

*The Journal of the
Lay Cistercians
of Gethsemani Abbey*

Issue 5 – Season of Advent 2019



Logo for the September 2019 Retreat by Ray Geers

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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 companioning 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

At the recent LCG retreat, I took part in a small-group session in which we all shared our experiences about the influence of the Plan of Life on our spiritual pilgrimages. Among the many impressions I brought away with me was a recognition of the diversity of religious experiences the participants of my group shared.

One member described a long journey from discouragement to finding home in the monastic setting. Another member enthusiastically talked about his lectio. Another spoke about a gradual awakening to the love of God. Another spoke of the structure of the Plan of Life as a helpful scaffolding for building belief. Another spoke of the Plan as an anchor in the midst of an ongoing struggle with doctrine. Some spoke with conviction and confidence, others spoke tentatively of their doubts.

As the session came to a close, many of the members thought that these were the kinds of stories we could share in the *Journal*.

That is the invitation to you for Issue 6.

Bill Felker

Monk Dreams:
(Another Chapter from my
unpublished book, tentatively entitled
My Monkish Twin: A Novice Tale)

By Ray Geers

*If my devils are to leave me,
I am afraid my angels will take flight as well.*

Rainer Maria Rilke

I dreamed I put on the religious habit of a Trappist monk and walked through the familiar monastery complex towards the church for community prayer time. But something was wrong. I was not welcome there as I had been in the past. Nobody said this out loud, but I could see it in the expressions of the monks. I was out of sync with what was going on as we transitioned from the divine office to the refectory for the noon day meal. As I got into line for dinner –it was a long line with everyone in the black and white habit of a Trappist monk –I attempted to smile at a passer-by, but the smile went unrecognized. Finally, I could sense the thoughts of the brothers: "Why be a father of three when you're really still a monk on the inside?" and

“How can you be a monk on the inside while married and the father of three on the outside?”

I woke up to from this dream, like so many others before, feeling lost inside a living, breathing, puzzle. What did these monk dreams want from me? The dreams were searching my life for something I couldn't tell, or at least not yet. In recent years, my parents had both died, my children were moving out of childhood and my marriage, like my career, seemed to be stuck in routines that spoke less and less to what was alive in my heart. What could the dreams be opening for me in the doldrums of my middle-aged life?

An image of this came to me while re-visiting the same Catholic monastery where I once thought I could live the rest of my life as a monk. While walking through the monastery corridors, I imagined what it would be like to meet an identical twin of myself who was still living the life I left behind so many years ago. I wondered what this “other me” would be like and how he would be different from the person I am now. I also asked myself what this monkish twin, this common ancestor to my original self, would say to me at this point in my life?

So, I began to imagine a reunion in which my old monkish-self and my new, rather less, monkish-self could finally sit down and spend some meaningful time getting to know each other again. I could see them staring intently at each other, no longer avoiding eye contact as near-strangers, but with boldness and growing confidence. But could they transverse across the years and over the barriers of limited memory? Could they discover a common

bond and a deeper, more rooted, meaning? Only by a continual reaching-out, was my guess, which was no longer satisfied with counting the costs or hedging one's bet. They could cross over the separation between them only by a fearlessness that seemed almost exactly like foolishness.

And that is what has been happening to me. Ever since the "monk dreams" started percolating in my sleep, the quest has been on for me to find a way to bridge the gap between past and present realities. By turning back and re-visiting the scenes of the past, I hope to find compelling answers to the questions posed by "the brothers" of the dream recounted above:

*"Why be a father of three when you're really still a monk on the inside?"
and "How can you be a monk on the inside while married and the father of three on the outside?"*

This is how the story, *My Monkish Twin: A Novice Tale*, was begun.

Being new to this kind of questing, I instinctively went back in memory to a time before the orderly calculation of consequences was available to me. It was there, in my graceful, clumsy youth, that the road was being built which would lead me out to a soaring spiritual height and then bring me back home again, safely, but maybe a bit too safely.

Early Cistercian Architectural Detail: Photo by Randy Cox



My Desert Season

By Scott Gilliam

As many of you know, I enjoy writing haiku in an unconventional, multi-stanza form. As my devotion to the Lay Cistercian charism has deepened, so has my use of the haiku to enter into spiritual dialogue with God. I'd like to share one such haiku, which recently wrote itself as I settled into my new life after retiring from the corporate world. The haiku below explores my desire to let the winds of life take me in a new direction as I seek to abandon the character traits I developed as a hard-charging Machiavellian lobbyist and embrace my desert season. I do not think I could have let the winds of life carry me in this new direction without my devotion to the LCG Plan of Life. Much work remains to be done as seek to leave the jet stream of my ego behind. But life is good in my desert season.

“My Desert Season”

by Scott Gilliam – Haiku Poet

August 30, 2019

Everything changes
When you accept the changing
Seasons of your life

Everything changes
When you ditch expectations
Of recognition.

Everything changes
When you give the power of
The pause room to breathe.

Everything changes
When you stop chasing windmills
And enjoy the breeze.

Everything changes
When your addiction becomes
Anonymity.

Everything changes
When just being overtakes
The stress of doing.

But nothing will change
If you fail to lose yourself
In these gifts from God.

So stop, take deep breaths,
And accept these changes in
Your desert season.



Photo by Scott Gilliam

The Long Lake

by Randy Cox

It's a long way
to the end of Frederick's Lake,
nearly beyond the seeing

the Sun sets there
and so do the mallards at dusk

The water lilies
grow along the East end
their trumpet stalks
bowing toward the dimming light

On a still evening
the long lake becomes a mirror
capturing the shadows
of oaks and maples
upstanding and fallen

The long lake
sings every Summer's twilight
echoing through nearby knobs
and hollows beneath their peaks
a haunting siren's song in
subtle tones and timbres
reminiscent of long lost love



Fredrick's Lake
Photo by Randy Cox

The Rhapsodic

(for Br Paul Quenon)

by Randy Cox

There is a fine line between
Hearing voices and hearing God
The rhapsodic melody of meaning
Takes the monk to heights unknown
Unpredictable and unexpected

The melodic places which appear
at times so out of character
Yet so sublime as to be shocking
Between the lines of the Psalms
And closing Compline into silence

In the temporal subliminal moment
When a tune or a text or a word
Or a sound lift the monk to new
Heights and new depths unrealized
Ever before and quite possibly, ever again

The earth moves under his sandled feet
The skies open to his hooded head
The choir becomes a concert stage
And the voice of heaven is heard
In the rhapsodic tome of eternity



Merton's Cross: Enhanced Photo by Randy Cox

Peregrine Wings

By Linda Boerstler

Peregrine wings

Bear me up to the branches green

To where the landscape sings

Where they are touched by the sun.

And carried on peregrine wings.

Look into my Heart

By Linda Boerstler

Look into my heart
And remove everything
That blocks my ability
To love you.

Pull out the fear of
Not having enough
And replace it with peace
Of what I already possess.

I need to see beyond
The clouds, and the fog
To the brightening stars
Above them – and know.

That is where the real
Comes from, rolling down
The hills like a downward
Flowing creek

Stopping for nothing
And running over,
Or diverting any obstacles.
You my only vision.

I cry because I
Don't belong
And cannot find the place where
I can settle and rest.

But I should be
Joyful because
That place is not here.

I am not a citizen of
This planet
I am a citizen of heaven
And heaven awaits my arrival.

Be at Peace, oh Lord

by Linda Boerstler

Be my peace, oh Lord
Let me walk on the water
On the Sea of Galilee.

May I look fully into
Your face, lest I look
At the waves that surround me.

I know that you
Are not far from me
Let me hear you call my name.

Don't let the fear consume me.
I know that I cannot stand
Without you beside me.

Help me to trust you.
Nothing makes sense anymore.
I am easily lost.

You are the one I long for
Don't let me try to fulfill those longings
With anything but you.

Moving into Spring

By Linda Boerstler

Moving into spring.
Crocuses pushing through
The hard once frozen ground
Dazzling and brand new.

Bright daffodils cheer
As if they are just born.
And everything's singing
And praising the Lord.

Spring is gentle but –
Fierce to take her place
transplanting winter to make room
With a smile on her face.

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 Bill Felker, Journal Committee Coordinator, at wlfelker@gmail.com or (937) 767-7434.



Enhanced Photo by Randy Cox