

The Navigator

The Newsletter of the Monastic Fellowship of Saint Brendan's
Volume V, No. 2 — Spring 2010

Where Are We Going?

Fr. Alan L. Andraeas, Prior

This newsletter begins a shift in direction for our Fellowship. We'll be taking some time throughout this year to review what Saint Brendan's has accomplished and to refocus on where Saint Brendan's is going. We'll be asking some hard questions. We'll be talking about some tough lessons. We'll be sharing some significant insights. We'll be turning some sharp corners. We'll be evaluating some major decisions — and all with a view to keeping in step with the Holy Spirit (cf. Galatians 5:25).

It's going to get interesting and we want to make sure that everyone in the Fellowship is fully aware of what's happening. We'll be using future editions of The Navigator this year to help us more fully explore and explain what Saint Brendan's was chartered to be (according to our Articles of Incorporation). In this edition I'm sharing some of the things I've learned during the past five years. Mother Sue will be examining what our call as a Fellowship requires in light of the uncertain times that lay ahead and she begins that process with her current article. Because of the significant amount of material this time around, we're limiting the normal number of pictures in order to give more room to text.



Saint Brendan's In Review: Lessons I've Learned

Fr. Alan L. Andraeas, Prior

We knew we would be emphasizing a life of spiritual discipline, so we began reading about, practicing, and attempting to grow in those disciplines.

We knew others might feel the Holy Spirit urging them to join us in faith and support, so we sought God about the work of spiritual direction.

We knew that people would come to Saint Brendan's for short periods of retreat and that others may ask to stay longer as interns or 'seasonal monks', so we took a hard look at the Benedictine model of hospitality.

And we knew that all of this was going to be lived out in a rustic setting where our home and prop-

The vision for Saint Brendan's was born in us during 2004, almost a year prior to my retirement from the Navy chaplaincy. All we knew for certain was that our civilian ministry was going to call us radically apart from the normal pace of a hectic world (and in many cases, the normal pace of the contemporary Church). As we prayed and sought the mind of Christ, several other aspects of Saint Brendan's slowly began to take shape.

We knew our home would have a small chapel, so we began collecting items toward that end.

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erty would serve as a living laboratory in hard work, simplicity, monastic spirituality, and reviving the lost 'arts' of peasant life – all with the goal of drawing a line in the sand and saying, "The world stops here."

Well, that's where I find myself today: looking back at over five years of monastic aspirations and wondering just how much headway we've made. Are we achieving our goals? Has Saint Brendan's been faithful to its original vision? Are there huge gaps that we must remedy? Have we adequately conveyed this unique vision to you?

As we take time this year for serious self-evaluation, I can't help but recognize several vital lessons that have characterized my own growth. I want to share some of those lessons with you. Mind you, these aren't profound scriptural truths carved out of the original Greek or Hebrew, or musings over the theological writings of the Early Church Fathers, or even a detailed analysis of the more significant monastic disciplines. These lessons are, in fact, rather simple and uncomplicated things (sorry if you were looking for something a bit deeper) that probably best convey what God has needed to work in me – and if you can make use of these as a type of spiritual direction, all the better.

1. Take Off Your Watch.

After 27 years of military service, the first thing I did when the retirement ceremony was over was to take off my watch. It was one of the hardest and yet most 'healing' things I ever did. For the first several months of retirement I wore no watch at all, then I carried around a pocket watch and only referred to it when I was outside and had to come in for the various Liturgy of the Hours in our little chapel. Sometimes the easiest way to be a slave to the world is to be a slave to time – and I had been a slave to time for years (even to the point of making sure that my watch – and every clock in the house – was calibrated to the second with the official government atomic clock at the U.S. Naval Observatory). Jesus tells us in Matthew 6:34a, **"Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself."** James 4:14 says the same thing: **"...you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes."** These were heaven's admonitions for a culture that calculated the passing of time by



**"It is life gone amok
for one simple reason:
it's very hard to find the Lord
in an artificial environment."**

watching the sun. How much more should we heed these words when we walk in near-slavish paranoia to the passing of every minute (or every second!). Think about it. Do you realize how often do you subconsciously, reflexively, mechanically, and involuntarily lift your arm to look at the time even when it has no bearing on what you're doing? This is a life in chains to the world, not a life of submission to the Lord. While I don't suggest removing every clock from your home, try taking off your watch and see how the Holy Spirit can begin to free you from the tyranny of artificial structures as He attempts to chart your day rather than Timex or Seiko.

2. Go Outside. Scripture tells us that we were fashioned from the stuff of the earth (Genesis 2:7; cf., Job 33:6; Ecclesiastes 3:20; 1 Corinthians 15:47). We're dust and clay. You would think that most natural place for us to be is in a setting that knits us to the earth. And yet it's amazing to see what great lengths we go through to isolate ourselves from creation. We work in environmentally controlled office spaces; we live in hermetically sealed homes; we walk on artificial wood floors or synthetic fiber carpets; we prepare our meals on artificial stone countertops; we drown out the sensations of nature with ear buds that flood our heads with music or with virtual reality games that block our eyes from...reality; we sit in air conditioning with a can of aerosol spray to mask the outside air, and we buy fabric softener loaded with chemical scents to duplicate the smell of fresh air! It is life gone amok for one simple reason: it's very hard to find the Lord in an artificial environment, and the world is becoming

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HOW TO CONTACT US

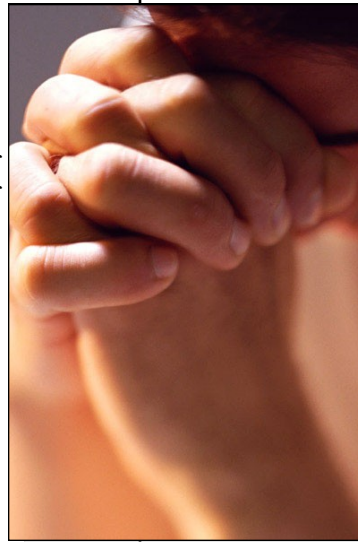
Father Alan L. Andraeas, Prior
Mother Susan G. Andraeas, Prioress

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

more artificial every day. That's why Paul reminds us in Romans 1:20 that God is **"clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made."** Creation is the Lord's greatest witness (cf., Psalm 148) and we do a terrible disservice to ourselves when try to live in isolation from it. Oh the joy of finding a place, even for an hour or two, where there are no horns, sirens, billboards, shopping centers, cell phone towers, pizza delivery cars, satellite dishes on every rooftop, and surveillance cameras on every traffic light. I'm not saying that we have to "go totally green" or turn into a tree huggers, but we must find those opportunities to unplug and disconnect from the world as we've created it so that we can more readily discern the nearness of God through the world that He created – the world from which we were originally made.

3. Work until You Sweat. I'll be the first one to tell you that I hate to sweat. I don't care if it's from playing sports, to working out in a gym, to sitting in a sauna, or to simply being outside on a hot and humid day. And yet I've also realized the value of sweat, especially since being here at Saint Brendan's. The majority of people have jobs that avoid sweat all together; the manipulation of data at computer screens – the labor of information management – while sitting in comfortable office environments (which I did for years). And calluses on our hands? Forget it! What a change for me when it came time to split firewood or drive fence posts or move hay bales. There's a lot of spiritual tempering that can only happen when your body feels the burn of labor. Why is that? Because back in Genesis 3:19 God told Adam (and his progeny) that any reward in life – especially our daily bread – would only come from the sweat of our brow until that day when our bodies return to the ground. This is God's mandate; this is God's design. Now think for a moment at how we have tried to engineer every-

thing in our lives to be as carefree and labor-free as possible, even to the point of using moving sidewalks so that we don't even have to walk anymore. I would contend that everything we do to countermand what God has decreed is a blow to the Lord's discipline and tempering of mankind. Technology and innovation has its place (can you imagine digging the Panama Canal without the aid of heavy machinery?) until it becomes a vehicle of escape allowing us to ascend from that which God said we needed most – sweating for the things that sustain us. Only then can we truly appreciate the eternal Sabbath rest that awaits us in heaven rather than trying to manufacture it here on earth. What should we do? Don't go out and break a sweat while you wash your car on a hot day. That's cheating; it's the wrong kind of sweat; it doesn't directly contribute to your daily bread. If you don't have a manual job, it might be good to find something at your place of business where manual work does take place and offer to help out. Or perhaps you can assist a neighbor who needs help



with physical work so that he doesn't have to hire someone. Or perhaps you can give your time at a volunteer organization (e.g., local food bank, Habitat for Humanity, etc.) that directly contributes to the wellbeing of others.

4. Pray All the Time. One austere religious order has as its governing motto, "Work till you weep, pray till you weep." I suppose that's how they kept their monks and nuns out of trouble during their waking hours. There are lots of guidelines for prayer, including Paul's injunction to **"pray without ceasing"** (1 Thessalonians 5:17). Monastic prayer rope

spirituality seeks to do just that: to bring the individual to a place where the "Jesus Prayer" becomes perpetually self-actualizing, cleaving the

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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..

"holding festival in our whole life, persuaded that God is everywhere, we cultivate our fields, praising; we sail the sea, hymning; and in all the rest of our life, we conduct ourselves according to discipline."

— Clement of Alexandria (c. 195 AD)

“See God’s design for life and see God as you tend to the fragile life under the care of your hand.”

of apples, every corn shock, every bucket of maple sap, every pumpkin, and every mason jar of home-stewed tomatoes. It didn’t take but a day or two after we arrived at Saint Brendan’s before Sue was staking out the

heart, tongue, and spirit even when a prayer rope is not available. And yet most people find such prayerful constancy almost impossible to achieve. That’s why I’ve always considered prayer to be less of a regulated discipline and more a matter of “conversing with God.” What do I mean by that? Well, if Jesus is our ‘friend’ who ‘sticks closer than a brother’ (cf., Proverbs 18:24; John 15:14-15), then we should be in constant conversation with Him by virtue of His proximity. Perhaps I’m just strange, but there isn’t a task, event, or situation where, in my head, I’m not engaged in a running dialogue with God. I’m constantly talking, listening, debating, and questioning. I’ve been this way for years, and even more so now that we’re living in a place far removed from the discordant noises of the world. It’s so much a part of my internal soundtrack that it baffles me when others don’t give God a second thought for weeks on end. Other people must certainly process their thoughts as silent, internal conversations, but unless they’re talking with themselves, who else do their thoughts engage with if not God? With the verbal memories of dead grandparents? With the lyrics of Top 40 hits? Or perhaps even with spirits of corruption? Constant prayer is nothing more than the spiritual awareness that there is never a moment in your day when you are absent from the Lord, whether on your knees in the Daily Office, driving to work, mowing the lawn, or shopping for groceries.

5. Grow Food In Dirt. According to Genesis 1:29 and 2:18 our first God-ordained labor was that of land husbandry (agriculture, horticulture, etc.) for the meeting of our daily needs. It fascinates me to see the innate understanding of spiritual things found among agrarian societies – the reliance, trust, and dependence on God for harvest – more than in technical or industrial societies. I am so thankful for Mother Sue and what she brings to our home (and Saint Brendan’s) from her family’s Mennonite background. The culture of Amish and Mennonite communities is deeply rooted to the earth where God is found in every turned furrow, every basket

location of the garden, clearing it of stones, and turning the dirt with a shovel. I was a Sailor; what did I know of gardens or farms? But her love for the land was soon contagious, especially as we brought in our first tomatoes, lettuce, green beans, radishes, cucumbers, peas, and carrots. We were connected to the things of creation with the same joy that Adam and Eve must’ve felt as they maintained that first garden. We want to get to the point where we only eat what we produce. We’re getting closer but there’s still a long way to go. Nevertheless, we find a direct corollary: the more we turn to the ground, the more we’re compelled to trust in God – not the Winn-Dixie or the Jewel-Osco, not the IGA or the Piggly Wiggly, not the A&P or the Acme, not even the Wal-Mart Superstore, but God. If you don’t have a backyard garden, try a window garden or a bucket garden on your porch or balcony. Begin with a tomato plant and some loose-leaf lettuce. Watch it grow, flower, and fruit as you pray God’s blessing over it. Harvest your garden, collect the seeds from what you’ve grown, and plant your own seeds the following season. Become part of local Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), or shop at a farm market. See God’s design for life and see God as you tend to the fragile life under the care of your hand.

6. Kill Something...Eat What You Kill. This is perhaps the hardest lesson because of practicality, and yet it’s certainly the most important. I’m not talking about flushing a goldfish down the toilet or stepping on a bug. I’m talking about laying your hand on something alive and warm and, by your hand, ending its life for the purpose of satisfying your own needs. It began for us as a necessary part of removing unwanted roosters from our chicken pen (we only needed one male; more than one leads to serious fights). We had a friend come over on ‘dispatch day’ to help us learn how as much of his childhood was spent raising chickens for eggs and meat. His first comment was that we could never understand the place of blood in the Old Testament if we never took



part in a butchering process. His second comment was to suggest that we pray over and bless the

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chickens before we slaughtered them. Wise words, indeed. We are so far removed from the culture of the Bible where blood and sacrifice were such a regular part of life. Remember the number of sacrifices that David made along the road as he transported to Ark to Jerusalem (2 Samuel 6:13,18)? Remember the number of sacrifices that Solomon made at the dedication of the Temple (1 Kings 8:5)? Grace comes to us through the ‘vehicle’ of blood and sacrifice. Blood helps to understand how much grace cost the Father and blood helps us to understand how much grace required of the Son. Well, after many chickens, two geese, and two goats later (and with plans for meat rabbits in the future), killing isn’t getting any easier although we are getting a little more competent. It is a sobering thing to take an animal that looks to you with trust only to rob it of its life. What cost. It also helps you to appreciate the intrinsic value of what God has placed in our hands and not to recklessly or gluttonously consume what we have so carefully raised. What a difference in reverence when you eat something you had to personally slaughter rather than gorging on fast food or meat that comes wrapped in Styrofoam and plastic. Do you know anyone who raises chickens or rabbits or

pigs? Can you help them on butchering day? You will never look at meat the same way again – not with the intent to gross you out but to make you appreciate God’s spark of life in all living things. If you can’t do this, can you buy whole wheat berries and grind your own flour? Believe me, the taste of your bread will be different because of your time and labor; you will certainly be less prone to waste it or discard the crusts. Can you crush and press your own apples for juice? Can you cook down, strain, and reduce your own tomatoes into sauce? Can you ‘kill’ something and, with great humility and thankfulness, draw life-giving benefit from it?

These aren’t profound lessons, but they have certainly had a role in shaping and defining our monastic life here at Saint Brendan’s. Reliance, humility, prayer, labor, simplicity, quietude, reverence, and the constant awareness of the nearness of God. Lessons, perhaps. Gifts, for certain. What a blessing to be a part of Saint Brendan’s as God uses this place (and this ministry) to daily transform us according to His design. ✕

The Foundation

M. Sue Andraeas, Prioress

Winters in Maine are cold. And dark. And windy. We turn our furnace on maybe 10 days of the winter, relying mostly on the heat created by one small woodstove for both warmth and much of our cooking. There are days when it reaches 60 degrees in our living room and we rejoice in the warmth. It’s exciting – we feel like pioneers. But by the end of January we are doubting our sanity, our resolve for simplicity, and (on really tough days) our call to monastic life. The sky is usually cloudy and since our indoor lighting is rather dim, it is usually dark inside as well. (I keep a flashlight handy to look for things in the pantry – and to read notes on my desk.)

Activities revolve around hauling firewood, hauling drinking water for the animals, and shoveling ash out of the woodstove and snow out of the trails to the barns. In other words, it’s not a time for relaxing. Winters are grueling and exhausting. Lent follows, and we feel we have already ‘served our time’ in self-examination and penance; we’re ready for some warmth and sun but they are both slow in coming here in Dennysville.

**“I see some problems here.’
Not the kind of words you want
to hear from an expert...”**

It was during a particularly frigid, dark portion of this past winter that we began to question what we are doing. We understand the farm part, and even the hauling-water-by-flashlight part. But what are we doing where YOU are concerned? What IS the goal of the Fellowship of Saint Brendan’s?

I know what you are thinking – that is, if you read the last newsletter. It was all spelled out and some of it even looked religious in nature. But all of you are far away and the work and prayer of the homestead seems so isolated from any kind of fellowship, particularly when it is only our boots and gloves that sit by the fire to be thawed out and dried between trips to the barn. What can WE achieve as a Fellowship flung across the nation?

Can we really be called a Fellowship? What can we offer you that is not already available through books, the internet, and fellowship with others in your own parishes and congregations? And what do Saint Brendan and Saint Benedict have to do with what happens here? Or with you? Why THOSE guys??

["I see some problems here." Not the kind of words you want to hear from an expert in renovating old

buildings as he studies a rotted beam in the foundation of your house! The man's name is Ed, and we called him to help us repair some damage to the 'old part' of the house, as we call it. The original structure was built in 1804, and the beam was along the ground in what had been the parlor. In the 1950's however, the parlor walls had been knocked out and garage doors installed. And where a piano had once sat, a car was now parked. Concrete ramps were poured in front of the house so that cars could make the 9-inch climb from the ground up into the parlor. Unfortunately, it was also these ramps that allowed water to be trapped between the foundation timbers and the concrete, causing 'some problems' that we needed to fix before converting the space into an office and den. Our foundational issues were both material as well as spiritual. One would cost big bucks; the other much soul-searching and prayer.]

Do you know who Saint Brendan was? Have you taken the time to learn about him? I'm no historian or biographer but I'll give you the highlights in hope



of inspiring you to do your own research. Brendan was born in what is now County Kerry, Ireland, in 484 AD, and was taught how to make boats (called currachs) and navigate the seas. He also traveled Ireland looking for spiritual guidance. He became a monk in 512 and set out to see where God would lead him. Accounts of these voyages contain myth, legend, and even some fact. There are many historians who claim he was the first European to discover America – in

the 6th century! He was a missionary-monk explorer who hungered and thirsted after the wisdom of God. Think of him as a kind of Holy Adventurer or Extreme Spiritual Sportsman.

And what of Saint Benedict whose Rule we follow in a modified format? Well, he was also born in the 480's and better records were kept of this son of a nobleman than those of lowly Brendan, and we know a bit more about him. At the tender age of 14 he was sent to Rome for schooling. But he found his peers to be silly and vain, and their shallow existence frightened him. Through the guidance of Saint Romanus (a monk), who recommended 3 years' worth of solitude to distill the worldliness out

of him (I'll let you investigate his 'Adventures in Purification' for yourself), he renounced the world. The most famous of his twelve monasteries, Monte Cassino, was built where a pagan temple to Apollo once stood (ironic, don't you think?), and it is from this location that he composed his Rule of Life for his fellowship to follow. I suppose this was to protect them from the world as much as from the 'purification' he endured for his own conversion!



[Ed and I stood staring at the rotted beam for over an hour, trying to find ways to fix it without needing a second mortgage on the property. For a little diversion, we decided to check out the basement. More 'problems.' The most obvious was the number of original support joists that had been cut in order to make room for 'modern' plumbing – most of which is antiquated now and also needs repairs. We had just visited a friend's business and had heard of the \$40,000 necessary to fix his foundation problems. Ed and I decided to go stare at the rotted beam outside again. At least then we could stand in the sunshine and look at problems rather than listen to the dripping of leaky pipes.]

Both Saint Benedict and Saint Brendan lived during time the Roman Empire was imploding. Saint Brendan, being more insulated in his small town in southwestern Ireland, may not have felt the repercussions of a dying empire at all. But the impact of Rome's frivolous insanity and coming collapse was very real to Saint Benedict. His Rule was intended to help his religious communities navigate around the excesses of the day, but also to prepare for the lawlessness that would surely follow as the infrastructure, government, economy, and military of the bankrupt Roman Empire fell under its own weight and decadence.

“...Rome's frivolous insanity and coming collapse was very real to Saint Benedict. His Rule was intended to help his religious communities navigate around the excesses of the day...”

[As Ed and I looked at the exposed beam, we noticed that some of it on the northern side – of all places – was still good. Also, the weight of the house was being supported by solid rock and not the wooden beam. That meant we could prop that portion of the house up long enough to replace the beam without using the costly methods usually needed when beams which support the entire structure need to be replaced. PRAISE GOD! We began to discuss options for the replacement of that beam. Railroad ties? An unused smaller beam in the loft of our barn (a remnant from the original construction)? Several pieces of pressure-treated lumber? The solution seemed to be one that would incorporate old-fashioned techniques with new solutions and methods – a sort of ‘variation on a theme’ to use a musical analogy.]

If all of the secular world around you would crumble, what are you built upon?

Back to the ‘bleak midwinter of our confusion and doubt.’ ☺

Monasteries are supposed to be communities of people who live together and ‘work out their salvation’ through the daily bumping into each other in the midst of work, study, prayer and recreation. But the Saint Brendan’s Fellowship does not bump into each other very often. Even retreats made here are done less by members of our Fellowship than by people interested in sustainable agriculture, ‘modern pioneer life,’ or (much to our dismay) cheap lodging rather than spiritual refreshing as they pass from one place to another.

Where we DO tend to ‘bump,’ however, is in our declining budgets, loss of jobs, increasing physical ailments (many due to American diets too rich in chemicals and not rich enough in minerals and wholesome elements that can only come from well maintained soil). Every single one of you who has contacted us in the past year has mentioned concerns over political, economic, and social issues, and has noticed how ill prepared the Church (overall if not individual congregations) is to lend assistance. Many have mentioned declining church attendance; church leadership that lacks vision or that has vision but is punished – and sometimes clergy convicted! – for moving forward with that vision. (It is slowly becoming a criminal offense to maintain a truly Christian stance as some of our Fellowship witnessed when their bishop was imprisoned simply for ringing church bells!) Many of you came to us in the first place because, while you loved your local parish/congregation, you were finding it more and more influenced by ideas and practices of our culture

rather than by Christ’s Commission, and you were looking for a place where spiritual disciplines were still cherished.

Can it be that we, like Saint Benedict, find ourselves needing to insulate ourselves not only from a secular nation that is buckling under its own licentiousness but also from a Church that is no longer just *among* that culture but also *of* that culture?

[Ed and I decided that we had stared at rotted wood long enough. We could not come up with any good solutions until we had removed the rotted parts, dug out the gravel from under the beam, and found out just how much of the original foundation was salvageable. Until then we could guess – or hope – but an objective analysis would first require demolition. We could not simply build around what had been abused and left to disintegrate. Ed went back to his truck and left me with instructions for how Alan and I should begin digging, and to call him when we were ready for the next step. He decided that since we were willing to ‘get down and dirty,’ he would be more of a foreman than an excavator, greatly reducing the cost of renovation. A second mortgage would not be necessary after all! That is the best, but not the only, nearly-miraculous gift to Saint Brendan’s the past week. Winter is over. We have survived another year of hauling, shoveling, musing, and questioning.]

Alan and I would challenge you – especially our Oblates – to begin digging into your own spiritual foundations. You may need to remove some shingles, so to speak, or dig under the main supports of your faith to see if they are truly supported by the Rock of Christ or by rotting traditions of man. If all of the secular world around you would crumble, what are you built upon? Would you withstand the shake? Western civilization endured the collapse of the Roman Empire because men like Saint Benedict examined their spiritual foundations and made sure they were sound. Could it be that God is asking Saint Brendan’s, and the many other similar groups that are ‘variations on a monastic theme’ to do the same? Are you ready to be a Holy Adventurer? Ready to renounce the silliness and frivolity of our day and see where it leads? Contact us and let’s talk about what needs preserving, what needs renovating, and how we as a Fellowship can proceed. We can’t do it alone, and the time of sitting and musing is over. It’s time to act! REJOICE! ✨

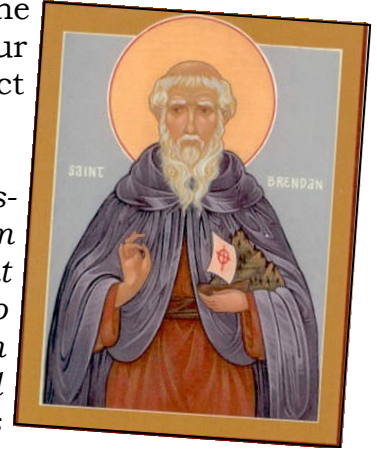


FEAST OF SAINT BRENDAN

The Feast of Saint Brendan is celebrated on May 16. Please take time on that day to

thank God for the wonderful example this early saint of the Church has left us. To learn more about Saint Brendan, visit our website and click on the Saint Brendan link. Below is the Collect for that day:

Almighty and everlasting God, Brendan's heart burned with chastity, monastic fervor, and a hunger to spread the Gospel far from home, shunning the choir of the world and sailing the seas in that perfect trust of Your heavenly providence: Grant that we may also lean upon Your guidance in all things, forsaking the familiar in order that we might carry the image of Your Son into dark and wild places; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.



The Navigator

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