

The Navigator

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Prayers of an Exile: How to Live in Babylon

Fr. Alan Andraeas, Prior

*But seek the welfare of the city
where I have sent you into exile,
and pray to the Lord on its behalf,
for in its welfare you will find your welfare.
Jeremiah 29:7*

As Christians we've probably all heard the saying that we're "in the world but not of the world." It's a good saying. It even sounds biblical. But have you ever tried to find it in Scripture? It's not a direct quote; you won't find it. However, it is loosely based on a portion of Christ's prayer for His disciples (and us) in John 17:13-19.

We're told twice in this short text that our lives no longer bear the world's mark of ownership. We're told that, through the Word and because of Christ, we've been sanctified (made holy and set apart for God's use) and granted heavenly citizenship. And we're told that we've been blessed with the grace-filled joy of Jesus. And yet, here we are...in the world. And to complicate things further, it's a world overshadowed by "the evil one" (v. 15b).

You see, until that day when the Church is finally called to its heavenly glory as the eternal Bride of Christ, we have

no choice but to be 'in' the world. We are subjected to its laws, its economics, its institutions, its systems of government, its moral decline, and (more and more) its persecutions. What are we to do? Sadly, many individuals and congregations turn to a solution called 'inculturation'—a fancy term that simply means, "When in Rome, do as the Romans do."

Technically, inculturation is what happens when a person adapts to and assimilates the culture in which he lives. We might call this "maintaining a low profile" by buying what the world buys, watching what the world watches, playing how the world plays, eating what the world eats, wearing what the world wears, listening to what the world listens to, talking the way the world talks, conducting business the way the world conducts business, engaging in relationships—casual or intimate—according to the world's standard for relationships... and, well, you get the idea. As I'm sure you can tell, the only thing this helps to produce is a Christianity that is nearly indistinguishable from its prevailing culture.



However, before we begin to lift our noses and *tsk tsk* such weak faith in others, keep in mind just how subtle this process is. In fact, it's something we deal with at Saint Brendan's on a regular basis! Even today as I write this, we had to look at items on our credit card purchases that didn't need to be there (my fault); we had to deal with poor diet choices that have directly

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impacted our health (my fault); we needed to reevaluate how our evening 'free' time has been slouching more and more toward 'Hollywood' entertainment even though we don't have a TV—although we do have Netflix internet downloads (yep, my fault)! To put it bluntly, I'm very prone to inculturation and if I'm not careful, Saint Brendan's will pay the price.



So how do you live in the world without being absorbed by the world? Perhaps we can make use of God's instruc-

tions to Israel during their time of Babylonian captivity. The verse I have in mind is at the top of this article. Take a moment to read it again. What's happening here?

The nation of Israel was living a divided life; called to be the People of God while also wanting to live like the surrounding nations. God had to place them in exile far from home to get their attention. This exile was going to last for 70 years during which time He had some peculiar orders for them to follow: build houses, plant gardens, eat the produce, marry, and have children. In short, set up "housekeeping" within the enclave of fellow Jews. Then He adds this curious addendum: "But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare" (Jeremiah 29:7, ESV).

Did you catch that? Do what you can for the welfare of your place of exile, especially by praying on its behalf. Don't become like the culture. Rather, be agents of grace to the culture while remaining distinctly Jewish under obedience to God. So what does that mean for us?

From a monastic point of view it means maintaining the "order of heaven" while "abiding on earth." Many of the early Church writers viewed a believer's time on earth as either a pilgrimage or a time of exile; living in one country while belonging to another. And much of that writing dealt with how to preserve one's divine

citizenship while setting up housekeeping in the domain of "the evil one."

Early Celtic monasteries had a unique way of dealing with this situation. Once they identified the place where a monastic compound would be built, they took 40 days to pray over and consecrate the land. Next would come the erecting of high cross where prayers would be made until the oratory or chapel was built. Then—and this is the interesting part—they would heap up a huge earthworks to form a large, circular enclosure where the compound would be built. They believed that within that earthen wall, heaven would be recreated in miniature—the rhythms of prayer, the order of life, the occupation of their hands, the sacrifice of worship. And from that monastic compound they would intercede for the neighboring communities, for the welfare of their king protector, and for their mission and witness to the surrounding area without the need to compromise their faith.

That call hasn't changed over the centuries. Our homes and our churches are supposed to be miniature representations of heaven; where the order and economy of God is maintained while at the same time not neglecting to pray for and seek the welfare of society. The only way we can fully impact the communities



around us for the sake of heaven is... to be more like heaven than the communities that surround us. The darkness can't perceive the light when the light shines no brighter than the prevailing darkness.

If you're looking for a challenge or a goal for 2013, let me make a suggestion: avoid the easy road of Christian inculturation. Why? Because the moment your life "in exile" looks more like heaven than earth, God is able to incarnate the presence of Christ in the midst of Babylon. ✕

"The darkness can't perceive the light when the light shines no brighter than the prevailing darkness."

Peace Unplugged

M. Sue Andraeas, Prioress

*Peace I leave with you,
my peace I give unto you:
not as the world giveth, give I unto you.
Let not your heart be troubled,
neither let it be afraid.
John 14:27 (KJV)*

It seems that, for the past few years, there has been a specific direction the newsletter articles were taking. This year, as I have been praying about what that direction might be for 2013, the only answer that seems to emerge is, 'Listen to what people are asking you.' People have been asking a lot of things, but there has been a theme, a recurring topic, that follows along these lines: "How does God talk to you?" "How do you know it's God you're hearing?" "What does God sound like?" "How do you know you are not grieving the Holy Spirit?" "What would Jesus do—and how can you be sure?" So I guess, people are interested in not just talking to God but also to listening to what He has to say back. I'm encouraged by that.

I can't tell you how YOU will hear from God. I can tell you what my experience is, and maybe that will aid yours. And I can tell you that my explanation is not very popular because it requires letting go of conveniences. American life is so very full of conveniences! Microwaved food, instant access to information, and cars that can be turned on by remote control so that they're

warmed up for you (in colder climates) or cooled down for you (in warmer climates) before you even leave the house. More computing power than was necessary to send men to the moon now exists conveniently in the back pocket of nearly every person in this country. In fact, one of the saddest news stories I heard during this past summer's power outage in New York was that people were scrambling *not* to find food and water for their families and themselves, but for a cup of coffee and a place to recharge their cell phone. Without it, they felt naked, disconnected...inconvenienced.

I'm not opposed to technology. (I'm typing this on a computer, not a manual typewriter after all.) What does concern me is that technology has stopped being



a tool and has become instead a crutch, an addiction. It is hard to hear God when you fear being alone or disconnected from the world, even for a few hours.

Hearing from God, having a two-directional prayer life, is a huge topic; one that might continue in upcoming newsletters. I'd like to hear your opinions. What helps *you* connect with God? In the meantime, here are a few suggestions of things that help me.

1. Get used to being you again. There was a time when people were rather comfortable with being in silence with their own thoughts. That silence was

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...

"The greatest apologetic for the Gospel has always been a community that actually lives by the Gospel. Our love for one another—our visible demonstration of living community—will prove our legitimacy...and his."

— Elmer L. Towns, Co-founder, Liberty University

slowly replaced with records, and radio, and television. Now it's nearly impossible to find a public place that is not filled with

sound, or pictures from a muted TV, or from individual smart phones, iPod's, tablets, etc.. So carve out a few hours every day when the technology is turned off or ignored. Start slowly if it makes you anxious to have to hear just your own thoughts, but keep working at it. Can you go a whole day without 'plugging in?' A whole weekend? (Let people know you're taking a 'techno-retreat' so they don't panic when you don't instantly message them back...)



2. Spend time in nature. We spend so much time in climate-controlled office buildings, schools, stores, and homes. We are surrounded with synthetic materials in our furniture, carpeting, clothing...food. This is the work of man. God created man to live in HIS creation. If you can't get out for a walk, at least look out the window. Put up a bird feeder and see who comes to use it. Grow a house plant—anything! I wonder how much damage we do to our ability to hear God simply by removing ourselves from anything connected to the Garden of Eden...

3. Memorize Scripture. If this isn't something you do often, start with a short verse, but with the goal to increase the numbers of verses you have memorized as well as the length of the passages you memorize. Why memorize Scripture when you can have Bibles downloaded to your Kindle or other gizmos? Because your technology is not the same as your brain. Memorized Scripture rolls around in your head even after you've put the screens away. It can transform how you think about other things in ways that technology cannot. (I just finished memorizing Luke 1:68-72—the Song of Zechariah. Those of you who regularly pray Morning Prayer or Lauds will recognize it! But reading it every morning is different from putting it in my noggin and rolling it around in there when I wake up in the middle of the night, or while I'm doing chores, or driving.) What better

way to hear a friend than to recognize his voice in a crowd? Scripture is the voice of God. You should be able to hear His voice in the silence of your brain.

4. When you pray, don't say anything. Just listen. You'll be amazed at how many 'requests' come charging in! Just remind yourself that...He already knows them. Acknowledge them—and let them go. Then you'll start to think of all the terrible things you've done in the past. He already knows them too! If you have already confessed them, let them go. If not, you can apologize, and then get back to listening. God may not have anything to say. It's ok! People who love each other don't always have to be yacking at each other. Sometimes just sitting in each other's company is more than enough.

When Jesus left his disciples, He left his peace with them. He didn't just leave peace, he left *HIS* peace. His



peace is not worldly peace—He told them that. Technology cannot bring peace. Modern conveniences cannot bring peace. Peace is not convenient. The disciples received Jesus' peace after being commanded to love. Love is not convenient either! Love is sacrificial, not selfish. And love and peace are the flip sides of the same coin. (For the bigger picture, read John 14. Better yet, memorize it! ☺) Be at peace. Un-trouble your heart. Stop being afraid. It begins with letting go of the worldly conveniences which, as it turns out, are not all that convenient after all—not if you want to hear from God. ✠

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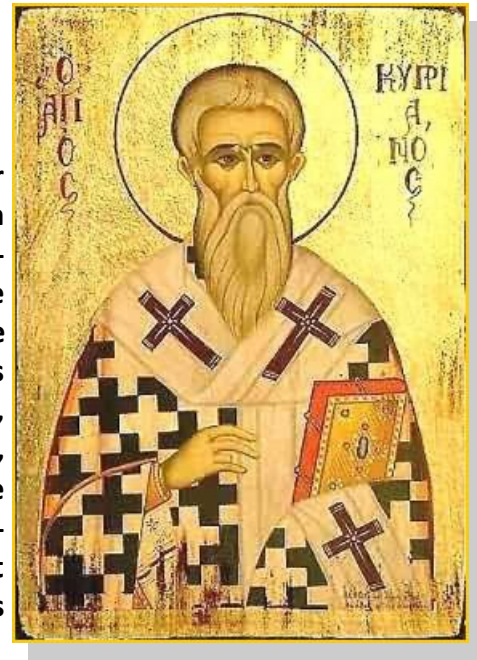
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(Left) Father Alan recently had the privilege to officiate at the wedding of David Caron, a Friend the Monastic Fellowship of Saint Brendan's. David and his new bride, Carolyn Potts, are "tying the knot" as Fr. Alan wraps his stole around their hands. The wedding took place on January 5th at the Berlin Mennonite Church in Berlin, OH. **(Right)** Mother Sue uses the snow blower to clear the driveway at Saint Brendan's following a heavy snowfall. The snow was quite deep with some drifts reaching up to five feet. This was a Sunday morning; it was one of the few times Holy Trinity Chapel had to cancel worship because of weather. We started 'moving' snow at 7:30 AM and didn't finish until almost 1:30 PM!

The Final Word: St. Cyprian of Carthage (d. 258 AD)

"Christians used to sell houses and estates so that they might lay up for themselves treasures in heaven. They presented the proceeds from them to the Apostles, to be distributed for the use of the poor. However, now, we do not even give the tenths from our patrimony [what we inherit]! And while our Lord bids us to *sell*, we rather *buy* and increase our store. Thus has the vigor of faith dwindled away among us. Thus has the strength of believers grown weak. And, therefore, the Lord, looking to our days, says in His Gospel, 'When the Son of Man comes, do you think He will find faith on the earth?' We cannot help but see that what He foretold has come to pass. The kingdom of God is manifested in the virtue of our living. We should ever and a day reflect that we have renounced the world and are in the meantime living here as guests and strangers."



[St. Cyprian was Bishop of the church in Carthage, North Africa, during a time of fierce persecution. He often had to work underground. However, he was eventually captured and executed by the Romans. An extensive collection of his writings remain which provide tremendous insight into the structure of the church in the middle of the third century. A contemporary of Cyprian, Pontius the Deacon, wrote of him, saying, "Neither poverty nor pain broke him down. The sufferings of his own body did not shake his witness. His house was open to every comer. No widow left him without an apron filled with food. No blind man was unquided by him as a companion. Who is sufficient to relate the manner in which he bore himself? What compassion was his! What vigor! How great his mercy! How great his personal discipline! So much sanctity and grace beamed from his face that it confounded the minds of all beholders."]

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