

# The Navigator



The Newsletter of the Monastic Fellowship of Saint Brendan's  
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## Hidden Prayer: God's Formidable Weapon

Fr. Alan Andraeas, Prior

**"Beat your plowshares into swords....  
Let the weakling say, 'I am strong!'"**  
Joel 3:10

It has been quite a few years since I read them, but I remember being captivated by how Christian 'thriller' novelist, Frank Peretti, verbally described the angels and demons in his books about spiritual warfare (e.g., *This Present Darkness* and *Piercing the Darkness*). What a defining moment in my own faith to glimpse, perhaps even fancifully in these stories, at the spiritual conflict waged over our heads—just beyond the range of our natural vision. And while the descriptions of these holy and hellish warriors were incredible, what really caught my attention were the descriptions of the swords they carried...and the strength (particularly that of the angels) they were given to wield them based on the steadfastness of our prayers. This emphasis on swords has only been strengthened over the years with the release of such epic films as Peter Jackson's *The Lord of the Rings* complete with their sweeping good-against-evil battle scenes with many, many swords.

Swords and prayers. It seems like an oxymoron. A conflict of interest. But is it really? Among the many monastic

tools we use is the 'sword' of prayer. It is the heart-beat of monastic discipline and spirituality, particularly that of intercessory prayer. For while a life of monastic practice lifts our lives up to heaven as a living sacrifice, our labor of intercession calls heaven down to earth in order to touch the world around us. And the thing that knits these two halves together is the meekness of hidden consecration.



So where do these swords, these weapons of spiritual warfare, enter the picture for someone who seeks a life of hidden consecration? The answer is simple: Our warfare is done in secret, in our prayer closets. You see, while our monastic endeavors are designed to change the interior castle of our lives, our labor of prayer is just as integral to the mission of the *Church Militant* in these last days as those who are called to visible frontline warfare. But how is this so?

The answer is best seen in two powerful texts. The first is Isaiah 49:2, "**He made my mouth like a sharpened sword, in the shadow of His hand He hid me; He made me into a polished arrow and concealed me in His quiver.**" Although this is part of a Messianic prophecy, I also

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believe that it's applicable to those who, by promises and vows, have surrendered themselves to lives of obedient, hidden prayer. Our prayers are, indeed, weapons, but they are hidden weapons; concealed for God's special purposes.

Does that mean other kinds of Christian warfare is wrong? Absolutely not! The Church needs its warriors who stand in witness at abortion clinics, who raise their voices at legislative assemblies, who press for educational truth at school board meetings, who petition broadcast companies for more wholesome standards, who rescue child prostitutes from off the streets, and who rally around churches targeted for protest actions from 'alternative' communities. The Church needs its visible army to stand against the enemy with spiritual horses and chariots and spears and trumpets and siege ramps. That's obvious warfare and the Church has been given great weapons to do what it needs to do. And then, often unnoticed by many, is God's armory of "hidden swords" and "concealed arrows." But what kind of war can you fight when your weapons are hidden? That's where the second text comes in.



It's found in Judges 3:19-30, the story of a left-handed man, Ehud; one of the deliverer-judges of ancient Israel. What happens in this story? In short, Israel had come under the control of Eglon, King of

Moab. In response to the cries of the people, the Lord raised up Ehud to help bring that captivity to an end. On the surface, he was officially tasked with the job of delivering Israel's tribute money to Moab. In secret, however, he made a short, double-edged sword which he hid within the folds of his cloak. After delivering the money to King Eglon, he mentioned that he also carried a secret "message from the Lord." Intrigued by this

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unexpected piece of news, the king sent everyone out of the room except for Ehud, the simple, unsuspecting money courier. Ehud came right up to the unwary king, drew the sword from its hiding place, and plunged the whole weapon into the king's belly, hilt and all. God's message was delivered! It's a great story and you need to read it.

That's the power of hidden swords and concealed arrows. That's the power of the prayer closet. That's the power of the monk's cell. What I want you to remember is that your hidden, consecrated life of prayer can go places where the visible Church can't. Sometimes your prayers can draw the hidden power of God so close to the enemy that he can be taken by complete surprise—and more often than not, to his utter ruin. Our intercessions move us from the rear of the *Church Militant* to the vanguard of the *Church Triumphant*.



Don't ever discount the impact you have as a contemplative, obedient, prayerful man or woman living out your life in the quiet of monastic disciplines. The prayerful heart of a monastic is the secret hiding place of God's most formidable weapons. ✕

Rejoice!  
Fr. Alan L. Andraeas+

## 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...

**"Intercessory prayer is warfare, and the principle way in which that warfare is carried on." — fr. Edwin Stube, priest and missionary**

## Back to Virtue: A Reading List Book Review

M. Sue Andraeas, Prioress

**“Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.”**

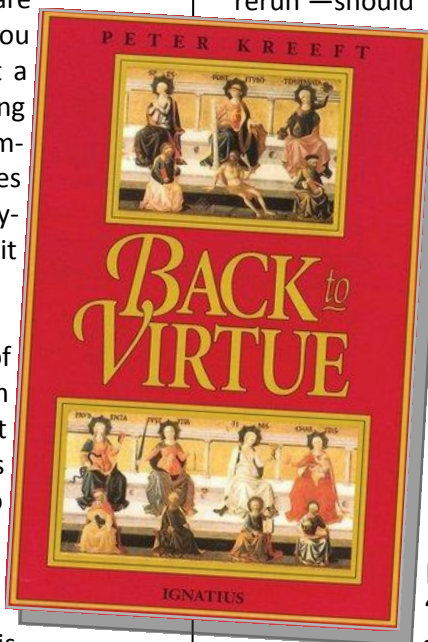
Colossians 2:8

We have received so many requests over the years for a “Suggested Reading List” that I thought, for this year, my articles would be just that. Now those of you who know me well, or have visited Saint Brendan’s, are probably bewildered since I am *not* what you would call an avid reader. I’m a doer, not a sitter. And even when I’m sitting, I’m knitting or spinning or tatting—hardly activities compatible with reading! But all of that makes me very selective about what I read, so maybe, in the end, a list from me may be a bit helpful.

Since all of you are capable of taking a list of titles and authors, and then hunting them down at a bookstore or online to see what the book is about, or to find book reviews from highly qualified sources (much more so than I am), I have prayed about a way to make a book list/review more relevant to lay monastic life in general, and specifically to the Saint Brendan’s Fellowship. My goal is to give you enough information about the book so that you can decide if you’d like to read it for yourself without giving you so much that you feel you don’t need to. Please! Let me know how I’m doing.

When I told Alan which book I’d like to write about first, one of my favorites that I’ve read every year (or every

other) since first finding it in 1995, he just smiled. As it turned out, he had already pulled a quote from the author for “The Final Word” at the end of this newsletter! It’s not surprising, I suppose. See, Alan and I read books together aloud; he reads to me while I cook, I read to him while he drives. (It’s our adaptation to the monastic tradition of reading during meals so that the Community is exposed to the same teaching at the same time, giving the Holy Spirit a collective ‘hook’ to work with.) Right now, we are reading the book I’m reviewing and Alan is quoting; **Back to Virtue** by Peter Kreeft. Knowing that I only read about 3 books per year—and that this one merits being a regular ‘rerun’—should tell you how I feel about this work. Here’s why.



Back in the 90’s, I began teaching as an adjunct faculty member at the University of Alaska, Kodiak campus. I was teaching music as part of the humanities department and it didn’t take me long to realize that my world view was far from ‘enlightened.’ I was exposed, really for the first time, to a non-Christian world view, one that I could not argue against because, even as a mature Christian (or so I thought), I did not possess the collective knowledge of history, philosophy, or psychology to provide an ‘apology’ for my faith. By apology I don’t mean that I was sorry for my

faith, but that I could not defend my faith. Then came Peter Kreeft and his less-than-200 page lesson in how to defrag a Western, Post-Modern brain and return it to one that sees the world the way God intended.

Since philosophy and psychology are of interest to me (and history, too, just so long as it’s not all about dates and places but people and intentions), I devoured this book and instantly went back to the beginning to read it over again. It has now become more of an exercise in mental housecleaning for me, to make sure that humanistic ideas aren’t lurking in my mind somewhere, growing roots and tainting my understanding of God’s idea of philosophy (literally ‘love of wisdom’), psychology (what St. Paul explains as the ‘renewing of your mind’ in Romans 12:2), and history (which is, after all, HIS (God’s) STORY). Once I began formation as a lay monastic, I was given a list of classic Orthodox—capital

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“O”—books to read, but none of them cut to the quick the way Peter Kreeft did for me. Since he is an American and still alive, the book is not a translation or ‘update’ from a foreign language or from older English. Since he is a professor, he’s used to talking to young adults rather than professional philosophers, theologians, or other elite academics. In other words, he’s got a lot to say, but says it in a way that is understandable even to us non-PhD’s.

*Back to Virtue* is divided into two sections. The first is more of a catch-up lesson for those not used to objectively looking at Western culture to see, sociologically, what we are doing right and what we are doing wrong. Kreeft’s ‘right’ and ‘wrong,’ by the way, are not defined simply by looking up Bible verses. In the end, he agrees that



God alone has ordained right from wrong based upon the way Creation was created! But he shows how all great world religions and philosophies can identify right

and wrong through a 4-step process: 1.) Observation of unwanted symptoms, 2.) Diagnosis of the disease (disease) causing those symptoms, 3.) Prognosis for a cure from the disease, and 4.) Prescription for treatment of the disease. Then, in a matter of a few pages, he spells out the works of Buddha, the Stoics, Plato, Luther, Pascal, Kierkegaard, Descartes, Marx and Freud—and Jesus Christ—and plugs their collective works into that formula. Genius!

For Kreeft, the cure for post-modernism is virtue. He arrives at this conclusion not just by studying Plato, who first outlined the four virtues, but through Scripture. (He notes that, just because Plato found these virtues doesn’t mean that he ‘invented’ them, nor

does it mean that God didn’t put them there for someone to find. He is also quick to remind his readers that virtue alone will not save you; they will just help you find the author of your salvation.)



These four virtues, upon which all the rest are ‘hinged,’ are justice, wisdom, courage, and moderation. These four pave the way for what he identifies as the Three Theological Virtues; faith, hope, and love. The rest of the book outlines how the Seven Deadly Sins are defeated through these virtues as outlined in Christ’s Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5). Yes, he is now Roman Catholic, but he converted from a Calvinistic background, so he is well-versed in both Catholic and Reformation theology.

You won’t find a lot of Bible references or footnotes. There are, however, some very helpful graphs and illustrations. And you will find some of the ‘truths’ that you know that you know challenged—and he artfully offers proofs from Scripture and from classic non-Christian teaching to defend his conclusions. If you are one of those folks who insist that “if it ain’t in the Bible, it ain’t true,” this probably isn’t a book you’d want to read.

For more about Peter Kreeft, jump to the end of this newsletter. Alan has a rather extended quote from the book, and a very brief biography. Happy reading!

Rejoice!

**“It has now become more of an exercise in mental housecleaning for me, to make sure that humanistic ideas aren’t lurking in my mind somewhere, growing roots and tainting my understanding of [God]....”**

His oath, His covenant, His blood, support me in the whelming flood;  
When all around my soul gives way, He then is all my hope and stay.  
On Christ the Solid Rock I stand: all other ground is sinking sand.

(“The Solid Rock” Text : Edward Mote; Music: John B. Dykes)

# Life at the Priory House



**TOP LEFT:** One of Saint Brendan's cats, Jack, is helping Fr. Alan as he adds the final course of new shingles to the barn porch. **TOP MIDDLE:** Doyle the donkey sizes up Saint Brendan's new yak, Mabel, on her first day outside in the sunshine. **TOP RIGHT:** Bishop Richard Lipka, Suffragan Bishop for the Missionary Diocese of All Saints, makes an episcopal visit to Saint Brendan's. During his visit he confirmed two members of Holy Trinity Chapel. In this picture, he's laying hands on Becca Greene. **BOTTOM LEFT:** M. Sue gets acquainted with two new Shetland sheep, Zinnia (L) and Poppy (R) who were also recently added to Saint Brendan's.

## The Final Word: Peter J. Kreeft (b. 1937)

God's Word says that "faith without works is dead." The works of virtue are the fruit of faith, that is, of a live faith. Being saintly is our response to being saved. We cannot do either without God, but He will not do either without us. He respects our freedom. He makes His power and His grace available to us once we are joined to Christ. But if we simply sit back and let that spiritual capital accumulate in our heavenly bank account without making withdrawals and using it, we are exactly like the wicked and slothful servant who hid his master's money rather than investing it, in Jesus' parable of the talents (see Mt 25:14-30). The answer to the faith-and-works issue is essentially a simple one, in fact, startlingly simple. It is that *faith works*. The whole complex question of reconciling Paul's words on faith and James' words on works, and of resolving the dispute that sparked the Reformation, the dispute about justification by faith, is answered at its core at a single stroke: the very same "living water" of God's own Spirit—God's own life in our soul—is received by faith and lived out by virtuous works. The water of the Sea of Galilee comes from the same source as the water of the Dead Sea: the Jordan River. But the Sea of Galilee stays fresh because it has an outlet for the water it receives. The Dead Sea lives up to its name because it does not. The same thing happens to the "living waters" from God as the fresh waters of the Jordan. When we bottle them up inside ourselves, they become stagnate. Stagnate faith stinks, like stagnate water. And the world has sensitive nostrils.

*Peter Kreeft is a Catholic philosopher, professor, author, and Christian apologist. A convert from fundamental Calvinism to Roman Catholicism, he currently serves as a professor of philosophy at Boston College and The King's College and is also a part of the Catholic Charismatic renewal movement. The above quote comes from his book, **Back to Virtue**.*



## MEMBERSHIP UPDATES

Please pray for Linda Cyr who, on December 17th, made her Oblate Promises to the Father Prior as a Postulant in the Monastic Fellowship of Saint Brendan 's.

