

The Navigator



The Newsletter of Saint Brendan's Monastic Fellowship

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FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT: KINDNESS

Fr. Alan Andraeas, Prior

"With everlasting kindness I will have compassion on you," says the LORD your Redeemer.
Isaiah 34:8b

Have you ever watched one of those TV shows where the dejected 'tween' blurts out at the dinner table, "I never wanna go back to school again,...ever!" The wise parents give each other that knowing nod and one of them says, "What happened at school today to make you say that?" "Nothing! Everything! It doesn't matter—I'm invisible!" Then out comes this anguished torrent of how everybody at school thinks they're klutzy, plain, dull, and that nobody will ever like them.

What happens next is what always happens next on TV. The parents try to console their child with comforting words that go something like this: "Now you know that's not true. I happen to know for a fact that you're smart and generous, you're funny, you have a beauty that only special people can see, and best of all, you're kind to everyone." Kind? That's like the kiss of death! A tween wants to be amazing; raw talent ready to explode; someone who "owns the room"; a figure, face, and hair that'll have paparazzi from *Teen Vogue* and *Seventeen* magazines camped at the front door. But kind? Might as well live in the basement and homeschool until graduation. [DISCLAIMER: This is not a slam against homeschool; we and the bulk of my

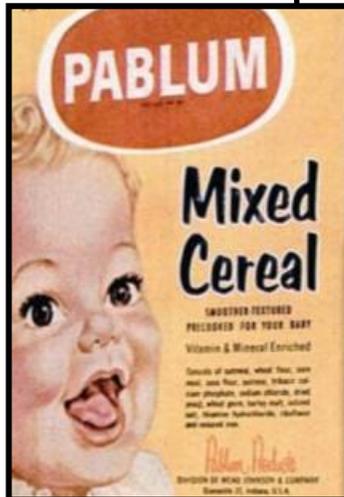
family have, are, and will homeschool!]

Kindness is like the pablum or cream of wheat of the Fruit of the Spirit: rather plain, non-descript, and generic. On the surface it doesn't seem to call for any great spiritual heroics or sacrifices. It's just...sort of there. However, in reality, once you understand what it really means, it's nothing short of a superpower. Let's take a few moments to analyze the superpower hiding inside this "Plain Jane" exterior. [Another DISCLAIMER: Yes, the 'Plain Jane' picture is actually from the ABC TV show "Ugly Betty".]

We get our first clue of kindness's true nature from 1 Corinthians 13:4 where Paul writes, "love is kind." Don't make the mistake of just brushing past that short phrase. When we say that

love is kind, what we're actually saying is that kindness is godly love in action. What does that mean? When traced back to its most primitive usage, kindness has the sense of "filling a void" in the people or circumstances around us. If that void is physical, we use our hands in Christlike action. If that void is emotional, we use our hearts and words and even our

tears as Christ would. If that void is a moral one, we bring the excellence of virtue to shine where there is none. In other words, kindness brings the salt, light, sounds, action, and aroma of heaven into a needy, broken world.



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Back when the Apostle Paul was writing his letters to various churches, there were two distinct kinds of Greek used in speech and writing: classical and koine. For classical writers and thinkers, kindness was a synonym for friendliness, clemency, magnanimity, and benevolence—like a favorite grandmother who would smile and hand you piece of hard candy found deep in the recesses of her old purse or apron pocket. But for those who used koine Greek (the ‘street’ Greek of Paul’s world), kindness meant much more.

On the one hand, it’s a part of God’s character. God’s kindness is how He unfolds and displays His gracious attitude toward us through the merits of Jesus Christ (Romans 2:4; 11:22). In fact, kindness is so directly knit to God’s character that Paul wrote of it as an equivalent of grace (Ephesians 2:7).

On the other hand, kindness is an attribute of mankind. As we experience God’s love and grace toward us through Christ, we can express that kindness to those around us by “filling the void.” This,

“Kindness brings the salt, light, sounds, action, and aroma of heaven into a needy, broken world.”

then, is how it finds itself nestled within the Fruit of the Spirit since the ability to express kindness toward others can only be accomplished through the Holy Spirit Who births the life of Christ within us (cf., 2 Corinthians 6:6; Colossians 3:12). What this also means is that any deed of benevolence—remember the classical Greek above—done outside the work of the Holy Spirit is nothing more than philanthropy. And as Jesus warned in Matthew 6:2, while such ‘acts of righteousness,’ even toward the needy, confer rewards, those rewards may actually be judgments in disguise!

In the end, what we have here is a discipline of faith—that’s what the Fruit of the Spirit is—with the qualities of a superpower (see, all your childhood dreams are true; you ARE a superhero!). And that superpower has a single objective: to display the love of Christ poured into you through similar action poured into the saved and lost alike. That’s what kindness is all about.

Rejoice!
Fr. Alan Andraeas



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WE COVET YOUR PRAYERS!!!

Please continue to pray for the needs of Saint Brendan’s:

- For necessary remodeling of the Priory House so that we can host more retreatants and guests.
- For the continuing interior construction Holy Trinity Chapel, including flooring, wheelchair ramp, and interior of the Sacristy.
- For discernment as we continue to define and refine Saint Brendan’s role in the Body of Christ and this local community.

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...

“Our actions disclose what goes on within us, just as a tree otherwise unknown to us is made known by its fruit.”

—Thalassios the Libyan (Monastery Abbot in Libya, late 6th and early 7th century).

For Goodness' Sake!

Susan Andraeas, Prioress

"And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose."

Romans 8:28, NKJV

Here we are again, talking about two more facets of the Fruit of the Spirit. Think of all the events that have happened since our last newsletter! In our Advent chapel services, we sing a Celtic song that includes the lyrics "... and the world is about to turn." I think this is one of those historic moments where the world is turning. Why bother sticking with a newsletter series about the Fruit of the Spirit when nothing else is remaining constant?! Because MANY things are remaining constant. Because God remains constant! Because this series was begun after much prayer and deliberation, and I can't believe for a moment that God didn't know how much things would turn from the beginning of this series to its end. So here we go. Alan is writing about the fruit of kindness. That leaves me with goodness. My favorite!!

Quick review. What IS the Fruit of the Spirit? And yes, it is singular, not plural. In the past, we have discussed the root of the plant—God—as being the Source of all of Creation. The vine—Jesus—is what we have been grafted to when we become His disciple and He becomes our Lord. We are the branches that produce fruit. The fruit is what perpetuates the 'plant' of the Kingdom of God. This fruit is not of our doing. A branch, severed from the plant, will produce nothing but firewood, and that only after it is totally dead. Fruit is produced only from healthy, connected branches, not for the branch's sake but for the sake of the plant's ability to grow more plants. The new plants will also have God as its root, Jesus as its vine, and the branches will produce more fruit. One kind of fruit. Kingdom-expansion fruit. In-the-name-of-Jesus fruit. To-the-glory-of-God fruit. All of these words we use to describe the fruit of the Spirit are various facets of that same Spirit-perpetuation power. And one of those facets is goodness.

God is good (see Matthew 19:17). That's why one of the Kingdom-spreading fruit facets is goodness. We perpetuate on earth the nature of our Heavenly

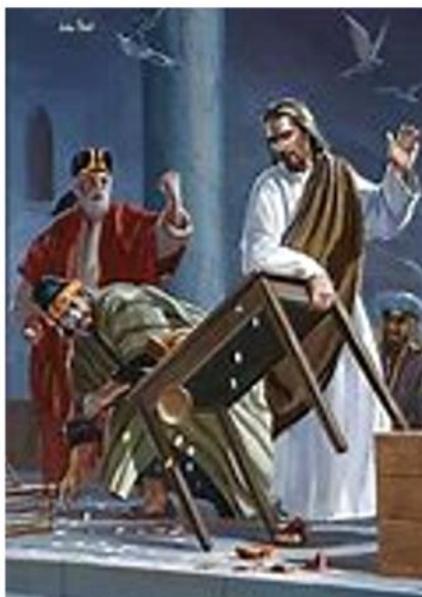
Father. In fact, God can do nothing that isn't good! God is totally good! Everything He does is totally good. All good gifts come from God. Nothing that is good comes from any source other than God. The more time we spend with God, the more of God's goodness we absorb, the more goodness we exude, and the more good our world becomes. None of this is because WE are good! In fact, even Jesus didn't like being called good! (Go back to that Matthew 19:17 verse again!) Only God is good. But God's goodness pours through us, by the power of the Holy Spirit, as He glorifies His Son through us. Our job is not to try to guess what 'good thing' we are supposed to be doing, but to be still, be obedient, be about the work of our Heavenly Father, and His goodness will be poured out through us—and often in spite of us.



The thing we need to be most cautious of is confusing what God thinks 'good' means, and what man thinks 'good' means. They aren't even close to being the same. WE tend to determine if something is good by how fun it is, fulfilling, rewarding, soothing; it's quality, delicious taste, pleasing aroma; the sensation to our bodies, amusement or engagement with our minds. Good things are comfortable. Good things don't cause stress or pain, strain relationships, or cause hardships. That's what WE think, but it's not necessarily what God thinks.

The reason for this inequality of definition is obvious when we remember that WE are wanting temporal, immediate, earthly goodness while God is wanting eternal, long-haul, heavenly goodness. Let's take a moment and see Jesus' goodness in action. I think it will help clear this all up.

Jesus made many trips to Jerusalem with His disciples. On one of these visits, He 'drove out the money changers' (Matthew 21:12). Well, that's not the whole picture. That's what we often imagine, but if we look at that verse more carefully, we'll see



that it wasn't only the 'currency exchange' people He drove out. He also cleaned out those who were making it possible for people to offer 'sacrifices' without it costing them much (blemished, cheap doves), those who brought the secular economy into the courtyards of God's Holy Place (merchants), and—take note here—those who were participating in these activities. Jesus drove out everyone who was exchanging money, buying cheap doves and other temple souvenirs, people who were thinking of this courtyard more as a marketplace or meeting place than a worship place, people who were not re-

membering the Passover lamb of Moses—nor were they waiting for their coming Messiah. And Jesus' response was anger. Zeal. In fact, this moment had been predicted by King David (Psalm 69:9).

“Goodness is preserving the Kingdom of God that has been passed on to us.”

This same zeal of Christ was prophesied by Isaiah concerning the establishment of Jesus being seated on the eternal throne in heaven—and that the ‘zeal of the Lord will establish it’ (Isaiah 9:7). Jesus being on His heavenly throne is good! God’s kind of good, not our kind. It requires constant attendance to heavenly things rather than earthly things, and occasionally it requires spiritual housecleaning—which is also good.

In Fr. Alan’s article, he explains that the Fruit of kindness brings the superpower of heaven down to fill an earthly void. Goodness is the continuation of kindness in that, once the Kingdom of God has filled a void—once there is now a piece of God’s Kingdom here on earth—His goodness will maintain it. The relationship between kindness and goodness was clarified by

St. Jerome who explained that kindness is ‘love in action’ while goodness ‘includes the sterner qualities of love which must sometimes move beyond gentle means.’ (This quote comes from St. Brendan’s *Rule of Life*.)

The Fruit of goodness, then, is more akin to bad-tasting medicine, the burning of weeds in a field, or corrective discipline. It’s the pruning of the vines so that the fruit is more plentiful. Moving beyond the analogy, goodness is preserving the Kingdom of God that has been passed on to us. Yes, we are commanded to show God’s mercy and kindness to a lost and wounded world by being Christ to those around us and in those circumstances where He places us. But we are also to act with that zeal to safeguard and preserve what is holy and righteous in order that God’s Kingdom remains different and separate from the world. If the goodness

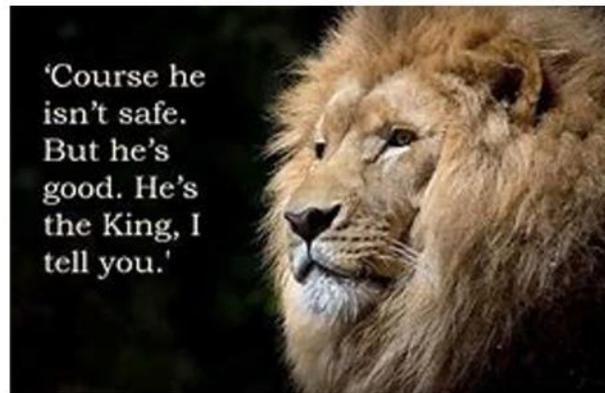
of our actions or characteristics are no different than what the world offers, why bother? In C. S. Lewis’ most wonderful books about Narnia, Aslan represents Jesus. If you don’t know these books, and you have time on your hands now, I highly recommend them. They are not just for children. Anyway, four children find themselves in the woods of Narnia which has been taken over by an evil witch. But Aslan is ‘on the move.’ Winter is melting. Hope is renewed. But when the children learn that Aslan is actually a lion, they ask, “Is he safe?” The response is, “Is Aslan safe??? [chuckle] No. He is not safe. But he is good.” Jesus never promised us the kind of ‘good’ that is comfortable, tasty, entertaining, without stress or conflict. In fact, he promises the exact opposite! The Kingdom of God is the exact opposite of the kingdom of darkness! Aim for presenting God’s kind-

ness while preserving God’s goodness.

Rejoice!
Sue

(PS While we are spending more time at home—and most are spending very little time at our churches—it might be wise to do a bit of our own spiritual housecleaning and moving of internal furniture. What part(s) of our spirit have become cluttered, filled with things that

don’t belong there? How has our prayer life and worship become dependent upon props and ‘stunt doubles’ to do our praise and intercession for us? In what ways have we invited Jesus in but asked Him to sit in a corner, out of the way? What blemished sacrifices, money changers, and merchandise has replaced holiness in our interior life? Tough questions. Let’s not wait for Jesus to have to take the initiative. Let’s get busy, and then ask Him to see if we have missed anything.)



Sowing in the morning, sowing seeds of kindness,
Sowing in the noontide and the dewy eve;
Waiting for the harvest, and the time of reaping,
We shall come rejoicing, bringing in the sheaves.
Bringing in the sheaves, bringing in the sheaves,
We shall come rejoicing, bringing in the sheaves.

"Bringing in the Sheaves"

Lyrics: Knowles Shaw (1874); Music: George Minor (1880)
Based on Psalm 126:6

The Final Word: St. Catherine of Siena (1347-1380 AD) — Dominican sister, mystic, and Doctor of the Church; canonized in 1461. A reading from her *Dialogue of Divine Providence*.

[NOTE: Christian mystic writing is sometimes a difficult 'genre' for people to grasp. Frequently, the writer is prompted by the Holy Spirit to write a message in the first person singular with/as the voice of God. Such is the case with this text from St. Catherine of Siena.]

As the vinedresser prunes the shoots of the vine so as to get better and more wine from them, cutting off the barren shoots and burning them, I, the true Vinedresser, do the same with My vine, pruning my servants who abide in Me, that they may bear more fruit and better fruit, and that their virtues may be tested. But the barren ones are cut off and thrown into the fire.

Thus the true laborers will toil away at their souls, uprooting all self-love and turning over in Me the earth of their affections. They nurture and foster the growth of the seed of grace they received in holy baptism. And as they work on their own vineyard, they work on their neighbor's vineyard as well, since the two go together; they are joined to their neighbor's without anything in between. All are so joined together that none can do any good to themselves without benefiting their neighbors, nor do any evil to themselves without harming their neighbors. And all of you together form one great vineyard which is the whole body of Christians, united in the vineyard of the mystical body of the Holy Church, whence you draw your life. And within this vineyard is planted the vine of my only-begotten Son, into which you must be grafted—otherwise you at once become rebels against Holy Church and are like limbs that are cut off from the body and immediately decay.

It is the bond of charity that binds my servants one to another with true humility acquired through knowledge of Me. So you see, I have made you all My laborers. And now I call on you again, because the world is already at its last gasp, for so many thorns have multiplied and smothered the seed that it will not produce any fruit of grace. I want you, then, to be true laborers, zealously helping to tend souls in the mystical body of Holy Church. For this I have chosen you, for it is my will to have mercy on the world—the world for which you pray to me so earnestly.



HOUSEKEEPING



Saint Brendan's has a new website: www.saintbrendans-online.com. Take note, we are now a .com rather than a .org. We're also testing new download options under its own dropdown menu on the main page. It will get better with time.



Did you know that Fr. Alan is uploading a daily video blessing on the Saint Brendan's Facebook page at least five times a week? You can find each video and its transcript here: www.facebook.com/st.brendansfellowship/ and then click on 'Posts'. Share it with others who may be looking for encouragement during our nation's response to COVID-19.

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