

Abbey Letter no. 248

Christmas 2011





Abbot Andrew



Prior Aelred



Fr. Jude

*The monks of St. Gregory's Abbey
thank you for your prayers and gifts,
and we pray that you and the entire
world may have a joyful Christmas
and a peaceful and prosperous 2012.*



Fr. William



Br. Martin



Br. Abraham



Br. Joshua



Richard

It's Christmas in Heaven

I have always been fascinated with what other people think Heaven is like. It is intriguing that whenever artists try to represent Heaven, or writers try to describe it, or movies try to show it, Heaven usually comes across as rather boring, the only attraction being that one is not suffering in Hell. While not suffering in Hell has much to recommend it, one does hope that there's more to Heaven than sitting on clouds wearing white robes and playing small harps for ever and ever!

Representations of Heaven in comedies are always entertaining. I remember an episode of "The Simpsons" that has Marge imagining two Heavens: one for Protestants, and one for Catholics. Protestant Heaven is a classy country club with people talking through their teeth. Catholic Heaven involves a Hispanic party with Jesus being tossed up in the air with a blanket, and then everyone breaks into a river dance. "Oh dear," says the Protestant, "it appears Jesus has gone native."

A screamingly funny portrayal of Heaven comes towards the end of "Monty Python's Meaning of Life." Here, Heaven is a giant Las Vegas stage show, complete with chorus girls. The main singer is singing a song that proclaims that everyday is Christmas in Heaven.

Because these are comedies, they reveal much about ourselves in parodying our ideas of Heaven. Being human, our ideas of Heaven involve our prejudices as much as they involve our faith. Let's be honest: our ideas of Heaven often are about who gets in, and who doesn't. We should strive to be better than that.

Generally speaking, I think it is safe to say that for most of us, Heaven is an idealized version of life as we know it. I believe this is natural and unavoidable. After all, this life is what we know. And there is much to recommend this way of thinking about Heaven. As Christians we believe God created all that exists, and that it is redeemed and good. Therefore, what our experience of life is can more often than not be our starting point when thinking about Heaven.

An interesting phenomenon is what I think of as "The Grass is Always Greener on the Other Side of the Fence" phenomenon. That is, cultures that are more rural tend to think of Heaven as a magnificent city, with streets paved with gold and all that. Whereas cultures that are more urban will generally conceive of Heaven as a pristine forest with friendly wildlife. Rightly considered, both of these ideas can lead to intuitive insights as to what Heaven may be like.

One of my favorite metaphors for Heaven goes something like this:

Heaven and Hell are identical. In Hell, everyone is seated at a lavish banquet. However, no one can eat anything because the silverware is so long that one cannot use it to reach one's mouth. Heaven is exactly the same thing. But instead of trying to feed themselves, everyone uses the long silverware to feed each other.

When it comes to me, I personally have two concepts of what Heaven is. One is trivial, the other not so trivial. In my trivial version, Heaven is me at a really good local coffee shop, drinking really good coffee and eating homemade coconut cream pie for breakfast one day, pecan pie the next. Outside is parked my cream-colored 1965 Rolls-Royce Silver Cloud III with a blue interior. The music inside the coffee shop is always perfect.

In my not-so-trivial version of Heaven, Heaven is more a state of being, and is rather more abstract than physical. Simply put, Heaven is ultimately a state of falling deeper and deeper in love with God and everyone else. And this falling deeper in love is never ending.

No one can definitely say what Heaven will be like. I would be so bold as to assert that the only things we can count on is that we will be with God, or perhaps it is God who will be with us. As Jesus said, "I am with you always." And as the name Emmanuel is defined, "God with us." Whatever the case may be, as Lady Julian of Norwich has it, "All shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well."

— Br. Martin



CONTACTING THE ABBEY

Mailing address -

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56500 Abbey Road
Three Rivers, MI 49093

Telephone -

269-244-5893

9:30am - 11:15am or 2:30pm - 4:15pm Eastern Time Monday through Saturday
(please do not telephone at other times or on Sundays or holidays)

E-mail -

Guest reservations and information -

guestmaster@saintgregorysthreerivers.org

Mailing list -

office@saintgregorysthreerivers.org

Abbot Andrew -

abbot@saintgregorysthreerivers.org

Information about becoming a monk or participating in the July Program -

novicemaster@saintgregorysthreerivers.org

Books and calendars may be ordered, prayers requested, and donations made at our website -

www.saintgregorysthreerivers.org

NOTES

Richard Zeikowitz from Athens, Georgia has joined us as a postulant. Richard is a native of New York City.

Bishop Edward Little of the Diocese of Northern Indiana was with us September 25th - 29th.

After thirty-one years of service, our property manager, Larry Engle, has retired. He is replaced by Dave Walter, who happens to be the father of our accountant, Karla Booko.

Several students from Grand Valley State University in Allendale, Michigan have been at the monastery during the fall

semester as part of a study and service program sponsored by the honors college.

A half-size PDF of our calendar is available for download at our website for a \$2.00 donation. Our website also has many other features, including slideshows, sermon archives, articles from back issues of the *Abbey Letter*, information about monastic life, the Summer Vocation Program and monastic vocations, and contact links for the abbot, novice master, guest department, and publications office. Prayer requests and donations can also be made online, as well as calendar and book purchases.

saintgregorysthreerivers.org



Bishop Little



Richard Zeikowitz



Dave & Larry

Daily Schedule at St. Gregory's Abbey

Weekdays

4:00 a.m. MATINS
6:00 a.m. LAUDS
8:15 a.m. TERCE
EUCHARIST
11:30 a.m. SEXT
2:00 p.m. NONE
5:00 p.m. VESPERS
followed by meditation
7:45 p.m. COMPLINE
(on Tuesdays and Thursdays, COMPLINE
is prayed privately)

Sundays and Major Holidays

5:30 a.m. MATINS & LAUDS
8:30 a.m. TERCE
EUCHARIST
noon SEXT & NONE
5:00 p.m. VESPERS
followed by meditation
7:45 p.m. COMPLINE

Music compositions from St. Gregory's Abbey

Missa Brevis

choral symphony by Br. Abraham - Latin text from the ordinary of the mass

Rumi

choral symphony by Br. Abraham - English translation of the poems of Rumi

A Symphony of Psalms

choral symphony by Br. Abraham - Latin text of four psalms

Life of Benedict

orchestral setting of Gregory the Great's Life of Benedict by John Webber

Composers' notes and essays, free perusal MP3 files of synthesized performances of individual movements, free perusal PDF files of full scores and piano reductions are available at webbermusic.com

search for "Abraham Newsom" on the website for *Missa Brevis*, *Rumi*, and *A Symphony of Psalms*

search for "John Webber" on the website for *Life of Benedict*

All perusal files are free, but donations are welcome and can be made at the website or sent to St. Gregory's Abbey designated for "music compositions." Hard copies of scores and orchestral parts are for sale at list price from webbermusic.com



St. Gregory's Abbey July Vocation Program

Spend two weeks (or more) in July with the monks of St. Gregory's Abbey, a Benedictine monastery of the Episcopal Church at Three Rivers, Michigan.

Worship & Pray Work & Learn

For males 18 to 50 who can stay for at least two weeks. The only cost is \$25 for registration.

For more information, use the envelope bound in this issue of the Abbey Letter or write:

July Program Director

St. Gregory's Abbey

56500 Abbey Road

Three Rivers, MI 49093

novicemaster@saintgregorysthreerivers.org

Applications will be accepted after January 1, 2012.

saintgregorysthreerivers.org

Books from St. Gregory's Abbey

Singing God's Praises (1998)

history of the community, select Abbey letter articles, photographs

\$20.00 Please send ____ copies. \$ _____

Born in the Darkest Time of Year (2004)

15 Christmas stories by Abbot Andrew

\$16.00 Please send ____ copies. \$ _____

Tools For Peace (2007)

Abbot Andrew's reflections on St. Benedict and René Girard

\$24.00 Please send ____ copies. \$ _____

Creatures We Dream of Knowing (2011)

fantasy stories by Abbot Andrew

\$20.00 Please send ____ copies. \$ _____

Come Let Us Adore (2011)

*select Abbey Letter Articles from 1999 to 2011 (companion book to **Singing God's Praises**)*

\$20.00 Please send ____ copies. \$ _____

Enclosed is \$ _____ in full payment. Please allow 4-6 weeks for delivery.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Any payment in excess of the book price will be gratefully accepted as a gift to the abbey.

St. Gregory's Abbey, 56500 Abbey Road, Three Rivers, MI 49093-9595

2012 Calendar Now Available As A PDF Download At Our Website
or use the coupon below to order a hard copy

2012 St. Gregory's Abbey Calendar

13 months, 15 photos, with the Abbey's liturgical calendar

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Saint Gregory's Abbey is the home of a community of men living under the Rule of Saint Benedict within the Episcopal Church. The center of the monastery's life is the Abbey Church, where God is worshiped in the daily round of Eucharist, Divine Office, and private prayer. Also offered to God are the monks' daily manual work, study and correspondence, ministry to guests, and occasional outside engagements.

The continuing existence of Saint Gregory's is made possible by the support of those who believe that the contemplative vocation within the Church finds valid expression there.

The monks ask your prayers and will be grateful for your offerings.

<http://saintgregorysthreerivers.org/donate.html> to donate online

Donations may be mailed to:
Saint Gregory's Abbey
56500 Abbey Road
Three Rivers, MI 49093-9595