

# *The Journal of the Lay Cistercians of Gethsemani Abbey*

**Issue 3 – Spring of 2018**



*The Ark, Photo by Ray Geers*

## **Our Purpose**

The stability of the monastic enclosure, combined with centuries of tradition, provides a structure and model for growth that offers support and guidance as well as rich resources for contemplation.

Non-cloistered contemplatives, however, face different challenges in respect to the environment and the companions with which their search for God takes place. Since they do not live within the walls of a monastic building, they must personally define a comparable place and fashion a practice of prayer, contemplation and spiritual companionship that complements their monastery-without-walls.

The primary purpose of this on-line publication is to contribute to the formation of such an enclosure. Ideally, the Journal is a context in which members and candidates explore and share aspects of their spiritual journeys and the role of the Cistercian charism and the monastery of Gethsemani in those journeys.

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## Introductory Note

This third issue of the *Journal* features a poem and a guide to Zen meditation by Ed Salerno, the third chapter of Ray Geers' memoir in which he describes his experience as a novice at Gethsemani, new poems and photographs by Randy Cox, haikus by Scott Gilliam, a book review and reflections by Robert Johnson on the LCG challenge, a *meditatio* on the imagery of light and darkness in the hymns of the Office, and artwork and music by Ray Geers.

Bill Felker



# **JUST SIT**

## **A Guide to Sit Zazen for Beginners**

**By**  
**Ed Salerno**

Just sit.

**Where?**

In a clean, cool, quiet place.

**How?**

In a straight-back chair to the edge of the chair with a cushion under ones seat  
and the feet firmly on the floor.

In Japanese sitting posture on a zen bench on a mat or folded blanket. Or, with a  
cushion (Zafu) between the heels and buttocks.

In Half-lotus posture with the left foot over the right thigh,

And the right foot under the left thigh.

Booth knees should be touching the mat.

I would suggest the use of a Zafu sitting cushion under the buttocks.

In full-lotus posture with the right foot over the left thigh and the left foot over the  
right thigh.

Use a Zafu sitting cushion under the buttocks so both knees can be touching the mat.

### **What do you do with your mind?**

Send it out to the dry cleaners. When it comes back, you will know....

Failing that, focus your mind on your breath at a point about two inches below the navel called the Hara. Place the tongue gently behind your front teeth on the cliff of the hard pallet behind those teeth. If your tongue gets glued to the roof of your mouth, which will happen, you're probably daydreaming. Begin again.

Relax, but don't move.

To start with, count one as you inhale and two as you exhale, three on the inhale and so up to ten. If you lose the count, which will happen, refocus and begin again at one.

As your ability to point your mind to your breath counting gets more focused, you can start simply following your breath gently in and all the way down to the Hara, following the breath all the way down. Then back up and out your nose again, following it all the way.

As for your posture, keep erect and comfortably balanced, not stiff. Be mindful of your posture, relax your shoulders and neck, don't move. Every move is akin to another thought taking you away from your Zazen. Be mindful of your location and try not to take any mental errands. Of course you will but simply say, "Not this." and start again.

Or you can quietly ask, "Who is doing the sitting"? over and over and over with each breath until that question settles in the Hara.

Also, keep your eyes open looking downward at the floor about two to four feet ahead. It takes time to find the best location for your gaze. But try not to close your eyes, it only increases daydreaming or trying to figure things out; all of which takes one away from one's Zazen.

## **How long should one sit like this?**

To begin with, about five minutes each time, morning and evening. Increase that time as you feel you can.

Ideally one should sit thirty to forty minutes each round.

Don't push it. Listen to yourself. Zazen is after all, studying oneself by quiet observation.

Increase the time only as you feel led to do so.

It's a good idea to use a quiet timer that has a bell to signal at the end of your sitting. Timers for the deaf are ideal. No sound and a flashing light to signal the end of the round. Also, there are a number of meditation timer apps.

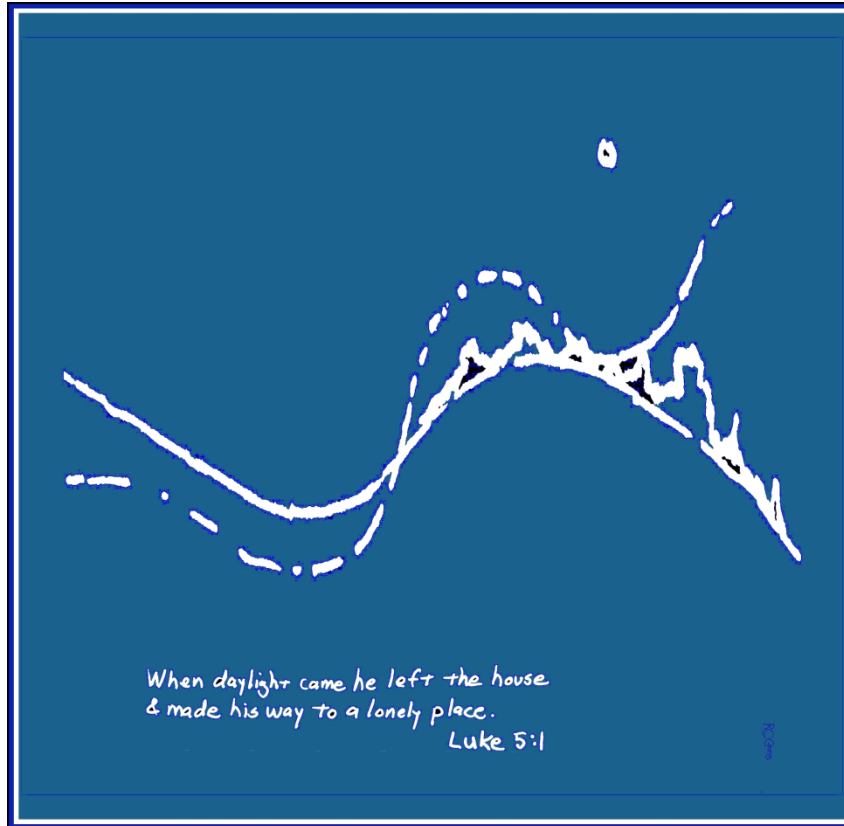
## **What time of day is best?**

Early morning or later in the evening is usually best, as it is quieter.

## **Why should I do this?**

I don't know.

Some people just feel they must do this practice and they spend their lives trying to learn how to do it. Actually it is quite impossible, and that is why we do it. So, just sit, see if it's right for you. There are many books available but only a few really help guide you in your practice. But truly, to learn to sit Zazen, one must just sit over and over and over...and over.



*Luke 5:1, Artwork by Ray Geers*

## **Monkish Son**

### **Chapter 3: Between One Way and Another**

By Ray Geers

*For some unobvious but long-intuited time mechanism had sounded  
and I was summoned forth.*

Francis Kline, *Lovers of the Place*<sup>1</sup>

*"In whatever place you find yourself, do not easily leave it."*

Saint Anthony of the Desert

*Things happening in the world in 1986:*

- The Space Shuttle *Challenger* disintegrates 73 seconds after launch, killing the crew of seven astronauts, including schoolteacher Christa McAuliffe.

- Corazon Aquino becomes the first Filipino woman president after the *People Power* Revolution in the Philippines.

- In an event called *Hands Across America* over 5,000,000 people form a human chain from New York City to Long Beach, California to raise money to fight hunger and homelessness.<sup>1</sup>

*Monday morning, August 4, 1986, is a new day in the world of the monkish son:*

A six o'clock in the morning, eight members of my immediate family had come together inside a little parish church in Groesbeck, Ohio. They came to lend proper ritual to my departure. The sound-dampened interior, the dimly lit altar and the sober movements of the older mass-going regulars were there as backdrop. I glanced at the faces of my mother and father as we waited for the priest to appear. My mother's emotions were poorly hidden, her face a decorative cloth trying to hide the fabric of doubts and concerns underneath. My dad, stonier of expression, gave fewer clues to the machinations of his mind. Broken, glass-stained, light penetrated a few feet into the church hall without fanfare. Outside, the seventeen-year cicadas were drawing closer to their moment. Just barely in the ground, they were waiting for a single lifetime event: busting loose and flying in madness.

I looked at the empty altar and then at my six brothers sitting with me in the pew. Curiosity and family solidarity were both there. I didn't know which was the real draw that brought them so early on a Saturday morning in August. It was 1986, and I, the fourth child of Clifford and Carol Geers, was leaving for the monastery this day. The appointed time came for me to walk up to the podium and lead the small congregation in reciting the responsorial psalm. With a long exhale, and mind fairly calmed, I stepped out of the pew and walked forward on the noiseless carpet to the podium on the left of the altar. I took a brief pause and scanned the church before reading the 34<sup>th</sup> psalm. That's when I noticed a familiar pair of brown eyes in the

room. Jeanne? What was she doing here? But of course, I knew. She was a good friend of mine and came to see me off that day to. I avoided all eye contact and recited, with as loud and clear a voice as I could:

*I will bless the Lord at all times,  
his praise always on my lips...*

After mass, my parents splurged by taking everybody to breakfast at the local Big Boy restaurant. Two of our parish priests, Father George and Father Ron, joined the ten of us. I'll never forget the scene: I was sitting in the restaurant table with two priests on my left side and Jeanne, with her brown eyes, to my right. Across the table sat both of my parents, neither of whom seemed very hungry. I wondered: Is this how a monastic journey is supposed to start? And even though I imagined myself to be the center of attention, my brothers in booths nearby were clearly more entertaining. They kept things light with their continual banter back and forth, as if they were the Marx Brothers on a road show. Questions came up about such things as the meaning of the term "Trappist".

"Does that mean the monkish son is going to be trapped?"

And there were questions about my immanent training, so secret they mentioned it only in hushed undertones.

"Under the Jedi master Yoda!"

"Shhhhhh!"

"The force is strong with this one" claimed my third youngest brother, Chuck. Chuck was the first one to refer to me as "the monkish son". Ten-year-old-like enthusiasm was beaming from his sixteen-year-old face as he envisioned my future as a hooded Ben Kenobi of Star Wars fame.

"Yes... but the monkish one must beware of the *dark side*" prophesied Douglas, my fourth youngest brother.

I wasn't a Jedi Knight in training, but I *was* familiar with some dark sides in life and with forces pulling me in dangerous directions. This force pulling me to Gethsemani *was* strong as far as forces go. It had been pulling me for years, far away from my hometown and far from the particulars of my first twenty-two journeys around the sun. Nothing in life had ever branded my conscience so deeply as having grown up in a big, white catholic family in a monotonous suburban sprawl

surrounding Cincinnati, Ohio, but I was trying my best to get re-branded. The circumference of my new-forming conscience was being pointed like a satellite dish towards rural Kentucky and ancient monasticism.

At the same time, it felt strange to have Jeanne beside me on this “last day in the world”, as I thought of it then.

Jeanne and I had met at an Italian restaurant where we spent loads of time working Saturday mornings together. She was the type of girl who liked to bring her boom box radio in to work so she could listen to Casey Kasem’s weekly pop song count down. My first memory of her is how well she looked in her waitress uniform with its white blouse and cute black vest. Her brown hair was shoulder length and tended a little towards the greasy side in the humid kitchen air. There was something a bit monkey about her as she popped up from behind the rack of water glasses to scare people.

I followed my younger brother Wayne into the restaurant world to become a cook and a beloved restaurant-clown in a kind of thrown-together, circus family crew. We all smelled constantly of garlic and onions, of perspiration and provolone cheese, especially on Sundays as we prepared the raw materials for our handcrafted pizzas, and other Italian dishes. There was real friendship amid the burning stoves, the blisters and cuts, around drinking and partying and, for me, despite my quiet nature, around the girls.

Eventually, I asked Jeanne out for a date. We sat that first night in my yellow Volkswagen Squareback and talked for three and a half hours because the bowling alley I took her to was only open for league play. I kissed her on this first date, an action that she told me later she did not approve of. We went out several times more, but our relationship seemed doomed for brokenness and about a year later we had given up on each other and went our separate ways. I continued to party with my restaurant friends on weekends, but at home, alone, I was reading books by Thomas Merton and folks before and after him who wrote about the spirit in a way I found so attractive that I couldn’t get enough of it. After many months of this, and after I made my decision to become a monk, I called Jeanne up on the phone.

Neither of us worked at the restaurant anymore. A couple weeks before I was leaving for Gethsemani, Jeanne and I sat side by side on a little hill overlooking Winton Wood Lake as the sun was settling down over the water. We pushed our fingers through the sandy ground as we talked and I told her of my intention to



become a monk, a thing she knew nothing about. Instead of judging my plan she simply accepted it. She went on to tell me her exciting news: her prayers were being answered and somebody with an incurable illness was being healed! Faith healing was a thing that *I* knew nothing about, but I accepted it, as I accepted her world, as uniquely her own. We were in the middle of a significant memory and I, for one, didn't want to mess it up by too many questions.

When the sky had turned almost completely dark, Jeanne turned towards me and asked "Do you think you might write me a letter now and then when you are at Gethsemani?" I told her I would – as much as I could, but I wasn't convinced about my answer. Did I want to keep the memory of her alive or leave it behind when I went to Gethsemani? I left the question hanging like an unfinished poem and merely concentrated on the new feeling of friendship between us. We were in this moment of time together. It was so strange, and so incompatible with our previous stormy relationship and with our growing in and out of whatever it was we were in – if not love.

At twenty-two years of age, I couldn't figure out how much importance to give to memories. My prevailing theory then was that memories could be put away, simply and easily, like a photo album tossed up in some dusty attic. As long as you didn't venture back up there, you would never feel them bother you again. Of course, this was a terrible theory and one that would be severely challenged later on; but I was too naive and driven by my ideals to predict this.

Now I want to return to that Big Boy restaurant on the day I left for Gethsemani. My family's parade of cars pushed out of the Big Boy parking lot for the journey south to Gethsemani. As we were doing this, I could see Jeanne's little red Horizon turn north the other way up Colerain Avenue. I didn't get real choked up about it, but I couldn't help but wonder if she did.

After three hours of family travel, the tires of our cars came to a hot, rubbery stop. We parked in the monastery's visitor's parking lot out under the huge shade trees. With my family in tow, and eager to speed things along now, I looked at Gethsemani for about the fifth time since high school. I could feel the wonder of the monastery growing larger in me as we stepped out of our vehicles. A tangible quietness surrounded the complex in a natural way. Maybe it was my imagination, but the activity of the squirrels and birds along the grounds and under the line of great trees seemed more relaxed than in the city. Without baggage to weigh me

down, and as relaxed as the squirrels, I led my family into a place that life never prepared them to see. For them, it must have seemed like a live, interactive museum; but for me it held the promise of an altogether new kind of life.

Gethsemani, for those unfamiliar with it, is a small village really, almost self-sufficient in the old days. When I came to live there they still distilled their drinking water from a stream, baked their daily bread and supported themselves with a diverse economy of old world cheeses, bourbon baked fruitcakes and books by Thomas Merton, their most famous monk. Farming had been reduced to a side job on their twenty-two hundred acres of steep wooded hills and low land prairies. The center of this village was still surrounded with stone walls built by the monks a century ago. Upon close inspection, you could see that large sections of the walls were falling into ill-repair, like the subject of a Wordsworth poem. In the 1980s those walls were tired, but still holding on to a more pristine past – such beautiful signs of tradition and change.

There was little talk as we walked towards the gatehouse to meet Father Michael, the new vacations director. My mom had a chip on her shoulder because women were still not allowed to go inside the cloister itself back then. “Chauvinists!” She didn’t mind saying this out loud. Here she was, about to give her son up for good, and the monks wouldn’t even let her in to check the place out! Who takes their child to a new campus and doesn’t get a proper tour? Well, the armed services, for one, I thought to myself, but didn’t say a word. When Father Michael gently thanked her for the gift of her son to the religious order, Mom said she wasn’t giving me up willingly. “So, don’t bother thanking me!” she said to poor Michael in a huff.

I also remember her remarking: “Such a male-dominated place... So austere! It needs a woman's touch.”

My youngest brothers, Doug, Chuck, Ron and Andy, no doubt, found allusions to *Star Wars* and *Doctor Who* – along with other pop-cultural trivia, to continue their flow of endless verbal amusements which began in the Big Boy restaurant. Wayne, the sibling closest to me in age and my first best friend, never told me what he thought about Gethsemani. Then a budding secularist and agnostic, I imagine the problem of religion was a blank spot on his map of reality and Gethsemani an even blanker one! As time passed, I think my own brushes with blankness and uncertainty led me to appreciate the stark, desert beauty of his point of view.

Father Michael was the new vocations director who took over from Brother Giles. He had been working with me for the past several months. Like all the monks, he had a burr haircut and wore the ancient garb of a fraternity founded in Europe before the general use of pants. I liked Michael from the very start. In the community of Gethsemani, he demonstrated an agreeable mixture of openness and tradition. He had a gentle spirit about him which made you think that, even if he were in the middle of a horrible day, Michael would do his best to keep it hidden from you.

I remember my entire family standing in the doorway of a quaint building reminiscent of a trailer home on cinder blocks. The gatehouse. All guests to the abbey were supposed to pass through this checkpoint and, in my opinion, the quicker the passing the better! The modular building was rickety to the point of embarrassment, and it creaked so much under the eighteen feet gathered there that it distracted the general conversation. Perhaps Mom was right about this bachelors' place needing a woman's touch. No convent would have put up with such shabbiness! But I loved that little building! I admired its anachronistic Gothic look on the outside along with its cheesy pointed arches. I enjoyed its uniform coat of white paint that tried to cover up its kind of shoddy fabrication. Most of all, I suppose I liked the role it played as the symbolic dividing line between one way of life and another.

Inside the monastery grounds, Father Michael was introducing the males of my family to a culture known to them primarily through books and movies – more myth than reality to all of us. If they were impressed with this strange milieu, my dad and brothers showed it only by their unusual silence. Even my four youngest brothers had nothing to say. At the time, I didn't really care what they might have thought. If they found it to be like a math problem without a solution, then that was okay with me. Totally incomprehensible? Fine! I wasn't concerned about providing explanations for them. I wanted only to get started, as fast as I could, in becoming a monk, as if it were a course that could only begin as soon as family ties were untangled. Then, I could go about my business of simply becoming one with God. Sound selfish to you? It does to me now, but there has always been more than one way to look at it.

We re-joined Mom back at the gatehouse. Just within the gatehouse door sat the gatekeeper Brother Joachim. Joachim seemed a quiet, almost shy, but friendly fellow perhaps in his mid-thirties. He was built like a lumberjack, but thinner and

bent over slightly, perhaps from a sore back. Joachim was dressed in blue jeans and a denim shirt. His bearded face had an Appalachian look to it, but he told me later that he had grown up in Southern California. I got to know him – some – by volunteering to work around the monastery during a couple of my previous stays. There was something big-brother-ish about him, but he hung out quietly and always a little bit back-aways in the distance.

My parents greeted the gatekeeper courteously like they would any stranger. Making small talk was something they both excelled in. Joachim asked about the drive south from Cincinnati and they asked him if the seventeen-year cicadas would appear in this part of the country.

"Well...I don't know the answer to that" Joachim admitted while he rubbed his whiskered chin. It seemed to me that Joachim liked to start out a most of his answers with "Well" and "I don't know".

"I've only been here for five years" he answered.

"You'll have to ask Michael. He's been here much longer than me."

"Oh, yes we'll be seeing the seventeen-year cicadas this year in the spring." Michael joined our conversation after he put the phone down on its receiver. He had just been talking to Mrs. Clark, the woman in charge of the family guesthouse, where we all would be treated to a delicious home cooked meal by an excellent southern style cook. Mrs. Clark was going to fix my last meal as a "normal person in the world" and the last one with meat as the main course. In my next meal I would be eating as a Trappist and a vegetarian. At the time, I didn't think about this. There was just so much happening, all at once, for me to think about anything very clearly.

After dinner, I was finally ready to start living my dream of becoming a monk. Having enjoyed a wonderful meal, compliments of the Trappists, I was left alone with my family for one last time so we could say our goodbyes to one another. This unique situation was an opportunity for me to do some things I hadn't done in the normal circumstances of my life before. For once, I had the chance to tell each of my family members how much I cared about them. I didn't use the word "love" with my brothers – it would be years before I could use that word with them. You see, in our German-Irish-American family of nine males and two females, the unwritten rule was this: *Geers family members don't admit to any deep personal feelings, period*; fearing, I suppose, the slippery slope of labile emotions. Mom was the exception to

the rule. At great risk to her reputation, Mom took care of the feelings department for all of us, even for my only sister Margie, who had to be mentally tough surrounded by so many boys. Housing all the feelings for eleven people was an unreasonably hard assignment for any human being, and even though Mom did her level best at it, I could tell she needed some help. Something inside of me tried to lend her a hand in this. I have an example of how I did this very thing.

One day, years before this chapter of my life, I caught my Dad off guard when I came home from high school and risked telling him, out of the blue, that I loved him. The high school counselor that I was seeing at the time put me up to it. It seemed crazy, this suggestion, but I summoned the courage to do it anyway. I don't remember exactly how it came about, but I vividly remember Dad's reaction. I think I must have hit a nerve inside of him because, after I told him this – that I loved him, I saw something truly amazing happen! The surface layer of his muscular masculine mind – a mind well suited for logic, problem-solving, for jokes and the occasional burst of anger – seemed to melt down right there in front of me. The mess of his emotions was like cold ice cream dropped on hot pavement. A splendid mess! Being a father of teenage and adult children now, I understand more what it must have meant for him to hear this from me. It rendered my Dad, that powerful man of my childhood, so incredibly and vulnerably human, that I almost want to cry just thinking about it.

And that's how I remember him as we said our goodbyes out in front of the gatehouse next to the open car door in the gravel parking lot. "We'll miss you" he said, his whole face, including his ears and the crown of his head, flushed red now and his voice a mere scratchy thing. I hugged him and each of my siblings, some for the first time. Then I kissed Mom's lips and felt her salty cheek. She gave me up – as was my wish. They all did. Only then did I realize that I loved them. I don't know why. It was something so new to me, and more than I ever knew before. Thank goodness – and thank God! I discovered love out there in the gravel parking lot, just beyond that crazy and now long departed gatehouse of Our Lady of Gethsemani.

<sup>1</sup> Francis Kline, *Lovers of the Place*, pg.4.

<sup>2</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1986\\_in\\_the\\_United\\_States](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1986_in_the_United_States).





*Sunlight on Fredrick Lake, Photo by Randy Cox*

## Even the Shadows

by Randy Cox

Even the shadows  
Welcome your light  
The hidden from the grave  
Say “come quickly”

The weary pilgrim  
Finds rest in your arms  
And walks willingly on  
Both day and night

And Peace is a truth  
Standing uprightly  
So just and full of you,  
Cannot be hidden

As for me I cry  
Loudly to your ears  
I speak with my mute heart  
Yet you hear my voice

My wilderness lost  
But found in your call  
The trees, the winds cry out  
Lost or found, you hear





*Walking Sticks, Photo by Randy Cox*

## Faith within Faith within Faith

by Randy Cox

The heart of the matter  
The very essence of faith  
In all the hidden places  
And in the pure light of day

Faith walks and talks  
And lives and breathes  
And thinks and wonders  
In occupied places running  
Past rivers of mercy  
And mountains of truth  
Asking all the right and  
Wrong questions, trying  
To get it "right" the first time  
Yet failing most times  
In its waiting and meandering  
The solid ground and  
Slippery slopes of uncertainty  
Carried in pockets or  
Holding on a ledge by  
Fingernails and breathless cold  
Faith is faith is faith  
Carried or faced on  
Streets or deserts  
In poverty or splendor  
In life or in death  
Masked or unmasked  
Priceless and measureless  
Hoped for and realized  
Broken and whole

Magnified and shrunken  
Not seen, not heard  
But real and profitable  
Marvelous, breathtaking  
Ambitious yet patient  
Faith is affordable and  
Available



*Abbot's Staff, Photo by Randy Cox*

# A Clue: A Reflection in Song

By Ray Geers

I based the following song, nominally, on Thomas Merton's prayer in his *Thoughts in Solitude*, but really on the prayer card available for so many years at the retreat house desk of Our Lady of Gethsemani Abbey.

## **A Clue**

*O my Lord God*

*When I have no clue to where I'm going*

*I cannot see*

*The road in front of me*

*I cannot tell*

*Exactly where it leads beyond here*

*Nor do I really understand myself*

*But I believe*

*That my desire to please does please you*

*O may I trust this in everything I do*

*And this I know*

*That hope will lead us forward*

*By the right road*

*Though I haven't got a clue*

*And just because*

*I think your will is what I follow*

*This doesn't prove that I'm  
Really following you  
Sometimes I wander off  
Near lost and fearful shaken  
Till I feel you're here  
And I do not walk alone*

*'Cause I believe...*

*And just because  
We think your will makes us great  
This doesn't prove we are  
Really following you  
Look how we wander off  
So lost and fearful shaken  
Can we feel you're here?  
That we do not walk alone?*

*Yes, I believe...*

Friends, just as some members of our group said in our last Lay Cistercians of Gethsemani meeting, I too often feel lost and as if wandering alone. That is why this song, whose words come directly and indirectly from Thomas Merton, means so much to me. Because – even though I don't always have a clue as to where I'm going, or to where we are all going, I at least know this: we do not walk alone. This is psalm 23 wisdom folks! Though we sometimes feel lost and in the shadow of the valley of

death, we do not walk alone. This is Sophia-wisdom, as our long-time leader Mike Johnson suggested to us, some weeks ago, while recounting his renewed struggle with cancer.

I sang this song often when my mother was dying and living in my house. I sang it when Trump was elected, and I still sing it whenever I'm afraid my children are in trouble, or when other peoples' children might be in trouble. I sing it every time there is a mass shooting, which is way too often! And I sang it today, this morning. Hardly a week goes by when I don't sing it at least a couple times. When life is hard, one of the only clues I have lately is the sense of love and the hope that my beloved offers me every time I begin to sing or recite these words: "O Lord, my God..." This is the heart of my personal psalter and the central experience and practice of my plan of life. I hope you don't mind my sharing it with you no matter the homeliness of its expression.

For those who want the music as well as the words, I offer a link to a sound clip of the song. It's not for everyone and doesn't need to be. It is fine either way. I'm learning to trust that my desire to please is pleasing despite these often somewhat clueless and awkward means.

<https://youtu.be/-Y7Aw814qzg>

With gratitude,

Ray Geers

*Grounded, Artwork by Ray Geers*





**Ruminations on the Imagery of Light  
in the Hymns of the Office:  
A Brief Lectio/Meditatio**

**By Bill Felker**

I

My first experience with hymns of the Office of the Hours was in Holy Cross Seminary at La Crosse, Wisconsin during the middle 1950s. All of our liturgy was in Latin during those times, and Gregorian chant was the norm.

From that period, I have kept one particular hymn, the "Salve Regina," as my bedtime prayer. It is the "Hail Holy Queen" prayer in English, and its haunting melody has never left me.

It is and was the purpose or the point of early hymns (and of modern hymns, too, of course) to present clear doctrinal statements and prayers in simple, memorable form. And so for me the purpose of the "Salve Regina" was achieved. Each night when I pray by heart, I recite a succinct statement of Mary as intermediary and advocate against the dark.

II

In *Benedictine Daily Prayer: A Short Breviary* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 2005), the Office presents hymns for each of the hours. Most of these are over 1,500 years old, many written in the fourth century by or ascribed to St. Ambrose of Milan.

St. Ambrose of Milan and the Christian Latin poet, Prudentius, appear to have created or adapted this particular genre of songs/poems, which were useful in liturgical ceremony, short and easily memorized, and which contained sound teaching. Although authorship of many of the hymns in use today cannot be established beyond doubt, it seems likely that Ambrose set their themes and tones

Ambrose may have also initiated or at least extended the tradition of ending his hymns with the doxology we all know from our Office of the Hours – a reminder that there are really three persons in one God, not, as the Arians would have it (during the controversy that raged at the time) that the Son of God is a subordinate entity to God the Father, begotten by the Father.

The history of Western Latin hymnody extends about a thousand year from the time of Ambrose to the rise of hymns in the vernacular and, of course, the influence of the Reformation. Among the most famous poets are the 6<sup>th</sup> century Fortunatus, the author of the *Pange Lingua* and *Vexilla regis* of the Passiontide liturgy. St. Thomas Aquinas (13<sup>th</sup> century) is also thought to be the author of the *Pange lingua*.

Since the Reformation and the Second Vatican Council, the history of Western hymnody has diverged in many directions, but I would like to stay with some of the imagery of the early hymns which are included in our *Benedictine Short Breviary*, especially those that use the imagery of light.

### III

As I say the Office for Lauds by myself, the sky is usually dark, and I very often imagine how early monks would have chanted their prayers, either by heart in the darkness or by candlelight. I imagine the chill of the stone monasteries, and the very real longing for dawn, for the sun, for daylight, for its warmth. Night and dark were understandably sinister, dangerous elements, the context for the works of the Devil, for threats from bandits, for all sorts of crime as well as for sins of the flesh. The night was also uncomfortably cold so much of the year.

And so I imagine a more intense, a more serious edge to the contrasting images of night and day, light and darkness, for those who wrote and chanted the Office hymns. The juxtaposition of the hymns of Lauds and Vespers with the references to the actual beginning and ending of the day, suggests a metaphor that is not simply circadian or seasonal but something visceral and fleshy, something that somehow transcends the simple statement that Christ is the light of the world. It is something more immediate and palpable. These are after all, poems or chants deliberately designed to be recited or sung in the context of night and day, and they gained and still gain much of their power from that evocative framework.

### V

The hymn at None from the Ordinary of the Liturgy of the Hours, *Rerum Deus tenax vigor*, anticipates, by its position in the Office, and by the time of day at which it is used, the fear of approaching darkness, which is so much like the fear of the approach of death itself.

*As we life's eventide draw near,  
Give us your light, remove our fear,  
With happy death may we be blest,  
And find in you eternal rest.*

*Lucis Creator optime* of Sunday's Second Vespers tightens the connection between the daylight and grace, expresses gratitude for both the physical world, visible because of natural light, as well as for the light of grace and new birth:

*O gracious Maker, God of light  
You gave us light that we might see  
The wonders of the world you made  
By your own will and wise decree.*

*We thank you for the sunlight bright,  
Sustaining life and growth on earth;  
We thank you for the light of grace  
Which by your love gave us new birth.*

*O beata trinitas* from Sunday's First Vespers, presents a mindfulness of the end of the day and the need for God's light:

*O blessed Trinity of Light  
And central Unity of might;  
As sunlight changes into night,  
May charity as light be bright.*

At Compline, the *Te Lucis ante terminum* reiterates the connection between the end of the day and the end of life, repeating the theme of None's *Rerum Deus tenax vigor*:

*As we to end of life draw near,  
Console us Lord, remove our fear,  
May we with light and grace be blessed  
And find in you eternal rest.*

And the Compline petition prayer is even more direct:

*Protect us, Lord, while we are awake and safeguard us while we sleep, that we may keep watch with Christ and rest in peace.*

## VI

Morning hymns present a different perspective on the night, shifting its context from the night as death to the night as a source of sickness, crime and ignorance. The day, on the other hand, is a source of hope, spiritual practice and renewal

In the *Aeterne rerum Conditor* of Sunday's Lauds, the hymnist writes:

*Creator of the universe  
You made the course of night and day;  
The seasons move by your design  
So that there may be pleasing change.*

*At cockcrow hope is born anew,  
Healing increases for the sick,  
Crime sheathes its sabre and retreats,  
New courage comes to weakened faith.*

*O Light, shine in our hearts today,  
Dispel the darkness from our minds;  
To you we sing our morning praise  
And dedicate ourselves again.*

*Splendor Paternae gloriae* from Monday at Lauds proclaims that Christ is the Light. He is the Day itself. The light of the sun and the light of Christ are tightly bound, the temporal and the eternal fused in metaphor:

*O splendor of the Father's ray,  
Extending to us light from light  
O Light of light and source of life,  
O Day who made the light of day.*

*O come true Sun, and live in us  
Shed your eternal light on us;  
And may the Spirit's radiance shine,  
To guide our senses on this day.*

*The golden dawn brings on the sun;  
May the true Sun arise in us;  
The Son is with the Father one*

*The Father also with the Son.*

Tuesday at Vigils reiterates this close tie between the day and Christ in *Consors paterni luminis*. And here, there are evil spirits in the night that are broken by song.

*O God from God and Light from Light  
You are yourself the Day  
Our chants shall break the clouds of night  
Be with us while we pray:*

*Remove the darkness from our mind,  
The evil spirits put to flight  
Unite us all in faith and love  
And keep us always in your sight.*

*Ales diei nuntius* in Tuesday at Lauds brings an ethical corollary to the day. Christ calls out for right living:

*The stately rooster, herald of dawn,  
With piercing voice announces day:  
But Jesus, herald of God's own Light,  
Calls out to us: "Do not delay.  
"Awake," he cries, "'tis time for life,  
Away with beds and lazy sleep;  
Lead sober, pure and upright lives,  
For I am near, your souls to keep."*

*Nox et tenebrae* in Wednesday at Lauds again contrasts the relief one feels at the dawning of the day, the dispelling of "evil things" and "shadows of the night":

*Darkness of night and evil things,  
Confusions of the world, give way,  
Light enters and the day is here,  
Disperse, for Christ the Lord has come.*

*Shadows of the night depart in haste,  
Pierced by the sun's compelling ray  
The world appears in colored hue,  
Bright in the glory of the day.*

*We only know you, Christ alone;  
Sincerely and insistentlly,  
O light from heaven, Morning Star,  
Serenely shine on us today.*

In *Lux ecce surgit aurea* of Thursday's Lauds, the light allows the singer to see and to avoid the dark abyss – a metaphor especially powerful perhaps in a world without electric lights and decent roads. And again there is a moral here: to remain calm and pure and honest and free from harmful thoughts: a morality of day against the immorality of night..

*Behold the golden Light appears,  
Making night's blindness fade away.  
Too long has it led us astray  
And drawn us toward the dark abyss.*

*May this new day be calmly passed  
May we keep pure while it shall last.  
Nor let our lips from truth depart  
Nor evil plans engage the heart.*

*Above us is His loving eye  
The faithful Guardian all our life,  
Witness of all our daily deeds  
From break of day till evening star.*

*Aurora jam spargit polum* in Saturday's Lauds reiterates the theme: When dawn comes, sin and darkness disappear. Frightening phantoms, bad dreams, perhaps, and guilt from our sins are wiped away. And the poet looks ahead to the "final morning" when all of the negatives will vanish in the true Light.

*The dawn now spreads its rosy hue,  
Daylight descends upon the earth;  
Morn's shining rays their course begin:  
Farewell to darkness and to sin.*

*May phantoms of the night be gone,  
All trace of guilt be cleansed away;  
Whatever weighs upon our heart  
Let it with darkness now depart.*

*Then when that final morning comes,  
Humbly and hopefully we ask:  
To see, illumined by new sight,  
What we now sing by early light,*

This is also the prayer of the Magnificat Antiphon from December 21, the “O” antiphon:

*O Rising Dawn, Radiance of the Light, eternal and Sun of Justice; Come and enlighten those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death.*

And, of course, the true Dawn rises as He promised: *Aurora lucis rutilat* the hymn for Lauds at Easter Sunday is a victory song instead of an exhortation or petition so common in both morning and evening hymns, a reassurance that the Resurrection is the ultimate victory of Light over darkness.

*The golden dawn has spread her rays,  
The heavens now resound in praise,  
The earth exalts in jubilee  
While Darkness groans in agony,*

*For He the king with glorious strength  
has crushed death’s power with mighty arm,  
He trampled darkness underfoot,  
and freed those who were languishing*

## VII

In the readings throughout the church year, I feel a certain uneasiness about the possibility that evil might overcome good. The uneasiness, of course, is my own, and it comes from questions about my own faith and death.

After all, Christ was betrayed and crucified. Darkness covered the earth when he died on the cross. Every Easter (and every morning in the Mass and the Office of the Hours), the darkness is broken, and the Light of the World is victorious once again, but still I wonder about myself, and so I read and watch the story one more time.

In the daily hymns of the Office, I acknowledge the fear of death that made Jesus himself sweat blood. With them, I hope and pray that for me and those I love the night will not prevail. And I meet darkness and my fear of darkness with my first hymn from the seminary over half a century ago, a plea to the great Queen and Advocate: *Salve Regina*.





*Sanctuary Light, Photo by Randy Cox*

## **OUR HOLY CHALLENGE**

By Robert Johnson

Lay Cistercians offer a unique “flavor” of the religious life involving work and prayer, ora et labora, as lived by our Cistercian monks yet as transposed by lay Cistercians into our everyday work-a-day lives. A charism different yet intimately related to that of our monks at Gethsemani. Is this important to you? Important enough to share with others? How might this be done?

First, we meet in local communities: Chicago like others in our eight local LCG communities may comfortably live in isolation and independence by only attending our local meetings, maintaining telephone and email contact with members, even

joining in periodic community dinner (most recently hosted by Brent Wilson at his Milwaukee home.) We select our lectio piece, choose a book or other common focus reading, and offer prayers for our monks and LCG, Lay Cistercians. It is so comfortable to meet intimately and share matters of life and spirit. We could almost do it alone, as if on an island. Are our windows open?

Second, we are integrated in LCG: each local community is part of LCG, from which we receive Vigils readings, Chapter Talks, homilies, and other communications but, overall, we can become rather isolated in our comfortable local community “nest.” Yet we are devoted to Gethsemani, to “our” Gethsemani monks, and eager to attend LCG retreats to visit the Abbey and recharge our spiritual batteries. To what extent does LCG offer elements that unite us—to Gethsemani and to each other? Gethsemani is the glue uniting our local communities. Our common Advisory Council is charged to assure nourishment to local communities by facilitating the sharing of elements between communities and from Gethsemani.

Third, labor and prayer are needed to sustain our LCG: without constant attention each community easily can become a silo, independent of duty and responsibility to our LCG and Gethsemani. We are challenged to overcome the “silo-effect.” Most of us have little time to spend communicating with lay Cistercians other than in our local community. We know work, family church, and home place honest and important demands. Yet, without willing workers our LCG becomes as a house built on sand. We assume communications from Gethsemani come with regularity. We assume continuation of Vigils readings, Chapter Talks, monthly LCG Compline, suggested reading lists, communications about our international lay sisters and brothers. We assume continued organized retreats to meet and worship with our LCG sisters and brothers, sharing the joy of our charism. We are blessed with many riches from Gethsemani and our local communities: our Advisory Council facilitates these activities.

Fourth, we can more widely share our charism: as we avoid siloes in our local communities we may broaden our horizon to more widely share our pearl of great price, the lay Cistercian charism. LCG of all lay Cistercian communities in the world, has the breadth of spirit and organization structure to share the charism with many people. If there is a somewhat evangelical spirit, a desire to share our wonderful

Cistercian charism to a world so greatly in need, it lies within our powers in LCG. We of Gethsemani particularly sense and echo the spirit of Thomas Merton.

We encourage our disparate local communities to reach the greater number. Unlike nearly all other lay communities in the world only our Kentucky community meets at the monastery. The rest of us meet and share the charism monthly hundreds of miles from Gethsemani. Yet, through LCG we share our wonderful spring of living water—the Cistercian spirit learned and sharpened through our formation process. Is this important in your life, important enough to share with dear friends and colleagues? To share with unknown persons around the US and the world?

Fifth, an emerging LCG charism. Though not fully developed, I suspect if we were to share in a room (or on line) those elements that unite us we could identify our unique LCG shared life. Not unlike the Identity document developed by international lay Cistercians in Spain in 2008. As Maya Angelou said: we are more the same than different. With common understanding and articulation of our charism we can effectively offer our charism to others.

Sixth: identity and formation: we incorporate our charism in a robust and common formation program for our new candidates—to fully develop understanding and appreciation of: our Cistercian history, the rich legacy of Cistercian writers, Gethsemani history, the comfort offered by stability of the daily office, daily prayer, Marian devotion, and the application of the Cistercian spirit in our daily lay life. We may call it “Cistercian 101.” Important for our wider mission, our shared formation should be accessible through our website even to people unable to or uninterested in joining LCG—but who will be exposed to and learn to live the lay Cistercian charism! Even to people in, say, Boise, Idaho.

Seventh, invitation: what might facilitate our sharing? We can support the Council to identify and commend successful programs developed in our communities. Continue and expand the use of our website and email program. Perhaps offer forums where people discuss and expand on a question or matter. Perhaps a periodic speaker series or monks and others through videoconference may focus on matters of Cistercian life and history. Continue and expand our wonderful *LCG Journal*—encouraging people to share when Cistercian charism made a difference in

their life. We are encouraged to solicit you to realize these and other efforts, offering to others what you have found important in your life.

Closure and plea: we are empowered and beholden to share what we have learned to a world with ravishing need. And our LCG structure best allows this wider sharing. We need only the spirit and work (ora et labora, again) to share our LCG devotion with our colleagues both present and those in the future. Will you join us? Contact your local community leaders and the advisory council. Pitch in. Many hands make light work!



*Formation Conference, Artwork by Ray Geers*

# There is you see...

Ed Salerno

There is you see,  
you see there is this tree  
right in the middle of a parking lot  
and it has pods of seeds ready and  
waiting to fall to the ground and  
become.

Sad fate,  
Asphalt  
planet  
landing.

To  
bounce  
to  
roll  
to  
rot in the sun, be crushed  
by tires and soles of feet  
picked up and examined tossed aside  
in ignorance while father/mother  
tree look on and weep –

another generation lost...

Why, if I were a tree, I wouldn't bloom  
just to protest the absurdity of this doom.

This  
tree  
bearing  
its  
fruit,  
the  
life  
of  
this  
truth  
of  
this  
universe  
in  
cyclical  
motion  
for  
all  
to  
see,

spat  
upon  
ridiculed  
mocked  
parked  
under  
in  
a  
parking lot  
for  
shade,  
It's  
a damn  
shame!

If I were a tree  
I'd cry – to irrigate  
my seeds, I'd try  
to delineate my needs  
I'd die...

Too  
old  
to

change  
the  
way  
I  
move  
summer  
spring  
winter  
fall,  
to  
lift  
my  
branches  
roots  
and  
soul  
and  
move  
to  
peace  
my  
children  
to  
plant  
my



leaves

to

live

my

heart

to

sing

my

shade

to

give.

# STRIVING TO ENTER THROUGH THE NARROW GATE:

## Capturing My Spiritual Journey in Haiku

Several years ago I started writing haiku poetry to express my spiritual thoughts and feelings. Inspired by the haiku writing style of Br. Paul Quenon, OCSO, I like to write multi-stanza haiku poems which allow me to go deeper than a single three-line haiku composed of five, seven and five syllables. Most of my work can be described as an uninterrupted dialogue with God through which I express my inner most longings and struggles and open them up to God. Sometimes they can get pretty “dark.” But my favorites are the ones I write with inspiration from my visits to the Abbey of Gethsemani, my life as a Lay Cistercian, and my love of Thomas Merton. I usually write them in microbursts and often find that each stanza writes itself before I can catch my breath. A close friend described my haiku poems this way: "word/phrase image/impression bursts to capture the full/whole contemplative flavor, clustered to enhance/sharpen." Another friend told me that through haiku I am able to “zero in on particular insights that simply wouldn’t take shape without the [haiku] form.”

I hope you enjoy these selections, inspired by Gethsemani and Thomas Merton.

Scott Gilliam  
Cincinnati Lay Cistercian Community

**MERTON'S TIMELESS CONVERSION.** In September 2017 I made a pilgrimage to Corpus Christi Church in NYC near the campus of Columbia University with Sr. Mary Lanning, my mentor in ministry to the homeless. A friendly young woman named Sarah answered the rectory doorbell and cheerfully accommodated our request to visit the sanctuary and the baptismal font where Merton made his conversion to Catholicism. Sarah also invited me to visit the room in the rectory where Merton first talked to the parish priest about converting to Catholicism. I was mesmerized by the carving of Christ's baptism on the front of the font (see the accompanying picture), which planted the seed for this haiku.



## "The Spring of Life"

By Scott Gilliam | Haiku Poet  
September 20, 2017

Sacred marble font.  
Hidden in the back of a  
Small neighborhood church.

I dipped my fingers  
In its cool pool of water  
And signed my forehead.

Thoughts of the countless  
Pilgrims who have made this trek  
Filled my head and heart.

Thousands united  
By the waters of the spring  
Which join us to God.

Such a powerful  
Symbol of our journey to  
Daily conversion.

I wetted my hand  
And returned to the pews where  
My friend was seated.

I touched her forehead  
With my wet hand and whispered  
"From the Merton font."

Sister Mary smiled  
And acknowledged my gesture.  
We sat in silence.

I wonder how that  
Future Trappist monk felt the  
Day he met the font?  
Energized? Alive?  
Like a beloved child of  
Our great Creator?

I made a deep sigh.  
Time to return to the world.  
But with renewed calm.

I left with deep joy.  
With my batteries recharged.  
God still reigned in me.

Thank you, dear Thomas.  
Your baptismal courage has  
Blessed many pilgrims.

+++

## BOOK REVIEW

### *The Saint vs. The Scholar, The Fight Between Faith and Reason*

by Jon M. Sweeney.

Intuition or Reason—the way of St. Bernard or of Peter Abelard? *The Saint vs. the Scholar* deftly explores the lives of both noting their privileged childhoods, their notable successes, and their constant aggressive denials/denunciations of each other.

Both dedicated to Mother Church and ordained into orders, Peter requested the June 2, 1140, forum at Sens Cathedral to refute Bernard's slanderous accusations. As six bishops entered the forum not one looked toward Peter, who knew the jig was up. Rudely, roughly, Bernard slammed a pile of Peter's theological papers on the table while loudly proclaiming: "*Damnamus!*" Quickly each bishop/judge echoed Bernard's shockingly loud dismissal of Peter's papers. Abelard quickly departed (he said: "To Rome"! ) Bernard had stacked the stage against him...again!

Peter Abelard was the most widely known and quoted scholar and intellectual of the era and a great writer (perhaps today more widely known for exquisite correspondence with his beloved Heloise). He later became an abbot.

Bernard, eminent Cistercian abbot, the maker of Popes, cheerleader of the Second Crusade, and mediator between kings was seen by some as more powerful than the Pope. Bernard masterly wrote of his abiding love of God including his magnificent, nearly erotic sermons on the Song of Songs.

The book frames their smoldering antagonism as the result of two ways of knowing: intuitive and rational. Both protagonists were God-devoted, renowned leaders in France and the Western world; the author suggests their differences continue through our present time. And offers that their contemporary, Hildegard of Bingen, might have offered a third way—something that we in the twenty-first century might adopt—accepting the truth and validity of both ways of knowing.

Breezily written and fact filled, the book describes the vast power and authority wielded by Bernard, his many contacts, his arrival at Citeaux, two years later founding the Cistercian Abbey at Clairvaux, later to found another seventy monasteries.

How do we “know”? Do we rely on the past, on the Bible and writings of the Saints and holy people? Or are we offered a wider ambit, to pursue the rational inquiry, to question everything, as Peter did as one of the first Christian humanists? The book offers a good glimpse into the characters and their era, always with focus on the truths of intuition and reason. A rather simple read but informative, particularly for we lay Cistercians to better appreciate the life, times, and power of St. Bernard.

Review by Robert Johnson

## *A CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS*

### *The Journal of the Lay Cistercians of Gethsemani Abbey*

The *Journal of the Lay Cistercians of Gethsemani Abbey* invites different forms of reflection through essays, poetry and other written narratives, as well through art, photographs or video presentations. The *Journal* also encourages book reviews and scholarly submissions, such as studies and reflections about Cistercian writers or themes. Monks of the Abbey are also invited to submit their works to the *Journal*.

An editorial committee reviews submissions, may make suggestions for corrections or changes, if needed, and attempts to compose a balanced selection of material for each issue of the on-line periodical. The *Journal* will be posted when sufficient material has been accepted. Volunteers to help shape the *Journal* and assist with editorial committee reviews are welcome!

For further information or to submit work for consideration, contact any member of the Journal Coordinating Committee:

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