



THE DESERT CHRONICLE

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Mary's Search for More

By Fr. Boniface Lautz, OSB

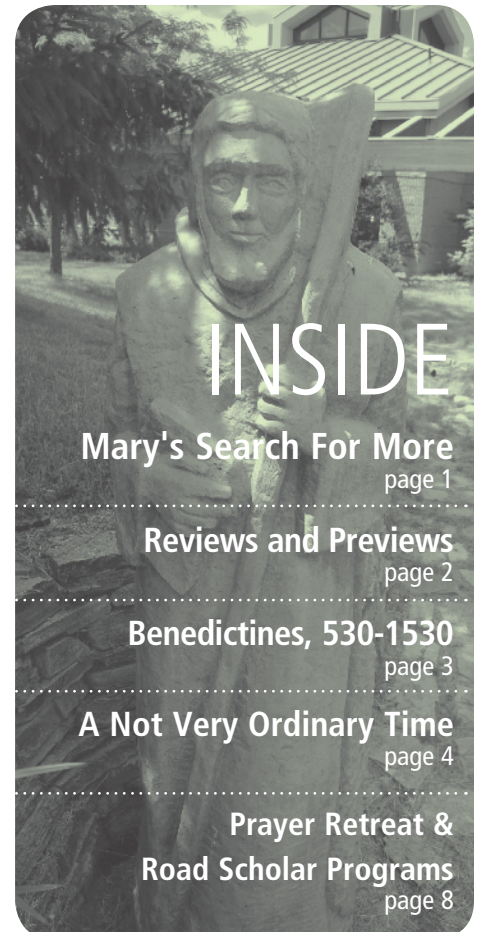
IT IS CURRENTLY 90 DEGREES PLUS. BY THE TIME YOU READ THIS IT WILL PROBABLY BE MUCH COOLER. OF COURSE I REMEMBER COMPLAINING ABOUT THE SNOW SEVERAL issues ago. Some of us are never satisfied. which is what i want to write about this time; never being satisfied. Or perhaps better put; always wanting more. It's the *more* part that caught my attention.

We will celebrate Mary's Assumption in a couple of days. The fullness of life with Christ, complete joy, arriving at the goal; that was all she ever wanted and all that the Lord wanted for her. We honor her as a model of openness to God's will: "Let it be done to me according to your word". (Lk. 1, 38) We also honor Mary as one free of sin; all her wants and desires somehow got filtered through a desire to do what the Lord wanted, which didn't mea that the decisions were easy. But there was an ultimate goal, something *more*.

It's that something *more* St. Benedict says that is basic to a monastic vocation. "The concern must be whether the novice truly seeks God" (*Holy Rule*, 58, 7) . This certainly does not mean that monks don't seek other things. Things and people are important to monks. It means that the one who wants to follow a monastic way of life is going to freely forego things and people that satisfy needs and desires in order to devote more attention to seeking God. And the motivation for that is the *MORE*.

Nowadays some people seeking a monastic vocation come with years of experience and accomplishment. One of the things they have discovered is that there is something *more*. It's not a denial or rejection of what has gone before., but they seek a way of life that focuses them in that direction.

Vatican II told us that all religious life, monastics included, benefits the mission of the Church. "The members of every institute, therefore, ought



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Snake River Canyon, Idaho

Reviews and Previews

By Fr. Boniface Lautz, OSB

MAY

The month began with promises of warmer weather. Covers on the air conditioners in the trailer were removed and the cooling tower was activated and serviced. It was a good thing. By month's end we had temperatures bordering 90 degrees. There was also a night when the vegetable garden water was left on to protect new plants from freezing. Fortunately it worked. We did have some snow on May 17, but then it was springtime. Lawn care became a weekly item. The farm crew activated and repaired the sprinkling system. There were varieties of colorful plants that brightened the place.

The long-awaited new telephone system is in place! Br. Sylvester, the current system manager, who worked hard on this update, recalls that we began with two phones, necessitating a search and find operation when a call came. We now have at least 30! The installers gave us instructions on how to use the system, barring user error.

We've been devoting Wednesday evenings to reviewing and revising our customary. Not a particularly exciting exercise, but useful and interesting. The final draft is being typed by Fr. Ezekiel.

We observed Ascension Thursday, our patronal feast, primarily and fittingly in liturgy. We had a very nice supper. The following Sunday, the Mass was of the feast.

JUNE

Geology of the Snake River Plain has gotten lots of attention this month. Our Road Scholar guests have spoken enthusiastically about their experience. We've also hosted a week on Benedictine history and a week of quilters, interspersed with weekend programs of centering prayer and 12-step retreats.

July begins the fiscal year, so June requires budget work. Our business manager, Diane Sparks and Fr. Andrew put it all together. We should be fine this coming year, if there are no surprises.

The paving of the front parking area has finally been

completed! It was begun last summer when a paving company gave us a discount if we would let them use up some asphalt left over from a project. This month another company showed up unannounced with a similar offer. It seemed a win-win situation for them and us. Our front parking area looks very nice.

Fr. Boniface and Fr. Ezekiel attended the General Chapter held at Conception Abbey, June 22-26. The educational sessions were timely and well presented. Business sessions were routine but necessary. The opportunities to "talk shop" with monks from other monasteries was a gift. The hospitality was great.

The heating and cooling system in the ministry center is suffering from age and diminished efficiency. Replacement rather than repair seems the way to go. That is what we plan to do. We've done some extensive research and consultation. The next step is to get it done and pay for it.

JULY

The month has been hot. There were several power outages, one of them just before meal time during a Road Scholar week.

Range fires in the area have burned thousands of acres and destroyed some real estate. Smoke from fires in surrounding states has clouded the atmosphere. The dry season is upon us. Our good friends have helped as volunteers for years and are letting us know that they are "ready, willing, and able" to do even more. We're grateful and currently exploring ways that can happen.

The view from our community room is truly spectacular. When we expanded the library last year, the addition included a large window overlooking the valley to the south. The first window needing replacement due to a stress fracture (we speculate) was that window! And so it has been replaced along with some older double-paned windows with broken seals. It would be great if clarity of vision was so easily attained. •





Benedictines, 530-1530

By Fr. Hugh Feiss, OSB

BENEDICTINES, 530–1530, IS THE NAME OF A BOOK THAT RONALD PEPIN, MAUREEN O'BRIEN AND I HAVE EDITED AND ARE PREPARING FOR PUBLICATION. THIS SUMMER WE OFFERED A ROAD SCHOLAR (ADULT LEARNING) WEEK DURING WHICH WE DISCUSSED SOME OF THE CONTENTS OF THE BOOK WITH TWENTY-one participants from around the United States. We began with the Rule and Life of St. Benedict and ended with fifteenth-century reform documents. Our aim was to learn the history of Benedictine of monasticism, but also to find the key ideas that define Benedictinism. At the end we spent some time sharing our ideas about what we thought were the key elements of Benedictine life: obedience and humility, discernment and moderation, hospitality, Liturgy of the Hours, community, discipline, reading and work, and how these led to the Benedictine contribution to Western Christian civilization. We also tried to understand why there has been a sharp decline in the number of vocations to monasteries (and religious orders generally) over the last half-century: decline in religious practice generally, materialism, smaller families, and individualism.

The people who came to the program had different backgrounds and different expectations. Some of them volunteered to share these.

Sr. Mary Ann Potts, CSJ
Brownsville, Texas

Sr. Janet Kuciejczyk, CSJ
St. Louis, Missouri

These two sisters belong to the Sisters of Joseph of Carondelet, who came to St. Louis from France. The order was founded in Le Puy, France, about 1650, under the guidance of Pere Medaille, SJ. The first six sisters were illiterate, but their novice mistress (a lay woman) read Fr. Medaille's

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Sr. Mary Ann Potts, CSJ



Sr. Janet Kuciejczyk, CSJ





A Not Very Ordinary Time

By Fr. Hugh Feiss, OSB

THE FEAST OF PENTECOST IS THE LAST DAY OF FIFTY DAYS OF LITURGICAL CELEBRATION FOLLOWING EASTER. THE DAY AFTER Pentecost begins “ordinary time.” However, the catholic church seems reluctant to quit celebrating. The next Sunday is the Feast of the Blessed Trinity, the Sunday after that is Corpus Christi, the Friday after that is the Feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the day after that is the Feast of the Birth of John the Baptist. Less than a week later comes the solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul.

Trinity Sunday

I read an article in a journal about art and theology by a professor who took a drawing class at Notre Dame. The assignment was to draw a still life with grapes. The professor walked up the aisle to look at the students’ progress. He told one of them, don’t draw grapes, draw *this* grape. Inspired by that I went to take a second look at a single allium plant growing in some weeds near the entrance to the retreat center. It appeared to be at its prime: deep purple, bigger than a tennis ball, and waving gloriously in the breeze three feet above its browning leaves. I looked at the fascinating structure of the numerous tiny flowers that constitute the big purple ball.

However, to know this allium in its distinctiveness, I needed to look at other alliums, so I went down to the uncultivated area just above the vegetable garden where several hundred alliums grow close together, many not yet ripe. The lone allium by the guesthouse was indeed at its prime. Like those of the lone allium, the leaves of all these plants were turning brown. Just behind were some bright yellow salsify flowers, also on long bare stems.

The one allium was very beautiful. Each allium in the patch was beautiful, but in their relation to each other and to the salsify

they had another beauty, the beauty that comes from relation or composition. That beauty requires many rather than one. Both beauties are in God, one and three. Suppose one could unite all these alliums into one, but keep the relationality, that would be one-in-many, a trinity.

Corpus Christi

I worked for seven years at Boise State University with Chuck Skoro, a former professor turned campus minister, and a kindly Christian man. Every evening he put some beans in a container to soak and started two loaves of bread in bread machines on a timer. After Mass the next day he served bean soup and bread to anyone who wanted to come to lunch. When I went to St. John’s at Idaho State University in Pocatello with Pete Espil, we also offered the daily lunch: most days parishioners from the Catholic community brought the soup (for 30 people or so) and in the morning I made bread in four bread machines donated to us by St. Vincent de Paul. When two wore out, I asked if they had any more—they brought twelve.

This operation at both universities was inspired by three ideas: be hospitable, don’t minister from afar to souls, but up close to people, and think about the Eucharistic meaning of bread. Pete asked Cindi Duft to do a painting of the Last Supper for the room where we have lunch at St. John’s. She peopled it with students, Pete’s dog and Catfael, my cat, and put in the middle of a long DaVinci-like table a loaf of bread-machine bread. The community gathered for two meals, one in Church, one in the lounge, both with bread, from many grains, ground and baked to form one loaf. In St. Augustine’s words, those who eat the bread of the Eucharist become what they eat. In Jesus’ words, I was hungry. In Paul’s words, we all eat of the one loaf.





The Feast of the Sacred Heart

Some medieval thinkers wondered why God used one of Adam's ribs to fashion Eve. Why not his head or his feet? They decided God chose Adam's rib to show the equality of Adam and Eve. If Eve had been made of Adam's head, it might

have suggested she was his boss. If she had been made of his feet, it could have been interpreted to mean she was his servant. Instead, God picked a rib, which was right in the middle, top to bottom, and back to front. We might think about this story a little differently. God picked a rib, something close to Adam's heart. In so doing God left an opening whereby Adam's heart was open to his new companion.

Until Harvey figured out the role of the heart in the circulation of blood, there was a debate whether the governing organ of the human body was the head or the heart, which many people thought was the source of the circulation not just of blood, but of "spirit," airy substances that circulated through the body and performed important functions. In favor of the primary of the heart is everyday experience. When we are startled by a loud noise or look down over a deep canyon, our heart jumps. We have held our friend in our heart while he or she has been on a trip, and now he or she is near and our heart leaps.

God has eternally had us in his heart. When he saw us in trouble, he sent his Son to love us with a human heart. From his heart Jesus reached out to us, and in the end from it flowed out blood and water from his side opened with a spear. He poured himself out for us so we might find refuge in his heart, a hearth to warm us and in-spirit us. When the Bible speaks of God holding us in his heart, it means in his thoughts and affection. When Christ says learn of me for I am meek and humble of heart, he meant he was humble both in his understanding of himself as human before the Father, and in his willing devotion to his Father. If we join Christ in his humility, we are of one heart with him and our hearts are set on the Father as the Father's heart is set on us.

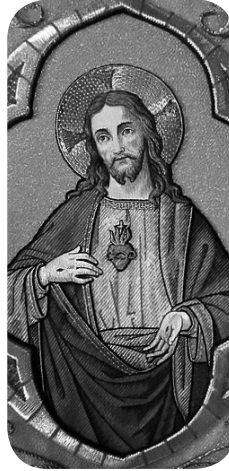
The Birth of John the Baptist

The tone poem *St. John's Night on Bald Mountain* by Mousorgsky/Rimsky-Korsokov tells the story of a man whose beloved was poisoned by a jealous woman who then sold her soul to the devil in order to make the man forget his deceased beloved. On Bald Mountain, on the Feast of St. John, he has a dream vision involving a witches' dance. As the night proceeds the music evokes the wild and wicked dance of the witches. Then suddenly the music becomes calm. The sun arises and the man is

left to ponder what he has seen. Behind this story and this tone poem are millennia-old ideas about the summer solstice. As the sun begins to recede, darkness will increase. In Christian times, in some places to this very day, on the vigil of today's feast, St. John's night, women gathered medicinal herbs, soaked them in water which was then drunk the next morning. On the night itself bonfires were lit to drive away demonic forces.

The connection between John the Baptist and the solstice is accidental, but suggestive. The Bible readings relative to the birth of John the Baptist and the liturgy for the feast emphasize

that John's role, to be the forerunner who pointed out Christ to his contemporaries, was part of God's plan. Like Isaac and Samuel, John was born of aged parents miraculously, as Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary. His name ("Yahweh saves") was announced by an angel. He was an ascetic who lived in the desert, and so is regarded as a patron of monks. What little we know of his life suggests it was tumultuous, as would be the life of any plain-speaking prophet calling people to conversion. His preaching and baptizing led to his arrest, imprisonment and beheading. As the ringing of the executioner's axe died away, tumult gave way to sudden peace, as John was born into eternal life, the peace and eternal life that dawned on Easter Sunday, after the tumult and terror of Good Friday.



The Feast of Peter and Paul

Last night I took a mentally ill man back to Boise after he became unruly and loud in the guesthouse just after midnight. During the two-hour drive to Boise he talked, often very loudly, about doctors, religion, and various categories of people who had wronged him. When we got to Boise at 4:30 am he told me to leave him off at the public library. As he got out of the car he asked that the monks pray for him. He shouldered his backpack and walked away. Then it was still as the first hint of dawn appeared in the sky.

The final words of the priest at Mass were for centuries, *Ite missa est*. The word *Ite* clear enough, Go (plural)! The rest is puzzling, but it seems to mean "you are sent" or "it is the sending." That is, "now you are being sent to bring about the reign of God in the world, so get going. God will bless you on the way." Paul looked back on his life as an apostle ("someone sent") and wrote, "The Lord stood by me and gave me strength." Peter was irrepressible and unchainable in his apostolic ministry. Their deaths mirrored those of John the Baptist and Jesus respectively. They handed on the faith at the beginning. It is our turn now, to go and do likewise in ordinary time, the time between Pentecost and the final coming of Christ our Crucified and Risen Lord, when in the end there will dawn an eternal springtime of intense life and lasting peace, when God will be our sun. •



letters to them. As the order grew, they committed themselves to doing any work that a woman could do. The order was suppressed at the French Revolution, but one of its members restarted it in Lyons. She had been slated for the guillotine, but Robespierre fell before she was executed. In 1836 some sisters were sent to St. Louis, and from there the order spread across the United States and now numbers four provinces, though like most religious communities they are growing smaller and older.

Sr. Mary Ann has always had association with the Benedictines, especially in Missouri. Her brother was a priest-monk at Conception Abbey, from where he was sent to do mission work among the Native Americans in South Dakota. She also had several cousins who were sisters at the monastery of the Benedictine Sisters of Perpetual Adoration in Clyde, Missouri.

Sister Mary Ann has had a long career in education; it has taken her to Green Bay, Wisconsin and Denver, Colorado, among many others places. She now teaches music at a public elementary school in a poor neighborhood in Texas. She jumped at the chance to receive funding from her community's fund for education so she could learn more about the Benedictines. And learn she did. She enjoyed attending the Liturgy of the Hours and daily Mass. It brought back memories of her early days in religious life. In listening to the presentations and reading the book of handouts, she recognized the names of many of the Benedictine saints of previous ages, since those were the religious names of the Benedictine priests and sisters she knew at Conception and Clyde. Most of what she learned was new to here, but she loves learning.

Unlike Sr. Mary Ann, Sr. Janet had not had a lot of interaction with Benedictines. She was interested in comparing Benedictine life with the life of her apostolically oriented community. She came away impressed with the scope and richness of the long Benedictine tradition. She believes that tradition is still a light for the Church, which needs places of study and prayer. Sr. Mary Ann added that she especially enjoyed the company who shared her enthusiasm for learning and religious life.

T. Lindsay and Julie Baker *Rio Vista, Texas*

Lindsay and Julie live on a ranch in Texas that belonged to Lindsay's grandfather. They are lifelong Christians and avid readers who like to travel and learn. They were attracted to the idea of visiting a monastery. Lindsay is a historian, who has taught at various universities and published a number of books on Polish immigrants to Texas. Julie was a music educator. Lindsay and Julie liked the monks and the engaged and interesting participants they met at this program. They faithfully attended the Liturgy of the Hours and felt they got a sense of

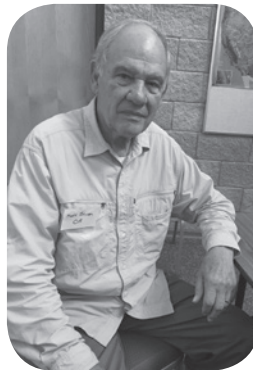


the daily routine of Benedictine monasteries. Julie has compiled a reading list that will keep her busy for a long time. They both left feeling they had learned a great deal about an era and a way of life. Both of them

thought that alternating two lecturers with different styles of presentation kept people's attention. Lindsay suggested a brief introduction to what Christianity was in St. Benedict's time and how Christian belief and practice had developed to that point would be helpful.

Mark Bliven *Dallas, Oregon*

Mark is the brother of Fr. Edmund Bliven, a retired priest



in Oregon, whom some of the monks from there have known for a long time. Fr. Bliven was active in the Catholic press in Oregon. Mark attended the prep school at the Benedictine Abbey of St. Martin's in Olympia, WA, so he is acquainted with Benedictines. This program broadened his awareness of the contributions of monasticism to Western culture. He is saddened by the current lack of vocations to Benedictine

communities. He appreciated the fact that the presenters at this program have devoted so much effort to translating Latin texts and their willingness to help the participants understand these documents.

Diane Hickerson *Boise, Idaho*

I came to the Road Scholar to find perspective from which to understand the current state of religion and the factors that account for it. This program brought together adults from all over the United States with different life-experiences. We studied one of the main arteries of Christianity over a thousand-year period. I hope that this study of our past will help us take the right fork in the road ahead.

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Assmption, Mariano Gerada

to seek God, and God alone, before all else; they should join contemplation, by which they cleave to God by mind and heart, to apostolic love, by which they endeavor to be identified with the work of redemption and the spread of the kingdom of God." (*Perfectae Caritatis*, #5). Our life here has a purpose, not just for ourselves, but for the Church, and indeed, in the world in which we live.

We pray daily that men seeking God will seriously consider joining us in that endeavor. Join us in that prayer and be assured that you are remembered in ours. •

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

Roberta Palumbo

Lafayette, California



Roberta was the only participant in the program who had been here before. She liked the Dante program she had attended, the spirit of the Benedictines here, and wanted to know more about this way of life. She also had been told that the Benedictines fostered education and preserved texts that she had used in classes she taught. She remembers hearing in high school history class

about the Benedictine motto of *ora et labora*.

She had a great week; she enjoyed both the classes and the company. She goes away with awareness of the Benedictine virtues of humility and obedience and kindness in accepting others, and with gratitude for the contribution that monks have made to literacy and education.

Gary Nelson

Troy, New York



Gary and his wife Dale attended the program at the suggestion of a Methodist minister they know. They also wanted to see the intermountain West. They enjoyed the restful atmosphere of the monastery. Gary is very interested in

communal agriculture and the manorial system of cooperative farming in the Middle Ages and sees parallels between it and monasticism. Like Robert Bellah and others, he is concerned about the seeming decline of intermediate institutions that mediate between the solitary individual on the one hand and the state on the other. Gary is a participant in a small, Episcopal parish that aims to offer communal ministry to a poor neighborhood, and that too sparked his interest in monastic community. •





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Road Scholar Programs for 2018

May 28-June 3: Geology of the Snake River Plain

June 11-17: Quilting

June 25-July 1: Quilting

July 9-15: England's Medieval Monarchs and
Mysteries Set in their Reigns

July 23-29: Knitting

Visit Elderhostel Website or contact Fr. Hugh:
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