

# The Navigator



The Newsletter of Saint Brendan's Monastic Fellowship

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## PILLARS OF MONASTICISM: FIDELITY

Fr. Alan Andraeas, Prior

*"I Keep working toward that day  
when I will finally be all that Christ Jesus  
saved me for and wants me to be."  
Philippians 3:12, NLT*

Remember the old phonograph advertisement of the dog listening intently to the speaker horn of a hand-cranked victrola (yes, I'm talking about the precursor to the record player!)? The slogan read: "His Master's Voice". It was clever way for the Victor Talking Machine Company of Camden, NJ, to say that their reproduction of sound was the very best that it could be. This, in time, gave way to the advent of High Fidelity—sound so much like the original that it could that it could shatter a wine glass. And the chase for pure reproduction hasn't stopped since. Stereo. Quadraphonic stereo. Dolby surround sound. Higher highs and lower lows. Waveform technologies. Advancement after advancement to give you the feeling that you're "right there".

This idea of fidelity gives us just a hint as to what our commitment to Christ is all about. Just a hint. By definition, while fidelity means the degree to which a sound is mechanically or electronically reproduced, its *primary* meaning is the quality or state of being faithful; accuracy in the details. That's why fidelity finds such an important place in Saint Brendan's *Rule of Life*—you'll find it on pages 39-41 as one of the components in our "Pillars of Monasticism". Let's see if we can flesh it out so

that it becomes less of a hint and more of a guide or pathway toward consecrated life.

1,500 years ago, when Benedictine novices were ready to profess their vow to religious life, they wrote out their vows by hand, signed them, and placed them upon the altar of the monastery or convent. It was their promise to a life of stability, fidelity, and obedience. This is the same vow we have adapted for use at Saint Brendan's (to which we have also added the Celtic spirit of joy). Taken as a whole, this vow served as the foundational bedrock of their sanctification of personal and community life in Christ—as it does for us as well. However, when Saint Benedict wrote his *Rule* in the original Latin, he used the word *conversatio* which, quite frankly, has no real, direct, formal English equivalent. 'Fidelity' is our best attempt at a translation.

Scholars have tried all kinds of linguistic gymnastics to give a sense of what *conversatio* truly means. Using a technique often found in biblical translation—referred to as "dynamic equivalence" or "functional equivalence" (think of a thought-for-thought rather than a word-for-word translation)—they have tried to use such phrases as

"conversion of life", "conversion of manners", "conversion of behavior", or even simply "the life of a monk". You see, no one can quite nail it down into English. That's why, in most translations of Saint Benedict's *Rule*, we're simply introduced to the call to fidelity; to reproduce the consecrated life of Christ; to



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fully enter it and stick to it; and to not give up even when mistakes are made, or lapses occur.

According to Roman Catholic scholar Thomas Merton, fidelity or *conversatio* is simply “a formal commitment to live until death as a fervent monk.” In other words, fidelity is our determination to renounce all those things that might impede our fealty to Christ; a putting aside of anything that might obscure our clarity of religious intent. It embraces our willingness and readiness to resist those things that might confuse our resolve for holiness. And do you want to know a secret? These are the same ideals of fidelity that EVERY Christian should live by—from the vowed religious, to the pastor, to the average lay believer, to the dear saint who works in the church nursery! Now there’s a game changer! In its simplest form, *conversatio* is a turning away from self-will in order to fully turn toward God’s will.

“That’s too hard. I’ll make mistakes. I can never be that good.” Take heart. Jesus is completely aware of our human shortcomings, but He is also uncompromising in His expectation for our zeal. That’s because, when we enter into the process of fidelity, our earnest desire to live for Christ can often carry the day in spite of our deficits; and it is a process. Fidelity is learned.



Fidelity is set upon. Fidelity is practiced. Fidelity is brought into perfection as each part of our lives is carefully given over in total abandonment to the mind of Christ and the will of God. If anything, all

of Christianity is a deliberate and intentional conversion of life—one thought at a time, one word at a time, one deed at a time—by putting into action “God’s saving work in your lives, obeying God with deep reverence and fear. For God is working in you, giving you the desire to obey Him and the power to do what pleases Him” (Philippians 2:12b-13, NLT).

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At the root of fidelity is our call to grow in grace, especially as we take up the cross of Christ every day and follow Him. And not surprisingly, this call finds its most challenging and rewarding venue within a worshiping community of faith. Why? Be-



cause Christianity was never intended to be an individual pursuit; never a ‘me-and-Jesus-only’ way of life. You see, it’s within Christian ‘community’ where we often discover our own deep-seated selfishness and sense of inadequacies. That’s what happens when your life is intertwined with others—

things eventually get revealed and we find ourselves either being offended or wanting our own way. The old nature of Adam isn’t far away from our lives, even among church members!

Community, then, becomes the ‘grist’ that reveals our need to move beyond comfortable faith and to push into deeper, surrendered faith. Amazingly, it’s also within the stability of the community where those failures or weaknesses are shown the cleansing, curative grace and love of Christ through the acceptance and love of others. In fact, it’s that very sense of acceptance and love which paves the way for an individual’s healing who would otherwise have remained content to dwell behind a lonely mask of pride or spiritual arrogance. The Bible is spot on when we read, “Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins” (1 Peter 4:8).

Since *conversatio* or fidelity is every Christian’s call to abandon ourselves to the lordship of Christ in all things, guess what? It, indeed, touches ALL things. And because fidelity is best practiced within the framework of relationships, guess what? It touches our CLOSEST relationships, especially in our sexual purity. For example, if we are single, we are to remain sexually pure in thought and practice even if we’re in a relationship be-

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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 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.



# Obedience Training

Sue Andraeas, Prioress

*“Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the Lord? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams.”  
1 Samuel 15:22*

I’m sure you’ve heard the story of the teacher who sent a young, rambunctious child to sit in the corner. He stomped over but would not sit down until she gave him another stern look. Then, as he plopped his backside in the chair, arms folded, he announced, “I may be sitting on the outside but I’m still standing on the inside!” And we smile because we all know this story could be about a child we know—or maybe could be us. It could certainly be me as a child. And as an



adult. We are so much better at compliance than we are obedience. What’s the difference, you may ask? That’s a good question.

The difference between obedience and compliance has to do with motivation or intent because both produce the exact same exterior behavior. Both will keep us out of legal trouble. For example,

let’s say you are driving 35 MPH in a 35 MPH speed zone. If you are driving the speed limit because you know there may be pedestrians and children around—or people in the nearby houses that don’t want to hear speeding cars all day—and you do it because it’s the right thing to do, you are being obedient. If you, on the other hand, drive the speed limit, but are constantly checking for police—because you don’t want to get another ticket, you are being compliant.

In both cases, a police officer watching your speed with his radar will notice you are keeping the law regardless of your rationale. Either way, you are not ticket-worthy. But the first example reveals a shift in your thinking. You ‘sit’ both on the inside and the outside, to use the analogy of the little boy mentioned above. Even if the sign—or the patrol car—weren’t present, you’d still drive at the correct speed. Obedience. In the second example, without a sign, and police to enforce it, you’d speed through that neighborhood every time. So, like the child, the ‘compliant you’ will keep the speed restrictions on the outside while chomping at the bit on the inside. Compliance.



Compliance is the first step toward becoming obedient. We have to know what behavior is expected of us and know how to perform it before we can bend—and bow—our will to make it part of ourselves. Nobody who understands dogs would buy a puppy and expect him to know not to pull on the leash while being walked. I’ve trained dogs for decades. You start obedience training by showing the dog that the right behavior gets a reward, and the wrong behavior gets something-not-too-fun. Eventually, the dog does the right thing even if there is no reward, partially because it is a habit but often because he accepts you as the head of his little dog pack. What we call ‘obedience training’ would be, for a human, relinquishment of will. And we now have the next piece to the puzzle. Obedience requires relationship with, and respect for, the one in charge.

When it comes to our Christian life, I think God is more interested in the motivation for our action than He is in our action. He’s more interested in our interior reasons for doing a thing than in the perfection of its execution. There are countless stories in the Bible of people whose behavior was not so stellar, but respect for the Leader—for God—led them to do something for Him. Rahab comes to mind. Remember her? (If not, you can look her up in Joshua 2.) Even though she was one of the residents of the wicked city of Jericho, and her ‘occupation’ was less than godly (she was a prostitute), she

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knew Joshua’s God was Someone you shouldn’t cross, and she protected Joshua’s spies from her king. Later on, in the book of James, we see her obedience was cited as one of his examples of faith with deeds (James 2:25). King David was far from perfect, but God still called him ‘a man after His (God’s) own heart.’ He was ‘sitting on the inside’ even if he was sometimes ‘standing on the outside’ by accident.

I suppose we could argue that compliance is external—‘works’—and obedience is internal—the ‘fruit’ of fidelity. To

obey God, and not simply act like a Christian, requires humility, relinquishment, and complete trust. Let's look at another Old Testament example, this time about King Saul and his lack of obedience. In 1 Samuel 15, Saul is returning from a battle where he defeated the Amalekites. The prophet Samuel had told him that God would give him victory, but that he would need to destroy everything including the cattle. God required that Saul totally remove the wickedness of the Amalekites from the earth. What did Saul do? He brought back the best of the cattle and livestock.

When Samuel questioned him about it, Saul's defense was that he kept the best to be offered to God as a sacrifice. In verse 22 of that chapter, Samuel says that obedience is better than sacrifice. Then he adds (in our verse 23) that rebellion—disobedience—is like divination, and arrogance like the evil of idolatry. Ouch!! We can look at the actual Hebrew translation to see if there is any wiggle room here. The word we translate as 'rebellion' means 'to push' or 'to press. So pushing (we might say nagging) God is like divination.

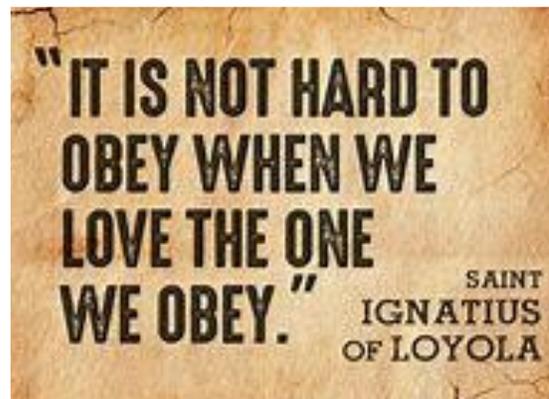
The only other way to translate *that* word is 'witchcraft.' So us nagging God, or disobeying His command is like witchcraft? Yep. How can that be??! Well, think about it. What *IS* witchcraft? Isn't it trying to seeking a knowledge and wisdom not of God? Let's not forget the second part of verse 23 that we started investigating above. Arrogance is like the evil of idolatry. In some versions, the Hebrew is translated not as 'arrogance' but as 'stubbornness.' It doesn't really matter; the bottom line remains the same. Samuel is talking about choosing our own way through and not God's, or following a path laid out by someone other than God. In either case, it is disobedience. And it leads to no good.

God created all that is. He knows how Creation works. He knows the course His plan will take. He knows how you plug into that plan. He knows what your 'interior life' must be like in order for you to accomplish your part by affecting your behavior. You cannot improve upon that Plan, nor can you improvise an alternative way to execute it. But before you go feeling all trapped and like you have no control over your life, be assured—or reassured: God IS Love. His creation is good. His plan is perfect. His role for you in that plan is best. And you are indeed in control of your life. You control whether you forge out on your own way through a different path—an unpath—or if you stick to the original plan. THE Plan. You control whether you eradicate pride and replace it with humility, stomp out divination and idolatry and replace it with obedience. Your creativity must be used to seek out the best way to stick to God's plan for you. Your reward may be miniscule here on

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earth, but the more you relinquish here, the better things will be for you in heaven, in your eternal life. (Remember, earthly life is not the whole game; death is not the end. This is more like boot camp, or like job training. It is not 'all that is!' It's all God is showing us, but He's got plans we know nothing about! SURPRISE!!!)

Our best example of humble obedience is, of course, Jesus. Philippians 2:6-11 is a poetic recap of Christ's entire life of obedience to His Heavenly Father, and how that worked out for Him in the end. I encourage you to look it up. And before you argue that Jesus can pull it off because He is, of course, God's Son, think about what HE had to relinquish compared to what YOU have to relinquish. He didn't just have the option to not say grace over a meal at a restaurant or of speaking up about His love for His Father in a room full of people He knew would think He was odd for saying so. He didn't just sacrifice sleeping in on Sundays to get to church, or think twice about putting 10% of his hard-earned cash in the offering plate.



In other words, Jesus didn't 'just' risk reputation and the ability to live like 'normal people'. Nor did He 'just' suffer hell on earth during His final earthly Passover week. No. He lost for all eternity that perfect union with His Father in heavenly perfection so that He could save us. And He went from possessing all of the wealth, health and prosperity of heaven to become homeless, poor, lonely while on earth. His total relinquishment of earthly 'normalcy' and of heavenly 'royalty' required His total obedience to His Heavenly Father's will

which paved the way for our salvation. Our total obedience may pave the way for someone else's salvation. It will certainly bring glory to God! The world can see a fake anyway. They know when we are 'sitting on the outside while standing on the inside!' We wouldn't be fooling anyone but ourselves.

I'm going to let St. Paul have the final say in this article. After reciting that most beautiful poem about the obedience of Christ, he says this: "Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose" (Philippians 2:12-13).

Rejoice!  
Sue

**The Final Word: Clement of Alexandria (150-215 AD)** — Titus Flavius Clemens; Christian apologist, philosopher, and missionary theologian to the Greek world and head of the Catechetical School of Alexandria. Origen and Alexander of Jerusalem were among his pupils.



We are commanded to reverence and honor the One Who we are persuaded is Word, Savior, and Leader; honoring the Father through Him—not just on special days as some others do, but continually in all our days and in every way.

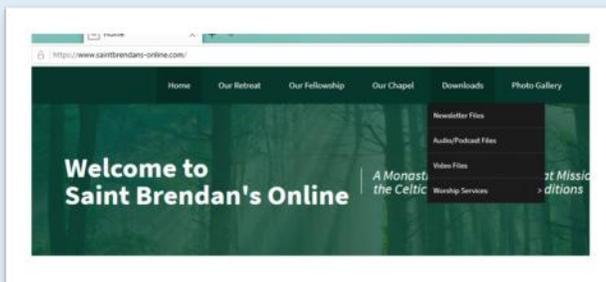
It is not in a specified place, or in a special shrine, or at certain festivals, or on appointed days, but during their whole lives and in every place that those who are truly spiritual honor God through the manner of their lives. Even more, it's the very presence of such godly people—through the respect and reverence they inspire—which improves the lives of those with whom they associate!

Holding festival, then, in all our life, in the certainty that God is completely present on every side of us, we cultivate our fields, praising; we sail the sea to the sound of hymns; and we conduct ourselves in all things as citizens of heaven.

The truly spiritual are closely allied to God, being at once grave and cheerful in all things. Grave on account of their attention to God; joyful on account of their consideration of the blessings of humanity which God has bestowed upon us. They always trace up to God the grave enjoyment of all things: food, drink, and pleasant fragrance; they offer their first fruits to the One Who has given all things, rendering thanks to Him through the One Who is the Gift, Unction, and Word.

Indeed, the truly spiritual pray throughout their whole life, since prayer for them is an attempt at union with God, and they reject all that is of no service to God because they have attained that state in which they have already received in some way the perfection which consists in acting through love. Their whole life is one, long, sacred liturgy.

## 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



TIS THE SEASON TO GET THINGS DONE! There's no stopping during the spring and summer months. Here's just a bit of what we've been up to. **TOP LEFT:** We're finally tearing out those nasty garage doors that were cut into the 217-year old side of the house. Time to convert that space back into living space and guest accommodations. **TOP MIDDLE:** Of course, every framing project also turns into a shingling project. Once the garage doors were removed and windows were framed in, the next step is to shingle over the vapor barrier. We're only going to shingle up to the old shingles; we'll strip off and re-shingle the rest when we replace the 2nd floor window. **TOP RIGHT:** One of our dearest friends and best helpers, Lloyd ('Pilly') Winchester, is a constant source of help, fun, and sage advice—we couldn't do this without him! **CENTER LEFT:** Time for more ground work as we ask local friends, Steven and Dickie Brown, to help 'shift' the original sidewalk to the old front door (which was also removed and framed up with a window) to the location of the new front door at our recently constructed mudroom. **CENTER MIDDLE:** Fr. Alan is working on a project to replace the old barn windows with new windows. Of course, with the removal of every window also comes the realization of wood rot that needs to be fixed. In the barn's defense, it is over two centuries old! **CENTER RIGHT:** Flooring for the chapel has arrived. 2,100 linear feet of unfinished floor boards are now ready for staining, sealing, and installation. Guess who gets to do all of that? Yep, us. Wanna help? **BOTTOM LEFT:** The season wouldn't be complete without an unending pile of firewood to cut and split. Sue is in that pile with her chainsaw (yes, she has her very own!). **BOTTOM MIDDLE:** The porch overhang of the new mudroom was left unfinished last year; we finally got to it this year. A nice place to greet people upon their arrival to Saint Brendan's. **BOTTOM RIGHT:** Oh, and don't forget the hay,...lots of hay. When it's not raining, that's where you'll find us—helping our local hay farmer in his fields. Fr. Alan helps get the hay up onto the wagon and Sue takes it and stacks it. Who needs a gym!?

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