

The Navigator



The Newsletter of the Monastic Fellowship of Saint Brendan's

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A Disciplined Faith: Silence and Solitude

Fr. Alan Andraeas, Prior

front row seats to all that the Lord has done both in the local area and in the lives of so many of His people in so many ways.

*"But the LORD was not in the wind,...in the earthquake,
...in the fire;...but in the sound of a low whisper."*

1 Kings 19:11-12

A gentle blowing. A whistling of gentle air. A still small voice. A sound, thin and quiet. These are just a few of the many English translations of the Hebrew *kole dem-aw-maw' dak* (my literal translation: a voice, muted, barely audible) when God spoke to Elijah in 1 Kings 19:11-12. In the middle of those raucous demonstrations of presence and power, the heart of God was revealed to Elijah in the hush of whisper. Oh, don't get me wrong, there are times when God's voice must thunder—and usually within the context of judgment—but in the day-to-day exercise of our faith He wants to see if we're sufficiently quieted from the discordant noises of this world (within and without) to perceive just how close He truly is.

That's how far I got in my article when God began to move us in a different direction for this newsletter. Sue has written an excellent article on our quarterly topic, and I commend it to your reading. But for our 'real' opening article, I would like to introduce you to some new things at Saint Brendan's that we want you to be aware of and, with my new work schedule, Sue drafted this article as well. Thank you, Sue!

2016 STATE OF THE FELLOWSHIP ADDRESS

Saint Brendan's has now completed its first decade of ministry, and Holy Trinity Chapel celebrated its 5th year as a house church last week. Fr. Alan and I have been blessed to have

What began as an 'experiment' in Celtic/Benedictine mission work has grown to include a diversified homestead to which many people have contributed; a chapel that has combined the talents and financial efforts of people in over 20 states; a constant outpouring of food, clothing, and miscellaneous odds and ends; hospitality; teaching; preaching; and spiritual direction—in person, online, over email and phone calls, and through example—and is now settling in as a way of life and an integral part of the fabric of Down East Maine. In fact, just today we had a visitor from Waterville, Maine (almost three hours away) who, after finding us online, decided to make the long journey on this, his Russian Orthodox Christmas break. WELCOME!

The chapel congregation that began as 5 people in our living room has grown to sometimes over 20 people in a sanctuary that is still under construction. We have celebrated births, mourned losses, visited the sick and elderly, assisted with orphans and victims of fire, helped with farming and administration, and all in the name of Jesus, without needing to receive a salary. He has provided for us as He promised from the beginning. WHAT A BLESSING.

As we have been praying for guidance for the next decade and beyond, we feel the need to make a few changes. We began 2015 with me (Sue) working off the property one day per week and Alan home to work here fulltime. We begin 2016, with me still working off the property one morning per week, but Alan now works for the US Postal service and will soon be promoted to a full-time position; he will be gone over 50 hours per week. This added income will go entirely toward the completion of a

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workshop and to continue restoring the 200-year old farmhouse so that larger families and groups (seminarians? Other college groups?) can be accommodated. But it also means that Alan's time at home will be greatly reduced, and he will need to spend it in prayer and in priestly duties. And THAT means... the newsletter is going to change drastically.

Each quarterly newsletter requires nearly an entire week of administrative time to research and compose articles and find appropriate quotes and writings from saints and other great Christian writers. The formatting alone takes a day! Add in the 'picture page,' the illustrations that correspond to the articles, and then addressing them all—well, we feel his administrative time needs to be spent in other ways. We also want to reduce my office time; the accounting and record-keeping needs to be streamlined so that I can also concentrate on tasks that are more conducive to ministry and less to business. So...here's the plan!

- **MEMBERSHIP:** There will no longer be a fee for ANY member of the Fellowship—not for Friends or Oblates. Newsletters, book studies and spiritual direction are now free of charge, just as retreats have been from the very beginning. However, every January, we will begin (for lack of a better term) a “new membership role.” If you wish to continue as a part of the Fellowship, **YOU NEED TO LET US KNOW VIA EMAIL, PHONE CALL, LETTER, OR IN PERSON.** Members will continue to receive newsletters and, as we add extra features to the website, have special access to online articles, pictures, study guides, and updates not available to others. **Oblates** who do not fulfill the annual requirements they have promised (and those promises are made to God, not to us), you will be returned to Friend status so as not to perpetuate unfulfilled promises, and if you do not let us know your wishes to continue in that capacity, you will also be removed from our records. **Life Vowed members**—we'll be in touch with you personally so you know how WE will continue in our unique bond of fellowship and ministry! You are so important to us, and we will not tear down what God has begun!!

- **THE NAVIGATOR:** Newsletters will continue to be a quarterly publication, but in a simpler format. And they will only be sent via email except to those who cannot receive them electronically. (Members who have no access to a computer will continue to receive paper copies free of charge.) Alan and I will continue to work through one of the Spiritual Disciplines with each edition of “The Navigator”, but his will be taken straight from *The Rule* (our guidelines for living a lay monastic life). We will be making this book and others available online as *ebooks*: our prayer book *The Breviary*; worship service book *The Holy Eucharist*—as well as Alan's dissertations on house church worship and convergence worship (the combining of sacramental, liturgical, evangelical and charismatic). Prayer Ropes and other items are already for sale on our Etsy site, and we'll be putting links to that on our website soon.
- **RETREATS:** Our policy for retreats will not change. All are welcome to come and stay without cost. Retreatants are expected to join in the labor without pay. Labor includes prayer, house chores, farm chores, construction, administration, etc. as skill, ability, strength and time allow. By the way, we uphold the principle of 2 Thessalonians 3:10; no work, no eat.
- **FINANCES:** Both Saint Brendan's and Holy Trinity Chapel will continue to be not-for-profit organizations and, as such, your financial and material contributions are tax deductible. We will provide you, at the close of each year, with the proper receipts for your records. If you would like to contribute to a specific part of the ministry (for example, chapel construction or the farm), let your wishes be known at the time of your donation. We are SO GRATEFUL for your generous contributions. And it is my personal goal, this year, to more accurately report just how many donations of funds, goods, services, and time flow from your hands through ours to those who need it—in the name of Christ!

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...

Without solitude, it is virtually impossible to live a spiritual life.
We do not take the spiritual life seriously if we do not set aside some time
to be alone with God and to listen to him.

—Henri Jozef Machiel Nouwen (1932-1996)
Dutch Catholic Priest, Professor, Writer, and Theologian

Alone with God

Sue Andraeas

Then after being ministered to by Ananias and visiting with the disciples, [Paul] withdrew to converse with Christ for three years in the isolation of the Arabian Desert.

Galatians 1:15-16

Our society operates in an odd paradox of connected isolation. With a smartphone in our hand, or a computer on our lap, we can be constantly connected to the world—but only if we first disconnect from the one immediately around us. Studies have revealed that there is a direct correlation between the increase in depression and an increase in feeling isolated, and that our obsession with technology does more to isolate us than we realize. For all its benefits, the instant ‘connection’ of social media, cell phones, and email isn’t preventing us from feeling alone. I’m not condemning cell phones, or email, or social media. They have their place. But they are poor substitutes for real communication, real social cohesiveness, and real relationships.

If isolation truly is a problem in our culture, if loneliness is truly at epidemic levels, then why would the Church offer solitude as a spiritual discipline? Wouldn’t it seem that what we need is to spend more quality time together? Wouldn’t we want to guard against encouraging people to be alone? The answer is no, and here’s why. There is a real danger to being constantly bombarded with information, news, pictures—whether from the world or from our friends and families—and even trivial ‘factoids’ without having time (and the ‘safe space’ of prayer) to digest it all or put it into perspective.

We are now expected to assimilate a constant barrage of news (most of it heart-wrenchingly catastrophic yet mind-numbingly repetitive) and information (and constant ‘viral’ videos and Facebook ‘favorites’) while still remaining in control of ourselves, our work, our family commitments and social obligations, and all while ‘being positive’ as the new mantra commands. It’s impossible. Oh, and we must be instantly accessible to everyone. (I had a woman email me, email again two minutes later, and then call a minute beyond that, hysterically worried that something bad had happened to me. I don’t have a cell phone and I wasn’t at my computer; I had no clue she was trying to reach me! What she wanted wasn’t even important. She just had no idea I was ‘so isolated.’ She lives less than 5 miles away!!)

Our human brains are not designed to mentally and emotionally multi-task on this level for any length of time. We can’t be constantly, simultaneously present everywhere with everyone. We need time to assess what is important—and what is not; what has been sensationalized and what truly needs our attention. We need to be alone with ourselves. Better yet, we need to be alone with our God. Our ability to cope with the pain and fast-paced chaos of our world is contingent upon our seeing it through His eyes and on His terms. It is, after all, HIS world.

I looked through some online references to spiritual solitude and was rather appalled by what I read. The first three links were to Christian magazine articles written by ‘expert’ leaders in discipleship—names you’d probably recognize. One suggested listening to soothing music during times of solitude—while driving to or from work. Another suggested taking a walk in a nature park. The third advised letting your friends and family know that you will be ‘out of reach’ during the 5-10 minutes per day that you are setting aside for solitude. 5-10 minutes? One also quoted Jesus’ words found in Mark 6:31-32, where He called the disciples, as a group, to come away from the demands of ministry. This is not solitude. Fellowship, perhaps, but not solitude.

These types of ‘strategies’ do more, I think, to explain why so many religious leaders suffer from compassion fatigue or burn-out than they do to teach the discipline of solitude. Our lives, today more than ever, require more than 5 to 10 minutes of soothing music or a walk. These activities are good places to begin, but as people seeking a deeper relationship with Christ, and a lay monastic commitment to heeding God’s voice, it is not nearly deep enough. Let’s look at the example of St. Paul instead.

He was a zealous Jew. Social unrest, caused by Jesus’ crucifixion, was disrupting the peace of Jerusalem, his city. He had a life-changing religious experience. He was

led, in his blindness, to the home of Ananias, who caught him up to speed with what really happened to Jesus and his disciples. If ever there was a tumultuous time in history, it was Jerusalem during these months! If ever there was a man trying to figure out what God was doing, it was Paul! Did he spend a few minutes to allow God to sort it out for him? No, he went far away from all ‘external stimuli’ to talk it all over with the Lord. He emerged, 3 years later, not as an enlightened Jew but as an Apostle responsible for the bulk of the non-Gospel New Testament, the human vessel used by God to convert the gentile nations.



“There is no safer place to be than in the arms of your Savior and King. There is no better place to totally lose yourself than in the great Timelessness of God Himself.”

Solitude is a game-changer of a discipline. You come out on the other side as someone other than the person who began—not someone else, just less influenced by everyone else and more of the YOU that God intended you to be. I’m sure Paul took some breaks during those 3 years to eat, sleep, and walk around, but his time qualifies in my book as extreme, uninterrupted solitude. Still, imagine how effective we, as the Fellowship of Saint Brendan’s, would be if we would devote even a few hours a week to the sole purpose of allowing God to have His way with us.

To be honest, this is by far the spiritual discipline I struggle with the most. It’s not because I don’t like to be alone. In fact, I spend most of my day alone! I don’t have a cell phone, or a Facebook account. I don’t like to spend time ‘just talking’ on the phone. The television is rarely on, and I don’t ‘live’ at my computer. I do often have music playing, but I can do without it. But I don’t think my ‘alone time’ qualifies as solitude. My concept of solitude as a spiritual discipline more closely resembles a sensory deprivation tank than anything else.

For me, solitude should be an attempt to remove all mental, emotional, physical, and psychological stimuli save one—the voice of God: not time sharing my brain while I drive (or muck the barn, or milk a goat); not contemplating Scripture I’ve just read; not listening to meditative music; not even admiring creation. I do all those things, to be sure. But for times of solitude, I want one thing—time alone with my Savior. It takes me more than 5-10 minutes just to organize my conscious thoughts so that they don’t bombard me. It takes even more time for subconscious thoughts to float to the surface so I can deal with them and put them aside. It’s still very hard for me to focus totally on Christ when I hear the washing machine beeping that it’s done, or when the phone rings, or my computer’s email signal chimes. (I’ve not ‘evolved’ beyond Pavlov’s dogs very much, have I?)

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Remember that old praise song? “Turn your eyes upon Jesus; Look full in His wonderful face, and the things of earth become strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace.” No they don’t! Turn your eyes upon Jesus and all in the sudden, all you can think of is the million earthly things that seem to need your attention more!! That’s why it’s called a discipline—you have to work at it. And it’s why even prominent church leaders are afraid of it, I think. It immediately reveals just how out of control we truly are. So, if we want to develop our ability for solitude—being fully alone with God—where do we start?

I suggest that you leave a minimum of a few hours for your ‘introductory attempt.’ Turn off ALL electronics (or at least their bells and whistles). It might help to have a tablet handy at first, to write down ‘important reminders’ that you just can’t let go of otherwise. Don’t have an agenda other than listening and being alone with God. It’s tough. We want to get up and move around, check fingernails, straighten out wrinkles, see what’s going on outside. Resist those urges. (What if you were paralyzed and couldn’t respond? Maybe ‘Bible People’ tended to fall on their faces when they saw God’s messengers because, that way, they couldn’t run away or fidget!) Your mind is going to want to race all over the place. Don’t chastise or reprimand yourself; just go back to waiting for God. (Perhaps this is why God talks to people in visions so much; their conscious thoughts were ‘sleeping’ and He had their undivided attention.) As you practice more, you’ll get better at leaving the world behind—and time won’t be so overwhelmingly controlling. (A thousand years, to God, is like a day—or a *watch in the night*; Psalm 90:4. IMAGINE! He can show you a thousand years in just a few hours! Can you imagine a better way to lose sleep than being an audience of one, alone with God!?)

I’m here to tell you, there is no better teacher than the Holy Spirit. There is no safer place to be than in the arms of your Savior and King. There is no better place to totally lose yourself than in the great Timelessness of God Himself. You don’t get to experience that kind of Love if you’re only willing to give up earthly connectivity for a few minutes, or only partially relinquish it! I’m not saying God doesn’t love you unless you ‘do the time.’ I’m saying that you can’t fully *experience* that Love unless you do!

One final thing. I went to a secular website with articles concerning the difference between loneliness (and the depression it causes) and being alone. Do you know what the experts there listed as their #3 strategy for avoiding depression—only after ‘make a plan so that the future is not totally unknown’ and ‘say hello to the person behind the cash register where you buy your morning coffee so you make real contact with a real person?’ #3 was ‘Explore your faith.’ I quote here: “People who have a *personal relationship* with their God or a higher power tend to do well” (Dr. Hawkey, PhD in psychiatry and professor at the Univ. of Chicago).

Note that he does not recommend that we ‘spend time with other people of our faith,’ or ‘study the religious writings of

your faith' in order to combat isolation. He says, as a secular psychiatrist who is not 'taking sides' with any religious group over another, that we need to have a personal relationship with our God. Even non-Christians seem to innately know what we need. It's not a secret; we just resist truth. God doesn't want us to only read what He's written, or to just talk with others who know Him, or to bring all our problems to Him. He certainly welcomes all those things! But at the very core, God is looking for us to be willing to sit and BE with Him; to just leave everything behind for a bit and BE with Him. You

wouldn't think it would take so much effort on our part, but it does. Is God worth it to you? I hope so!

Rejoice!
Sue Andraeas
Prioress, Saint Brendan's

This article is dedicated to Mr. David Holifield who has taught me more through his stillness than I have learned through the words and actions of others. Thank you!

**Take time to be holy, the world rushes on;
Spend much time in secret, with Jesus alone;
By looking to Jesus, like Him thou shalt be;
Thy friends in thy conduct His likeness shall see.**

"Take Time to Be Holy" -- Text, William D. Longstaff; Music, George C. Stebbins

Fr. Alan Prays at the Maine State House

Fr. Alan was invited by Maine State District Representative Beth Turner to serve as "Chaplain of the Day" at the Maine State Capital on Thursday, January 14. As Chaplain of the Day, guest clergy are expected to lead the House of Representatives in prayer at the start of the legislative day. The prayer is offered from the rostrum of the House Floor. This was also an unprecedented day in Maine history because the House was being presented with a bill to begin impeachment proceedings on Governor Paul LePage, making this occasion to pray all the more important.

Fr. Alan offered his prayer to a full Floor and overflowing gallery. Afterwards, he was invited into the Governor's office for a personal 20 minute meeting where he also anointed, laid hands on, and prayed for the Governor. Two hours later, after intense debate, the House voted to reject the Bill by a 2-1 margin.

While the prayer was required by the State Clerk's office to be delivered as a public/civic prayer (i.e., non-offensive or slanted toward one particular faith), it nevertheless contained numerous Old and New Testament scriptural allusions that were not lost on the hearers, gaining almost instantaneous reactions on the "Maine Politics" Twitter feed. Because of the impeachment proceedings, a number of news outlets and major network affiliates were also present, providing a live feed of the event.



The Final Word: Philo Judaeus — Jewish Theologian and Philosopher (20 BC—50 AD)
from his book, *A Treatise on the Life of the Wise Man Made Perfect*

Wickedness is a very multiform and extensive thing, on which account it is known to many persons; but virtue is rare, so that it is not comprehended even by a few. And besides, the bad man runs about through the market-place, and theatres, and courts of justice, and council halls, and assemblies, and every meeting and collection of men whatever, like one who lives with and for curiosity, letting loose his tongue in immoderate, and interminable, and indiscriminate conversation, confusing and disturbing every thing, mixing up what is true with what is false, what is unspeakable with what is public, private with public things, things profane with things sacred, what is ridiculous with what is excellent, from never having been instructed in what is the most excellent thing in season, namely silence. And pricking up his ears, because of the abundance of his leisure, and his superfluous curiosity, and love of interference, he is eager to make himself acquainted with the business of other people, whether good or bad; for the bad man is by nature envious and a hater of all that is good, and a lover of all that is evil. But the good man, on the contrary, is a lover of that mode of life which is not troubled by business, and withdraws, and loves solitude, desiring to escape the notice of the many, not out of misanthropy, for he is a lover of mankind, if any one in the world is so, but because he eschews wickedness, which the multitude eagerly embraces.



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