



May, 2020

Well, the good news is that Gaston County, the county Belmont Abbey resides in, has declared the county open in opposition to the Governor's order. But Bishop Jugis, as of the time of this writing, has not opened the churches nor has the Abbey opened up yet. North Carolina Governor Cooper's order is scheduled to start easing May 9 but the exact date everything will finally open is unclear.

So everyone can properly plan travel, **all regular meetings are cancelled until further notice.** The Novice Oblates will be meeting, as this small group feels comfortable doing so. There will be, however, no meetings in May. The Novice Oblates will be notified by email and phone.

One item that the virus closures has made evident is that Oblates have not been keeping their contact information up to date. When you receive this newsletter please email Gail Warlick (gailwarlick@bac.edu) AND George Cobb (gkcobb0929@gmail.com) with your email address and phone number. Please email both since the Abbey office is not open yet. If you do not use email please send a letter to Gail Warlick, 100 Belmont-Mt. Holly Road, Belmont, NC 28012 and include the best phone number to reach you.

*The author of this piece has given permission for me to use this and to pass it on. It is a good read for Christians, for those who believe in the Eucharist especially.--
Br. Mark Dohle, Holy Spirit Monastery*

It's hard to overstate the crushing trauma and demoralization, the numbing shock, and the paralyzing fear the apostles experienced as they watched the sufferings and death of Jesus unfold before them in a quick succession of sudden and violent events. Once the betrayal was set in motion, their entire understanding and expectations were brutally assaulted and swiftly destroyed in a matter

of hours. So overwhelming was the Paschal Mystery for the closest friends of Jesus that they could not stay with Him as He went through it. St. John, the beloved disciple managed, not on his own, but by relying on the only one who had any courage and faith left: Our Blessed Mother, who had also gathered a handful of grieving



As the events played out, darkness descended and stalked the followers of the Nazarene, now dead and locked inside a dark tomb behind a monstrous, immovable stone with Soldiers assigned to keep it sealed. An eerie stillness, a strange, suffocating breathlessness, unlike anything anyone had ever known, blanketed the whole earth and penetrated their own hearts, so there was no escape from it. Hope and faith beat feebly in the spirits and souls of those, (save one Woman), closest to the horrific Death of the Anointed One, the Messiah who was going to save the Chosen People. The whole world groaned, "Foundations once destroyed, what can the just man do?" Ps11

Jesus' followers, who had known oppression, persecution, and exile in their history as a people, who had been separated from the temple and the worship of the One True God, were not ready. They were shocked by these events which had been foretold. And they were afraid.

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Though Jesus had tried to warn and prepare them, they did not understand Him deeply enough to hold onto the center of His entire message. We don't understand either. We, too, have difficulty holding onto the truth about the Cross in our lives.

Despite this, the Resurrection of Jesus takes place. In the midst of trauma, fear, isolation, grave uncertainty, and a feeling of profound abandonment on the part of the disciples/apostles, Jesus rises. He definitively conquers death and wins for us freedom from sin, and the glory of everlasting life.

This Easter will be like that first Easter in many ways: we will be locked behind our doors, afraid, protecting ourselves, stupefied by what has so suddenly happened, mourning the loss of Our Lord Who has been taken away and sealed in a tomb whose entrance is barred to us.

This year there will be no public witness to the sufferings and death of Jesus, our Savior and Redeemer. Easter will not be communally celebrated with processions of light, incense, resounding notes of alleluia, flowers and bells ringing in the colors of spring and newness of life. Yet, Jesus, Who rose in an instant in the darkness of the night giving way to the dawn, will walk right through the barricades of fear, of unbelief, and unfaithfulness by first walking through our material protections: tombs, doors, and the roads we take away from the "awful" events of our lives.

He will do this for us this year just as He did on the very first Easter. We will not have the joy of physically celebrating together the most beautiful liturgy of the whole year, nor of receiving Jesus sacramentally. But this will not stop Jesus. There will be nothing to disguise or distract us from His presence if we have the hope of Easter in our eyes, and are truly yearning to see Him as the holy women did on Easter morning.

Jesus will spend the next forty days, strengthening us in our faith, just as He did, starting with Mary Magdalene, who didn't recognize Him because she was not expecting to see Him. Peter, and the rest of the Apostles, assailed by shame and doubt will also need direct evidence before their faith is strengthened. But what joy then engulfs them when their eyes are opened, and they see beyond the limited appearances and understanding of this world. This crisis can deepen our faith in the same way. Jesus has no barriers and is not held back by anything. He wants fearless warriors who charge right into the face of evil to conquer it in the name of the Risen One Who lives forever, no more to die. This is what the apostles became. This is what we too can become if we trust.

Emily Bronte expresses something of this in her poem: "No Coward Soul Is Mine"

There is no room for death,
Nor atom that his might could render void;
Thou – Thou art Being and Breath,
And what Thou art may never be destroyed.

Knowing God does not abandon His people ever, in exile, in suffering, in death and dying, we believe Our Risen Lord is always with us and promises us His glory if we persevere. Only one other person has walked through these kinds of times without faltering, and no others have done it without her. We ask Mary to attend us, teach us and keep us safe both in faith and from the invisible enemy looking for entry. We pray this virus die a timely death and forge us into great saints in the meantime in the midst of our hurt, our sorrows, fears and grief.

May we experience this Easter what St. Augustine so beautifully exclaims:

"In my deepest wound I saw your glory and it dazzled me.
Sr. Anne Marie of Jesus

READING GOD: LECTIO DIVINA



The shelter at home order gives us all an opportunity to spend more time in Lectio Divina and using the Liturgy of the Hours. The following is our continuation of the selections from Reading God by Garcia M. Colombas .

Detachment and Docility

Other fundamental dispositions for drawing near to the God who awaits us in Scripture are: simplicity, detachment, docility, self-surrender.

Cardinal Pironio has written, "The Word of God is simple. We must penetrate it with a soul that is poor and with a contemplative heart. Only thus will be born in us 'the taste for Wisdom' and will we work 'in the power of the Spirit' who makes us free. This happened in Mary, the poor and contemplative Virgin, who received the Word in silence and realized it in the obedience of faith and saw it again with the simplicity of her flesh." Unfortunately, "sometimes we complicate the Gospel and therefore do not grasp the clarity and the force of its demands ... Possibly we see the Gospel too much from ourselves. But the Word of God transcends our reality, and hence we must enter it from the depths of the Spirit 'who penetrates all things, even the most intimate things of God.'"

Detachment ought to free us, as Ambrose Southey says,



ORDO

MAY

2 Athanasius, Bishop and Doctor of
the Church, Memorial

3 4th Sunday of Easter (Wk IV)

10 5th Sunday of Easter (Wk I)

11 Odo, Maiolus, Odilo, Hugh and
Peter the Venerable, Abbots of
Cluny. Memorial

13 *Our Lady of Fatima, (Opt. Mem.)*

14 Matthias, Apostle (Feast)

15 Pachomius, Abbot, Memorial

17 6th Sunday of Easter (Wk II)

24 Ascension of the Lord (Wk III)

**25 Mary, Help of Christians, Titular
and Patron. Solemnity**

29 Pope Paul VI (*Opt. Mem.*)

31 Pentecost, Solemnity

*(8th week in Ordinary Time is
omitted in 2020. Begin Week I of
the Psalter tomorrow, June 1)*

*Please remember to pray for the fol-
lowing deceased monks of the Abbey.*

5 Fr. Edward Bissy (1969)

7 Fr. Ambrose Andelfinger (1889)

7 Fr. Adelard Bouvilliers (1950)

9 Fr. Anthony Cahill (1985)

17 Fr. Leo Kuntz (1917)

18 Fr. Alphonse Buss (1951)

24 Fr. Hugh Hagerty (1979)

24 Fr. Matthew McSorley (2012)

26 Br. Andrew Huemer (1900)

27 Fr. Charles Kastner (1959)

30 Fr. Francis Meyer (1905)

31 Br. Joseph Maria Rabbani (1972)

from "the anxious desire for results." We must not "go in search of feelings, of 'experiences,' of good ideas to communicate to others later ... Lectio is a labor of long duration which leads to continual deepening though usually imperceptible of our intimacy with God."

In the Cistercian symposium on lectio divina referred to earlier, it was insistently mentioned that we usually have recourse to the Bible to see what we can draw from it, instead of seeing what it can draw from us. This, of course, is of the greatest importance. In order that "reading God," be authentic, we must approach it with a spirit of self-surrender, of perfect availability for what the Lord is going to ask of us. "Lectio is true asceticism. It does not stop at theological level, but like the Word of God itself, is a two-edged sword, which reaches into the inmost depths and demands a personal response."

According to St. Gregory the Great, one of the outstanding masters of "reading God," to know how to read Scripture can turn into a definition of a Christian, to the degree that this reading is existential and not merely a superficial exercise of the intellect. "Just as good servants are always attentive to the eyes of their masters in order to carry out without delay whatever they command, so likewise the spirits of the just remain attentive to the presence of almighty God by fixing their eyes on Scripture as if it were God's mouth. Therefore, since God's will is expressed in Scripture, the more they know God through God's Word, the less are they separated from it. It does not echo in their ears without leaving an impression, but engraves itself on their hearts." This fundamental disposition of scrutinizing the Scriptures in order to fulfill and put into practice the will of the Lord which manifests itself in them, this generous attitude of heart opens to the simple and less prepared the meaning of God's precepts which may escape better endowed spirits through their negligence. "The eye of love illumines the darkness of the unlettered ... Thus they arrive at the height of understanding, because they do not hesitate to carry out to the least detail what they have grasped."

One of the secrets of holiness of St. Therese of the Child Jesus perhaps the principal one was her complete acceptance of the Word of God in order to carry it out and to live it. She never tried to accommodate it to her way, but accommodated her way to the Word of God in a total arid absolute manner. Inaki Aranguren asserts that he knows a monk who during the night-hour that follows the monastic vigils, when he kneels and opens the Bible, "the most personal book of the monastic," calls to mind, the words of Isaiah (50, 45): "Every morning the Lord opens my ear that I may hear like the beginner. The Lord has opened my ear; I have not resisted nor turned my back." About another monastic he says that on the cover of his Bible are written these words from the Book of Revelation, "I took the little scroll from the angel's hand and ate it. In my mouth it tasted as sweet as honey, but when I swallowed it my stomach turned sour" (Rev. 10, 10). That religious usually says that lectio divina is not authentic unless "the Word of God turns back on you." If a person is not disposed to have this happen, let this person not open the Scriptures. The person will be wasting time.

In speaking of prayer, St. Benedict gives us an excellent norm: we must not approach God except "with the utmost humility and pure devotion." The proper meaning of the word "devotion" is "surrender." The same holds true of lectio divina, which signifies an approach to God and a colloquy with God, as in prayer. *Lectio divina* demands surrender, sincere surrender, "pure devotion" on the part of us who practices it. "It supposes that we (the readers) abandon ourselves to God who is speaking to us and grants us change of heart," according to the beautiful expression of the Fathers of the Society of Jesus, gathered in their thirty-first General Congregation.

Spirit of Prayer

As we have already seen in the words of Father Giustini-ani, "The monastic must approach the Word, not for entertainment, not for study, but as if he or she were going to the altar of God, with great preparation of soul and body." The Lord offers himself to us, so that we may read in his heart; he calls us to intimacy with himself. Such contact with the Lord can only be effected in a climate of living faith and, as Ambrose Southey writes, "It requires that we prepare ourselves by an attitude of humble desire, an attitude of prayer."

The Ancients have stressed a fundamental principle: understanding Scripture is a gift of God. St. Gregory the Great, for example, says that "one cannot penetrate the

words of God without God's wisdom; he or she who has not received God's Spirit can in no way grasp God's word." Mark the Hermit teaches that "the Gospel remains locked up to the efforts of humanity; opening it is a gift of Christ." For this reason St. John Chrysostom prayed before the Bible, "Lord Jesus Christ, open the eyes of my heart ... illumine my eyes with your light you alone, the only light." And St. Ephrem agrees, "Before every reading, pray and beg the Lord to reveal himself." If "divine reading" is a gift of grace, we must ask the Lord of grace to grant it to us. Only humble, sincere, loving prayer can bring it about that he who gave us the Scriptures may open to us their profound meaning.

Reading God, Garcia M. Colombas, pp. 72-76.

DEGREES OF HUMILITY

Knowledge of the truth comprises three degrees, which I will try to set out as briefly as possible. In the first place we seek truth in ourselves; then we seek it in our neighbour, and last of all we search for truth in its own essential nature. We discover truth in ourselves when we pass judgment on ourselves; we find it in our neighbour when we suffer in sympathy with others; we search out its own nature by contemplation in purity of heart.

Notice not only the number of these degrees, but also their order. Before we inquire into the nature of truth, Truth itself must first teach us to seek it in our neighbour. Then we shall understand why, before we find it in our neighbour, we must seek it in ourselves. The sequence of beatitudes given in the Sermon on the Mount places the merciful before the pure in heart. The merciful are those who are quick to see truth in their neighbour; they reach out to others in compassion and identify with them in love, responding to the joys and sorrows in the lives of others as if they were their own. They make themselves weak with the weak, and burn with indignation when others are led astray. They are always ready to share the joys of those who rejoice and the sorrows of those who mourn. Men whose inner vision has thus been cleansed by the exercise of charity toward their neighbour can delight in the contemplation of truth in itself, for it is love of truth which makes them take upon themselves the misfortunes of others. But can people



find the truth in their neighbour if they refuse to support their brothers in this way – if on the contrary they either scoff at their tears or disparage their joys, being insensitive to all feelings but their own? There is a popular saying which well suits them: A healthy person cannot feel the pains of sickness, nor can one who is well-fed feel the pangs of hunger. The more familiar we are with sickness or hunger, the greater will be our compassion for others who are sick or hungry.

Just as pure truth can only be seen by the pure in heart, so the sufferings of our fellow men and women are more truly felt by hearts that know suffering themselves. However, we cannot sympathize with the wretchedness of others until we first recognize our own. Then we shall understand the feelings of others by what we personally feel, and know how to come to their help. Such was the example shown by our Saviour, who desired to suffer himself in order that he might learn to feel compassion, and to be afflicted in order that he might learn how to show mercy. Scripture says of him that he learned the meaning of obedience through what he suffered. In the same way he learned the meaning of mercy. Not that the Lord whose mercy is from age to age was ignorant of mercy's meaning until then; he knew its nature from all eternity, but he learned it by personal experience during his days on earth.

A Reading from the Degrees of Humility and Pride by St Bernard. Degrees of Humility and Pride 3.6 (Opera Omnia, 1963, 3:20-21); Word in Season II, 1st Ed.