



Monastery of the Ascension

THE DESERT CHRONICLE

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Br. José Echanove, OSB 1946-2013

By Fr. Bonaface Lautz, O.S.B.



BR. JOSÉ FRANCISCO ECHANOVE, OSB, DIED SUDDENLY AND UNEXPECTEDLY HERE AT THE MONASTERY ON FRIDAY AFTERNOON, JULY 12. He had returned from St. Jerome's Parish where he served two days a week helping local Hispanic people with the immigration process. It was a favorite task of his and he returned home that day in a happy mood. It had been a productive day. His usual routine was to stop by the kitchen, and when that didn't happen, Br. Selby went to check on him and found him unresponsive. Local emergency personnel worked diligently and at length, but to no avail.

Br. José was born on December 22, 1946, the son of Nemesio Echanove and Tomasa Aguirre Echanove in Vizcaya, Spain. He had four sisters, three of whom survive; all of them live in the Basque area of Spain. His grade and high school years in his hometown were followed by a brief period of compulsory service in the military and work in a local restaurant. He also continued to work on the family farm. In later

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From the Prior's Pulpit

ALMSGIVING AND THE ECONOMY OF SALVATION

THE EXPRESSION "ECONOMY OF SALVATION" IS A PUZZLING ONE AT FIRST. UPON CLOSER INSPECTION, WE WILL SEE THAT IT IS A useful and meaningful way to speak of salvation. Christ tells us in Luke 12:32-34, "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell what you have and give alms; make for yourselves purses which do not wear out, a treasure in the heavens that fails not, where no thief draws near, nor moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

Here and elsewhere, Jesus uses language taken from the "financial markets" of his day to talk about the kingdom of God. In doing so, he uses comparisons and analogies that his hearers could understand and relate to. For instance, we moderns readily understand that a treasure in heaven is beyond the reach of a thief. But why add the bit about the moth that destroys? In Jesus' day, however, cloth was very expensive--the stuff of kings. Cloth merchants could well be compared to jewel merchants. In admonishing his followers to give alms so as to store up treasure in heaven, Jesus is drawing upon language and concepts that are well founded in the Old Testament.

In the Old Testament, almsgiving was generally viewed as a way of redeeming a person from bondage of servitude or poverty that had come about as a result of the loss of property. The Book of Leviticus, chapter 25, details the system of jubilee years when all property was to be returned to the original owners and servants were to be given their freedom. A new ruler in Israel would proclaim "liberty for captives" (cf. Isaiah 61:1-3) as a way of reestablishing equality among his subjects. This redistribution of wealth and power not only put the Israelites on an equal footing socially and economically, it also prevented extremes in poverty that might lead to rebellion arising among slaves and impoverished people. In this context, almsgiving was viewed not only as a way for forestalling revolt, but also, more importantly, as an act of justice rather than mere mercy. "God, who gives us everything freely, acts mercifully toward us so that we might act justly toward one another", one might say. Proverbs 14:21 reads "The one who despises his fellow commits a sin; but blessed is the one who give generously to the poor." Proverbs 19:17 even dares to say: "He who is generous to the downtrodden makes a loan to the Lord; He will repay him his due." In other words, what one does for the poor is seen as something done for the Lord. Sin was interpreted as a debt owed to the Lord, and almsgiving was thus viewed as a way of paying off that debt.

This understanding of almsgiving raised heated debates at and since the time of the Protestant Reformation, an issue beyond the scope of this article.

One view of almsgiving that is particularly striking in Old Testament times and in rabbinical teaching is that alms given to the poor are equivalent to or even exceed sacrificial offerings that give one access to the Lord. Tobit 4:11 states, "Alms are a worthy offering in the sight of the Most High for all who give them." In Jesus' day and earlier, almsgiving was a common event at festival times. Judas Iscariot was sent forth at the time of Jesus' last Passover to "do quickly what you have to do." Some of the disciples thought that Jesus was asking Judas to go and give alms to the poor (John 13:29).

In Christian times, almsgiving naturally became a way of atoning for one's sins as a sort of "sin sacrifice". It is not uncommon in confessional practice that the priest-confessor might ask the penitent to make a donation to some worthy cause, especially in cases of theft when restitution cannot be made directly to the victim. St. John Chrysostom (d. 407 A.D.) in Homilies on 2 Corinthians viewed the poor as altars upon which one's almsgiving becomes the acceptable sacrifice made to God.

The Rule of St. Benedict speaks of the poor in at least eight places. In keeping with the Gospel command the one who is entering the monastic life is to "go and sell what he has and give to the poor" (Mt 19:21; RB 58.24). The goods of the monastery are also to be used for aiding the poor (RB 55.9); for "great care and concern are to be shown in receiving poor people and pilgrims, because in them more particularly Christ is received" (RB 53.15).

In our day and in our land, monasteries continue to extend help and hospitality to the poor to the extent that circumstances dictate and need arises. We are fortunate to live in a country that makes allowance for this in its tax code. In this way, both the country itself and individual citizens are able to reach out to the poor to serve both charity and justice and to ease the differences between the extremes of wealth and poverty. "The Lord hears the cry of the poor" (Job 24:38, Ps 9:12, Prvb 21:13). Let us always be "tuned in" to this cry --and respond appropriately. •



years, Br. Jose recalled an early interest in pursuing religious life. There were religious and priests on both sides of the family. His father was not in favor and so it was not to be, for then.

In October 1974, Br. José came to the United States under contract to work as a cook for a sheepherding crew in Hagerman, Idaho. Three years of trailing the sheep were followed by nine years driving a forklift at the Tupperware plant that was then operating in Jerome, Idaho.

During the years before his entrance into the monastery, Br. José was an active member of Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish in Twin Falls, Idaho. There he collaborated closely with the pastor, Fr. Juan Garatea, a fellow Basque, and Sr. Rosemary Boessen, RSM. This collaboration, reinforced by a Cursillo, rekindled the spark of calling to the religious life. Through Sr. Rosemary he was introduced to our community.

After an initial three-month discernment stay at the monastery in 1989, in July of that year he made formal application to join. His novitiate began on August 14, 1989, and was followed by simple profession on August 15, 1990, and perpetual vows on August 15, 1993. Fr. Meinrad Schallberger, OSB, as novice master, and Fr. Joseph Wood, OSB, as junior master, guided his years of formation. Both recommended him for profession, recognizing some of the qualities that would be familiar hallmarks to us in the years to come.



A proud moment in his life came on November 4, 2002, at the federal court in Boise. There Br. José became a citizen of the United States. He retained dual citizenship and was proud to claim both nations as his own. He also used his dual citizenship to advantage when he went to visit his family in the Basque Country every two years.

Br. José was a man of many talents. He was an excellent cook and up until the time of his death helped in the monastery kitchen to the delight of monks and guests alike. His sewing skills served the monks in tailoring habits and mending clothing. He was an accomplished knitter, as many local wearers of his stockings will attest. His fluency in Basque and Spanish made it possible for him to serve people in the immigration process. Just this summer he received an award and recognition for his twenty years of service.



Br. José was a perfectionist. Whatever he was doing—sewing, knitting, cooking, filling out immigration forms—it had to be right. His expectations of himself and others were often “black and right.” He did excellent work, but he could be hard on himself and was sometimes prickly. He used to complain of himself that he was too quick to notice deficiencies in both others and himself.

He spoke of himself as a “people pleaser.” He liked to do nice things for others. He was also genuinely kind and generous. When one’s birthday came along, he was ready to cook something he knew one liked. When he traveled back from Spain, his suitcase always contained gifts for his community and others, even if it meant running the risk of having the gifts impounded because they were on the forbidden list.

He had a playful, mischievous streak. He loved to play jokes or tease, and he was delighted when his efforts were successful. One Christmas he prepared a really delicious meal for us; we congratulated him on the lamb (one of his favorite dishes). As we all congratulated him on his cooking, he was pleased to announce that the main course had been goat. He loved to say that what he had prepared for a meal had “secret ingredients.”

Br. José could be stubborn. The things he didn’t want to do often went undone. That included following the doctor’s orders and prescribed dietary programs. For a severe diabetic in fragile health, that was not good. His health was often precarious.

His love and concern for family in Spain was strong, and he was in regular contact with them by phone and email. We were often asked to pray for specific things that affected them.

Br. José was a bit of a showman. Guests to the monastery will remember friendly and sometimes lively interactions when they encountered him either on the way to Sunday Mass in our chapel or as he gave them directions at the serving buffet in the dining room.

There was intensity about Br. José that seemed to be part of his Basque heritage of which he was rightfully proud. Perhaps as a vestige of his years on the sheep trail, he was also able to sit in silence and quietly observe his surroundings. He had a steel-trap memory that was remarkably accurate.

The vigil service and funeral for Br. José were held in St. Jerome’s Parish church.

The large gathering of Anglo Americans and Hispanic Americans testified to how many people’s lives he had touched and who will miss him. His brother monks at the monastery will miss not only what Br. José could do, but also the man he was. •





Nesebar Church

On The Shores Of The Black Sea

By Fr. Hugh Fiess, OSB

“THE EUXINE! THAT STRANGE MYSTERIOUS SEA, WHICH TYPIFIES THE ABYSS OF OUTER DARKNESS, AS THE BLUE MEDITERRANEAN BASKS UNDER THE SMILE OF HEAVEN IN THE CENTRE of civilization and religion. The awful, yet splendid drama of man’s history has mainly been carried on upon the Mediterranean shores; while the Black Sea has ever been on the very outskirts of the habitable world, and the scene of wild unnatural portents . . . visions of barbarous tribes, Goths, Huns, Scythians, Tartars, flitting over the steppes and wastes which encircle its inhospitable waters.”

So wrote Cardinal Newman of the Black Sea in his 1859/60 essay on St. John Chrysostom, who, like Ovid and St. Clement of Rome earlier, was exiled to die on the shores of the Black Sea. However, in July 2013 the Black Sea was very blue, under blue skies and a warm sun. The beaches, rimmed with resorts, were occupied with sunbathers from Russia, Bulgaria and elsewhere. Improbably, I was there for a family reunion of 23 people, including my nephew’s Bulgarian wife and her family, who when she was a child used to camp and sunbathe on those shores.

Near where we stayed are two towns, with “old town” districts,

built on the ruins of many different cultures. The archeological museum in Sozopol (ancient Apollonia) is built on the ruins of a very large 5th-6th century AD granary (22 x 14 x 3.5 meters) lined with waterproof plaster. Above it was a fortress (4th-14th c. AD) whose watch-tower looked out over the sea. On the same site is a well (4th-3rd c. BC) that was part of a religious complex dedicated to the three nymphs. Near it are the remains of the tile water-mains of the 5th c. BC Greek city that was situated on the site.

Nesebar, the other town in the area, is located on an island-like peninsula connected to the mainland by a narrow causeway. The “old town” is only 850 x 340 meters. Near the boat-dock where the causeway joins this peninsula are the ruins of a large medieval fortress that was conquered by Amadeus of Savoy in 1366, thirty years before the Ottoman Turks captured the city. The site has been occupied for 3000 years. The Thracians called it Melsambria. In the 6th c. BC, Dorian Greeks settled and built up the town. Their tombstones we saw at the museum in Sozopol; in the more extensive museum in Nesebar are their coins, jewelry and pottery, but also the pottery of their predecessors dating back to the Bronze Age. Nesebar surrendered to the Romans in 72 BC, and for the



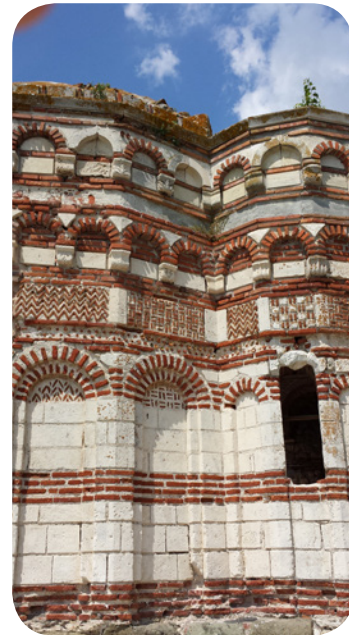
next 1500 years its history was intertwined with that of Byzantium. It became a Christian center and today is most known for its medieval Christian churches, most of them small and three-naved, topped with domes or other roof structures, and constructed of delicately patterned red-brick and white stone. The Ottomans insisted that the churches be small, no larger than a mosque. Even under the Turks for several centuries Nesebar was a center of icon and mural painters. Their depictions of Christ Pantocrator and warrior saints like Demetrius and George are reminders of the struggles of the Byzantine Empire against various foes (Arabs, Bulgars, Turks, and Crusaders). The narrative murals of the life of Mary and the twelve apostles have a more peaceful aura.

In the 2011 census, when Bulgaria's population was 8,000,000, approximately 4,375,000 indicated they were members of the Orthodox Church. 683,000 reported that they were atheists, and 577,000 identified themselves as Muslim. 50,000 reported they were Roman Catholics. Throughout its history, the Bulgarian Church has sought to keep some independence from the Greek Orthodox Church. That led them several times to explore union with the Roman Church (Boris I, 9th century; Tsar Kaloyan, 12th century; Dragan Tsankov, 19th century), but nothing came of these overtures. Pope John XXIII, when he was still Giuseppe Roncalli, was papal nuncio to Bulgaria (1925–1935). Bulgaria refused German demands to deport Jews during World War II. Ali Agca's attempt to assassinate Pope John-Paul II has often been attributed to a Communist plot orchestrated by the KGB through East German and Bulgarian intelligence agencies, but Bulgaria has steadfastly denied involvement.

Bulgaria is a member of the European Union although it does not use the Euro. As I was flying out of Bulgaria there were peaceful, anti-government demonstrations in several Bulgarian cities. Like people in so many countries today, Bulgarians are seeking a responsive and non-corrupt government. •



Fort, Granary and Cistern of Sozopol



Church in Nesebar



Dalmatian pelican



Ruins of fortress of Nesebar





Summer 2013

THE HOT, DRY SUMMER OF 2013 IS DRAWING TO A CLOSE. WE HAVE FINISHED FIVE OF OUR SIX ROAD SCHOLAR PROGRAMS. MOST OF THEM HAVE BEEN FULLY SUBSCRIBED, AND ALL OF THEM have brought very nice people, both participants and faculty, to the monastery. Some are old friends, who have been attending or teaching programs for many years. Ron Pepin (Colchester, CT), who teaches in the Ancient Rome program, recalled that this was his thirteenth year teaching here. Jane Rickenbaugh (Milwaukie, OR) who taught medieval dance in the program called *Windows on Medieval Life*, and Susanna Lundgren (Milwaukie, OR) who taught art and music in the *History and Culture of Ireland* program, have been coming that long as well. Moreover, this year we celebrated the 25th anniversary of the *Dance of the Angels*, a group that put on medieval dances and dramas, of which Jane was the founder, and Susanna and Fr. Hugh were charter members. Roy and Jody Anderson (Missoula, MT) and John O'Hagan (Boise, ID) taught in the *Religion and the Settling of the West* program, and a wonderful crew of friends--Fran Golding (Hagerman, ID), Dennis Pettygrove (Hansen, ID), Dar Wagner (Twin Falls, ID), Catherine Nelson (Dixon, CA), and Kat Pliska (Happy Valley, OR) will help lead the Hiking program in early September.

On July 7, we hosted the Oblate picnic. As part of festivities, Jaime Thietten, a Christian singer who is the wife of oblate Peter Espil, gave an inspiring concert. A week later Pete brought 30 teens and their chaperones to the monastery for the third annual Benedict-Teen retreat, which was a big success. As a follow-up on the retreats, Pete has set up a Facebook page and begun a newsletter for teens who make the retreat and want to keep in touch. The retreat was overshadowed somewhat by the death of Br. José who died of a sudden heart attack the Friday before the retreat. The teens cleaned up the cemetery and columbarium as one of their projects. Just a few days before Br. José's death, Br. Tobiah had a very serious heart attack while he was shopping at Wal-Mart. A policeman rushed to the scene and gave him CPR, which saved his life. After several weeks in the hospital he returned to the monastery, where he is still recuperating. Meanwhile, Fr. Eugene and Fr. Boniface have been taking care of his poultry.

Fr. Boniface has been busy this summer arranging for several projects. One involves replacing the windows in the monks' rooms on the south side of the monastery, which has the most exposure to the sun.

The new windows seem bigger and make the rooms lighter and more cheerful. Next, a roofing company is going to fix the roof over the library, which has a very dangerous leak. Currently the books under it are shrouded in plastic.

The priests of the monastery have been busy helping in parishes. A new pastor took over the parish in American Falls, so Fr. Boniface and Fr. Kenneth no longer have to alternate weekends there. Fr. Jerome was chaplain to a group of geology students at Yellowstone for a week and has been helping out at St. Mary's in Boise. The Air Force Base in Mountain Home is once more between Catholic chaplains, so Fr. Hugh and Fr. Boniface are scheduled to help there until November. Fr. Nathaniel had one memorable Saturday in the local parish: he said three Masses, baptized, gave first communion, celebrated a quinceañera, and witnessed a wedding.

Fr. Ezekiel has been doing quite a bit of the cooking. With Br. José's death, that is a service that he will likely continue to provide. Guests continue to be very pleased with the quality of the food LuAnn Kraft serves them. Their only complaint is that it is toooooo good, and so they eat too much. LuAnn is very good at connecting with local growers and artisans. Most of one day of each Road Scholar Program is devoted to a bus tour of the area. This summer we have been visiting two of LuAnn's suppliers, Ballard Chesse for a tasting and tour, and Cloverleaf Dairy for a fresh ice cream cone.

This summer there are very few voles, and also very few raptors. Our resident Great Horned Owls fledged their chicks, but we have not seen much of the owls since the beginning of August. The lack of voles may have forced them to go further afield to find food. In August, some Nighthawks have joined the Barn Swallows, and between them and the Western Kingbirds (fewer of them this year, it seems) they have done us a big service in keeping the bug population down. A female Bullock's Oriole was killed in a collision with a window, but there is another who sometimes works the tree in the middle of the courtyard outside the church. The Magpies are thriving. A few trees are turning, the grain has been cut, and the sugar beets are luxuriant, all of which suggests that the summer is drawing to a close. Summer began with northward migrating Western Tanagers; the Barn Swallows will mark the end of summer when they gather to head south. •



Barn swallow

1. View from one of the new windows.
2. Quilting Retreat
3. Monument to Archbishop F. N. Blanchet
4. Quilting Retreat





Library overflow in hallway

The Monastery Library at a Crossroads

By Hugh Feiss, OSB

IT HAS BEEN A NUMBER OF YEARS SINCE THERE HAS BEEN A REPORT ON THE MONASTERY LIBRARY IN THE DESERT CHRONICLE. IN THE MEANTIME, a number of things have happened. We received several large donations of books: one primarily of theology, one of philosophy books, and one primarily of literature. We have also been purchasing books, primarily in Scripture and monasticism, but also in theology and to meet specific needs of members of the community. We've kept our periodical subscriptions at about 30 journals. Linda Henderson has volunteered several hours a week to do cataloging, so we have made some inroads into the backlog that has been nagging us for quite a while. Gloria Rice keeps the library itself clean and orderly. Linda's records show that we now have more than 12,000 titles in the catalog, and we calculate that there are about 4000 books waiting to be cataloged. Unquestionably, it is the best Catholic library in Idaho.

All of this activity has brought about several results. In spite of the fact that we are trying to be very selective in what we let into the library, the library is overflowing its space (down the hallway and into the basement). We have reached the point where we either have to start de-acquisitioning a book or two each time we add one, or expand somewhere else in the building (the only possible place seems to be the meeting room in the basement, which like the rest of the basement is not very clean and is poorly lighted), or build on to the library or build a separate library.

At the same time we are out of room, the automated system we use to catalog our books has become obsolete. We only use it for cataloging and for the online public access catalog, so we are looking for a replacement system that would not require us to pay for modules we don't need. We think we have found one that is inexpensive and meets our needs, but we are still investigating our options.

The decision about what to do next has to be made against the backdrop of a number of trends. First of all, there is the uncertain future of libraries generally. Many books are available online—though not many of those in our library. Big libraries now offer almost all of their periodicals in digital forms, but a very small library like ours cannot do that, at least yet. So we retain and bind

back issues and have built up more or less complete runs of some basic periodicals: Theological Studies, American Benedictine Review, Cistercian Studies Quarterly, American Catholic Historical Review, American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly, Downside Review, Journal of Biblical Literature, Catholic Biblical Quarterly as well as shorter runs of some of the other journals to which we currently subscribe: America, Commonweal, US Catholic, Bible Today, Poetry, Spirituality, and Image.

As the future of libraries is unpredictable, so is the future of any monastery. We don't know who will come in the future to join us, or if anyone will come. Although Benedict's Rule expects his monks to read privately 15-20 hours a week, few monks do that now. The upcoming generation of Americans (and so of American monks) seems unlikely to be enthusiastic readers. However, having a good library is also a recruitment tool. People who do want to nurture their souls and minds with reading are not likely to join a rural monastery with a mediocre library.

A further consideration is ministry. Ours is the biggest and best library collection of Catholic theology in Idaho. Although we are glad to loan our books to others, few people are currently borrowing books from us. That may be our fault, for not making its availability more known. Or it may be that there is not much need for a theology library in Idaho. We need to publicize the library more and make sure that people can have a way to use the Internet to find out what books we have. One service we could render is to provide space, connected with our decent, if small, theology library, where people could come and write, prepare classes and sermons, or just read for a week or a month.

Another ministerial concern is our own ministry: it is hard to imagine effective ministry that is not based on ongoing study, though perhaps library books are not necessary for that.

In the light of all these factors, we will have to make some decisions before too long. I have received advice of various sorts from members of the monastic community and well-wishers outside of it: sell the books and use the money for something useful; keep the library as is for nostalgia's sake; build a new building to house the library and a couple of infirmary rooms. Perhaps you have some thoughts on what we should do. If so, let me know: hughf@idahomonks.org•



Library main reading room



Library main reading room



Events at the Monastery

Adult Faith Enrichment Series. Fr. Norbert.

Tuesdays, 1:00 to 3:00, repeated 7:00 to 8:30 PM,
September 10 through October 22. *Topic: second part of
Gerhard Lohfink, Jesus of Nazareth. What He Wanted.
Who He Was.*

Register with Fr. Norbert: 324-2377x210;
norbert@idahomonks.org.

November 1-3: Oblate retreat.

Report on Third World Oblate Congress by Nancy Kobe,
conferences on Jesus by several monks. Anyone is welcome
as long as there is room. Register with Fr. Hugh: 761-9389;
hughf@idahomonks.org



Long Term Weekend Parish Help:

St. Mary's and St. John's Cathedral, Boise:
Fr. Jerome

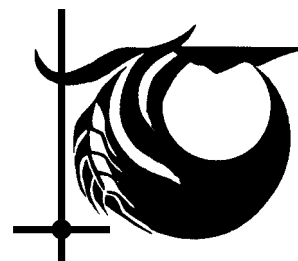
Mountain Home Air Force Base:
Fr. Boniface and Fr. Hugh (till mid-November)



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