



MONASTERY OF THE ASCENSION THE DESERT CHRONICLE

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The Monastery and I

Pete Espil, Benedictine Oblate

DURING MY YEARS AT ST. EDWARDS I VOLUNTEERED AS A YOUTH GROUP LEADER. I attended a few more retreats at the Monastery with confirmation classes from our parish, and I continued to visit from time to time to talk to the monks. However, I still had one major demon in my life. I was still drinking and by this time there was no doubt that I was an alcoholic, but God was still working and waiting.

In 2002 my wife and I moved to Boise, Idaho, so I could finish my bachelor's degree. After a year in Boise, I was hired as the youth minister for St. Paul's Catholic Church in Nampa, Idaho. I believe that God led me to that job. It turned out to be the best four years of my life. While at St. Paul's I found sobriety after a direct and rather humbling visit from God. And the same year that I got sober my wife came into communion with the Catholic Church.

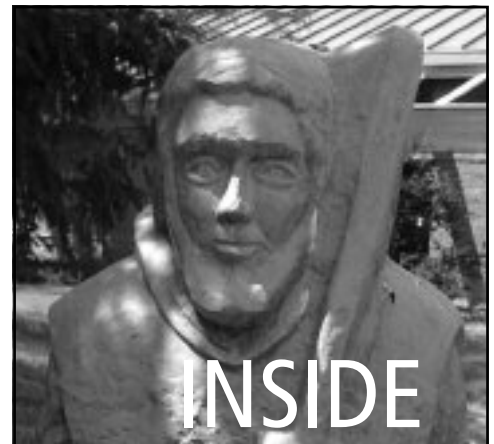
St. Paul's was a two-hour drive from the Monastery but that didn't stop me from visiting. Once a year I would take a small group of teens from youth group on a day trip to visit the monastery. For some reason I felt that it was important to keep connected to the monastery but I didn't know why.



*St. Rose of Lima
(Murreesboro, TN) Teens*

While I was working at St. Paul's and finishing up my Linguistics degree at Boise State University, I began to frequent the Catholic Student Center on the BSU campus. I became acquainted with the resident priest at the center. The first time I met him I was pleasantly surprised to find out that he was a monk from the Monastery of the Ascension. His name was Father Simeon. I instantly liked him. He was never too busy to give me his time. He was also

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From the Prior's Pulpit

The Practice of Lent

Fr. Kenneth Hein, OSB., prior

BY WAY OF PREPARING SOME THOUGHTS ON LENT, I PLUGGED THE WORD, "LENT", INTO GOOGLE AND CAME UP WITH FOUR-MILLION-FOUR-HUNDRED-AND-SEVENTY-THOUSAND (4,470,000) "HITS" IN JUST THIRTY-ONE HUNDREDTHS OF A SECOND! So I decided in the same length of time that I should limit myself to just a couple of sources. First I checked out a site that claimed to explain "the real meaning of Lent". It turned out to be a way-out fundamentalist preacher spewing out his spleen on "this evil, unbiblical, Romish practice." Interesting, but obviously not much help. Next I accessed the Wikipedia article on Lent. That turned out to be more help than I could use, but I would like to summarize some of the article.

The number forty is prominent in the Bible: Moses spent the forty days on Mount Sinai with God (Exodus 24:18); Elijah walked for forty days and nights to Mount Horeb (1 Kings 19:8); God sent forty days and nights of rain in the great flood of Noah (Genesis 7:4); the Hebrew people wandered in the desert for forty years while traveling to the Promised Land (Numbers 14:33); in his prophecy of judgment Jonah gave the city of Nineveh forty days in which to repent (Jonah 3:4). Jesus retreated into the wilderness, where he fasted for forty days, and was tempted by the devil (Matthew 4:1-2, Mark 1:12-13, Luke 4:1-2). He overcame all three of Satan's temptations by citing Scripture to the devil, at which point the devil left him, angels ministered to Jesus, and he began his ministry. Jesus further said that his disciples should fast 'when the bridegroom shall be taken from them' (Matthew 9:15), a reference to his Passion. Since, presumably, the Apostles fasted as they mourned the death of Jesus, Christians have traditionally fasted during the annual commemoration of his burial. It is the traditional belief that Jesus lay for forty hours in the tomb, which led to the forty hours of total fast before the Easter celebration in the early Church. Catechumens undertook this fast to prepare for the reception of the sacraments. Later, the period of fasting from Good Friday until Easter Day was extended to six days, to correspond with the final six weeks of training given to those converts who were to be baptized.

Catechumens underwent a rigorous initiation process. In Jerusalem near the close of the fourth century, classes were held throughout Lent for three hours each day. When Christianity was legalized by the Edict of Milan (313 AD) and later made the official state religion under Theodosius (d. 395), the Lenten fast and practices of self-renunciation were required annually of all Christians, both to show solidarity with the catechumens, and for their own spiritual benefit.

Traditionally, these Lenten practices have centered on prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. Prayer puts us in the right relationship with God; fasting brings the individual into the right relationship with him/herself; and almsgiving places one in right relationship with one's neighbor. Finally, as my suggestion for Lent, I would encourage you to read the entire Wikipedia article. It reminded me about our present Lenten practices and how lenient they are compared to other places and times. St. Benedict notes that "the life of a monk ought to be a continuous Lent" (RB 49:1), but in the next sentence, he allows that severe asceticism may exceed our strength. The severity of a practice does not determine its value; it is sincerity that counts. Thus I sign off—

A blessed Lent and Easter!

Prior Kenneth Hein, O.S.B.



never too busy to dispense some, often times, rather gruff advice. He was especially quick to dispense this advice if he felt that I was whining or complaining about something.

I graduated from BSU in 2005, which was also the year I had my “visit” from God about my drinking. It was an experience so real and intimate that it prompted me to begin attending recovery meetings and to seek out a spiritual advisor. I had no idea how to go about choosing a spiritual advisor so I prayed about it and the answer came quickly through a fellow youth minister. She suggested, “Why not go to Fr. Simeon?” I called him and made an appointment to see him the following week.

Even though I was sober and much of my life seemed to be getting back on track, in reality I was very confused and scared. I desperately needed someone to help me heal the damage I had caused through 15 years of drinking. I was learning how to live soberly in a recovery program, but many parts of my spiritual life were broken. To make matters worse, the only real hero I had ever had in my life was my grandpa and he had died 2 weeks after I got sober. I truly believe that God saw that I was broken, hurting and needed help, so he sent me Fr. Simeon. I will thank God for this every day for the rest of my life.

In 2007 my wife and I decided to move to Nashville, TN so that she could be closer to the people involved in her music ministry. We lived in Tennessee for three years and during that time I worked as the Youth Minister for St. Rose of Lima Catholic Church in Murfreesboro, TN. In October of 2009, after much prayer, I wrote an email to Fr. Hugh Feiss, OSB, and asked if I could become an oblate of the Monastery. Despite my distance from Idaho, Fr. Hugh responded positively and I began formation. I made my first Benedictine retreat in February 2010 and on November 7, 2010, at the oblate retreat, I made my final oblate promises. Since my first contact with Fr. Hugh in 2009, he has become my new spiritual advisor and I speak with him via telephone once or twice a month.

My wife and I now reside in Midvale Utah. I am currently employed as the Campus Minister at Judge Memorial Catholic High School in Salt Lake City. This year marks my 15th year working with teens and my 8th year in full time ministry. We chose to move to Utah in order to be closer to my father (who lives in Murray, UT) after he suffered a massive stroke. Although I wish that it had been some other reason that brought us back to the western United States, I am thankful to be closer to friends and family and, of course, the Monastery. Over the past



Pete Espil and St. Rosa of Lima Youth at National Catholic Youth Convention.jpg

several years I have been blessed with the opportunity to travel and minister to Catholic teens in many different parts of the United States including Hawaii and overseas in New Zealand. I am currently working on a book for Catholic youth called “Being a Teen for Christ” which will be dedicated to the Monastery and to Fr. Simeon. In the summer of 2011 I hope to plan and facilitate a three-day retreat for teens at the Monastery called “BenedicTEEN”. I hope the and pray that the monastery and the monks continue to be a part of my life for years to come. •



Pete Espil with a Peer Ministry Class at Judge Memorial Catholic High School in Salt Lake



Basketball and Beyond

Fr. Hugh Feiss, OSB

DURING CHRISTMAS TIME I SPEND A MONTH IN RELATIVE SOLITUDE IN EASTERN OREGON TAKING CARE OF ST. JOSEPH'S MISSION IN UNITY, OREGON. A couple of times during my stay there this year I hitched a ride with a parishioner to watch the local Burnt River High School basketball teams play in Monument and Spray, two other small towns 100 miles away. There are seven players on Burnt River's girls' team; they are all the American girls enrolled in the school. Two of the girls are new this year; they are in Unity to make a new start. Two of the girls I have known since they were preschoolers. As I watched them play, I was struck by how hard they were trying to play better, to win, and to get to the state tournament, but to achieve other things too, things that are difficult to put into words. I

thought about their stories, about what had brought them to this point, about the three seniors deciding what they would do about college. In late January I went on the road to Malta, ID, to watch a young man, who sometimes comes to Mass at the monastery, play for Valley High against Raft River. Watching that game prompted the same sort of thoughts.

In a textbook in philosophical anthropology that we used when I was teaching philosophy, the author said that at any given moment a person is both facticity and possibility.

Facticity is what one is right now—what one has come to be through one's genetic endowment, environment, education, relationships and above all through one's choices. Possibility is what one can do, given who one is right now. Some things that weren't possible once are possible now, and vice versa. So, on the basis of one's possibilities one decides what one will do: one projects toward a future that reaches beyond or transcends the present.

This bit of philosophy is typically modern, in that it focuses on the individual self and her freedom, but it does offer a way of thinking about what the basketball team was doing. Individually and collectively they were choosing who they would become—as players, as a team, as human beings. For them basketball is not just a symbol of life, it is a sacrament, in the sense that what they are doing in the gym will help make who they will be.

What makes it all possible is the belief that the practices and the hundred-mile bus trips are worth it; the hope that they can win or at least play better; the love and support they received and shared.

In Catholic theology we speak of the three theological virtues: faith, hope and love. Paul wrote, "We give thanks to God always for all of you, remembering you in our prayers, unceasingly calling to mind your work of faith and labor of love and endurance in hope of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Thes. 13; cf. 1 Cor. 13:13). Our faith, although it is a conviction and commitment that exists in the

present, has its roots in the past. Each of

us has made decisions about what is ultimately important, whom we believe, and what we build and stake our lives on. If those decisions are centered on Christ, we have Christian faith. Hope looks to future good that we expect and strive for—for Christians that is the Kingdom of God in all its worldly (e.g., basketball) and heavenly dimensions—a just world, lasting happiness, and a new heaven and a new earth. Love is centered



BSU men celebrate victory over University of Idaho



on the present: the decentering of our hearts away from ourselves toward God and neighbor.

Fifty years ago, I was the same age as the high school basketball players whose games I watched over Christmas break. Like them I spent long hours in the gym. Now I joined their parents and neighbors cheering them on, sensing their fears and hopes, loving them, and praying their lives will be blessed. No doubt we elders in the stands project

on these players our own desires, some of which are no longer genuine possibilities for us. However, there is more: we are not just living vicariously through them; we want them to succeed in life and in basketball for their own sake and not for ours. Having left our own youth behind, our project toward the future has a much shorter range than that of these girls. Our hopes are more focused, less about time

and more about eternity. Our love may embrace the world, but the circle of those for whom we can actively care is more limited than once it was. Nevertheless, we can draw inspiration from these young basketball players: no matter how limited our possibilities, we must have faith, hope and love. Our choices are more limited, but choices they are—to live generously or not, to draw profit for others from our experience, to show sound faith, lively hope, and nurturing love.

In that way, directly or indirectly, we can repay these young people for the joy and inspiration they bring us. I thought about that when at Spray I won a platter of cupcakes at the halftime drawing and handed them around to the players after a game that they lost in the very last second when the other team made a wild three point shot. As Christ nurtures us with his Body, we



nurture each other by our faith, hope and love, our screens and assists, and our cupcakes. Of all of these, at this juncture of history we seem to need hope most of all: a sense that we can transcend the

stalemates and polarities of the present.

However, all is not a project of hope toward the future. There is the present. Recently, I watched a college basketball game: Boise State University vs. the University of Idaho, two longtime rivals who this year are very evenly matched. One young man I know was in the most enthusiastic BSU student section. He was utterly caught up in the game: exuberant and ecstatic, forgetful of past and future, totally absorbed in the present drama. That too is transcendence—not toward a distant or looming future in or out of time, but exultation in a now where time seems to both speed up and to stop, a time that is a taste of eternity. •



Burnt River High School girls at Monument



Monastic Mothering

Kim Warhank, Benedictine Oblate

I BECAME AN OFFICIAL OBLATE ABOUT THREE MONTHS BEFORE MY DAUGHTER WAS BORN. When she was born, pretty much everything I learned and practiced in those years leading up to Oblation flew out the window. When Fr. Hugh asked me to write an article about motherhood and the Holy Rule, I had to giggle a little. I'm relatively inexperienced at both, but I do have some thoughts to share on both.

As an Oblate, I seek to include St. Benedict and his Rule whenever possible. After countless readings and much pondering of the Holy Rule, I suppose you could say I've been subliminally influenced by it.

As a mother, and as an Oblate; it's crucial I ground myself in God. From Him comes the grace to be faithful to my Oblate promises, from Him comes the grace to be the wife and mother He created me to be. My children are young – 2.5 years and 11 months, to be exact. I was whining to a priest how my prayer time was kaput, mainly because the kids kept me busy. He gave me two pieces of advice: schedule an appointment with God daily (and keep it), and remember that God is in the faces of my children (and husband). Both require tremendous self-discipline, especially when the kids are acting like they need an exorcism! Or when I'd rather do anything but *lectio*.

My appointment with God comes at the afternoon nap time. Everything revolves around that. If my toddler doesn't need to nap, she's required to be quiet. She can look at books, play with dolls; but she has to be quiet. It's in that time that I do my *lectio* and pray the Office of Readings. As the children grow I'll need to find another pocket of time to dedicate to God; but for now, it works for me. Granted, there are days when it's hard to have that appointment – sick kids, a kink in the day somewhere. I consider those interruptions as God's will for *that moment*. He brings them to my attention for whatever purpose He has in mind.

Monastic Mothering also requires some level of order. I think of it as a rhythm. The family has an entire rhythm that we all flow with. There are situations that throw everything off balance, such as when my husband spent 6

days in the ICU last summer or, most recently, being with my mom for some "minor" brain surgery. In such situations, the rhythm goes on the road, and we adapt as best we can. Like the Monks who are away Monastery are encouraged to pray the Divine Office at the same hours as their Monastery if possible, we attempt to keep our routine to the best of our ability. It's in these times that that appointment with God is so crucial; the

medical issues that remind us of our utter dependence on God are easier to get through when you're hanging on to God.

A daily Examination of Conscience is important, as well. I find St. Benedict's admonitions to the Abbot very applicable to parents. We are giving our children the formation that will carry them through the rest of their life.

What they learn about God, emotions, food, health, culture, and so on will shape them long after we're called home. Our Good Lord will hold us accountable for what we give them, so it's important to ensure what we're giving them will assist them into becoming the person God created them to be.

Monastic Mothering is a constant work in progress. As the children grow into new seasons of life, as new blessings expand our family, it all shifts. It's so important to remember that this moment and everything in it were given to us by God with whatever He knows will help us grow in holiness. My appointment with God may change from nap time to midnight nursing time with a newborn, to early morning before everyone else wakes up. It may expand to include teenagers, toddlers, my husband, extended family members, or it may be just God and myself. Monastic Mothering is gentle, but rigorous. It accepts me and my children and my family where we are right *now*, and helps us to move to

where we are being called to go. •



Light of the World

Fr. Hugh Feiss, OSB

“The Mass is “an act of going out to meet One who is coming, ... to the Lord who has already been coming all along.”

LATE LAST YEAR A GERMAN JOURNALIST PUBLISHED A SERIES OF INTERVIEWS he had with Pope Benedict XVI in a book called *Light of the World: The Pope, the Church, and the Signs of the Time* (Ignatius, 2010). The book makes clear the humanity and intelligence of the pope, but it also conveys a refreshing simplicity.



Pope Benedict XVI

Benedict's idea of the church does not focus on its institutional side, which though essential, is secondary. He describes the nature of the church as “a community of men standing together in faith. The task . . . is to live the faith in an exemplary way, to proclaim it and at the same time to keep this voluntary association, which cuts across all cultures, nations, and times and is not based on external interests spiritually connected with Christ and so with God himself.” The

focus on Christ is central. Right now, “the bureaucracy is spent and tired.” We need new initiatives from within faith communities.

A second theme the pope emphasizes is the complementary tasks of faith and reason. He felt he was called to be a professor and loved the work. The student unrest during the 1960s and 1970s troubled him, but he is clearly a man of reason and books. He has no doubt that reason and faith need each other, and that they lead to truth, which is always one and non-contradictory. “For after all, reason was given to us by God. It is what distinguishes man.” On the other hand, Benedict is no rationalist: to confine truth to the confines of scientific reason is unreasonable. It takes humility to recognize the truth

A third theme is his conviction that modern culture, born in the 18th century Enlightenment, is a complex reality. It includes many positive elements. “It is important for us to try to live Christianity and to think as Christians in such a way that it incorporates what is good and right about modernity. . . . We must see . . . all the opportunities for good that are there; the hopes, the new possibilities, for being human that exist. So as then, finally, to proclaim the need for change, which cannot happen without an interior conversion.”

Regarding his own role, Benedict notes that he has no coercive power. He is “a completely powerless man” who “bears a great responsibility. Echoing Benedict of Nursia's *Rule*, which says

that “the abbot is believed to hold the place of Christ,” he explains, that he can lead the church and be its focal point of unity in a globalized world, only to the extent that people realize that we belong together and only through a common faith can the church succeed in its mission. He may write books as a private theologian, but as pope his task is not to present his own ideas, “but rather to live the Church's faith, to act in obedience to [Christ's] mandate.”

Benedict is clearly a man not afraid to stand up for what he believes to be true, even in the face of public opinion. On the other hand, he told the interviewer “someone who is always only in opposition could probably not endure life at all.” Throughout his life he has found “that Christianity gives joy and breadth.”

There is a grave ecological crisis brought about by a notion that progress consists in knowledge and power and expanded freedom. The problem with such an idea of progress is that it does not take into account the question, What is good? Ethics must not refer just to self or one's nation and group, it has “to keep the earth and all people in view.” But theory won't help, unless there is “willingness to do without.”

There is a connection between this warped theory of progress and atheism. If there is no God, it is difficult to find standards for freedom; the danger is that anything may become possible and permissible (which is not to say that atheists are all immoral or that there can be no morality without God). The question of God is crucial today. We need to find a way to witness to “a God who knows us, speaks to us, and approaches us—and who is then our judge also.”

Even if one doesn't feel particularly enthusiastic about some of the liturgical adjustments made during Benedict's papacy, it is hard to quarrel with his motivation. If “Christ is really present in the Eucharist, then this is the event that is at the center of absolutely everything.” It is the most intimate heart of the Church. And sharing it is communion in an act of belonging. The Mass is “an act of going out to meet One who is coming, . . . to the Lord who has already been coming all along.” It is important then that we not “bury God underneath our words and our ideas and that the liturgy doesn't turn into an occasion to display ourselves.”

In the end, there is simplicity. Christ came so that we may become capable of God, know the truth and find life that is no longer subject to death. •



May 19 - June 2

Pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela, Spain

We'd like some more pilgrims! Details at www.idahomonks.org

Road Scholar Programs

June 6-12, & August 29-September 4: Hiking the Snake River Plain

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

August 8-14: Quilting

Want Ads

- Canning jars, especially pints and half-pints
- Ideas on what to put into some nice pottery bowls to sell at Christmas time
- Volunteers to work in monastery vegetable garden (*especially in May*) or to help (*at night*) with canning in August and September (*will share produce!*)
- Men to join monastery and carry on its presence in Idaho

Contact Fr. Hugh: hughf@idahomonks.org; 208-761-9389.



The Desert Chronicle is available in digital form on the monastery website: www.idahomonks.org. If you would like to receive the Desert Chronicle in digital form and cancel your paper subscription, please email Fr. Hugh: hughf@idahomonks.org and send him your email address.

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