



Monastery of the Ascension

THE DESERT CHRONICLE

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Lightening Our Footprint

By Fr. Hugh Feiss, O.S.B.

IN THE LAST ISSUE OF THE DESERT CHRONICLE, WE CELEBRATED CREATION, PARTICULARLY THOSE ANIMALS THAT LIVE IN CLOSE PROXIMITY WITH US. SOME, SUCH AS HORSES AND CATS, ARE OUR friends; others, such as herons and squirrels, robins and coyotes delight us from a distance.

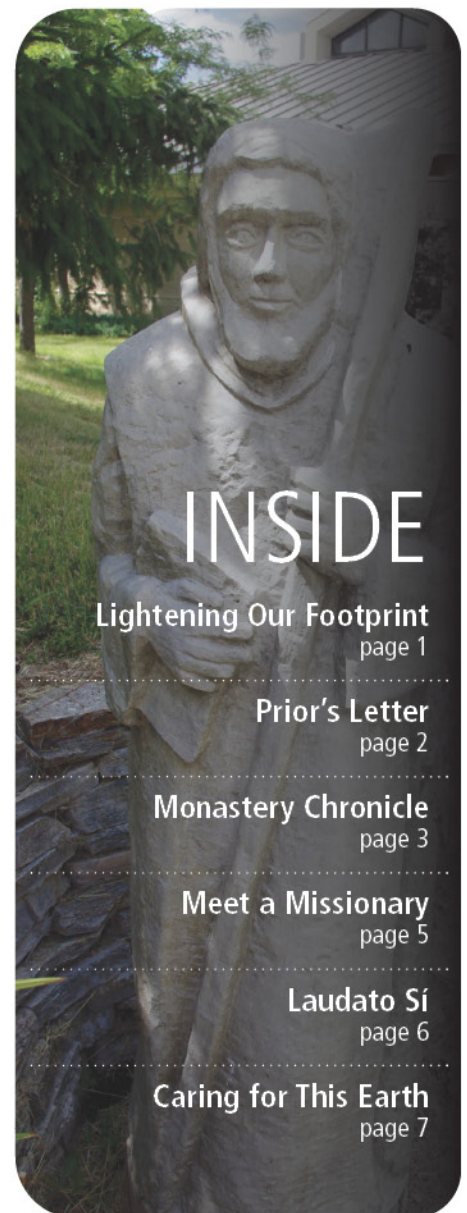
In late March, a very healthy looking adult female coyote wandered into our backyard and treed a squirrel. It stretched up as far as it could on its hind legs, but could not reach the squirrel, gave up, looked around, and then trotted off with a nonchalance characteristic of its kind. In May, a herd of mule deer have been coming to stay in our little game refuge for the summer. Until a few summers ago, Western kingbirds spent summer days sitting on our telephone lines, hunting bugs. Further back in time, we could enjoy the songs of Western meadowlarks in the scrub land across the county road. These birds have stopped coming here. Maybe that is our fault. Certainly, the current die-off of so many species is our fault. We are not living in such a way that other species can live, just as the extravagance of the wealthier among us is making it harder for the poor to live.

THREE GOOD IDEAS

Before most of us will do anything, we need to be convinced that we can make a difference. Take water in Idaho, which currently—along with much of the West—is facing drought. Agriculture accounts for about 95% of water use in the state, households for just a percentage point or two. So why bother? Well, for one reason, in a time of drought, every little bit counts. More importantly, perhaps, is bearing witness to a new way of thinking. If we ask the dairy farmers—who in our area use much of the 95%—to take less, we should do what we can about our 1 or 2%. We are all in this together.

Something else we need to think about: convenience is always easier, but the consequences can be devastating. If we drive instead of walk, and eat fast food instead of cooking, we are choosing to live a less healthy lifestyle for a small convenience. If we use disposable plates, cups and cutlery so we don't have to wash dishes, and we

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Dear Friends of the Monastery,

Blessings to you. At this writing, we are looking forward to the Feast of the Ascension, our patronal feast. How the monastery got the name *Ascension* is interesting. Father Walsh (later Bishop Walsh) and Bishop Byrne of Boise had filed a petition under the Desert Entry Program to get ground which would be deeded to Mt. Angel Abbey if it decided to come to Idaho. The documentation was filed in the diocesan chancery under the title “Ascension,” on Ascension Thursday.

The feast is now celebrated on a Sunday in most dioceses. In days gone by, Ascension Thursday was a holy day of obligation, and if you went to a parochial school, it was a day free of classes. It also was the day when we had the altar boys’ picnic, a trip to a state park with hot dogs and ice cream. During the 1940s, that made Ascension Thursday a major event for us indeed. Granted, our enthusiasm for the feast was earth-bound, a little shy of the Church’s reason to celebrate, but not completely unrelated.

Kids having a fun time together is a very human, good, down-to-earth event. Jesus, when he walked on this earth, appreciated children and shared their joys and sorrows. He shared their humanity, and still does. Jesus, God and man, human and divine, is one with us, and is leading us to be one with him. That is what we celebrate on the Feast of the Ascension.

In ascending to the right hand of his Father, Jesus didn’t leave his humanity behind. In the Nicene Creed, we profess: *He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.* The saving work Jesus undertook while on earth is completed. He is with his Father as God and man. Our heavenly goal is to be with him as complete human beings. The Church prays in the Collect of the Mass: “The ascension of Christ your son is our exaltation, and where the head has gone before in glory, the body is called to follow in hope.” And, in the Preface: “He ascended, not to distance himself from our lowly state, but that we, his members, might be confident in following where he, our head and founder, has gone before.”

And so, we have reason to be confident that Christ’s promise will be fulfilled if we remain faithful to his word. In John’s gospel, we’ve been hearing, “If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back again and take you to myself, so that where I am you also may be” (John 14: 3).

The Ascension is a mystery of hope. By entering the sanctuary of heaven, Christ has opened up the way for us to follow him. Our lives are sustained by this hope. In the contemporary world, being able to look forward with confidence is a treasured gift.

Be assured of our prayers for all of you and, please, pray for us.

Peace and good things.
Fr. Boniface Lutz, O.S.B.
Prior



Monastery Chronicle

By Fr. Boniface Lautz, OSB

March 2022

Ash Wednesday set the tone and direction for the month. Our annual retreat was given by Abbot Peter Eberle, O.S.B. It was special to have him with us. His leadership in the early days of our independence from Mt. Angel was supportive and encouraging. During his current visit, we had time to reminisce and catch up. His conferences were timely and appropriate. Abbot Peter also gave the retreat for our Oblates. By all reports, it was truly appreciated.

On Sunday, March 6, our dear friend Louise Marshall died. She and her husband, Dick, have been a significant part of our history from the very beginning. We were able to participate in her rosary vigil and funeral liturgy. It is not possible to measure the value of Louise's relationship with us. Her interest and loving concern for each of us was a gift. We are grateful.



Our Wednesday evening sessions have been taken with a video series called *The Chosen*. It situates the calling of Jesus' disciples in the human context of living in Gospel times. Friends recommended the series to us.

During March, heat pumps, dishwasher and refrigeration units have been repaired and/or replaced. We have had some medical repairs, also.

We've all survived and, if we follow the doctors' advice, we'll likely do well.

The MSP community and John Wasko have cleared leaves and other winter debris and laid out some water lines. They have also begun work in the garden.

April 2022

Fr. Meinrad's birthday was on the 3rd, and Fr. Ezekiel's name day on the 10th.

Six volunteers trimmed/pruned our fruit trees on April 2. By noon, they were finished and had a pizza lunch outdoors in the sunshine.

On Sunday, April 3, the candidates from the St. Edward's Parish RCIA program had a day of recollection here. It is something they had done annually, but discontinued two years ago because of Covid-19. The same weekend, the MSP retreat was in progress. The dining room was filled with 60 people.

We received a load of fertilizer from the neighbors, which Dave Burgess tilled into the ground. Father Benito and the Brothers installed the irrigation lines and moved several trees.

On Palm Sunday, we made wearing of masks optional and offered Communion under both species. Both we and the MSP's had complete Holy Week services, they in Spanish in the conference room; we in English in the chapel. They transformed the conference room into a beautiful chapel for the Triduum and Vigil; their observances on Good Friday and the Vigil were an inspiration. Brother Sylvester and helpers decorated the chapel. The weather cooperated for the outdoor Stations of the Cross on Good Friday, and the wind calmed down for the fire at the Easter Vigil. Our Easter Vigil began at 8:30 pm and was over at 10:00. We had three lay readers and four of us. About 20 people came to the Vigil; on Easter morning, there was a full congregation.

Ben Marshall stopped one day and informed us about the irrigation plans for the coming summer. Our part of Idaho faces severe water shortages and will need to observe some restrictions. The Marshalls have used careful planning both in crops and ground-water use. The result is that this year should go well.

We've all been afflicted with some kind of a bug that gives us coughs, runny noses and plugged sinuses. We get varied stages of relief one day and then it flares up again.

The MSP's have cleaned and restored one of the storage sheds formerly used to house chickens. They did a thorough job and can make use of the space for things they use for liturgy and mission activities.

May 2022

Father Hugh had a birthday on the 8th and a name day on the 11th. During that week, he attended digitally the International Medieval Congress at Western Michigan University.

We were able to resume retreats for married couples. On April 30-May 1, the MSP's had a large group of couples. And May 14-15, we hosted a Hispanic Marriage Encounter. The participants were enthusiastic; we were glad to have them.

The MSP's have planted the large vegetable garden. A freeze killed the tomato plants. They have plenty of gardening experience, but most of it is in warmer climes.

We have a bell tower! Fr. Benito moved both the bell from our front parking lot and the outdoor chimes secured by Fr. Koelsch to the west lawn. The wind creates gentle sounds of chimes and the bells can be rung by hand.

We will celebrate the Feast of the Ascension on Thursday, May 26, and repeat the Mass texts on Sunday, May 29.



use single use plastic bags vs reusable fiber bags, we are contributing to the enormous amount of plastic being put in our landfills. (It takes up to 450 years for plastic to break down in a landfill.) These are just a couple of examples, but choosing convenience often contributes to the overall adverse effects on the ecosystem, exacerbating climate change and a future that will create challenges for all—especially the poorest members of our community.

Finally, we need to ask ourselves: whose is this bit of land, this tree, this water, this air? The Catholic Church says it is God’s gift to all; it is destined for the common good. Private property, such as bank accounts and water rights, are not the absolute good, nor are they superior to the right of everyone to potable drinking water and other necessities of life. I have no right to squander or hoard, when others are in need—and when are there not people in need? We hold all that we have in trust. That means buy less, use less, reuse more, re-purpose, and recycle.

TOURING THE HOUSE

Let’s take a little tour of our living space and try to see it in the light of these principles. We can start in the bedroom, with the clothes closet and the dresser. We are encouraged not to hoard so, periodically, we pack clothes off to the thrift store. That’s good, but how did we come to have so many clothes? How many should we have? It can take 700 gallons of water to grow the cotton for one T-shirt. It takes more water to dye the fabric and considerable energy for the shirt’s manufacture and shipping. If we do need a piece of clothing, we can buy things that last, that are made with a care for the natural and human environment. We can also buy clothes used.

Next, there’s the bathroom. How much water can we save by showering more quickly, converting to a two-speed toilet, turning off the water when brushing our teeth and shaving? Toiletries are usually sold with layers of multi-component packaging. Is there any way to eliminate some of it?

Out in the hallway, in the cleaning closet, there are chemicals for cleaning. What impact does their use have on the environment? Are there safer products? Can we use them less? The washer and dryer in the laundry room use water and energy. Do we adjust the water level and wash with cold water? Is the detergent we use environmentally safe? Could we dry some of our clothes without using the dryer?

In the kitchen, quite a bit of food is being stored. Do we need it all? How much food is

wasted here? How energy-efficient are the appliances? Do we need them all? Could we take some no-longer-used items to the thrift store? Can we buy more things in bulk with less packaging? More locally grown items?

Out the back door is the garbage can. How many cubic feet of garbage do we produce a week? How can we cut that down? Is there a way we can compost more of the waste from the kitchen? How much plastic are we sending to the landfill?

While we are out on the lawn—how big is it? Could we make it smaller, so that it takes less water, fertilizer and pesticide? Why not mow it with a push mower? Could some of the area be devoted to native plants, vegetables and flowers, or to plants that are beneficial to wildlife? If we do have garden spaces, can we make them more water efficient and less dependent on fertilizer and pesticides? If there is a drain sprout at the corner, could we attach it to a rain barrel and use the water from that to water the garden? Is the soil in the yard and gardens improving?

That is probably enough for one day. Next time, we can check the rest of the house and the garage. Meanwhile, we might consider lowering the thermometer in the winter and raising it in the summer.



Meet a Missionary: Brother Geovany González, MSP.

Fr. Hugh Feiss, O.S.B.

WE ARE SHARING OUR PROPERTY WITH THE MISSIONARIES SERVANTS OF THE WORD. They arrived last summer. Fr. Benito Rojas, the superior, and four seminarians are resident here; several priests and some lay Missionaries are here part of the time.



Here is the story of one of the seminarians, Brother Geovany González, whom I interviewed on May 19, after the Missionaries returned from a quick trip to Palmdale, north of Los Angeles across the San Gabriel mountains. That trip, to attend the ordination of some Missionaries, included two 11-hour car rides on successive nights. In Palmdale, it was close to 100° F. In spite of that, Br. Geovany was his usual soft-spoken, alert self.

He was born in Guanajuato, Mexico. His family lived there until they moved to Atlanta, Georgia, when he was 11 years old. He has three siblings, two girls and a boy. After graduating from high school in Atlanta, he worked at a cafeteria in a farmers' market and did a stint in retail.

He first met the Missionaries through his grandmother, who was engaged with them in Mexico. During the years after high school, he attended several MSP retreats. One in California, especially, prompted his decision to join the Missionaries.

The first step was to serve as a lay missionary in California for eight months. After that, he was on mission in Tacoma, Washington, for another eight months, followed by four

months in California. The following year, he made a year-long postulancy in California, then spent a year in the novitiate.

Brother Geovany was one of the first group to profess his vows in the order in the United States. Until they are finally professed, Missionaries profess temporary vows annually for a year at a time. After their first profession in August, 2021, he and the other newly professed came to the Monastery of the Ascension, where they are taking college courses online, majoring in philosophy. In addition to taking classes, and their routine of prayer and work, they are also helping give retreats, going door to door to invite people to biblical retreats that they offer here and in parishes, and selling the magazines their order publishes. After they graduate from college, they will have a year-long “desert” experience before they begin the study of theology.

Brother Geovany likes movies and photography. Even if he doesn't have a camera with him, as he walks around, he notices good subjects for photos. He doesn't have much time for hobbies, though. Among the resident Missionaries, he is most fluent in English, so he does some translating. He helps with bookkeeping and their retreats as well.



Laudato Sí—Praise Be You, My Lord

Fr. Hugh Feiss, O.S.B.

“YOU HAVE GIVEN ME THE GREAT GRACE OF LIVING UNDER THE SKY, AND IN THAT LAND THAT YOU LIVED, OF WALKING ON THE VERY GROUND YOU WALKED OVER.” These are the words of newly canonized Charles de Foucault, written 100 years ago, describing the grace of working as a laborer at a convent in Nazareth, where Jesus lived for many years. I had an opportunity to visit Palestine many years ago, and it was a grace. However, long before that, another sky and land had captivated me.

I was born in Lakeview, Oregon and, by the time I was in the first grade, I had lived in Austin Junction, Baker City and John Day. I never lived in Eastern Oregon again, but I also never left it. I spent countless weekends and weeks camping there and, for thirty years, I spent a month in a trailer, next to St. Joseph’s Catholic Church outside of Unity, Oregon, enjoying a solitude at once austere and life-giving. Nowhere have I ever felt so attached to a place as I have in the high desert and mountains of Eastern Oregon.

For several years, on camping trips to the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge, I shared a creekside camping spot with a weasel. In the last winter I was in Unity (2019), a large herd of mule deer came by every evening in single file, heading for a haystack nearby, jumping a split-rail fence in the glow from the trailer window, like ballerinas in a spotlight. At midnight, I could go out and see countless stars sparkling in tandem with the winter snow. Earlier in 2019, my brother and I were traveling from Boise to the Oregon coast but, when we arrived in John Day, we couldn’t bring ourselves to go any further. After we spent four of five days exploring old haunts, we went to Succor Creek and Leslie Gulch, where we met a small flock of whimbrels in a wide space in a magnificent canyon.

I think that my love of Eastern Oregon has helped me to love other places also. As the hymn “This is My Song”—set to Sibelius’ “Finlandia”—says (condensed), “This is my home, O God of all the nations, where my heart is, here are my dreams,



my holy shrine. But other hearts in other lands are beating with hopes and dreams as true and high as mine.”

Eastern Oregon has been a source of natural resources—gold, sheep, timber and cattle—which has left many scars, and the decline of which has left many towns and people

vulnerable to joblessness. There are places I would not visit again, because they are so fragile.

The landscape of Eastern Oregon is, for me, a book written by the finger of God. God spoke—and speaks—the Creating Word and, so it has been and is, for hundreds of millions years and now. The immensity of the vistas, the story written in its rocks, a flock of snow geese, the tiny desert flowers, declare the glory of God.

Eastern Oregon is not an island, but part of a continent on a planet, where the climate is rapidly changing, so that the survival of many nodes in the web of life is uncertain. To love any part of the earth requires that we love it all, and take care of it, starting in our own homes and backyard—that is one way we declare the glory of God.





Caring for This Earth, and the Animals That Live Here

Julie A. Ferraro

AMONG MY TASKS AS SOCIAL MEDIA MANAGER FOR THE BENEDICTINE SISTERS IN ATCHISON, KANSAS, I HAVE PLENTY OF occasions to snap photos of the Sisters going about their daily business, including interacting with an aging black Labrador, Sophie, and three young cats roaming the monastery grounds. Besides caring for these animals—as well as the birds who frequent the plentiful feeders and turtles who live in the garden—the Sisters are known for their care of the environment. For me, being able to venture outdoors and spend a few minutes stroking the tabby Joey’s thick fur, or scratching Sophie behind the ears, releases any tension I might be harboring during a busy work day. The Sisters understand that pets can be a form of therapy. The retired Sisters living in Dooley Center enjoy visits from Sophie and the cats, stopping to cuddle or pet them.



Overall, the Sisters have a profound grasp of the connectedness of people and animals, as well as human beings and this earth on which we live. An array of solar panels tops the buildings, with another set up near the gardens. A cistern collects rainwater, used to irrigate the gardens when the Kansas weather remains dry over a course of weeks. The Sisters, with their green thumbs, grow everything from grapes to corn, tomatoes and zucchini—and plenty of flowers—a bounty that

finds its way onto the dining room tables. Pecan and walnut trees also augment the menu options in abundance, as do “microgreens”, grown under lights year-round as a supplement to the salad bar. Then, there’s the bees. More than a dozen hives are located well away from more populated areas—I, personally, keep my distance. In the fall, the honey is harvested, and even the wax formed by the bees in the combs is processed and used for candles and other crafts.

The Atchison community is not alone in their endeavors to care for creation. A crew from the cable network Newsy visited three monasteries last year, discussing how faith and the environment are linked, collecting enough footage for a full-length documentary. My “documentation” of the Sisters’ work finds its way onto Facebook and other social media platforms. Those who view the photos I post of the animals find in the images a respite from the concerns of the moment, an instant of divine refreshment to remind them of God’s loving touch. Sharing how the Sisters care for the environment encourages them to continue their own efforts to do likewise.

When we welcome animals into our lives, we welcome the undeniably loving God, as well. Taking concrete steps to reverse the damage caused by climate change, we acknowledge the gift of this home and its beauty. May we never cease to marvel at God’s wisdom!





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"There is something too narrow
and something missing in the Gospel
as presented to us today.

Wider horizons,
not a tighter rein,
that is, if I'm not mistaken,
the only remedy
that can effectively
bring our generation
back to the ways of truth."

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin



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