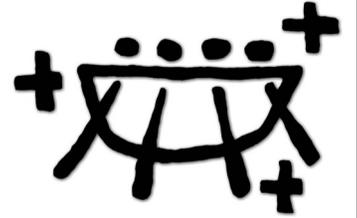


The Navigator



The Newsletter of the Monastic Fellowship of Saint Brendon's
Volume IV, No. 2 — Spring 2009

God with Us: the Importance of the Home Altar

Fr. Alan L. Andraeas, Prior

“When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, ‘Surely the Lord is in this place, and I was not aware of it.’”

Genesis 28:16

Have you noticed how hard it is find holy ground? Our grandparents and great grandparents had the comfort in knowing that, as a nation, there was a great respect for the church; that every community held itself up to biblically based morals and ethics; and that every school started its day with the Pledge of Allegiance, Scripture reading, and the Lord’s Prayer (or at least with a moment of silence when the students were encouraged to lift up their own prayers). It’s no wonder that a generation ago we could still say with some confidence that America was a Christian nation. We sure have come a long way since those days. Now let’s fast forward to the present.

On April 6th, President Obama, while speaking on behalf of you and me to the international press in Ankara, Turkey, declared, “...we do not consider ourselves a Christian nation.”¹ And as you know, many of the paths our nation is taking through new legislation are absolutely abhorrent to Scripture. This parallels the growing trend in many of our denominations and communions over the past few decades of drifting further and further away from the ancient standards of faith so that – as they continue their tumble into spiritual darkness – they shame God while proclaiming that they’re advocates the light. We have churches that embrace every manner of

sin and call it enlightened faith to the point where you can now receive condoms at the door of the church on your way out from Sunday morning services.² How heart wrenching to see God’s children calling evil good and good evil (Isaiah 5:20) because they refuse to distinguish between the holy and the profane (Ezekiel 22:26). What that means is, the only bastion left for God in some places is the sanctity of the home – and even that is increasingly coming under attack.

Whether you manage a home of one or your roof shelters a house full, for those who truly desire it, the home can be like a monastery in miniature – a place where God is revered and the world is kept at bay. Not a monastery in the sense where everything is conducted with hushed tones and somber mood, but that in all aspects of home life, God is placed at the center of every activity and where every activity is found to be sacred: chores, study, recreation, rest, hospitality, intimacy, and devotion. What joy, contentment, and security when God is found in it. And so, like a monastery, all things are blessed because the Lord is honored. But also like a monastery, there should be a special place where the Lord is met in the service of prayer and devotion.



USA TODAY ran an interesting article some years ago³ about the new trend in home altars and, as a result, how many families were

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“What I’m talking about here is carving out a place in our homes this is uniquely God’s;...”

finding a greater sense of God’s presence in their homes and in their lives. A home altar is nothing new. We see this going back as far as Genesis 31:19,30-32 when Rachel took her father’s idols from his house while Jacob and his family were quickly preparing to flee from Laban. The same is true of Micah in Judges 17:4-5. In fact, altars of various sorts have always been a part of the home; most notably in the homes of the Orthodox faithful. Even still, most homes have an altar of some sort or another.

When you walk into a home, you will quickly discover what things hold places of tremendous prominence for that family. Though they may quickly dismiss the notion, many of them have the equivalent of an altar or shrine. In some homes it’s a shrine to NASCAR; in others, an altar to Elvis; in others where younger hearts predominate,



perhaps a devotion to Hannah Montana (aka, Miley Cyrus); in others, almost a spiritual loyalty to pro-football; and in others still, a wall of homage to blue ribbon animals or to one’s military achievements.

Oh, there’s nothing wrong with displaying the collectables of one’s hobbies or passions, providing a

focus of conversation when company comes over, but do we accord God the same place, space, and prestige in our homes?

What I’m talking about here is carving out a place in our homes that is uniquely God’s; a place where He receives due honor, a place where we meet Him in our prayers and devotion; a place that is set apart from all other intrusions or distractions; a place that doesn’t have to time-share with the other “artifacts” of our many interests or hectic schedules.

We might look at that preceding paragraph and think, “But I don’t time share where God is concerned.” Hmmmm. Are our devotions done in a rush at the kitchen table while it’s still covered with dishes and toast crumbs or at the coffee table hidden under channel viewing guides and newspapers? Is prayer time done in the bathroom while we’re rushing to get ready for work, quickly rattling off a list of names to the Lord for those who need blessing or healing? Is devotional reading done in bed at the end of the day when we’re too tired to remember what was written in the last paragraph? Does our time with the Bible usually end up as nothing more than a glance in its direction while we confess, “Lord, the

spirit is willing but the flesh is weak?” If that all sounds familiar – admit it, we’ve all been there – then perhaps it’s time to consider the value of a home altar.

Not that a home altar will instantly remedy a compromised devotional life, but once you begin to order your externals in a way that pleases the Lord, it makes it easier for the internals to follow suit. What do I mean by that? We’ve all heard advice given to children and teens who find it hard to do homework. The advice usually follows the line of: “Find a place with no distractions, visual or auditory; have all your study materials handy; make sure the lighting is adequate; let your friends know that you can’t be reached during study time; etc.” Those are the same kinds of things that should shape your decisions about a home altar.

Sue and I are fortunate at the Priory House to have a chapel with an altar, kneelers, incense, candles, crosses, icons, and, well,...it’s a chapel. But we didn’t always live here. At first we struggled. Our prayer offices were sometimes done on the couch, at the table, or in the car while driving to different functions. I wish we had the foresight then to make a place in the house that was exclusively the Lord’s. How different things might have been. In our last house before moving here, Sue’s intention was to make sure that there wasn’t a room anywhere in the house that didn’t have some kind of cross, or icon, or piece of Christian art so that there was no mistake in the minds of visitors as to Whom our hearts and faith belonged. And while that’s getting closer to the idea, it’s still not a family altar. I was fortunate to have a designated devotional place with a kneeler in my office at work where I served as a Navy chaplain, and Sue eventually had a small location for intentional devotions carved out of a spare bedroom that we used for storage. Those were the beginnings of the home altar for us.

Here’s something I want you to begin thinking about, praying over, and asking God whether you should in-

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vest any time and effort toward its completion. Designate a place in your home for a home altar...and then make one. Now remember, this isn't meant to be something that simply garners comments from visitors to your home, but that it truly becomes the place where you meet with the Lord; an intentional location where intentional devotion and prayer takes place.

There's no set requirement for how big or small it needs to be. Perhaps you have a spare room that can be set up as a prayer chapel. Perhaps a corner in your living room can be arranged with a small table, side boy, or credenza that can serve as your place of prayer. You could transform a nice shelf or mantle on the wall into that "divine intersection" between heaven and earth where you and your family meet with the Lord. It doesn't take much: a clean cloth, maybe a candle or two that are lit during your devotion time, a cross or crucifix, or perhaps an icon so that you never forget how you are always being joined in prayer with a "great cloud of witnesses" (Hebrews 12:1). The emphasis here is that your home altar is precisely that – a place that belongs exclusively to God and which is not time-shared under a clutter of newspapers, toys, or all the weekend sales flyers from your mailbox.

When it's time to for you and/or your family to pray the Daily Offices (or just when you want to be quiet before the Lord), turn off or shut out all distractions and gather some chairs around your home altar. Maybe you can even find a source for simple kneelers (contact us if you want some leads about where to purchase a kneeler) so that the position of your body can match the position of your heart as you come before the Lord. There are even some wonderful sources⁴ for church incense that you can burn at home in your own thurible or censer. What a wonderful impact incense can have as it reminds you that you are entering a place of sacred space and time. And don't forget this one important thing: if you have a rector or pastor who can come over and bless your home altar, do it. Set it apart from the very beginning under the anointing of a pastoral benediction.

Please don't forget my earlier caution that a home altar will not instantly remedy a compromised devotional life, but it will certainly help. In fact, you might even experience a renaissance or honeymoon period with the Lord. That's not a bad thing, so ride it for as long as you can. Just know that after a while the nov-

elty or pleasure of a new home altar will soon begin to temper with the realization that our relationship with the Lord is never to be built exclusively on the highs of religious experience but on the day-to-day realization that our faith is to grow as deeply downward into the Rock of Christ, withstanding the daily assault of spiritual wind and rain (Matthew 7:24-27), as much as it desires to reach heavenward in bliss and joy. Nor does this mean that you can no longer take those precious opportunities to read a devotional classic or engage in *lectio divina* while sitting in your favorite recliner or armchair. It just means that we're encouraging you to make intentional time for God in an intentional place that belongs to God.



If this is where God is leading you, please take a moment and let us know so that we encourage you and bless you in the Name of the Lord and, most importantly, pray for you before the altar here at Saint Brendan's. In the next newsletter I'll be writing about the value of devotional life and prayer – what it gives to God, what it brings to you from God, and what your family receives from it through your time spent with God. ✕

Rejoice!
Fr. Alan Andraeas

Sources referenced in this article:

- ¹ www.lifesitenews.com/ldn/2009/apr/09040809.html
- ² www.onenewsnow.com/church/default.aspx?id=468294
- ³ Cathy Hainer, "Altars to Fit Personal Sanctuaries," *USA Today* (May 8, 1998): pg. 4.D
- ⁴ for example, www.autom.com

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...

“...the righteous soul is the truly sacred altar, and the incense arising from it is holy prayer.”

— Clement of Alexandria (c. 195 AD)

The Simplicity of Disciplined Devotions

Sue Andraeas, Prioress

**“Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.
Cleanse your hands, you sinners;
and purify your hearts, you double-minded.”**

James 4:8

As I have prayed for a ‘theme’ for this year’s newsletter articles, only one word came to mind over and over again: simplicity. I remember writing about that before – maybe you remember reading about it. ‘Simplicity’ is not the same as ‘easy.’ In fact, they are often opposites! In the next few newsletters, I think I will share with you some places the Lord has taken me over the past several years, at least where simplicity is concerned. Just as a quick reminder... we are *not* referring to the kind of ‘simple’ you find in Old Testament verses such as Proverbs 27:12 – where the ‘simple’ man is found lacking when compared to the ‘prudent’ man. Nor are we talking about the ‘simple’ people mentioned in Romans 16:18 – the ones who are the unsuspecting recipients of poor Christian teaching. No, I’m talking about the kind of simplicity that combats the double minded tendencies mentioned in James 4:8, quoted above.

The directions for a simplistic lifestyle are, well, easy to give: draw nigh to God! Clean your hands and your hearts from being vacillating and two-spirited. That’s what James was saying. A simple life, then, is one with a clear, singular purpose – get close to God. But while the directions are easy to give, navigating a path through it is not. So... here in the pages of the Navigator, we will begin to provide a road map. This is not the sort of thing you’ll find in most Christian ‘how to’ books or DVD series. Why? Because at first glance, some of our suggestions will appear to be rather secular in nature. Secondly, it is not popular to teach true simplicity. It doesn’t sell well, if you are into marketing your spiritual direction. Simplicity is tough! It’s not for wimps!! But I am not looking to get rich.

The Lord has placed us all in this lay monastic group to teach each other how to take the narrow, difficult-but-simple path, and I’d like to share with you some things I’ve learned. If you study them, pray about them – I mean really converse and wrestle with God about them – you might find that they bring you closer to Him than

you thought they would. This first little ‘path marker’ will be more sanctified in appearance than ones that will follow. I don’t want you to think I’ve totally gone off the deep end! (And I promise not to suggest that you all turn your back yards into donkey pens, chicken coops or goat pastures! Not that it hasn’t crossed my mind! ☺)

I’ve been sitting here, trying to think of a gentle, tactful way to say what I need to say, and nothing is coming. So I’m just going to say it. You have absolutely NOTHING of heaven to offer others if you have not spent time each and every day with your Savior! In fact, I’d go so far as to say that if you ‘do devotions’ while you race down the road to work, you still have very little of heaven to offer those around you. If you spend more time with the news (even ‘Christian’ news) – whether it’s on the radio, TV, or internet - than you do listening to your Lord as you read the Bible, your views are distorted and bent toward the activity of earth rather than the activity of heaven. If you ‘chat’ – whether in the lunch room or a cyber chat room or on email – more than you pray, your ability to say anything truly meaningful is greatly reduced. Ouch! When you do your Daily Reading of Scripture (you do, don’t you?), do you buzz through it, put the marker back for tomorrow, and head off – checking off THAT ‘requirement’ from the list? Do you pray through your daily prayers in the Breviary (you do, don’t you?) silently speeding through the words while you think about the next thing you’re going to be doing? If you do, you are double minded and your heart is not pure. What happened to the *intentional* part of intentional faith?

Believe me, I know how it is. You plan to give that time fully to God. My ‘devotional time’ used to look something like this: I would

plan to do my private readings (Alan and I pray Lauds or Morning Prayer later in the morning – I’m talking about my private devotions) but I’d want a cup of coffee to help me focus. But my favorite cup was still dirty, so I’d wash it out, along with the other dishes in the sink. I’d pick up the dish towel to dry them but it would be soggy, so I’d take it back to the laundry room. But there was a load of laundry still sitting there that I meant to put in yesterday, so I’d quickly throw that in the washer so I could REALLY get to my devotions without thinking about it. But there was a load of laundry left in the washer, also from yesterday, and I’d put it in the laundry basket to

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Have you established any ‘patterns’ for simplicity in your devotional life?

“At the root of the problem here is not a lack of desire, but a lack of discipline. A lack of simplicity.”

hang outside – better do it now so I don't think about it anymore. But the basket was full of dry laundry that never got folded, so I'd just quickly take care of that. And there would be dust on the table where my Bible as, and dirt on the floor. And my coffee was getting cold. And then it would be time for breakfast and Lauds, and... my Bible was never even opened. And now it was too late in the morning for that quiet, private time alone with God. Can you relate? At the root of the problem here is not a lack of desire, but a lack of discipline. A lack of simplicity. The 'simple,' undivided thing to do would be to skip the coffee! Or use another cup. Or not worry about the dish towel, or the laundry, or dirt and dust. But the things of earth are usually so much closer to us than the things of heaven, and they block our vision of heavenly things.

And there it is! Simplicity is a focus on heavenly things. Paul, in his letter to the Colossians, wrote, **“Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth”** (Colossians 3:2). You may have memorized it as, 'Set your minds...' (You do memorize Scripture, don't you?) The Greek word Paul chose for 'affection' or 'minds' is **phroneo**. It means to exercise the mind or entertain an opinion; to be intensely interested in, or to savor or think. So we could say that simplicity is exercising the mind on things of heaven, being intensely interested in savoring the things of heaven. Not the things of earth, but the things of heaven. My affections were focused on laundry and coffee and dust balls rather than heaven – and, more specifically, on things of earth rather than on my Lord. How have I fixed it? Simple!

Milking time here is at 6:30. Every morning. No weekends off. No holidays. At 6:30, you will find me in the dairy parlor, with Annie (our milk goat) and a milk pail. (Brigid will be milking soon, we pray!) When I come back in the house, I filter the milk, put it in the fridge, wash the milking dishes and stack them. AND THEN...

I pick up my Bible. No coffee. No dish towels. Never. Once I realized that I was choosing mundane chores over Jesus, it left a terrible feeling in my heart and I could not do that to Him anymore. It is not that I am better than anyone else. I'm worse! I was not even doing anything noble! I was sacrificing my time with the Lord of my soul and for what? Laundry, dust, and dirt?? The only way I could overcome my lack of discipline and heavenly vision was to put nothing – absolutely NOTHING – in that time slot. The world can wait for me or it can go on without me, but it can NOT have me once the milking is done. That time belongs to Jesus and me.

What 'pressing thing' keeps you from setting your mind on heavenly things? What have you done today in place of your devotional time with God? Take a moment to think about it and then do this for yourself. Stop it! Ask God for forgiveness. Ask Him for help. Resolve to



clean your hands from earthly activity for just a while. Purify your heart from scattered affections for a few minutes. Give your whole, undivided attention to God. Read His words rather than words of earth. Ponder His thoughts rather than worldly thoughts. Stop racing around. Be alone with the Creator of all that you are so busy about, and savor the blessed quietness and simplicity of thought and purpose. The work will still be there when you re-

turn to earth. And you will be better equipped to handle it in a godly way.

People tend to make New Year resolutions. I suggest that you make an Easter resolution. Now that Lent is past and the Easter decorations put away, resolve to spend time in private worship every day for the rest of this year. Let me know what happens. I promise you that the more time you spend pondering the things of heaven, the better you will be equipped to deal with the things of earth.

Rejoice!
Sue

“The Navigator” in .PDF

We’re able to convert our Navigator files into a .PDF format. If you would like *The Navigator* sent to you by e-mail as a .PDF attachment, please let us know right away. It will not only save us paper and postage, but you have the added benefits of seeing each edition in color, the ability to save it to your computer, you can copy and save the text for sharing with others, or you can print it out in a way that better suits your needs.



The Second Generation!

Saint Brendan’s welcomes the second generation of our dairy goats. Our Alpine/La Mancha mix, Annie (short for Anastasia) gave birth to two kids on March 3rd. Daphne, with the little stubby ears, was the firstborn and looks like her mom. Eloise, with long ears, looks like her dad. By their second day we already had them down at the local grade school where they toured all the classrooms and met all the children. Pictures were taken during that visit which eventually made our local newspaper. “Mom” and kids are doing well. In fact, mom is giving over 3/4 of a gallon of milk a day—which is wonderful for a “first time freshener” doe! Of course, that also means we’re in the cheese business, and boy oh boy, does it taste good! Our second doe, Brigid, is also expecting to kid soon. Keep her in your prayers.



Left: Eloise (L) and Daphne (R) are learning how to balance on top of a hay bale in the goat barn. Actually, they’re four bales up and can jump to the floor from that height. Amazing! **Below:** two-day old Daphne has a “face-to-face” conference with Fr. Alan as they discuss feeding and sleeping schedules, but to no avail—Daphne won!



Monastic Fellowship of Saint Brendan's Friends and Oblates

We want to thank everyone who renewed their memberships after the new year. Below is the current list of our Fellowship members. Please be in prayer for one another. We also have several applications out in the mail due to recent inquiries. May the fruit of the Lord continue to multiply through this ministry.

FRIENDS:

Dn. Tom Abbott—FL	Fr. David Hall—TN
Zachary Carman—NY	Clayton Landwehr—AZ
Jamie Collins—AZ	Marcia Landwehr—AZ
Lon Eilders—TN	Judith Laudone—NY
Richard Fake—PA	Donna Miller—ME
Susan Fake—PA	Carolyn Talley—AZ
Betty Glazener—TN	Helene Thatcher—NY
Bill Guenther—FL	Steven Tilney—PA
Barbara Guenther—FL	Susan Tilney—PA

OBLATES (in various stages of application):

Postulant

David Laudone—CO
Jeffrey Felter—FL
Jo Ann Munson—FL
Allison Shonk—AZ

Novice

Dn. Nathan Haydon—TX

Life

Fr. Alan Andraeas—ME
M. Sue Andraeas—ME
Dennis Maloney—AZ

Final Thoughts: Poverty and Lay Monastic Simplicity

Among the vows taken by those entering into vocational religious life is the vow of poverty. Holy poverty is the complete surrender of all worldly goods and the complete reliance on the care of God through the church or monastic community to which a vowed religious belongs. Even the habits they wear are provided by the cellarer of the religious community. It is a true abandonment into the hands of God.

Lay monastics realize that we must work for the care of our families and the maintenance of our financial obligations. We cannot be expected to live in holy poverty—to which many of us sigh with relief and say, "Thank God." Our equivalent, however, is the monastic promise to a life of simplicity; perhaps a harder calling because we must find a way to utilize money and property without it consuming and managing our lives. The result is a lifestyle that treats our possessions and resources as God's gifts, holding them with an open hand so that He has the final say in how they are used, with whom they are shared, or with how much we can be trusted in the practice of godly stewardship. The end result is a life that intentionally seeks to do with less so that there are fewer footholds the enemy has with which to access our lives.

Problems occur, however, when we begin to compare our wealth with that of others and then feel as though God has called us not to simplicity, but to deprivation. This can lead our hearts to bitterness. We grouse and complain that the call to simplicity prevents us from enjoying the things that others enjoy, thus driving us toward unchecked consumerism and even debt. After all, who wants to believe that, if God had it His way, He'd call us all to live in poverty like the rest of the world? Surely this can't be God's plan! What a distorted, North American view of wealth!

Did you know that a family of four in North America, living at the 2009 federal poverty line of \$20,050.00, can count themselves among the top 10% richest people in the world? In fact, before I retired from the Navy as a chaplain, my Lieutenant's salary put me within the top the top 1% of the world's wealthy! According to some analysts, even if we should only happen to earn \$500 a month (\$500, not \$5,000), we would still be among the top 14% of the world's wealthiest people.

Praise God for the wealth He has given you. But don't stop there; seek His face about how He wants you to handle your resources—both your wealth and your debt. Remember, to whom much is given, much is required (cf., Luke 12:48). To check this out for yourself, visit sites like: www.globalrichlist.com.

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