

Monastic Musings

News and Views of the Eastern Rite Monastics
of the
Ohio Orthodox Catholic Church

June 2012

From the Idle keyboard

by: schema-Archimandrite Barb



Summer is almost officially here! The birds have been nesting and babies are being born. Gardens have been planted and being nurtured each day to grow wonderful vegetables and/or flowers. It is beautiful to look out of the windows and see the different colors on the plants and all the little critters running about. For us here at the Community, it means that June 1st is the anniversary of the 3 nasty tornados that came through the area last year. So much cleanup/repair is still needed! But life is coming back to normal even if it is a “new normal”.

Slowly I am getting my travel arrangements completed for the trip to Clergy Synod in Cincinnati, OH in September. So much to think about when it comes to traveling these days. What to wear to make it easier to clear the TSA security system. What to pack in the carry-on bag in case the airline misplaces the checked bag! Will the flight chosen actually happen or will it be cancelled and then I have to see what next flight I can get on to make it in time! Flying is not as fun and easy as it used to be, that is for sure. At least my tickets are purchased so I have a seat at the moment. Next it will mean I have to go look at my vestments and see what I am taking and do they need cleaning/pressing before I pack. One good thing though, I won't be surprised this time with snow, or I sure hope not! Never know what Mother Nature might decide to throw at us. I am looking forward to visiting again with Archbishop Charles and all of the Our Lady of Peace Cathedral members again. It will be almost 2 years since I last saw any of them.

This month we have moved into the liturgical season of Ordinary (after Pentecost) time. Basically, it is a very quiet time in the church when all of the major Feasts have been completed and we move once again toward Advent, the start of the new liturgical year. In some ways, it is appropriate that this liturgical season is the quiet time given it is a time where we are so busy with activities with our homes, taking vacations, and farming. Sometimes I like to think of this period as the time of relaxation even though physically that is not the case. It is a time when we can take a deep breath and see all the wonders around us. It is a time that we can use to build our spiritual walk even stronger given that we have nicer days and longer days to enjoy all that

God has given us. We don't feel so rushed to get things done daily. We are able to do things in a little more peaceful pace which is nice. It is also a time that we often gather with our families and friends to share fellowship. Summer is a time of rejuvenation and joy for us! I pray that each of you have a wonderful June. Let the warmth kindle a new spiritual "drive" within you to share the gospel of God's love with everyone you come into contact with. Invite someone to come and visit at church. Your invitation may just be the thing they needed to bring them back into church!

St. Ephrem (Ephrem) of Syria

by: schema-Archimandrite Barb



St. Ephrem was born in 306 and grew up in city of Nisibis (the modern Turkish town of Nusaybin, on the border with Syria) during a very turbulent time. Nisibis was a strong Christian town during the rule of Constantine I, but when he died, the wars broke out and the major persecution of the Christians began. St. Ephrem's family were "poor farmers", and it is thought that his father might have been a pagan priest. From his childhood he was known for his quick temper and impulsive character; thus he often was involved in fights, acted thoughtlessly, and even doubted God's Wisdom. Once, he was unjustly accused of stealing a sheep and was thrown into prison. He heard a voice in a dream calling him to repent and correct his life. After this, he was acquitted of the charges and set free. He finally recovered his senses, and embarked on the path of repentance and salvation by running off to the mountains to join the hermits.

St. Ephrem became a disciple of St. James of Nisibis (a bishop within the Eastern Orthodox Church) and attained gentleness, humility, submission to God's will, and the strength to undergo various temptations without complaint. St. James soon realized the talents of St. Ephrem and asked him to preach sermons, instruct children in school and took him to the First Ecumenical Council at Nicea. St. Ephrem remained with St. James for 14 years (when St. James died).

After the capture of Nisibis by the Persians in 363, St. Ephrem went to a monastery near the city of Edessa. Here he saw many great ascetics (monks), passing their lives in prayer and psalmody. Their caves were solitary shelters and they ate very simply. During this time he became very close to Monk Julian, and it was discovered that St. Ephrem had the gift of teaching. People would often come to him just to hear his counsel. Slowly St. Ephrem started teaching people and writing about repentance along with faith and piety.

St. Ephrem wrote the first Syriac commentary of the Pentateuch of Moses. He wrote many prayers and hymns, thereby enriching the Orthodox Church's liturgical services. Famous prayers of St. Ephrem are to the Most Holy Trinity, to the Son of God, and to the Most Holy Theotokos. He composed hymns for the Twelve Great Feasts of the Lord (the Nativity of Christ, the Baptism, the Resurrection), and funeral hymns.

In many of St Ephrem's writings, we catch glimpses of the Syrian monastics' lives, which were centered on prayer and working in various obediences/chores for the common good of the

brethren. The outlook of all the Syrian monastics was the same. The monks believed that the goal of their efforts was communion with God and the acquisition of divine grace. For them, the present life was a time of tears, fasting and toil: "If the Son of God is within you, then His Kingdom is also within you. Thus, the Kingdom of God is within you, a sinner. Enter into yourself, search diligently and without toil you shall find it. Outside of you is death, and the door to it is sin. Enter into yourself, dwell within your heart, for God is there."

St Ephrem was a great teacher of repentance and was known throughout the Christian world. The forgiveness of sins in the Mystery/Sacrament of Repentance, according to his teaching, is not an external exoneration, not a forgetting of the sins, but rather their complete undoing, their annihilation. The tears of repentance wash away and burn away the sin. Moreover, they (the tears one shed) enliven, they transfigure sinful nature, they give the strength "to walk in the way of the the Lord's commandments," encouraging hope in God. In the fiery font of repentance, the saint wrote, "you sail yourself across, O sinner, you resurrect yourself from the dead." Eternal life is not bestowed on man through God's one-sided efforts, but rather, it constantly grows like a seed within him by his efforts, toils and struggles.

St Ephrem, saw himself as the least and worst of all. He went to Egypt at the end of his life to see the efforts of the great ascetics/monks. He was accepted there as a welcome guest and received great solace from talking and sharing with them. On his return journey he visited at Caesarea in Cappadocia with St Basil the Great, who wanted to ordain him a priest, but he considered himself unworthy of the priesthood. At the insistence of St Basil, he consented only to be ordained as a deacon, in which rank he remained until his death. Later on, St Basil invited St Ephrem to accept a bishop's throne, but the saint faked madness in order to avoid this honor, humbly regarding himself as unworthy of it.

After his return to the Edessa wilderness, St Ephrem hoped to spend the rest of his life in solitude, but God again summoned him to serve his neighbor. The inhabitants of Edessa were suffering from a devastating famine. By the influence of his word, he persuaded the wealthy to render aid to those in need. From the offerings of believers he built a poor-house for the poor and sick. St Ephrem then withdrew to a cave near Edessa, where he remained to the end of his days.

One of St. Ephrem's famous prayers is known as the "Prayer of St. Ephrem":

*O Lord and Master of my life, give me not the spirit of sloth,
despair, lust for power and idle talk.*

*But grant unto me, Thy servant, a spirit of chastity (integrity),
humility, patience and love.*

*Yea, O Lord and King, grant me to see mine own faults and not to
judge my brother. For blessed art Thou unto the ages of ages.
Amen.*

Desert Wisdom

"....Whether you are in church, or in your house, or in the country; whether you are guarding sheep, or constructing buildings, or present at drinking parties, do not stop praying. When you

are able, bend your knees, when you cannot, make intercession in your mind, 'at evening and at morning and at midday'. If prayer precedes your work and if, when you rise from your bed, your first movements are accompanied by prayer, sin can find no entrance to attack your soul.

Prayer is a guard of prudence, control of wrath, restraint of pride, cleansing of malice, destruction of envy, righting of impiety. Prayer is strength of bodies, prosperity of a household, good order of a city, might of a kingdom, trophy of war, assurance of peace. Prayer is a seal of virginity, fidelity in marriage, weapon of travelers, guardian of sleepers, courage of the wakeful, abundance for farmers, safety of those who sail. Prayer is an advocate for those being judged, remission for the bound, consolation for the grieving, gladness for the joyful, comfort for mourners, a feast on birthdays, a crown for the married, a shroud for the dying. Prayer is converse with God, equal honour with the Angels, progress in good things, averting of evils, righting of sinners. Prayer made the whale a house for Jonas, brought Ezechias back to life from the gates of death, turned the flame to wind of moisture for the Youths in Babylon. Through prayer Elias bound the heaven not to rain for three years and six months....."

(St. Ephrem of Syria)

Angelo Guiseppe Roncalli – Servant of the Servants of God *By Rev. Mother Myrella LeClair*

On June 3rd, we celebrate the heavenly birthday of a simple and humble man, Angelo Guiseppe Roncalli, whose life and actions in many ways demonstrated the teachings of Christ. He too challenged and upended the entrenched teachings of the equivalent of the 20th century Sanhedrin (the Magisterium) by preaching, teaching, and demonstrating love, mercy, and forgiveness to all with whom he came into contact. Angelo desired to fulfill the principle of universal brotherhood espoused by Jesus. This man whose life of "humility, kindness and service to others" inspired so many people throughout the world is better known as Pope John XXIII.



Although his birth was not heralded by angels nor was he visited by Magi, Angelo also was born into poverty just as his beloved Jesus was. Born on November 25, 1881 in a small town in northern Italy, he was the firstborn son and fourth oldest child in a family of 14 peasant sharecroppers – a family so desperately poor that they could barely afford bread. They lived in the house of the main sharecropper, his father's brother. So, Angelo grew up in a household of about 32 people – with 20 of the members being children! The lessons of simplicity, understanding, forgiveness, charity, and love that he learned from being raised in this extended family influenced his thoughts and actions throughout his life. It was during Angelo's childhood that he developed a wonderful sense of humor and a great love of people.

Angelo entered the diocesan seminary of Bergamo at the age of 12 and began the practice of keeping a spiritual diary (*Journal of a Soul*). While still a seminarian, he became a professed Secular Order Franciscan and took to heart Francis' exhortation to "preach the Gospel" by word and by actions. He received a scholarship to attend the Pontifical seminary in Rome and was ordained to the priesthood in 1904. In 1905, the new Bishop of Bergamo appointed Father Roncalli as his secretary, and it was during this period that Fr. Roncalli became more involved

with the issues of the working classes. His perspective was further influenced when in 1915 during World War I, he was drafted into the Royal Italian Army as a sergeant, and served in the medical corps as a stretcher-bearer and as a chaplain. After being discharged from the army in 1919, he was named spiritual director of the seminary and continued to be involved in social justice issues. It was his outreach to and association with all people regardless of social status, politics, and religious beliefs that upset the Roman Curia. Fr. Roncalli was removed from his Professorship and transferred to Bulgaria – as its Titular Bishop in 1925. His superiors probably thought that they had silenced him and ended his activism; however, Bulgaria was only the beginning of his long diplomatic and activist career. While there, he worked with Eastern Rite Catholics as well as with the Eastern Orthodox to teach them “Catholics and Orthodox are not enemies, but brothers. We have the same faith; we share the same sacraments”. That comment was not appreciated by the Roman Catholic leadership, who regarded the Orthodox Church as heretics.

In 1935, Bishop Roncalli was made Apostolic Delegate to Turkey and Greece. During the ten years that he spent in Istanbul, he worked to foster peace and harmony among various national groups in Istanbul and established friendly relations with the Turkish government. Bishop Roncalli introduced the use of the Turkish language in worship and in the official documents of the church and eventually won the admiration of some high Turkish officials. He also continued to make conciliatory gestures toward the Orthodox and met with Ecumenical Patriarch Benjamin in 1939. Bishop Roncalli’s pastoral initiatives and ecumenical approach, along with his diplomatic activities, were the foundation for the many innovations he later implemented during his pontificate. In his own words:

“Jesus came to break down barriers. He died to proclaim universal brotherhood; this central point of His teaching is charity, that is, the love that binds all human beings to Him as the elder brother and binds us all with Him to the Father. I know right away that difficulties can emerge locally, which may go against the free development of the soul of each faithful in communicating the truth and grace of his brothers. But you know very well that there are many, countless relations and contacts that provide possibilities to transmit the divine message.”

During World War II, he used his office to help the Jewish underground to save thousands of refugees in Europe from the Nazis and criticized Pope Pius XII’s slow response to the Holocaust:

“We are conscious today that many, many centuries of blindness have cloaked our eyes so that we can no longer see the beauty of Thy chosen people nor recognize in their faces the features of our privileged brethren. We realize that the mark of Cain stands upon our foreheads. Across the centuries our brother Abel has lain in blood which we drew, or shed tears we caused by forgetting Thy love. Forgive us for the curse we falsely attached to their name as Jews. Forgive us for crucifying Thee a second time in their flesh. For we know what we did”.

After France was liberated by the Allies, Pope Pius XII named Bishop Roncalli as papal nuncio to France in late 1944. He negotiated the retirement of Roman Catholic bishops who had collaborated with the German occupation forces. In 1953 he was made a cardinal and patriarch (archbishop) of Venice.

On Oct. 28, 1958, when the College of Cardinals elected Cardinal Roncalli to be the next pope, they assumed he would be a short-term, caretaker Pope – one who would just sit on his throne and leave the decisions to the Ultra conservative faction headed by Cardinal Alfredo Ottavani.

However, when John XXIII was enthroned as Pope, he shattered any illusions that the Ultra Conservatives had that he would just be a puppet pope. On the day of his enthronement, he defined the kind of Pope he wanted to be: “as pastor rather than an expert administrator, as priest rather than as skilled prelate, as servant rather than as politician”. John XXIII was the people’s Pope – the Servant of the Servants of God.

When Pope John XXIII convened the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, it was because he felt that the Roman Catholic Church needed to be more Catholic than Roman, one that was more universal and caring than controlling. By inviting representatives of other Christian groups to attend as observers, he aimed to promote a council that truly was ecumenical in nature and that fostered Christian unity and world peace. To Pope John XXIII, Tradition was important, but so was openness to new ideas:

“It is important to always keep moving and not to rest on traditional paths. We have to keep seeking new contacts, and to always be receptive for the legitimate challenges of the time in which we are called to live, so that Christ may be proclaimed and recognized in every way.”

On April 11, 1963, Pope John promulgated his last Encyclical Letter *Pacem in Terris*, addressing it not only to Roman Catholics but also to the “Clergy and Faithful of the Whole World and To All Men of Good Will”. This letter was a plea for world peace and international cooperation:

“This is the peace which We implore of Him with the ardent yearning of Our prayer. May He banish from the hearts of men whatever might endanger peace, may He transform them into witnesses of truth, justice and brotherly love. May He enlighten the rulers of peoples so that in addition to their solicitude for the proper welfare of their citizens, they may guarantee and defend the great gift of peace; may He enkindle the wills of all, so that they may overcome the barriers that divide, cherish the bonds of mutual charity, understand others, and pardon those who have done them wrong; by virtue of his action, may all peoples of the earth become as brothers, and may the most longed-for peace blossom forth and reign always among them.”

On June 3, 1963, the spiritual journey of Pope John XXIII, the Vicar of Christ, ended when he died of stomach cancer. His legacy, however, continues. Pope John XXIII loved people – all people. He understood that all humans were God’s creations – made in the image of likeness of God – and that nothing could change that regardless of a person’s religious beliefs or even their non-belief. John did not just say “the whole world is my family” but also demonstrated it throughout his life. He asks us to do the same:

“Every believer in this world must be a spark of light, a core of love, life-giving leaven in the mass: and the more he is so, the more he will live, in his innermost depths, in communion with God”.

For today, and every day, let us practice what Pope John XXIII has taught us:

“I want to be kind, today and always, to everyone”.

Call to Action

*“The world is my cloister, my body is my cell, and my soul is the hermit within.”
-- St. Francis of Assisi*

St. Francis really could not have said anything more true today. That is how the monastics of the Ohio Orthodox Catholic Church feel each and every day. Whether it be the Franciscan Order or the Eastern Rite Order, all have been called to serve God in the place they are living at the moment and in a way that will help the community they live in. No, our monastic orders do not have physical monasteries and they have to provide everything for themselves, but they live their lives as monastic hermits!

Have you felt the call to be a monastic or hermit? If so, why not explore this feeling with Archbishop Charles (chancery@ohioocc.org) and see just where it might lead you.

Prayer Requests

Mom LeClair
Br. Yossi and Jim
Linda and Wayne
Fr. David and family
Fr. Rick Hobbs
Our Archbishop -- +Charles Smith, OSF

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