

The Navigator +X+P+

The Newsletter of Saint Brendan's Monastic Fellowship

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VOWS: FOUNDATIONS OF DEVOUT LIFE

Fr. Alan Andraeas, Prior

*"Thy vows are upon me, O God:
I will render praises unto Thee."
Psalm 56:12 (KJV)*

From the very beginning of mankind's relationship with God, those desiring to walk a life of consecration have characterized their lives by making and keeping vows (or promises or covenants). These vows were their 'commitments' to the Lord that would define their lives as the People of God.

The Nation of Israel standing at the foot of Mount Sinai is perhaps the biggest example of a covenant vow. God said, "This is what I want from you," and they said, "These things we will do." And with that, their lives were set apart in law, commerce, property, interrelationships, and religious observances unlike any other nation in the ancient world. Another example among the Jews were those who submitted themselves to Nazirite vows (Numbers 6:1-21). For some Nazirites, this vow was a religious vow for a specific period of time, perhaps months or several years (Acts 18:18). For others it was a consecration for life (Judges 13:5). You might also remember the Rechabites who lived under family vows to never drink alcohol and to never live in a fixed house—they and their posterity would always live a nomadic life—and their unfailing obedience garnered for them the divine blessing of God (Jeremiah 35:1-19).

One of the most interesting vows in European history was the Code of Chivalry which flourished among knights in the 12th



and 13th centuries, and was perhaps best personified in the story of Don Quixote. This code included such requirements as to believe all

that the Church teaches, respect and defend

the weak, remain faithful to your pledged

word, be open-handed with your purse and resources, never shy away from a just cause or battle, and exercise great gallantry toward women.

In its simplest form, however, vows essentially bind us to one another through a "code of conduct" that shapes everything we say and do. Mention *code of conduct* to anyone who served in the Armed Forces and they will see a clearly defined, mental picture in their heads. In fact, military life without a code of conduct is inconceivable. But what about in the Church?

Let's go back to the Nazirite vow for a few minutes. A Nazirite in ancient Israel was someone who separated himself from the world by consecration to Yahweh.

Whether for a period of time or for life, the distinctive feature of this consecration was not just to restrain the body from things that could lead to evil, but to enlist oneself into holy service. It extended a way of holiness to the layman that was usually reserved for and associated with the priesthood.

When properly understood with a religious view in mind, a vow, then, is always made with reference to God; either to perform some particular thing (Genesis 28:20-ff), to abstain from some particular thing (Psalm 132:2-ff), or as an expression of zeal or

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devotion towards God (Psalm 22:25). There is no sin in making a vow and no sin in not making a vow, but if a vow is made it is as sacredly binding as an oath (Deuteronomy 23:21-23). Therefore, a vow should not be entered into lightly or hastily (Proverbs 20:25). This is where monastic vows (and even lay monastic vows) come in.

Most monastic vows made today find their basis in something known as the *Counsels of Perfection*. In some circles they're also called the *Evangelical Counsels*. Now be sure to note which word is being used here: *counsel* rather than *council*. It makes a big difference! A council is a group of people that talk through issues and make decisions. Counsel, on the other hand, is a word of advice or clarity that speaks into and shapes one's course. A council (group of people) can speak counsel (advice) to its leader or head, but the two are not synonymous. The *Counsels of Perfection*, when heeded, speak into and shape one's course of action. As the name implies, the *Counsels* afford one the avenue by which they strive for a perfect evangelical life; a life shaped by the Gospel to the glory of Christ. And since the late-Middle Ages (15th century), they have been held as the basis of devoted religious life in nearly all its forms.

The *Counsels* embrace what we recognize as the traditional, triad vow of poverty (the renunciation of private property), chastity (the renunciation of marriage and/or sexual activity), and obedience (relinquishment to a lawful, spiritual superior in things both internal and external). The *Counsels*, however, are rather late in their development. They were actually preceded by a thousand years by the original vows of Benedictine spiritual life! The vows St. Benedict handed down to his followers were stability, conversion of life (Latin, *conversatio*, variously translated but generally understood to mean fidelity), and obedience.



"In its simplest form, vows bind us to another through a 'code of conduct' that shapes everything we say and do."

A student of St. Benedict's *Rule* will note that in Article 58, "*The Reception of Candidates for the Community*", the original vow which was signed and placed on the altar was a profession to stability, fidelity, and obedience, and is the same vow we have adapted for use by the Monastic Fellowship of Saint Brendan's. Bear in mind that, like the *Counsels of Perfection*, these are not three separate vows, but like the Fruit of the Spirit they are, in fact, one vow expressed through three facets of intentional life; a triad vow. And to make this vow more in keeping with the spirit of Saint Brendan's, we have supplemented this vow with the added Celtic spirit of joy. Taken together, these expressions of monastic life aid us toward the sanctification of

our lives just as praying the Liturgy of the Hours is an aid toward the sanctification of time.

Don't think of this as something new-fangled. It's rather old-fangled (is that a proper expression?) and something we're already familiar with. For instance, when we have a Service of Baptism a series of questions are asked, and answers are made. Those answers are vows. Here's what you may hear at a baptism:

- Do you renounce Satan and all his works that rebel against God?

I renounce them.

- Do you renounce all sinful desires that draw you from the love of God?

I renounce them.

- Will you continue in the Apostle's teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers?

I will, with God's help.

- Will you join together in resisting evil, and, whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord?

I will, with God's help.

- Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in our Lord, Jesus Christ?

I will, with God's help.

Saint Brendan's Fellowship

38 Cemetery Road
Dennysville, ME 04628-4326
207-726-5129

st.brendans@myfairpoint.net
www.saintbrendans-online.com
www.facebook.com/st.brendansfellowship
www.facebook.com/holytrinitychapel.maine

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 exterior and interior construction Holy Trinity Chapel, including flooring and the 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.

- Will you seek and serve Christ in all people, loving your neighbor as yourself?
I will with God's help.
- Will you obediently keep God's holy will and commandments, walking in them all the days of your life as is fitting for a brother or sister of Christ?
I will.
- Do you promise to support this local congregation through your prayers, tithes, worship, and labor, seeking to serve as Christ would serve?
I do.
- Will you, with all your heart, seek to live as an obedient witness of the faith that dwells in you, sharing the love of Christ with all those around you?
I will.
- Will you participate in the full life of this church through

its worship, government, common life, and outreach to this community and beyond?

I will.

Remember saying something like that when you were baptized? Doesn't it sound easier to simply say "stability, fidelity, obedience, and joy"? And yet in those four simple foundation stones, all of our baptismal vows can be kept. Taken together, we can think of these things as the Pillars of Christianity upon which our walk with Christ can be built. And over the next several newsletters we're going to see how this is the case and why they are built into the very fabric of our community life at Saint Brendan's. In this edition of *The Navigator*, Sue will introduce us to the Pillar of Stability.

Rejoice!
Fr. Alan 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...

**"As the vow lies on the altar, they intone this verse:
'Receive me, O Lord, in accordance with Your word and I shall live.'"**

—*Saint Benedict's Rule* (516 AD), Chapter 58, 'The Reception of Candidates for the Community'. Describing the preparation of the novice to make the vow of stability, fidelity, and obedience.

Steady On

Sue Andraeas, prioress

*"As iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens
the countenance of his friend."*
Proverbs 27:17

It's spring! My garlic is poking through the garden dirt. Elderberry trees have buds ready to pop. My mom just told me she's got daffodils and forsythia flowers in Pennsylvania, but it's still snowing here—our flowers are limited to crocuses. But still, it's spring. Two baby goats are hopping around the pasture, and 5 very pregnant moms are wishing theirs were too. Water hoses have been run to the pens so we don't have to haul water in buckets anymore, and I can do morning chores before 6:00 AM—in the light—without boots, hat, scarf, two pair of gloves, wool sweater, and winter coat. And the hens are laying eggs. Many, MANY eggs! Some springs, the change

from winter to spring takes well into May. This year, it's earlier and I am very grateful!

A month ago, while shoveling snow that had several inches of ice under it, I was wondering why in the world we put ourselves through the difficult, monotonous drudgery of farming in Maine. It's cold and tedious, hard on the body and mind. And all without much return. Egg production slows down; no milk from the goats (so no cheese or butter, either); no veg from a sleeping garden; and I can't even ride Molly (the horse) due to ice, wind chill, and a lack of

desire on both our parts. A farm in the dead of winter is a lot of effort with very little gain. And then...spring. The garden wakes up. New life is everywhere. The work gets easier (for a bit, and then the blackflies arrive and planting season begins—and cutting/splitting/stacking of fire wood begins for next winter), it's warmer, and it seems farming in Maine is the best show in town. What changed? If anything, there's MORE work in the spring and summer. Days



are longer and hotter—and buggier, and we work many more hours than we do in the winter. But it's different.

We tend to think of time as being linear, like on a time LINE, because that's how schools teach history. You line up the dates with the oldest on the left and most current on the right, and you track events or people or inventions from left to right—just like we read. At least how English-reading people read. But I think time is more like the helix of a spring. It circles around and around, coming back almost to the same point over and over but with a few changes each time, slowly progressing upward. Sometimes, those changes are almost insignificant. (The garlic plot looks exactly like it did last year at about this time—except it's been moved over about 10 feet.) Other times, those changes are enormously significant (the first spring after a loved one passed away, for instance, is devastatingly different than any other spring). I can't navigate through July without thinking about Alan's and my wedding—or Alan's ordination to the priesthood and how that's affected our life together—or the sobering moment of pulling into the driveway at Saint Brendan's after dropping our son Zac off at the Merchant Marine Academy, knowing this would be my home for the rest of my life but it would be a home not shared with him—or the bittersweet memory of the last conversation I had with my dad just days before he died, and his telling me he's decided to go where Jesus is. That July part of the helix is an emotional journey that is heartbreakingly joyful. Most of life is like that; extremes blended together into one, and they are cyclical, not linear.

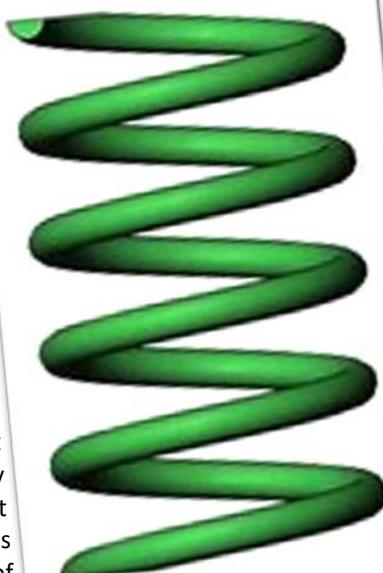
What does that have to do with stability? Well, the first thing to remember is that the Fruit of the Spirit (which we've discussed previously in past newsletters) is the work of the Holy

"While the journey is unpredictable, the path is known. And the more closely we stick to that path, the more stable the journey becomes."

Spirit through us individually. We give our lives to God—we die to self—and the Spirit works through us to produce fruit that impacts others around us in a way that brings glory to God. Like a helix. God—to us—to others—to God—to us—to others. On and on, sometimes with slight variations and sometimes with significant ones, but always around and around. Community life for Christians, especially those who have chosen a monastic life (lay monastic or professed monks and nuns), takes that cycle to the next level. I give my life to God—Who calls me to die to self and live to serve Him and to do so with these other people who have also been called to this communal life—in order that together we may bear the Fruit of the Spirit—that impacts others around us in a way that brings glory to God. It's the same helix, but we go round and round together. Sometimes we bump into each other as we circle around. Sometimes we hang on to each other for dear life! But around and around we go. Together.

The good thing about a communal 'spring' is that, in a moment of weakness, there are others to carry us. There is also a structure of how we choose to live together—our

Rule of Life (based on the one St. Benedict wrote centuries earlier) that helps us to keep us on the same journey around the helix—that is intentional, predictable, and acts as the glue which binds us. While the journey is unpredictable, the path is known. And the more closely we stick to that path, the more stable the journey becomes. The trouble with all this structure is that it *is* predictable and that human beings like



**Blest be the tie that binds / Our hearts in Christian love;
The fellowship of kindred minds / Is like to that above.**

**Before our Father's throne / We pour our ardent prayers;
Our fears, our hopes, our aims are one / Our comforts and our cares.**

**We share our mutual woes / Our mutual burdens bear;
And often for each other flows / The sympathizing tear.**

"Blest Be the Tie that Binds"

Text: John Fawcett (1739-1817); Music: Johann G. Naegeli (1773-1836)

novelty or we become bored and uninterested.

For example, if you follow the structure for Morning and Evening Prayer, you'll pray through the entire Psalter every month. You'll read every Psalm every month! In 6 years, you will have read every Psalm 72 times. You will have read through all 4 Gospels at least 6 times. You will have read through most of the Old Testament 3 times. If you stick to that 'rule' (think guideline) with others, whether it be in a larger community or with your spouse and/or children, there are set times each day when your 'regular life' is interrupted by your prayer life. (Actually, it's the other way around; your prayer life is interrupted by your 'regular life' but we'll save that for another discussion.) The fewer people involved, the more flexible that schedule may be but only to a point.

Alan and I struggle to adjust that set time for prayer, especially as the seasons change; the animals use the sun as their clock and our wall clock is much more rigid. In a larger community, or when there are retreatants here, that time for prayer is set. Miss it and you are late—or absent. But once the pattern is set, it becomes more of a guide than a rule—like knowing how to get to work or school on time. So, on a good day, these facets of the Rule, as well as others that govern behavior, provide a stable, dependable structure. On other days, they are monotonous and tedious with no perception of growth or reward—like farm chores in winter in Maine. But if we stick with the stability of that Rule, as we move along that spiritual repetitive helix, we emerge into deeper spiritual life, deeper love for one another, and a reliable stable Rock-of-a-lifestyle that is based on the deep roots of our faith that are grounded in Jesus Christ Himself.

None of us are perfect. We are affected by this cyclical 'stability' in different ways at different

times. My imperfections will annoy you. Yours will annoy me. Our sins are less hidden, our weaknesses affect everyone else—as do our strengths. But those of us who are Oblates and have promised to work this through together will be perfected as we come to terms with each other, with the repetition of pattern, will find a subtle novelty and growth in the depth of a cyclical repetitive monastic life that can't be found in the 'shifting sand' that is experienced in the ever-changing, unstable world. Believe me—there is plenty that still 'shifts' in monastic life because we are weak; we are sinners. But we are weak sinners, saved by grace, and as we continue to die to self and live for Christ—together, as we learn to trust each other in the knowledge that we won't give up on each other but that we have a group of brothers and sisters who will drag us

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through our own moments of weakness, we begin to trust the security, the 'safety net' of a community that will not let us stray far from the promise we made to live our life only to the glory of God. We find Christ in that stability of community. We find ourselves as well.

That kind of commitment to others is rarely found in American life anymore. People shift jobs for personal gain, change churches and neighborhoods, friendships, even marriages. Life is constantly 'new and improved' and updated. And the ways our national life 'shift' are ever increasing! Entering into a long-term contract is getting more rare. It's easier to 'see where things go,' and when things go in a way that doesn't please us, to walk away and try something novel and different. Monastic stability can't be like that. Spiritual maturity comes from running the race all the way to the end and working through 'the wall' of seeming impossibility. We bear one another's burdens and don't allow others to quit. We work through the seasons of the Church and the seasons of life, seeing the helix and repetitiveness as a gift. The stability found in communal Christian

life, whether that be in a lay monastic group like Saint Brendan's or within a congregational group, is found in the commitment to fellowship with one another in a life lived for Christ. Together.

Spiritual winters are tough and they are part of the helix of our walk with Jesus. It takes the stability of a group dedicated to sticking together during communal tough times, and to carrying each other during individual tough times, to keep us from drifting away. To those of you who have stuck with Saint Brendan's during the past few years of particularly tough times, THANK YOU! We could not have done it without you.

Rejoice!
Sue

P.S. If you are interested in learning more about Saint Brenda's Oblate program, please contact us via phone or email.

P.S.S. If you are interested in seeing the entire *Rule of Life*, contact Fr. Alan at frumpymonk@myfairpoint.net for a PDF version. We are out of paper copies for now.

The Final Word: Hilary (310-367 AD) — Bishop of Poitiers (west-central

France along the Clain River) and Doctor of the Church, also known as the ‘Athanasius of the West’ and the ‘Hammer of the Arians’. A champion of Orthodoxy, he was the first Latin Father to introduce Greek/Eastern Doctrine into Western Christianity.

[NOTE: from Hilary’s *Commentary on Psalm 132*—this is the Latin numbering of the Psalms; in most Bibles today, this would be Psalm 133.]

“Behold, how good and pleasant it is for brethren to dwell in unity!” It is good and pleasant for brothers and sisters to dwell in unity, because when they do so their association creates the assembly of the Church. The term ‘brethren’ describes the bond of affection arising from their singleness of purpose.

We read that when the Apostles first preached, the chief instruction they gave lay in this saying: “The hearts and minds of all believers were one.” So it is fitting for the people of God to be brethren under one Father, to be united under one Spirit, to live in harmony under one roof, to be limbs of one body.

It is good for believers to dwell in unity. The prophet suggested a comparison for this good and pleasant activity when he said: “It is like the ointment on the head which ran down over the beard of Aaron, down upon the collar of his garment.” Aaron’s oil was made of the perfumes used to anoint a priest. It was God’s decision that his

priest should have this consecration first. Aaron’s anointing did not belong to this world; it was not done with the horn used for kings, but “with the oil of gladness.”

When this oil is poured out upon those of an unclean heart, it snuffs out their lives, but when it is received as an anointing of love, it exudes the sweet odor of harmony with God. As Paul says, “we are the goodly fragrance of Christ.” So just as it was pleasing to God when Aaron was anointed priest with this oil, so it is good and pleasant for believers to dwell in unity.



Let Us Know How We’re Doing!



As you can imagine, the activities on a homestead keep us pressed against a wall. We need to make sure our time, energy, and resources are wisely spent. We’ve been taking extra time to add sermons, Bible studies, and video clips to the download feature of our website. Do you access them? Are

they helpful? Please drop us an email and let us know. We are happy to do it, but only so long as they are beneficial. Thank you.

Life at the Priory House



TOP LEFT: Sue's amazing and beautiful job at decorating Holy Trinity Chapel for Easter Sunday; **TOP MIDDLE:** Sourdough bread, anyone? Sue named her sourdough starter "Doughvid 19"—and like the virus, it might be with us a long time (that's why it needs a name!); **TOP RIGHT:** One of Fr. Alan's indoor projects was to add built-in bookshelves down the hallway connecting the 1803 section of the house to the 1950 section of the house; **CENTER LEFT:** Baby goats everywhere! Sue is holding up Aggie, just minutes old; **CENTER MIDDLE:** We had ten of our Easter Sunday folks join us for dinner after the service—what a great meal! **CENTER RIGHT:** A bitter-sweet day as Sue gave her baby grand piano as a donation to a small tuning and restoration business that was going to try to start over in South Carolina; **BOTTOM LEFT:** "Zoose the Moose" is enjoying a snuggle with Phoebe, one of Sue's piano students, just hours after he was born; **BOTTOM MIDDLE:** Welcome to (St.) Basil (the Great) and Chamomile, only 45 minutes old in this picture!

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Monastic Fellowship of Saint Brendan's
38 Cemetery Road
Dennysville, ME 04628-4326

