

The Navigator

The Newsletter of the Monastic Fellowship of Saint Brendan's
Volume VIII, No. 2 — Spring 2013

The Apple of My Eye

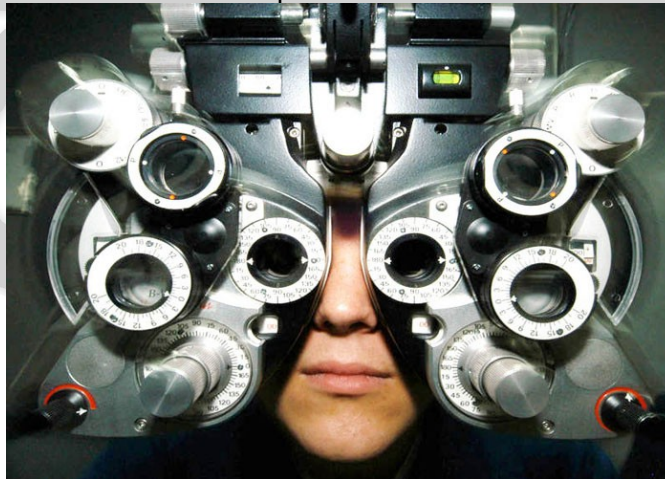
Fr. Alan Andraeas, Prior

"I have made a covenant with my eyes;..."

Job 31:1a

"Cover your right eye and repeat back to me the lowest line on the chart that you can clearly read." I had an eye exam several weeks ago and it coincided exactly with the Psalter readings in *The Breviary*—you know, the one that includes, **"Turn away my eyes from looking at worthless things, and revive me in Your way"** (Psalm 119:37). We're often reminded about how precious our eyesight is and we are quick to care for it, but are we as quick to safeguard our spiritual eyes? After all, from God's perspective our spiritual eyes are perhaps more important than our physical eyes! Let me tell you what I mean.

A part of my eye exam included a test on a fairly new piece of equipment: an Optomap® Digital Retinal Imaging System. In less than one second per eye, it took a 200 degree-of-arc digital scan of my retinas, capturing almost 80% of the curved surface of the back of my eyeballs in breathtaking, panoramic color pictures. I was given the chance to see the image results on a computer screen and I was stunned by the incredible resolution as it recorded the smallest blood vessels and finest optic nerve filaments. Zooming in on



potential areas of concern allowed my eye doctor to see if there were any abnormalities that could lead to compromised vision. Amazing! Even more amazing is the fact that my individual retina patterns are as unique as my fingerprints—no one has retinas exactly like mine!

It's the bio-mechanics of vision, however, that truly interest me: how the rods, cones, and optic nerves all function together like light-sensitive camera film, sending data to the visual cortex of the brain which assembles and interprets the information into our perception of sight. And it's this process, engineered by God, which also speaks of a greater biblical truth because the spiritual equivalent of that light-sensitive 'plate' is your heart (according to St. Augustine) and soul (according to St. Chrysostom)—the very seat of who and what you are.¹

What we let into our eyes can flood our spiritual depths with brilliant light or smothering darkness (Matthew 6:22-23; Luke 11:34-36). Jesus, as a result, must then characterize our lives as having either imitated the kingdom of heaven and light

(Continued on page 2)

IN THIS ISSUE OF "THE NAVIGATOR"

The Apple of My Eye	1
Devotion to What?	4
Monastic Muse	4
Life at the Priory House	6
Monastic Fellowship of Saint Brendan's	7
The Final Word—St. Cyprian of Carthage	7

(Revelation 21:23-24; 22:5) or the kingdom of hell and darkness (Matthew 22:13; 25:30; cf. 13:42,50).

Heaven or hell? Those are pretty ‘terminal’ assessments, especially when we live in a culture so impregnated with every conceivable form of visual poison! Certainly He will cut us some slack,... right? Please don’t make that false hope the cornerstone of your faith. You see, at one end of the biblical spectrum we have Christ’s admonition to pluck or gouge out our eyes if they hanker toward visual sin (Matthew 18:9; Mark 9:47)—and thankfully His words are written as hyperbole! At the other end of the spectrum is the encouragement to **“fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith”** (Hebrews 12:2). And everything in between is a sober acknowledgment that Satan

loves to despoil Christians through the **“lust of the eyes”** (1 John 2:16).

These are not archaic cautions found in Scripture. Neither have we been given permission to ‘adapt’ our faith to this permissive culture. We

have been given these scriptural cautions in order to defend ourselves against the poison that seeks to overwhelm our culture. That’s why the Bible is inundated with references about the eyes—for example: **“Open my eyes, that I may see wondrous things from Your law,”** and **“Turn away my eyes from looking at worthless things, and revive me in Your way”** (Psalm 119:18,37). It’s clearly a matter of what we should behold AND what we should avoid.



From a more monastic perspective we must agree that our desire is to live first and foremost in “intentional devotion” to the Lord. This kind of devotion is more than what we *give* to God (through our offerings of prayer or the practice of spiritual disciplines); it must also involve what we *become* for God (a living sacrifice and incarnation of His Son, Jesus Christ). Saint Brendan’s *Rule of Life* speaks of this in the sections on “Self-Control” (pp. 29-30) and “Temperance” (pp. 69-70). As our *Rule* says,

Taken together, we see that temperance calls for the discipline of our appetites, thoughts, emotions, and interactions. Temperance calls us to the right use of created things, the right employment of our thoughts and desires, and the right practice of social behaviors (p. 70).

This is especially important since most theologians see the ‘eye’ as representing the entire person. When we pursue those things that are dark, we ourselves are “plunged into moral darkness.”² What we choose to fix our vision upon, then, is nothing short of declaring where we have decided to place our loyalties. This ‘vision’ includes our pursuits, imaginations, desires, and dreams. It can color the nature of our hearts through our choices for entertainment, the things we search for on the internet, the materials we read, how much we imitate secular

“What we choose to fix our vision upon, then, is nothing short of declaring where we have decided to place our loyalties.”



society, and even what we try to envision about someone else (especially of the opposite sex) when it's not even visible (e.g., Matthew 5:27)! All of these things have the ability to cloud and darken us because they draw our attention away from heaven and chain it, instead, to the things of earth—an earth which is passing away (1 John 2:17).

What are we to do? God is faithful to tell us. Proverbs 7:1-2 is a good place to start—**“My son, keep my words and store up my commands within you. Keep my commands and you will live; guard my teachings as the apple of your eye.”** We've heard that expression—**“the apple of my eye”**—before, but it's usually a reference to how God beholds us (Deuteronomy 32:10; Psalm 17:8; Zechariah 2:8). In this case, however, we are being told to keep something as the apple of *our* eyes; specifically the commands and teachings of the King so that we might live. One classic commentary says that this Hebrew phrase is actually very similar to early Arabic which literally means “the little man of the eye”—that when you look into someone's eye you can see reflected back a miniature portrait of yourself.³ What God is saying here is that, when He looks at us, He wants to see His law, His commands, His very Living Word reflected back at Him. It makes sense because if He can see Himself in us then we are clearly filled with more of Him than we are of the world.

This transformation into Christlikeness can simply begin as a spiritual exercise in displacement: the more of one thing you pour into your life, the less room there is for something else. It's like taking a jar full of dark, black, used motor oil and slowly pouring into it clean, clear water. The water, being heavier than the oil, settles down to the bottom of the jar and causes the oil to flow out of the top. If you add enough water you will eventually displace all of the oil. There's certainly some cleaning that

needs to happen, and that's what repentance and confession is all about, but 'displacement' is something that we can work on right away. No doubt that was a part of Paul's admonition to the believers at Philippi: **Finally brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things** (Philippians 4:8).



We live in a world that is rushing pell-mell into spiritual darkness. We're assaulted from TV commercials that border on soft porn to 'Christian' romance novels that, even a generation ago, would've been banned from most high school libraries. You can't drive by a highway billboard sign, walk past the perfume and cosmetics counter of a department store, or read a weekly entertainment magazine without being targeted by the scintillating messages of the world. And oh how easy it is to be seduced by them! Remember, Satan's tactics have never changed; not since he held the forbidden fruit up to Eve and she saw that it was **“pleasing to the eye”** (Genesis 3:6). Let us strive, therefore, in our journey of devotion and discipline to fix our eyes on those things that fill us with light, hope, truth, and purity so that, when Jesus finally looks at us, He will see nothing but Himself within us. ✠

¹ *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*, NT Vol. 1a, InterVarsity Press, 2001, p. 142.

² *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Vol. 8, Zondervan, 1984, p. 178.

³ *Keil & Delitzsch: Commentary on the Old Testament*, Vol. 6, Hendrickson Publishers, 1966, p. 114.

“...if He can see Himself in us then we are clearly filled with more of Him than we are of the world.”

Open my eyes, that I may see glimpses of truth Thou hast for me;
Place in my hands the wonderful key, that shall unclasp and set me free.
Silently now I wait for Thee; ready, my God, Thy will to see;
Open my eyes, illumine me, Spirit divine!

(“Open My Eyes” Text and Music - Clara H. Scott)

Devotion to What?

M. Sue Andraeas, Prioress

“And every creature which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, I heard saying: “Blessing and honor and glory and power be to Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, forever and ever!”

Revelation 5:13

“How do you pray the Offices every day and keep it feeling fresh and ‘real’?” That’s a question we are asked from time to time, and the simplest answer is... we don’t. It’s human nature to become less attentive to the things we are exposed to on a regular basis. I think that’s why people are prone to change devotional books every year or to look for new and exciting ways to keep their prayer life ‘interesting.’ But the simplest answer isn’t always the best answer, or the most complete. And I think it also veers away from the question that is more at the heart of the matter: “What are we trying to accomplish during devotions?” Let’s ponder this one carefully for a moment.

‘Devotions’ is a curious word to begin with—the fact that it’s plural. It’s curious because it only appears in Scripture once, in reference to the Athenians’ ‘devotions’ that included a statue to the ‘unknown god’ (Acts 17:23). I know. The definition of words change over time, and we now use ‘devotions’ as a way to identify the time and tools we use for our daily Scripture reading, prayer and meditation; and often, it also

includes some form of commentary or life application. But here’s the rub. As the definition of ‘devotions’ has changed, so has the focus.

The Church, very early in its inception, began meeting for prayers every morning and evening. Until just a century or so ago most church congregations and parishes still met, twice a day, for prayer and Scripture reading. It wasn’t a time to learn and mature, but a time to, well, to devote to Christ. *He* was both the Object and the Subject of that time. Most of the prayers were scripted out, not because individual intercessions weren’t important, but because people could pray personal intercessions on their own. Morning and Evening Prayer were communal times, where all the ‘living

stones’ of the ‘Body of Christ’ would meet together with one voice, with one spirit to devote to their Lord.

Even today many use a prayer book, written ages ago, that unites them one to another as they pray. They read the same Scripture verses and pray the same prayers that people all over the globe are reading and praying. So even though they are praying and reading alone (or as a couple or family) they are united with others in their parish—and in their denomination. Still, the

purpose for their ‘devotions’ remains a bit more clear; it is a time which they *devote* to the Lord. Many monastic communities expand those two prayer times to as many as eight, stopping to devote time to the Lord every few hours even through the night.

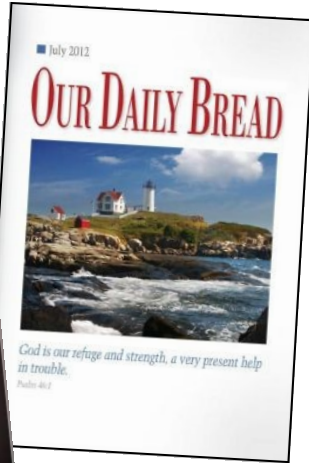
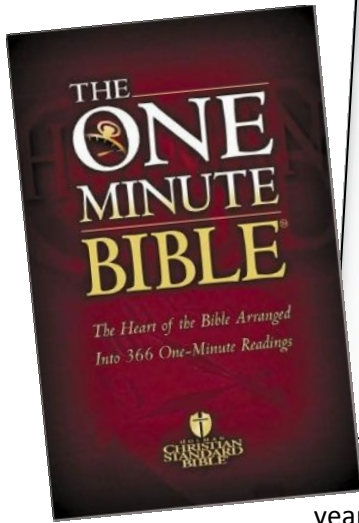


MONASTIC MUSE

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

**"I have so much to do today
that I'm going to need to spend three hours in prayer
in order to be able to get it all done."**

— Martin Luther, 1483-1546



But somehow, over the years, our culture has demanded that we pick up the pace. We barely have time to meet together with our families for even one meal a week, let alone twice daily for devotions! And we often live too far away from our churches to be there twice daily for prayer. (Sadly, most of our pastors and priests do not even have that ‘luxury’ anymore.) Christian book companies are more than happy to produce devotional guides that fit into the cracks between our activities, many of which follow the three-part format of (a) Scriptural Sound Bite, (b) Explanation, and (c) Short Prayer.

I can’t help but see the resemblance to much of our internet news where an ‘expert’ gives a brief explanation of what’s happening, followed by a quick poll of people who witnessed it, followed by a link to readers’ comments concerning the news and the poll. There is no depth, no history offered to put it into context. Much of the ‘article’ is not well thought out but is simply ‘off the cuff.’ And many of the stories follow a contemporary ‘trend’ such as (in our current culture) ‘the economy,’ ‘jobs,’ ‘wars and rumors of wars.’ How much of our ‘news’ truly explains these topics in a way that offers any real perspective? The same is true with devotional guides that offer the same sound bite/commentary/response format.

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

St. Paul had something to say about this kind of format, particularly when it came to spiritual matters. In his letter to the Colossians he begins by identifying the sound bites: ‘don’t touch this, don’t do this’ (Colossians 2:20-21). Then he says: “These things have the appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion, humility, and harsh treatment of the body, but they have no value against self-indulgence” (v. 23). In other words, these kinds of sound bite self-help, DIY instructions look good and may help *you* to look good, but they are not going to help you break free from bondages that tie you to the sins of the flesh. In other words, it’s all surface and no depth; it’s hypocrisy.

What solution does he offer? “Set your mind on the things that are above, not on the things that are upon the earth” (Colossians 3:1). That means our devotional life should be focused upon heavenly things rather than on earthly things or, more accurately, upon Christ and not upon ourselves. Heaven doesn’t change much. The angels and elders are not constantly looking for new and exciting things to sing about. They have found that worshipping the Lamb who was slain, the Christ who has died and is now alive, is exciting enough! If our own enthusiasm wanes, it is not the Subject of our praise that is the problem. We don’t need a new topic or a new ‘angle.’ We need to let go of some of our earthly obsessions so that we have time to devote to our devotions—we need to refocus our devotion to the One who is worthy of it.



There will still be times when the words of Morning and Evening Prayer (or the Offices) are recited as just words. We are still ‘vessels of clay.’ But please—resist the urge to shortchange your spirit by ‘downsizing’ your devotional life to spiritual sound bites and the commentary of man. Give your mind and body a chance to be still so that your spirit can worship. Allow yourself to be infused with Scripture and with the prayers of the Ancient Church. Spend TIME meeting with Christ—nothing on earth is so pressing that you do not have time for your Lord and King. He is very much aware of the activities of your day. Spend some time each day in the stillness of His eternity.

Rejoice!

Life at the Priory House



TOP LEFT: Brent and Pam, brother and sister from North Carolina, visit Saint Brendan's—although Doyle the Donkey thinks that they came just to visit him! **TOP MIDDLE:** If you could zoom in on this picture, you would see that M. Sue and our queen goat, Brigid, are sharing a Fig Newton just prior to Brigid's delivery of triplet kids. **TOP RIGHT:** One of the kids born that night was Yives, our first buckling of the season. **MIDDLE LEFT:** Kathy, a regular helper on the property and a good friend of Fr. Alan and M. Sue, comes over to help bottle feed new kids. **BOTTOM RIGHT:** Fr. Alan spent several weeks during the early Spring cooking down maple sap. It was an experiment to see how feasible it was to make our own maple syrup. **BOTTOM LEFT:** You have to cook down 40 gallons of sap to produce one gallon of syrup. But after you taste it, you know it's worth it!

Monastic Fellowship of Saint Brendan's

Thank you to everyone who has renewed their annual membership with the Monastic Fellowship of Saint Brendan's. We also welcome all of our new members as well as bless those whom God has led into different paths of service and devotion. As you look at this list and hold each other up in prayer, please remember that our newsletter is also sent to many more people than are listed 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
Mary Greene - ME
David Laudone - CO
Bryan Martin - PA
Allison Shonk - AZ
Catherine Thorp - MA

FRIENDS

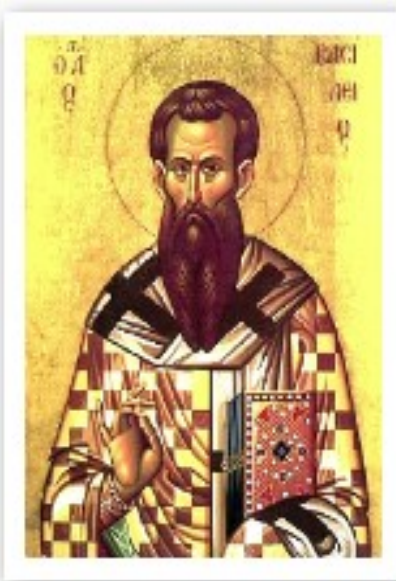
Dcn. Thomas Abbott - TX
Joyce Barr - ME
Zachary Carman - VA
David Caron - OH
Ann Carter - ME

Julianne Clark - VA
Dcn. Michael Clark - VA
Richard Fake - PA
Susan Fake - PA
Betty Glazener - TN
Rebecca Greene - ME
David Holifield - CA
Kevin Johansson - S. Africa
William Landmesser - ME
Clayton Landwehr - AZ
Marcia Landwehr - AZ
Judith Laudone - NY
Donna Miller - ME
Susan Ober - CT
Charles Opara - Nigeria
Laura Renwick - AL
Carolyn Talley - AZ
Helene Thatcher - NY
Steven Tilney - ME
Susan Tilney - ME

The Final Word:

St. Lactantius (c. 250-325 AD)

"True things must be preferred to false; eternal things to those that are temporary; useful things to those that are pleasant. Let nothing be pleasing to the sight but that which you see to be done with piety and justice. Let nothing be agreeable to the hearing but that which nourishes the soul and makes you a better man. If it is a pleasure to hear melodies and songs, let it be the praises of God. For he who chooses temporal things will be without eternal things. And he who prefers earthly things will not have heavenly things. Whoever, then, prefers the life of the soul must not relish the life of the body. He will not be able to strive after that which is highest unless he will have despised the things that are lowest. However, he who prefers to live well for eternity will eschew the present. Rather he will gladly subject himself to all sorts of conflicts and labors while he is on earth so that he may have heavenly consolation. And he who prefers to live well for the present will live ill in eternity. For he will be condemned to eternal punishment by the sentence of God."



[Lucius Caелиus Firmianus Lactantius was a Christian apologist who began his career as a teacher of rhetoric at Nicomedia. He was a convert to Christianity. His abilities to teach and defend the Faith were quickly recognized. He was called upon by the Emperor Constantine to be a Christian tutor for his son Crispus. He is mostly known for his writings, several of which still survive. "Divinae Institutiones" was a treatise written to present the truth of Christianity to scholarly skeptics. "De Opificio Dei" was an attempt to prove the existence of God based on the marvels of the human body. "De Ira Dei" focused on God's punishment of human crimes. And "De Mortibus Persecutorum" documented how the persecutors of Christian believers often fell themselves to horrible deaths.]

The Navigator

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

