



Monastery of the Ascension

THE DESERT CHRONICLE

XXXI, No. 4 DECEMBER 2012

Three Parables for Christmas

By Fr. Prior Kenneth Hein, O.S.B.

BACK IN THE MID '90S OF THE PREVIOUS CENTURY, I WAS SERVING AS AN ASSOCIATE PASTOR AT A CHURCH IN BOULDER, COLORADO, AT A TIME WHEN BOULDER WAS FAST ATTAINING THE REPUTATION OF BEING "A CITY OF SOME 25 SQUARE MILES SURROUNDED BY REALITY." A week or so before my first Christmas in Boulder, someone called the rectory to ask the pastor to ask the regular Sunday churchgoers to stay home for Christmas "so that those of us who only go to Church on Christmas and Easter can find a place to sit when we come to church this Christmas." Amen!

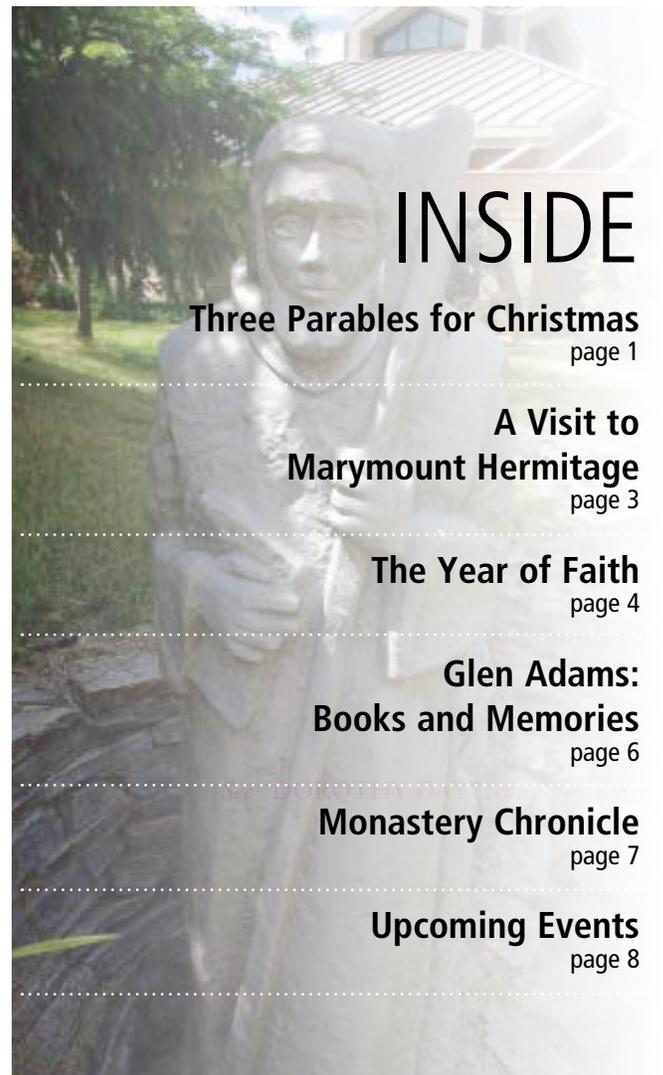
Then there's the rumor that the three wise men who visited Jesus in Bethlehem were really three Catholic priests: a Franciscan, a Benedictine, and a Jesuit. The Franciscan was particularly concerned that the animals were properly sheltered and fed. The Benedictine made sure that all was liturgically proper: that Mary was kneeling with head bowed toward the manger, that Joseph was dutifully standing nearby with a lantern in one hand and a staff in the other, that the shepherds were

carrying a sheep on their shoulders, and that the choir of angels were harmonizing to the right songs for the season. The Jesuit, without hesitating a moment, stepped over to Joseph, tapped Joseph's staff to get his attention, and asked, "What are you going to do about the little fellow's college education?" Alleluia!

And for our third and final parable: Back in the early '70s of the previous century during one Christmas season, I was concelebrating a Mass at Saint-Sulpice in



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Paris. Shortly after the Offertory collection had been taken, a shabbily dressed, straggly bearded man with hat in hand began going from row to row to solicit a “second collection” from the bemused and amused assembly. But it did not take long before the ushers gave the gentleman the “bum’s rush” right through the back door. Ahhh, shucks!

These three stories are presented here as parables. A parable focuses on a single point; the details are secondary. The above three parables all center on an incongruous portrait of the supposed purpose of Christmas. Each reader or hearer will interpret the stories and incongruities according to his or her own life experiences. So here are my interpretations.

I have ended each parable with an exclamatory expression, which hints at an interpretation of the story. “Amen”, a Hebrew word, means “This is true”. It’s true that “irregular church goers” often have a hard time finding a place to sit in church for Christmas or Easter. But it is also true that we need to welcome the irregulars at those times as well. Let’s make room for them, even if we “regulars” must squeeze into tighter than usual spots. When we unconditionally extend God’s love to others, hearts and lives are changed for the better, just as God’s love given unconditionally to us through Jesus has changed our

hearts and lives for the better. Love means to desire and work for the best spiritual interest of another person.

“Alleluia”, again a Hebrew word, means “praise the Lord”. The three wise priests were intent on the best spiritual interest of someone other than themselves, even if their judgments were not entirely in harmony with the scene or the angelic choirs. Bethlehem was the big moment when God showed a special concern for the best

interest of each and every one of us. So, God be praised!

And finally, God’s concern for the best spiritual interest of everyone still leaves room for disappointment and failure; for by these “incarnations” of God’s grace we grow into persons who are more responsive to the needs and best interest of others. When I said to myself, “Ahhh, shucks”, as the unwelcome guest was being shucked out of Saint-Sulpice in Paris, I was not affirming the shucking. However, my concerns were not entirely praiseworthy either. I felt rather disappointed that the amusing scene was cut short by the zealous ushers. Nevertheless, my subsequent reflections on the scene and my writing up the experience for this column have made me more aware of street people everywhere. I have especially become aware of the fact that the poor and downtrodden who tread along our highways and byways and past our doorways do not have the luxury of choosing “the right moment” or “the right way” to make their needs known to others. They will always be out of place, unless we are ready and willing to make a place for them—for their best spiritual interest. “If today you hear God’s voice, harden not your hearts” (Psalm 95:8). God heard the voice of downtrodden humanity and became one of us and one with us. Emanuel! Amen! Merry Christmas!•



Rainbow over chapel

A Visit to Marymount Hermitage

By Fr. Hugh Feiss, OSB

ON OCTOBER 13, FOUR OBLATES AND I JOINED FOUR FRIENDS FOR A DAY OF RETREAT AT MARYMOUNT HERMITAGE. The hermitage was founded by Sister Rebecca Mary Bonnell and Sister Mary Beverly Greger and dedicated in 1984 by bishop treinen. It is located just outside of Mesa, ID, about two hours drive northwest of Boise. The complex consists of a chapel and central residence and five hermitages for guests and those discerning a vocation. It is situated on 100 acres 3200 feet above sea level on a high desert mesa with broad vistas.



View from Marymount

It is not incongruous for hermits to be engaged in hospitality. It is reported that Cassian, a fourth-century visitor to the monks of Egypt who became an influential spiritual writer, was surprised that a hermit was willing to break his fast to eat with his visitors. The hermit told him Jesus said it is not right for the friends of the bridegroom to fast while he is among them. St. Benedict taught the same: every guest who shows up is to be treated as Christ, lovingly and humanely. In keeping with this tradition, Sister Beverly welcomed us.

Sister spoke to us about desert spirituality and guided us in private lectio divina of the Scriptures. She gave us as a word for meditation: the biblical teaching “Be still, and know

that I am God.” She told us to close our eyes and listen very carefully to the sounds and the silence. Then we were to open our eyes and see the life around us, abundant in the apparent emptiness. Then we were to ask God for the gift of stillness so that we might begin to pray interiorly. After this exercise, we celebrated Mass in the lovely chapel and had a brown bag lunch in a common room connected with the library. Then we again pondered a word from the Bible.

Hospitable solitude is only one of many paradoxes involved with the hermit’s vocation. As Sister Beverly told us, the hermit’s vocation is at the heart of the church. Hermits are not trying to avoid people; their aim is to seek God. The Bible and the lives of the saints present the desert as a place of peace and closeness to God, but it is also a place where the Israelites, Jesus, St. Anthony and the later desert fathers wrestled with temptation, with the unruly thoughts and images and desires that came into their heads.

As winter closes in, Marymount becomes somewhat more difficult to access for those of us who don’t have four-wheel drive, but once spring comes we hope to return again to Marymount to be still and to know that God is. •



Our group with Sr. Beverly





The Year of Faith

By Fr. Hugh Feiss, OSB

ON OCTOBER 11, 2011 POPE BENEDICT XVI ISSUED A LETTER ENTITLED “DOOR OF FAITH” (ACTS 14:27). IN HIS LETTER, HE ANNOUNCED A “YEAR OF FAITH” TO RUN FROM 11 OCTOBER 2012, THE FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, AND THE TWENTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF THE PUBLICATION OF THE CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH, which Pope Benedict describes as “a tool providing real support for the faith.” Pope Benedict explains that when we enter that door we begin a lifelong journey to a place of life with Christ. We find meaning by abandoning ourselves into the hands of divine love. “Faith grows when it is lived as an experience of love received, and when it is communicated as an experience of grace and joy. . . . Through faith we can recognize the face of the risen Lord in those who ask for our love.”

To start off the Year of Faith the oblate retreat November 2-4, 2012 brought together five speakers with different perspectives on Christian faith. Fr. Prior Kenneth Hein, OSB spoke of the biblical teaching on faith. In the Scriptures faith is spoken of as content and as an attitude. In the Old Testament Abraham embarks on the journey of faith because he trusts in God’s promises. Faith is a covenantal act: by faith one makes one’s own the promises the people of God have made in response to God’s promises to them. Faith involves memory; it helps one overcome fear; it makes one free.

Deacon John Hurley from Twin Falls spoke about the experience of faith in the catechumenate. He demonstrated how people take in facts and ideas differently. We need, therefore, to listen carefully to what people say about their experience of faith. Sarah Ciotti from Boise told of her own experience of conversion. She decided several years ago to



explore the Catholic side of her family heritage. She described her process of conversion in terms of the Tower of Babel (Gen. 11:1-9). The people in that story were unified in an unhealthy way through pride. Instead of spreading through the earth as God had commanded them, they wanted to make a name for

themselves, to achieve something. Sarah saw the same striving for achievement in her life. Then she chose to enter into God’s story: “I live no longer, but Christ lives in me. I live by faith in the Son of God who has loved me and given himself up for me” (Gal. 2:20).

Since the Reformation the nature and role of faith has been contentious between Catholics and Protestants. One strand of Protestant thinking that is met with in Idaho quite often teaches that we are justified (declared innocent) when we accept Christ as our personal savior. In their view, justification is different from sanctification that should follow from justifying faith, but does not radically alter the believer’s standing before God. Such a position is challenged by biblical scholars who advocate “the new perspective on Paul” and also by the 1999 Catholic-Lutheran “Joint Declaration of the Doctrine of Justification,” which concluded that there are no longer any church-dividing differences between Catholics

and Lutherans on the topic of justification. If some streams of Protestantism have emphasized “justification” (a judicial declaration of innocence) to the detriment of other New Testament metaphors for what Christ did for us (e.g., salvation, liberation, new creation, incorporation into the Body of Christ),

***“Therefore, since
we have been
justified by faith,
we have peace with
God through our
Lord Jesus Christ,
through whom we
have gained access
to this grace in
which we stand.”***

(Romans 5:1-2).



we Catholics may have overemphasized the idea of “merit.” In any case, this conversation has reminded us all that our being, goodness and life with God are from beginning to end pure gift.

Fr. Ezekiel Lotz, OSB spoke of faith in the arts. Art is a window into beauty, truth, and God’s presence. It can inspire, provoke, console, and make us laugh at ourselves. What Fr. Andrew Greeley calls “the Catholic imagination” is sacramental: it sees the divine in the commonplace. It sees the world in terms of metaphors. This Catholic imagination is alive among Catholics, even in suburban celebrations of the Eucharist. The modernist Russian composer Igor Stravinsky wintered in Venice, where he became friends with the Patriarch Angelo Roncalli (later Pope John XXIII). In the late 1950s, Roncalli commissioned a sacred cantata from Stravinsky for an anniversary of the basilica of San Marco in Venice. Stravinsky composed his *Canticum sacrum*. When Stravinsky conducted it for the first time, Roncalli went up to the podium and asked him to play it again, because it was less than twenty minutes long, and Roncalli was afraid people would think they hadn’t received their “money’s worth.”

All the texts in this work of Stravinsky came from the Latin Bible (several performances can be heard on youtube). The verses Stravinsky chose capture very well the message of the Year of Faith:

- I. “Go into the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15)
- II. “Arise, O north wind; and come, O south wind; blow upon my garden and let its spices flow out. Let my beloved come into his garden, and eat his fruits. I have come into my garden, my sister, my spouse. I have gathered my myrrh with my spices; I have eaten honeycomb with my honey; I have drunk my wine with my milk. Eat, friends; drink, drink abundantly, dearly beloved. (Cant. 4:16–5:1)

III. *Exhortations to Three Virtues*

Charity: “And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.” (Deut. 6:5) / “Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one who loves is born of God, and knows God.” (1 John 4:7)

Hope: “Those who trust in the Lord shall be like mount Zion” / “I waited patiently for the Lord.” (Ps. 125:1, 130:5-6)

Faith: “I believed, therefore have I spoken. I was greatly afflicted.” (Psalms 116:10)

- IV. “Jesus said to him, ‘If you can, all things are possible to him that believes.’ And immediately the father of the child



Sarah Ciotti

cried out, and said with tears, ‘Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!’” (Mark 9:23-24)

V. “And they went forth, and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming their word with the signs that followed. Amen.” (Mark 16:20).

To have religious faith at this juncture is human history is not easy. There is a very strong current in our culture that puts its faith in the proposition that only what can be known by scientific means is valid—a dogma that is not a scientifically approvable fact, but an act of faith. At the other extreme from this kind of scientific fundamentalism is religious fundamentalism that distrusts scientific findings and clings to a literalistic reading of the Bible that seems to be almost as tied to tangible fact as materialistic scientism. The religious fundamentalists’ ignorant disdain for science is as harmful to religion as is the ignorant disdain of scientific fundamentalists for religion. “Just the facts, Ma’am,” was a catchy phrase for *Dragnet*, but if Sergeant Joe Friday had had nothing but facts (even with some logic) he wouldn’t have solved many crimes. No one can live guided only by facts and logic. All kinds of fundamentalists—Christian, Muslim, scientific—and even gum-shoes need massive infusions of imagination, sympathy and intuition, not to mention love, care, and generosity. Even in biological evolution, it may be that generosity is as important as competition.

A second challenge to religious faith is a historical one. It seems somewhat fashionable to blame most of the ills of the last two millennia of human history on Christianity (or less often, on religion in general). Christians, including church

leaders, have certainly done many evil things, but in the twentieth century anti-religious movements like Nazism and Soviet Communism brought evil to new levels of quantitative and qualitative horror. Some of that horror was fed by the eugenics movement in the United States. We all need both sorrow and forgiveness, for what we have done and for the evils that we are unwittingly nurturing right now.

Christian faith in the twenty-first century needs to be honest, humble, and in quest of understanding of the great Mystery in which we live and move and have our being. It needs, I think, to be nurtured in face-to-face groups of believers who support each other as the first Christians did. Above all it needs to love others as God loves us, in the midst of darkness like that into which the Son of God entered on a cold winter’s night 2000 years ago. •



***“Faith is... evidence of things not seen...
By faith we understand that the universe
was ordered by the word of God, so that
what is visible came into being through
the invisible.” (Hebrews 11:1)***





Glen Adams: Books and Memories

By Fr. Hugh Feiss, OSB

RECENTLY I CAME ACROSS A REPRINT OF FR. PIERRE-JEAN DE SMET'S (D. 1873) NEW INDIAN SKETCHES, WHICH WAS FIRST PUBLISHED IN ENGLISH IN 1863, AND 8 TIMES MORE BEFORE BEING REPUBLISHED BY YE GALLEON PRESS, OF FAIRFIELD, WA, IN 1985. Ye Galleon Press was a small but important press, specializing in reprints of hard to find books about Northwest History. The copy of the De Smet book that I found is inscribed by "Glen Adams, printer," to Father Edward Kowrach, a historian who wrote the introduction for that and other Ye Galleon books of Catholic interest. The book is #2 of the 413 copies that were printed.

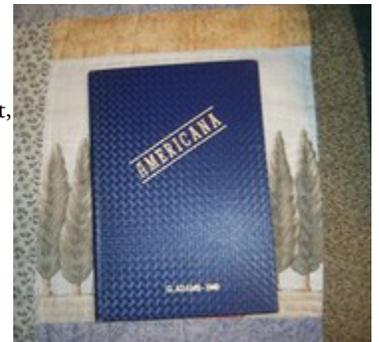
When I was the library director at Mt. Angel Abbey, I purchased most of the Ye Galleon books dealing with Catholic and Northwest history (Yale University purchased a copy of every one of the hundreds of books Ye Galleon published). Glen Adams wrote personal thank-you notes when he sent the books and chatted about his plans for future publications. A few years before his death in 2003 I happened to drive through Fairfield, WA, so I stopped to say hello. Mr. Adams was not there that day, so I never had a chance to visit with him.

Glen Cameron Adams was a remarkable man. He was born in the same county (Spokane) in which he died. A book of his poetry, *Americana*, was published when he was 17; he became a registered printer when he was 25. He was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis when he was 35, but he worked steadily almost to the time of his death when he was 91 at his publishing business in Fairfield, which printed or reprinted hundreds of volumes of books of historical interest. I never had a chance to tell him how much I appreciated his books; I hope many others did.

History, which books make available, is an aid to memory,

and memory is essential to Christianity, which cannot live without tradition. Tradition keeps Jesus present, and puts us in touch with all those who have believed in him, thought about him, prayed to him. At the central moment in the life of the Christian community we hear Jesus' words: "Do this in memory of me." That act of memory flowers in Christ's presence in sacrifice and thanksgiving, in Eucharist.

St. Benedict did a revolutionary act when he legislated that his monks should be literate and spend two or three hours a day in solitary, sustained reading of books of the Bible and other religious texts. Reading need not involve bound books; e-readers certainly have their place. What is important is reading that is thoughtful and prayerful, leading to immersion in the Mystery of God revealed in Christ two thousand years ago but present now in Word and Sacrament. In the monastery dining room we just read a memoir written by one of the first Catholic priests in the Pacific Northwest and published by Ye Galleon Press. It conveyed a sense of the sacrifices those first missionary priests made. Glen Adams made that reading possible. Now may the Holy Spirit enable us to show something of the same generosity of spirit that prompted those early missionaries to make the sacrifices they did and Glen Adams to make their stories available. •



Glen Adams, Americana



Chronicle of Events at the Monastery

September – November 2012

September 3-9: Our friend Sr. Michon, RSM, was here making a retreat.

September 9: Fr. Boniface went to Mount Angel Abbey to celebrate the 60th anniversary of Abbot Joseph Wood's profession as a Benedictine monk.

September 10-13: Room to Learn Quilting program in the Ministry Center

September 14-16: Spanish language Marriage Encounter

September 15: Karren Boguslawski, a regular visitor at Sunday Mass, died in a Utah hospital, one month after being injured in a car accident in which his wife was killed.

September 17: Cathy Leth who was here for a visit died suddenly in her room. She was buried in the columbarium next to her daughter.

September 21-23: Desert Pause Retreat for those suffering from HIV and AIDS

September 30-October 4: Fr. Ezekiel's mother visits

October 1: Fr. Nathaniel goes to Brazil to be with his father who is to have an operation

October 5-7: Episcopal Bishop's Retreat

October 8: Br. José has an operation for carpal-tunnel syndrome

October 15-17: Room to Learn Quilting

October 19-21: NNU Students with Oblate Dr. Jay Akkerman

October 25-27: Presbytery of Kendall Gathering

November 2-4: Oblate retreat

November 9-12: Students from St. John's at ISU on retreat

November 14: Fr. Eugene and Fr. Paul drive to Oregon for a week

November 20-24: Fr. Hugh drives to Mount Angel on various errands, including returning a framed copy of Archbishop Blanchet's "Catholic Ladder" to the abbey library.

November 29: Fr. Jerome drives Fr. Eugene to Virginia Dale, CO, where Fr. Eugene will be chaplain to the Benedictine Sisters of St. Walburga's until the beginning of 2013. The Abbey of St. Walburga is located on the Colorado-Wyoming border at Virginia Dale, CO. St. Walburga (710-779) was an Anglo-Saxon missionary to Germany. Her relics are housed at the abbey named after her in Eichstätt, Bavaria. It was founded in 1035 AD. In 1935, five sisters were sent from Eichstätt to a farm near Boulder, CO, in part because of the growing political uncertainty in Germany, but also because the abbey in Eichstätt had outgrown its buildings and means of support. Around the same time, the abbey at Eichstätt also made foundations in Latrobe, PA (now St. Emma's in Greensburg, PA), Canyon City, CO, and one in England. The community in Boulder became independent in 1986. That community grew beyond the buildings, and Boulder grew around it. So, in 1997, the sisters relocated to Virginia Dale, CO, on land donated to them. Fr. Kenneth served as their chaplain for two years from the fall of 2002 to the fall of 2004. He liked the nuns and the lay people who came there, but missed being more fully part of a community, and so he came to the Monastery of the Ascension.

November 30: Feastday of Fr. Andrew, birthday of Fr. Ezekiel



GENERAL OBLATE EVENTS 2012-2013

Retreat, March 1-3, 2013 at the Monastery
(by official of the Vatican Observatory)
International Oblate Meeting, October 4–10, 2013, Rome
Retreat, November 1-3, 2013 at the monastery

OBLATE MEETINGS, 2012-2013

Discussion text, Terrence Kardong, OSB, Conversations with Saint Benedict: The Rule in Today's World (Liturgical Press, 2012). Fr. Hugh has copies for anyone who wants (\$13.63). Or you can order pb or ebook from Amazon.

Treasure Valley (at St. Paul's):

January 20, Sunday, 2:00 PM (Kardong, chs. 9-11)
March 10, Sunday, 2:00 PM (Kardong, ch. 12-13)
April 14, Sunday, 2:00 PM (Kardong, ch. 14-15)
May 19, Sunday, 2:00 PM (Kardong, chs. 16-17)

Magic Valley (at the Monastery)

January 27, Sunday, 1 PM (Kardong, chs. 9-11)
March 17, Sunday , 1 PM (Kardong, chs. 12-13)
April 21, Sunday, 1 PM (Kardong, chs. 14-15)
May 26, 1:00 PM (Kardong, chs. 16-17)

Idaho Falls and Helena, MT

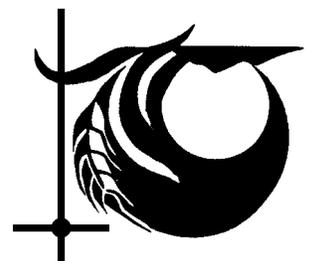
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THE DESERT CHRONICLE
The Benedictine Monks of Idaho, Inc.
Monastery of the Ascension
541 East 100 South
Jerome, ID 83338-5655



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