

Monastic Musings

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

May 2012

From the Idle keyboard

by: schema-Archimandrite Barb

May ends the Easter Season within the Church with Pentecost on May 27th. I hope each of you had a great Easter Season and have found the “new spiritual you” as you move forward through the next few months. We all have to watch out that we do not fall back into old habits but continue the new spiritual habits that we have developed or are developing. That’s not an easy thing, but as we work at it, it becomes almost second nature to live in our new pathway.

We here at the Holy Theotokos of Mercy Community continue to strive to live our lives as monastics although we are directly involved within the world because of our jobs so that we can support ourselves. We do dream of a day when we can focus our daily lives on doing God’s work within the community that we are living in - whether it helping at food banks, food kitchens, offering spiritual classes to others, etc. That time will come when God knows it is the right time for us and places us in the right place for the ministry. We have learned to live each day letting God be the guiding force. We may put out ideas of what we might like to do, and God may decide that it is not the right path at the moment. That means we have to see things a little differently! You know how hard that can be at times. Our egos love to rule us and have us do things that maybe are not the wisest ideas at the moment. We have to constantly guard against following the wrong path, but as one grows stronger in listening to God, it actually becomes so much easier to realize when it is your ego versus when it is God wanting you to do something with your life.

As you know, this newsletter is a product of our monastic community. Given this, there may be times you wonder where we are coming from in our teachings/writings - not to worry though as our teachings/writings are well grounded in theology and really do not stray from what Bishop Charles teaches. We just love to say things in a way that will “stir the pot” so to speak so that you are forced to think in a little different way than you may have in the past. That is one nice thing of being with an independent church. You are able to cross denominational lines in your teachings/writings so that you can bring forth ideas more clearly. So many times our churches and even pastors are not willing to touch certain topics because they are uncomfortable or they know it will make the congregation uncomfortable. Is that what we should be doing, or should we be willing to discuss all topics so that all of us can learn and share openly together? Our spirituality and, our understanding of God grows when we are willing to challenge our long held

ideas so as to be able to see things in a new light. Do we here at the Community have the absolute answers? Of course not - however we are willing to put out some thoughts and allow you to draw your own conclusions. Hopefully, you are willing to challenge us so that we too can learn what you are thinking and what you hold as beliefs.

Desert Wisdom

A hermit said to a brother, "Do not measure yourself against your brother, saying that you are more serious or more chaste or more understanding than he is. But be obedient to the grace of God, in the spirit of poverty, and in love unfeigned. The efforts of a man swollen with vanity are futile. It is written, 'Let him that thinks he stands take heed lest he fall' (I Corinthians 10:12); 'let your speech be seasoned with salt' (Colossians 4:6) and so you will be dependent on Christ."

The Ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ

by: Rev. Mother Myrella LeClair

"I ascend unto my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God" (John 20:17)

As I began to think about what I wanted to write about in the May monastic newsletter, I kept seeing this large van with a bumper sticker that said: "Christ has died for your sins and mine". While I believe that statement is true, I also believe that the person's focus is misguided. At times, I want to paste a bumper sticker right next to that one that says: "Christ is risen, and He has deemed us worthy." If we only see our sinfulness, then we have chosen to ignore what Christ accomplished through His Resurrection and Ascension: our salvation, eternal life, and union with God. The owner of the bumper sticker is not alone in his or her thinking and focus.

Christ remained on earth for forty days after His Resurrection continuing to teach His disciples, who did not "get it" despite their witnessing the many miracles that Christ performed and listening to His sermons. The disciples did not understand what Christ was teaching them. Seeing the Crucifixion as an end rather than a horrific means to an end, the disciples were disillusioned and wallowing in self-pity; they still believed in an earthly triumph – in earthly glory. Except for John, the disciple "whom Jesus loved", none of the other disciples had at first grasped the meaning of the empty tomb. Only John understood at once and believed (John 20:8). Jesus had to come back and scold them about their unbelief and hardness of heart:

"The mystery of the Apostles' "unbelief" is partly disclosed in the narrative of the Gospel: "But we trusted that it had been He which should have redeemed Israel," with disillusionment and complaint said the two disciples to their mysterious Companion on the way to Emmaus (Luke 24:21). They meant: He was betrayed, condemned to death and crucified. The news of the Resurrection brought by the women only "astonished" them. They still wait for an earthly triumph, for an external victory. The same temptation possesses their hearts, which first prevented them from accepting "the preaching of the Cross" and made them argue every time the Saviour tried to reveal His mystery to them. "Ought not Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?" (Luke 24:26). It was still difficult to understand this.

He had the power to arise, why did He allow what that had happened to take place at all? Why did He take upon Himself disgrace, blasphemy and wounds? In the eyes of all Jerusalem, amidst the vast crowds assembled for the Great Feast, He was condemned and suffered a shameful death. And now He enters not into the Holy City, neither to the people which beheld His shame and death, nor to the High Priests and elders, nor to Pilate - so that He might make their crime obvious and smite their pride. Instead, He sends His disciples away to remote Galilee and appears to them there. Even much earlier the disciples wondered, "How is it that Thou wilt manifest Thyself unto us, and not unto the world?" (John 14:22). Their wonder continues, and even on the day of His glorious Ascension the Apostles question the Lord, "Lord, wilt Thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6). They still did not comprehend the meaning of His Resurrection, they did not understand what it meant that He was "ascending" to the Father. Their eyes were opened but later, when "the promise of the Father" had been fulfilled."

(V. Rev. George Flovorosky, Orthodox Theologian)

Christ eases the disciples' anxiety by telling them:

"It is not for you to know the times or seasons that the Father has set by his own authority. Rather, you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.¹⁰ And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes,¹¹ and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven." (Acts 1:7-11)

We also learn in Luke's Gospel (24:44-53) about the promise Christ made to His disciples and that they became joyful at the departure of their Master:

Jesus said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the Law from Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms must be fulfilled." Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures. He said to them, "This is what is written: the Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and a change of heart and life for the forgiveness of sins must be preached in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. Look, I'm sending to you what my Father promised, but you are to stay in the city until you have been furnished with heavenly power." He led them out as far as Bethany, where he lifted his hands and blessed them. As he blessed them, he left them and was taken up to heaven. They worshipped him and returned to Jerusalem overwhelmed with joy. And they were continuously in the temple praising God.

The disciples now knew that Christ was indeed alive and that He had completed his earthly mission of bringing Salvation to all people. Having fulfilled His Father's plan for mankind, Christ ascends and returns to His Father. In doing so, he raises earth to Heaven with Him. "Christ's



body ascended into heaven and opened heaven's doors to all." He now goes to prepare a place for us and sends us the Holy Spirit to be our Guide along the Way.

Finally, after much doubt, the disciples understood, believed, and spread the Good News throughout the world. They had to have a change of heart and mind, though, for their transformation to occur. The first step was to allow their minds and hearts to be open to Christ's teachings and be willing to place their trust in Him. Only then were they able to awaken to their true nature and allow their minds and hearts to ascend to and join with Christ so as to become "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4)

So, just as the disciples finally "got it", we also must move from the Crucifixion (repenting) to the Resurrection (awakening to our Redemption) and finally to Ascension (following the Way so as to reunite with Christ eternally).

Let us pray:

"O Christ our God, You ascended in Glory and gladdened Your disciples by the promise of the Holy Spirit. Your blessing assured them that You are the Son of God, the Redeemer of the world."

O Christ our God, upon fulfilling Your dispensation for our sake, You ascended in Glory, uniting the earthly with the heavenly. You were never separate but remained inseparable, and cried out to those who love You, "I am with you and no one is against you."

Amen!

Pachomius the Great

by: schema-Archimandrite Barb

Pachomius the Great is known as the founder of the Coenobitic way of life or living in monasteries. Given the time he was living, the Church of the area would have been Eastern Orthodox (Coptic Orthodox to be exact) thus he was an Eastern Orthodox monastic.

He founded his nine monasteries in Tabennisi (Upper Egypt area), Egypt starting around 327AD which counted around 7,000 monks. At this time, he had been a hermit monk for 13 years learning all he could to follow God's commandments in this world. He was given a dream one night to start his first monastery and a basic rule for the monastery. He and the elder he had lived with for 10 years founded the first monastery and used the new rule for the monastics. Pachomius' rule balanced the communal (living in a monastery) life with the solitary (hermit) life; monks live in individual cells but work together for the common good.

Pachomius was strict with the community of monks that began to grow around him. He gave everyone the same food and attire. The monks of the monastery fulfilled the obediences (chores) assigned them for the common good of the monastery. The monks were not allowed to possess their own money or to accept anything from their relatives. Pachomius considered that an obedience fulfilled with zeal (love of God) was greater than fasting or prayer. He also demanded from the monks an exact observance of the monastic rule, and he chastised slackers. Once he even refused to speak directly with his own sister in order that he might maintain his detachment from the world. He did, however, talk to her through a messenger, and he blessed her desire to become a nun; soon, she had her own all-female monastic community growing up around her across the Nile River from his monastery. Severe and strict towards himself, Pachomius had great kindness and courtesy toward the deficiencies of spiritually immature monks, helping them grow stronger in their spirituality. He taught his monastics to avoid judging others, and he himself feared to judge anyone even in thought.



Pachomius died around the year 346 at the age of fifty-three, and was buried on a hill near the first monastery. Pachomius' monastic rule became the foundation of the Rule of St. Benedict that is used frequently with the Western monastic communities. His rule is still the basic rule used within the Eastern Orthodox monasteries.

Thou didst prove a chief pastor of the Chief Shepherd, Christ, guiding the flocks of monastics unto the heavenly fold, whence thou learntest of the habit and the way of life that doth befit ascetic ranks; having taught this to thy monks, thou now dancest and rejoicest with them in heavenly dwellings, O great Pachomios, our Father and guide.
(Orthodox Hymn to the Saint)

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 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 hermit!

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

Prayer Requests

Mom LeClair

Br. Yossi and Jim

Bill and Monica

Linda and Wayne

Fr. David and family

Fr. Rick Hobbs

Our Archbishop -- +Charles Smith, OSF

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All writings are the views of the author(s) on a particular subject and are meant to challenge your thinking so as to help you grow in your spiritual walk with God.

Contact: archimandritebarb@ohioocc.org