

The Navigator



The Newsletter of the Monastic Fellowship of Saint Brendan's
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A Heart of Devotion

Fr. Alan L. Andraeas, Prior

*"I am saying this...
that you may live in a right way
in undivided devotion to the Lord."
1 Corinthians 7:35 (NIV)*

In the last newsletter I spoke about the value of setting some space apart in your home exclusively for God; an intentional meeting place with the Lord – a home altar. This tangible junction between heaven and earth becomes the anchorage for our prayer, devotion, and worship, knowing that God dwells in our midst. In this newsletter I want to share my thoughts on devotions, what they are and what they do.

The term *devotions* is found more often in evangelical Protestant circles than it is in Anglican, Catholic, or Orthodox settings. Whereas Christians of a more sacramental and liturgical background speak of the various Offices of prayer (e.g., Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer) as integral to their daily spiritual life, devotions is uniquely Protestant; and with it comes the full range of successes and failures.

• It's the young teenager who gets out his brand new, metal-cased study Bible stamped to look like the top of a giant soda can (complete with a pop top) so that he can "refresh" himself in the Lord through devotions but, like so many of us, it only satisfies for several weeks until the novelty of his Bible wears off.

- Or it's the hurried (and harried) mom who, finding no time for devotions, grabs for her "Daily Bread Promise Box" from the kitchen counter, pulls out a small Scripture promise for the day, reads it, utters a brief prayer, and then files it to the rear of the box until it cycles through several months later.
- Or it's the rushed business man who pops a devotional "Bible on CD" into the CD player of his car on the way to work so that he can listen to someone else read the Bible while he's swerving around motorists and cursing the traffic jam looming ahead.

On the other hand, those who shape their lives around the Daily Offices often find themselves in the same predicament, skipping an Office because of equally hectic schedules and, even when they do find time, the Offices are rarely married to significant amounts of Scripture reading; focusing more on fixed patterns of fixed prayers and responses which run the risk of mechanical recitation.

That being said, there doesn't seem to be a standard shape and size for devotions. So what are they, really? The difficulty in finding a biblical definition is that our English word devotion has no Hebrew or Greek equivalent in the original languages of Scripture.

Every time you see 'devotion' in the Bible, its original language word means something else. The best we can do is let our English dictionaries define what devotion means today. In this case, religious fervor; an act of prayer or supplication (usually used in the plural); a

(Continued on page 2)



IN THIS ISSUE OF "THE NAVIGATOR"

A Heart of Devotion	1
The Reason for Simplicity	4
Announcement — "The Navigator" in .PDF	6
Alpaca Invasion!	6
Final Thoughts: On Prayer by St. Chrysostom	7
News Updates	7

**“Offer God the sacrifice
of a devotional life and watch
as the power and grace of heaven
flow back into your being.”**

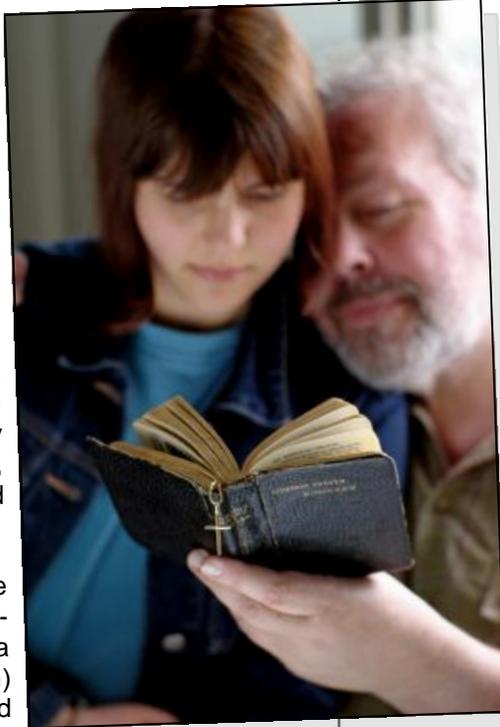
religious exercise or practice other than the regular corporate worship of a congregation; ardent love or affection. Essentially, then, devotion means the fervent practice of private prayer and other religious exercises (i.e., Scripture reading) compelled by one's love for the Lord. Now we're starting to get somewhere.

What strikes me here is this idea of religious exercise. Devotions take energy. They don't simply happen. Remember about 20 years ago when Cher made a TV commercial (for a chain of health clubs, I think)? She was sitting on a Nautilus-type gym machine and was glistening with a perfect sheen of perspiration. She looked at the camera and said, "If exercise came in a bottle, we'd all have great bodies. But it doesn't. You have to work at it. So, just do it." That's the same kind of fervent dedication that our devotional lives call for, which makes it hard because devotions are often done out of the public eye. Family devotions may fare a bit better because there's mutual accountability to the process, but consistent, private time with the Lord takes, well,...devotion.

In that regard, devotions are more like a discipline. Or better yet, like a regimen. Not a regimentation (that's legalism) but a regimen; a concerted effort to achieve a desired objective. We have all kinds of regimens in our lives – skin care regimens, vitamin and medication regimens, exercise regimens, dieting regimens; and we are faithfully, even tenaciously devoted to these things. So why not a devotion regimen? And what is the desired objective? Ideally, to spend time with Lord in a relationship that moves us closer into the imitation of Christ; allowing us to be shaped from the inside so that we can better reflect Him on the outside.

How do we enter this relationship? What should devotions look like? The answer most frequently given is Scripture reading. I would agree. But not simply for the sake of saying that you spent 15 minutes in the Bible today. You may have been reading for 15 minutes, but unless that time was also spent earnestly listening to the voice of the Holy Spirit and seeking to enter the mind of Christ, then you're no better off than the devil who can quote Scripture for his own advantage. You see, apart from the Eucharist (receiving the Body and Blood of Christ) and corporate worship, our devotional life is how

we enter into daily intimacy with the Lord. Through devotions we let the Word saturate and satiate our spirits; we open our ears to the sounds of heaven; we pray with a desire to better understand Christ's yearning for us; and we yield ourselves to the molding, shaping, and transforming hands of the Father. Devotions are our own "Song of Solomon" with the Lord.



At a more practical level, devotions put us in a place where we can read, listen, ask questions, contemplate, digest, and be subject to what the Word of God says. Perhaps you have sufficient time in your day so that you can incorporate devotions into your Daily Offices or perhaps your devotions are separate from your more structured times of prayer. Sue and I spend time in personal devotions separate from the time we spend before the altar during the Liturgy of the Hours, which is separate still from the time we spend in the Word in preparation for our sermons or Sunday School lessons, as well as our study of the Word for our graduate pursuits. In other words, we count our Offices, our devotions, and our study as separate elements of our daily walk with the Lord; each one being tied to a different aspect of our call to monastic, corporate, or academic life and faith. I once had an old Bible college professor encourage his class of stressed

students with this piece of advice, "Let your study be your devotion and let your devotion be your study." It sounds good on the surface for someone who is short on time, but I don't recommend it because the two do very different things. Whereas Bible "study" feeds the intellect, devotion is intimate relationship with the Lord through the clearest means we have for Him to speak with us.

(Continued on page 3)

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What are the benefits of devotions? Intimacy with the Lord should be reason enough, but there are other advantages. Regular devotions sanctify our thoughts and imaginations so that they are more fully fixed on the things of heaven throughout the day. Regular devotions conform our minds to the Living Word so that we see everything around us through the eyes of Christ. Regular devotions provide constant surgical attention upon those things in our lives that God wants sacrificed for His sake. Regular devotions transform our behaviors and actions. And regular devotions shape us into proper spiritual cover over our spouses or children.

Whether your devotions take on the shape of small passages of Scripture slowly dissolved into your spirit through *lectio divina* or the systematic reading schedule of the many "One Year" Bibles available at most bookstores, the emphasis is to do it because Christ dwells in you...and He's worth it. Does that mean it will be easy? Yes and no. Let me share an example of something I learned as a part-time school bus driver and you'll see what I mean.

When we first moved here, the local grade school desperately needed bus drivers, and I thought this would be a great way to get to know the families who live in town. When I passed my test for a Commercial Driver's License (CDL) and was hired to drive a bus, I loved it. What a wonderful feeling to sit so high with a commanding view of the road; a throbbing diesel engine under the hood; the sound of airbrakes; and the ability to stop traffic in all directions with the flick of a switch and some flashing lights. Those first few weeks were great until a

young student asked me, "Don't you get bored driving the same road over and over again?" And do you know what? It didn't take long before that initial zeal turned into monotony – the same route, the same stops, the same schedule down to the second, the same difficult children with the same complaints every single day. That actually lasted for quite a bit of time, but I had to push through, forcing myself to be aware of the engine gauges, passenger safety, oncoming traffic, dangers on the road (especially during deer season!), etc. But after a what seemed like months,



everything began to settle into place. Driving soon felt comfortable and I enjoyed my time on the road. There was a certainty to the routine, a joy in the proficiency of perfect schedules, an endearment to the children and a concern for the things that touched their lives, a love for the beauty of the school district that I drove through. It was like slipping my foot into old slipper. Those are the three stages of devotional life – honeymoon fervor, indifference and struggle, and finally

comfort and appreciation, and if you stick with it you will certainly experience them all. And that's okay.

Like the act of breathing, devotions are essential for healthy discipleship and spirituality. Scripture reading is the inhale, prayer is the exhale; both are necessary or else we fall unconscious. Many Christians are spiritually unconscious because they neither read the Word nor pray. Offer God the sacrifice of a devotional life and watch as the power and grace of heaven flow back into your being. ✕

MONASTIC MUSE

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

“Follow your trades as secondary, as something necessary for earning a livelihood. However, make the worship of God Your main business.”

— Apostolic Constitutions (compiled c. 390)

The Reason for Simplicity

Sue Andraeas, Prioress

*"And whatever you do in word or deed,
do all in the name of the Lord Jesus,
giving thanks to God the Father through Him."
Colossians 3:17 (NKJV)*

Simplicity – it isn't easy! Remember? We talked about the difference between the two in the last newsletter. Something that is easy requires little effort from you personally, but simplicity requires a great deal. For starters, it requires single-mindedness – of purpose and desire. It requires scrutiny, and an understanding of the real process by which a decision to act a certain way is reached. And that is where we are going to continue in this newsletter. After all, history is filled with people who did the right thing but for the wrong reason – and the result can often be as catastrophic as if the wrong thing were done in the first place.

Let's start with the topic from my last article concerning devotions, and the simplicity of making them constant and consistent. We know devotional time is important, but do we know *why*? Certainly we do! A solid devotional life makes us better people, better disciplined, better acquainted with Scripture. It can hone our minds and sharpen our thought processes? Right? WRONG! I mean, yes – all those things can happen with a solid, consistent devotional life, but if that's why you do them, you've missed the point. Ok, you say. Then the reason for a consistent devotional life is so that we can be better connected to the life of the Saint Brendan's gang. We've all agreed to do this, and to be a good member, we need to hold fast to what we said we'd do. Wrong again! There is some truth in that statement, but it is far from totally accurate. PLEASE – do NOT spend time with God each day – or fulfill any spiritual discipline for that matter – just so you can 'belong' to a ministry, or a cause, or a group of people, no matter how good they may be. Do not do it for them. Do not even do it for you! Do it in the name of Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him. Isn't that what the verse above says? To (thankfully) do everything you do, and to (thankfully) say everything you say in the name of Jesus? Well, then, what does that mean? (Are you beginning to see that a life of simplicity requires a lot more thought and a lot less impulsive behavior? A lot more *why's* to analyze your actions much fewer *status quos* that just sort of carry you through your day?) Perhaps we need to look at this just a bit more closely, just a bit more out in the open.

If you go back a few decades, you would find that people all but idolized their doctors. They believed their doctor to be wise, intelligent, experts at healing, experts

at understanding new medicines, professional, and trustworthy. It would be rare indeed for a sick person to tell a doctor what was wrong with them, and then state that a specific medicine was required. Patients did not research their own symptoms or follow the latest advances in treatments but fully relied on their doctor to do that for them. Today, research and prescription information is commonplace, and many people have already diagnosed themselves and prescribed the cure before going to the doctor – they only need the doctor's signature to make it possible obtain the drug. The days of blindly believing his diagnosis, then following his treatment, are all but over. Do you see the two types of patient styles? Well, they exist in Christians as well. There are those who stop thinking for themselves, stop reading or meditating on Scriptures themselves, even stop praying their own words. They rely fully on pre-written, pre-formulated devotionals, prayers, practices, and disciplines to the neglect of personal input. Their pastors, priests, spiritual directors, and authors of the books they read dictate the practice of their faith. And an individual who conforms to that kind of non-individual spiritual



practice will learn that either their leadership (personal or in the form of texts, missals, devotionals, etc.) become idols and their worship stops with that idol rather than with God, or they follow the practice with contempt and rebel against the thing that is supposed to bring conformity – which means it also has become an idol, but one that is obeyed with loathing rather than with devotion. In other words, **if the authority over you has become the ultimate authority over you rather than God Himself, you are practicing idolatry and not devotion.**

The other scenario is equally dangerous. Like the patient who self-prescribes and only needs the doctor to sign the prescription, Christians are often tempted to be a 'congregation of one' and only need their church to provide the illusion of congregational life. This kind of Christian reads what he wants, prays what he wants, worships when he wants. He has become his own authority; he has become his own idol.

There needs to be a balance between submission and personally testing everything while holding onto only what is good (1 Thessalonians 5:21) just like there needs to be a balance between submission to your doctor's diagnosis/treatment while still researching on your

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own. There needs to be a balance between congregational fellowship and personal accountability. The best way to make sure that the balance is maintained is to be sure you know *why* you are doing your devotions, and to whom you are devoted. And the best way to do that, I think, can be found in Paul's admonishment found in the verse at the beginning of this article.

What did Paul, the writer of the letter to the Colossians quoted above, mean when he said to do things in the *name* of the Lord Jesus? To better understand his intent, we need to look at the Greek word he used for 'name.' He said to do everything in the *onoma* of the Lord Jesus. This word, *onoma* is a rich one. First of all, it does mean 'name,' as in the literal name of someone.



But it means more than that. It refers to that person's authority and character. So, let's go back to the example of devotions.

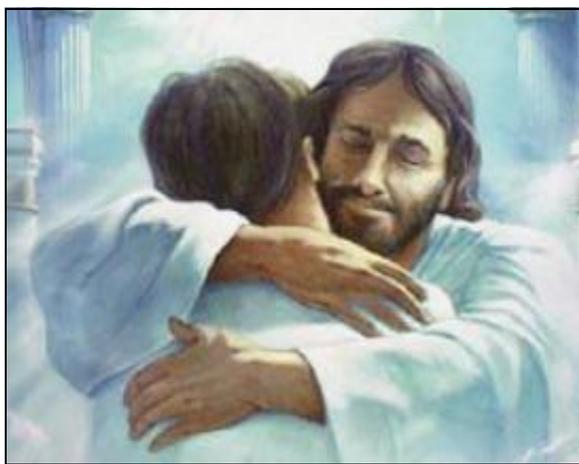
We are to do our devotions with the authority Jesus gives us – and with the same character that Jesus would have done them. Would he have approached his Father with boredom or sense of duty? The Scriptures do not give that impression at all, but rather that he loved the time spent with his Father. Even more amazing, God has given Jesus the authority to be over all things and to rule all things (Luke 10:22, John 13:3, Eph. 1:22). So when we do something in Jesus' name, it is as though we are acting as power of attorney over those things Jesus himself would do – but which he has given us to do. Jesus has given us his authority to be with his Father, God. We, in our absent-mindedness, forget that devotional time puts us in contact with the Creator of Everything! We slump in a chair, sip our coffee or tea or soda, and as our eyes trace the word on the pages of our Bibles, our mind wanders to events of the day – or, probably more accurately, to our emotions concerning the events of the day. There we sit, in the presence of the Almighty... day dreaming. Is that in the character of Jesus? Or acting as though we understand his authority over all things? (I'm guilty too. Don't think I'm writing this because I've arrived at some transcendent level of spiritual concentration!)

But it gets even more profound. Let's go back to that word for 'name.' *Onoma* is derived from the Greek word *oinemi* which means, among other things, to 'derive

“...a life of simplicity needs to be...more about the joy and pleasure that is derived from that closeness with Jesus Christ.”

pleasure or advantage from; to have joy; to gratify.' Let's plug that concept into Paul's verse. He is saying that whatever we do – whatever we say or whatever deeds we are doing – we should do them all for Jesus' pleasure, for his advantage. There should be mutual joy between ourselves and Jesus when we speak or act. It should gratify him. Ok, now plug THAT back into your devotional life. Do you and Jesus derive mutual pleasure from your devotional life? Is it advantageous – to you and to him – that you have spent that time in devotion? Did it gratify him? Did it gratify you?

More than anything else, a life of simplicity needs to be less focused upon what you 'get out of it' and more about the joy and pleasure that is derived from that closeness with Jesus Christ – both his pleasure and yours. Whether you are telling a joke, holding an office in your local church congregation, washing the dishes, (cleaning skunk fumes out of your dog – as we had to do here this week; try to derive pleasure from THAT job!), you are to do all that you do in the name of the Lord Jesus. And you are to give thanks that you could do it! AND – you should be thanking the Father through the Son. That means that, when you are done doing what you are doing, or saying what you are saying, Jesus should turn to his Father and say, "Thank you for the gift you have given me through _____." Plug your name into the blank.



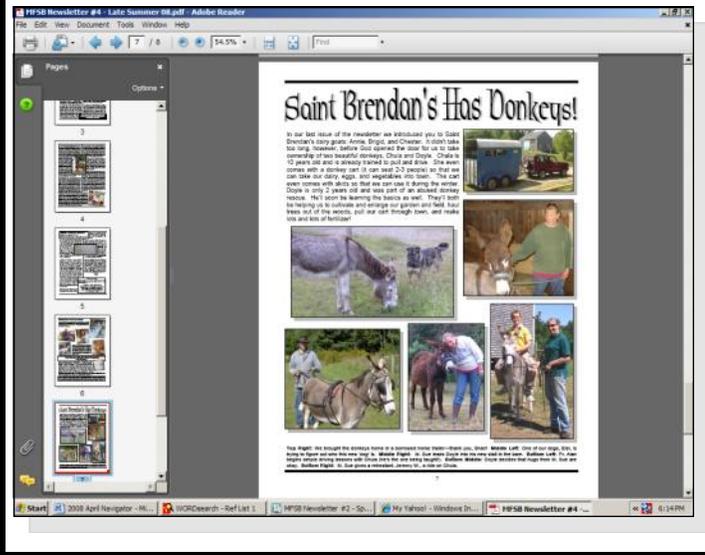
This kind of scrutiny of simplicity is what makes monastic life so hard. It is not about living a life of faith on 'auto pilot.' It is about taking even the most basic parts of your daily life and surrendering them so fully to Jesus that everything is done with Jesus, for Jesus, because of Jesus, and to his great pleasure and

joy. Yes, it will take a lifetime to live that kind of faith. But... isn't Jesus worth the effort?

Rejoice!
Sue Andraeas

“The Navigator” in .PDF

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Alpaca Invasion! Our New Additions to Saint Brendan's



Saint Brendan's welcomed its newest arrivals, four alpacas, on Sunday, June 14th. Their names are Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego; the four Hebrew Children. Very appropriate since alpacas are cousins to the camel (and, yes, they also spit!). **Top right:** Fr. Alan helps lead the alpacas to their new home. **Middle right:** all four alpacas pose for a group picture. **Bottom right:** Our goats, Annie, Chester, and Brigid, check out their strange neighbors. **Bottom left:** Shadrach and Meshach examine their new surroundings.



Final Thoughts: On Prayer John Chrysostom Bishop of Constantinople, 407 AD

Prayer, loving conversation with God, is the supreme good. It is both a relationship with God and union with Him. As the eyes of the body are made sharper by the sight of light, so the soul yearning for God is illumined by His ineffable light. Prayer is not



the result of an external attitude; it comes from the heart. It is not limited to set hours or minutes, but, night and day, it is a continuous activity.

It is not enough to direct one's thoughts to God when concentrating exclusively on prayer; even when absorbed in other occupations—such as, caring for the poor, or some other concern in the way of a good or useful work—it is important to combine the

work with desire for and remembrance of God. For thus you will be able to offer the Lord a very pleasing food from the universe, seasoned with the salt of love for God.

Prayer is the light of the soul, true knowledge of God, a mediating activity between God and mankind. Through it, the soul rises heavenward and embraces the Savior with ineffable love. As a suckling to its mother, it cries to God, weeping, thirsting for the divine milk. It expresses its deepest desires and receives gifts greater than anything on earth. Prayer, by which we respectfully present ourselves to God, is the joy of the heart and the soul's rest.

Prayer brings the soul to the heavenly fountain, satisfies the soul with the draught, and raises up in it "a fountain leaping up to provide eternal life." Prayer gives a real assurance of the good things to come, in faith, and makes present blessings more recognizable. Do not imagine that prayer consists only in words. It is a leap to God, an inexpressible love that is not of our making, as the Apostle says: "We do not know how to pray as we ought; but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groaning that cannot be expressed in speech."

Such prayer, when the Lord grants it to anyone, is a treasure that cannot be taken away, a heavenly food that satisfies the soul. One who tastes it is filled with an eternal desire for God, such a devouring flame that it kindles the heart. Let this fire flare up in you in all its fullness, to adorn the dwelling place of the heart with kindness and humility, to make it shine with the light of righteousness, and to polish its floor with good deeds.

Hence, adorn your house and, instead of mosaics, decorate it with faith and magnanimity. And as a finishing touch put prayer at the top of your building. Then you will have prepared a house worthy to receive the Lord, as a royal palace, and you yourself, through grace, will already be possessing Him, in a certain manner, in the temple of your soul.

NEWS UPDATES

- We welcome our newest member to the Monastic Fellowship of Saint Brendan's, Barry Folland of South Portland, ME.
- For those who are ready to read "The Inner Room: a Journey into Lay Monasticism" and to work on its study guide, we've been informed by the publisher that it is no longer in print. Used copies can still be found on-line but they are very expensive. I'm trying to contact the author to see what our options might be. Be patient; we may have to substitute that book (a requirement for our Postulants) with another title.
- Saint Brendan's celebrated its fourth anniversary on July 10, 2009. It seems like we arrived here just yesterday.
- A special thank you to those who are so generous with their gifts to this ministry. May God grant you blessings above and beyond your capacity to receive them!

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