

The Navigator

The Newsletter of the Monastic Fellowship of Saint Brendan's
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Tools of Devotion: Prayer Rope Spirituality

Fr. Alan L. Andraeas, Prior

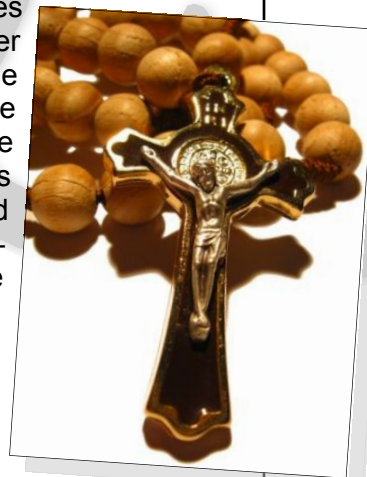
Differences in theology can often divide Christians, as can differences in doctrine, practice, denominational lines, and even loyalty to various church 'celebrities' (cf., 1 Corinthians 1:12). But there's one thing that seems to divide Christians more than anything else: the 'tools' of faith and devotion.

Tools? One might say that he uses only a Bible for devotions while another one says he uses a prayer book. One is convinced that pure Christianity only flows out of the 1611 King James Version of the Bible while another believes that any translation is fine so long as you read with the anointing of the Holy Spirit. One person might insist that prayers are more authentic when prayed extemporaneously or while wearing a Jewish prayer shawl, while another insists that the authorized prayers of the Church are best while kneeling on a *prie-dieu* before a crucifix or the icon of a patron saint. How protectionist we can be about the ways we think are right!

One of those divisive tools is a prayer rope or rosary. Protestants look at Catholic and Orthodox Christians and ask, "Why in the world do you need

one of those to pray?!" Catholic and Orthodox Christians look at Protestants and retort, "How do you maintain your prayer life without one?!" Let's take some time to understand what this ancient tool of faith is all about; its history, purpose, and current use.

Christianity actually has a long tradition of "prayer counters" to keep track of prayers, usually in the form of beads or knotted cord. It's a tradition that is also experiencing a resurgence, and not just among Roman Catholics and Orthodox but also among a growing number of Anglicans and Protestants as devout Christians from many backgrounds, hungry for deeper spiritual things, are searching for something to hang their prayers on.



Historically, the earliest Christians had a variety of ways to count their shorter prayers throughout the day. The first of these was, of course, the fingers and then the joints on each finger. This was followed by carrying loose stones in a pouch or in one's pockets. St. Paul of Thebes used to have two bags, one with 300 pebbles and one that was empty. With each prayer he would take a pebble from the full bag and drop it into the other bag until it was full and the first bag was emptied. Christians in Ethiopia used prayer sticks as staves to help them stand during long services. Forty-one notches were cut into these sticks and were 'fingered' as they prayed; forty-one being used

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because they held to the tradition that Christ received forty-one lashes (rather than thirty-nine) during His passion. In other places dried fruit pits, fragments of bone, or small bits of wood were tied to a length of string to help count. These soon gave way to just a string with knots.

Believers of the Western Celtic tradition and the Sarum Rite were the first to develop what we know today as the rosary or “garland of roses.” But rather than marking the short invocations and prayers that we normally associate with today’s rosary, it was used instead as a tool for reciting the Psalms.

The early Western Churches, like those of the East, had a great devotion to the Psalter which they divided into three parts of fifty psalms each. These “Three Fifties” were offered up by both monks and laymen as a means to “pray without ceasing.” There were even prescribed numbers of times that the Psalms were to

be recited. For example, when a bishop died in Old England, the entire Psalter was to be recited by monks and laity 600 times! When a lay person died the Psalter was said over the body immediately and all the mourners would take turns reciting it over the body at least another four times throughout the night. Tradition also says that St. Patrick and other early Celtic saints would recite the first “Fifty” and then stand in cold water to recite the next group so as to keep alert and awake.

Where, then, does our current version of the prayer rope come from? To accommodate those monks and laity who could not read or memorize all 150 Psalms, a little ‘psalter’ was developed as a substitute. It was based on a combination of the Lord’s Prayer and the angelic greeting of Mary, repeated 150 times and also divided into three fifties. Other substitutionary ‘psalters’ were being similarly developed based on the meditations of the life of Christ. These psalters were eventually fused together into the “Rosary.” Catholic tradition suggests that this took place in the 13th century when St. Dominic prayed for a weapon to use against the heresy sweeping throughout Christianity and he was in-

“Even Orthodox monastics view their prayer beads...as their primary “weapon” in spiritual warfare.”

structed in a vision to use the Rosary as this weapon. Most monks and nuns continue to wear their rosaries on the left side of their cinctures (rope belts); the same place where a knight would wear his sword. Even Orthodox monastics view their prayer beads (and the prayers they represent) as their primary “weapon” in spiritual warfare.

Saint Seraphim of Sarov had his own special devotion of walking around the perimeter of the Monastery of Diveyevo, prayer rope in hand, reciting 150 “Our Fathers” and 150 “Hail Mary’s” for all of his relatives and friends, living and dead. At the end, he would ask for a special grace for each of them, believing it would be granted on the condition that the person truly needed it. The use of a form of the Rosary was also in vogue among certain Orthodox bishops that incorporated meditations on the holy mysteries. St. Dmytry Tuptalo adopted the Rosary in honor of the “Joys and Sorrows of Our Lady” by reciting prayers of devotion at the beginning of every hour of the day, even throughout the night!

In the desert traditions, monks of the East developed intense, personal prayer lives where they repeated short prayers to God throughout the day. This was, again, in obedience to the Gospel injunction to “pray always.” St. John Cassian remarks in his “Confessions” that the monks of Thebaid made use of Psalm 70:1, “O God, come to my assistance; O Lord, make haste to help me!” throughout the day. It wasn’t long before this petition gave way to a short prayer which

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HOW TO CONTACT US

Father Alan L. Andraeas, Prior
Mother Susan G. Andraeas, Prioress

The Monastic Fellowship of Saint Brendan’s
38 Cemetary Road
Dennysville, ME 04628-4326
207-726-5129
saintbrendans@pwless.net
www.saintbrendans-online.org

knit together a cry to Jesus with the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector (Luke 18:10-14): “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.” Forms of this prayer were used by monks to develop the “Prayer of the Heart” or “Jesus Prayer”, perfecting in them the discipline of constant spiritual watchfulness over their souls and spirits so easily corrupted by sin.

How often did they pray the Jesus Prayer? We’re told that St. Pachomius (according to the Slavonic Psalter) once had a vision of an angel who told him to use the Jesus Prayer on a knotted cord of one hundred knots. One hundred repetitions of the Jesus Prayer – one per each knot – was called a complete “Prayer.” The angel told him to recite 12 Prayers (for a total of 1,200 Jesus Prayers) during the day and another 12 Prayers at night; and on evenings where he observed all-night vigils, he should pray an additional 12 Prayers. The angel also encouraged him to recite an extra 300 knots at 3:00 p.m. every day to acknowledge the time of day when Jesus died on the cross. This became a way of life for those monks who lived under the Pachomian Rule. That means they invoked the Jesus Prayer between 2,700 and 3,900 times a day!

This may seem like a staggering amount to us today, but it was only the beginning. Many monastics would recite the prayer up to 12,000 times per day on prayer ropes consisting from between 100 and 300 knots to keep track of their prayers. They believed that this prayer needed to cleave their lips, hearts, and minds until it became “self-activating” – the point at which it would literally resonate from their bodies day and night without a need for counting; drowning out the noise of the

world and focusing exclusively on the mercy and merits of Christ. Monks in Greek monasteries would sometimes add “martyria” (strings with moveable beads attached to the prayer rope – like a prayer abacus) which helped them to keep track of the thousands of times they recited the prayer each day.

The use of a prayer rope for reciting the Jesus Prayer or any short prayer is a tremendous spiritual aid for many Christians. It helps to maintain concentration and recollection during prayer time by centering one’s self and screening out distractions. Repeating the same prayer over and over should never be thought of as a tedious exercise or even vain repetition. Instead, short invocations such as the Jesus Prayer are like a stream of refreshing water for our souls. Drinking often from such prayers quenches our spiritual thirst and develops us into spiritually strong people until, as Jesus told the woman at the well, “Springs of living water will flow from you.” Some of the Church Fathers have called the Jesus Prayer the “Epiclesis of our Lord” – the means or formula by which we call down the Holy Oil of Divine Mercy into our hearts and souls. This is the spiritual oil that transforms us into the imitation of the five wise virgins who entered the wedding banquet with abundant oil in their lamps.

Bishop Kallistos Ware, writing in “The Power of the Name,” says, “A prayer rope is often employed in conjunction with the Jesus Prayer, not primarily in order to count the number of times it is repeated, but rather as an aid to concentration and the establishment of a regular rhythm. It is a widespread fact of experience that if we make some use of our hands as we pray, this will help to still our body and to gather us together into the act of prayer.”

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...

*“Prayer is the wall of faith. It is her weapons and missiles
against the foe, keeping watch over us on all sides.
And so we never walk unarmed.”*

— Tertullian (c. 198 AD)

Of the various types of prayer ropes, beads, or rosaries that the Church claims as its special aids to prayer, we must remember that these aids are intended as tools only and never an end in themselves. They are never meant to take the place of devotion to Christ or to be used as badges or symbols of great piety. That would only bring the same rebuke upon us that Jesus levied against the Pharisees in Matthew 23:5, "Everything they do is done for men to see: They make their phylacteries wide and the tassels on their garments long." Nor do we pray to the prayer rope or rosary like an idol; but rather, like a door, we pray *through* these tools in our devotional approach to the throne of grace.

How do we pray with these aids? First and foremost, they are designed to be a mnemonic which brings before our mind's eye the most profound mysteries of faith. These would include the glorious splendor of our Lord, Jesus Christ; our own weaknesses and frailties; the cry of our hearts for the succor of heaven; the eternal majesty of the Holy Trinity; and the perfect prayer that Jesus gave to His Church. In some cases the use of "Scriptural Rosaries" unfolds the divine mysteries of Christ's life into scriptural reflections from the Gospels – one for each bead or knot in a prayer rope – interspersed the Lord's Prayer and other brief intercessions.

Secondly, the use of a prayer rope or rosary knits our whole body to the act of prayer as each knot or bead calls us to focus on the object of our devotion, Jesus Christ, by harnessing our bodies' senses in the act of prayer. For example, in praying the Jesus Prayer as a "breath prayer", the first half of the

prayer ("Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God,...") is silently intoned in the heart with the slow intake of one's breath; the second half of the prayer ("... have mercy on me, a sinner.") is offered the same way with a slow exhalation of breath. Each bead or knot, then, is given a full, gentle, measured, rhythmic breath which, after several minutes, begins to order the often chaotic and discordant noises of our hectic world. Some spiritual directors recommend praying a complete rosary or prayer rope in this fashion at least three times through at each sitting. Also, the physical presence of the beads or knots passing through our fingers helps us to catch ourselves in moments of distraction, returning us to the labor and love of prayer.



Members of the Monastic Fellowship of Saint Brendan's are encouraged to explore this powerful tool as one of many time-honored aids for devotional prayer and spirituality. While any style of prayer rope is acceptable, the one we have available is an adaptation of the Anglican Prayer Rope (which is shorter than a Rosary) with an emphasis on brief, biblical

intercessions which makes it a good introduction to Protestants who've never considered the possibility of prayer rope spirituality. This prayer rope is also suited to those members of the Fellowship who are testing a call to lay monasticism and its various spiritual disciplines. If you are interested in trying a prayer rope as part of your spiritual devotion, please contact us by phone, e-mail, or visit the Saint Brendan's website. ✘

Tools of Devotion: Adoration

Sue Andraeas, Prioress

***O come, let us adore him;
O come, let us adore him;
O come, let us adore him,
Christ the Lord.***

(The original 4 verses of "Adeste Fidelis" are attributed to a 13th century Cistercian monk.)

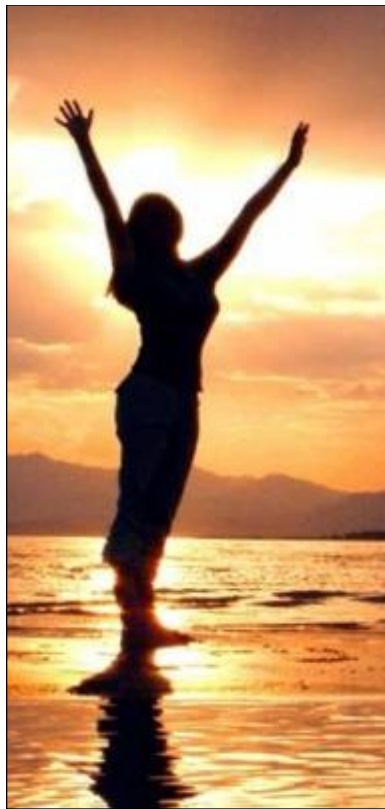
Adoration. It's not something that comes easily for our Western, American, news-oriented, performance-oriented brains. Let me rephrase that. Adoration *is* something that comes easily for our Western, American brains, but only in reference to babies, puppies, kittens, antique sports cars, and a partner in a new relationship – especially the 'young love' type. But when it comes to our faith, and more specifically our relationship with Jesus, we find it difficult. Why? Well, it just isn't practical, is it? It doesn't seem time effective. Jesus knows we love Him, doesn't He? So isn't it more productive if we just 'get down to business' and intercede for those who are in need, make our own petitions

“Adoration is the ‘sap’ that feeds the relationship with things beyond the objective necessities so that it is sustained even in times of great trial and testing.”

for things we need, praise God for the good things He’s done in the past, and worship Him for being Who He is? But adoration? Just sitting around being ‘sappy’? Why is *THAT* necessary??

The best answer I can give is this: if you just don’t get it, observe a teenager in love. They can spend literally hours thinking (subjectively and irrationally) about their new lover, and they tend to focus on the really important issues, things like how cute the new lover is, how cool, how thoughtful, how perfectly behaved – even shortcomings are endearing. It doesn’t matter how wealthy, how stable, how intellectual, how responsible. So what if he’s fired from every job he’s ever had. So what if she burns everything she cooks. Love covers a multitude of sins and they are in love!

This all reminds me of something Alan did shortly after we were engaged to be married. I was living in PA; he was living in NC. (Long distance courting is the pits!) Alan wrote me a mushy, gushy, epic love poem. The first time I read it I immediately knew two things: (1) he oozes ‘sap’ like nobody else, and (2) his vocabulary is far more advanced than mine! I read it (many verses, several pages), knew that he was saying how much he loved me, didn’t understand huge portions of it (what’s a ‘foible’ anyway?) and had to lay it aside in exchange for a dictionary so that I could see what he was ‘sapping on’ about! He had spent hours pouring over every word, every alliteration, in total adoration for his newly betrothed, and while I didn’t comprehend all that he was saying, the message that he adored me came through loud and clear! In other words, adoration goes much deeper than rationality and objectivity. I would go so far as to say that where adoration is concerned, words aren’t really all that



important. What is important is the feeling in the heart, the connection of spirit, the distraction of love that transcends the practical, the temporal, and the seemingly necessary. Adoration is the ‘sap’ that feeds the relationship with things beyond the objective necessities so that it is sustained even in times of great trial and testing. It’s the way that God loves us! WHAT?

Think about it. When we look at our mismatched teenagers, don’t we try to convince our (superior) child or grandchild to ‘trade up’? To hold out for someone better? Don’t we try to point out the flaws in the other’s character, the lack of life skills that will rear its ugly head once the romance fades into the mundane existence of married life? What if Jesus thought of us – His bride – that way? (See Rev. 21 for a description concerning the Church Universal as the Bride, the wife of the Lamb – Jesus.) What if God had said to Him, “You know, I created these lesser beings to merge together to be your Bride, but they just aren’t measuring up. From the first pair of them, they have been unfaithful, they don’t really know what love is – they’re just using You, and they’ll bring a lot of family baggage into the relationship. I think You ought to wait for a better People. Let’s keep looking.” God would indeed be justified if He thought of us, His Church – the intended Bride for His Son – in that way! But does He? No! Listen to this excerpt from Song of Songs, 1:4 (NIV). The Beloved is the woman. She is speaking to her Lover. The friends are those watching the courtship – angels perhaps? – speaking to the Lover.

Beloved:

Take me away with you--let us hurry!
Let the king bring me into his chambers.

Friends:

We rejoice and delight in you;
we will praise your love more than wine.

Beloved:

How right they are to adore you!

The neat thing is that the Beloved realizes the importance of the Friends adoring the king (a foreshadowing of Jesus). The sad thing is that she is not the one doing the adoring – not here anyway. She is more concerned with her own faults, and in pointing out her own merits. (Her very next line is, “Dark am I, yet lovely” (1:5, KJV). She’s way too focused on what she brings to the

relationship, and on the mores of her culture to focus on her Lover. But if you read on, *his* entire focus is on her – totally subjective (he doesn't even notice her skin is dark).

In her defense – ‘her’ meaning both the Beloved of the Song above and the Church – a relationship can't run solely on ‘sap.’ Eventually, one of the partners needs to think practically. The couple does,



after all, need food, shelter, a way to survive, and the means to provide for the children that are to come. The Church does need to inter-

cede, petition, organize meetings, create a budget, and set goals. But when those things happen to the exclusion of adoration of the One they are to be eternally joined with, love grows cold and churches become social institutions with a religious bent rather than the future Bride of Christ. So let's take a little ‘religious sap’ quiz and see how your adoration skills are where Jesus is concerned. Try some of these on for size. (We'll start with the easy ones. And Jesus is the Beloved; we are the Lover. Naturally.)

Beloved:

I am the way, the truth and the life (John 14:6).

Lover:

– O come, let us adore him!

Beloved:

Whosoever believes in [me] shall not perish but have everlasting life (John 3:16).

Lover:

– O come, let us adore him!

Beloved :

I have overcome the world (John 16:33).

Lover:

– O come, let us adore him!

Beloved:

Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me (Matthew 5:11).

Lover:

– O come, let us adore him!

Beloved:

All men will hate you because of me (Matthew 10:22a).

Lover:

– O come, let us adore him!

Beloved:

In this world you will have trouble (John 16:33).

Lover:

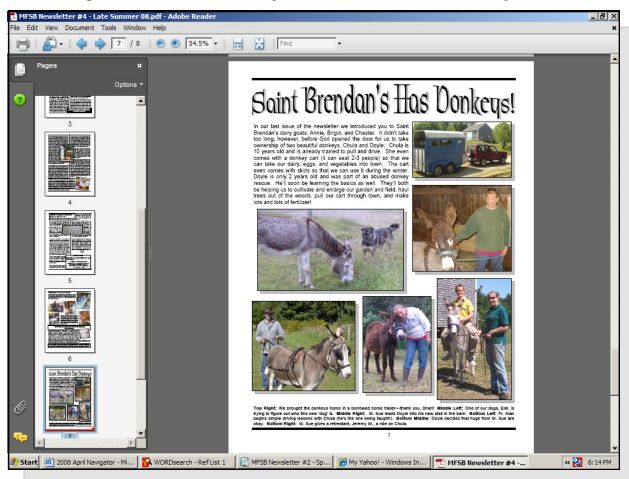
– O come, let us adore him!

It gets harder and harder to look subjectively and adoringly at Christ as He tells us we will struggle and suffer because of Him. But He never stopped adoring the Church as He suffered and died for Her! Jesus adores the Church. Jesus adores *you!*

Adoration will not increase your understanding of doctrine or theology. You will not come away a better scholar, a more convincing apologist, or a sharper interpreter of Scripture. Or will you? If God is Love, and love covers a multitude of sin – and if adoration can subjectively and irrationally overlook the shortcomings of a human lover, what can happen if we adore the perfect, sinless Lamb of God? What if we stop talking to Him with the agenda of rationality and lose ourselves in simply loving Him even when times are tough, even when we're not happy with the way He is doing things? My suggestion to you in the coming weeks is to practice that sappy skill you have left behind when

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you became a 'grownup' and spend some time with Jesus. Don't worry about what you want Him to do – don't be a nagging spouse. Remind Him that you love Him in spite of the problems in your life, in spite of the issues with your congregation and family, in spite of the condition of a world rapidly spinning out of control. Better yet, don't even mention those things! Ignore 'reality' and focus on what really matters. When young parents begin raising their first children, they are told not to neglect loving each other because, one day, careers and children will move on; all they will have is each other. The same is true with us. One day, the world will cease to be and all we will have left is Jesus. Invest in that eternal loving relationship. I guarantee it's an investment worth making!

Rejoice!
Sue Andraeas

NEWS UPDATES

- We welcome our newest member to the Monastic Fellowship of Saint Brendan's, Catherine Thorp of Roslindale, MA.
- Saint Brendan's has received authorization to conduct its Eucharist in Holy Trinity Chapel using its own liturgy adapted and contemporized from the 1642 Book of Common Prayer. The 'imprimatur' was granted by Bishop Barry Yingling, Bishop Ordinary of the Diocese of the East, United Anglican Church.
- During a recent retreat at Saint Brendan's, Dcn. Nathan Haydon of Sherman, TX, was formally received as a Novice of the Monastic Fellowship of Saint Brendan's. He also helped us in the hay fields—23 bales of hay on the truck and another 45 bales in the trailer. Dcn. Nathan is the one on the top!



MFSB OBLATE CEREMONIES

We thought you would enjoy some pictures of several Oblates as they were being received into the Monastic Fellowship of Saint Brendan's.

Included are **(Top)** Dennis Maloney, ObSB, making his Life Profession at Christ the King Cathedral, Phoenix, AZ. Officiating is Bishop Rick Painter.



(Middle) Allison Shonk is being received as a Novice, also at Christ the King in Phoenix, AZ.

And during a recent retreat to Saint Brendan's **(Bottom)**, Dcn. Nathan Haydon of Sherman, TX,



is being received as a Novice during a service in Holy Trinity Chapel at the Priory House with Fr. Alan officiating.

Please continue to pray for our Oblates and for those whom the Holy Spirit is drawing to the place of Oblate commitment.



The call is challenging, but the Lord is desirous of "living sacrifices."

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Monastic Fellowship of Saint Brendan's
38 Cemetery Road
Dennysville, ME 04628