



# Monastic Musings

*Living in and Practicing the Presence of God*

Fall/Winter 2022

## *Seeing the World in a New Light*

*by: Right Reverend Barb Martzall*

Welcome to all our readers around the world!

Here in the United States, the Christian Churches are getting ready to celebrate Advent Season. It is a time of reflection on the meaning of the birth of Jesus in each of our lives. Unfortunately for so many, the Advent Season really has no meaning for them as so many people have walked away from their religious roots for one reason or another. Instead Advent has become a gift giving time with friends and family and not so much a religious celebration time. Sad actually. As a head of a monastic community and also a bishop within my religious jurisdiction, I am called to look long and hard at why so many people are turning away from their religious roots. If I look at it from an outsider's point of view, I see that so many of the different denominations/jurisdictions have found themselves at odds with their original beliefs/teachings. In the process they have created disharmony among the believers and thus have driven them away. Don't get me wrong, change can be really good for any group so long as the change takes into account everyone's ideas and finds common ground. Honestly, this driving others out of your group is not what Jesus was teaching from the day of his birth. He wanted unity of the people as everyone is a child of God. God does not see any difference in one's race, heritage, religious upbringing, etc. God only sees the person as they truly are –

His child! So what are we going to do to bring unity and love back around us? That is really a tough question, but really there is one simple answer – treat your neighbor as you would like to be treated! This means that you cannot push your values on the other person. You have to learn to meet a person in their space so as to open communications with them. If we always demand others to change to be what we want, we shall never understand or even build a rapport with the other person. We have to learn to give and take on a non-threatening manner. Maybe what we see is the correct way, but it may not be for someone else. It is time for us to



be open to others and their ways of thinking and doing things. Time to let go of the idea of "My way is the only way"! So let us prepare to see Jesus in everything that we do. Let us learn to be more accepting of people even though we do not understand their ways. Let us show what it means to be a Child of God in all that we do everyday. Make that pointed choice to learn

more about other faiths and the people who live around you. Don't prejudge them because they are different. Their difference just might be the thing you need in your life!



*Introducing another Guest Writer*  
*by: Right Reverend Barb Martzall*

With this newsletter, I want to introduce you to another writer, Edie Yakutis. Edie is a 5<sup>th</sup> year student at Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion. She along with her husband have been friends of this Jurisdiction for several years. Her writing was prepared as a teaching required by her school. She gave the teaching at her Synagogue this past September. It really has so much to share with all of us. Here at Ohio Orthodox Catholic Church we welcome many different faiths knowing that we all come from the same Creator! The teachings may sound different depending on the faith, but really when we look at things, we are much the same! Edie really put into words how we see the world and how we should respond to it!



*Parashah - Ki Tetzei (When You Go Out)*  
*by: Edie Yakutis*

I live in a middle-income neighborhood on the West Side of Cincinnati. It's a little grittier, older and more Conservative than most other parts of Cincinnati. A walk through my neighborhood will show you a full spectrum of yard signs and flags: Black Lives Matter and Queer Pride flags, Ukrainian and American Flags, military service flags and Lets go Brandon signs, along with a couple of those all-black American flags signaling "no quarter, no surrender" in the event of battle.

A couple of weeks ago, **two** yard signs went missing in our West Side neighborhood. Guess which two? I'll give you a hint. One of those missing was from our house. Both thefts were caught on video. The teenage culprit was identified. His parents walked with him to our home to apologize and replace our flag. We asked him, why THAT particular flag, and not the military service flag that flew beside it? His response was to stiffen, and look away. He flinched from what he assumed would be judgement, and not an opening to curiosity and conversation. And this is a problem.

I've been reading a lot of news lately. And it FEELS like we are all in a battlefield. And I am really concerned that we are heading towards something much scarier much worse than where we sit right now. The problem is that we don't REALLY communicate. We are just talking AT each other. Scoring hits in an escalating war of words. And it feels at least as dangerous than the battlefield scenario at the start of our portion –

כִּי־תֵצֵא לְמִלְחָמָה עַל־אֹיְבֶיךָ

(When you go out to war against your enemies...)

And right now, that feels more dangerous to me, because we don't really SEE each other now; we stay up, all high and mighty in Headline Land, and Twitter land... we don't look past our black and white screens. We no longer recognize the essential humanity of the opponents –our Other... because they are NOT our enemies. They are People -- who disagree with us.

I believe we are in a time of **breaking. Change.**

In my corporate career, “Breaking Change” meant that within the software system, something, somewhere had failed or its performance had changed so drastically that a lot of other components connected to it were now failing too. The entire system was crashing. Things were no longer as they were. And they never would be, again. The scary part is that there's no real retreat from a breaking change. You **MUST** go forward, one way or the other.

And my job for 20-some years in that world, was to go there. Towards the scary place – towards the hot pile of steaming messiness... identify, name and analyze the problem and work with my team to make it better. And it usually boiled down to TWO broad choices. Both of them present risk.

The first; To go forward, by identifying and accepting risks and work on the problem itself, to create change and opportunity – with a chance of creating **something better, stronger and more resilient.** Taking that path represents scary changes for a lot of the system and the people dependent upon it.

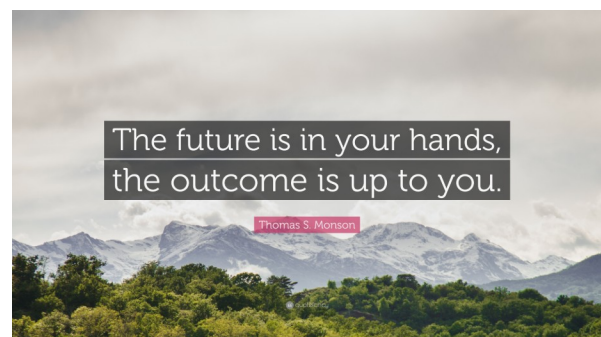
The other choice – is to SORTA go forward by saying that the system was NOT ready for larger changes, then hunker down – work to minimize the immediate fallout, then, when it finally truly crashes and entire business systems melt down, you hope that not too many folks lose their jobs.

I don't think I have changed roles very much. Rabbis sit in that role, too... working with intense situations of **human** conflict. Comparatively... the corporate/ computer problems now seems pretty clean and easy. And what we do is vital. We rabbi to ... People. Humans. To **ALL** of the people in our purview. With joy and sorrow, ANGER and numbness, worry and hope. We help with the challenge of making meaning in our shared humanity, in the mundane battlefield of daily life.

My personal problem is that I used to get to see stuff fixed — software re-written with more resilience, or business strategies modernized. And that is not going to happen as long as we don't communicate WITH each other.

I see a downward trend. We have book bans across the country today. Is anyone wondering when the first public book burning of our century takes place?

I see this situation as just ... ratcheting up the verbal conflict until we have some kind of explosion and catharsis... which may or may not provide any real long-term solutions.



And somehow, because of all that business training, I really think we SHOULD be able to get people to recognize this. That we can be brave enough to ask someone a question, because we genuinely want to LISTEN to the answer and learn the story behind the headline... and not because we are looking to confirm an already formed opinion.

At every touch-point in our daily life, we are capable of making a connection with another human being... whether they are already in our community, as the individual who delivers mail, or just a passing interaction with a cashier. Whether we agree with them or not, Curiosity – a willingness to ask for and listen to the stories of others, without judgement, opens doors to communication and a human connection. That desire for a human connection with ANY of our current opponents may be at odds with our portion this week. It leads off on the battlefield I mentioned earlier, and ends with telling the Israelites to obliterate the memory of *Amalek*. BUT this portion gives us the gift of tension. Because also within this portion is another option – guidance on how to treat Others... Ben read it this morning.

לֹא תִטֹּה מִשְׁפַּט גֵּר יְתוֹם וְלֹא תִחַבֵּל בְּגֵד אֶלְמָנָה:

*("You shall not subvert the rights of the stranger, or the fatherless; you shall not take a widow's garment in pawn.")*

That verse does not qualify if the widow or the orphan is a Ger/Other or not, and the stranger itself- to my interpretation ... the stranger may **be** from somewhere else... or they may **look LIKE US ... but they don't THINK like US**. Maybe the stranger sees stories and facts... differently. And we're told not to subvert their rights. NOT to dehumanize them. Our text goes on to remind us that we should remember that we were once on the other side; viewed **first** as dangerous, potential opponents, in Egypt.

Tables turn... votes don't go your way. The individual leading the way one year is cast aside the next. THOSE changes do not reduce our value as humans, unless we forget that the constant, through it all, IS our humanity. Our need for need for connection, community. The uniting thread, I believe, is

וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים | אֶת־הָאָדָם בְּצַלְמוֹ בְּצֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים

*(we are all created in the image of the divine. All of us.)*

**That** is the foundation of a resilient community. That we are ALL connected by the spark of how we came to be. No matter what our stories are. And in this time of breaking change – with news full of fear of anger, do **we** believe in that teaching? Do **we practice** it? Because ... if we DO – we cannot let our mindsets calcify and become rigid in how we perceive our opponents, the Other in our lives. We cannot look past the humanity within people in front of us – ALL people ... whether we agree with their yard signs and flags OR NOT.

I do NOT want to buy into the easy narrative of demonizing that skinny kid in my neighborhood as a Ukrainian flag stealer – or be angry at what I tell myself his parents are teaching him. I do expect that there were consequences for his actions – stealing is wrong. BUT he is MORE than a sign stealer. He is a person. And he'll be voting hopefully, someday soon.

We need to see ourselves, standing across from that kid, or any other person, as offering the potential for growth and learning – and be open to real conversation.

Its risky... AND, We need to be curious about the stories living behind the yard signs and genuinely look for the human connection. Because maybe, knowing a little of that will let us begin to humanize the other. To actually **PRACTICE** the **faith** we so often profess; that we are all *betzelem Elohim*. Because if we really believe THAT, we include that person, that other spark of God, into the wider story of our own humanity.

AND We do NOT have to validate the opinions of others. We do not have to agree. We can seek to LEARN THEIR story of why. Its a risk we can take, to make connections. It's a risk we MUST take.

We are in a time of breaking change – our systems are at risk of crashing. We MUST remember our shared humanity. We must refuse to sit up there in headline land. Because headlines are not people, are not true connections across divides. HEADLINES will not resolve the problem of denial of humanity and lack of real connections to Others. CHOOSE TO SEE THE HUMANITY OF OTHERS....Because the results of choosing an alternative path of hunkering down... will be anything but civil. And that is too frightening to contemplate.

Amen.

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### *Talking With G-d*

*by: Ronald Lahti*

The subject of prayer has inspired thousands of books over the ages, from all faith traditions and views. I feel that prayer is essentially a natural extension of the basic human drive to communicate. I'm writing this article now because I felt moved to communicate my thoughts to whoever will read this. We gather as families, plan parties with friends and meet as clubs for the express purpose of communicating with one another. I am amazed to see the depth and effects of the profusion of social media just in the past few years.

Often, spiritual writers focus on the forms and rituals of prayer. Too often I feel seekers can come to feel that saying the “right prayers”, following the “right ritual”, performing the “right actions” will bring the seeker into direct contact and communication with G-d. Unfortunately it is often the case that hundreds of rosaries, countless Jesus prayers, untold recitation of psalms just leave the seeker not feeling closer to G-d; just frustrated, disappointed and usually with a severe headache. I know, I've been there.



It took the teachings of Rabbi Nachman of Breslov (1772-1810) to give me a spiritual “slap in the face” and awaken me to the reality of communication with G-d. Rabbi Nachman taught extensively about “*hitbodedut*” – personal, intimate communing with G-d. *Hitbodedut* is a Hebrew word that literally translates as “self-solitude”. It is making time to be

alone with oneself and through this aloneness to find the Presence of G-d. Rabbi Nachman emphasized that one gets alone, preferably outdoors in nature, and speaks to G-d in simple, natural language – not using prepared prayers or liturgies, and using one’s native language. During this time one poured out ones heart – maybe words of praise or thanksgiving; maybe concerns or needs, often sadness or questions. Rabbi Nachman even encouraged using the time to argue with G-d following the examples of Moses. In short, *hitbodedut* is a time to communicate with G-d as Friend, Family, even Lover.

The disciple of Rabbi Nachman, Reb Noson illustrated the teaching on *hitbodedut* using the image of the High Priest entering the Holy of Holies. The High Priest was only allowed to enter the deep inner chamber of the Temple – the Place where the Ark of the Covenant was kept – only once a year on *Yom Kippur*, the Day of Atonement. The High Priest entered the Holy Place alone with no one to accompany him. Tradition tells us that once in the Holy Place, the High Priest experience the Presence of G-d often as a Light or “Cloud” which he entered and spoke with G-d. Reb Noson pointed out that each one of us can enter into our own personal Holy of Holies and pour out our hearts to the Holy One. Today, many Jewish people use the *Tallit*, or prayer shawl, as a way of “going within” to be alone with G-d.

It will be remembered that Jesus taught his disciples to “enter into the closet” to pray “in secret” (Matthew 6:6). Most faith traditions advocate for times of aloneness, whether in a prayer closet, on a retreat or during long walks in nature, in order to quiet our minds and find G-d within. As we do so we can find that the Who we sought to commune and communicate with was there all along – never farther than our breath or heartbeat.

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### *Believing in God*

*By Rev. Mother Myrella LeClair*

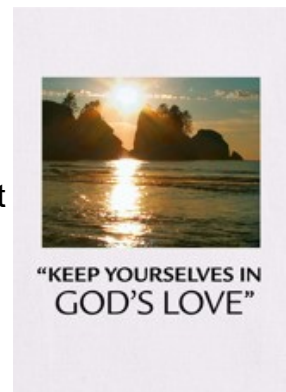
*I believe in the sun even when it is not shining.*

*I believe in love even when feeling it not.*

*I believe in God even when He is silent.*

(Jewish Prayer)

We seem to continue to be locked into a vicious cycle of negativity, but we must ask ourselves who or what is causing these unsettling feelings. Peace does appear to be elusive. Mother Nature also appears to be as unsettled as we are. Hurricanes, tornadoes, floods, and wildfires have taken over, but Nature will replenish and rejuvenate itself because Nature is also God’s child. Nature however knows when to let go and let God heal the destruction. We humans for the most part have not yet given ourselves to God to seek what His will is for us. Instead, we dwell in despair. We tend to forget that we are all equal before God. So, stand before Him and ask Him to remove all hatred from your heart, mind, and spirit. There is no reason to feel helpless or hopeless. Allow God’s will to work in and through you.



When you begin to despair or to start feeling sorry for yourself, take action and get back on the pathway to peace by seeking God's compassion and help. Let us be grateful for what God has given us, and pray to God for healing, for compassion for all of us and for all of His creation.

We can let go of the darkness and see God's healing and loving Light surrounding all of the universe. As we let go of our anger, we are surrounded by God's forgiveness. Be willing to live in gratefulness to God.

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*The Wheat and The Tares*  
*by: Ronald Lahti*

*Another parable Jesus put to them saying: "The Kingdom of Heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field; but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat and went his way. But when the grain had sprouted and produced a crop, then the tares also appeared. So the servants of the owner came and said to him, "Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How, then does it have tares?" He said to them, 'An enemy has done this.' The servants said to him, 'Do you want us then to go and gather them up?' But he said, 'No, lest while you gather up the tares you also uproot the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest and at the time of harvest I will say to the reapers "First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn"'*  
*(Matthew 13:24-30 NKJV)*

The elections are over! I was disheartened when I saw the number of church leaders and people claiming to be Christians spewing venomous, hate-filled, bigoted, sexist, racist, antisemitic and homophobic rhetoric while backing candidates who espoused fascist and undemocratic ideals and goals. But it wasn't just Christians spewing their hate, I heard Hassidic Jews, Blacks, even some Muslims supporting this hate fest. What I didn't hear was an outcry by those people of faith who recognize this hate as wholly not a reflection of the teachings of our sacred traditions. I shook my fist to the heavens and cried "Where are you? Are You going to watch again as this hate blossoms into violence, pogroms and death camps? They're doing this in Your Name – can't You at least do something for the sake of Your Name?" There was silence until I was meditation and the above parable came to mind.



The simple answer is that those who represent themselves as members of faith traditions, but who actually are a poison in those traditions will always be here. And, yes, they will pollute and corrupt our faith traditions leading some into error, hate and even violence – think of the Inquisition, the Pogroms, Jonestown, Hassidic child abuse sects, etc. and etc. We are human. And as the Buddha taught, we are usually ruled by the three poisons of greed, anger and their mother ignorance.

So, what do we do? First, we look at ourselves and ask how we have been infected with the poisons. This first step is usually the hardest. Where do we harbor racist, sexist, bigoted ideas or feelings. And believe me we all have them. Then we take steps to resolve those poisons, replacing them with their opposites of acceptance, humility, compassion and the search for truth. Second, we pray for those we see in obvious error. Not in a hypocritical we-are-better-than-you way. But as fellow humans, recognizing our own failings, and pleading for Light to enlighten and heal. Third, we witness to the Truth of our faith traditions which confronts the hate with love; the bigotry with understanding and acceptance; the violence with compassion. We join with those who likewise seek to witness to Truth – many voices joined as one is powerful.

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Blessed Advent to all!

Happy Hanukkah!

May the New Year bring us Love and Peace!

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