

PAX - WITH THE GOSPEL FOR OUR GUIDE EASTERTIDE 2016

SECTION ONE: Reading and Reflection

THEME: Simplicity and Truth

Thomas Merton says, in “Contemplation in a World of Action”, that the “charism of the monastic vocation is one of simplicity and truth. The [monastic person] is one who abandons the routines, the clichés, the disguised idolatries and empty formalities...in order to seek the most authentic and essential meaning of the dedicated life on earth. Ideally speaking then, the monastery [and the monastery of the heart] should be a place of utter sincerity, without empty and deceptive formalities, without evasions, and without pretenses.”

The charism of “simplicity and truth” is the charism of inner freedom.

A little at a time, the monastic person discards false gods and embraces liberty of spirit. Some Religious traditions call it “detachment”, or “abandonment to God”. Benedictine monasticism uses the term “liberty of spirit”, although in the writings of Bl. Columba Marmion, we often see “abandonment to God”. It means the same thing.

Sr. Joan Chittister adds her wisdom to this monastic charism of “simplicity and truth”. She writes that “...consumerism and accumulation have become the root diseases of a world in which everything is not enough and nothing satisfies.”

In “Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander” Thomas Merton writes more strongly against false gods, saying: “In losing touch with ‘being’ and thus with God, we have fallen into a senseless idolatry of production and consumption for their own sakes.” Then he talks about the “fury of humankind, the restlessness, the avidity, the desperation.”

So, for Eastertide 2016, the call is to “simplicity and truth” which leads to inner freedom or liberty of spirit.

On a practical level, we can respond to this call by looking around us to see what we have accumulated by way of possessions over the years of our lives. Are there things we can off-load? I think the word most of us use is “cull”. Some of us prefer to say, “We’re having a clean-up!” The more we discard in the way of clutter, the more we are free. Physical clutter affects our inner spirit and weighs us down. Often we don’t realize it until we begin to get rid of our “things”. The old “saying” applies still: “One can’t see the wood for the trees”. Too much clutter and we can’t see the truth.

Summer 2015/2016 saw bushfires across Australia. Those who had to flee their homes and properties took the essentials with them. One of those was (where possible), wedding photographs and photographs of their children. So many people taught us what is important, what is precious and what is not. The comment we heard over and over was: “At least we have each other. Possessions are not important.”

Some of us read a lot of Esther De Waal’s writings on the Rule of St. Benedict. In a “Life-Giving Way”, she says, “If we are foolish enough to let avarice into our hearts, it will become an insatiable tyrant.” Avarice is greed.

Simplicity and truth will set us free. Often we can't get to the truth, because of all the "evasions", "deceptions" and "pretenses" which are in the way of the truth.

SECTION TWO: Further Reading and Reflection

As Benedictine Oblates, people of the Word, the very best we can do, is read and pray with the texts for each Sunday of Eastertide. A reflection is provided on our website, and some of you receive this reflection either by email or by Australia Post.

SECTION THREE: About the Rule of St. Benedict

What does St. Benedict have to say about "simplicity and truth"? Since every part of the Rule is addressed to all of us, St. Benedict says in Chapter 31, that we should not be prone to greed, nor be wasteful and extravagant with the goods of the monastery, but should do everything with moderation...

In chapter 32, he teaches us about handing out tools for work, and bringing them back, cleaning them and treating them with care.

Then in chapter 33, he speaks about the issue of private ownership. We all own something. So, let us reflect on the attitude we have towards the things we own. We can own them in a spirit of freedom, always willing to share with others, or we can own them in such a private, secretive way, that we make sure they will never be shared with others.

And, there is the issue of the earth's resources, which Pope Francis addressed in his Encyclical, "Laudato Si". Our greed and possessiveness of the earth's resources has left millions of people disadvantaged and even dispossessed of their homelands.

So, there are many interpretations we can give to the Rule of St. Benedict in our world today.

A further insight into "detachment" is given by Sr. Joan Chittister, in her book "The Rule of Benedict, Insights For The Ages". She cites the disciplinary code in order to outline Benedict's call to growth, as 'pressing and intense'. Then Sr. Joan notes that Benedict believes "there are indeed things we must be willing to die to in life if we want to go beyond the fruitless patterns we're in right now. We aren't allowed to hang on to useless ideas or things or behavior regardless of how good they might seem to us, regardless of their effect on others. The Rule insists that people are called to growth." This process of growth is a growth towards simplicity and truth – a journey to find the truth of me – who I am without my evasions, deceptions and pretenses. It is the hardest journey of all – the journey to the truth of me.

St. Benedict calls Monastic Life a School of the Lord's Service. In this School of the Lord's Service, we are on a journey and we study certain subjects which equip us for the journey to the truth. We study and practise love, reverence, holy reading (Lectio Divina), prayer, knowing when to speak and when to keep silent, care for the sick, - overall, we travel "with the Gospel for our guide." (Prologue). We are Benedictine Monastic men and women, who have chosen freely to embrace this journey. Renunciation is part of this journey – not just renunciation of things we don't need, but ideas and opinions which we cling to, believing that we are the only ones who know what is right and what is wrong. Letting go of ideas and opinions is the hardest "letting go" of all. It's easier to sort through clothes and household goods we don't

need and give them to the poor than it is to rid our minds of ideas and opinions which are also cluttering our lives and keeping us in prison. Liberty of spirit is the call of the Benedictine journey.

SECTION FOUR: Community History

The many obituaries of our nuns who lived in the 19th and 20th centuries speak of the situations they had to detach from in order to follow their vocations. Some were the only Catholics in their families. Whatever the situation, it is a powerful witness to read their stories and get into touch with their courage and spirit of simplicity and truth. Some came from very wealthy British or European families, complete with servants, and yet embraced the simplicity of monastic living and made their journey to truth. In more than one case, a family turned its back on a daughter because she had made her choice for monastic life. This also happened in many marriages, where a Catholic married a non-Catholic and endured rejection from family. Many of us will have a story like that in our family.

The stories are inspiring, though painful, and the question for each one of us is: What do I truly seek? Do I seek simplicity and truth, my truth before God, or do I (have I) spent my whole life pleasing others with my evasions, pretensions and deceptive formalities?

SECTION FIVE: Liturgy

We are now in Eastertide.

The Octave of Easter ends with the Liturgy of *Compline* (Night Prayer), on the Second Sunday of Easter - but strictly speaking, each Sunday in Eastertide is considered in terms of 'solemnity' in the Church, and in Monastic communities. From Easter Sunday, March 27th, until the Second Sunday of Easter, April 3rd, no feast or *Memoria* is celebrated because of this SOLEMN week of Liturgy. The Liturgical Calendar for the rest of Eastertide is printed here for your reference.

April 3:	Second Sunday of Easter. Divine Mercy Sunday
April 4:	The Annunciation of the Lord (transferred from Holy Week).
April 10:	Third Sunday of Easter.
April:17:	Fourth Sunday of Easter
April 24:	Fifth Sunday of Easter
April 25:	ANZAC DAY
April 28:	St. Peter Chanel (Memorial)
April 29:	St. Catherine of Siena (Memorial)
May 1:	Sixth Sunday of Easter
May 2:	St. Athanasius: (Memorial)
May 3:	Sts. Philip and James (Feast)
May 8:	Ascension of the Lord.
May 11:	The Abbots of Cluny
May 13:	Blessed Julian of Norwich
May 14:	St. Matthias. (Feast)
May 15:	Pentecost Sunday.

SECTION SIX: Your Community

Oblate Andrew (Stephen) Davies died on February 16th after a few years of terminal cancer. He made his oblation on May 11th, 2008.

On February 2nd, 2016, the Annual Foundation Day of our community, Sr. Hannah Massy-Greene made her Solemn Monastic Profession.

On February 5th, Christine received the Monastic Habit and took the name of Sr. Petra, after St. Peter, with whom she identifies.

On Monday February 8th, Sr. Clare Gamble celebrated her Silver Jubilee of Monastic Profession. This day (the Solemnity of St. Scholastica) was transferred from Feb. 10th, because Feb. 10th was Ash Wednesday.

The Community is away on holidays from April 24th, until the eve of Pentecost Sunday, May 14th.

THE ABBEY IS CLOSED DURING THIS TIME.

I DELIBERATELY DID NOT SCHEDULE ANY OBLATE MEETINGS FOR THIS YEAR, BECAUSE OF THE NUMBER OF WEEKEND RETREATS WHICH ARE AVAILABLE FOR YOU TO ATTEND.

We had our first Oblate Retreat for the year on February 13th and 14th. A small number of Oblates and interested persons attended. Probably the timing (early in the school year) prevented a larger number attending.

Happy Feast Day to:

Mary (of the Annunciation) Wyatt, Bernadette (Mary) Maher, Jenny (Ancilla) Shirvington, Sr. Ancilla Leech, and Sr. Hannah Massy-Greene, for April 4, The Annunciation of the Lord (date transferred from Holy Week).

Tony Anselm Tarleton, Alfred Anselm Breznik, Robert Anselm Cashman, Kate Anselm Trevenen, for April 21, St Anselm.

Claire Catherine Devlyn and Marie Catherine Gleeson, Kathleen Catherine Daysh, for April 29, St Catherine of Siena.

Brigid Julian Inder, Rev. Catherine Julian Eaton, Colleen Julian Hines, Therese Julian Proctor, Jean Julian Reid, Patricia Julian Morgan, Margaret Julian Crooks, Sr. Julian Barbara Garwood, Sandra Julian Cooper for May 13, Bl Julian of Norwich.

Happy Anniversary to:

Elizabeth Teresa Montgomery and Leo Thomas Montgomery, Wendy Mary Young – for March 29.

Maria Matilda Curtis for March 29.

Helen Seraphim Shorter, for April 16.

Margaret Thomas More Whetham and Ewa Maria Teresa Komorovska, for April 19.

Sr. Hilda Scott, for May 4 (Solemn Profession Anniversary).

Necrology

MARCH

28 – Mother Magdalen Le Clerc, Founding Mother - 1878

APRIL

03 – Sr. Mary Hildegard Doyle (1969)

- 07 - Sr. Mary Monica Hardy (1956)
- 10 - Sr. Mary Aelred Bradshaw (1959)
- 17 - Sr. Mary Editha Thompson (1983)
- 23 - Mother M. Ignatius Harnett (1915)
- 27 - Sr. M. Magdalene Parkinson (1900)
- 28 - Sr. M. Placida Burrows (1859)

MAY

- 01 - Sr. M. Veronica Brown (1992)
- 02 – Sr. M Dolores Haselden (1951)
- 04 - Sr. M. Angela Regan (1859)

SECTION SEVEN: Saints

St. Catherine of Siena (Feast day April 29), was once praying in church. A poor man came to her and asked for alms for the love of God. She didn't have any money with her, but gave him a small silver cross which she was wearing. The following night Christ appeared to her, holding the silver cross set now with precious stones. Jesus said to her. "You gave it to me yesterday out of your love; the precious stones signify this love..."

There are numerous stories of the Saints and their spirit of detachment, generosity, lack of greed. Many of our Oblates have taken the name "Catherine" after St. Catherine of Siena. She was also one of the greatest spiritual writers and mystics of the Church. May we all remember that "whatever you do to one of these the least of my brothers and sisters, that you do unto me."

SECTION EIGHT: For Reflection

The word "simplicity" in the Scriptures means "pure" and "unadulterated". The Word of God is associated with this meaning. The Word of God is "alive and active" says the author of Hebrews. It "discerns the thoughts and motives of the heart..." The Word of God doesn't play games, it is not evasive and it doesn't pretend. The charism of the Monastic vocation is one of "simplicity and truth", as was stated at the beginning in Section One. These are the words of Thomas Merton. Simplicity and truth is also the essence of monastic mindfulness, or what Sr. Joan Chittister calls "awareness". Being aware of the simple way in which God comes into our "every day", touches our lives with the sunrise, the dawn, the fresh grass, the birds, our loved ones, the smell of morning coffee, the cows in the pasture, our gardens with their fresh produce or flowers, a friendly visit from a neighbor. These are the real treasures of life.