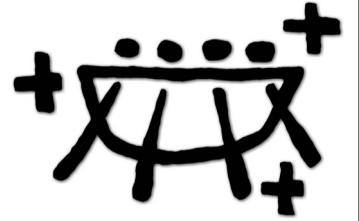


The Navigator



The Newsletter of the Monastic Fellowship of Saint Brendan's
Volume III, No. 3 — Early Summer 2008

Hear, O Israel: The need for Holy Listening

Fr. Alan L. Andraeas, Prior

*"Hear, O Israel: the LORD our God,
the LORD is one..." Deuteronomy 6:4*

The form of liturgy we use for the Eucharist at Saint Brendan's includes the recitation of the *Shema*. Most of you already know it as a part of the answer Jesus gave to the Pharisee when He was asked, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?" (Mark 12:28; cf., Matthew 22:36). Christ's reply included these words: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul..." (Mark 12:30-31). Our Lord's answer was a quote from the Old Testament. And what was He quoting? In part, the conclusion or epilogue of the Ten Commandments (Deuteronomy 6:4-5).

We can think of the *Shema* (a combination of Deuteronomy 6:4-9 and 11:13-21 to which Jesus also added Leviticus 19:18) like the final comments a speaker might share at the end of a lecture: "In summary, let me say...." If the summary is written well, it captures the entire essence of the lecture in a distilled, crystallized form. In time, the Jews realized that the *Shema* captured the entire essence of the Ten

Commandments, and that if a Jew faithfully kept just the *Shema*, the Law of Love, the rest of the commandments would be perfectly satisfied (cf., Matthew 22:40).

This summary became so important that every observant Jew was taught to say it from memory as the first waking activity of the day and the last activity of the night before falling asleep. These words were meant to cleave the heart, giving shape to how one's day would be fashioned in loving service to the Lord and to provide a standard by which one's work could be critiqued when the day was done. Now the interesting thing about this conclusion to the Ten Commandments is that it begins with the words, "Hear, O Israel: ...;" in the Hebrew, "*shema' yisra'el.*" Over time it simply came to be known as the *Shema*, and even today serves as the opening call to worship (the *Keri'at Shema*) of every synagogue service.

We celebrate communion at Holy Trinity Chapel as often as five times a week. And for the past three months my attention has been drawn to these words. What is it that captures my attention? Not the declaration of God's unity. Not the commandment to fully love

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Him. Not even the commandment to love our neighbors. Yes, these are all vitally essential to our faith; I don't want to minimize them in any conceivable way. Instead, my attention has been captured by the opening words, "**Hear, O Israel.**" Why? Because the thing that strikes my heart is the fact the greatest commandment given to mankind, the commandment *sine qua non*, the one thing we can do that most pleases the Lord, is itself preceded by a command! What do we make of that? What was Jesus saying in these words? What was the Living Word saying through Moses in these words?

The first thing we need to understand is that this simple admonition is not to be taken lightly. In both the Old Testament Hebrew and Septuagint (LXX) Greek, the verb 'to hear' is written in the imperative mood. This is the language of command. We are being told to "Listen up!" We are being called to attentive obedience. Let me illustrate.



While Mother Sue and I were still living outside of Chicago several years ago, we visited All Saints Antiochian Orthodox Church pastored by the Rev. Fr. Patrick Henry Reardon (also senior editor of *Touchstone* Magazine – if you don't subscribe to it, I suggest you check it out). When it came time for the reading of Scripture, Fr. Reardon called for the undivided attention of the people by saying, "Wisdom! Let us be attentive!" – a powerful line in the Orthodox liturgy of St. John the Divine – at which point everyone knelt down on the floor with their faces touching the ground (there were no pews), and they stayed in that position until the reading was finished. It reminded me of the Children of Israel trembling at the base of Mount Sinai as they heard both thunder and trumpet blast and saw lightning up at its summit while Moses climbed the mountain to receive the Ten Commandments (Exodus 19:16).

There is something profound that God wants to work in us. Likewise, there is something extraordinary that we can give to God. There is a call upon our lives unlike anything else we can do

in this world. There is a way to walk in joyful, pleasing union with Him – in holiness fueled through love; in obedience conditioned by love; in simplicity tempered by love; in fidelity to Christ patterned in love. And yet so many of us fall shy of this mark because we've by-passed the *preliminary condition* that prepares us to fulfill this call – placing ourselves in a position and attitude that allows us to clearly hear what God desires of our lives.

A life of monastic spirituality characterized by internal and external stillness is what gives our ears that window of opportunity to hear the voice of God. This was made dramatically real to Elijah when everything was cascading around him to the point of confusion, anxiety, and fear. How can you know the mind of God in the deluge of such external (and internal) commotion or warfare? God showed Elijah how futile it all was; letting the prophet see that He wasn't to be found in the

violent shaking of the earth or in the howling wind or in the raging fire but in the still small voice, the gentle whisper (1 Kings 19:1-12).

I truly believe that a genuine relationship with God only comes through the sustained, diligent discipline of hearing. What I mean is that unless we place ourselves in a position of intentional, spiritual listening we'll be unable to know what it is that pleases God. Just this morning I called a friend's answering machine and told him that I needed to talk to him. I said I would be outside working with the goats and that I would have my

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cell phone with me; I didn't want to miss his call. However, the project Mother Sue and I were working on also included the use of the lawn tractor. He tried calling the cell phone several times, but I was working right beside the lawn tractor while its engine running at full throttle. Did I have the cell phone? Yes. Could I hear the phone ring over the din of the engine? No. I had every good intention to be available for that conversation, but I carelessly orchestrated my time and surroundings in such a way that I could never hear the sound of my ringtone.

What are the things that may get in the way of our ability to 'hear' God? What are our schedules like? What are our distractions like? What are the things that constantly beg for our attention? What are the noise makers or time wasters or activity bloaters that devour those precious opportunities to enter into the presence of God? We run our lives at such a frantic pace that, while we may certainly know of God and have a friendly relationship with God, we rarely find ourselves in a place of intimacy with God. And if the Song of Solomon is any indicator of how God desires us (whether individually or corporately as the Church), it is with the most tender and absolute intimacy we can imagine – an intimacy that completely overwhelms both Lover and Beloved; a total consumption of love. But that can't happen if our distractions end up overwhelming the gentle whisper of the Lover.



Imagine inviting a friend out on a date to a very upscale restaurant. The wine has been poured and the appetizer has

been served. You look adoringly across the table while the warm glow of candlelight dances on the face of your friend. As the strains of classical music waft quietly in the background, you finally say to your friend, "Tell me a little bit more about yourself; I only know you as someone I work with, but I really want to get to know more about you." And just as they begin to answer, your cell phone vibrates and you say, "Oh, wait a minute, I have a text message coming in; I need to answer this" – and the door to the heart sitting across from you is

"...the greatest commandment given to mankind, the commandment *sine qua non*,...is itself preceded by a command!"

both hurt and shut. Yes, you're having dinner together, but you will never know who that person truly is. That is how so many Christians walk with the Lord.

If we take the time to listen, what are the things that God would whisper to us? The *Shema* shows us at least two things. God tells us about Himself, His nature, His indivisible tri-unity – that "the LORD our God" (Hebrew, 'Jehovah our Elohiym') is unique, united, and alone; He is the only One; there is no other. Our worship, our praise, our adoration belongs to Him; no questions asked; period. But that's hard to grasp when we permit our attention to be pulled in a hundred different directions. That's why getting to a place in our lives where we can hear, daily, is so very important.

The other thing we learn from the *Shema* is how to render our lives back to God. The answer, of course, is through love; unreservedly expressed through our heart, soul, and strength; or in a more contemporary sense: emotionally, mentally/spiritually, and physically; with everything we feel, everything we are, and everything we do. Of course, if we don't truly stop to listen to the voice of God, we will fail to understand what He wants from us, and we end up offering Him little bits and pieces of ourselves, wrongly believing that He is just as happy with our convenient castoffs rather than our whole lives as total, complete, and living sacrifices.

God is so desirous of us that He gave us specific directions for this relationship. Too often we lament, "But I just don't know what God wants from me!" Have you slowed down enough to listen? He is speaking to each of us. We just need to set our day in such an order that His voice can break through the



A Pilgrim's Down Payment

Mother Sue Andraeas, Prioress

*"For I am a stranger with thee, and a sojourner,
as all my fathers were." Psalm 39:12b*

I don't know about you, but I've been feeling a real 'itch' to move forward with the Oblate program of Saint Brendan's. Now I know that God's timing is perfect, and I don't want to rush ahead of Him. But those who have taken such monastic promises and vows know the stability they provide. The best way I can explain it to those of you who don't know what I'm talking about is this: think about a vacation that you are planning to take, maybe a bus trip to some local sites. The day of the trip rolls around and you realize how behind you are in your work around the house. The weather doesn't look so great, and now you're thinking that signing up for the bus trip wasn't such a good idea after all. You might be inclined to just skip it, right? But what if the organizers of the bus trip had required a non-refundable down payment to act as your 'promise' that you'd be on that trip? Do you think that would influence your resolve to go? I'd bet it would! The deposit, that 'monetary promise,' helps you hold true to the plans you had made. Monastic vows are sort of like that.

The alarm goes off in the morning and you'd rather hit the snooze alarm than get up and pray. Laying there, half asleep, it all seems rather intangible compared to the very tangible pillow under your head. After all, you can pray later in the day, can't you? This is not some legalistic thing, is it? BUT... add a promise – to God – that you WILL get up and talk to Him, first thing every day, before you dive into your earthly tasks – that you WILL pray for the world, the Church Universal, and for our little band every day without fail, along with your personal intercessions, knowing that they are also praying for you – that you WILL spend time each day in listening prayer, waiting to hear the voice of God for you with the clarity that can only be sensed in intentional devotional prayer and reading of Scripture – that you WILL remember to live a disciplined life of simplicity that prepares you to be



"In most places in the world, Christians suffer. They are beaten. They are refused food and shelter....They waste away in prison camps....They watch their families tortured because they refuse to renounce their Savior. Their faith costs them."

used by God. Monastic promises are very much like a down payment for the bus trip mentioned above. The difference is that your monastic promises are for the 'spiritual bus trip' of pilgrim faith rather than an actual bus trip. They help make you a more consistent sojourner. You are promising that you will remember to live a simple life of discipline – no matter what the weather is like or how you feel or how busy you are - rather than just waiting to see if you *feel* like doing those things.

How in the world can monastic promises make any difference in the way I live out my spirituality? We, Fr. Alan and I, have had that question put to us several times this past year, and we have asked the same question of some of you, in various forms, as you contemplate what a monastic call is. What makes monastic life different from 'regular Christian' life? The only 'separate' vowed life mentioned in the Bible is that of a Nazarite, and the main component of Nazarite vows seems to be to avoid grapes and razors at all costs! That's not the kind of promises we're talking about. ☺ Maybe this will help to put

things in perspective for you, as it also helps us define our mission as Friends and Oblates of Saint Brendan's. It'll involve a little history, but not much. (Those of you who love history, this isn't going to excite you at all. Please bear with me. I'm a musician, not a historian!) First, let me sketch things in from the beginning of Christianity – just a very sketchy review. Jesus dies, is risen, and ascends into heaven. The Holy Spirit is given to the Church as promised, and after a period of explosive growth and expansion, the persecution begins. I haven't studied this period of Church history in great depth, but I do understand that there were no such things as 'nominal Christians' back then. From the time a Christian was

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baptized, literally as he was leaving that service, he could have been arrested, caused to suffered horribly, and be listed among the martyrs – all for being a Christian for several hours! The lifespan of an Early Christian was usually not all that long; they had to KNOW what they believed because they might have to die for their faith almost instantly! That’s why extensive training was expected of all people wanting to become a Christian. They may not have time to ‘grow into’ their faith.

Then Emperor Constantine came along and legalized Christianity (313 AD). On the one hand, that’s a very good thing. A Christian’s life span greatly increased. On the other hand, that’s a bad thing. Christians no longer had to love Jesus enough to die for him. Christianity became popular; vogue. You could say you were a Christian even if you didn’t know the first thing about Jesus, even if your lifestyle proved the exact opposite. It became very difficult to tell a ‘real’ Christian from a ‘fake’ Christian because they all looked and acted alike. (I’m generalizing, obviously.) The extensive training of the early Church began to dwindle to – well, to what it is today. (How many of you needed to undergo 3 years of extensive training to join the church? My guess is... not a single one of you.)

Two hundred years later, more or less, St. Benedict struggled hard with the deterioration of Christianity. He and a small band of laymen founded a community at Monte Cassino where they could ‘reinvent’ Christian life. He wrote his Rule for them to live by. They promised to hold each other accountable to a higher calling, to not just be popular, vogue Christians but to be real Christians. Stable. Consistent in word and deed. Consistent in intercession and devotion. Kind to all, but fully devoted to serving Jesus. You can find the same thing happening in the Orthodox and Celtic monasticism of that era. There are slight variations, but the underlying purpose was always the same; a community of people who promised to support each other and help each other to be genuine in their faith so that ALL that is said and done proves that they belong to Jesus; that they abide in him and he in them.

End of history lesson. Let’s look at our contemporary culture. We hear political leaders

(and political leader wanna-be’s) saying that they are ‘people of faith’ not because they love and serve Jesus, but because saying the word ‘faith’ wins votes. We hear sports people thank Jesus for their latest touchdown or championship win when they never thought to mention him prior to their famous accomplishment. We observe people we pass on the streets doing very non-Christian things while wearing a cross around their neck or a Bible verse on their T-shirt. (I won’t even go into the Christian music or book marketing scene!) All evidence points to the fact

“It would be wise to begin, now, to resolve to live a life of faith - whether we feel like it or not.”

that we are, once again, living in a culture where it is vogue to be Christian and

that *vogue-ness* impedes are ability to live lives of genuine faith.

If we keep looking ahead, if we use history to predict the future, we’ll see that the tides are turning. Jesus told us that this is exactly what would happen in the last days. We will return to the time before Constantine, and Christianity will again be not just unpopular but also illegal. We will return to the days when Christians are horribly persecuted and killed moments after their baptism. That’s not a prediction – Jesus said it would happen! (See, for example, Mark 13 – nearly the entire chapter.) It’s already happening. In most places in the world, Christians suffer. They are beaten. They are refused food and shelter. Their children may not attend schools. They hide to worship. They hide their little scraps of Scripture – if they are lucky enough to have even little scraps. They waste away in prison camps. They watch their families tortured

MONASTIC MUSE

muse \ˈmyüz\ 1: *vb* to turn something over in the mind meditatively 2: to think reflectively 3: *n* a state of deep thought...

“We should ever and a day reflect that we have renounced the world and are in the meantime living here as guests and strangers.”

— St. Cyprian (c. 250 AD)

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because they refuse to renounce their Savior. Their faith costs them. Our time will come too. It would be wise to begin, now, to resolve to live a life of faith – whether we feel like it or not. It would be wise to begin, now, to develop Christian relationships where we encourage each other, and hold each other accountable before Christianity becomes risky to do so, don't you think?

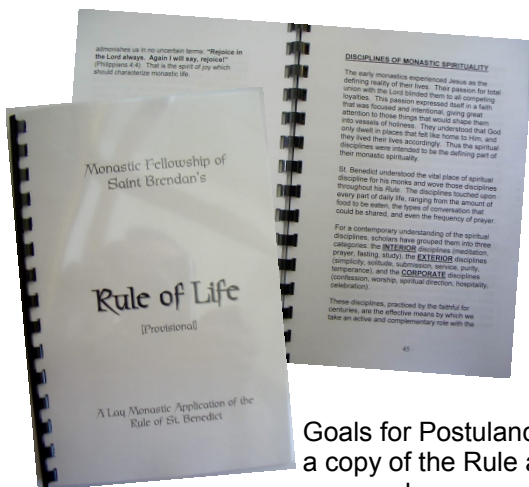
Back to our bus trip...

So if the monastic promises are the down payment for this little excursion, what is the Rule? If you've ever taken a bus trip, or an organized tour of any kind, you know you get a list of things that you need to do to prepare for, and to enjoy, the trip. It tells you how much room you have for your luggage, that you'll need a passport or other ID, what to pack, what not to pack, key phrases in a foreign language that might be helpful – that kind of thing. In short, they help you prepare to get the most out of your trip. That's what St. Benedict's Rule did for his community too, except his Rule was for a spiritual journey rather than a vacation. The Rule for Saint Brendan's is based upon the

one St. Benedict wrote, but is just adapted a bit, to make up for the differences in culture, communication, and lifestyle. (For example, chapter 31 of Benedict's Rule tells the cellarer – the person in charge of the wine cellar – to give special wine allotments to the sick, the young, the poor, and to guests. You won't find a cellarer chapter in the Saint Brendan's rule. Sorry.)

It's never good to offer spiritual guidance in a way that scares people into action. The same is true of monastic promises. I don't want to paint such a scary picture of our future, or a bleak perspective of our culture's Christianity, that you feel you have no other option but that of lay monasticism. I know what will happen. Your resolve will be temporary. The Holy Spirit needs to lead in spiritual decisions, and he never scares any of us into any relationship or action! I'm just letting you know that, should you want to put a 'deposit' down on this 'pilgrim bus trip' through earthly life, pray about becoming an Oblate, either through St. Brendan's or another monastery. It won't be long before Alan and I make our promises. Then we'll be ready to organize the trip for others. Interested in making a down payment?

Monastic Fellowship of Saint Brendan's — Rule of Life



Finally! The Rule of Life for Saint Brendan's Oblates is completed, approved, blessed, printed, bound, and ready for mailing. If you were a former Postulant, Novice, or Life Vowed member of the Society of St. Seraphim of Sarov, you should have received your copy of the Rule with this newsletter. If you did not, please let us know immediately so we can make things right! Those of you who became a Friend of Saint Brendan's without formerly being a member of the Society of St. Seraphim, will regrettably need to wait just a little bit longer.

If you consult your chart of the Goals and Expectations of each 'level' of membership to Saint Brendan's, you will find 'exposure to the Rule' under Goals for Postulancy. Those who make application for advancement to Postulant will receive a copy of the Rule as part of their acceptance package to the Postulancy. Of course, anyone can purchase a copy (or additional copies) whenever they like; they will be available for purchase...soon. (We are binding them ourselves and everything takes time. Please be patient.)

The Rule of Life is NOT a legalistic control over your spirituality or your daily life. Rather, it is a guide to help you know what God has required of you as one of His children. It contains ecumenical teachings and strategies that should have been part of your preparation for church membership, but is often neglected for various reasons. Each section contains teaching – along with references to St. Benedict's Rule AND, more importantly, Scriptural references so that you may use it as a guide for a Biblical study of Christian living.

We welcome constructive criticism and positive comments! This is a Community effort, and you are part of this

OUR NEWEST MEMBERS

Please join us in adding the following names to our growing list of Friends in the Monastic Fellowship of Saint Brendan's...

Dn. Thomas Abbott (Jacksonville, FL)

Lon Eilders (Chattanooga, TN)

Fr. David Hall (Chattanooga, TN)

Pray for them daily as they seek to serve and please God through the daily sacrifice of their lives. May the Lord richly bless them as they move higher and deeper in the things of intentional faith.

Saint Brendan's Has Goats!

We were planning on putting out this edition of the newsletter much sooner than now - and we do apologize for the delay - but when Spring hits the farm, all the priorities change. Even more so this year because now we have...GOATS! They're only two months old, but hopefully by this time next year we will have milk, cheese, and yogurt to share with the needy folks in this area. What a wonderful complement to the eggs and produce that God already uses as tools of ministry to those around us. And now, here's Annie (Anastasia), Bridgid, and Chester...



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