life "as if" I have already taken the three vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, thus becoming a novice friar. The novitiate is the stage where I am training and preparing to become a vowed religious brother, like a fiancé getting ready for marriage.

The word friar comes from the Latin word for brother, a title given to men who take religious vows but not living in a monastic setting as monks. As a Gregorian friar I participate in the celebration of the Eucharist at least once in each week. I pray the four offices daily (morning, noon, evening, and night). Each day I meditate, and study the Bible or other religious writings.

Additionally, I live my life "as if" I were under the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience — the vows I hope to make at the end of my novitiate. Each religious community has their own versions of these vows. Paraphrasing from the Brotherhood's Rule: The vow of poverty consists of tithing our income to our parish and the Brotherhood. The vow of chastity asks that we live with all in love, respecting each person's integrity and dedicating our whole

self to God. Finally, the vow of obedience calls us to obey Jesus Christ as our only Lord and Savior, to follow the discipline of the Episcopal Church, the Rule of the Brotherhood, our Minister General (who is the head of our order), and others in authority in the church.

My brother in religion, Tobias Stanislas, explains our vows in this way:

Poverty is not not having,
but sharing with the poor.

Chastity is not not coupling,
but loving all in Christ.

And obedience is not not willing,
but willing as God wills.

Similarly, the late Brother Ron Fender wrote, “Poverty has little to do with being poor; chastity has little to do with sex; and obedience has everything to do with being obedient.”

Throughout history, Christians (not just the vowed religious) have struggled with various forms of poverty, chastity, and obedience in their daily lives. In fact, when I recently posted a photo of myself in my religious habit on social media, some of my acquaintances called my best friend to ask him if I recently had a bad breakup. In their minds, that is the only reason anyone would give up on love and romance and become a friar, sister, nun, or a monk. Many people mistakenly equate chastity with celibacy. Celibacy is refraining from sex and chastity is having restraint or self-control over all aspects of one’s life including their sexual life. For instance, all Christians are called to live chastely but only a few are called to a life of celibacy. Celibacy is a spiritual gift given to a few but not a requirement for everyone.

The Brotherhood follows Saint Francis of Assisi’s teaching on chastity. He taught that all men and women, married or single, ordained or lay, could become the “Spouse of Christ.” Francis believed that when one is faithful to Christ, their soul joins to Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit, it is not a matter of one’s marital status but of one’s deep devotion. Therefore, like Francis, the Brotherhood of Saint Gregory is open to all men, married, single, lay, or ordained, regardless of sexual identity or orientation.

Now that I have given you some definitions and commentary on Christian religious vows, I can tell you why I finally decided to become a friar. After years of learning about religious orders and communities and by staying in monasteries for silent retreats, I realized that God was calling me to this vocation. All Christians are called to various vocations in and out of the church, but with the help of the Holy Spirit I finally found mine as a friar. A friar is someone who strives to love God with all his heart, all his soul, all his mind, and with all his strength, and tries to love his neighbor as himself. Being a friar is not about wearing special clothes or attending daily masses. As Saint Francis wrote, being a friar is about living the gospel without compromise, every day of our lives. Being a friar is about living one’s life in obedience to Christ, in self-denial, and bearing the cross. Being a friar is living one’s life as part of a

religious community within the larger church. Being a friar is being someone who recognizes that it takes a religious community to help one reach one's full potential as a Christian. By joining a religious community, one leaves behind their isolated individualistic lives, their egos, their self-centeredness, their self-love, and all their agendas in order to be of service to God and the people of God, by being Christ's hands and feet in this world.

The seeds of this desire began in my early childhood. As far back as five, I spoke with God in the backyard on the swing-set. While some children had imaginary friends, I had God. My mother and uncle nurtured this practice. My mother taught me to pray, and I followed my uncle's example. My uncle Junior was born with cerebral palsy that left him confined to a wheelchair and with a severe speech impediment. Despite these challenges, he was a father figure; he was my friend, my tutor, and my mentor. One day while watching Mother Angelica's talk show on TV, he told me he often desired being a monk but knew his disabilities and his poor health would not make it a reality. That stayed with me and has helped me become the person I am now. I hope he is happy that I am on my way to taking religious vows as a Gregorian friar. Like Saint Bernard, August 20 is the anniversary of my uncle Junior's death, and I would like to thank him for all that he taught me in the time we had together.

Before I step down, I pray that if anything I have said sparks any curiosity in you, I recommend that you pray to God for guidance, and check out some of the resources available about religious communities. There are many religious orders in the Episcopal Church and Anglican Communion that you can join. There are communities that live in monasteries like the Society of Saint John the Evangelist in Cambridge, MA, while others have members dispersed throughout the world, like mine. Some communities are only for men or women, while others welcome both men and women. Some are focused on teaching and scholarship, others on contemplation and prayer, while others are about community service. I pray that as Saint Bernard was able to inspire his brothers, uncles, and 30 friends to devote their lives to God's service, I have planted a seed in you to join me in serving God and God's church.

May God's grace be with you all.

Carlos Roberto Fernandez

