



Monastery of the Ascension

THE DESERT CHRONICLE

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CORPUS CHRISTI

By Hugh Feiss, OSB

There are various ways to approach the Eucharist. The biblical readings for the feast consider the Eucharist from the perspective of covenant. Scott Hahn, a former evangelical who has done important studies on both the Eucharist and the idea of covenant, concludes that the biblical notion of covenant is “a kinship bond established by oath.” That is to say: one person swears that others will be regarded as members of his or her family. Thus, in Exodus, the Israelites under Moses agree to the conditions by which God adopts them as his people. The blood sprinkled on the altar and the people makes it as solemn as it can be, a matter of life and death, a self-swearing by both God and the people.

In Hebrews, Christ as a high priest enters not the earthly temple where animals were killed as sacrifices, but a heavenly sanctuary by his own blood, so that Christians are cleansed from sin to worship the living God. Thereby, Christ

established a new covenant which, to those who enter it, promises an eternal inheritance. They are with and in Christ co-heirs of eternal life.

At the last supper Jesus took a cup of wine, blessed it, and gave it to the disciples to drink. He told them it is the blood of the covenant which will be shed for many. That is: the wine is the blood that Jesus will shed on the cross to establish a new and eternal covenant between God and those who believe in it. Jesus, God and Man, sheds his blood on the cross to seal a new and eternal covenant of love between God and us. He gives us his blood to drink, making present the one, eternal covenant he established by his dying and rising. As the Jews celebrated the Passover to renew their covenant with God, so we celebrate the Eucharist with Christ to renew our covenant with his Father by sharing in his sacrifice.

On May 29, a group of people arrived in a van, along with Bishop

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Prior's Letter

Dear Friends of the Monastery,

In transferring our monastery to the Missionaries, we have to decide what we need to save for our use and what not. Our archives need to be kept, but not by us. The contents of the archives are another question.

Fr. Hugh and faithful helpers have been working to collect and store the materials pertinent to our history. It has been a major project: one that is being completed as I write this letter. The results will be transferred to our motherhouse, Mount Angel Abbey, in the near future.

That set me to thinking. Just how much of our history needs to be remembered? For what reason?

One of the reasons we would like to be remembered is that our years here have contributed to the faith of the Catholic Church. On August 3, we celebrated our Foundation Day. The prayer at Mass read, "Through our service of prayer and work,

may we be found pleasing in your sight and be a source of blessing for your people."

Our archives, like those of any religious community, will record the ups and downs of very human beings. If they also show that we have been a "source of blessing for your people," that will be plenty.

On August 16, our Fr. Kenneth Hein, O.S.B. celebrated the 55th anniversary of his ordination as a priest. His years of priestly service have been quite varied, and signs of Christ's pastoral care. His celebration that day was modest, indeed. It did include a selection of coconut desserts... enjoyed by all.

We look forward to the formal transition of the monastery to the MSPs. Keep them and us in your prayers. Be assured of our prayers for you. Thank you for all you do on our behalf.

Peace and good things!

Fr. Boniface Lautz, O.S.B., Prior



Christensen. They were one of four groups processing from the four corners of the United States to the July Eucharistic Congress in Indianapolis, Indiana. These processions and the congress are meant to revive Catholic devotion to Christ's real presence in the Eucharist. It is interesting to think how we got from the Last Supper to the Eucharistic procession. In the early Church and into the Middle Ages, adoration of the Eucharist outside of Mass was rather muted. On either side of the year 1000, there were theological controversies about how Christ was present in the Eucharist, which led to the clarification that Christ is really present in the consecrated bread and wine, fully present in each host and drop of wine. The appearances of bread and wine remain, but the deepest reality is now not bread and wine, but the risen Christ in a way that we cannot fathom. This led to greater emphasis on the consecrated hosts that were kept in the church after Mass, primarily to provide communion to the sick and dying. In the thirteenth century, the feast we celebrate as Corpus Christi or the Feast of Christ's Body and Blood was introduced, which gradually led to processions with the host in a cross shaped display called a monstrance, such as was carried in the procession at Jerome that Wednesday in May and then used to bless the 1100 or so people who gathered afterward in the church.

It is a solemn doctrine of the Church that Christ is really present in the consecrated host, and it is a great gift to be able to kneel before the tabernacle in adoration, but we need to remember two things. One is that the host is not the only way in which Christ is present. At the beginning of the Gospel of Matthew, Christ is called Emmanuel, God with us, and at the



Bishop Peter Christensen blesses the crowd in Jerome, Idaho, during the Eucharistic Procession on May 29.

end of that Gospel, after commissioning his followers to go and make disciples of all nations, Christ says he will be with them until the end of time. He came to redeem all things, St. Paul says, and so he is at work doing that everywhere. In a particular way, he is present in those who, by faith and baptism, are incorporated into the family of God, who are, St. Paul says, members of his body. Again, St. Matthew documents Jesus saying that whatever we do to one of his little ones we do to him. St. Benedict writes in his Rule how every guest is to be received as Christ, as someone either actually or potentially in the covenant Christ established.

The second thing we need to remember: the consecrated bread is adored precisely because it is consecrated in the Mass in which Christ's self-offering is made present. We are enabled to renew our share in the new and eternal covenant he established on the cross. The Last Supper, the covenant meal, anticipated the crucifixion and is renewed in the Mass. We are encouraged to adore Christ in the Eucharist, reserved in the tabernacle or in the monstrance but, more fundamentally, we are invited to join in his offering of himself made present in the Eucharist, and then to give flesh to that offering by living the Gospel day-to-day, by joining Christ in his efforts to save all: all people, but also the world itself.



Father Boniface chats with Deacon Scott Pearhill in Jerome, Idaho, during the Eucharistic Procession on May 29.



A SENSE OF PLACE

By Hugh Feiss, OSB

When I read Wendell Berry's writings, I envy his rootedness: he lives where he grew up, amid those who taught him by word and example. He knows the place intimately. I was reminded of that intimacy when a local farmer showed me a picture of a meteorite he found in one of his fields. Although it is common for rocks to work their way to the surface in the local fields, he saw this one was different. Someone else would have thought it was just another annoying stone to pick and throw on the rock pile in the corner of the field.

As an adult, I have been fortunate to have lived permanently in only two places, though I have traveled extensively, and learned by word and example from teachers at several universities — a charmed life. Yet, for 80 years I have always gravitated back to where I lived until I was six: the large, thinly populated area lying southeast of John Day, Oregon. It is high desert, devoid of the many of the benefits and encumbrances of urban life, reticent and basic. Standing there in silence under the night sky crowded with stars, nebulae, and galaxies, one catches a glimpse of the distant horizon. It is very peaceful, but a peace that stirs yearning.

In his most recent book, *The Passions of the Soul* (Bloomsbury, 2024), Rowan Williams, the former Archbishop of Canterbury, includes an essay titled, "To Stand Where Christ Stands," which was written as an introduction to Christian spirituality. To stand where Christ stands is also to walk where he walks. As Moses only caught a glimpse of God from behind, so the disciple

of Christ walks behind Christ, following where he goes into the heart of the world, where the Father awaits Him, the Word who stands eternally with the Father.

Here is a paradox, one explored and lived by Gregory of Nyssa, the brother of St. Basil, and a profound theologian of Christian life.

As Williams interprets him, Gregory sees the Christian life propelled by a desire to be with and in God, whose infinite love is the source and ground of all that is. Faith and Baptism plant us in that love; "we are because God is." But God's love is also growth-giving; it energizes us to grow toward it, like a sunflower growing toward the sun. God is ever greater than our desire, and our desire is always urging us on. Heaven is a continuation of this, the paradox of desire fulfilled yet increasing beyond that place of fulfilment, like the groom in the Song of Songs, calling the bride to come out, then running ahead of her toward the horizon.

Williams includes this essay at the end of a study of the eight thoughts, or "passions," that can, if not properly directed and moderated, keep us from being fully human and fully free. If unacknowledged and unchecked, these thoughts and desires become pride, vainglory, anger, gluttony, lust, envy and despair. God's grace helps us use these feelings constructively, but unless we continually grow more receptive to God's free and boundless grace, they will pop up to distract and distort us. We need to keep moving, advancing in and toward the love that moves all things.



THE BIG RIVER

By Hugh Feiss, OSB

The Big River is the name that the Chinook people gave the river we now call the Columbia, the name given to it by Robert Cook in 1792. *Big River* is also the name of a book (Braided River, 2024), which combines beautiful photography and insightful essays and gives a large place to the Indigenous Peoples who inhabited the Columbia watershed for centuries before the first European settlers occupied their ancestral lands. The Indigenous Peoples knew the river and watershed intimately and saw them as a source of gifts to be shared.

Before I came to Idaho in 1996, I hosted a meeting of Catholic environmentalists, from which arose a lengthy process of consultation, dialogue, and study that resulted in the pastoral letter of northwest American and Canadian bishops, *The Columbia River Watershed: Caring for Creation and the Common Good* (2001). I stayed involved with the process; no one else represented Idaho in the preparation of the document. Around 2016, the Boise Catholic Diocese asked me to attend a conference at Boise State University on the renewal of the agreements between Canada and the United States governing the use of the Columbia River. At the conference, the Indigenous Peoples of the Columbia watershed were ably represented. Since then, they have been influential in shaping policy and attitudes toward the Columbia River.

The Bishops' Pastoral did not include any input from Nevada, even though there is a sliver of land along the northern edge of Nevada in which Salmon Falls Creek and the Owyhee River originate. *Big River* devotes several pages to the Owyhee River, none to the much smaller Salmon Falls Creek. That creek flows through three ranches that constitute the Shoesole Collaborative Management Team, a group which coalesced in 2002 to employ holistic management to enhance the environmental, cultural and economic well-being of the ranches. One of the main mechanisms for achieving its goals has been to change grazing patterns so that land gets more rest, and cattle are rotated to different pastures to avoid overgrazing or interference with wildlife, such as nesting Sage Grouse. The membership of Shoesole includes ranchers and members of government and non-governmental agencies, who are committed to sustainability and collaboration. Not long after the group started, I was invited to join and bring the perspective of someone interested in environmental ethics.

This June, on the annual Shoesole tour, we visited a new water distribution system on a meadow of one of the ranches. While the group discussed the water system, I sat enthralled by a hillside covered with sagebrush and bright yellow buckwheat. Over the meadow and the hillside loomed a basalt escarpment, which seemed

to have formed from several lava flows. It is a place of millions of years of geologic history, hundreds of thousands of years of plant and animal habitation, thousands of years of Native American dwellers, and less than two hundred years of Euro-American settlement. Each of these are part of a whole, that in some way I am part of, and in which I feel the presence of God.

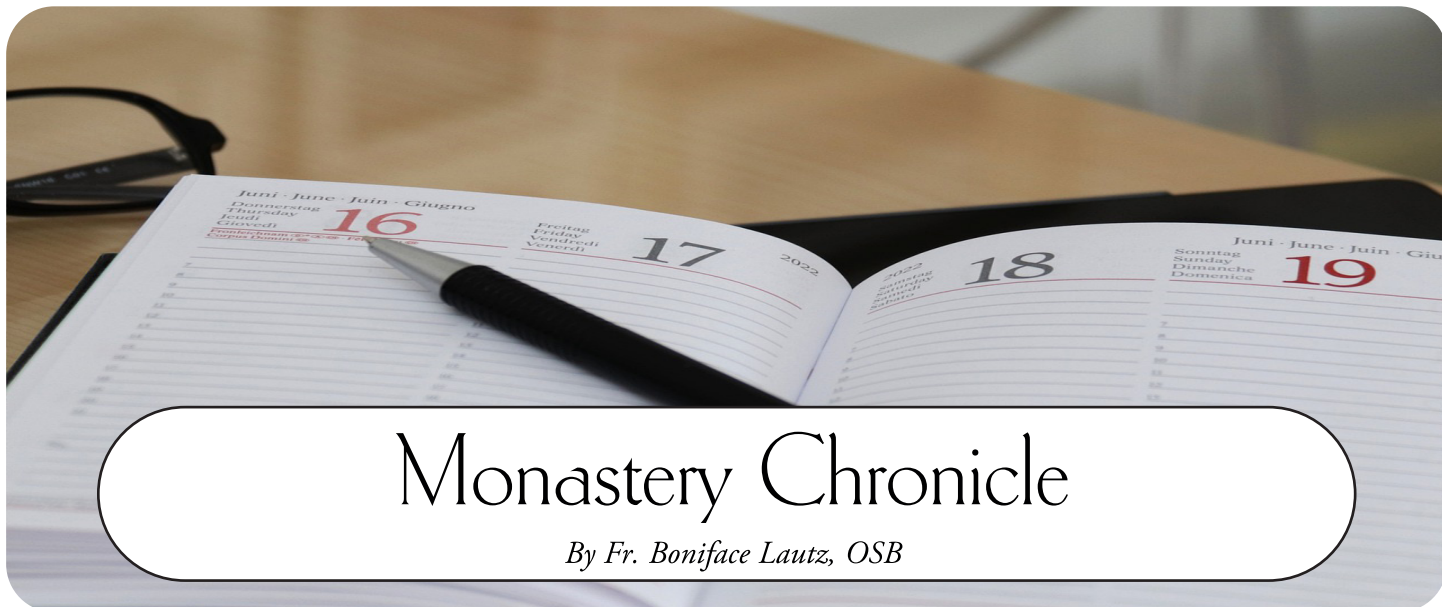


On the same tour, we visited some marshlands that are expanding because of beaver activities. There was an extremely large beaver house, 6 to 8 feet tall, covered with dried mud, so that it looked like an adobe igloo. I have seldom seen a beaver, but we see their handiwork throughout the ranches, in most cases benefitting riparians and wetland formation. Decades ago, beaver were hated rodents to be shot on sight. Now, they are revered as wonderworking hydraulic engineers. I regard them as relatives.

David Moskowitz, who contributed the photography and introduction to *Big River*, writes, “We are reaching a new inflection point as the dominant settler-colonial culture comes to terms with the existing unsustainable nature of their relationship with the watershed while Indigenous nations rebound and renew their effort to steward their territories.” His fellow author, Eileen Delehanty Pearkes, describes the river as “alive and well, although struggling as many of us are today.”

The upper reaches of Salmon Falls Creek are a special place. They are one of many hundred sources of the Columbia River. The Shoesole territory is remote, a home to most of the beautiful wild animals showcased in the book *Big River*, and to ranchers and others who know and love it. Other places in the Columbia River Basin also have inhabitants who care about them deeply — or should care, since the Columbia River watershed is like the circulatory system of a vast and beautiful area, “alive and well, although struggling.”





Monastery Chronicle

By Fr. Boniface Lautz, OSB

May 2024

We began May by taking driving tests that resulted in “safe driver” classification for those who took the test. It was a good idea for us octogenarians to check our driving skills. The local DMV office was impressed.

May 5: The MSPs hosted a group of Catholic women for a day of recollection.

May 6: We had a memorial Mass for the son of one of our good friends. We also had our monthly social.



May 7: Fr. Meinrad was ordained 60 years ago. Fr. Hugh left for the International Medieval Congress in Kalamazoo, where he spent his birthday. We came down with a variety of afflictions, which made for small numbers at community exercises for several days.

May 10: We were present for the Church’s official blessing of the marriage of some friends of the community. We also had an inurnment of a longtime friend. An Anglican group from Boise came for a weekend retreat.

May 12: We celebrated the Feast of the Ascension. The MSPs ministered in Nampa.

May 13: Tomatoes were planted. The annual heat pump maintenance project was started. Rising temps in the chapel required some adjustments.

May 15: We blessed the farm ground and irrigation sources.

May 18-19: The MSPs held a Marriage Retreat. We also had a plugged septic system that was quickly repaired, but will eventually lead to a major repair on the plumbing system.

May 23: Fr. Boniface, Fr. Abraham and Br. Geovany consulted with our legal advisor on the progress we are making with our plans with the MSPs. The process continues to move forward.

May 24: Fr. Hugh met with some Oblates on Zoom and then went to Boise for oblate meetings and a theological book club on May 25. The MSPs had a Lay Theology class and a Biblical Retreat.

May 27: Memorial Day, a new computer repair man was here and did some good work.

May 29, The National Eucharistic Procession came to Jerome. We and all the parishes in our Deanery gathered for a public procession and adoration in St. Jerome’s church.



June

June 1: Br. Omar, MSP, won a half-marathon in Twin Falls by six minutes.

June 2: The MSPs held a youth retreat. Fr. Kenneth celebrated his birthday.

June 3: We have a new lawn mower.

June 4: We had our monthly community meeting.

June 5: Fr. Boniface's name day, Fr. Hugh went to a meeting in Nevada.

June 7: The Idaho Council of Catholic Women came for weekend retreat. Fr. Hugh gave Zoom talks at an international meeting.

June 10: MSP seminarians began week of spiritual exercises led by Fr. David, MSP.

June 11: The roof repair man was here. The Alfalfa seed crop got sprayed.

June 14: We responded to a hospice call in Twin Falls. The MSPs hosted a group and held a Lay Theology session on June 15.

June 17: John Wasko and Br. Paco checked the fire alarms. The weather turned cloudy and breezy. We had a "farewell" for Br. Omar. Br. Sylvester went for a diagnostic procedure. Before beginning, he had a heart fibrillation and wound up getting a pacemaker.

June 20-22: The MSPs held a youth retreat. Participants slept in tents in the front pasture. Chaperone duties kept the seminarians and local friends busy.

June 24: The MSPs had wedding anniversary Mass for friends in chapel.

June 28: We had a helpful Zoom meeting with consultants regarding possible ways to provide good health service for ourselves once we "retire."

July

A lot of time and work this month has been devoted to drafting our "Agreement" document with the MSPs. We've had a number of reviews and revisions. It remains a work in progress, but is getting done.

July 4: The MSPs decorated the dining room. We hosted long time friends from Oregon for several days.

July 7: We held our monthly social. The freezer quit working. We were able to keep the temperature down until it was repaired.

July 11: For the Feast of St. Benedict, the MSPs joined us at Mass. We had special treats and a haustus at supper. Fr. Hugh and Br. Sylvester went to donate blood. The temperature reached 100 degrees Fahrenheit. A lot of hot weather followed.



July 12: We began budget preparations. Fr. Hugh went to Boise to help with a wedding on the 13th. On Saturday we were visited by some men from Boise who were asking if we could host an English Cursillo. We have not had one here for some years.

July 14: Fr. Moises and Fr. Alejandro, MSP, arrived from Mexico. On the 15th we gave medals and cards to MSPs who will soon be changing assignments. Fr. Hugh attended the local interfaith meeting.

July 16-19: MSP priests from the USA had a week of spiritual exercises here. We met with the MSP superiors and shared our most recent Agreement.

July 19: Br. Tobiah read at a wedding of good friends of the monastery.

July 20: We celebrated First Communion with a granddaughter of friends. The MSPs had a Lay Theology day. Fr. Hugh left for vacation in Toronto.

July 21: Fr. Hugh's vacation got cancelled along with all the Delta Airline flights. He got only as far as Salt Lake City. He spent his vacation days here helping Diane Sparks revise the Agreement.

July 24: The septic tank behind the trailer overflowed. Additional plumbing problems in the trailer needed repair. John Wasko and the MSPs were able to handle most of that.

July 27: The water pressure in the trailer was fully restored.

July 28: We celebrated the Sacrament of Anointing with Br. Tobiah. He had a cardiac catheterization on the 29th. The procedure went well and no problems were identified.

July 29-31: Several of the community were afflicted by a brief but strong stomach bug. It was a good reminder of our fragile condition (as if we needed one).



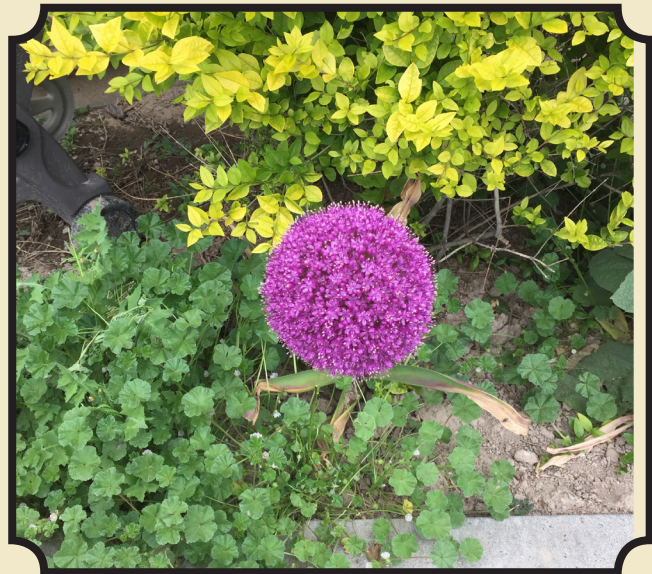


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As the Season of Creation is celebrated around the world from September 1 to October 4, let us join together in our appreciation of God's creation, as well as prayer and action to restore and nurture this earth we share with all.



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