

*The Journal of the  
Lay Cistercians  
of Gethsemani Abbey*

Issue 6 – Season of Easter 2020



*Enhanced Photo by Randy Cox*

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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 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

Exploring the readings in *The Lay Cistercian Experience: A Program of Reflection and Sharing*, I have been retracing some of the elements of my practice as a Lay Cistercian. And as I read through the contributions to this sixth issue of the *Journal*, I follow with personal interest the varieties of religious experience expressed by members of the LCG community, and I am taken in by the sincerity and the richness of that variety, realizing that the more I am exposed to the examples of our new, lay tradition, the more powerful it becomes for me.

The eclecticism of that community vision creates a loose and open sharing within our *Journal* context. But the process of sharing with each other, the sharing of such intimacy, is daunting. This monastery without walls is a tentative and dangerous place; we have not been there before together. With all our prayers and our rituals and retreats, we have not shared such privacy before.

Or that is what I feel when I encounter the surprised haikus of Scott Gilliam, graced with his photos, the awe in Stephan Young's poems, the gentle reflections by Laurel Clement, the intense retreat notes and poetry of Linda Boerstler, the visions of Randy Cox's words and art, and the playful exegesis of Ray Geers.

This collection is such a miniscule sampler of what is really taking place in the newly formed society of the lay Cistercians, but it is an invitation of the most personal sort to those who would construct this place by their shared practice.

Bill Felker

## ***“My Trappist Canterbury Tale”***

By Scott Gilliam | Haiku Poet | June 27-28, 2017

***Introduction.*** In June 2017, I was in Europe for two weeks to attend a meeting of the International Association of Lay Cistercian Communities in Avila, Spain, followed by a business meeting in London, England. The timing of things left me with two days to explore the English countryside before the business meeting. The first day I took a two-hour drive south to Canterbury to visit Canterbury Cathedral, inside which I discovered St. Anselm’s Chapel. The next day I took a two-hour drive north to visit Mount Saint Bernard Abbey, a Cistercian (Trappist) monastery in Coalville, Leicestershire. There was an unfathomable connection between the events I experienced in these two places, on two consecutive days, and the haiku poems I wrote in each place to memorialize these experiences. But I never could have imagined that the haiku I wrote in St. Anselm’s Chapel would predict something I would experience the next day at Mount Saint Bernard Abbey.

Two other tidbits to provide some context for the haiku. First, since 2015, I have been a member of the Lay Cistercians of Gethsemani Abbey (LCG), a commitment I made as a lay person in the secular world to live a contemplative life defined by the values of the Cistercian charism and guided by the Rule of Saint Benedict and the LCG “Plan of Life” (prayer, work and study). Second, at the time of the events prompting this haiku, I longed for an encore career in social justice. This longing was prompted by my passion for serving people on the margins of society and my growing disenchantment with my career in lobbying and business-related political engagement. My longing became reality two years later ... on God’s timetable, not mine. I hope you enjoy the haiku.

*Part I – Canterbury Cathedral*  
Canterbury, England | June 27, 2017

Anselm Chapel gives  
Refuge to a crowd-weary  
Pilgrim seeking God.

Not many come in  
This sacred and quiet place.  
A blessing for me.

The stone walls hush the  
Tourist chatter; calm returns.  
Tells me to stay put.

Mobile phone buzzes.  
Politician wants money.  
I'm not calling back.

Reminder of what  
I seek to leave far behind  
As soon as I can.

I'm praying that God  
Will speak to me soon and give  
Me some direction.

Oh, Canterbury,  
Why won't you reveal the plan  
God has made for me?

I briefly doze off.  
Awakened by loud children,  
Nine-year-old me smiles.

I will keep the faith.  
Like a lost child who knows the  
Good Shepherd is near.

Oh, sacred chapel,  
Thank you for comforting me  
On my pilgrimage.

Interrupted by  
Head splitting jackhammer noise  
I decide to leave.

The noisy send off  
Reminds me that God is not  
Finished with me yet.

I still need to be  
Hammered and chiseled by God,  
Who knows my rough spots.

So onward I go.  
Resuming my search for what  
God wants me to find.

*Part II – Mt. Saint Bernard Abbey*

Coalville, Leicestershire, England | June 28, 2017

Cold gray skies and rain  
Can't dampen my joy as I  
Trode these sacred grounds.

A school group leaves the  
Abbey Church in full frolic.  
The kids give me pause.

I think how my life  
Has lined up to make this day  
Possible for me.

Thousands of years of  
Cistercian patrimony  
Have guided me here.

Now I wait in the  
Refectory for what seems  
Like a thousand hours.

The guest master is  
Late and I wonder if he  
Forgot about me.

And then it happens.  
An unbelievable sight  
Grabs my attention.

I suddenly see  
A sculpture of Christ with a  
Hammer and chisel.

The Divine Artist  
Is busy sculpting a child.  
Are you kidding me???

I quickly recall  
The hammer and chisel verse  
I penned yesterday.

The image born in  
Anselm Chapel has come to  
Life in a sculpture.

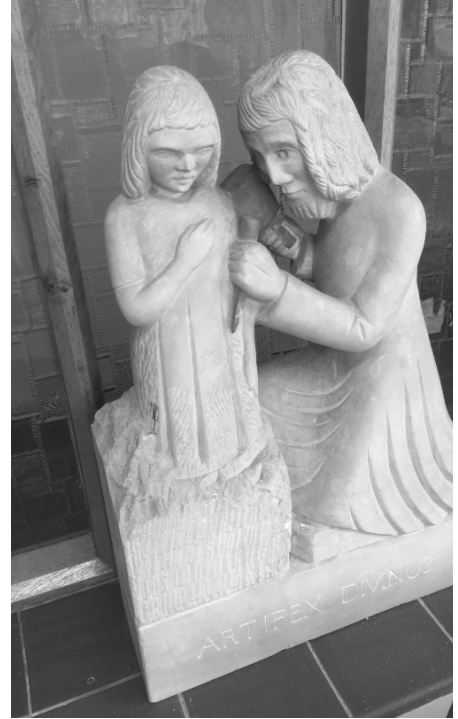
For a brief moment  
A strange calm blankets my soul.  
Yes, all will be well.

The Divine Artist  
Gazes deep into my heart.  
My mind settles down.

His message is clear:  
Hold your horses and let things  
Happen on God's time!



*St. Anselm Chapel  
Canterbury Cathedral*



*"Artifex Divinus"  
Mount Saint Bernard Abbey*

*(Photographs by Scott Gilliam)*

# At Last

By Stephan Young

When at last I am with You  
Face to face  
Forever and ever to come,  
The urge to sing will well up in me  
Love filling my heart to the bursting point.  
Your mercy overwhelming me,  
Washing me clean.  
All words will fail me,  
And I will remain eternally  
Speechless  
In awe of  
You.



*Fredrick's Lake: Enhanced Photograph by Randy Cox*

# Haikus

By Stephan Young

## **Painting on Tissue Paper**

As difficult as  
painting on tissue paper  
Comprehending God

## **With the Lay Cistercians**

Being together  
One, before our loving God  
Sacredness of silence

## **May I be a Candle**

Throughout history  
The darkness is defeated by  
The candles of hope

## **For you, with love**

This experience  
I created just for you  
This very moment

## **Abbot**

On abbot's shoulder's  
Rests much knowledge, pain and joy  
God bless the abbot

## **Heaven**

God loves, I do too  
Incorporeal and Timeless  
Ah! This is heaven

## **After reading Thomas Merton**

Me, tired, thirsty  
Now offered living water  
Come and dance in it

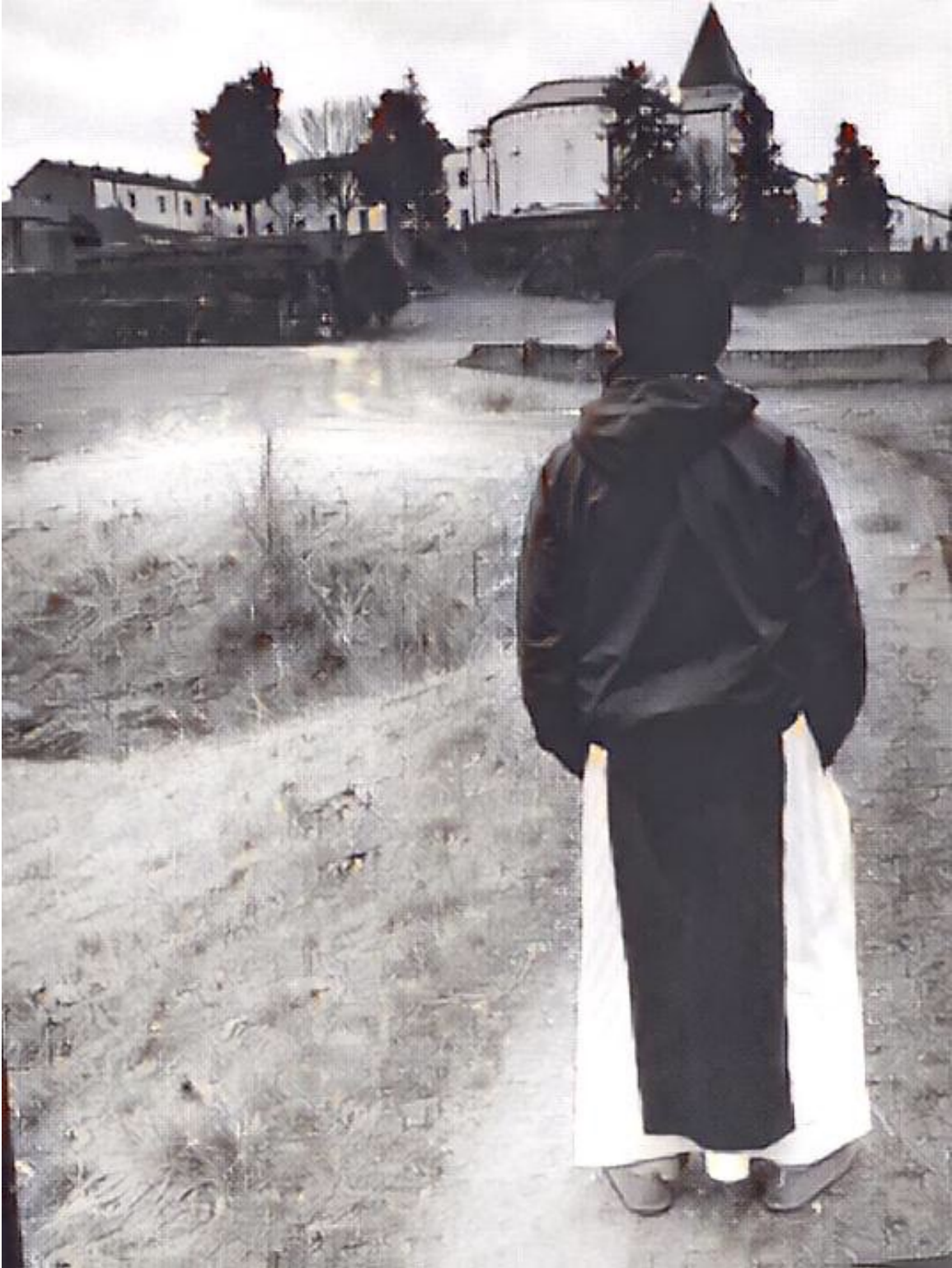


Photo of Brother Paul by Randy Cox

# PEACEFUL SILENCE CONNECTS US

by Laurel Clement

LCG Spiritus

February 17, 2020

Being a committed Lay Cistercian of Gethsemani for the past 10 years has reconfigured how I have chosen to live my life. Through the formation process with our Plan of Life, there is a depth in learning its many dimensions, such as community and solitude, silence and hospitality. I've discovered them to be a continuum that integrates us rather than compartmentalizes us. One of the most profound changes for me has come from living out the concept of silence.

Sometimes, the curious ask me how much solitude was required before silence became my first response in some interpersonal communications. A lot, I tell them. For me, I had to become comfortable, rather than avoidant, of that agony of truthfully examining my conscience for issues within my heart and the clutter inside my mind. I had to be comfortable with solitude, for from that came silence. That torrent had to be stilled first so that my disordered pride no longer interrupted conversations with others and even my own internal dialogue. I recollect from time to time things that I've said from such pride, and I humbly ask for mercy and for peace to those who had to hear it.

Because peaceful silence connects us:

I believe that we can be among many people and bring peaceful silence to the situation. I have experienced such silence from the monks at choir and how it seems to permeate their very environment. As it says in Habakkuk (2:20): “But the Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him.” As the monks process from choir, I will stand silently out of respect for their way of life. I remember once joining them in mid-day prayer before leaving from my visit at the Abbey. As the monks processed from choir, there was this resolute peacefulness, a silence that unified the purpose of choir and the need for extended silence as each monk transitioned into another part of his day. For me, there was such beauty in sharing that last visage of prayerful silence. No words were spoken. I think to have uttered a single word would have changed the reality of that treasured moment.

Another example is when I listen to hurting clients share their stories. I remain silent. It can take several minutes before they find a stopping place. And at that moment I look at them with empathy and say

nothing. They usually respond with a nod and what I call the cleansing sigh.

I wish that a well-worn path of suffering hadn't been my main route toward the way of silence. But suffering became a way for me to recognize what I needed to change and the importance of letting it go. That letting go opens space within me for silence. Over time, I have become more cognizant of the importance of also being an instrument of peaceful silence at work, at church, and even when on errands.

Silence takes practice. But please understand. I listen to music. Watch movies and current events, and enjoy my home and office being filled with conversation and laughter. What I'm talking about is carving out time for my daily practices with silence. Before, I would automatically turn on my TV when I got home. I no longer need to fill up the space around me with sound when I'm alone. Now, it's a choice. For example, I may be working around the house and simply stop for no other reason than to listen in that moment to silence. In other words, to remember that I am in the presence of God and just listen with the ears of my heart as the Rule says. It's amazing how much I begin to hear in my environment that my busyness had blocked out. I also practice to maintain discipline in moving toward that inward path to silence.

There is also the practice of silence in prayer. Here, too, I have had to quieten my mind and my heart of what I wanted. Whether it was something I wanted to pray or something I hoped to experience. That moving away from pride and moving to humility. I recall a learning experience in my early days with monastic encounters when I would look for opportunities to be alone in the sanctuary. It was a hot summer's day and the windows of this Abbey's sanctuary could open. I had settled into a pew alone, and a bird began having a delightful time singing its heart out. I could have chosen in that moment to be bothered by the sound of a bird when I was trying to be silent, or I could join in peaceful silence to the trill of the bird's song. It's similar to being calmed by a repetitive sound, like waves from the ocean, the wind through the leaves of trees, or a bird singing on top of its lungs. Peaceful silence connects us, even to God's creatures.

And of course, there are those rare moments of grace when we may be still and silent. And then share in that moment of life in silence in prayer with God. For that is what our soul longs for, God alone.

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# All In All

by Randy Cox

There is no bettering His benefits  
No measuring His mercy  
There is no gathering His grace  
No perfecting His passion

There is no exhausting His excellence  
No lessening His Love  
There is no out-creating His creation  
No widening His wisdom

There is no decrying His devotion  
No preventing His Power  
There is no abrogating His authority  
No broadening His boundaries

There is no reliving His resurrection  
No leavening His Living Bread  
There is no over-powering His promise  
No losing His Living Water

There is no overshadowing His obedience  
No bettering His Body  
There is no over-rating His Righteousness  
No diminishing His deliverance

There is no out-serving His Servanthood  
No calculating His Coming  
There is no over-valuing His Victory  
No out-reaching His Relevance



*Founding Father: Photograph by Randy Cox*

# Retreat: 2006

By Linda Boerstler

What follows are the journal entries from a retreat taken in 2006, about the same time that I made my commitment as a Lay Cistercian. I have edited it and updated it, and I wanted to present it as part of the *Journal* since we are all struggling through this difficult time in our nation and our world. Please let us make a commitment to not only pray for one another, but to also communicate encouragement through electronic connections to each other as we are able.

This retreat began in March 2006

## Tuesday

No walking today, at least for now as it is raining. Sleep did not come easy last night. It was well after midnight when I last looked at the clock.

Now, just to lie in the silence is restful, comforting, healing. The dark, so dark because it is devoid of the obnoxious brightness apparent elsewhere, envelopes me much like a cocoon, or in the way a nestling is covered by the warm feathers of her mother, safe, secure, quiet, whole.

Because I did not sleep right away last night, I missed Morning Prayer. However, the ultimate reason for me being here is to rest, and for the seclusion. For a few days, I get to be cloistered, hidden away in this warm bosom of love and perfection. When I sigh, I breathe in the presence of all that is holy and of all that is real.

This would make no sense to someone who has never been here. They would ask, "How can you be happy in a place where nothing happens? How can you stand it with no TV or radio (or other

devices)?How can you manage without a computer, or at the very least a cell phone? Don't you go out of your mind with all that silence?"

*In 2006, it was still difficult to raise a cell signal, so making a call sometimes meant getting in the car and driving up the hollow a bit to get closer to a tower. In addition, internet service was spotty at the Abbey. Things have improved greatly in both areas now, but there was something significantly holy and sacred in knowing that while at Gethsemani, one could remove oneself from all outside distractions and interruptions.*

Oh, they simply don't know what they are missing. The silence is the purest form of music because it comes directly from the symphony of God. The sound of the birds singing outside my window was the sweetest reveille. This is how it is intended to be, waking slowly morning upon morning, listening, seeing and knowing that God has orchestrated the ebb and flow, not man. That is why there is healing here. No rushing. No demands. Just quiet.

And grace. Somehow, when you enter this place, all is forgiven; the frustration from yesterday's impatience, the harsh words spoken last week in anger – gone. Not only gone but forgotten, as if it never happened. Like the rain that forms the misty veil as it washes down the sides of the blue rolling hills, so does grace wash down the sides of me, taking with it the filth of the world, leaving me fresh, clean and new.

God knew that I needed to be here this week, and so He met me, waiting with loving open arms, no questions, no comments, just love, love, love. Always in this world, there will be much that I don't, and can't understand but He stands there telling me that it is not for me to understand. It is only for me to trust and that then becomes the easier journey.

So now, Lord, I pray that you would create a new place in my heart for you. I pray that you embrace the very center and core of my being. Push aside those unholy thoughts, idea, desires and make my wanting only to be for you. As you have engraved the words GOD ALONE on the archway leading to the monastic enclosure, please engrave these same words on the fleshy tablets of my heart. You have brought many here to find you. Thank you for letting me be one of them. Let me leave here with more than I came with and let me carry the solitude of the ages in my soul so I can continually draw upon it when I am back in my own world facing stress and conflict.

Teach me Lord, how to stay still. Teach me how to not just to think, but to slow down, to ponder, to ruminate, to meditate. For many of us life has become nothing more than a series of sound bites, flash photography, and rapid paced images that do not allow room for thought at all. Rather it is a barrage, an overload, and inundation of garbage that we have no use for. This is the enemy's way of filling our minds with junk so that when the quiet comes we can't stop the noise.

Bring us all too our own private hermitage, whether it be the back of a hill, or nestled in some divine valley. Perhaps, the only hermitage we can know is that which is hidden within our own hearts. That being so, then take us there, beyond the city gates, beyond the false splendor, through the bejeweled obstacles until we are heart-to-heart with you, sheltered in your Holy Pavilion.

I am a flower, Lord.  
Long past beauty.  
Petals hard, misshapen, dark.  
Leaves withered and dry.  
Yet, here I am on slender stem  
Waiting for you to pass by.

I have seen many things.  
I have heard the rumbles  
Of approaching war.  
I know the heart cry  
Of the motherless  
And the inconsolable weeping  
Of the childless.

They have stood looking  
As I swayed in the wind  
Brilliant soft plumage  
Rising above the foliage  
And I rejoiced at the chance  
To give them a moment  
Of beauty.

I have heard the rejoicing  
Of peacetime dancing,  
Festivals, feast, celebrations.  
And I stretched up to  
Laugh with them, blushing  
Ever so lightly  
With the color of joy.

But now, they are gone  
And here I am alone  
On feeble stem, thirsting  
For that first drop of new rain  
And the warmth of spring sun.

I am a flower, Lord.  
Nourish me! Renew me!  
Bind my heart to Your heart!  
I long to sing with you.

My petals soft again  
With the pleasure of your love  
In my ruddy cheeks --  
A reflection of mercy and grace  
Kissed by the dew  
Of the earliest mornings.

... and since the rain is unrelenting this afternoon, I will forego the walk, and rest. The sweetest part of being in such a peaceful place is that repose is possible without interruption or worry. From my window here I can see the road, and a school bus has just passed by – what will those children see before they are old? How many of them will not “get old” but will die before their time? Oh, heavenly Father, what do you see when you look down upon us? How you must weep for what you see in the heart of humanity.

But you must let the seeker seek  
And leave his own footprints  
In the desert sand.  
Let him weep those great tears  
Of utter hopelessness.  
Let him feel the weight  
Of his own aloneness.  
Let him know the confusion  
Of his own words.

The journey is only if it needs to be.  
Some will take the path more rugged  
And delight themselves with the climb,  
Others will find the smooth way difficult.  
And some – will not go at all.

Though the travel may not begin  
From the same point of departure

And the trek may not see  
The same mountain paths  
And the voice may not carry  
The same words, the destination  
Is the same for all.

The seeker will eventually find  
The right path, and there, without speaking  
Someone will carry his burden.  
The tears of fear will be replaced  
By those of the greatest joy.  
Now, the traveler knows  
That he is slowly coming home.

There is nothing so still as a monastery at rest. I feel like a thief in the night quietly going from one place to another. Even the whoosh of the elevator is too loud. Halfway through the night already the monks are three hours from rising. Even the heartbeat is different here; softer, truer, methodically planning for each future beat with the completion of the one before it. I have been a night owl for far too long; working far past the hour of a normal day, driving home through darkened streets, and crawling into bed just as the watchman begins his second watch, so now; while the Abbey sleeps, her grand head is bowed in repose, I sit alone in my lighted room and I write.

I desire to capture every moment here, for each one brings something new and different. The Psalms were especially mournful tonight at Compline, coming from hooded faces darkened by the hour. As the litany rose, my eyes caught the ray of that single candle, always burning, and my gaze froze there, not wanting to leave its promise of warmth. I allow the Compline Psalms to drift over me, removing me from the burden of the day so I can peacefully, comfortably, prepare myself for sleep.

I did not seek the Abbot's Blessing tonight preferring to sit it in the shadows as the others went forward for theirs. I watched, first as the monks as they filed through, then the retreatants briefly bowing before the Abbot as he sprinkled them with holy water. Then the lights slowly dimmed into darkness, and apart from that one single burning candle above the altar, no other light was present.

I have felt like a foreigner here, a stranger in a strange land, a protestant in this Catholic place. The others know the rote, the bows, the signs but I stand here watching, observing, and lending my voice to the prayers when it seems appropriate, remaining silent when it is does not. Even after several visits there is much here that remains a mystery to me. There is much that I can see, taste, experience and remember. There is much more that I am not. I am knocking upon the door and it has been opened enough for me to peek in, but alas, the bolted chain allows it to open no further, so I stand pondering the mysteries on the other side.

God is gracious. We all come here to seek Him. In His mercy, He lets us find Him, in the shadows, in the prayers, behind the door, and in the lone candle above the altar. Bless me, Oh God! I will not leave this place until you do. My heart leaps in your Presence and though my soul is bruised where you have touched it, I rejoice!

## Wednesday

The sun is with us today. If it is warm, I shall go walking after lunch. Again, I woke up late, later than yesterday. Like the night before, sleep did not come. Each time I felt like I was finally drifting off I got a feeling of oppression even to the point of suffocation. At one point I it felt like something or someone was trying to lay itself upon me. When I would feel that weight, I would protect myself by saying the name of Jesus, consciously and actively but not verbally, I would lay awake for a time; then, lo and behold, it would happen again.

This continued all night. A couple of times I even got up, turned on the light as if to proclaim my right to be in this world after all. Sleep only came in snippets, so instead of getting up for Morning Prayer I stayed in bed feeling not sufficiently rested and slightly disturbed. So now, I am up, showered, dressed, and aware of my surroundings and thinking more as to how to spend my time here.

Why are the dreams  
So tormenting here  
Where the world  
Cannot get at me?  
Why do the voices  
Fill the quiet of  
My mind with  
Their chaos?

Did I bring them?  
Those demons  
That I tried so hard  
To ignore?

Here, in the silence  
There is little to block them out  
So, they laugh, jeer, haunt  
Disturbing my peace –  
The peace that I sought  
In coming to this place.

Unholy images on the backdrop  
Of my mind, flashing, demanding  
That I notice them, running  
Like a reel the minute  
My eyes close in an  
Attempt to sleep.

Several times they came –  
Several times I fought them  
Proclaiming the blessed name of Jesus  
As it rose from the depths  
From my sacred soul.  
For a time, they would subside  
And my breathing would soften,  
Relaxing in the comfort  
Of my Savior's name.

Finally, when the light came  
Their ugly hold released  
And I could rest here  
In Mary's bosom.  
Bright sun heralding  
Morning with accents  
Of faint birdsong dancing  
In the breeze of early spring.

I did walk, but I was extremely dismayed that two others had already chosen the spot at the top of the hill that I had directed my sights on earlier. So, I went over the crest of the hill, and followed it downward, along the outside of the monastic wall, and I reached the end of it. There a path presented itself. As the path turned upward, I decided to follow no further because I did not know where it was going. I then followed the grey wall back around to the Welcome Center and that is where I concluded my walk.

#### **4:30 PM**

The sun is still bright, and I have rested. The ringing of the Abbey bell marks each quarter hour. Ever so gently she reminds me that I am here, and that in my being here she holds me, bears me, comforts me, covers me, more like a whisper than a proclamation,

peals rolling down into the accepting arms of the blue hills, the wanting arms of the dark cool earth, the saving arms of our Lord.

And so, the bell rings  
As she has done day after day  
Week after week  
Year after year.  
She counts the passing of time  
Not as a herald  
But as a statement of fact.

Those that come  
Hear her long after  
They have gone  
Setting the flow of life  
Forever in the deepness  
Of their souls.

She calls often for prayer.  
Come kneel here  
In the nestled bosom, come  
Bring your tears, come  
Bring your pain, come  
Bring your joy, come  
Bring nothing, but  
Leave with everything.

She is the voice of the Abbey  
Crystal, clear, pure.  
She speaks of God  
Who dwells here.  
She speaks of souls  
That came seeking  
And never left. For  
Their refuge is here

And from here she  
Will ring them upward  
On the wings of eternity.

How easily the poetry flows here. Wave upon wave it rolls desiring to be given voice. This must be where it resides! Oh, that I could take with me the pure solitude of this place so that when the phones ring and the people demand, I have a place to take shelter.

I come as weary traveler, as a wounded warrior, as a broken heart. I come bent over with the years longing for renewal. If there ever was a place where I could choose to stay, it would be here. It is easy to imagine that this is not Kentucky but rather some far-flung shore; remote and private. Because it is Kentucky I can come, be, and see what it is like to be in God's own heart if only for a few days.

### **5:15 pm**

If you are inside when the bell rings you can hear her echoes reverberate against the white walls. I am in the balcony now, looking down into the church as the time for Vespers approaches. The monks come in one by one, two by two, in long white flowing robes. Their workday is done, now it is prayer, supper, prayer again, then retiring for the evening. It is a heartbeat; the Abbey a living organism, the monks encircling her with the Spirit of the love of God.

Years ago, when I first came here, I did not understand. Then, I just knew that being here gave me a centering that I had not found elsewhere. I came here looking for something undefinable. I am not sure if I can define it even now, but I do know I have a greater chance of finding it here than anywhere else, and it is for precisely that reason that I keep coming back.

## Thursday

It is not sunny, but neither is it raining today. I hear the birds above the noise of my heater. Though the first day of spring has already passed, it is still too cold. I did notice some bright daffodils on the hill, a small clump of them. Someone must have planted them there because they are not in a flowerbed, or in a rock garden, but just sitting on the side of the hill proclaiming spring to all who see them.

**11:25 am**

After coming back from morning prayers and mass, I took a shower, then promptly fell asleep. At first I was mad at myself because I lay sleeping when I could have been up walking, reading, being, doing, but then I realized that sleep was probably the most needful thing. Life does not slow down this much at home, in fact, I am lucky if it slows down at all, demanding me to keep up with its frenzied pace. When I cry out with fatigue, it laughs at me as if to say, “If you can’t keep up then get out of the boat!” Often when I can without neglecting duties or responsibilities, I do get out of the boat, and I go sit on the dry land somewhere letting the world go on without me.

It is okay  
To sleep here  
Even though  
The rest of the world  
Moves forward –  
It is okay  
To let the hours  
Wash over you  
Like a fine mist.  
It is okay

To breathe in  
The sweet incense  
And the quiet  
Heart of  
The Presence of God.  
It is okay  
To rest here  
Safely, warmly  
Without demand.  
It is okay to  
Rest here, come  
Rest here, let  
Me wrap you  
In the blankets  
Of rest, of love  
Of peace.  
It is okay to  
Sleep here,  
Come sleep here  
With me –

Dear God, you know that I sometimes look at the world with dread – because there are so many things I do not understand, so many things that frighten me. It would be easy for me to want to stay here, but this is not my calling – this is not the plan you have for me.

I must go amongst the noise and find a way to bring peace. I must stand against the fear and find courage. I must fight against the discord and carry unity. It is a hard job, Lord, and I can only do it if I know you are with me.

Please! Be with me! Show me from time to time that you are close by me. I need to feel you there because the journey is long – and I

do not want to get lost. I have been lost before and it took forever for me to find my way home again.

Home is not where I go, but what I carry with me. None of us are permanent residents here. Some stay longer than others do, but it is not home to any of us. Our home is in a higher place, so it is prudent for us to engrave the map of that journey on our hearts. No one who has gone before can guide and there are no signposts along the way – but once you get there you will know that this is the place that you have been looking for from the beginning.

I am a gatherer. I like to collect things that remind me of where I have been or what I have done. Things that renew my vision or that give me a “fresh scent,” pictures that carry me back to a former time, so that I can remember. So that I don’t forget.

But Lord, make me a sower too. Let me be not only someone who gathers – who takes, but also someone who can leave something valuable behind for someone else to find.

Tomorrow I leave here, and I must go back to my life. Unfortunately, things have not stopped just because I have been here. The mail piles up, the bills come due, the checkbook becomes overdrawn, and people demand my time. I can’t expect for someone to fight my battles for me. No one is going to come in and give me money, so I don’t have to work. I still must face the medical appointments, and the birthdays.

But, Lord, through all of this, let me breathe a little more slowly. Let me sing a little more often, and help me to know that through the work, the worry, the frantic craziness, the demands and sometimes the tears, that only one thing remains – GOD ALONE!

I see the agony  
From the crucifix

as your twisted  
Nail-torn body  
Bleeds for me  
And so, I taste the cup  
Of your bitter suffering.

Though tears run  
Down my cheeks  
In warm rivulets  
I cannot voice  
“Why?” the words  
Won’t surface.

I have sinned.  
I was the one  
Who dragged your  
Bleeding, torn, ravaged  
Body through  
The streets  
As an open display  
Of my own personal  
Wickedness.

And when I denied  
You, you pierced me  
With one long look  
Of your love-filled eyes.

You knew  
That I would need  
You to wash me  
With your  
Poured out blood.

You knew

That I would not  
See God, except  
In You, Oh, crucified one.

You knew  
That it should have been  
My back that bore  
The floggings –  
And when you died  
I wept –  
Because it was then  
That I knew why!

#### **4:30 pm**

Another period of transition – the changing of the mind, or the focus on to what lies ahead, thinking of going home.

I want to continue to simplify my life. If something becomes too complicated, I want to have the opportunity to remove myself from it – or it from me. Especially in terms of relationships. I will be helpful when I need to be, when God calls me to, but I don't want anyone draining me of my energy and of my resources. Maybe later I will feel the desire to jump into the middle of something, but for now, I want to focus on my relationship with God. He has brought me to such a holy place.

#### **5:24 pm**

Sitting in the lower part of the church, waiting for Vespers to begin. The call to prayer is sounding. Vespers and then supper.

Dear God, please help that dear old saint that sat next to me tonight. Give her what she needs when she needs it. Send her someone to stand beside her when that is required. Let her sleep be

sweet! Let her death be sweeter! Fill the remaining part of her life with flowers and springtime. I do not know where she came from, or where she is going. I don't know if she came alone – or if she came with someone. None of that matters, Lord. What matters is that today we shared the same space. So as this night passes and she moves on, please bless her especially because I have asked it!

And because I have prayed this day, my God, I ask you to bless me! Please grant to me the things I need when I need them. Send someone to stand beside me when that it required. Let my sleep be sweet! Let my death be sweeter! Fill the remaining part of my life with flowers and springtime! You know where I have come from and where I am going. I come here alone but that doesn't matter because You brought me here and as the night passes and I move on, you will bless me because I have asked it.

If you are all and in all –  
And nothing exists apart from you  
Then you have painted the night sky red  
And have given the wind its wings.  
If you are all and in all—  
And nothing exists apart from you  
Then you have given fragrance to the hyacinth  
And wrote the sparrow's song.

If you are all, and in all –  
And nothing exists apart from you  
Then you have filled the sea-basins  
And colored the crystal sands.  
If you are all, and in all –  
And nothing exists apart from you  
Then you have given the jackal his laughter  
And bedded the forest with moss.

If you are all, and in all –

And nothing exists apart from you  
Then you laid down the rolling hills  
And gave the stream her boundary.  
If you are all, and in all –  
And nothing exists apart from you  
Then you gave breath to my nostrils  
And put the life in my bones.

God be in my seeing; show me  
The beauty in the darkness.  
God be in my hearing; teach me  
To hear the music in the discord.  
God be in my doing, tell me  
Where the heart is broken.  
God be in my knowing; help me  
To carry your light to the world.

If you are all, and in all –  
And nothing exists apart from you,  
Then you shed yourself for the wretched  
And rent the veil for my access.  
If you are all, and in all –  
And nothing exists apart from you,  
Then you knew my name from the beginning  
And bought my redemption with your sorrows.

God be in my living; direct me  
How to be your willing servant.  
God be in my singing, lead me  
To recount your praises daily.  
God be in my working; guide me  
To be a worker worthy of your hire.  
God be in my sleeping; protect me  
So, I can rise in your morning.

Please God, as I go home, let me take the light of this place with me. When I am caught up in the stress, let me hear the bells of the Abbey and remind me that a simpler life is possible. Keep me focused on you, Lord, not my present circumstances because within you lies the hope of Glory. Oh God, come to my assistance; make haste to help me.



*Shepherd's Staff*: Photograph by Randy Cox

# Notes on Conversion

By Bill Felker

These days I have been reading through *The Lay Cistercian Experience: A Program of Reflection and Sharing*. One of the questions in the first chapter relates to why I was attracted to lay Cistercian life, and I think the shortest (but least satisfactory) answer was that I had lost interest or faith in the diocesan approach to Catholicism.

How can I explain what that diocesan approach meant to me and what a lay monastic approach meant to me? My feelings most likely had little relationship with what either of those traditions might have meant or might mean to a bishop or an abbot.

After four years in a minor seminary (high school), I had rejected the Church's teachings on sexual matters. At first I welcomed the changes brought about by Vatican II, but I was soon disappointed by the dogmas that remained the same and by the loss of Latin in the liturgy and the introduction of new hymns that I felt were in bad taste.

I missed the seminary, but not its rule, and my new emotional theology was full of contradictions. One priest said I had a hate-love relationship with the Church, and that was probably true. I resented the indelible marks that Baptism and Confirmation had left on me. At the same time, in many ways, those marks defined who I was.

My marriage had ended in divorce, and my ex-wife died in a car crash a year afterwards. I chose to live with the woman who eventually became my second wife, but not for several years, much to the chagrin of my mother. As for my daughter from my first marriage, I wasn't able to give her a Catholic upbringing. I finally wrote to my parents that I just couldn't do that to someone, considering all the pain and confusion Catholicism had caused me.

Still, I said my prayers and went to church occasionally. Sometimes I made a general confession. I couldn't let go. The indelible marks were apparently really indelible!

A trip to Gethsemani with three friends opened the door to my interest in monastic prayer and practice. The daily structure of Gethsemani was

reminiscent of my seminary structure. Even without the Latin, the liturgy was tasteful and meaningful to me. And adrift in my retreat, I felt free and unjudged.

In the silence of Gethsemani, I felt lifted from my previous confused and confusing path and guided onto something simpler. I didn't know at the time what that simplicity might mean, nor how such a sudden, illogical and unintellectual conversion could dissolve years of theological and political anguish.

When I eventually discovered the Plan of Life and the principles of the Lay Cistercian vocation, however, I realized I had been gifted with a scaffolding on which I could rebuild an inner life, enter a parallel universe within which to follow a way toward (not a way back to) a meaningful Christianity.

# Alone in Silence

By Linda Boerstler

I am here alone  
On a bright Sunday morning.  
I love the silence.

Too much noise makes me  
Want to hide where it's quiet  
To listen to God.

My God, I'm calling  
You to be near to me and  
To safely hide me.

I cannot find you  
On my own, it is too dark  
For me to see you.

I can feel you  
Within the rough wind  
You call my name.

Do not ever leave  
Me, I will live in your house  
For all of my days.

"Take Words with You"  
Ray Geers



Take words, you say,  
and become the child I loved,  
and still love, even in Egypt.

Where are you child?  
Still in Egypt?  
Still making your little  
gods in the sand?  
Come on out and I will show  
you real gods.

Real gods are simple and speak  
the language of children.  
Unspoilt by the world, they say  
"I love you" without pretense  
and (in a Mr. Rogers kind of  
way) just the way you are.

Real gods don't care about  
your gods in the sand  
as if they were the main thing,  
as if they were important like  
you.

No, it is you they look at,  
your eyes, your heart,  
the scene underneath the seen-  
and they are so much in love  
with what is there...

Did you know that real gods  
would take you out of Egypt if  
you were child-like enough to ask  
them to?

So take words with you, the prophet  
advises, to start your journey back.  
Sincere words, words that fit the truth,  
often spring from failure recently understood  
such as:

Alright Lord,  
I blew it...  
I'm lost...  
I'm ready for a change...  
Help me...  
Sincerely,  
Your child Israel.

Where are you child?  
Going deeper in or heading out of Egypt?  
Real gods (translated as "God") are  
watching patiently.  
They are not far-off, nor are they  
complicated, not to a child.

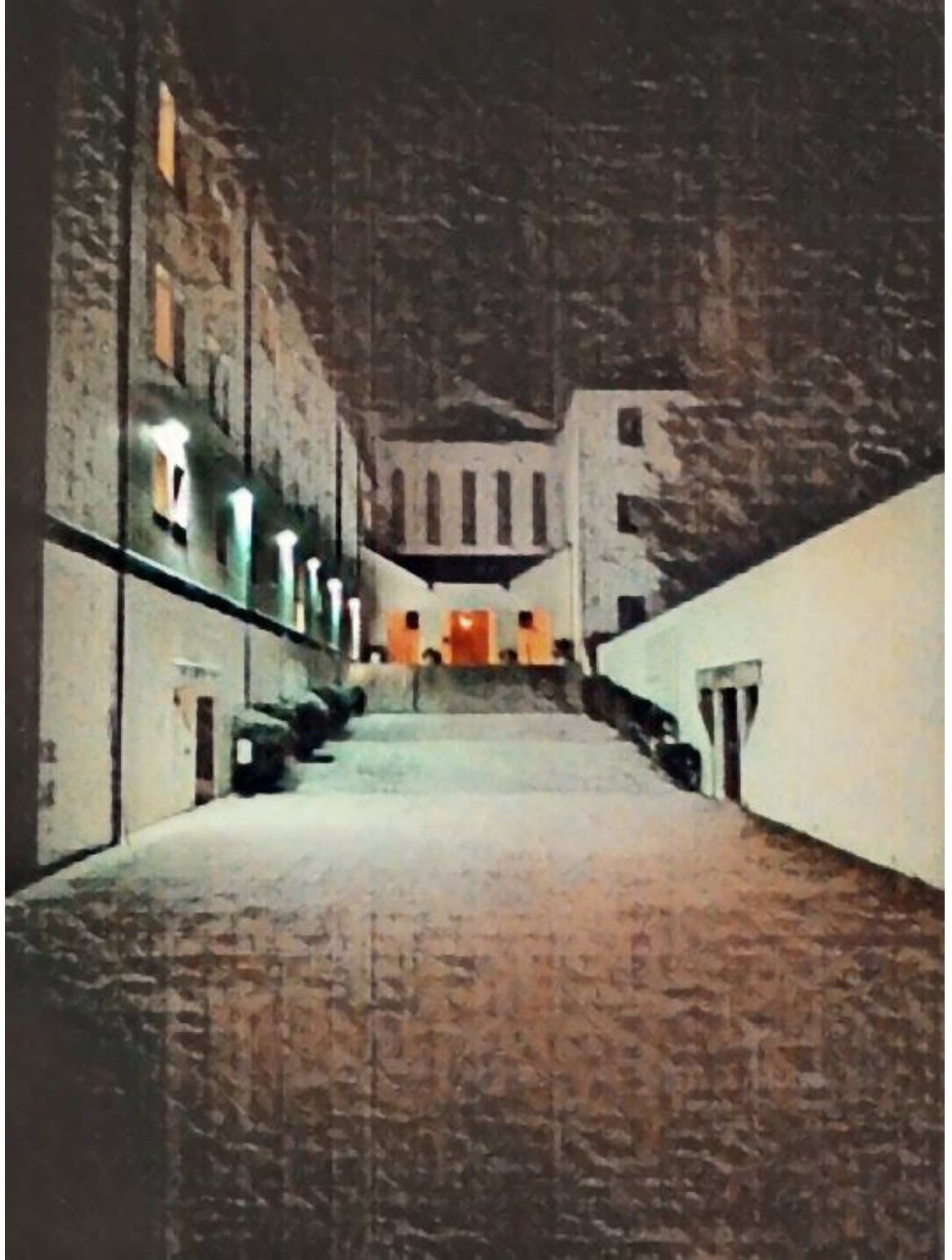
Amen.

***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](mailto:wlfelker@gmail.com) or (937) 767-7434.



*Compline*: Enhanced Photograph by Randy Cox

