



MONASTERY OF THE ASCENSION THE DESERT CHRONICLE

XXIX, no. 4 December, 2010

Vocation

Fr. Hugh Feiss, OSB

‘Live in a manner worthy of the call you have received, with all humility and gentleness... There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were all called into one and the same hope when you were called.’ — Ephesians 4.4

THERE WAS A TIME IN MY YOUTH WHEN CATHOLICS IN TUNE WITH NEW THEOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENTS STRESSED THAT PRIESTHOOD AND RELIGIOUS LIFE ARE not the only Christian callings or vocations. There are callings to marriage, to a profession or trade, to the single life. In each of these Christians are to work together to try to bring their work or home or neighborhood into line with Gospel values.

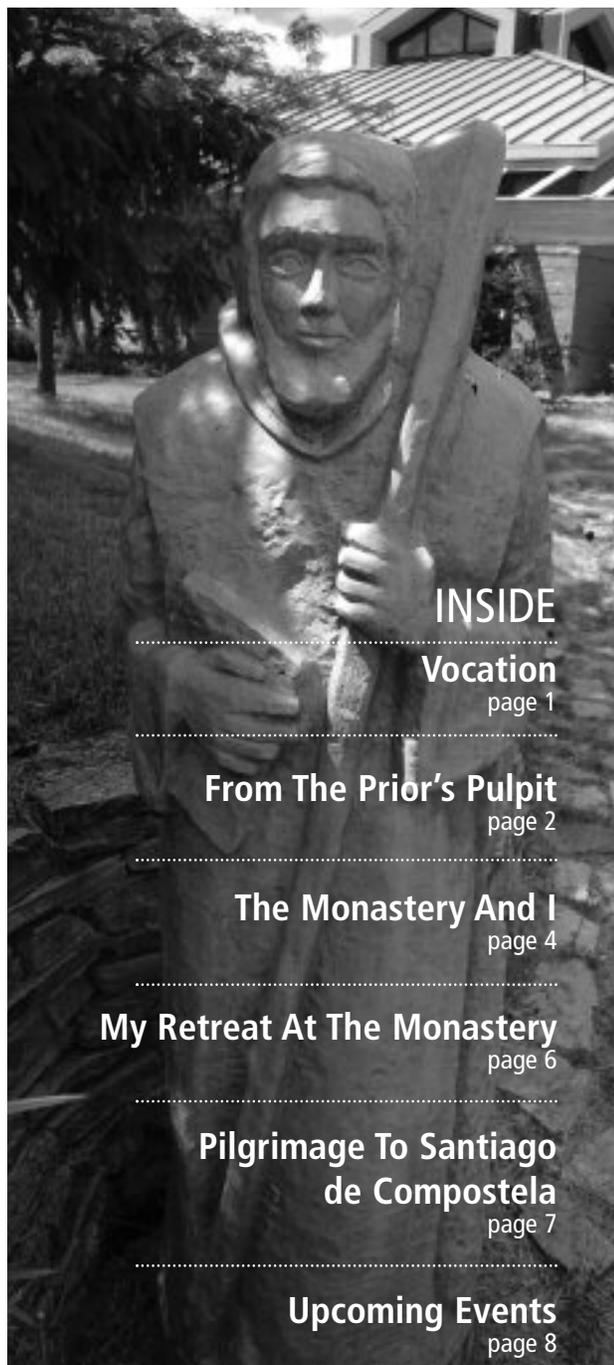
Since the 1960s much has changed. People seldom stay in one trade or profession for a lifetime. People outlive their jobs and their spouses and they have been able to look forward to twenty years of retirement. The idea of the lay vocation in the world has been overshadowed by the narrower notion of

lay ministry within the church. The idea of Catholic involvement in social change seems to have focused on lobbying and voting, rather than on joint efforts within trades, businesses, offices, and professional organizations to bring about a more humane world. All of which leaves one wondering, what can vocation mean to us in the United States in 2010?



Alice Trabert, FNP

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From the Prior's Pulpit

The Four Seasons and the Four Reasons of Christmas A Meditation on the Advent Wreath

Fr. Kenneth Hein, OSB., prior

WE ALL KNOW THAT THE ADVENT WREATH IS “AS CATHOLIC AS THE POPE”. RIGHT? WRONG! The Advent Wreath first came into vogue among Lutherans in Germany in the mid-1800s. German Catholics took up the custom in the 1920s and brought it to America in the 1930s. Most non-Catholics in this country, however, saw it as one of those peculiar things that Catholics do—like not eating meat on Friday, and genuflecting in church (and sometimes unwittingly in the aisle of a movie theater). Now, with that said, let's skip the footnotes and fast forward to an explanation of the title of this article.

In some traditions the first of the four candles on the wreath is called the “prophets’ candle” which signifies hope for Christ’s coming. The second is the “Bethlehem candle” to symbolize Christ’s birth. The third and fourth candles are the “shepherds’ and the angels’ candles.” In the tradition that I learned, the four candles represented the biblically sketched 4,000 years between Adam and Eve’s eviction from Paradise to the birth of Christ in Bethlehem. Now, combining these two traditions, we can come up with “a brand new” tradition—so to speak.

Let’s allow that the four candles represent four “comings” of Christ, with each coming being a “season with a reason” to celebrate Christmas. The first is “the season of **hope**” in Old Testament times. It was a season of loss followed by promise for better times and hope for someone, a messiah, to bring better times. Each year at Christmas, we celebrate the persevering hope of the “ancestors of our faith”. They kept their candle burning and passed the faith on to us. With Tevye from *Fiddler on the Roof* at his daughter’s, we raise our glasses *le Chayim* (“to life”) and hope that all goes well and the Tsar stays put.

The second season is the historical time of Christ on earth. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. . . . And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us. . . . For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life” (John 1:1, 14; 3:16). Christ’s life on earth was all about **love**, and that is certainly reason enough to celebrate Christmas.

The third season is the present time in which Christ

comes to us in the Church through his word and the Sacraments. “Go and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen” (Matthew 28:19-20). In the Mass, when we “do this in memory of me”, we are not on a sentimental journey. Instead, we are “re-calling” Christ, body, blood, soul, and divinity, right into the body of worshippers and into our own bodies and lives “until he comes again” (1 Cor 11:26). This is the season for celebrating the real presence of Christ in and through the Church. “Although you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and rejoice . . . for you are receiving the result of your **faith**, the salvation of your souls” (1 Peter 1:8-9). Wow! In Christmas we celebrate Christ in faith, hope, and love. Break out the champagne and pop the cork! But wait! There’s more! There’s season number four!

Number four is commonly called “the Second Coming”; but it’s really number four by our reckoning. “Behold, I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me. To the one who overcomes will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne” (Revelation 3:20-21). Aha!—there’s a *Catch 22* in that statement, namely, “To the one who overcomes”, that is, to the one who perseveres to the end. The Advent Wreath is a circle; and “what goes around comes around”. So we’re back where it began: waiting in hope, but this time spiraling upward in the joy of Christ’s victory over sin and death. As we celebrate the word of God and the Sacraments in the liturgy, we celebrate our well-founded hope for everlasting life with and through Christ. The four seasons and four reasons encircle the one real season and reason—“Jesus Christ, yesterday and today . . . the Alpha and the Omega”.

*From all of us to all of you,
Merry Christmas!*



Four speakers and a dozen participants explored that question in a retreat for the oblates held at the monastery on November 5-7, 2010. Fr. Norbert Novak, OSB, presented some current ideas about the theology of vocation. He was followed by three presenters who told of their own sense of

helping profession. Part of being a disciple is being an apprentice: observing, internalizing, improvising and becoming a mentor or role model in turn. As one participant said, “If by our kindness and humility we cause someone to pause, we’ve done a lot.”

“There is no set blueprint we can discern in advance. We need to be nimble. Vocation as we experience it today requires a great deal of trust and courage.”

For most of us, the specific way we follow Christ as disciples is not once-and-for all and clearly laid out. There can be a great deal of ambiguity; all we can do is wait and receive with open hands what God says and does. Often, it is a matter of seeing what doors open and going through them bravely, even if the profession or job or relationship is not perfect.

calling and how they lived it out in their lives: Sara Hollingsworth, a graduate student in speech pathology at Idaho State University, recounted how through prayer and exploration she has come to see more clearly what she thinks God is calling her to do with her life. Alice Trabert, a Family Nurse Practitioner in Jerome, told of how her parents imbued her with a strong work ethic and a joyful attitude toward work, which she took with her in different employment settings, and which she learned to balance with the calling to be a wife and mother. Peter Espil, from Salt Lake City, spoke of his calling to youth ministry and people who influenced him on his journey.

One participant cited Pope John Paul II’s encyclical *On Human Work*. “The human being, created in the image of God, shares by his work in the activity of the Creator. . . . For while providing the substance of life for themselves and their families, men and women are performing activities in a way that provides appropriate benefits society. They can justly consider that by their labor they are unfolding the Creator’s work, consulting the advantages of their brothers and sisters, and contributing by their personal industry to the realization in history of the divine plan.”

According to E. Hahnenberg, *Awakening Vocation: A Theology of Christian Call* (Liturgical Press, 2010) the fundamental concern for Christians is not *choice*, which can be “trivial, privatized, and self-absorbed,” but our *response* to God’s callings. Vocation arises in discernment, which involves listening to others, especially those suffering. As one presenter said, “others help reveal my own self to me” (she referred to St. Francis de Sales, *Finding God’s Will For You*). This listening leads to a sense of solidarity and self-knowledge (e.g., regarding one’s values and gifts), which will enable us to hear God’s callings more easily. More basic than the call to do is the call to be God’s image and likeness, Christ’s disciple. The call to discipleship invites us to embark on “a shared journey of faith . . . and transformation in the light of Christ.” As we journey on the path of discipleship, the way will likely involve shifts and changes. There is no set blueprint we can discern in advance. We need to be nimble. Vocation as we experience it today requires a great deal of trust and courage.

At the end of the retreat, most participants agreed that our primary vocation is a call to discipleship of Jesus, something that extends beyond retirement to the moment of our dying. It may be that today Americans reach maturity more slowly in the past, but discipleship does not begin when one finishes school or enters the workforce. There was agreement also that work in the secular world is a calling from God to share in God’s creative activity. How most effectively to bear witness in the workplace and contribute to shaping a more humane world is not so clear, but within the ambiguities and limitations of the current moment we can try to make the secular world hospitable for all God’s people. •



Sara Hollingsworth



Fr. Norbert Novak, OSB



The Monastery and I

PART 1

Pete Espil, Oblate OSB

MY RELATIONSHIP WITH THE MONASTERY OF THE ASCENSION BEGAN WHEN I WAS A TEENAGER GROWING UP IN KIMBERLY. I WAS RAISED IN THE LDS (MORMON) CHURCH by my mother and I suppose I was what you would call a “good Mormon” as a child and even into Jr. High but once I got into High School I was far more devoted to parties with my friends than I was to any religion. Nevertheless, my mother still expected me to attend Wednesday night youth activities at my ward and even though I don’t remember a lot of the stuff we did on those nights so long ago, there was one Wednesday night that I will never forget.

Occasionally for Wednesday night youth activities we would take field trips. Usually it was to do some sort of a service project. But on one Wednesday we did something very out of character for LDS youth groups. When I arrived for youth group I was told we were taking a field trip to a Catholic Monastery to see how monks live. As we drove that night I remember thinking to myself that I didn’t even know what a monastery was or what monks were. I didn’t even realize they still had those things. I thought they only existed in movies.

Upon arrival we were greeted by one of the monks who led us into the Monastery and took us on a tour of the grounds. We were allowed to visit all parts of the Monastery except for the Monk’s living quarters.

Before leaving we sat in the chapel while the monks did their evening prayers. I didn’t understand anything that was going on. I didn’t understand anything we were shown either. I had never heard of icons. I



had never seen candles in a chapel. I thought “vespers” was an article of clothing. I had never seen statues and had no idea what they meant by “saint”.

Despite my confusion, I could not get over the fact that this was the most peaceful place I had ever been in my life. As a selfish teenager whose biggest concern was making sure I knew where the parties were for the upcoming weekend so I could get drunk, the idea of someone dedicating their life to work, prayer and study was so far out of my grasp that I couldn’t believe it, let alone understand it. We left the Monastery that evening and within weeks I had forgotten it.

I graduated from Kimberly High School in 1992 and enlisted in the Marines. I was 17 when I reported to boot camp in May 1992. For the first time in a long time, I really tried to practice my Mormon religion. I read the Book of Mormon everyday and prayed a lot. I even had a reputation as “the religious guy.” However, my newfound devotion to the religion of my childhood lacked real substance and quickly faded away. And I entered one of the lowest points ever in my life. I left the Marines early and in an attempt to straighten out my life I threw myself into the religion of my childhood one last time, even marrying in the Los Angeles Mormon Temple. However the marriage did not last and a short time later I was divorced. Following the divorce my drinking intensified and I swore off religion once and for all, or so I thought at the time.

In 1995 I met a girl named Jaime, to whom I am now married for 12 years. When we met she described me as “an angry white boy with tattoos”. She informed me that if we were going to date then we should go to church together. I rebelled against this at first. I had no interest in returning to the church of my upbringing and I was not interested in attending her church (she was a Seventh-Day Adventist). However, she wore me down and we eventually agreed on an Evangelical Protestant Church to attend. Jaime and I attended this church for a while. I was baptized in this Protestant



church and became a member. Eventually we were married in that church. Many of the members are still friends of ours to this day.

However, something happened before we got married that caused a religious “change of direction”. I came to a point where I decided that if I was going to drag myself to church every Sunday then I should pick a church based on my own studies instead of just settling on the nearest church out of convenience. I began reading the New Testament and the history of Christianity. Over time I came to the conclusion that I had to become a Roman Catholic. One month after Jaime and I got married I signed up to take the R.C.I.A classes at St. Edward the Confessor Roman Catholic Church in Twin Falls. One night during R.C.I.A. class I was told we would be going on a “retreat”. The leaders explained to us that a retreat was a time when we all went away somewhere together to spend time in prayer and fellowship in order to get closer to God. At first I was a little skeptical. My head told me I needed to join the Catholic Church but my heart wasn't too sure about all this “touchy feely stuff.” I remember sitting in class and listening to one of the leaders giving us the details about the time and place of the retreat and then I heard something that jarred a distant memory loose in my mind. I heard the leader say that we were going to the same monastery that I had toured as a teen.

The retreat was very peaceful. I met several of the monks and after the retreat I started going out and talking with some of the monks from time to

time for spiritual advising. They were some of the most holy men I have ever met. I found it fascinating that God had directed me back to this monastery. I spent the year continuing my studies and that following Easter I joined the ranks of Roman Catholics. However, I have to admit that my conversion had been strictly intellectual. My head had been converted to Catholicism but my heart still had a long way to go before it belonged to Christ. (To be continued)



My Retreat at the Monastery

Samantha Rice

EVERY FALL MY CHURCH, ST. PAUL'S CATHOLIC STUDENT CENTER AT BOISE STATE UNIVERSITY, HOSTS A WEEKEND RETREAT. THE THREE YEARS I'VE PARTICIPATED, WE'VE GONE TO A SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CAMP, A CAMP OUTSIDE IDAHO CITY AND NOW THE MONASTERY OF THE ASCENSION.

This is the first time I've gone on a retreat at a Catholic facility. So far it has been my favorite experience.

The monastery was a very different from what I usually think of when I think of a monastery. It's not a tall, severely beautiful building but a very cozy, comfortable one. My first impression was of warmth and quietness, even though when I walked in some of my friends were playing the piano in the lobby and singing praise and worship songs. I realized later that it was a spiritual quietness.

I loved my room, which I shared with a friend. It was a quiet place to read my Bible, and there were some prayers hung on the walls. Most of the time, though, I wanted to be out and about with my friends, deepening my faith or just having fun.

The theme of our retreat was Christian manhood and womanhood. We formed small groups for discussions and later met back with the whole group. The monastery has several nooks with comfy chairs where we could hide away from the other groups.

For the first time in my life I got to experience the Liturgy of the Hours. Scripture reading is one of my favorite devotions, but *lectio divina* was the closest I'd ever gotten to praying the Bible with others. It was an unusual experience to

pray the Hours with the monks, but it opened me up to a new kind of communal prayer.

One of my favorite parts of the retreat was the food. That sounds silly, but the food at the monastery is amazing. There was also plenty of coffee available, which was great for us college students who wanted to cram in as many activities as possible.

The bookstore was another highlight for me. I'm an English major, and as soon as I walked in and saw the store, I knew I'd be visiting it later. I was right. I picked up an



BSU students on retreat at the monastery: facing the camera are Sara Hollingsworth, Tessa Knight and Dory Hammersley

apologetics book I'd been wanting for some time.

I was sad to leave when Sunday came. I had such a wonderful time studying my Bible and praying

with my friends and going to Mass and Liturgy of the Hours with the monks. I almost didn't go on this retreat because of my school workload. I'm very glad that I changed my mind. •



BSU students on retreat at the monastery: the author, Samanth Royce, is second from the right



Pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela

SIX YEARS AGO UNDER THE AUSPICES OF THE OBLATES OF THE MONASTERY WE BEGAN A SERIES OF PILGRIMAGES. In successive years we went to Ireland, England, Bavaria & Austria, and northern France. A year ago we went of a bus tour of the California Missions. We now plan to go on a pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela in Spain, May



Santiago de Compostela

19 – June 2, 2011. We won't be walking the route, but using a bus, and including Madrid and Zaragoza that are not on the Camino (pilgrimage route). As in the previous pilgrimages our goals are:

- to form a group of thirty, including three leaders: Fr. Hugh Feiss, OSB, Vanessa Butterfield and this year, Raquel Arenz, a professor of Spanish and bilingual education at the College of Southern Idaho;
- to keep coast down (clean, but simple accommodations; local food);
- to stay in religious houses as much as possible both for the atmosphere and also so that those who wish can attend Mass;
- to immerse ourselves in the religious history and art of the area, but also
- to visit important secular (e.g., Roman ruins) and artistic sites;
- to balance the time spent in rural and urban areas;
- to give ample opportunity for participants to explore on their own (especially in cities).

We've found three monasteries at which to stay for the first eleven nights. Our final 3 nights will be in a hotel in Madrid. We are still finalizing the budget, but the cost for what we provide will be about \$2000. In addition, participants will need to pay their own plane fares to and from Madrid, buy about one meal a day (usually lunch), and take care of incidental expenses. We will pay for entrance fees to any place we visit as a group.

Outline of the Pilgrimage

I. Monasterio Cisterciense Santa María de Caridad, Tulebras (Navarra)

Fri May 20: Tarazona and Veruela an easy day to recuperate from

jet lag; introduction to architecture of the Camino.

Sat May 21: Zaragoza (Aljafería palace, basilica, Roman ruins)

Sunday May 22: Pamplona (cathedral and citadel); Olite (medieval castle and churches)

II. Abadía Cisterciense, Señora de la Anunciación. Santo Domingo de la Calzada

Mon May 23: Tulebras to Santo Domingo de la Calzada, at Nájera to visit the Monasterio de Santa María la Real and San Millán de la Cogolla.

Tuesday May 24: Burgos. Cathedral, Casa de Miranda, and Miraflores and/or Las Huelgas.

Wed May 25: Santo Domingo de Silos (monastery known for CD "Chant", and gorgeous cloister; Quintanilla (Visigothic church), and Covarrubias

Thur May 26: Fromista; Villacázar de Sirga; Carrión de Los Condes: A sample of the Camino and small pilgrimage churches

Friday May 27: Travel from Santo Domingo de la Calzada to San Juan de Poio.

III. Monasterio de San Juan [Xoan] de Poio

Saturday May 28: Santiago de Compostela

Sunday May 29: Santiago de Compostela

Monday May 30: Santiago to Madrid, stop at Ávila. St. Teresa sites; churches, walls.

IV. Hotel in Madrid

Three spectacular art museums (Prado, Reina Sofia, and Thyssen-Bornemisza—all quite close together); gardens; Escorial on edge of city (use public transport). We should be able to get rid of the bus when we arrive in Madrid on May 30. Check on bus tours of the city). There are walking and bus tours, including a tour bus system that let's you jump on and off at various sits through the day. Can access this bus at the Puerta del Sol and the Prado.

Tues May 31: Madrid: museums Escorial, bus tours of the city.

Wed June 1 Madrid: continued

Thurs June 2: Fly Home

**FOR INFORMATION
OR TO SEND DEPOSIT**
(\$200—final amount
due April 15)

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Road Scholar Programs at the Monastery for 2011

June 6-12: Hiking the Snake River Plain

June 20-26: Ancient Rome: Life, History, Literature and the Spread of Christianity

July 18-24: Windows into the Lives of Medieval People

July 25-31: Ireland: History, Myth, Saints and Culture

August 8-14: Quilting

August 29-September 4: Hiking the Snake River Plain

To register contact Road Scholar (formerly Elderhostel):
www.roadscholar.org; for information contact Fr. Hugh
208-761-9389 or hughf@idahomonks.org



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Monastery of the Ascension
541 East 100 South
Jerome, ID 83338-5655

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PERMIT NO. 849