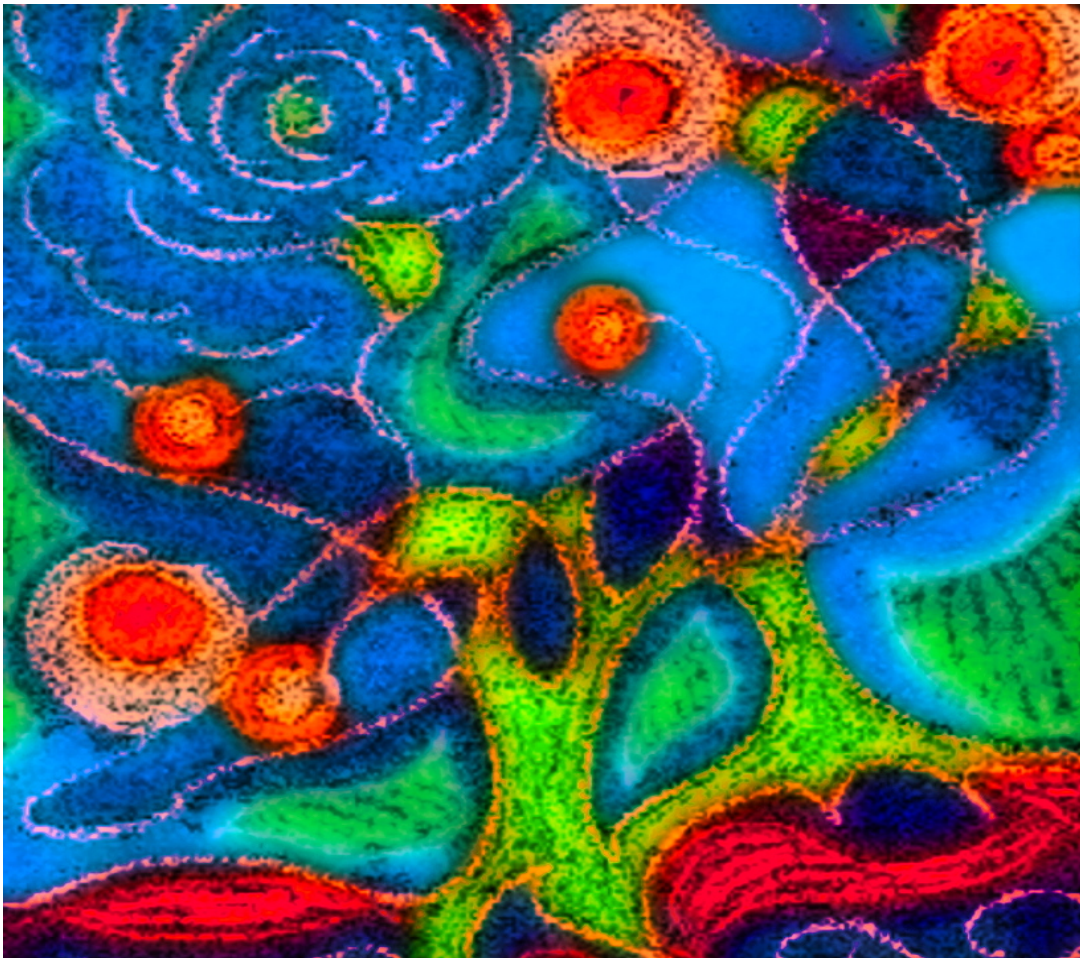


The Journal of the

Lay Cistercians of Gethsemani Abbey

Issue 8 – Season of Lent 2021



The Journal of the Lay Cistercians of Gethsemani Abbey

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.

CONTENTS

Introductory Note	p. 4
<i>Life –Long Companions</i> by Allen Thyssen	p. 6
<i>True Self/False Self</i> by Stephan Young	p. 10
<i>Book Review: For Your Own People: Aelred of Rievault's Pastoral Prayer</i> by Mike Johnson	p. 18
<i>God Alone: Jottings</i> by Joe Gentilini	p. 22
<i>There's Gold on That Beach</i> by Pat Klus	p. 26
<i>Encounters with the Holy</i> by Ed Salerno	p. 29
<i>Working as Team: My Daily Bread</i> by Ray Geers	p. 39
<i>God is my Refuge</i> by Linda Boerstler	p. 42
Call for Submissions	p. 43

All original art work is by Ray Geers

Introductory Note

This eighth issue of the Journal of the Lay Cistercians of Gethsemani Abbey presents the process of Lenten discernment from many sides.

In the beautiful memoir, “Life-long Companions,” Allen Thyssen reflects on the career path he chose as a young man and how his true love, the love of music, never died and finally bloomed as he reached maturity.

Stephan Young’s essay, “True Self – False Self,” explores the themes of identity and music from a different angle. From the conviction that we are all children of God and that God loves us, Stephan moves through issues of personal prayer and self-knowledge to matters of culture and social justice.

Mike Johnson’s review of Marsha Dutton’s *For Your Own People: Aelred of Rievaulx’s Pastoral Prayer* considers Cistercian spirituality from the standpoint of Aelred’s philosophy of friendship and leadership, pointing out the practical application of this author’s work in lay monastic life.

“God Alone: Jottings” by Joe Gentilini highlights the complexities of finding the true self in the very real world of sexuality and social-religious norms. The true self and the false self not only coexist but their contradictions are the source of deep pain and confusion. The contemplative journey may uncover the resolution, the wholeness.

“There’s Gold on That Beach,” a poem by Pat Klus, offers a different portrait of conflicted emotions and the tentative nature of wholeness. “For with a different set of eyes one sees rightly,” the poet says, “Until....”

The autobiographical narrative by Ed Salerno, “Encounters with the Holy,” details Ed’s long journey from Confirmation in the Catholic Church, through Fundamentalism and Zen Buddhism to the Lay Cistercians of Gethsemani. Like many of the spiritual pilgrims in this issue of the *Journal*, Ed honors the numerous

realizations that ultimately end with the acceptance of a true self and with “God Alone. Home at Last.”

In “Working as a Team: My Daily Bread,” Ray Geers, presents an example of how all of this might come together in a practice of service. And as in all the stories included in this collection, that practice is never simple. Ray writes:

*“Love is in the mess
And love is there to bless
Despite all the crazies and distress
Love is in the mess”*

Linda Boerstler, who will be the coordinator for the next copy of the *Journal*, closes Issue 8 with a poem-prayer, “God is my Refuge,” a psalm-like admission that the only answer to the mess is God.

LIFE-LONG COMPANIONS

By Allen Thyssen

Spiritus LCG Community
9 February 2021
Sugar Land, Texas
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*“The choices you make may make you or they may break you
but in either case they will define you.” (author unknown)*

I vividly recall that crisp fall day on the campus of Louisiana Tech when as a sophomore at university I realized that I could no longer pursue both music and engineering. What was a young man to do? Upon reflection, I surmised that an engineer could probably buy a nice stereo whereas most music majors might have more difficulty with their finances. So,

on the sidewalk outside the band hall I informed my band director that I would no longer be participating in his program.

The following three years were very difficult. I worked in natural gas plants during the summer and studied during the school year. I was not particularly talented as an engineering student and it took a great deal of perseverance to complete the program. On the side, I probably also spent more time in the religion section of the library than I did studying engineering. (I was trying to sort my life out.) In the end I did obtain a degree in Chemical Engineering and was soon licensed as a Professional Engineer. Before long I found myself working in the international petroleum industry.

One day in 1976 I was walking down the cobbled streets of Stavanger, Norway when I spotted a bare brass baritone horn in a shop window. It “had my name written all over it.” So, to the astonishment of my wife, that simple horn came home with me. A couple of years later we were living in London. I was stunned one day to come upon a watercolor painting that was hanging in the stairway of an English antique shop. It depicted an old man planning his horn. Below the painting was the caption, “Life-long Companions”. That painting came home with us. I had become an engineer, but the music bug was still present. I had also become a “closet horn player.”

By the mid 1980s we were living in Cairo, Egypt. One evening I attended a wedding that was held in Giza at the base of the Great Pyramids. The bride and groom were seated in a “throne” on the roof of what would become their humble mud brick home. A brass band was playing Egyptian music. On a lark I borrowed one musician’s baritone and proceeded to play “When the Saints Go Marching In” to the largely Muslim and Coptic Christian audience. Of course, they had no idea of what the lyrics meant. Great fun!

Much later I purchased a nice Besson 956 baritone on my 60th birthday. It wasn’t a stereo but it was certainly a good substitute! Before long I found myself playing with the Tyler Community Band. It was fun but my eyes had trouble reading the music, so before long I had to quit. But the “closet playing” continued.

Today I am 76 years old and retired. No longer the engineer, I have just purchased a world class Adams E1 euphonium that is being flown in from Holland as I type. I have become that old man in the painting! I fantasize that the new horn will serve as my constant companion for whatever time I have left on this earth. It will become a contemplative-oriented devotional tool, providing breathing exercise and the playing of spiritually oriented music.

I feel something like Rip van Winkle. Having slept for 40 years, I have awakened to find professional and serious amateur euphonium players sharing their trade all across the Internet. Euphonium Facebook groups abound. For example, last weekend I was able to sit in on two one hour Zoom classes with the renowned Steven Mead (lives in England) and 130 other players from literally around the world...for free.

Yes, the choices we make may make us or they may break us but in either case they will define us. Choose well!



True Self/False Self

By Stephan Young

Cincinnati LCG

True Self/False Self

I am what God Says I am

At its simplest, our true self is who we are at our core, in our essence. The false self is all the other personas we manifest throughout our lives. The false self is not bad; in fact, it's necessary. But even though it is necessary, it is not who we are. The false self is like clothes we wear or roles we play – we usually don't want to be seen naked or with no sense of self, no ego –and yet there are moments when you truly feel genuinely you and moments, special moments, when you feel accepted by another for who you truly are, moments when you know love. Moments of peace and joy.

The roots of our understanding of true self/false self are from the psychology of Carl Jung, which was then written about by Thomas Merton and later Basil Pennington and Thomas Keating. As these Cistercians point out, the spiritual journey is a process where each of us must learn to see ourselves as God sees us. We need to strip off our false self and acknowledge our true self to make any progress on the journey. Easier said than done.

I'd like to use a scripture passage as a tool to a simple process that I think allows each of us to see our true selves.

“When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi he put this question to his disciples, ‘Who do people say the Son of Man is?’ And they said, ‘Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.’ He said to them, ‘But you, who do you say I am?’ In answer Simon Peter said, ‘You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.’ In reply Jesus said to him, ‘Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you but my Father in heaven. So now I say to you, you are Peter and, on this rock, I will build my church.’ ” Matt. 16:13-18

Now imagine yourself with Jesus and turning the tables you ask, “Lord, who do You say I am?” His response is your true self.

You really need to spend time to *experience* the answer to this question. While you can know it in your mind and feel it in your heart, it isn't until you accept it in the core of your being that you are in touch with your true self. Put simply it is not as important to know your true self or to feel your true self, you need to be your true self.

A friend of mine who studied many years under a Zen master tells me that the first koan he was given to meditate on was “Who am I?” And remember St. Francis who often prayed to God “Who am I, and who are You?”

Having wrestled with this question over the years and read a lot of books and heard talks by and about holy people who have wrestled with this question, I'm going to give you the question's answer, because it turns out the answer is the same for all of us. Read the answer very slowly and let it sink in.

The answer:

You are a child of God, ***and*** God loves you.

You are a child of God *and* God loves you.

That is your true self. No matter how you may try to run from it, deny it, scoff at it, distract yourself from the question and its answer, the core of who you are, the core of who each of us is, is that we are a child of God.

You are a child of God, and if you look around at each person you meet, no matter what their false self may look like, each person everywhere is a child of God. We are all brothers and sisters. Take a deep breath and let that settle in. Wow!

How does that make you feel?

Wouldn't it be wonderful if every moment of your life you were conscious of that fact? If every moment you knew that you are a child of God and so is everyone else, and God loves each of us and all of us.

A priest I know tells a rather lengthy story with the final line being “God loves you and there’s nothing you can do about it.” Put another way, the Hound of Heaven is on your trail.

Pretty special isn’t it? “Nothing can separate us from the love of God.”

And you know it’s true, don’t you? Once you experience your true self you are never again comfortable in you false self. You know the false self is not really who you are. What is so wonderful about family, community, being in love is that we are our true self in the presence of another. Paradise.

That’s why when we see some of our brothers and sisters aren’t being treated as children of God we cry out – Black lives matter!

That’s why when we see children separated from their loving parents and put in cages for desiring a better life for their family, we know that it isn’t right.

The last four years were filled with untruths that tried to convince us that our false self was who we were. If we didn’t realize that already, the insurrection on Jan. 6th, 2021 made us very aware of how powerful and dangerous a false self can become.

No wonder we’ve been angry and unsettled. We cannot rest, until we rest in You.

I mentioned the question St. Francis of Assisi asked, “Who am I and who are You?” If you’ve been to Assisi you know it is a medieval city, enclosed by a wall as many medieval cities were. When Francis heard God speak to his true self, he left his earthly father’s house, living part of his time at San Damiano and eventually in the caves above Assisi. Both places outside the walls. Living as our true selves moves us outside the walls, outside our traditional places of security and safety. And as Francis wrestled with the question of his true self, he grew in his understanding of the answer to that question and he left us the wonderful prayer, “Lord, make me an instrument of Your peace....” Knowing our true self, we are able to take risks, be at peace with ourselves and our history, hopes and aspirations and commit ourselves to being at peace with others. We are driven to do this because it is who we are and we know it is who we are.

Now let’s come down from the mountain like Jesus did in the Gospel for the first week of Lent. How do you live your life, conscious as much of the time as possible of your true self?

1. Forgive yourself: you’re not perfect, will not be perfect and if you’re like the rest of us you probably really screwed up at some point in your life and may do so again. God does not expect perfection. Think of all the reasons you may have for the mistakes you’ve made, the opportunities you’ve lost, the

people you may have hurt. If you had all those reasons on a list would you want to give it to God when you get to the pearly gates? Of course not. Your true self knows those reasons are excuses and God knows who you truly are. Remember, even with all your baggage:

You are a child of God and God loves you.

2. Commit to a life of prayer. Start or continue a practice of prayer. Prayer puts you in God's presence and it is in God's presence that you can be your true self. True prayer is the space you strip yourself of your false self. "Go to your room and the Father who sees...." I've heard Centering Prayer described as a place where there is no room for the false self. In your prayer, let go of your thoughts; they are your false self, trying to get your attention. Thomas Keating talks about the unconscious being healed in Centering Prayer. Simply be present. You will realize you are present to God, that you are a Child of God, that God loves you and that God loves everyone else.
3. Be attentive to when God is most present or least present and, in those times, remember: You are a child of God and God loves you. We've all had those moments that pop up, seemingly out of nowhere, and we're aware that God is present to us at that very moment. Grace, a gift. My experience is that the more

faithful I am to prayer the more likely it is that these moments occur.

I have also learned late in my life that the times I am angry, agitated, anxious or feeling that I don't have control are the times my false self is dominating and I need to remind myself: I am a Child of God and God loves me.

My musical journey over the last few years has more deeply exposed me to the music and spirituality of the African American people and community, a spirituality heavily influenced and shaped by slaves who contributed so much to our country and our spirituality.

They knew their true selves; they knew that they were not slaves but created free by God. Their songs, sometimes written in code, speak to the reality that things are not what they appear here on earth and a true home awaits. Swing low, sweet chariot: help me cross the river to that land where there will be no more weeping and wailing and I will be free.

I'd like to close with a passage from James Weldon Johnson who reflects that spirituality and images God as he creates our true selves.

*Up from the bed of river
God scooped the clay:
And by the bank of the river
He kneeled Him down;
And there the great God Almighty
Who lit the sun and fixed it in the sky,
Who flung the stars to the most far corners of the night,
Who rounded the earth in the middle of his hand;
This Great God,
Like a mammy bending over her baby,
Kneeled down in the dust
Toiling over a lump of clay
Till he shaped it in his own image;
Then into it he blew the breath of life,
And man became a living soul.
Amen, Amen*

From The Creation by James Weldon Johnson

Book Review

By Mike Johnson

Cincinnati LCG Community

Dutton, Marsha. *For Your Own People: Aelred of Rievaulx's Pastoral Prayer*. (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 2008) pp. 69; \$15.95, ISBN 978-0-87907-273-5.

This publication is one of numerous works on the 12th century English Cistercian abbot, Aelred of Rievaulx (1110-1167), written by the Aelredian scholar, Marsha Dutton. [Marsha Dutton is associate editor of *Cistercian Studies Quarterly*.] In this book Dutton provides a critical edition of Aelred's *Pastoral Prayer* with an extensive introduction and annotations. The text of *Pastoral Prayer* is printed in her book in its original Latin with an accompanied English translation.

In her introduction to Aelred's *Pastoral Prayer*, Dutton includes an overview of Aelred's life, discusses the role of abbot in a Cistercian monastery, and provides context for understanding Aelred in light of the Cistercian reforms of Benedictine monasticism. Also, Dutton treats the profound importance of prayer and Aelred's unique contribution to a theology of prayer. She further presents Aelred within the context of his development of a doctrine of spiritual friendship that he developed earlier in his monastic life. Being familiar with Aelred's earlier writings, such as, *The Mirror of Charity* and *Spiritual Friendship*, allows one to have more insight and to

grasp the fruit of Aelred's approach to abbatial leadership. The exact date of composition of *Pastoral Prayer* is not known, but is thought to have been written late in Aelred's life, a few years before his death.

In his *Pastoral Prayer* Aelred illustrates his pastoral skills which he demonstrates both in his role as abbot of Rievaulx over a twenty-year period, plus Aelred's engagement in ecclesial and civil disputes in the Yorkshire area in northern England where Rievaulx is located

Aelred addresses his *Prayer* to Jesus the Good Shepherd. He prays for mercy and wisdom from the Good Shepherd who has appointed him as abbot (father). He seeks to care for his community of brother monks in wisdom and compassion, as he performs his pastoral and administrative responsibilities as abbot. Aelred desires not to "lord it over them." He is guided by charity in all his interactions. Aelred expresses a deep love of his brother monks.

Throughout his *Prayer*, Aelred expresses the virtue of humility in recognizing his lack of worthiness and inadequacy in his role as abbot. He begins his *Prayer* by confessing his sins of his life before he entered the monastery and during his years in the monastery. However, Aelred states his intent to model in his approach to leadership as abbot one of "true shepherd of his flock."

Aelred concludes his *Pastoral Prayer* stating that he is a servant of the Good Shepherd, and, because of Him, theirs (his monks) also,

“...I entrust them into your holy hands, and to your loving providence, in the hope that not even one of them will be snatched out of your hand, or out of the hand of your servant to whom you have entrusted them, but that they may persevere joyously in their holy intention. By persevering may they obtain everlasting life. Grant this sweetest Lord, who live and reign forever and ever. Amen.”

From the early days of our development as lay associates of Gethsemani Abbey and our eventual recognition as Lay Cistercians, we have been encouraged by Fr. Michael Casagram, one of our monastic advisors, to acquire a fundamental understanding of the writings of Aelred of Rievaulx in our efforts to familiarize ourselves with the characteristic elements of the Cistercian charism. Those who serve in leadership roles as members of the LCG Advisory Council and coordinators of local LCG communities could benefit by reading and experiencing Aelred’s *Pastoral Prayer*. Those who are involved with LCG formation and mentoring could also benefit greatly in their roles.

Providing nurturing guidance for fellow LCG members and candidates in their spiritual journey in the Lay Cistercian way of life, local coordinators and mentors should especially be equipped to articulate the unique characteristics of the Cistercian charism for lay persons. Aelred in his *Pastoral*

Prayer provides one resource for LCG leaders in caring for “the LCG flock” in their journeys.



God Alone: Jottings

By Joe Gentilini, PhD
Columbus, Ohio LCG Community

When I was a young man looking at the possibility of entering religious life, I was confronted with the different congregations and orders, some contemplative and some active. I kept thinking that there had to be a combination of both because I doubted that one could be totally one or the other. Richard Rohr, ofm, once wrote that the goal of a spiritual life was to go to a level where the distinction was resolved in God alone, where God holds the paradox. At my age of almost 73, I wanted to journal about how this played out in my own lay vocation and life. These are my jottings.

I think that I have both aspects of contemplation-mysticism and action in my life. I hold the paradox of present church and future church. I hold the mystery of being homosexual – gay – at a time when the RCC cannot affirm my life. I hold the tension of being a gay Catholic man in relationship with Leo and with God within the institutional church. God holds the paradox in my life.

I think the pain of growing up gay in my family, church, and society made me search for God, someone who would and could love me as I was and am. I kept begging God to help me, asking him not to lose me and to help me not lose myself. On occasions, I had a mystical encounter with God. Despite the pain, I knew that God loved me.

But for many years, I searched for God, who often was silent in my life. Looking back in my life now, I saw and see how God protected me, loved me, supported me, pushed me, surrounded me, became a part of me, etc. But living in the dark night was painful over many years. While no one ever really knows God, I have had glimpses of God and I have asked and do ask him to love me into himself - to enter my life and bring me to himself.

I have started to read a new book even though I am already in another one! This one is entitled, *Essential Writings* by Father James Martin, S. J. He is the priest I sent my book (*Hounded by God: A Gay Man's Journey to Self-Acceptance, Love, and Relationship* (2nd edition) by Stratton Press) and letter to last month and he responded.

There is one passage on St. Mother Teresa and the dark night of her soul. In a mystical experience, she promised Jesus to never refuse him anything. I said out loud, but to myself, “I am not that good,” and immediately out came the words, “I have placed you **here**.” I heard them as coming from God, telling me that the path of St. Teresa is not my path and he has not asked me to promise never to refuse him anything. God asks me to be where I am – in a gay relationship within the institutional church. This is my vocation, and this is where I’ll find any holiness.

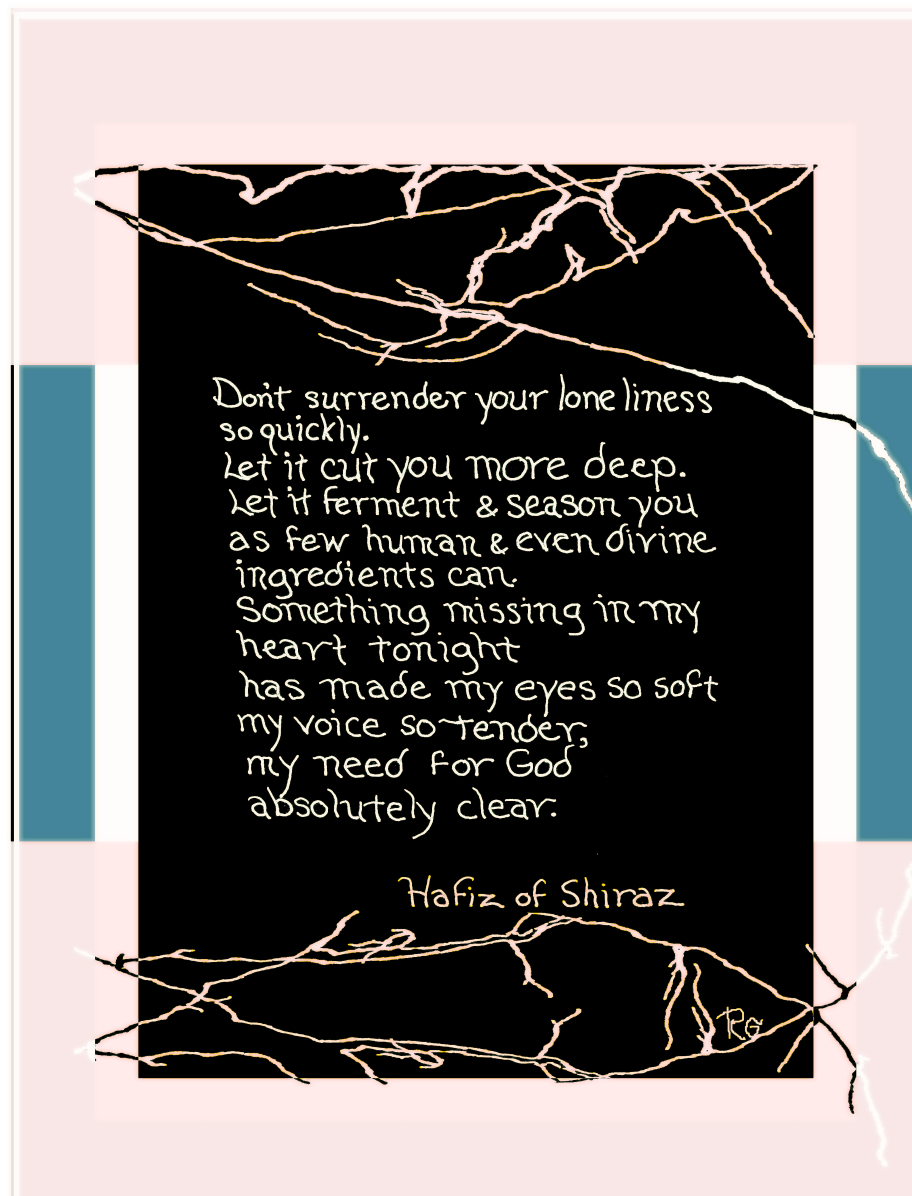
So, God has asked me and does ask me to be here with Him – to be in this place and time. For what purpose? I don’t know. My part in this arrangement with God was to write my journals, share them with Sister Mary and John McNeill, and to be willing to share them with a wider audience. And so, I published my book. As I have written before, my book seems to have touched others who are dealing with their own sexuality and/or spirituality. I have no idea how many – I only hear from some people, but how many has the

book touched that I will never know? Not really important

– how many, or many more than I will ever know.

So God, I accept your bargain – I will do my part.

Joe Gentilini has a Doctorate in Counseling and Guidance and retired from the State of Ohio as a vocational rehabilitation counselor. He lives in Hilliard, Ohio with Leo Radel, his spouse of 39 years. Both are active in DIGNITY/USA and value their Christian spirituality.



There's Gold on That Beach

By

Pat Klus

Cincinnati LCG Community

“Dissolution is the path.” But I resist.

“Failure is the only way to learn now,” I’m told.

It sounds good.

In reality, it hurts. Then it happens:

Angry—

I embark on an operation of sorts—a cleanse. A purge.

I pass by that one house from 2010. 10 years later, am I any better?

More sweat, more pain...again, the only path of transformation.

My Calvary commences under the pier.

The shade is a brief respite from the roiling sun which awaits my Way...back--

But the return is different. My eyes behold the sand brilliant.

Littered with gold, I reach down to pick up a nugget amid a shining powder.

“Fool’s gold,” they’ll say.

But I know better.

For with a different set of eyes one sees rightly.

I tip my sunglasses and realize someone’s been here

before—“flinging gold” to this pilgrim desperately

seeking a different kind of wealth—one more permanent.

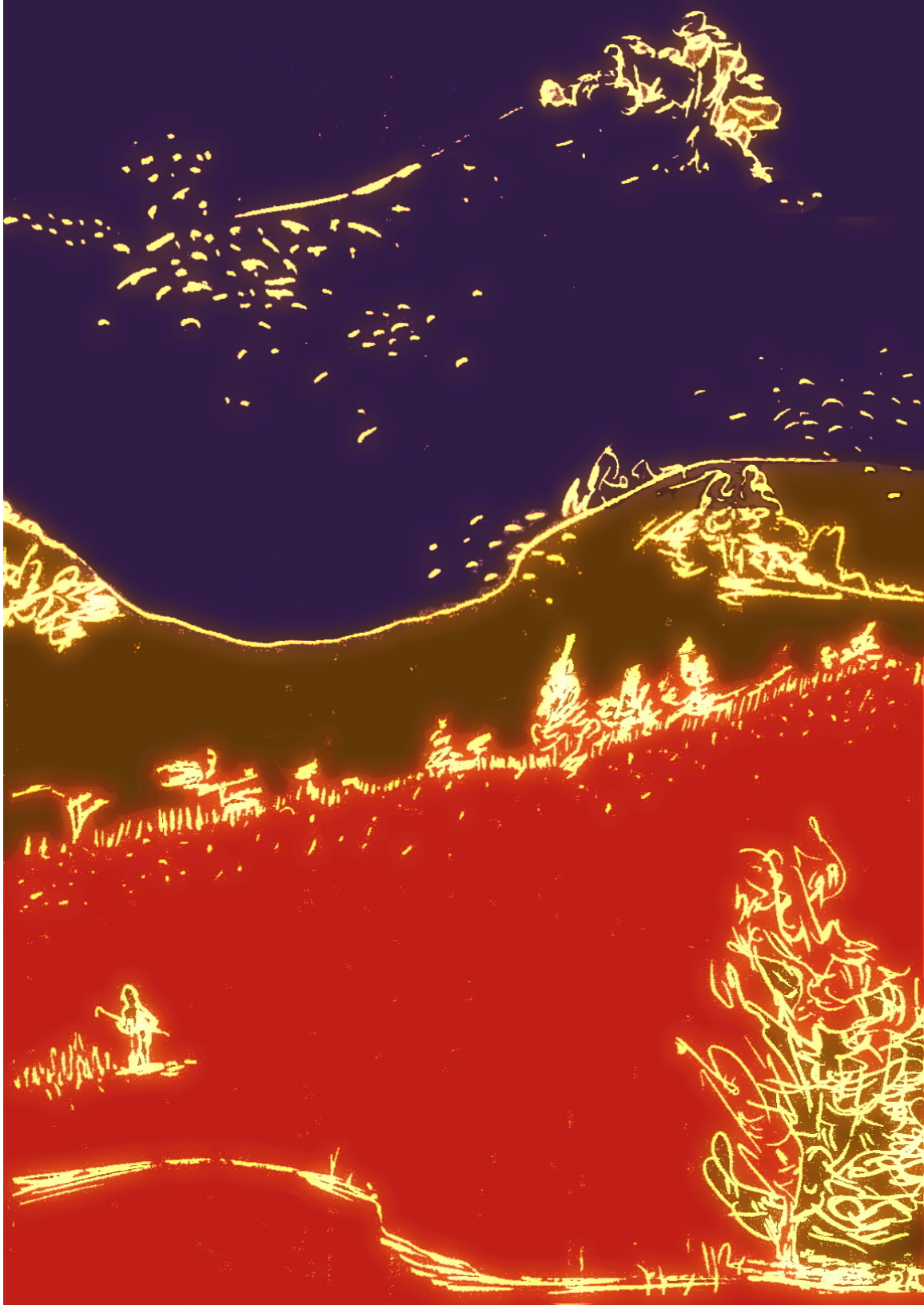
I am a rich man.

My journey culminates with a wash in the Atlantic—my own private Siloam.

I can see.

Again.

Until....



Encounters with the Holy

By Ed Salerno

Cincinnati LCG Community

1-11-21

In an effort to document those few moments in my life when “The Holy,” for want of a better term, chose to become present to me in what were clearly inexplicable, unsolicited, and outside-the-realm-of-rationality experiences, I will attempt here to set down moments that clearly awakened my being in ways that no amount of reading, dialogue or any other academic effort could bring about.

Perhaps one important question I have had to face despite my ego, is, “Why me?” or “Why at those specific times?” My only answer is, **God is totally in charge of when and why He teaches us by presenting Himself to us. He rules our spiritual growth when we submit to Him. In fact, there is no technique or any major religious practice that can bring about a truly “Holy Moment.”**

It must also be said that these moments for me were in no way restricted to strictly “Christian” experience but rather were and continue to be encountered in the midst of both Christian and Zen Buddhist practice. Yet, they were clothed in the same clothing, they

were similar in feeling and thus suggest to me a clear universality regarding the presence and workings of God in the realm of the Holy which manifests itself regardless of religious affiliation.

Enough talk, allow me to proceed. In ca. 1957 I was Confirmed at St Philomena Catholic Church in Livingston, New Jersey. Confirmation is one of seven Sacraments through which God works providing grace to His children, so the Church teaches. For whatever reason the traditional blessed Scapular, which hangs about the one's neck with a medal in front and one in back is given to all conferees; it shows, on one side, the image of the Our Most Holy Redeemer and on the other side the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus. For whatever reason I do not remember, I did not get my Scapular on the day of my Confirmation.

After Mass the following week, my mother and I stopped by the convent of our parish to pick it up. When I got back to the car, I put it on. In that moment I was overcome with a deep feeling of warm embracing love unlike any I had ever known in my life from any embrace or expression of true human love at that time or to this day.

It lasted but a few moments. My mother asked if I was alright to which I simply said, "Yes". We never spoke of it again, but that

feeling remains in my heart to this day, never to be forgotten.

In March or thereabouts of 1978 during my senior year at Lexington Theological Seminary in Lexington, Kentucky I was involved in daily practice of Zazen, Zen Buddhist silent sitting. I was introduced to Zen Buddhism by Zen Master Philip Kapleau's book, *Three Pillars of Zen*, in 1972, which I came across while working at Haslam's Book Store in St Petersburg, Florida.

During my seminary days I was using the central practice of "Just Sitting" from the Soto school of Zen Buddhism founded by Zen Master Dogen in the thirteenth century. It's a practice I learned from a book of talks given by Shunryu Suzuki Roshi and compiled by his students. In these talks Suzuki Roshi details specific issues that come up during practice and provides direction for handling them. The book is called *Zen Mind Beginner's Mind* and I had been using it for several years as my guide and help with my sitting.

While at seminary I had been struggling for some time with the question of just what is a pastor to do? In fact, it came up during my initial interview when entering seminary. During this particular morning while sitting Zazen focused on my breathing, a clear, and for me, definitive answer presented itself to this question

connecting two things. **First, one must pray daily and from prayer one is directed to acts of service.**

From that day on a struggle with discernment emerged. After all, how is one to know what, where, when, why and how one is directed by GOD! This moment led to many years of mistakes and mishaps and some successes. But more importantly, it added an additional struggle to my practice of Soto Zen, trying to hear God. That's a big mistake in Zen practice. For in Just Sitting one must do nothing, not know, predict or even suspect anything. Instead, "Just Sit".

In 1977 I met and in 1978 married Beverly Skidmore, a beautiful elementary school teacher from Falmouth, Kentucky, where I was serving as student pastor of Margan Christian Church DOC. We were called to a youth ministry in Evansville, Indiana at EastSide Christian DOC.

While at EastSide I received an invitation to attend a youth rally with the children in my charge and their parents at a local Independent Baptist Church. At the end of the service an invitation was given to give one's life Christ. I was overcome by an urge to go forward but was reluctant to do so in front of these children and their parents. When I got home, Beverly was out at our church at a

women's meeting.

I lay on our bed and began to spontaneously repent of every sin in my life especially my very large EGO. Overwhelmed with deep crying I began to speak in very clear terms to God to send His Son Jesus into my heart, which he did. This encounter lasted several hours during which time Beverly came home, and becoming deeply concerned, asked what I was crying about. I said I was repenting and had asked Jesus to save me.

As a good born-again Baptist, she immediately understood and we began to rejoice together at this exceptional moment. From that day forth my life took a turn toward Fundamentalist Christianity, a position not well suited to the Disciples of Christ Church, a very liberal cerebral denomination.

Not long after this experience I accepted a position as Pastor of Walnut Hills Christian Church DOC in Cincinnati, Ohio. While there I started attending a Saturday morning Pentecostal Prayer breakfast, suggested by a member of Walnut Hills, at the Top of the Crown Hotel in Covington, Kentucky for any and all clergy and lay persons. At the end of the message for this particular Saturday an invitation was given to come forward and receive the Gift of the Holy Spirit. I

went up and immediately began speaking in tongues. The experience lasted some twenty minutes.

The spiritual “high” from this encounter lasted many weeks and caused me to look for a church more suited to the changes going on in my spiritual life. This led me to the Baptist Church which in my mind was a good fit for both Beverly and me. Although Beverly kept saying, “Don’t make this change for me.” I did anyway. And that led to a bi-vocational ministry in small Baptist churches in and around Pendleton County where we settled to live and raise our family. I had also gone back to school to get certification to teach elementary school. And so we lived for some 15 years teaching elementary school and pastoring Baptist country churches.

Through all this I continued to sit Zazen daily, and one morning I was given a clear word from the Psalms, “My word is a lamp to your feet and a light to your path.” Believing at that time that “THE WORD” meant “THE BIBLE” I began reading and studying in earnest, believing every word to be absolutely true and preaching it to be just that. It wasn’t until years later that I realized that “The Word” was much deeper and richer than words in any book. Rather, it is a direct interior experience of the presence of God speaking, as it were, in one’s own heart by His will, much like simply putting on a

scapular. This insight took many years to unfold and a serious struggle to separate myself from my fundamentalist position which I had held for so long as a minister in the Baptist Church. But the glow of fundamentalism gradually wore off, and I felt compelled to resign from ministry in the Baptist Church and return to the Catholic Church, where I became a cantor.

In 2005 following retirement from our careers in elementary education, I took a summer job as an instructor with The Governor Scholars Program in Kentucky. While there during the second summer, I heard about Furnace Mountain Retreat Center in Powell, Kentucky. As we were studying monasticism in all religions as a vehicle to lives of service I took my class to visit this Korien Zen Monastery and meet the master teacher Dae Gak.

Up to this time I had often dreamed of finding a teacher for my Zen practice. The only one I knew of was Edo Roshi at International Dai BoSatsu Zendo in Livingston Manor, New York. I had gone there back in 1972 for a week-long retreat in June but never really felt that Edo Roshi was the teacher for me.

Dai Gak, on the other hand, seemed just right. He too had studied under Edo Roshi but did not stay there. He found Zen Master Seung

Sahn and was ultimately given Inka, the official confirmation of one's enlightenment leading to the title of Zen Master given by another Zen Master. Officially called the passing of the dharma. Dae Gak, is his dharma name, and it means Great Enlightenment. In another interesting twist to this story, Dae Gak and Seung Sahn often went to Our Lady of Gethsemani Trappist Monastery in Trappist, Kentucky, to provide Zen retreats for the monks there. I too had been going to Gethsemani for retreats for some time and as a young teen had considered becoming a monk there.

In October of the year 2005, I attended a seven-day retreat at Furnace Mountain. That entails six hours a day of Zazen along with work periods, meals etc., all in total silence. Along about the third day I had a very deep Kensho experience which was confirmed by Zen Master Dae Gak. That profound clarity of the here and now lasted three full days but in essence has never left me; as have all these experiences from Scapula to Kensho.

I remained a student of Dae Gak's for some ten years during which I experienced several additional awakenings while on retreats at Furnace Mountain, Loretto Sisters Community in Loretto, Kentucky, Our Lady of Gethsemani Monastery, Furnace Mountain and at home. During all these retreats I was in contact with Dae Gak either in

person or via email. The resulting experiences can best be described in the few words that were given to me and confirmed by Dae Gak at the time.

Busy mind, quiet mind, same mind.

An answer to the Koan Mu.

All things in the universe are what they are.

An exceptional awakening to universal compassion/love for all.

An answer to the Koan, "What is the meaning of that object being thrown in the water?"

While at Gethsemani in 2010 during a visit with the Guest Master we were discussing my struggle with my wanting to be a monk and be married. He told me that my vocation was marriage and to my wife I must devote my life. Those words hit me hard in a very good way. Later that week I happened upon some books in the Gethsemani Library about the Lay Cistercians, a group of lay monks, monastics of all faiths and persuasions of religious monastic expression. Following this discovery I was sitting in the chapel at Gethsemani when I was again overcome by an unbelievable embrace of love to which I uttered, "I never want to leave this place!" In that moment it all came together, my marriage/vocation, my sincere search to truly find peace in God, my Zen practice and the Lay Cistercians. Not too

long after that I communicated with Mike Johnson, the head of the Lay Cistercians of Gethsemani in Cincinnati, Ohio, at that time. Soon after I started my two-year Formation period during which I discovered men and women whose lives, though different in practice, were precisely like mine. They were deep into this search to find truth, one's true self, God, and all through the Plan of Life, the guiding principles penned by Father Michael at Gethsemani, the sponsor of the Lay Cistercians of Gethsemani.

Everyone of us is unique in his or her approach. These men and women are a very special library whose life pages illustrate the varied and special ways God intervenes in our lives to awaken us. Sometimes He drags us along through our down times and other times He reveals Himself in his surprising unique wondrous beauty beyond all words or symbols when we least expect it. And just when we think, "AH, YES, I have it." He pulls the rug out from under us reminding us that this road has no end, no beginning, only here and now. God Alone. Home at last!



Working as a Team: My Daily Bread

by
Ray Geers



In my hospital workplace, I am grateful for working on a team rather than strictly on my own. The work we do as rehab therapists is often—I'd even say usually—very difficult. Every day, we work with people who are sick, wounded, and debilitated, both physically and mentally. If not for the shared courage of our team, I could not have been doing this for more than 30 years.

I have found that working closely with another therapist (in what we call *therapy co-treatments*) has become the foundation of my daily

life's work. It has become my daily bread. We co-therapists are like the disciples going off in dyads to bring good news to the world. And what is the good news that we bring? Simply this: that with hard work, hope, and perseverance, we can help each patient move towards their next fullest potential.

It takes a village—like a hospital—to do this. It takes a departmental team and good leadership. It often takes two therapists and a gait belt. It takes patience. It takes time. Love is ultimately involved, although we don't often talk about it in this way. Still, I see how love is in this work.

*Love is in the mess
And love is there to bless
Despite all the crazies and distress
Love is in the mess*

It takes so much human energy to do this kind of work! It takes me beyond myself and always leaves me tired, but amazed, and sorely grateful. Because we work as a team, I can do this work—even when I don't know how! It can indeed be done, day after day, and in so many unfavorable conditions, even by someone as simple and limited as me. This is precisely why I thank God for my rehab team, and for the privilege of sharing this work, this ministry, my daily bread.

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Ray Geers began working in Physical Therapy in Cincinnati, Ohio in the fall of 1989, less than 2 years after he left the novitiate of the Abbey of Gethsemani in Kentucky. He has been married to his wife Jeanne for 27 years. They have three adult children and a grandson due in the spring of 2021. He has been affiliated with the Lay Cistercians of Gethsemani since the early 2000s.



God is my refuge

By Linda Boerstler
Columbus, Ohio, LCG Community

Seriously, Lord
There is no refuge
In this world – save you.

There is no shelter
No place to hide – except in you.
No resting place, God.

But under your wings
Hidden close to your breast
No safety, but in your shadow.
There is no point to seek
Solace elsewhere.
It will leave me wanting.

Only food from your table
Can fully sustain me.
Save me, Oh Christ,
From those who seek
To destroy me.
Protect me from those
Who mock and laugh.

You are my only refuge
The big and strong tower
That I can run to
And find you there – waiting.

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* is 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 Linda Boerstler, Journal Committee Coordinator, at Poetry 328@aol.com.



Linda writes: I have been writing poetry since I could hold a pen and have never stopped writing. This is the main way with which I worship God, I have been a Lay Cistercian since 2006 and up until the pandemic get to Gethsemani twice a year. My poetry is moving into a spiritual theme, perhaps a sign of the growth of my relationship with Jesus Christ. I am currently working on a book which I hope to get into publication soon. I am 65 as of 3/28/2021. I have a BA in Business Education and a MPS in Christian Ministry and leadership (MA). I am active in my church when possible, hoping to that increase as the world comes back to some kind of normal. I share my house with my friend Patty and the two dogs and two cats that inhabit the same space.

