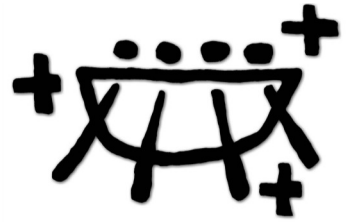


The Navigator



The Newsletter of the Monastic Fellowship of Saint Brendan's
Volume VII, No. 2 — Spring 2012

This Old House: A Priory House Parable

Fr. Alan L. Andraeas, Prior

“Your camp must be holy, so that He will not see among you anything indecent and turn away from you.”

Deuteronomy 23:14b

You never know when a spiritual truth is going to reveal itself. Take today for example. It's Holy Saturday. Some mulberry tree saplings just came in the mail and we had to get them planted. But before we could begin digging, Mother Sue needed to take the laundry down from the clothes line (yes, she hangs our clothes out to dry!). Several of my cleric shirts had some lint on them and, with tears in her eyes, she confessed that she didn't know how to fix it—our washing machine has a problem with my clerics—and she has tried a number of solutions to no avail.

I knew that a spiritual 'pressure wave' had been slowly building for quite some time, and this was the catalyst to bring it to the surface. "I know how to wash clothes, but I can't get your shirts clean." And then, connecting to the larger concern, she continued with teary eyes, "I'm not stupid; I know how to clean; I'm good at cleaning. And even though I clean this house every day I never see any results. It's my job...and I

can't do it!" My heart broke for her and the Holy Spirit said, "Listen to what she's saying."

In one sense she's right. Our house is difficult. The original part of the house is 208 years old...and the 'new addition' is 100 years old! Sometimes squirrels find their way in and they run through the walls and rafters. It gets dusty. We track in a lot of dirt from the barnyard. Parts of the house are in a constant state of remodeling. Our wood-

stove releases an amazing amount of ash into the house and onto every flat surface. And the dogs are already shedding their winter coats. It's a part of the trade-off for rural living in Washington County. As a consequence, cleaning the house is a continuous process and I know it weighs heavily on her.



Mopping, sweeping, vacuuming, dusting; she does it every day and there's always more to do. In fact, she recently had a dream where the main character was...a bucket of *Top Job*. Remember that? And we received

a food co-op order this morning that included a container of *Bon Ami*. Remember that? I

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guess you can't be a good German without having a penchant for scrub buckets and dust rags.

Well, the mulberry trees got planted and it was time for me to do the afternoon milking. While I was in the dairy parlor with the goats, the Holy Spirit began to unfold a little 'word' in my head: "As difficult and frustrating as it often seems to be, I have given you this house; it's a parable." And then the Holy Spirit showed me a number of biblical parallels for the things that were happening to Sue.

In the Song of Songs the 'lover' cries out for the "little foxes" to be caught; the little foxes that ruin the vineyard (Song of Solomon 2:15). Jesus taught about the woman who swept her house in order to better discover the treasure that was there (Luke 15:8; cf., Amos 5:6). Paul writes about the need to purge or sweep the old 'leaven' out of our lives so that the sanctity of Christ's presence won't be compromised (1 Corinthians 5:7). And James is adamant that we should lay aside all moral filth and evil in exchange for the Word and the hope of salvation (James 1:21). There were more, many more, that the Holy Spirit showed me but I think you get the picture.

This year is already fraught with numerous challenges—political, economic, technological, environmental—but especially spiritual as assaults on our Christian faith become more frequent, brazen, acceptable...and legal. As a result the Church is being called upon to get its house in order. After all, God's judgment begins with His own family (1 Peter 4:17). But with our analogy in mind, when we live in homes that are climate controlled, hermetically sealed, UV protected, radon-emission monitored, intruder monitored, etc. (or even when we have a regular cleaning service come in to take care of our 'clutter'), God's built-in



Mother Sue sweeping up 200-year old floor timbers during renovations.

parable becomes mute (and moot) and we end up forgetting how essential it is to be in a constant state of internal attentiveness and external vigilance. There are so many things in our lives that need to be picked up, bagged up, scrubbed out, and left out on the curb as trash. What's more, no one can do it for you. As Luke 21:19 says in the KJV, "possess ye your souls."

In other words, monastic faith (no, Christian life in general) is to be one of scrupulous vigilance and cleansing; putting away what doesn't belong there, straightening up what does belong there, and making an assessment of what needs to belong there. It's different for each of us, but it might include less television, more Scripture reading, squelching fantasies in exchange for prayer and devotion, restricting certain kinds of reading material, assessing the godly value of intimate friendships, increasing service to others as unto Christ—you get the picture. Nor is it a one-time deal. Just as you can't straighten up a house with a cursory "once over" and expect it to stay perfect forever, you also can't "give your heart to the Lord" without committing yourself to regular, constant, and even daily attention to its upkeep. It takes spiritual vigilance and spiritual scrub buckets and dust rags.



My challenge for the Fellowship, then, is this: just as Nehemiah had his workers rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem with a trowel in one hand and a sword in the other (cf., Nehemiah 4:18), may we push forward in our faith with the spiritual disciplines in one hand and spiritual *Top Job* in the other. As temples of the Holy Spirit, our lives require that kind of consideration (1 Corinthians 6:19). ✱

NOTE: As Sue edited my article, she wasn't so sure about this last paragraph ("It's too sappy!"), but I insisted, so here it is. *Sweetheart, I don't say it often enough, but you are the best, most diligent housekeeper I know and I have never questioned the sincerity of your desire and the effort of your labor to make our home, clean, safe, and happy. You are my living parable. I love you!*

Be Still

Mother Sue Andraeas

By the time you read this we will all be celebrating Eastertide, but for me, today it's Good Friday. Although I'd like to be meditating upon Christ's crucifixion, my thoughts keep turning to Mary. That's probably because I've spent much of the afternoon in a barn stall with Matilda, a pregnant goat who needed tending. Sitting there in the hay, listening to 'Tillie' chew and make pregnant goat sounds, I thought a great deal about the Mother of God who also spent a night or so in an animal stall. Actually, my Marian meditation started this morning when I was milking Brigid, our queen goat (head of the herd). While listening to the milk hit the pail, I wondered if Mary had a goat.

Scripture doesn't say much about her day-to-day life, but Mary still had to feed her family and there were no supermarkets. I'm sure she was familiar with milking cows or goats and tending chickens, cleaning barns and watching over pregnant livestock. And I wondered if it was these ordinary chores—meal preparation (farm and kitchen chores are so intertwined when your food comes from your barn), mending and sewing, and looking after younger siblings—that tempered her with a disciplined obedience to answer the angel bearing God's plan for her with the words, "...Be it unto me according to thy word" (Luke 1:38, KJV). I wonder,

though, if she was assuming that God's plan would be something a bit more typical: that she and Joseph would be wed, that she would give birth to God's Son among loving family, and that life would go on pretty much as usual? Isn't that the way our brains work? We assume that God will use us where we are and in doing what we're doing in the way our society is used to having things happen.

But for Mary, the next thing she knew was that this man who loved her was now legally under obligation to stone her because she was pregnant *before* they were married (Deuteronomy 22:20-21). She probably didn't



think for a moment that God's great plan for her would be packaged in a situation that appeared to be adulterous, scandalous sin! In her shoes, I'd be wondering if, secretly, Joseph actually believed the angel's story—and mine. I'd be waiting for him to burst back into 'normal' reality, ready to stone me because the social pressures of their life were suddenly so incredibly degrading and embarrassing.

Then, Jesus is born! I'm sure that in the middle of labor, she was not thinking about weird celestial signs overhead or remembering the prophecy of Scripture. She is in a

MONASTIC MUSE

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

“As I conceive it, sanctity is perfect pureness of mind, deeds, thoughts, and words. And in its final degree, it is also sinlessness in one's dreams.”

— St. Clement of Alexandria (c. 195 AD)

“...this God she worshipped all her life and promised to obey had asked her to fulfill a plan that unfolded in a way she had not imagined.”

stall with animals, just like I was, sitting in the barn with Tillie. Looking around, I decided this is NOT the place I would want to have a child. It's difficult enough helping an animal give birth in a stall where there is no light or water! And poor Mary had only Joseph as a midwife; a man who's probably wondering how he got himself into this. Their first big 'adventure' should have been a honeymoon—not the delivery of a baby that was not his! Shouldn't Jesus be born in the Temple?

Soon others arrive. The Son of God is not visited by holy people but by shepherds. They are stinky (not too many showers on a sheep pasture) with greasy lanolin, bits of grass, and scrub weeds stuck to their clothes and hair. These men were on the fringes of Jewish society. You might compare them to our own migrant workers. Again, I tried to put myself in Mary's position. Exhausted from a long journey and the birth of a first child with no experienced midwife or the assurance of a woman who has been through this ordeal, surrounded by critters—and now these men show up, ranting on about yet another angelic message.

I do not think the biblical note that Mary *pondered* all these things in her heart can be interpreted as, “Mary sat among the animals, thinking, ‘hmm—wasn't that lovely?’” Her 'ponderings' were not necessarily a review of events, or a passive acceptance. Even though her body was exhausted and probably very still, her mind was attempting to reconcile the events of this night—and of the previous several months of gossip and accusations—with “Thou hast found favor with God” (Luke 1:30).



'Ponder' in the Greek is the compound word *sumballo*. *Sum* = union or completeness. *Ballo* = to throw; sometimes in a violent way. It can mean to cast out (as in dung—think 'mucking') or striking or thrusting. In other words, maybe Mary's 'pondering' involved a complete paradigm shift of her interpretation of God's prophecy. Not that she doubted God or was angry by what He was doing in her life, but she did need to readjust her expectations of God's plans to His REAL reality rather than her perceived reality. There was a 'defragging' that needed to unfold so that the events taking place and her expectations could be reconciled. And she did this pondering in her 'heart'—her thoughts and feelings, not with blind acceptance but with resolve. She worked to make her expectations fit God's plan rather than vice versa.

By the time Jesus was twelve, Mary's *sumballo-ing* had mellowed. If you recall, Mary and Joseph realized Jesus was missing after a 3 day's journey away from Jerusalem. They found him in the Temple, astonishing the experts (Luke 2:42-51). But this time, Mary 'treasured' these sayings in her heart. This time, she did not *sumballo* but *diaterreo-ed*. *Dia* = through, and *Tereo* = to 'keep an eye upon' or 'guard from injury.' It's connected to the idea of a fortress. So THIS time, Mary did not have to mentally throw God's working in her life around in her head to make it fit. She had learned to watch and protect God's work and accept it as good! Notice: in the stall, her body

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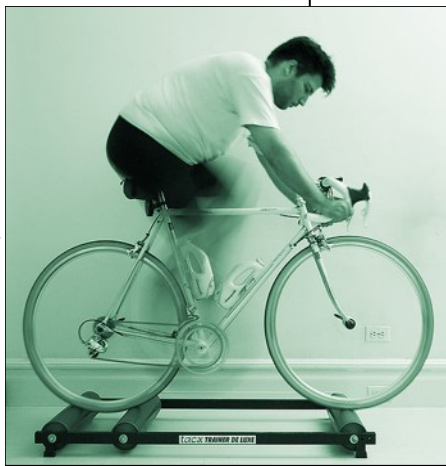
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was still; her mind was *sumballo-ing*. Now, her body is walking home but her mind is *diatereo-ing*. Big difference! Amazing spiritual growth!!

“Be still’ is the psalmist’s equivalent to ‘be it done to me according to thy word.’”

Elsewhere in Scripture God tells us to be still and know that He is God (Psalm 46:10). I’ve thought about this verse a lot lately, mainly because of emails with a former Buddhist who is now part of our Fellowship. Kevin and I have been discussing meditation and how Christian and Buddhist forms differ—and about my hyperactive tendencies that make sitting still not very conducive to meditation. My body is rarely still and when it is, focus is impossible. Luckily for me, Scripture’s command to ‘be still’ is not a command to ‘sit still.’ (WHEW!) It is the Hebrew word *raphah* which means to be slack, or feeble. It actually comes from a word that means to be healed. In other words, it means to let God have His way—and to interpret your life as His work rather than trying to interpret it through earthly success or earthly normalcy, and that this acceptance of God’s will brings healing and wholeness to our minds and bodies. “Be still” is the psalmist’s equivalent to “be it done to me according to thy word.”



life-transforming Plan, you are not being still (being *raphah*), nor are you allowing God to do to you according to His word, and it is causing you problems. Trying to be a godly person while also trying to be earth-ily ‘normal’ is a hopeless endeavor. Stop looking for earthly normal and start watching for heavenly spectacular. BUT remember that God’s idea of ‘spectacular’ is often the world’s idea of scandal, embarrassing, impossible, risky, insane. And often, things appear to get worse before God’s plan can even be seen. (Think of Mary lying in the itchy hay while migrant shepherds bring all their noise, filth, and other culturally unacceptable ‘ick’ near God’s Son. If He is willing to subject Christ to that kind of nonsense in Mary’s life, what do you think He’ll subject Christ to in yours!?)

If your life has been like mine (and judging from the emails and phone calls we’ve had here lately, it has been), you are wondering when things are going to return to normal. You might be defining ‘normal’ as comfortable, convenient, and easy. My advice to you is this: if you want that kind of ‘normal’ earthly life, stop going to church, stop praying, and break your relationship with Jesus. If you are asking God for that kind of ‘normal’ and trying to squirm out of his

As I finish this article, it is now several weeks past Easter. (I knew this would happen.) Tillie still has not delivered her kids. (I did not know THAT would happen!) Our life here is taking unexpected turns—long-term retreatants, financial snafus, family emergencies, financial drains—you know how it goes. I can’t promise that I’ll sit still as I mull them over, but I will try to *be* still—to ‘treasure’ rather than ‘ponder.’ God is at the helm and I just need to remain disciplined, and obedient to His plan rather than mine. Things may become ‘weird’ but they will not be wrong so long as we remain disciplined and obedient. We may be embarrassed but we will not be abandoned. Happy Easter! Be still, and treasure God’s will for you in your hearts. ✕



CHAPEL NEWS: Holy Trinity Chapel at Saint Brendan’s is soon to become its own building. It began almost seven years ago as a room upstairs in the Priory House with an altar and a few kneelers. Last year the altar was moved downstairs to make our Sunday Eucharist more accessible to our neighbors and friends. There has been a small but faithful group of believers here on a weekly basis and it is time to build a true chapel. At this point there is over \$5,000 in the chapel construction account; it comes from offerings, donations, and the sale of books and prayer ropes. It doesn’t sound like a lot, but all we need is the lumber; we’ll do all the work ourselves. Please pray for wisdom in planning the next phase of this project.

The Monastic Fellowship of Saint Brendan's

Thank you to everyone who has renewed their memberships for this year,...and to those who are new members! We also continue to bless those whom God has led into different paths of service. As you look at this list and hold each other up in prayer, please remember that our newsletter actually goes out to quite a few more people than what you see here. We love them and count them as 'Members in the Spirit.' ☺

Life Vow

Fr. Alan Andraeas (ObSB) – ME
M. Susan Andraeas (ObSB) – ME
Dennis Maloney (ObSB) – AZ

Postulant

Jeffrey Felter – FL
David Laudone – CO
Allison Shonk – AZ

Friends

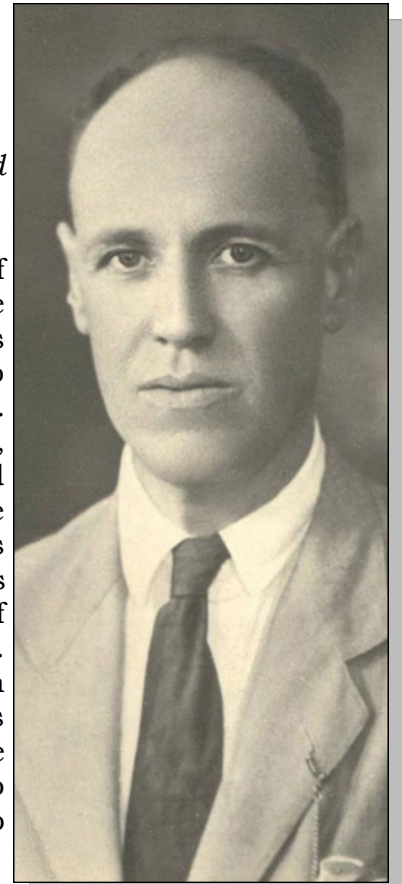
Thomas Abbott – FL
Joyce Barr – ME
George Bundock – CT
Zachary Carman – VA
Ann Carter – ME
Anthony Ciere – MA
Leona Downer – MA
Richard Fake – PA

Susan Fake – PA
Mary Greene – ME
Betty Glazener – TN
Kevin Johansson – S. Africa
William Landmesser – ME
Clayton Landwehr – AZ
Marcia Landwehr – AZ
Judith Laudone – NY
Donna Miller – ME
Susan Ober – CT
Laura Pocius – TN
Carolyn Talley – AZ
Helene Thatcher – NY
Catherine Thorp – MA
Steven Tilney – ME
Susan Tilney – ME

The Final Word: James O. Fraser (1886-1938)

[From J.O. Fraser's "The Prayer of Faith"—extracts from his diaries and letters while a missionary to the Lisu people of Southwest China.]

Unanswered prayers have taught me to seek the Lord's will instead of my own. I suppose we have most of us had such experiences. We have prayed and prayed and prayed, and no answer has come. The heavens above us have been as brass. Yea, blessed brass, if it has taught us to sink a little more of this ever-present self of our into the Cross of Christ. Sometimes our petition has been such a good one, to all appearances, but that does not ensure its being of God. Many "good desires" proceed from our uncrucified selves. Scripture and experience certainly agree that those who live nearest to God are the most likely to know of His will. We are called to be "filled with the knowledge of His will" (Colossians 1:9). We need to know more of the fellowship of Christ's death. We need to feed more on the Word of God than we do. We need more holiness, more prayer. We shall not, then, be in such danger of mistaking His will. It does not follow that because a thing is the will of God, He will necessarily lead *you* to pray for it. He may have other burdens for you. We must get our prayers from God, and pray to know His will. It may take time....God is not in a hurry. He cannot do things with us until we are trained and ready for them.



[A British Protestant missionary to China with the China Inland Mission, he pioneered the work of Christ among the Lisu, a Tibeto-Burmese people in the isolated mountain region of Southwest China. Despite poor initial results, he persevered in witnessing to the people, learning their language, translating the New Testament, preparing a hymnal in their own tongue, and writing a catechism. Through patience, prayer, and the sovereign move of God, now over 200,000 Lisu Christians look to J.O. Fraser as their spiritual father in Christ. Overseas Missionary Fellowship (OMF), the successor to China Inland Mission, has recently released a docu-drama, "The Breakthrough," on his life.]

Life at the Priory House



TOP LEFT: M. Sue and Fr. Alan's son, Zachary (a member of the Fellowship), was married on February 11th to his new bride, Siobhan, at Holy Family Parish in Memphis, MI. **TOP MIDDLE:** Mary (a member of the Fellowship and the chapel) was present for the birth of one of our newest goats, Quincy. He was born one hour after our Sunday Eucharist. **TOP RIGHT:** Fr. Alan stands next to a local farmer, Myran Curtis (the father of a chapel member), after loading up over 100 bales of hay. Myran, 79 years old, never broke a sweat while throwing hay bales down from the loft of his storage barn! **BOTTOM LEFT:** Brigid, the 'queen' goat, decided to engage in quality control of the new hay. **BOTTOM MIDDLE:** The Priory House bathroom undergoes demolition in order to replace the old bathtub with a new shower. **BOTTOM RIGHT:** David (a member of the chapel), visits with some of the new goats, now 1 month old (the kids, not David!).

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