



Monastic Musings

Living in and Practicing the Presence of God

Spring - Summer 2022

Finding Space for our Creator's Love *by: Right Reverend Barb Martzall*

Welcome to the Spring/Summer Monastic Newsletter for the Eastern Rite Monastics of the Ohio Orthodox Catholic Church. We all hope that the articles within our newsletter(s) will help you along your spiritual pathway.

As you are all aware, there has been so much going on in the world over the last 3 years. The Covid virus has made a real mess of things and then the war in Ukraine is so disturbing



besides all of the shooting here in the USA. Given all that has been going on around us, I want to ask one question of you – how are you doing? Have you found a spiritual practice that helps you feel less anxiety and more peace within yourself? Hopefully you have. It is not easy, but if life is really getting you down, then it is time to find some help. Take the time needed each day to be able to center yourself within your Creator's love. Find a place within your place of living that you can call your spiritual space where you can focus on all the love your

Creator has for you. For me, I find that I like to be out in nature for my spiritual place. That usually means I will spend some time out on my deck just observing all the wonderful creatures that pass by. Taking the time to feel the breeze as it moves through the yard area. Being aware of the simple peace that is surrounding me at that moment. Everyone reaches a point of needing to draw away from the everyday madness and that is okay. But you need to find a way within yourself to be able to bring peace back to yourself and in your life.

Mother Myrella used to say that she found so much peace just sitting in the grass and pulling out the crab grass! I know she always enjoyed working in the yard getting rid of weeds or trimming the plants as needed. It was her peaceful time to commune with her Creator. Have you found your space/time yet? If not, why not start today and make it your new daily practice to spend some time with your Creator.

Have a great summer. Stay safe and as healthy as possible. Catch all of you in the Fall!



Peace Maker or Peace Keeper?
by: Archbishop Charles Smith, OSF

“I am giving you a new road to walk,” he said, “In the same way I have loved you, you are to love each other. This kind of love will be the sign for all people that you are walking the road with me.”¹

In preparing to write my article, My first theme was “Why A women Priesthood “, my thoughts were to present arguments why we in 2000 made the proclamation that women could be ordained to ministry.

Then I found this book, amazing, the Christian Scriptures entitled First Nations Version: an Indigenous Translation of the New Testament. I ordered the book and began reading it when it arrived. The translation spoke to me in a way that our scriptures had never spoken to me in the past. So then, I was going to devote my article on ‘The living Scriptures’. That reality came tumbling down on Tuesday night, May 24, 2022, as I met several parishioners for dinner at ‘The Farm’ here in Cincinnati, Ohio. This is when I heard the news that nineteen children and two adults were killed in a shooting at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde County by an 18yr old gunman who shot his grandmother and then entering the elementary school he carried out this horrible event.

I was taken back by a post I saw on Facebook ‘offering our thoughts and prayers’ it said. A statement that we all make, almost daily I’m asked to remember someone, or some event in my prayers to which I agree to ‘offer prayer’. Prayer can be a powerful tool.

I think that most of us would agree that prayer is a good thing, but sometimes, I believe it is used to ‘let us off the hook’ from being involved or taking a stand.

In Matthew Chapter 5 verse 9 Matthew's Beatitudes says, “*Creator’s blessing rests on the one who makes peace.*” It will be said of them, “*They are the children of the Great Spirit!*”² A passage that most of us know by heart, but I like this version which says “*one who makes peace*” rather than the traditional “*Blessed are the peacemakers*”³ I believe sometimes we internally translate this as peacekeepers. This translation makes it clear; we are called to action. So, what keeps us from being ‘peacemakers’ rather than ‘peacekeepers? We are not called to be peacekeepers.

One of the major issues facing our country today is the issue on abortion. I’m not here to question you on your personal position on the issue, but I do ask; where all are those who walk in the lines against abortion shouting at women calling them all sorts of horrible names. I don’t remember seeing them turn out at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Tx. Nor do I remember seeing them gathering in Buffalo NY, To protest these killings or calling on leaders to change and/or enact laws. Should not protecting the lives of our children from the age of 1 to 199 be equally important to a Right to Life movement?

In our own jurisdiction, we have lost children to drug abuse, to gun violence and to bullying. Yes, we offered prayers, but as a community what have or are we doing to support victims

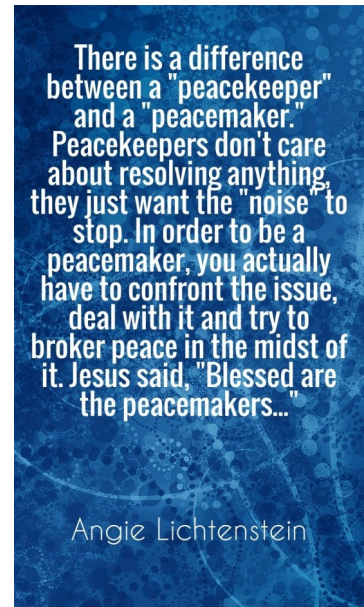
and to prevent these crimes from occurring ever again? Are we peacemakers or peacekeepers?

I'm not saying, don't pray, but I am saying, if you are not willing to put your prayers into some action, what good are your prayers?

We pray for starving children in the world. What do we do to help to put an end to starvation? We pray for an end to war, again, what do we do to help stop war? We pray for healing, what do we do to aid in that healing?

Our offer of prayer are simply empty words if we don't put them into action.

So how do we do this? Very few of us have the means to stop world hunger, to stop child abuse, to guarantee equal social justice for everyone, regardless of the color of our skin, nationality, sexuality or status in life, in fact, we may not even have any money towards helping one person. But Christ calls each of us to Do Something!



Calling local leaders, sending postcard or letters. Volunteering at a soup kitchen, shelter or food pantry. Walking in a peaceful protest for social justice issues.

I have spent much of my time in my ministry in working towards protection of our children and vulnerable adults but today, I stand ready to face new challenges to protect children, to stand in ways as never before for social justice and to become more what Christ is calling us to be: A peacemaker.

I've been warned by loving and caring friends to be careful, to protect myself and not get into situations that endanger my own life, but I choose to be a peacemaker regardless of the risk or cost, because I value being a 'child of God'. And they will know us by our Love.

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1. Terry M. Waldman, "John 13:34-35" in *First Nations Version: an Indigenous translation of the New Testament* (linterVarsity Press and the "Chief" of Rain Ministries), Pg196.
 2. Terry M. Waldman, "Matthew 5:9." in *First Nations Version: an Indigenous translation of the New Testament* (linterVarsity Press and the "Chief" of Rain Ministries), Pg7.
 3. Berean Study Bible · <https://biblehub.com/matthew/5-9.htm>

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All Who Wander...

by: Fr. Ron Lahti

One of the great pastimes for city dwellers, especially in great cities like New York, San Francisco or Boston is walking the city. Simply starting in a direction and walking. This is a great way to learn the city, but more importantly to discover new and interesting neighborhoods, stores and restaurants. One time in Venice, Italy my husband and I found ourselves dropped off on a side of the city we had not been to before. As anyone who has been there will tell you, maps mean very little in Venice. We just started down one street then another, more or less trying to find the direction back to St. Marks Square. We wandered for a long time, often pausing for something to eat and drink – it is Italy after all – and then continuing our way. We discovered hidden gems of painted murals and niches with amazing statues. We did not set out to find anything in particular, but we found wonderful discoveries – even some really great art glass! Eventually, we arrived in a neighborhood we recognized and soon found our way back to our hotel. We were tired, but much richer for the experience. I'm sure we could have asked for directions, or sought out a water-taxi and found our way to St. Marks much faster, but we chose to explore. Our spiritual lives also frequently entail explorations.

Three of my mythic heroes all share the trait of being spiritual explorers. Wodan, the All-Father of Norse Myth, is the Wanderer in a blue cloak, with a big floppy hat covering his one bad eye. He wanders the universe seeking new knowledge and wisdom. Vainamoinen is the hero, some might argue a deity, of the Finnish epic The Kalevala. Vainamoinen also is shown to be one who travels in search of new magicks (I use magick to differentiate spiritual power and skill from the magic of stage tricks and illusion), new sources of knowledge and power – even venturing into the lands of the dead. Finally, a character many will know – Gandolf the Grey in Tolkein's Lord of the Rings masterpiece trilogy. Gandolf also seems to always be traveling seeking new experiences, sources of power and magick, but always it seems with the intention to help, guide and protect others. In the first book of the Lord of the Rings, The Fellowship of the Ring, we find the statement: "Not all who wander are lost". One common factor all three of my heroes share is that, in the end, they return home. No matter how far afield they might wander, they always return to where they started; richer, more powerful perhaps, but back home nonetheless.

I recently came across a thought-provoking statement, I believe it was by Frederica Matthewes-Green (not a writer I read often, and who has religious and political views very different from mine). Ms. Matthewes-Green described her spiritual journey to Eastern Orthodoxy as an "exploration" more than a "seeking". I started meditating on this distinction. To seek, to me, is to look for something to meet a need or interest. But, on the other hand, to explore is to simply venture into uncharted territory and see what is found there. It would seem Ms. Matthewes-Green was making the point that she was already a Christian, but had started a journey of exploration which eventually led her to embrace Eastern Orthodox



Christianity. She was not seeking something new or different, but rather was simply exploring the world of Christianity and found herself in a new place which became her new spiritual home.

Often people begin their spiritual journeys seeking something – an answer, a comfort, a healing, or they seek a someone – a G-d, a Protector, a Friend. And they find what they were seeking, and this becomes their “home”. But it seems that when one has found their “home” spiritually then one can venture out to begin the greater exploration of spirituality. One can enter spiritual traditions, practices, ideas which appear foreign and strange, but which, once experienced bring beauty and richness to one’s spiritual understandings – deepening and maturing one’s spirit. Then, once the new adventure is over, the journey home begins. Sometimes it might take a long time to get there, and there might be some wrong turns and, G-d forbid, some dead ends, before one eventually finds oneself back at a familiar neighborhood, a friendly and warm front door. And, sometimes, like Ms. Matthewes-Green, one finds a new spiritual neighborhood which immediately feels safe, comfortable, even familiar. This new spiritual neighborhood then can become one’s new home.

In our modern spiritual landscape, in which the entire array of humankind’s spiritual traditions are only a keyboard click away, we have to remind ourselves that not all who wander through various spiritual pathways are lost. Often these spiritual journeyers are simply exploring and standing amazed at the wondrous spiritual landscapes that humankind have engendered. Given time the explorers will return with stories of adventures and the things they have seen, perhaps with a deeper appreciation of their spiritual home. And, if they don’t return, having found new soul-place to dwell, it becomes an invitation for those left behind to visit and allow the journeyers to show off their new spiritual home.



Finding Peace and Being Grateful in Trying Times
by: Rev. Mother Myrella LeClair

Do you sometimes feel as if the world continues to spiral out of control and that there is nothing you can do about it? One only has to look at what is going on in our own hate-filled country never mind what is going on in other areas of the world. Hatred appears to be swirling around us, dominating our souls and minds. We are overwhelmed with our own negativity as well as our hatred toward others and their hatred toward us. Perhaps one of the reasons for that is that for many people, political figures have replaced God, and these false gods only take us further into despair. We can counterbalance by living in gratefulness to God.

Are you coping with all that is going in our country and the world in general? If you find yourself overwhelmed by what is going on, perhaps you need to immerse yourself in prayer, reflection and God’ healing light to counter the negativity and hatred that is surrounding not only our country but also the whole world. In my 72+ years, I have never experienced a time in which there has been so much hatred toward one another because of our differences. God

has been co-opted by certain religious groups, who are substituting their theological beliefs in place of the beliefs that God gave to us. Do not worship their false gods!



Remember that Our Father (the one true God) gave us the Son to show us the Way, the Truth, and the Faith). Remember what Jesus said: “Love One Another” – not just those who share our beliefs but those who do not.– and even those who are unbelievers or whose Faith is different from our own. Let us all take time for personal introspection. Start by shaking off your anger – whatever is holding you back from extending forgiveness to those who are hateful towards you. Ask Jesus for his help with this because you will need it. Replace all of the

hurts you are harboring with forgiveness.

Learn to live in harmony and gratefulness to God. Spend time in in meditation. See yourself surrounded in Jesus’ Light and then see that Light surrounding the world. See the darkness disappear into the Light, and the Light embracing all that there is now and will ever be....

The choice is ours: Are we willing to embrace God’s Healing Light and live in harmony with all of God’s creation?



*Teaching of the “Heavenly King Prayer”
by: Fr. Ron Lahti*

One of the most often used prayers in the Eastern Church is called simply “O Heavenly King”. This prayer forms part of the opening prayers sometimes called the “Trisagion Prayers” which begin any formal liturgical or personal devotions. In English this prayer reads:

“O Heavenly King, Comforter, Spirit of Truth, Who is everywhere present and fills all things. Treasury of good gifts and Giver of Life, come and abide in us, cleanse us of all impurity and save our souls, O Good One.”



One thing I like about this prayer is its adaptability to many religious/spiritual understandings – it really is an inter-spiritual prayer *par excellence*. As we’ll see, this prayer offers many “fill-in-the-blank” opportunities in our communion with G-d. I offer below my reflections on this prayer, and how it has become my “go-to prayer”.

In the first part of this prayer, we address G-d by various titles which express our understanding of G-d’s Nature and Being.

O Heavenly King

OK, this prayer starts with a very non-PC title. Most of us today are put off by the concepts of “King”, “Ruler”, etc.. because of their inherently sexist and imperialistic tones. So, I try to understand the sentiment behind the title. We are really saying, “I’m addressing the One who lies behind all the workings of this universe”. I invite the reader to find a title that feels comfortable, but also expresses this sentiment. In my case, I often use the phrase “O Heavenly One”. One could also say “O Father/Mother”. I also like a title from the ancient Mandeian people “O Great Life”.

Comforter

The first thought this title conjures of course is of Jesus’ famous “Farewell Sermon” recorded in John’s Gospel (John 16:5-10). There, Jesus promised that though He was leaving, He would ask the Father to send the Holy Spirit to the believers as a Comforter. The Greek word used in this place is *parakletos*, from “para” beside and “kaleo” to call, to invite, to forcefully entreat. *Parakletos* is usually translated as “to invite, to beseech, to aid, to give comfort”. I see this title as: “The One Who Stands Beside Me”- the Presence of G-d with me and even in me; “The One Who Aids Me” – The Presence Who Guides and Protects; and the “One Who Calls Me” – The Presence of G-d Who calls to get my attention when I lose focus and I am distracted by the illusions and deceits of the world. In addition, *parakletos* can be translated as “the one who forcefully entreats beside one”, in other words, an Advocate. This is the Presence of G-d who actually advocates or prays for us, through us (Romans 8:26).

The Spirit of Truth

Again, I return to Jesus’ own words “But when He, the Spirit of Truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth...” (John 16: 13, New American Standard Bible, NASB). The Spirit of Truth is the Presence of G-d within us which gently (sometimes not so gently it seems) guides us in our maturing as spiritual people. Perhaps we can think of a nurturing, supportive teacher or mentor when we think of the Spirit of Truth.

Who Is Everywhere Present

We can note that this phrase says “everywhere” – not just in a particular church/synagogue/masjid/temple, but everywhere. The Presence of G-d is always present in spatial and temporal terms but also....

Fills All Things

The Presence is within “all things”. Think about that for a moment. I can find G-d’s Presence in this tree, in this stone, in this meal, in my dog, and in my neighbor (even the disagreeable ones). Some have advocated a “pantheistic” view of G-d – that everything actually makes up or comprises G-d. I happen to feel more comfortable with what has come to be called a “panentheistic” view – that G-d is in all things and all things are in G-d, but G-d is not limited to or defined by “things”. G-d is bigger than things, while also inhering all things. This really is just theological babble to say “G-d is always available in whatever way we can imagine finding him, and in some ways we cannot even imagine”.

Treasury of Good Gifts

G-d is described as a “Treasury”, hearkening back to the days when a king would have, in the innermost chambers of the castle a room full of the wealth of his kingdom. We still use this word to describe the part of our government which controls, regulates and distributes the

currency, the wealth, of our country. In James 1:17 we read “Every good thing bestowed and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of Lights, with whom there is no variation, or shifting shadow.” (NASB). What gifts do we mean? Well, in the Christian scriptures there are lists of the Gifts of the Spirit (I Cor. 12:4-11, Rom 12:6-8) as being supernatural talents for the purpose of showing the Presence of G-d in the world and for strengthening and supporting the People of G-d. But, I think we need to see this title in light of the previous title and see that indeed all things we encounter in life are in truth gifts of G-d. Our task is to recognize them as such – yes, even the not so pleasant ones.

An interesting fact from the Greek. The word used for the Gifts G-d bestows (*doron*) is the same word used to describe sacrifices we make to G-d. So, really, we see our sacrifices to G-d are perhaps in response to the “sacrifices” G-d has already bestowed to us.

Giver of Life

G-d is the Source, the Origin of Life. As I mentioned earlier, the Mandaean people of southern Iran (if, g-d willing, they are still alive and thriving) used “The Great Life” as their title for Deity, recognizing that G-d is not only the Source of Life, but is in fact the only true Life. In the Shema, the prayer/statement recited by Jews at least twice a day, is stated – “Hear O Israel, Hashem is our God, Hashem is One” (Hashem means The Name and is used instead of G-d’s Name out of respect). Many Jewish thinkers see in this statement an acknowledgement that G-d being One points to G-d as the only real Life, all else being expressions or manifestations of G-d’s Life.

Now, in the second part of this prayer we offer our requests of the One we just addressed.

Come and Abide In Us

We ask the Presence to not only hear us, but to come and live within us. This can mean communally as well as personally. G-d lives within life as a whole, but also lives within the individual life of each living being. I think of Jesus’ statement “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make our abode with him.” (John 14: 23 NASB), further reflected in the Book of Revelation in which the Risen Jesus states “Behold I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me” (3:20 NASB). For humans, the act of eating together is one of the most intimate actions in which we can take part. Eating together involves trust that we can let our guard down, relax and be ourselves. We make a prayer that we may enter into a relationship with G-d in our most personal and intimate life.

Cleanse Us From All Impurity

For us to enter into an intimate relationship with G-d, we must be free of all things that impede that relationship. Biblical language calls impediments “impurity”, “sin”, “transgression”. It’s the stuff that pulls our attention away from the Source of Life to the things in which we think, wrongly, that we can find fulfillment and wholeness. Repeatedly we read in Christian, Jewish and Islamic scriptures warnings against idolatry. I see this not so much a concern of calling Deity by other Names, as it warns against putting “things” in the place of our acknowledgement and embracing of the One True Source of Life.

And Save Our Souls

We make a final appeal for “salvation”. When I pray, I change this phrase to “and make us whole”. I think of salvation as being so much more than concern for where my “soul” will spend eternity. Drawing on Eastern Christian thought, as well as Jewish thought, I see redemption as involving the whole person – a transformation away from the self-centered, ignorant being into the being originally conceived by G-d.

O Good One

To end our prayer, we once again express our faith that G-d is ultimately the “Good One”, the One who loves us, seeks our love and wants only Good for us.

I encourage people to try this prayer. Pray it as you start your day, and try it for one month and see the change in your life. Happy Praying!

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World of Confusion

by: Right Reverend Barb Martzall

I’m sitting quietly in our office at the moment. I’m contemplating what I should write for the monastic newsletter. It is early evening, supper has been eaten, dishes are finished, tomorrow’s lunches are set aside, and tomorrow’s supper has been brought up to the kitchen for tomorrow. I watched some of the evening news and my heart just wanted to explode in tears.



All my head kept saying was “what is going on in this world”. What has happened among all of the people of this world? It’s like I’m sitting here watching a horror movie and wondering where is our faith in all of this? Wondering how did we reach this point of what we say is religion and/or Christianity? Really when you look at the world today where is our Creator, where is Jesus, and really where are all the teachings of the Apostles?

I look back over at least the last 10 years and I see the slow creeping of the rewriting of what the Scriptures teach depending on what church you attend, depending on what community you live in, depending on what state you live in, depending on what country you live in. Excuse me but where does it say that you can rewrite our Creator’s words to suit your present needs and your present desires? Nowhere in the Scriptures has this permission then granted to us. What was asked of us and is still asked of us is that we live a life of love and protection of the world we live in. We are not asked to destroy everything around us.

What do you gain by trying to destroy the people around you for whatever reason? What do you gain by putting false stories out there in the universe via the Internet? What do you gain by lying about others? And finally what do you gain by lying about yourself? The answer is

simple to all these questions, you gain nothing! All you have created is hatred, confusion, injury, and possibly even death. Is that what you set out to do?

What happened to families gathering together at the dinner table and sharing with one another what their day was like? What happened to seeing needs within a community and finding a way to personally fulfill at least some of the needs? What happened to the neighbor helping neighbor? And what happened to churches helping other churches within a community? Once upon a time we would be willing to put aside our differences to work together for the betterment of the community. Not anymore!

I look at how people are responding after two years of Covid -- almost three years and I shake my head in sorrow. Yes it is so tiring to have to wear a mask and it is so tiring not to be able to gather with those that we love. And yes we are tired of seeing empty shelves in the stores. But hello, we are all in this together. Here locally our Covid numbers are going up again. Why, because we want to just do as we want to do. We don't truly care about those around us. Sad isn't it? Is that what Jesus taught us? I don't think so.

Jesus taught those around him in the communities and in the temple of how to live a life full of love for others. If you remember your scriptures well, Jesus reprimanded the money changers at the temple for not following the teachings that our Creator had handed to Moses. Jesus realized ultimately that to get people to truly understand our Creator's laws, he needed to teach the people outside of the temple. He needed to reach them with words and actions that they understood. Did you ever see him strike another person? Yes you saw him get angry, but is that not a human trait? But he only got angry when nothing else worked. He always tried to reach the people through love.

For a moment sit and contemplate what have you done this past week to help someone outside of your home to feel worthwhile or did you do the opposite where you made others feel less than a human. That they are not worth anything in this world. I sure hope that you took the time to raise up those that needed support. That you gave words of encouragement to those who needed to be encouraged. And that you showed some sort of recognition of love to those around you who needed some extra love.

Maybe it is time that we stop living our life through the Internet. It is getting harder and harder to decipher what is true and what is false of the information provided on the Internet. It is time to get back to having family dinners. It is time to spend some quality time with friends. And really it is time for us all to find a way to make those around us feel worthy and loved. Jesus taught us that the most important thing in life besides loving our Creator is to love those around you as you would love yourself.

So today I would ask you, look to the people around you and find a way to make them feel worthy. Find a way to stop the hatred that is growing throughout this world. A simple smile to the person as you pass by them. Saying have a good day to the person you pass by. Share love. Share hope. It is really that simple and does not require any preaching, but just requires love and respect.

Take the time to be that child of our Creator that you and I are! Love is always the answer. And now I close this message hoping that each and every person in this world finds that they are loved and that they are respected for who they are and for what they believe.

Blessings be upon all of you this day and always. Become Peacemakers in this world!

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