

THE JOURNAL OF THE LAY CISTERCIANS OF GETHSEMANI ABBAY

Issue 10: Advent 2022



Table of Contents

3	I Give You Thanks: A Soundscape Meditation
6	Hibernation
8	November Allies
9	Photo by Br. Paul Quenon
9	Psalm 23 from a sheep
11	Coming of Age in a Monastery

I Give You Thanks: A Soundscape Meditation

by
Ray Geers



*In the presence of the angels, I will bless you. I will adore before your holy temple
You stretch out your hand and save me, your hand will do all things for me.*
Psalm 138:1-2, 7-8

The soundscape finds us on a busy street where the song of birds competes with honking car horns and idling truck engines. The children at a nearby bus stop chatter among themselves as they enter the familiar yellow vehicle, some scraping their feet on the floor of the bus before taking their seats. It is just another day in a life of education and socialization for this generation. You can hear and feel the curiosity and sense of belonging in the young voices. Nothing special here unless we take the view that all of it is special and important – just as each child and each family member and every relationship is special and important in the grand scheme of things.

Gun shots are suddenly fired in the middle of this world, which could easily be the Cincinnati neighborhood of Evanston where two drive-by

shootings happened this past week. 39-year-old Yarsellay Sammie Sr. and 16-year-old Javeir Randolph were shot on the same day within a mile radius of one another. As I reflect on these two deaths, I'm left wondering: "What do the words of my chosen mantra – *You stretch out your hand and save me, your hand will do all things for me* – mean for these children of God?" I visualize the dead bodies lying there on Evanston's asphalt floor while the school bus continues its journey. It is another day in a life of education and socialization for this generation. You can hear the dripping of rain on fabric. It is part of the constant dripping of sorrow and pain in this depressed neighborhood. How can the people living there continue to live their lives amid all the random violence? Meanwhile, far away from the inner city, the cry of a flock of loons in distress argues, in my imagination, for the oneness of all beings. The loons cry out on behalf of the slain victims in my make-believe vision. They cry out on behalf of God, who has no voice except through the divine spirit ringing like a bell within all creation. The spirit rings out a song of danger and it rings out a warning. Without sufficient love between brothers and sisters, there goes you or I, fatally wounded.

After they have given us God's message, the loons flap their wings against the waters and lift their bodies heavenward. In unhurried grandeur, they elevate themselves, carrying with them the souls of Yarsellay and Javeir; that's how I see it. Into the light of peace and eternal prayer they go.

The rest of the soundscape meditation is me playing my guitar and continuing the mantra: *You stretch out your hand and save me, your hand will do all things for me*. "Never give up on your holy mantra" my meditation teacher repeats tirelessly. The advice, so often repeated, is itself a mantra underneath the mantra. In other words, never give up. This is what is required of us as long as places like Evanston mourns its random dead. It is hard not turn to away from sorrows like this. And it is so, so easy *not* to act justly and *not* to love tenderly and *not* to walk humbly with a humble God in the face of human victimization. "What does God require of us in the face of the Evanston murders and so many other acts of human violence?" A modern bell ringer named Bayard Rustin answered that question in this way: "What God requires of us" he said, "is that we not stop trying."

The bells begin to ring louder and louder near the end of the soundscape meditation. Time to wake up the world to what is happening here. Maybe God really is stretching out a hand to save us. Even though we may not know what

to do about the events of Evanston last week, we can reply to this psalm verse with another one. *To you Lord I stretch out my hands* (Psalm 88:9.)

Once the bells have got our attention and the storms have cleared the horizon of our hearts and minds, once, that is, we are restored within, we can go about our business, as the Quaker John Woolman advises, of “turning all the treasures we possess into the channel of universal love.” All the treasures we can ever possess are available right here in this painful moment. This is one way of describing what I have tried to illustrate in this soundscape meditation. *I Give You Thanks: A Soundscape Meditation* is a guided tour into the channel of universal love – right now and right here where we are. Always hold a holy mantra in your heart and prepare yourself for challenges to it. Never give up on your holy mantra.

In the presence of the angels, I will bless you. I will adore before your holy temple...

*You stretch out your hand and save me, your hand will do all things for me.
Amen.*

You can view the music video on the following link. The chanting is by Chris Walker of the Cincinnati chapter of LCG. He uses the melody from the psalter of the Abbey of Gethsemani. <https://youtu.be/oVQEtwe9lX>

Hibernation

by
Bill Felker

The barometer is rising, snow is falling, and the wind is whistling. I retreat to the warm attic and moisten the soil under the grow light to get ready to plant geranium seeds. The whirring sound of the furnace surrounds me and separates me from the outside storm.

I open the package of seeds and think about J. W. making porridge on cold winter mornings. I place the seeds neatly in a row on a piece of brown paper. I act deliberately and quietly as though my acts were part of a ritual. My mind travels back to my junior year at Holy Cross Seminary. It was a time during which I had overcome numerous temptations, suppressed "bad thoughts," and had found a sudden, if short-lived, peace with myself and with dogma.

As a junior, I was eligible to serve Mass in the crypt below the main chapel. Here, altars lined the walls of gray stone. Massive pillars supported the low ceiling. Like my attic, it was an isolating and comforting place, fans circulating warm air, their murmur helping to shut out the world.

I would get up early, go to the crypt and set out the hosts and pour cruets full of water and wine, making sure the proper readings for the day were selected. The priest came in silence, put on his ceremonial vestments. And we performed the service together in Latin, I responding to formulaic clues that wove the spiritual sacrifice together.

I had a safe place from the winter there. I fit in. I knew who I was and what to do. I was creating miraculous food. I could look forward to the security of ritual as long as I chose. I had never felt so protected and never belonged so perfectly.

In the end, my piety got old. I became restless, wrapped in the limits and contradictions of so much safety. But I miss it now, more than half a century

later. I return home to the attic to sprout seeds and to the narrow, suburban seclusion of a corner in Wildwood Park where I have found myself in southwestern Ohio, hibernating in nostalgic solidarity with the seminarian I was.



November Allies

by
Bill Felker

*O angels, blessed in numbers vast,
Protect and guard us on life's way
Against all evils of the past,
Those yet to come, those of this day.*

From *Christe, redemptor, omnium*, Vigils Hymn for All Saints Day, November 1,
in the Ancient Christian Office of the Hours

I grew up surrounded by icons and rosaries and holy practices. Now at the turning of the season, when all the leaves come down and I lose the security and warmth of summer, I am especially aware of my vulnerability, and of the mystery, both for better and for worse of my belief in spirits.

In times of personal or social stress, I do not forget the guardian angel to whom I always prayed. I used to imagine him on my right side, balancing the bad angel on my left side. I still feel it as a presence, when I think of it at all, still there.

What effect could he have now? Is he superstition purely? Is he a seasonal ghost of the Thin Time between fall and winter, between my childhood and my old age? Or is he a real power, a relentless energy, to be conjured through my fear by my will? What could he possibly do for me? What cultural-religious baggage does he slyly carry for me? Do I dismiss him at my peril?

A hymn for the Christian feast of All Saints Day (November 1) invokes all spirit creatures, angels, and souls of those who have gone before us, to come to our assistance, asserting that we are not alone, that there is continuity between as well as community in corporeal and spiritual beings, strength in our

coexistence. This is a time of chill and danger, the tradition says, time to invoke and hold close the allies.

For a time, I doubted the existence of angels or God or any personal spiritual beings. Could I believe even though it made no sense to believe? I concluded, forced by my indelible Catholic training, that even though I could not believe, I could intend. If there were such an experience as faith, it would have to be a desire, a willful act of defiance against the left side of my brain. I wanted the angels. I chose the angels. I choose the angels.



Image by Br. Paul Quenon

As we celebrate the Advent season, it is easy to think about the shepherds in the fields with their flocks, lovingly guarding the animals regardless of the chill of the long night. Jesus becomes our shepherd as we struggle through the vagaries of life, in the darkness of soul, as we seek to draw closer to Him.

Psalm 23 in the mind of the sheep – a meditation

The Lord shepherds me like a lovely husbandman
And leads me to a soft and luscious place
Where I am always safe and comfortable.

I rest there, and He gives me everything I need
And so much more than I could imagine or ask for.
I merely breathe His name and He is there
I am secure with Him next to me.

The waters in the meadow soothe me
As if I am bathing in it, healing everything,
That is broken, wounded, damaged, in my body
And in my soul. He sustains me.
His path is sure, and He takes me into His righteousness.
Though I am stained, in His eyes I am perfect.

Sometimes though He takes me to places
That are so dark, I cannot see Him
Because there is no light, and evil and death
Is everywhere I turn. In the shadow He remains with me.

When the enemy approaches, they stop
When they see His rod and His staff.
I am greatly comforted.

And there it is! The table!
Laden with flowers and banquet
Spread out right in front
Of these vile and wicked warriors
That want nothing more to destroy me
In malice and foul manipulations.

They watch from afar while
My Master, the One who loves me
Anoints me with the sweet oil
So fragrant that even the flowers
Are lost in this scent.

So much oil He uses that it cannot be contained.
In such a small vessel so it overflows onto His hands
Onto my face, and down to the ground.
I am almost inebriated with the perfume.

And as I sit at His table, He blankets me,
Wrapping me up in the sweetness of His love.
Extravagant in goodness, and mercy
And His promise of eternal regard
For the safety of my healing, hungry soul.

I shall not leave this ineffable scenery
That has no end, no boundaries.
And will dwell with Him, and in His house.
Now, and for one thousand forever.
The Lord is my shepherd and
I am in want for nothing.

Linda Boerstler 2022

November 02, 2022, 12:55 AM

Coming of Age in a Monastery: ALWAYS PARTLY BROKEN, a Memoir by Ray Geers

A Review by Bill Felker

Several years ago, when I was one of the editors of the Journal of the Lay Cistercians of Gethesemani Abbey, Ray Geers submitted several chapters of a memoir about his time at the monastery of Gethsemani in Kentucky. I was excited to receive those submissions and encouraged Ray to finish and publish his manuscript.

ALWAYS PARTLY BROKEN is the completed version of Ray's story. It is an easy and interesting read, a coming-of-age odyssey set in the 1980s, a story beautifully and honestly told. It is, as well, an unassuming yet profound exploration of Catholic spirituality. The casualness, the informality of his style and his occasional asides to the reader help to make the depiction of his journey both personal and moving.

Ray Geers is unabashedly open about his doubts and fears. He begins the narrative with tales of his confused teenage years. He was a rebel who didn't fit in, and given his Catholic upbringing, the monastic path seemed the right one for a person who felt himself to be different but didn't quite know how to be different.

Several chapters follow events of life at Gethsemani and describe the kind of monks with whom Geers interacts. The descriptions are often bittersweet because his descriptions include the misgivings that troubled him from the start. Slowly, those misgivings become doubts and then an awareness that the monastic world is one he cannot honestly embrace.

When he finally decides to leave the monastery, it is no surprise. Geers has amply prepared the reader for his decision, steadily revealing parts of the process in which the woman he loves is decisive but not separate from his soul-searching and his unhappiness within the monastic context.

In my opinion, the "partly broken" refrain throughout the book refers to a division in the author's view of himself. His confessions create a compelling portrait of a self-divided, first by a teenage sense of alienation, a sense of being different that sets him apart and which contributes to his choice to enter Gethsemani in the first place.

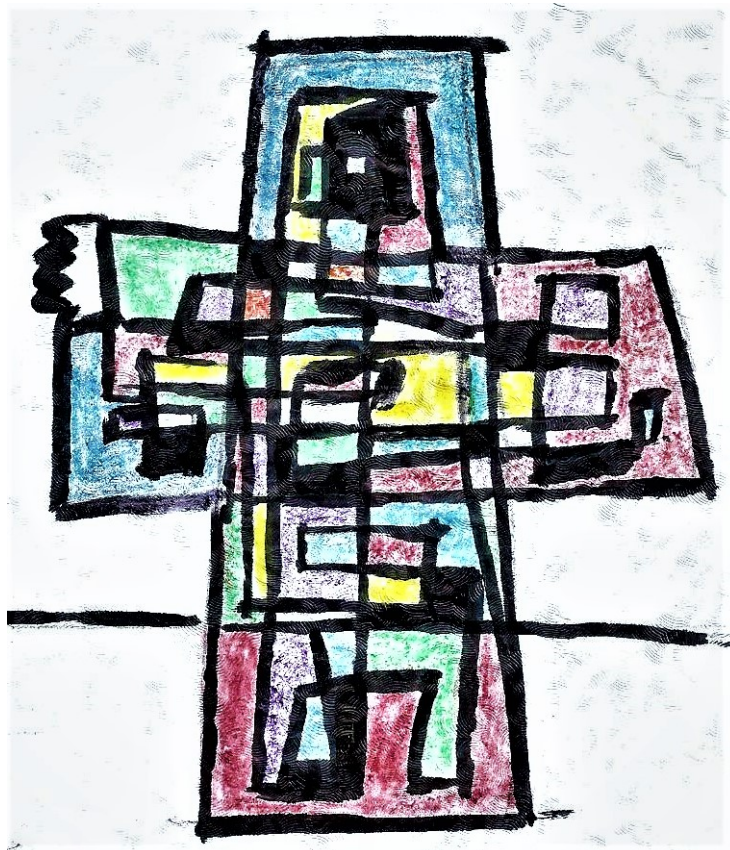
Later, reflecting as a married man with three children, Ray talks about his feelings of alienation from the other parents in his parish. He sees how his wife fits easily with that

society, but he does not feel completely comfortable in that world; he is not able to share his introverted self-enough with others. The issue seems to be not so much a matter of vocation as of simply who he is, a person who does not always fit in to the social contexts he has chosen.

Geers' book encourages me to see my own introversion and religious wanderings in his image. Geers' inner isolation, his struggles, conflicts, and contradictions, even if they keep him from fully participating in certain groups, also open creative paths toward reconciliation and understanding which reveal and repair both sides of the "brokenness."

His confession helps me to feel whole. I believe it has helped him to heal and to know himself better, as well.

https://www.amazon.com/gp/aw/d/B09SWQF6JN/ref=tmm_pap_swatch_0?ie=UTF8&qid=1667364525&sr=8-1



Drawn by Ery

Please find attached a drawing of a cross inspired by the drawing style of Thomas Merton. I was fortunate to have an opportunity to view some of Merton's drawings held in the archives of the Abbey of Gethsemani, including a few pencil drawings (doodles) of crosses Merton made. For whatever reason, they really made an impression on me, and I have made a number of images since then inspired by his style, many of them made while on retreat, including the one I am sending you now. It is really a drawing meditation on the cross.



Eryk Burns

*It is with this hand
That I created the earth –
And all that dwell upon it.*

I.Boerstler

I would like to thank Ray Geers and Bill Felker for the help I received from both of them during the generation of this journal. They both gave me feedback or helped with the formatting.

**An introduction to this issue is not included due to the quick pace with which it was created.
The next issue will be prepared before the beginning of Lent so please begin to consider what you might consider submitting for that issue.**

It is my hope that this issue blesses and inspires you,

Until next time, Linda Boerstler.