

The Navigator

The Newsletter of the Monastic Fellowship of Saint Brendan's
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The Incense of Prayer: Our Supremely Holy Sacrifice

Fr. Alan Andraeas, Prior

*"May my prayer be set before You
like incense; may the lifting up of my hands
be like the evening sacrifice."*

Psalm 141:2

If there's one thing held in common by priests and pastors, it's that they have more than one version of the Bible in their offices. I certainly do; lots of them. Over the years those versions have settled into different categories. I use some for public reading and preaching; I use others for the detailed study of Scripture; and I use others still for my own devotional reading. It was one of those devotional Bibles, the *New Living Translation* (NLT) to be exact, in which the Holy Spirit showed me a most wonderful thing.

It wasn't too long ago when I was caught up in a very intensive study of the wilderness Tabernacle of Moses. I was getting so lost in all the details of the Exodus account (and I love details!) that I was no longer seeing the hand of God behind it all. At that point I decided to lay aside all of the technical matters and just read the texts prayerfully and devotionally in the NLT. What a difference! That's when you really begin to see how many times God reminded Moses to make everything exactly the way it was revealed to him. Why? Because the Tabernacle—and all the foundational

elements of worship within it—was to be a mirror, an echo, an exact earthly shadow of the eternal worship in heaven.

This wasn't necessarily something new, but as I read about the different pieces of Tabernacle furniture (the washbasin, the table of showbread, the altar, the Ark of the Covenant, etc.) I noticed something very different about the incense altar. Do you remember the incense altar? It wasn't a very large piece of furniture. It was, however, extremely important. It was designed to stand right in front of the curtain that separated the Ark of the Covenant from the rest of the world. It stood there like a sentry guarding the way into the Holiest of Holies.



What caught me by surprise was the language used by the NLT translators. While each piece of furniture in the Tabernacle was declared by God as "holy to the Lord," the terminology about the incense altar changes in Exodus 30:10. Not only was the incense altar holy to the Lord, but the NLT described it as, "The Lord's *supremely holy* altar." That's the phrase that grabbed my attention and called for a little more reflection.

The Hebrew word used in that verse is *qodesh* and means *sacred, consecrated, or hallowed*. It's usually

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translated into English as *most holy*. Not just *holy* mind you, but *most holy*; or in the case of the NLT's translation, *supremely holy*. Only a handful of things in the Bible are given this unique description: the Holiest of Holies (Exodus 26:33); the altar of burnt offerings—but only after it was sanctified with blood (Exodus 29:37; 40:10); the furniture of the tabernacle—again, only after each piece was anointed with the sacred anointing oil (Exodus 30:29); the incense used on the altar of incense (Exodus 30:36); and finally the meat, sin, and trespass offerings (Leviticus 2:3; 6:25; 7:1).



The thing that struck me most about this *supremely holy* incense altar was its task. According to Exodus 30:8 it was designed and built to burn with a perpetual offering of incense before the Lord; never to go out; never to stop. And that, my friends, is very significant. Here's what I mean. We know that Scripture links prayers and incense together. The Psalmist says that our prayers are lifted up as incense to the Lord (Psalm 141:2). In his vision of the Last Days, John records that the bowls of incense brought before God were actually the prayers of the saints (Revelation 5:8; 8:3-4). We even read in the birth narrative of John the Baptist that a great crowd stood praying in the courtyard of the Temple at the same time Zechariah was in the Holy Place tending to the altar of incense (Luke 1:10); prayers and incense mingling as an offering to God.

These are not biblical coincidences or random connections, especially when you think about them in terms of God's heavenly patterns. Think about it terms of the floor plan that God gave to Moses for the layout of the Tabernacle. The Ark of the Covenant rested, of course, inside the Holiest of Holies. Between the Holiest of Holies and the rest of the Tabernacle—the rest of the world for that matter—there hung a veil; and in front

of that veil stood the altar of incense. When the Tabernacle was completely set up (i.e., the earthly 'echo' of the eternal Temple in heaven) nothing could penetrate that veil except for two things: the high priest who alone could go in once a year to sprinkle blood on the Ark (Leviticus 16:1-15; cf. Hebrews 9:7) and the aroma of the burning incense which would permeate the veil at all times, flooding the Holiest of Holies with its fragrance (Leviticus 16:13).

The Bible tells us that the Ark of the Covenant was the base of God's presence on earth (Exodus 25:22); literally the footstool to His eternal throne (1 Chronicles 28:2); a direct conduit, a doorway, to the Temple in heaven. And just like His divine throne room today, what are those two things that still have direct access to God from this world? What can pass from this current side of the 'veil' to the other? If you're familiar with the Tabernacle, then you already know the answer: (1) Jesus Christ our great High Priest and the sprinkling of His atoning blood, and (2) the pleasing fragrance of our prayers.

Folks, that's why Saint Brendan's—as a fellowship and a community—is first and foremost a ministry of prayer. Not because prayer is that monastic 'thing' we do but



because prayer is second in holiness only next to God's Son. Our prayers are not weak, insignificant, useless, or irrelevant things. And while our *Rule of Life* makes use of a *Breviary* so that we can prayerfully sanctify our time, it's even more than that. The prayers that ascend from the altar of our hearts become that un-

ceasing and *supremely holy* gift given to the Lord because, for the time being, it's the only thing we have that can pass through this earthly veil and touch the face of God. ✘

Rejoice!
Fr. Alan L. Andraeas+

“The prayers that ascend from the altar of our hearts become that unceasing and *supremely holy* gift given to the Lord...”

Everything Old Is New Again

M. Sue Andraeas, Prioress

"This is what the Lord says: 'Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls.'" —Jeremiah 6:16a

In my articles this year I've been addressing some of the many questions we are asked concerning the work of St. Brendan's; who we are, and how we got here. They are good questions! Some are a bit unnerving because they make us think about things we thought we knew but can't easily put into words. Some make us revisit topics we thought we had put to rest. But since our Fellowship is constantly growing (another Friend was added just this week), it is good to go back to the beginning, again, and remember who we are, what we are doing, and where we are headed—or, more accurately...who God made us to be, what He has called us to do, and where He is leading us.

This month's question is one that had nagged at me almost daily, and only recently has my prayer for clarification been answered. The question is: why monasticism? *WHAT* is monasticism, and what is the difference between what Alan and I do as lay monastics and simply being a Christian couple living on a homestead in Maine? Isn't it enough to be a Christian, attend a church and support them through giving, service and prayer? Why take vows (or make promises) in a world that requires flexibility and networking rather than tradition and long-term relationships? More than any other topic—any other questions posed to me—this is the one that could most easily reveal that (even as Prioress) I wasn't sure what I was doing.

Part of the problem was that, in the beginning, I resisted the position of prioress. When I couldn't squirm my way

out of it, I tried to hide it. But as of just this year, I no longer struggle to define the monastic 'side' of Saint Brendan's, or to define my role within our Fellowship, even though my daily activities still revolve around cleaning barns, milking goats, tending gardens and orchards, selling eggs, teaching school, praying.... Even though the bulk of you are in other states—even in other countries—the Lord has created, in my heart anyway, a definite bond between us made not by proximity but through common purpose. So what, exactly, is monastic about Saint Brendan's Monastic Retreat Community and the Fellowship that forms a very wide circle around it?

To answer that question, let me tell you a little story about a man from long, long ago. This guy lived in the most powerful nation of his day. By the time he was a young adult (an affluent one at that) and heading off to college, his homeland was in desperate trouble. First of all, much of the power was now a façade. The bulk of national wealth was being channeled into the military because only the military could conquer the lands necessary to glom the resources needed to keep the nation solvent. While his nation boasted about its most advanced technological advances in infrastructure (complete with running water), they were oblivious to (or concealing the fact) that this infrastructure may have been the leading cause for the poor health of its citizens (lead pipes don't make for healthy drinking water!). The novelty of diversity, brought about by assimilating the cultures of many nations, led to unsustainable practices that caused the family unit and community values to crumble. The political platform had, for decades, promised a life of comfort and ease, and in order to protect their own careers, politicians had to either cut corners on the quality of goods and services provided—or lie. Corruption in government, agriculture, and medicine became an acceptable alternative to truth. And so, as our friend headed off to college to

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...

"Disciples of Christ are to despise the life that is eagerly sought after by the multitude, and are to be earnest in living the life that resembles God."

— Origen, c. 248 AD

study rhetoric, he was confronted with these issues head-on. (Sometimes, it's easier to see what's going on at home when you're not at home!)

As a student of rhetoric, he should have been studying persuasive speech that leads to an understanding and defense of truth. But even the universities could not risk the truth being told. So, instead, students were taught how to be convincing and captivating—how to sway an audience with words so that success was all but guaranteed. They were being taught how to write speeches with phrases that hypnotized, that transformed a crowd into putty in their hands. A person educated in such a way would make a formidable politician, military leader, businessman, or educator! In other words, our friend was being taught how to linguistically control large groups of people by manipulating their emotions, and by creating a truth rather than defending *the* truth—and he saw right through it. He saw how this scandalous 'education' was turning his classmates into power-hungry monsters, many of whom were self-destructing even before his very eyes. And he began to realize that his beloved country had been oppressed by leaders trained in just this way for so long that very few even noticed anymore.

So what did our friend do? First, he prayed. Then he renounced all his earthly inheritance and fled from the university town, and his hometown, and headed for a small village. It wasn't long before, in prayer, he was led by the Holy Spirit to go deeper into solitary life in much the same way St. Paul was called into Arabia for three years after Christ called him (see Galatians 1:17). He lived as a hermit under the guidance of another hermit—for years—and his reputation as a holy man grew.

(Of course, his holiness was made all the more evident as his powerful nation imploded upon itself, exposing all manner of lies, corruption, financial instability, and resource-draining practices.) At one point, a group of men asked if they could join him. He refused at first, telling them that his lifestyle would be too grueling for them. Later, he allowed them to join him. But when they could not convert their soft, corrupt lifestyle to an honest one, they tried to poison him! Later, he tried to maintain several small groups of individuals located in various settlements, but they came under the attack of a 'competitive hermit' who, perhaps, had a bit too much of the national façade still in his psyche. Eventually, our friend gathered a group of like-minded men into a community and, with his sister living nearby and leading a similar community for women, he proposed a means of honest living, with honest relationships; a life that would glorify God, be in harmony with nature, with each other and with strangers; a life that would repel worldly disillusion and corruption.



Have you figured out who our friend is? If you guessed St. Benedict, you are right! St. Benedict was entering Rome to study in the latter part of the 400's AD. The Roman Empire was coming apart at the seams in every conceivable way. And, believe it or not, many of its citizens blamed the 'new religion'—Christianity—for its downfall. Christianity had only been legal for about a century, bringing with it the teaching of humility, sacrifice, truth, and a Savior who is to be the master of our lives rather than letting our own hedonistic desires reign. First, Christians were hated and killed in the coliseum. Later, it became vogue to join them. Finally, they were blamed for the destruction of a culture. Some said it was because they took away the 'teeth' of the Roman Empire, making it tame and more easily conquered. Others said it was because Christianity was biased and ruthless, not allowing individuals to express their true selves or live freely. (Homosexuality was rampant in the Roman Empire. So was abortion.) The institutional church had found an ally in the political circles of the day. Likewise, the politicians had found, in (already sec-

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ularized) Christianity, a new coercive 'tactic' for their rhetoric.

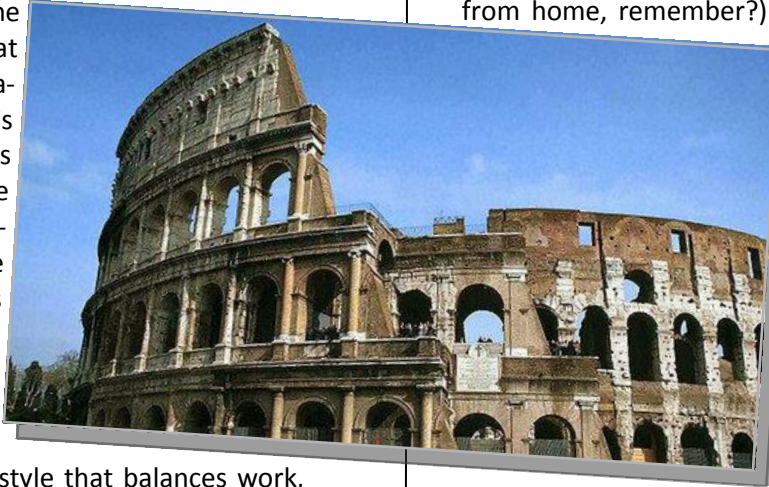
Benedict saw the need to pull back from both. He remained in contact with a bishop (there were no denominations yet; all of Christianity was still united under the bishops of Rome in the west, and of Constantinople in the east). Likewise, he did not abandon the power of the *tool* of rhetoric that he learned. (Scholars find that the Roman style of persuasive speech and writing is present in Benedict's *Rule*—but more about the *Rule* later...) Instead, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and with his Bible in hand, St. Benedict created a whole counter-culture that integrated all facets of life and worship into a Christ-centered lifestyle that balances work, study, prayer, and rest; a way to live in community without the strong conquering the weak or the young adults excelling at the expense of the elderly or the children.

In short, St. Benedict created a community where God was the Head, in much the same way that the early Israelites lived under Moses' leadership (and later that of the judges) where God was the Head. And he devised a set of guidelines (or rules) that modeled the regulations the Lord gave to the Israelites to define their God-led culture. Their government, education, agriculture, medicine, and relationships all fell under God's guidance, ensuring His rule, not man's. St. Benedict's radical way of life, what we know today as the *Rule of St. Benedict*, was unheard of in his time. Was it successful? Well, the only other 'nations' that have lasted under one 'rule' for as many centuries as the Benedictine 'culture' are other monastic communities such as Lindisfarne, on the eastern coast of England (founded in the late 700's). In comparison to Benedict's 1500+ years of existence hidden within many other nations and cul-

tures, the United States is still in her infancy and already experiencing many of the same issues that caused the Roman Empire to crumble.

Back to St. Brendan's. As Fr. Alan and I were being drawn to learn about monastic life, he was still a chaplain in the U.S. Navy, and we were sent to Puerto Rico. (Sometimes, the best way to learn about home is far from home, remember?) We had no television, no radio, and a very spotty internet connection; the Holy Spirit had us in a quiet place technologically speaking, and could begin to teach us to be more careful in our search for truth. We were given experiences on that foreign island that would radically transform our understanding of invasive agricultural practices

(the destructive nature of mega-plantations operating alongside very sustainable, generations-old, small family farms), the value of real food (not tainted by synthetic chemical additives), the hidden indulgences of government at the peoples' expense (it's easier to see when you're on foreign soil, and where government handouts such as welfare and food stamps don't mask it), and were given a unique look into a simpler method of administering even advanced medical techniques and pharmaceuticals (saving the 'big guns' for real trouble).



“...under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and with his Bible in hand, St. Benedict created a whole counter-culture that integrated all facets of life and worship into a Christ-centered lifestyle...”

From Puerto Rico we were sent to North Chicago for a short period. (That was an education of another sort! Chicago is the most corrupt city in America.) And from

Take my love —my Lord, I pour At Thy feet its treasure store;
Take myself —and I will be Ever, only, all for Thee,
Ever, only all for Thee.

("Take My Life and Let It Be" Text - Frances Ridley Havargal; Music - Henry A. Cesar Malan)

all these chaotic relocations, we were finally brought to a place of monastic solitude in much the same way St. Benedict was taken from place to place before

the Lord placed him at Monte Cassino to begin his monastic work in earnest. Like Benedict, we have learned to scrutinize every cultural 'tendrill' that finds its way onto this property—from banking practices to groceries, from technology to organic soil amendments, from prayer and worship practices to entertainment choices. And THAT is the difference between monasticism and 'regular' Christian life; it is the

intentional testing of all things, and holding on to only what is good—what is of God. We are blessed to have his example, and to be allowed to modify his work to fit our contemporary needs on a global scale.



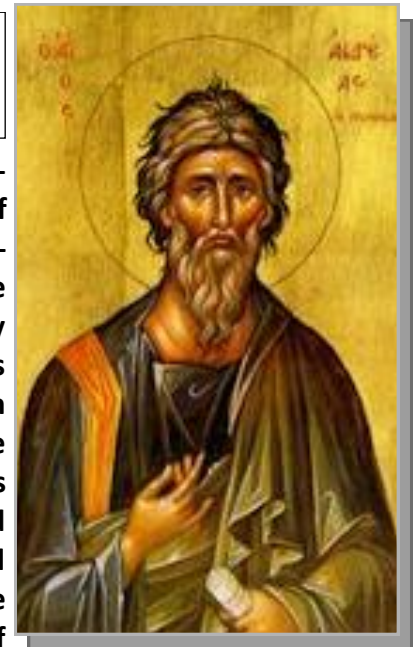
Are you with us? Do you see the Holy Spirit doing this type of work in your life? Are you moving from the bondage of secular culture to the freedom of intentional relinquishment for Christ's sake? The work that Benedict did in his day was radical—it had never been done before. All over this country, (and beyond!) small lay monastic and 'modified monastic' communities are springing up and the old is becoming new again. Are you ready to move beyond loose affiliation and curiosity in order to prayerfully consider intentional Oblation? ("Oblation" means a gift offered to God; an "Oblate," then, is offering himself to God as a gift.) If you are an Oblate, have you allowed

the Lord to move you more fully toward total surrender of your life into His hands?

Rejoice!
Mother Sue

The Final Word: Tertullian of Carthage (c. 160-225 AD)

[Addressed to non-believers] "On the day of pagan festivals, we neither decorate our door-posts with laurels, nor intrude upon the day with a parade of lamps. It is not a proper thing for us—at the observance of a public festivity—to dress up our houses like some new brothel. We do not celebrate along with you the holidays of the Caesars in a manner forbidden alike by modesty, decency, and purity. All zeal in the pursuit of glory and honor is put to death in us. Thus we have no pressing inducement to take part in your public meetings nor even the affairs of state. We acknowledge only one all-embracing commonwealth—the world. We renounce all your spectacles and excessive grandeur. We reject the need for much seeing and the need for being seen at such exhibits. There is nothing ever said, seen, or heard among us that has anything in common with the madness of the circus, the immodesty of the theater, the noise of public shows and the carnality of their celebrants, the atrocities of the arena, or the useless exercise of the wrestling ground. Why do you take offense at us because we differ from you in regard to your pleasures? For we are foreigners in this world; citizens of the Jerusalem above."



Tertullian (Quintus Septimius Florens Tertullianus) was an African Church Father born in Carthage, Tunisia, of a Roman centurion. He was educated in rhetoric, literature, and law. He converted to Christianity in 197 AD. He spent his early Christian ministry as a profound thinker and theologian, writing many books in Latin. His topics included moral and disciplinary works regarding public amusements, Christians in military service, idolatry, and penance. His theological works included the early formulations on the Trinity, the incarnation of Christ, and issues surrounding infant baptism. His chief concern, however, was maintaining one's purity in the midst of society's contamination and immorality.

Life at the Priory House



TOP LEFT: Fr. Alan, nail gun in-hand, surveys the completed floor joists for the new Holy Trinity Chapel. **TOP RIGHT:** Mother Sue takes the reins to a team of Amish-trained Percheron draft horses (Ben and Jerry) that paid a visit to Saint Brendan's. **MIDDLE LEFT:** A personal friend of ours from Eastport, Elizabeth, spent two days at Saint Brendan's re-shingling the back porch which will be converted into a second kitchen for processing all of the homestead dairy and produce. **BOTTOM LEFT:** Prior to a Celebration of the Eucharist at Holy Trinity Chapel, Mary (L) and Helen (R) help to assemble relief packages that will be sent to persecuted Christians living in Southern Sudan; this was one of our mission projects coordinated through Voice of the Martyrs. **BOTTOM MIDDLE:** Helen's grandson, Rylan, had the opportunity to ride Chula the donkey during a visit to the property. **BOTTOM RIGHT:** One of our newest additions to the Priory House kitchen is a 1950's-era wood cookstove. It'll serve double duty throughout the winter—we'll not only use it for cooking and baking, but it will also be our primary source of heat.

NEW MEMBERS

Please welcome (and pray for) the newest members of the Monastic Fellowship of Saint Brendan 's:

Christopher McCann - Massachusetts

Linda Cyr - Maine

