

The Navigator

The Newsletter of the Monastic Fellowship of Saint Brendon's
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The Mark of Intercession

Fr. Alan L. Andraeas, Prior

*“But do not touch anyone with the mark.
Begin right here at the Temple.”
— Ezekiel 9:6 (NLT)*

The Book of Ezekiel is hard to decipher in many places. Through words and symbols the prophet Ezekiel foretold the fall and destruction of the Holy City, God's intended wrath for the surrounding nations, the hope of Israel's restoration, and the ideal architecture of Jerusalem's future Temple (and the layout of the city and lands that surrounded it). All of his prophecies took place during a 30-year period of time while he was in Babylonian captivity.

One of Ezekiel's early visions was a glimpse that God gave him of the spiritual corruption of those who were still living in Jerusalem; a vision of their depravity that required divine reckoning; a vision that drove him to the ground, prostrate before the Lord in prayer. And like Abraham who interceded for the citizens of Sodom and Gomorrah, Ezekiel cried out, **“Ah, Sovereign LORD! Are you going to destroy the entire remnant of Israel in this outpouring of your wrath on Jerusalem?”** (Ezekiel 9:8).

This vision had another purpose. It also revealed God's heart for those in Jerusalem who groaned over the spiritual captivity of the people around them. These people had a mark placed on their foreheads by a heavenly scribe (whom

some scholars suggest was a pre-incarnate theophany of Christ), sealing the people against God's judgment similar to the homes of the Jews in Goshen which were marked with the blood of the Paschal Lamb on the night of the final plague of Egypt (Exodus 12:13,21-23). In the language of the original text, the mark the scribe was required to make on these people was the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet which, in early Hebrew, looked like an 'X' or a form of the cross.

I would like to call this particular cross the “mark of intercession.” These were the people who grieved and lamented over (and presumably repented for) the detestable things that were being done in Jerusalem and throughout the land.

These were people who grieved in their hearts over the failure of their countrymen to walk in obedience and righteousness before God, especially since this disobedience began right in the very courts of the Temple. I'm surprised these ‘intercessors’ even continued to live there. I would've been tempted to move my family to a place that was less rebellious. And herein lies the point that I believe God wants to make, particularly to those who are drawn to a monastic walk.

We know that many folks who've entered monasteries and convents throughout history were similarly grieved over the corruption of society – their biographies tell us this – and as such they

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“The life of monastic spirituality is most assuredly one of intercession, whether you wear the habit of a religious order or, as a lay monastic, simply kneel before God in your prayer closet at home.”

were seeking places of holy refuge. Their lives were characterized by that Amish sense of “... **come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing;...**” (2 Corinthians 6:17). This is, without a doubt, a legitimate reason for monastic life. But is it the only reason, especially for lay monastics who don't have the luxury of a cloistered house of equally-minded men or women where the rebellion of the world is forbidden to enter? I ask this because too often the walls of a vowed community can often cause the people inside to forget the world from which they came – out of sight, out of mind. And that is a shame as they become too heavenly minded for their own earthly good. Perhaps I should rephrase that: they become too heavenly minded that they forget or neglect the good they can bring to earth.

Did you realize that the early monasteries were often built on hilltops that overlooked the villages or towns in the valleys below? Why was that? Certainly it was to model the call to



come apart from the world and live consecrated lives, but it was much more. They were built in visually prominent places to remind the townsfolk of the 'higher call' that God places on everybody. It was to allow the efficacy of the Eucharist to flow out from the monastery chapel and down into the town, spiritually bathing the town in the blood of Christ. And it was for the vowed religious of that monastery to keep a prayer vigil of tears and intercession over the townsfolk in order to repent for those who couldn't (or wouldn't) respond in obedience to the righteous claims of God.

The life of monastic spirituality is most assuredly one of intercession, whether you wear the habit of a religious order or, as a lay monastic, simply kneel before God in your prayer closet at home. Sadly, this is not always the case. For example, how often do we follow the patterns of the world when the news of the day is far from encouraging? Our initial reaction the TV is to complain, grouse,

criticize, gossip, and judge. Our vitriol actually becomes a spoken spiritual poison as we critique the efforts of everyone from the Oval Office to our neighbors next door. Shouldn't the news be our call to prayer as we attempt to see the world through the eyes of Christ rather than through the eyes of political pundits or conspiracy theorists? Even the wringing of our hands in despair is a spiritual concession to hopelessness. I think it's significant that, in our text from Ezekiel, the judgment of God began with those who were in the courtyard of the Temple, with those who should've been grieving and lamenting for Jerusalem but weren't. Doesn't this sound similar to 1 Peter 4:17? (If you're not familiar with that verse, please look it up.)

For those in the Monastic Fellowship of Saint Brendan's, we hope that each member bears upon his or her forehead the mark of intercession, groaning first for the depravity that is ever increasing in the Church, then for the depravity of the nation, and finally for the depravity of the world. We need to be in prayer for the people who won't pray. We need to be in an attitude of worship for folks who refuse to worship. We need to offer up our sacrifices for those who don't know Christ. We need to repent for those who can't repent, shouldering some of the weight of their sin and stubbornness until they come to a place where they can repent. We need to pray for the stay of God's hand for folks who don't know how close God's hand of displeasure truly is. We need to be monasteries of intercession.

Additionally, intercession doesn't only mean prayer. We can intercede through our actions. We can give groceries to the person next door who just lost his job. We can help a struggling teen with tutoring before he decides to drop out of

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school. We can help clean the house or do the laundry of a young mother who came through a difficult surgery. We can read the Bible to someone who has severe glaucoma. Every action we perform in the name of Christ is a 'groan' to the Lord over the ills and brokenness of the world around us.

A final note. We know a wonderful lady who lives on Long Island. She has chosen to live in an apartment in one of the roughest, meanest, gang-

infested communities on the Sound. And she lives alone. Many of her church friends have encouraged her to find somewhere else to live; that she's being careless with the safety of her life. Do you know what her answer is? "Every church has abandoned the neighborhood. If I don't live here among these people and lift them up in prayer to the Lord, who else will? Who else will be Christ to them? They have nobody else." The mark of the cross is on her forehead. I pray that it's on mine. I trust that it's on yours. ✕

Ideology vs. Ministry

M. Sue Andraeas, Prioress

"And he [Jesus] gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ."
— Ephesians 4:11-13 (KJV).

Alan says I like to 'push the limits' of things. It's not that I intend to be rebellious or untrusting. I just want to make sure that if I am supposed to accept something as fact that it is accurate, complete, and trustworthy from all angles. Paul says to test everything, holding on to the good. (1 Thesalonians 5:21 (NIV)) Lately, my testing has been limited to what I've come to think of as Christian ideologies. An ideology, Webster says, is in part, "the integrated assertions, theories and aims that constitute a sociopolitical program." Karl Marx used this word to define the components of a society or organization that are taken for granted to the point that they are no longer even thought about – they are no longer tested. In other words, they are those things that have become so rudimentary in our thought processes that they become part of us;

'accepted' truth. The ideology that I have been testing is nothing less than our concept of *church*. I could spend this entire article trying to explain exactly how this testing came to pass, but I'll simply say that from every direction my life takes – from every circle of friends, family, work, and worship that affects my life – I have seen so much turmoil and division of Christ's people that there was nothing left for me to do but to return to 'the test' and hold on to the good – which also implies letting go of the bad. What exactly *did* God have in mind when He decided to give His Son a *Church* for a Bride? What kind of arranged marriage is this supposed to be anyway?

For me, the test began with Genesis, but that part was rather predictable. It got more interesting once I started really unraveling the Scripture from Ephesians found at the beginning of this article. Let's dissect it a bit.

First of all, Jesus is giving these five kinds of people to His Bride to prepare Her to be a better Bride. That means that in order for the Church to best please Her Spouse, she needs these folks! Who are they? Apostles (the ones who make sure that the Church accurately maintains Scripture as a whole,

"What exactly *did* God have in mind when He decided to give His Son a *Church* for a Bride? What kind of arranged marriage is this supposed to be anyway?"

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..

*"This way is indeed narrow, for even now the majority of those
In the Church are lovers of their flesh and cannot bear to walk in it."*

— Origen (c. 228 AD)

“the problem of disunity within the Church has less to do with denominational differences than it does with a lack of testing our paradigms and holding on to what is good.”

Christ to the lost world. Many put the greatest emphasis on teaching but do not hold their members to any accountability for what is taught; discipleship is optional and subjective at best.

specifically the Gospel); Prophets (the ones who are used by God, as His spokesmen, to talk to the Church and the world); Evangelists (the ones who hunt down the lost sheep and bring them into the Church); Pastors (those who ‘shepherd’ the Church, caring for the wellbeing of Her members); and Teachers (those who instruct the Church, making disciples out of members). At this point, the punctuation of the KJV gets a bit dicey. Paul didn’t use punctuation so it’s sometimes hard to tell what goes with what in his writing. Often-times, verse 12 is translated to mean a chain reaction. Other times it becomes a job description for the five ministry tasks. I tested those two contrasting translations. Why would the five ministry tasks need to be redefined as jobs for perfecting the saints AND work of ministry AND edifying the body of Christ? Weren’t those tasks inherent in the jobs of apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor and teacher? But what happens if it is translated more as a chain reaction? Those five kinds of people were given to the Church to perfect the saints. (WHY?) So that they can do the work of ministry. (WHY?) For the edification of the Church, the body of Christ. (WHY?) So that we *all* reach unity in the faith AND unity in the knowledge of Jesus AND become mature. With maturity, we *all* attain to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. In other words... it’s the Church leaders who prepare the rest of us in holiness, so that through our ministry to others we, as the Church (not as individuals!), become the body of Christ, are united in mature faith and knowledge of Jesus and... at that point, we collectively become the Bride Jesus wants us to be.

But what has our Church ideology become? Well, some denominations have thrown out the prophets – others elevate them to such a lofty position that very little matters but the latest ‘word from the Lord.’ Some love evangelism but end all responsibility after the lost are saved; discipleship never happens. Some put much emphasis on the preservation of Scripture and Tradition, often forgetting that those things are not the end-all but the means to the end; to ensure the wellbeing of the congregation or parish so that it may effectively be

As I pondered all of this, it occurred to me that the problem of disunity within the Church has less to do with denominational differences than it does with a lack of testing our paradigms and holding on to what is good. We’ve let ideology get in the way of our preparations for our wedding day! Paul says that unity is the result of edification. Edification is the result of ministry (service). And ministry flows from perfected saints, not converts who have never moved beyond the point of that first decision to follow Christ.

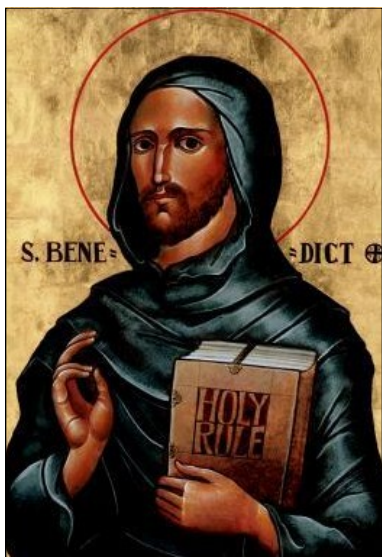
Let’s test the meaning of a few of these words, looking at the Greek words that we translate into our English Scripture. *Edification* – the Greek word used is closely related to architecture, to building a structure. It’s the result of ministry, more specifically, the work of the ministry. The Church is built upon the work of the ministry she does. Work = toil (*ergon* – we get our English word ‘ergonomics’ from this Greek word). Ministry = servanthood. This Greek word for ‘ministry’ is where our church word “deacon” comes from. *Diakonia* means an attendant, a servant, someone who waits on others in order to assist them. But what does our typical Church ideology show? (I am generalizing; I know some of you are members of fabulous congregations – count it among your most cherished blessings!) Typically, congregations complain about the lack of ‘service’ they receive from their church leaders. The preacher talks too long or is too boring; the music is not professional enough; the seats are uncomfortable; the sanctuary is too hot – or too cold; nobody came to visit; nobody sent a card; nobody remembered to empty the trash cans; there aren’t enough missionaries.... We whine about the ‘poor service’ we receive. The flip side is church leaders who are burnt out because they have to do nearly everything to keep the church running and the grumblers less grumbly, or who get so infatuated with their own personalities and gifts that

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they forget to let the congregation have a role in ministry. Most people who participate in the work of the church expect a pay check in return – or recognition – or at least a plaque with their name on something when they die. Our church ideology is not working because it is not Biblical. We forget that WE are supposed to do the work of ministry; the church leaders are to train us for it! For all our talk of ecumenism, we are more divided than ever, and I think this is why. We have not understood Paul’s “chain reaction” that causes unity.

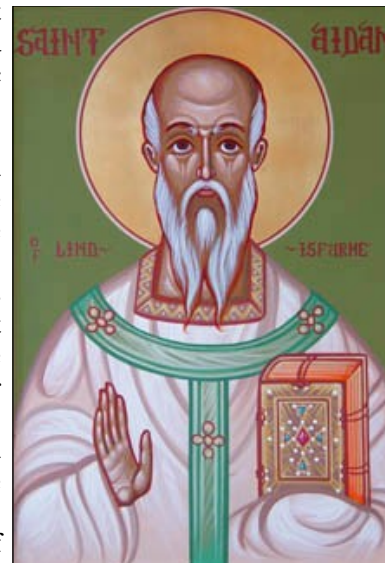
What kind of ‘ministry’ are we, the pew-sitters, supposed to be doing? Well...who were the first to establish orphanages for the care of abandoned, parentless children? The Church. Who established the first universities? The Church. What about libraries? Hospitals? Food pantries? Places of hospitality for travelers and the homeless? Nursing homes for the elderly? It was the Church. More precisely, it was often the monasteries. These were not church leaders but communities of men and women who did the ‘work of ministry.’ The Church of our day has outsourced nearly all of these societal needs to governmental and philanthropic groups, writing a check to cover expenses while someone else does the work. We volunteer a few hours at a food pantry and pat ourselves on the back for our great work, but we have, for the most part, distanced ourselves from the true ‘work of ministry.’ Worse yet, we have come to understand the ‘work of ministry’ to mean the ‘upkeep of the church.’ We interpret our expected participation in worship, in teaching, in the overall needs of the church building and our congregation as ‘ministry’ when, in fact, the deacons – the ‘workers’ – were established to do the outreach portion. We are so blinded by our selfish ideology that we have forgotten that church duties are NOT ministry; we are not called to minister to ourselves



but to the needs of the lost, the hungry, the naked, the poor, the oppressed, the captives, the orphans and widows. We are called to worship Christ in our church and then serve Christ by going out into the world!

St. Benedict (c. 480-543) found the Church of his day to already be so corrupted by wrong ideology that he wrote

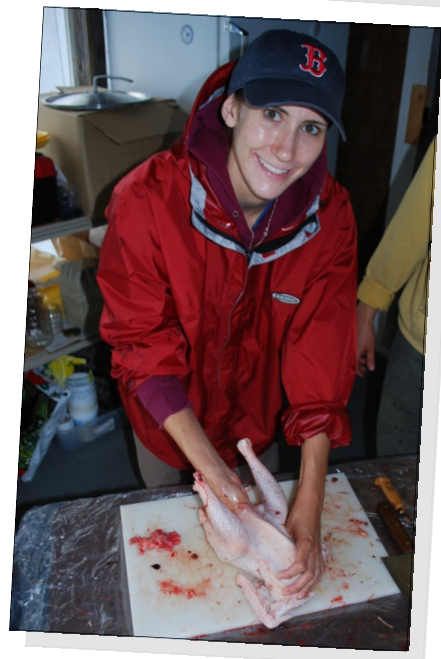
his Rule to reestablish the edification of the saints in order to do the work of ministry. St. Aiden (Irish missionary to England; c. 635) established Lindisfarne, the monastery Alan and I studied as we consecrated Saint Brendan’s as a homestead monastic community. His patron, the king, wanted St. Aiden and his men to live in the castle and enjoy the luxuries of the court. But Aiden, in his wisdom, knew that he had to escape worldly comforts for the sake of edification, unity, and preparation for the work of ministry. Note that both of these men were already



finding that the Church was getting lost in ideology even before the first schism of the church occurred – the split between Rome and Constantinople! I don’t think it was only differences of political opinion and church doctrine that caused disunity in the Church, but a forgetting of the Her primary role. We are to do the work of Christ, and in doing so, *we* are prepared to be a fitting Bride for Christ. Our work of ministry IS our wedding preparation. Unity follows maturity, not ideology. And maturity follows ministry, not doctrine. And ministry follows holiness, not philanthropy. It seems to me that if the Church would stop bickering among herself about who is right and who came first and who is the ‘real church,’ and if she got back to serving rather than outsourcing, a lot of the differences would not seem so big. I also think that a lot of the schism would heal itself as we unite in the common goal of Wedding Preparedness. Yes, right doctrine and the defending of the Gospel is mightily important! But it is not the end goal. Rather, it is part of the job description. It should unite, not divide.

Test what YOU believe your role in the Church to be. Unless you are an apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor, or teacher – one ordained by God and not just by men – test what Jesus means for your ‘work of ministry’ to be. If you think it’s a church committee or singing in the choir, think harder! (Those are gifts given back to the Lord – not ‘the work of ministry.’) Then roll up your sleeves and ask God for a clearer job description. The world is getting crazier and we pew-sitters are wallowing in selfish ideology. Time to get to work folks! ✘

The Priory House: Something's Always Going On



Top Left: Our summer intern, Stephanie, helps M. Sue finish one of the new kitchen cabinets.

Top Right: Fr. Alan's sister and her family came to visit from PA—pictured here are Bonnie, Joanna, Andrew, Grant, and Allen. **Middle Left:** M. Sue's mom, Rowena, also came for a visit; here she is with one of our dairy goats, Annie. **Middle Center:** A neighbor in town, Kathy, comes over for a goat milking lesson. **Middle Right:** Saint Brendan's is trying its hand at honey bees. **Bottom Left:** Friends of Saint Brendan's, George and Susan, come up for a retreat from CT. **Bottom Middle:** A group of local homeschoolers get a fiber and spinning lesson from M. Sue as well as a visit with all the animals and an introduction to homesteading vs. farming. **Bottom Right:** Emily, recently moved into the area from CO, helps us on butchering day as she 'dresses' one of our young chickens; she also joined us in the Daily Offices and Eucharist.

The Final Word: Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906—1945)



Let him who cannot be alone beware of desiring a place “in community.” He will only do harm to himself and to the community. Alone you stood before God when He called you; alone you had to answer that call;...and alone you will die and give an account to God....But the reverse is also true: Let him who is not in community beware of being alone. Into the community you were called, the call was not meant for you alone; in the community of the called you bear your cross, you strive, you pray....We recognize, then, that only as we are within the fellowship can we be alone, and only he that is alone can live in the fellowship. Only in the fellowship do we learn to be rightly alone and only in aloneness do we learn to live rightly in the fellowship. It is not as though the one preceded the other; both begin at the same time, namely with call of Jesus Christ. Each by itself has profound pitfalls and perils. One who wants fellowship without solitude plunges into the void of words and feelings, and one who seeks solitude without fellowship perishes in the abyss of vanity, self-infatuation, and despair. Let him who cannot be alone beware of community. Let him who is not in community beware of being alone....The mark of solitude is silence, as speech is the mark of community. Silence and speech have the same inner correspondence and difference as do solitude and community. One does not exist without the other. Right speech comes out of silence, and right silence comes out of speech. [Dietrich Bonhoeffer, German theologian, seminary founder, pastor, and concentration camp martyr, wrote these words in his book, Life Together: the Classic Exploration of Christian Community. This quote is a profound one for the Monastic Fellowship of Saint Brendan’s and our disciplines of solitude and worship/hospitality. God, indeed, calls us to come apart AND calls us to come together.]

The Monastic Fellowship of Saint Brendan’s

We’re so grateful for our Friends and Oblates,...and the many unofficial ‘friends’ who don’t appear on this list (our mailing list is much longer than this!). Barry Folland has been received as a Postulant and our newest member, Rev. Gagnon, is from Canada...which now makes Saint Brendan’s an ‘international’ ministry! Please be in prayer for one another.

FRIENDS:

Dcn. Tom Abbott, FL
George Bundock & Susan Ober-Bundock, CT
Zachary Carman, NY
Leona Downer, MA
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Dick & Sue Fake, PA
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