

The Navigator



The Newsletter of the Monastic Fellowship of Saint Brendan's

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Death-Dew on My Brow

Fr. Alan Andraeas, Prior

*I'll love Thee in life, I will love Thee in death,
And praise Thee as long as Thou lendest me breath;
And say when the death-dew lies cold on my brow,
"If ever I love Thee, my Jesus, 'tis now."*

—from the hymn "My Jesus, I Love Thee"
William R. Featherston, ca.1862

In his recent book, *The Pastor*, author and Bible translator Eugene Peterson (*The Message* is his popular version of the Bible) recounts a visit he and his wife, Jan, made to a Benedictine monastery in New Mexico. As they were walking along a pathway from the chapel to the refectory, they passed the monastery's small cemetery wherein they noticed an open grave. They asked the brother who was accompanying them if one of the other brothers had recently died. "No," came the reply; "that's for the next one." I'm sure they didn't plan to spend their lunch in the refectory contemplating death and mortality, but that's exactly what happened.

Was the presence of an open grave unique to this monastery alone? Such a practice sounds rather macabre. Believe it or not, but Benedictine monasteries have had a long tradition of maintaining open graves in the plain view of their resident monks. In fact, sometimes these graves were even located at the main gate of the monastery so that lay visitors would also be reminded of the gateway between temporal life and eternal life and how Jesus was the only faithful Pilot across that river.

Well, we don't maintain an open grave on the property at Saint Brendan's. That doesn't mean, however, that we're exempt from those opportunities to experience and reflect on the fragile, transitory nature of life. Both of us (Mother Sue and I) were allowed the 'privilege' of coming face-to-face with "open graves" these past few weeks; of occupying that razor-thin line between temporal life and eternal life.

It happened for Mother Sue about three weeks ago on the back of a hay wagon. We were helping to load bales of hay on a flat-bed wagon in a neighboring field less than a mile from St.

Brendan's. I was walking ahead of the truck and flatbed, gathering separate bales of hay together into piles of 3-5 bales while the truck and wagon would slowly move from pile to pile. Sue was on the hay wagon, stacking hay as other helpers were throwing them up to her. Picture the wagon: old, wooden, eight feet wide, almost 20 feet long, and being towed by a 4x4 pickup truck. At this point Sue was standing on hay bales that were stacked three courses high and she was building the fourth and fifth courses as the bales were tossed up to her level. As she was lifting a bale over her head, the truck and wagon lurched over an uneven spot of the field and she went over backwards, tumbling down off the stacked hay and onto the hitch between the moving truck and the wagon. Cracked ribs, twisted back, broken neck; anything could've hap-



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pened. She even could've gone under the wheels of the wagon! Everything came to a halt while she was checked out. A bruised thumb seemed to be the worst of it (and a gymnastic score of 9.5—farm humor!). Of course, as we thanked God for her safety and protection throughout the day, it became more and more clear just how close she came to serious or fatal harm. (Oh, and by the end of the day we still ended up with 186 bales of hay stacked in our barn!)

My brush with the “open grave” happened about two weeks later during the aftermath of hurricane Arthur. The storm came up the eastern seaboard and hit our area of Down East, Maine with 75 mph winds and over nine inches of rain. We lost power before 6:00 AM on Saturday, July 5, along with 19,000 other customers. In our case, the power line had been ripped off the side of the house (while still maintaining its connection with the meter) and was laying on the ground. And just beyond our property a number of trees were uprooted or broken

and laying on the line. There was severe storm damage across Washington County. I called the electric company (I was 61st in the queue for service!) and was told that even though there was no power, a truck would be along to physically de-energize our line. Once that was done, we were to have repairs made by an electrical contractor (our service comes across 500' of line and one pole on our property). Once the repairs were completed, we would need to call the electric company. They would send out a truck to inspect/verify the repair, and then they would re-energize the line. Fast forward to Tuesday: I'm in the deep brush and sapling trees with a chain saw, clearing a path



from the house to the pole so that our electric contractor can see the extent of the damage and to make the pole accessible in case he had to climb it. I'm walking back and forth across the 'dead' line, hauling out brush and cutting down trees when all of the sudden Sue comes out tell me—shouting over the noise of the chain saw!—that the power is back on in the house,...and I'm STANDING on the line when she tells me this news! After she made an emotional call back to the electric company, we were visited by the district line crew supervisor and the regional safety officer. They wanted to make sure that I was okay, that they understood the sequence of events, to take pictures, and probably to get a sense if we were going to sue them for negligence and endangerment of life. The power was turned off again so that the repairs could be made. What followed was a long, probing, reflective 24 hours as I came to grips with how close I was to serious or fatal harm. Fortunately, repairs were made and our electricity was finally restored on Wednesday afternoon, five days after we lost it.

I suppose each of us has encountered one of these “foot-in-the-grave” experiences. Perhaps it was the near miss of a car accident; a tumble down several steps; while undergoing a tricky medical procedure; or (in my case while in the Persian Gulf) hearing the sound of the ship's claxon followed by, “All hands, man your battle stations—this is not a drill!” There are hundreds of different scenarios. And while the progress of a slower-moving disease may 'deposit' you at the same destination, the suddenness of these other examples awakens you to the fact that God may have to 'measure' who you are at that moment in time: your faithfulness, devotion, and spiritual cleanliness; the quality of relationships with other Christians and the extent of your Christian witness; even your faithfulness in corporate worship and your regular reception of the sacraments. It really makes you think!

Fortunately for those folks who try to fashion their lives around monastic spirituality, all of these things are addressed as a matter of daily discipline within the Rule of Life. In fact, from the monastic viewpoint, the only way to truly live is through the act of dying. We are introduced to this governing principle of monastic faith in *The Rule* of the Mo-

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...

**Men, after the loss of immortality through Adam's sin, have conquered
Death by submitting to death in faith.**

—Tatian, c. 160 AD

nastic Fellowship of Saint Brendan's—it appears in the section on humility (pp. 31-32). It says in part:

Our English word humility comes from the Latin word *humus* which means 'fertile ground.' It is soil rich in dead and decaying matter yet, paradoxically, is prepared with everything necessary to bring forth life. Likewise, humility is made up of things both dead and dying which bring richness into the Christian's life—dying to self, selfish ambitions, selfish desires, etc. When we die to all that is sinful within us, what we are left with is the soil of humility from which God can harvest the fruit of righteousness.



Please don't get me wrong. I'm not suggesting or teaching that if we do (or don't do) a set list of things that we're somehow grafted into the living vine of Jesus Christ and that we're handed eternal life as our grand prize. Jesus Himself commented on the Pharisees'

rigorous and complex observance of the Law and yet He said that they were still full of dead men's bones (Matthew 23:27-28). If such were the case with us, then a monastic life might be tallied as nothing more than an exercise in self-disciplined life with 'self' as the source of the motivation. The foundation of our hope must be faith in Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 3:11). Nevertheless, our daily actions continue to lay additional courses of gold, silver, and precious stones or wood, hay, and stubble on that foundation—each according to the outworking of our faith (1 Corinthians 3:12). These works, recorded by God (Revelation 20:12), will eventually be judged and tested for how well they reflect the nature of Christ more than they project ourselves (cf., 1 Corinthians 3:13). That means that even the greatest Christian achievement must be an exercise in the diminution of 'self' so that the 'humus' of our lives is constantly composting with dead things. Looking at it another way, Christianity is all about dying well [now] so that we may

live well [in eternity].

Back to the re-energized power line. As I mentioned, I spent the next 24 hours in a rather silent reflection of those things that filled my life; of those things that reflected Christ and those things that reflect me. I must admit: my 'humus' was a little thin in some places. Would God reject me because of that? I will answer that with another question: Are there places in my life where I can benefit from additional monastic discipline? Absolutely. Are there places in my life where I can continue to "mortify the deeds of the flesh?" Absolutely. Are there places in my life that need more of Jesus and less of me? Absolutely. All of these things are opportunities to "die to self" in order that I might live for (and with) Christ. Hmmmm,...dying well that I might live well. Or as that verse from the great hymn says: *I'll love Thee in life, I will love Thee in death / And praise Thee as long as Thou lendest me breath / And say when the death-dew lies cold on my brow / "If ever I love Thee, my Jesus, 'tis now."*

Enough about me. How about you? Don't go rushing out to dig a "mortality grave" in your back yard. Simply ask God to show you how your internal compost is looking. Do you need more hummus? Are you dying to self in order to live for Christ? Because when it comes right down to it, Christianity is all about dying well now (cf., Philippians 2:8) that we might live and reign well with Christ in eternity (cf., Philippians 2:9).

Rejoice!

Fr. Alan Andraeas

SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENT!

**We have recently changed our email address.
The old email address is no longer in service.
Please make a note of the new address:**

st.brendans@myfairpoint.net

**We have also changed to a new web server and
have begun the process of updating the website.
Still lots of work to do, but you can visit the new
site at:**

www.saintbrendans-online.org

Thank you for your patience!

HOW TO CONTACT US

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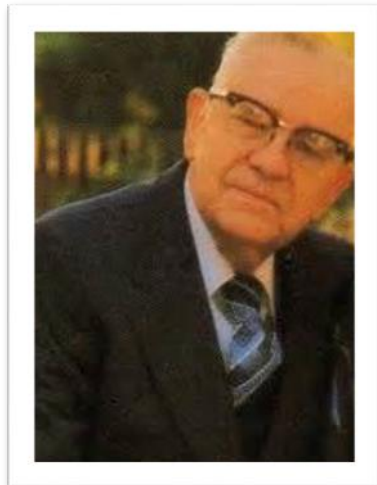
Don't Waste Your Sorrows: A Reading List Book Review

M. Sue Andraeas, Prioriess

*Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard,
neither have entered into the heart of man,
the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him.*
1 Corinthians 2:9

For us mere humans, life often seems to be one inconvenience after another. Time seems to move too quickly, or not quickly enough. Good 'stuff' seems to happen mostly to people who (in our humble opinion) don't deserve it while those who are most saintly are handed one trial after another. Why IS that? Soon after Fr. Alan and I opened the doors of St. Brendan's to receive our first retreatants, we began to realize how little we truly understood what God was accomplishing here. So we looked for a mentor, someone who could teach us about both monastic life for our own understanding as well as a way to instruct others. Finding no mentor in our area—or even in our state—we began reading, and reading, and reading. We naturally began with the classics; St. Benedict, St. Teresa of Avila, Celtic saints, Russian Orthodox saints, Roman Catholic saints, Protestant saints. And as I fervently prayed for a 'teacher' who could lead me in the areas that most affected my life (an odd mix of spiritual direction, building a homestead, and learning the 'ancient paths' of spiritual and pragmatic life), the Holy Spirit kept reminding me of a line in a little card that was given to me by a dear friend. Embedded in the Scripture verses she had included was the little phrase, "Don't Waste Your Sorrows." I thought it was also Scripture. It isn't. It's the title of a little book by Paul E. Billheimer.

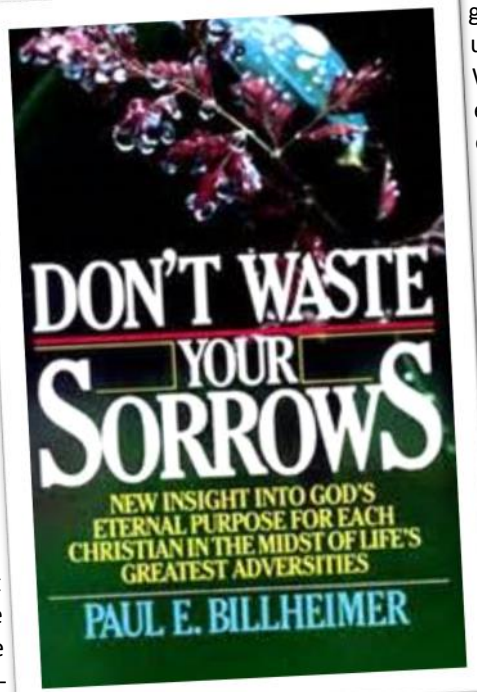
I doubt that many of you, if any, have heard of this man. He's not one of the well-publicized authors of our time, nor can you find recordings of his sermons or studies. He hasn't even rated a Wikipedia article, although I recommended that they add one. When you look at the fruit borne of his life—the things that God says make for a worthy elder in the church—he fits



the bill: married to the same woman for 63 years, quietly raised a respectable family, began a little tent ministry that grew into a Bible Institute, a Christian High School and Day School, and later into a small television station in the Midwest. He ended his career working for Trinity Broadcasting Network, and died in 1984. His books include *Destined for the*

Throne, Destined for the Cross, Destined to Overcome, Spiritual Warfare I & II, and one I've yet to read, Love Covers. And finally, the book from where my friend got the line that she wrote on my little card, Don't Waste Your Sorrows (Bethany House Publishers, 1977, ISBN 0-87123-310-X).

If you are looking for a book that is theologically deep, academically challenging, and uses big words and long sentences, you'll be disappointed. If you hold to the idea that, in order for a book to be spiritually uplifting and stimulating, it needs to be complex and difficult to wade through, Billheimer is not for you. His



writing is about on an 8th grade level and not exactly up to university standards. What he has to say, however, is transforming and eye-opening. And the older I get, the more I appreciate someone who can take God's Truth and explain it with common illustrations and with the curiosity and infectious, childlike excitement that reminds me that faith is not stuffy and academic. It's more like a great adventure; exhilarating, a little scary, and something new at every turn.

If you want to read just one of Billheimer's books, I recommend *Don't Waste*

Your Sorrows for several reasons. First of all, he quotes rather large portions of some of his other works, partly to review and partly to expand upon previous points he was making. Second, he explains rather clearly why there is suffering and pain in the universe—and why this MUST be; what morality is from God's perspective rather than man's; what deliverance from evil is all about, and why it is a legal matter more than an emotional one; and why 'bad' things that happen to good people aren't really bad—and that the 'good' people aren't necessarily good. And if that isn't enough to explain in just 84 pages, he saves the best for last. The final 40 pages, my favorite part of this particular little gem, are spent explaining what agape love is, and why we must become more skilled at it than anything else. What is it? Well, I'll just give you a taste of Billheimer's explanation, hoping that you pick up the book yourself.

Most of us think of love as an emotion, a gushy, sappy, feel-good kind of thing. It can be romantic love that is all-consuming and intoxicating as nothing else can be. Or perhaps it's more of a passion for a hobby, or sport, or project—a love of golf, or knitting, or saving the whales. It could even be an overwhelming desire/preference for something—like my love for mint

chocolate chip ice cream! But Mr. Billheimer gives a whole different meaning to love. Love, at its core, is sacrifice. Outpouring. The loss of self for the sake of another. Christ's Passion for us was not mushy, co-dependent, or caused by addictive tendencies. His Passion, His dying on the cross for the salvation of those who believe Him to be the Son of God, is the best example of agape love: full submission to the Father: full surrender of personal agenda, comfort, and temporal future for the full benefit of eternal Creation; for us.

I read at night, just before bed. This spring, while I was in the middle of hand-tilling the garden and cleaning out barns (talk about stiff muscles!) I was reading the chapter about aging. I could relate! But according to Billheimer, aging—and all its pains and limitations—is part of God's design. In fact it is His finishing school. Funny thought, isn't it? Billheimer talks about the way most Americans squander these 'retirement' years by playing while they should be committed to prayer and intercession. Our younger days were designed to be the lab that prepares us for these 'senior' years of serious spiritual work. The busy-ness of life is training for intercession. It's a priority. It's where the action is. It's where 'on earth as it is in heaven' happens. But THEN...he goes on to explain that all of earthly life is simply preparation for our real lives—our eternal lives.

I can't explain here all that Billheimer does. I'm not a skilled enough writer. But the gist of it is this. Earthly creation is but a blip on the eternal radar. As immortal beings, destined for the perfection of heaven, we need to learn to live by and to execute the government of heaven—a government where the only law is the law of agape Love. Love God with all your

heart, soul, mind, and strength—and your neighbor as yourself. (Jesus was quoting the Heavenly Constitution, so to speak.) If heaven is perfect, if heaven contains no pain or conflict, then we humans cannot learn to sacrifice once we get to heaven. We have to learn it here during the precarious nature of a temporal earthly life because sacrificial love can only be learned in a place where there is pain and sorrow. Therefore, earthly existence is the 'boot camp' of our life; the training camp; the indoctrination. Mr. Billheimer is reminding us not to waste this time of sorrow and grief but to, instead, use it to hone our ability to love as Christ loves. The question remains: what WILL we be doing in heaven that requires us to be so skilled at agape love? Worship? Definitely. Ruling and reigning? Jesus says it is

so! Ruling *what?* Ruling *who??* Ah, now THERE'S the million dollar question, isn't it!? If we think faith on earth is an adventure, what happens when all prophecy is fulfilled, all of God's work for this temporary creation is completed and we're off and running in the Eternal Now? It's still a secret! The best surprise ever!! I can't wait! And I'm grateful for this little book. It's given me lots of curious little exciting things to ponder. And it's made me think about the 'bad' things in life;

that maybe it is these very things that God uses to make me into who He needs me to be. If that's true, then they aren't really bad, are they? They're bad only if...we waste them.

I invite you to check out some of Billheimer's books. Start with this one. And I bet you'll delve into a few more of his books as well.

Rejoice!
Mother Sue



And then one day I'll cross the river,
I'll fight life's final war with pain;
And then as death gives way to victory,
I'll see the lights of glory and I'll know He lives.

"Be cause He Lives"—Text and Music: William and Gloria Gaither, 1971

Holy Trinity Chapel Construction Update

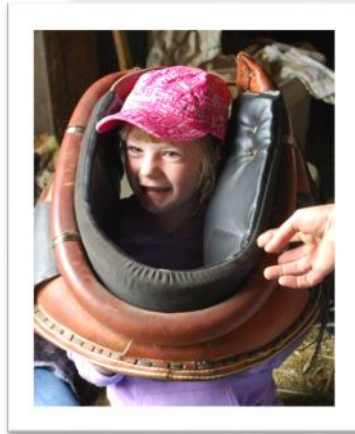
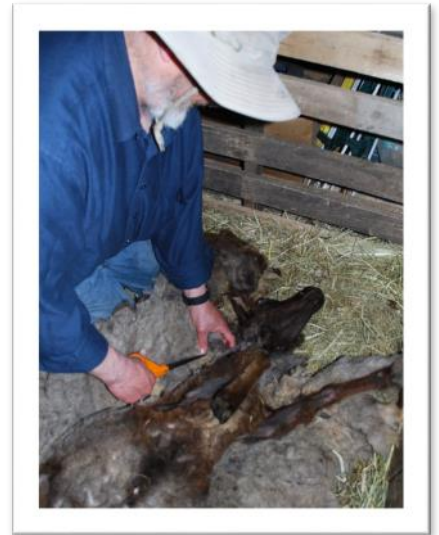
We want to take the opportunity to bring you up-to-date on the construction of Holy Trinity Chapel. After the ‘hiatus’ of late fall and winter (and the rush of farm activity in spring and early summer!), things are finally moving forward...and at a pace quicker than we could have imagined or prayed for! In the last few weeks we completed the entryway extension on the front of the chapel; the flooring rim joists were insulated; the subflooring was installed; a carpenter was placed at our disposal (his salary paid by a gift!) for a week; framing material and roof trusses purchased at contractor rates; a beautiful, custom-built, window for the wall behind the altar; a financial gift was made for the cost of the roofing shingles; and solid oak pews were obtained for the sanctuary. The list seems to go on and on—we can only rejoice in God’s ability to provide far beyond our expectations. There is still much to do. By the end of July we should have a complete chapel ‘shell’ onsite; all the interior work will still need LOTS of attention. We ask you to please contribute to the completion of the chapel through your prayers. Remember, Holy Trinity Chapel is the “mother church” of our monastic fellowship.

As a matter of accountability to the fellowship, we’re providing a summary of how the designated chapel construction donations have been applied to the project:

Ground preparation and tree removal	1,500.00
Excavation	2,117.00
Foundation	4,093.07
Subfloor joists and sheathing	2,734.20
Framing lumber	3,343.47
Windows	1,699.11
Roof trusses	2,449.94
Sanctuary pews & altar rail	1,000.00
TOTAL	18,936.79



Life at the Priory House



TOP LEFT: A local kindergarten class made a fieldtrip to the Saint Brendan's homestead. **TOP MIDDLE:** Fr. Alan (euphonium) and M. Sue (viola) are pictured with the conductor of the Passamaquoddy Bay Symphony Orchestra following a concert performance. **TOP RIGHT:** A local sheep farmer, Chris Guida, came over to give us lessons on sheep shearing. Zinnia is having her winter fleece shorn. **BOTTOM LEFT:** David and Carolyn Caron, members of the Fellowship from Ohio, make a visit to Saint Brendan's—Fr. Alan performed their wedding ceremony in January, 2013. **BOTTOM MIDDLE:** One of the fieldtrip children gets a hands-on lesson on how to wear a donkey drafting collar.

The Final Word: St. Cyprian (Latin, *Thascius Caecilius Cyprianus*), Bishop and Martyr of Carthage, North Africa, 200-258 AD

Our brethren who are freed from this world by the Lord's summons are not to be lamented. For we know that they are not lost. Rather, they are sent before us. They should be envied, not bewailed! Black garments should not be taken upon us *here*, when they have already taken white garments *there*. When the day of our summons arrives, we should come without delay. We should come without resistance to the Lord, when He Himself calls us. Although this should always be done by God's servants, it should much more be done now—now that the world is collapsing. We should ever and a day reflect that we have renounced the world and are in the meantime living here as guests and strangers. Who would not hurry to return to his own country, if he has been placed in foreign lands? Who that is hurrying to return to his friends would not eagerly desire a favorable wind to that he might embrace those dear to him even sooner? We regard Paradise as our country. We have already begun to consider the Patriarchs as our parents. Why do we not hasten and run so that we may behold our country? Why do we not hurry to greet our parents? For a great number of our dear ones are awaiting us there. Remember, therefore, this truth whom the blessed Apostle Paul lays down in his epistle, saying, "To me, to live is Christ and to die is gain."

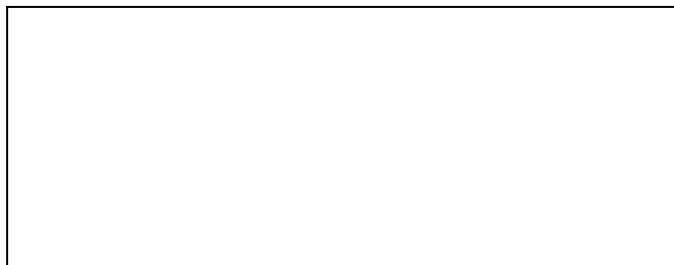




Holy Trinity Chapel last week...



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