

The first three articles in this issue of the newsletter treat the topic of vocation to the monastic life. First, Abbot James reports on a conference in Texas in January at which superiors and vocations directors shared concerns and prospects. Then Brothers Ignacio and Isaiah treat the matter from their personal perspectives as they complete their juniorates, and approach the watershed of solemn profession in the monastery.



Religious Vocations Conference in Houston

From January 14 through 16, Abbot James Wiseman and Fr Christopher Wyvill, the abbey's vocation director, joined about sixty other religious priests and brothers for a conference sponsored by the National Religious Vocation Conference to focus on new-membership issues. Funded by an anonymous foundation, the gathering was held at the Holy Name Retreat Center in Houston (where these photos were taken) and was similar to one held at St Meinrad Archabbey a month earlier, both meetings being part of the NRVC's Moving Forward in Hope National Vocation Plan, which was developed in 2010.

The first of the four major speakers was Fr Francis Morrisey, OMI, former dean of canon law at the University of Saint Paul in Ottawa. He gave very practical advice about what canon law says about the foundations of religious life and how the various canons can help communities discern whether or not a particular inquirer should be encouraged to join. As there was limited time for discussion after his presentation, Fr Morrisey was also available for a lengthier period of questions and answers that evening, as were the other speakers. The second talk was of a very different nature. Fr Thomas Gaunt, SJ, executive director of the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, located here in Washington, DC, gave a detailed presentation on "Changing Demographics of the Catholic Church and their Implications for Vocations to Religious Life for Men." Among other things, he

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noted the ever-increasing numbers of Hispanics in the Church in our country. The third major address was by Br Sean Sammon, FMS, who has published many books and articles about religious life in recent decades. His talk, later made available in booklet form, addressed "The Impact of American Culture on Religious Life and Vocations." The final speaker was a fellow Benedictine, Br John Mark Falkenhain, OSB, of St. Meinrad, who presented the "Culture of Vocations Assessment Tool" that he had helped develop and that each participant subsequently received in booklet form. We at St Anselm's have ordered copies of this tool for each member of our community and will be using it for community discussions in the coming months so that we may be better prepared to receive qualified new members into our community.

Throughout the days of the conference, there were also opportunities for those attending to discuss in small groups the matters raised by the speakers. All sessions were expertly facilitated by Br Paul Michalenko, ST, director of the Institute of Religious Formation at the Chicago Theological Union, and the liturgies were very well prepared, with five different instrumentalists providing music to accompany our singing. At the end of the two and a half days together, everyone seemed very pleased with the program and eager to share with their own communities all that they had learned.

God Calls Us When He Wills: A Method to Discern One's Calling

Hello to everyone out there! The article you are about to read is simply a reflection, a way that may be of help to you or someone you know who may be struggling with aspirations to a religious vocation. Near the end, it includes a piece by a woman named Elise Amyx that we have been given permission to print in this newsletter, for I found it an interesting and unique way of gathering data about oneself to assist in the process of discerning what God may be saying to any of us as we seek our path in life. Before turning to that, I want to start with a brief synopsis of my own spiritual journey.

The photos accompanying this article are of me at different times in my life. I added them because they have helped me review my life in a visual way and at the same time see the slow step-by-step process that God was taking in bringing me to what I am convinced was his right moment or time. Over the years I have been asked on many occasions why I wanted to be a priest or, more recently, a monk. My usual response has been, "I don't know," and to be honest, my response remains the same today. So let's see if we can piece together what a true calling is or means. I'll start from the present and some of the methods I used to assist me, along with prayer and professional guidance.

Just a few months ago, at the regular Sunday community mass here at Saint Anselm's Abbey, I made a commitment to the monastic way of life. During the ceremony I professed temporary vows of stability, *conversatio morum*, and obedience for three years, signing the profession document in the presence of God and his witnesses as Brother Isaiah (David) Lord, OSB. How, you may ask, did I reach this point?

A native of Erie, Pennsylvania, I was born to my parents, Frank Lord, Jr., and Rose Lord, on December 17, 1955 and was given the name David Kirk Lord. I later learned that the name David comes from a Hebrew word meaning "beloved." My father was born in Johnsonburg, Pennsylvania, to English and Irish parents and had been baptized a Lutheran. He served in the United States Army for eight years and upon discharge was a blue-collar worker for most of his life. He passed away in 1982 at the age of sixty-five.

My mother was born in Erie to Italian parents, Leonard and Algesia Scalzitti, and was baptized and raised a Roman Catholic. Within a year after her marriage to my father I was born and, by mom's influence, was raised a Roman Catholic.

I well remember a story that my father told me several years later that both shocked me and persuaded me that my birth was in fact truly the beginning of God's plan for me. He told me that it was a cold winter day and he had been sitting patiently for long hours at the hospital wait-

ing for his first born. He didn't remember the hour, but he said that he was eventually approached by the attending physician in charge of the delivery and told by the doctor that in all likelihood I would not survive the birth. My mother had been in labor for over thirty hours and was carrying me breeched. The doctor had concluded I would probably be dead upon delivery and so told my father to prepare himself for the worst. Happily the doctor was wrong and I survived, as did mom, so our family had a new member. Two years later she gave birth to her second son, Dean Douglas Lord.

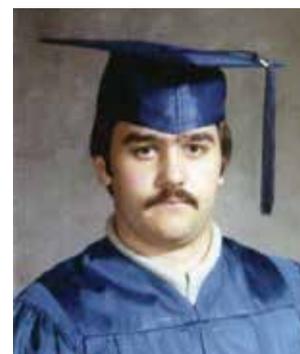


When I was five years old I began attending kindergarten and then first grade at a public school in Lake City, Pennsylvania, not far from Erie, but my parents then decided to transfer me to a Catholic parochial school, St John's, in the nearby town of Girard. There I received the sacraments of Reconciliation and the Holy Eucharist. This, I now believe, was the beginning of my thoughts about a religious vocation, specifically about becoming a priest. These thoughts continued

when I began to attend a different parochial school, Our Lady of Peace, in another of the suburbs of Erie. Here I received the sacrament of Confirmation and subsequently graduated in 1969. I still did not really understand anything about callings and the discernment process, but the thoughts about a religious vocation lingered, though not for long, for by the time I graduated from a public high school four years later, any such thoughts had dissipated.

For almost all young people in our country, high school is a time of transition, and I was no exception. My vocational aspiration was now focused on a career in law enforcement.

Just before graduation I had taken the college boards and, having received an acceptable score, applied to a local Catholic college, Mercyhurst, that had just started an undergraduate program in criminal justice. I was accepted for the fall term and so began a new chapter in my life, which I thought would lead to a lifelong career in law enforcement. It wasn't long, however, before thoughts of a



David Lord as
high school graduate

religious vocation sneaked their way back into my mind. I didn't understand any of it!

Like perhaps many others, I ignored these thoughts at first and continued on to what I thought was the right path for me. I continued my studies and was eventually offered a position with the college's campus security department, where I worked until I was offered a position as a corrections officer with the Erie County Department of Corrections at the age of twenty-four. In addition to this full-time position, I was also working as an on-call officer for the US Marshal Service and the Sheriff's Office. For a while I left the corrections field and worked as a police officer for two separate agencies, but then returned to corrections in my late-twenties. I was still having passing thoughts about, yes, again, that religious vocation thing.

Shortly after beginning work at the Erie County Prison I met two Catholic priests who were assigned as prison chaplains to that facility. I became friends with both of them and eventually opened my heart and mind to both about my recurring thoughts about a religious vocation. I was hoping that since they had different backgrounds and personalities, at least one of them would be able to resolve these mysterious recurrences. In fact, both priests gave me great reassurance and confidence, so on their advice and now at age thirty-one, I finally had the courage to resign my full-time position as a public servant and enter the priestly formation program at Saint Mark Seminary for the Diocese of Erie. I spent two great years in formation there as a seminarian, although I was still working on-call positions as an officer for the Sheriff's Office and the Corrections Department, and as an investigator for the Public Defender's Office. I attended classes at both Mercyhurst College and Gannon University in order to fulfill various course requirements in philosophy and theology. I was very happy, doing a little bit of everything I desired. But guess what? I was close to completing the formation program when the vocation director called me in one day and, along with his team members, said they had come to the conclusion that my heart was still embedded in a career with law enforce-

ment. So in 1990, at the age of thirty-three, I left the seminary, hoping this would be a sign and a definitive end to what I considered this "fantasy."

Even though the formation director said I was free to look elsewhere, I vowed not even to consider such thoughts again, so I re-entered the corrections field. I spent the next two decades in such work, attaining the rank of lieutenant and training coordinator and eventually taking an early retirement to become my ailing mother's primary care giver while also taking classes to be trained as an emergency medical technician (EMT).

Mom passed away just before her eighty-eighth birthday. My own heart remained restless. To clear my mind over the loss of my mother, especially after having watched her long years of suffering, I began immersing myself in activities at my parish, Saint Peter Cathedral. I served there as a catechist, eucharistic minister, parish council member, and lector. Needing some income, I also took on a position with AmeriCorps, a public service organization where I worked primarily with a specialist in behavioral counseling in the public school system. After about a year, I applied for and was offered a position working with troubled youth at Abraxas Youth Services in Erie as a night supervisor. Another year passed, and as I continued at Abraxas and helped care for an elderly uncle, guess what?—the possibility of a religious vocation began haunting me once more.

So, here are the questions that seem inevitably to arise: When does God actually call us to a particular vocation? When does our heart stop being restless? Does God possibly call us to more than one vocation in our life time? That's the great mystery underlying the title of this article. What's the story? What's the truth? Let's see if we can get some answers to these questions. Might there be an approach that can give us a new perspective? I think there is, for not long ago I came across an article by a woman not widely known. It contained some interesting suggestions that could help a person in dealing with some of life's great mysteries, questions like: "What are we truly here for?" and "What does God really call us to do?" The author of the piece, Elise Amyx, is the manager of special projects at the Institute for Faith, Work, & Economics. The Institute is a unique, Christian research organization committed to advancing biblical and economic principles that help individuals find fulfillment in their work and contribute to a free and flourishing society. This article is reprinted with permission from the Institute and originally appeared on the Institute's blog, Creativity—Purpose—Freedom, at blog.tifwe.org. Here is what Elise wrote:

I expected to discover my calling in college. I planned to take different classes, see what subjects I did or didn't like, and my calling would be discovered. But it didn't turn out that way. I was still clueless about calling when graduation rolled around. I trusted God and I knew he had a plan for me, but I was still frustrated. Why was it so hard to figure out what God wanted me to do with my life?



David Lord, kneeling (center)

One piece of advice I wish I heard in college is that your calling is not something you discover, it is something you recognize.

Your calling is always present. It's not something you find under a rock or something that falls from the sky onto your lap. Instead, it shows itself, being revealed after prayer, reflection and input from trusted friends and relatives.

At the "What's Next? Figuring Out Faith, Work, and Calling" conference at Regent University earlier this month, Rick Wellock, director of organizational development at Serving Leaders, explained this concept about calling:

God's will for your life is not a job. Rather, it's being who you are, where you are, with who you are with, given the way that you're gifted, and the way you've yielded those gifts.

When I heard Wellock say this, I couldn't believe it was that simple. I knew God's calling for my life was not limited to a job, but it never occurred to me that my calling was really just who I am, created with unique gifts in the image of God.

A second piece of advice I wish someone had told me in college is that your calling is not something you figure out on your own. Wellock demonstrated this by pairing students together and walking them through an exercise to help them recognize their vocational callings together in relationship. This is an exercise you can participate in, too. Here's what you need:

1. One hour.
2. A close friend or family member.
3. Paper and something with which to write.

Step #1: Each person starts by writing down a short summary of two stories they remember from their childhood, one occurring before ten years old and one occurring after ten years old. The stories can be anything from

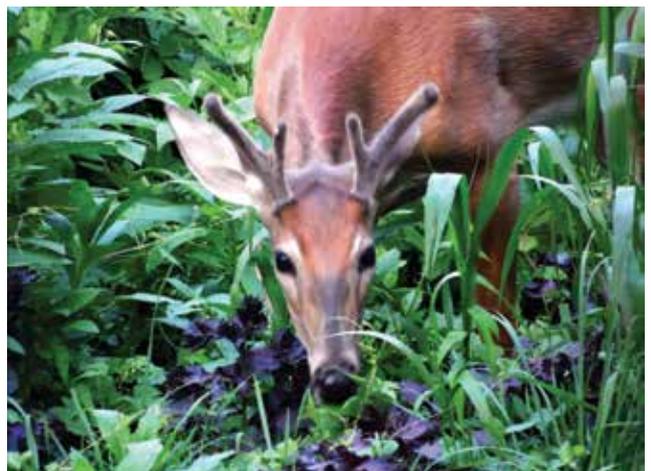
building a fort to running a lemonade stand. Each story should be an example of something you enjoyed doing and did well, with some sense of satisfaction. The idea behind this is that God has created us with unique gifts that have always been present in us. Romans 12:4-6 says, For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. Conversation about childhood memories can help us recognize the different talents God formed us with in the womb, so that we might use them for his glory.

Step #2: Exchange papers and take turns interviewing each other. Ask your partner three questions about each story:

1. What did you do?
2. How did you do it?
3. How was it satisfying to you?

Pay attention to the verbs your partner uses in their explanations. These verbs are clues to determining prominent themes or patterns in your partner's stories. Take note of these themes or patterns, and write them down.

Step #3: Exchange papers again and take some time to reflect on the themes and patterns your partner recognizes in your stories. Pick one theme about yourself to intentionally observe moving forward. Think about how you will observe it. Try to catch yourself repeating this pattern in the future and ask yourself, "How can I do more of this?" and "How can I do it better?" Knowing your gifts allows you to use them as God has called you. When I went through this exercise, God revealed patterns in my life that I did not see before. As I revisited my childhood, I was surprised to see self-inflicted stereotypes of myself crumble. God used conversation about my past to reveal new talents that I previously didn't recognize. He



also used this conversation to affirm what I already knew about myself and my calling. Repeating this exercise with prayer and several people who know you well can help reveal what you are made of and awaken you to what God has called you to do.

So, what do her thoughts have to do with you or me? Maybe nothing. But if you are still wondering where God may be leading you, then continue to wonder and pray, pray hard, for as it is said, "Prayer changes things." And if you have these questions about vocation and liked Elise Amyx's suggestions, then give them a try. Go for it. You can't go wrong, and if you are truly seeking an answer, it may surprise you! And remember, as I said in the title of this article, "God calls when *He* wills."

Before closing this article, I would like to share one last thing: the letter below, which I wrote on a Saturday morning, November 12, 2011, when I was visiting St Anselm's from Erie, after the abbey's community Mass.

Dear Saint Anselm's Abbey Vocation Committee,

After Mass on the date of this letter, the feast day of St Frances Xavier Cabrini, I parked my car at the top of the hill facing the Abbey school, looking toward the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception. This is something I usually do each morning during the week after Morning Prayer, and on occasion after Mass on the weekends. It is an extra moment with God to reflect on the prayers and readings that start my day. It was, however, on this particular Saturday morning, as I was quietly sitting in my car, when a sparrow suddenly landed on the driver's side window ledge; it sat there for a moment, gave a small chirp, and then flew away. At first, I did not think anything of it and continued with my silent meditation.

I left the area a short time later, returning to the Abbey halls. The brief encounter with the sparrow, however, was still on my mind. I went to my

room changed and went on to continue my day. As the morning was passing, for some reason the sparrow incident came to my mind again. I needed to know why! I went to the Psalms, hoping to find some consolation. I found in Psalm 84:1-3, "How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts! My soul longs, yes, faints for the courts of the Lord; my heart and flesh sing for joy to the living God. Even the sparrow finds a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, at your altars, O LORD of hosts, my King and my God."

As some of you may already know, I have been on a religious vocation journey for a long time. My story is probably no different than most of yours and others, so I am not going to bore any of you.

This is my second visit to Saint Anselm's and as of today I am now on my 33rd day here. My departure date for my long stay will be on December 9.

I cannot explain the sparrow story or why I felt a need to write this letter today after reflecting on Psalm 84, but I did. I also cannot provide you with any profound explanations as to why I have kept wanting to return to this Abbey, at the same time remembering the saying someone once said, "Where your heart is, so is your home," so it is by this that I now humbly request on this day, in the month of November of 2011, your consideration to enter Saint Anselm's Abbey as a Postulant in the spring of 2012.

I signed that letter David K. Lord and now am signing off this article as Br Isaiah Lord, OSB. Please pray for me, as you are all always in my prayers. God bless,

ISAIAH LORD, OSB
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davidlord95@yahoo.com



Brother Isaiah



Brother Isaiah has taken a photographic interest in abbey wildlife.

Assignment: A Spiritual Biography



Brother Ignacio

In May of 2008, I began to discern my vocation in earnest at St Anselm's Abbey. Now, six years later, in anticipation of making my solemn profession, I have revisited the initial stages of my monastic discernment. The excerpt that follows is by no means intended as any sort of hagiography; rather, it is a snapshot of my thought processes at the time. Not a direct word-for-word transcription, the following "conversation" is but a manifestation of my interior

thoughts, which could have only been confirmed by the mutual discernment of the monks who approved my request to enter as a postulant. Part of the application for entry was my "spiritual biography." I was limited to one page, so the challenge was to present myself as honestly and concisely as possible.

Preparing for the assignment, I jotted down the following words as guiding principles to frame and structure my thoughts: *disciple, discipline, detachment, calling, obedience, prayer, servant*. After reading them, I thought rather confidently and boldly, and without any tinge of irony, "Yep, that's me!" Little did I realize at the time just how much the daily monastic routine and living in such close proximity with other grown men would strip me of all illusions I had about myself!

As I began to write, I faced this conundrum: how do I write about my relationship with Jesus without sounding (from the original application) "sickeningly, saccharinely, syrupy-sweet, ultra-pious/über-Catholic, detached from reality and dogmatic as the day is long"? Here's what came to mind after a quick prayer to the Holy Spirit:

"Just be yourself."

"Lord, that's the problem, because I'm all of these things—and worse!"

"Why are you these things?"

"Because as you know, I love you as would an immature, petulant child. I find serenity in known things and am not at all secure with ambiguity. Things must be just so."

*"That is why I have called you here—to this 'school of [my] service,' for as you know, **you have much to learn**—especially from the collective wisdom of the men living here, many of whom have been here longer than you have been alive! Learn from them. I am here. What more do you need?"*

"But I feel ill-equipped and inadequate to the task, Lord."

*"Am I, then, not enough? I have also given you the tools you need. They are spelled out clearly in the Rule—and **I am here**—with you and with them! You have what you need to enter as a postulant. I will supply what is lacking if you but **stay with me**, at my pace! Be still, and relax. Not everything is a crisis for you to fix. Always remember that **I am God and you are not**. You will come to know this even more if you decide to **follow me here**."*

"But what about . . . ?"

*"Sshhh, sshhh, sshhh. Enough. **Trust in Me**, and I will do the rest."*

I bowed my head and prayed, "**Lord Jesus, I trust in You. Help me to trust You more,**" and I waited on the Lord.

Six years later, the conversation is as real as the day I set it on paper. I have learned much since entering the abbey, and the longer I am here, the more I have to learn. Through all of the challenges and difficulties of formation, what keeps me here, now wanting to profess solemnly, is a profound peace that first entered the empty crevices of my soul when I came to the abbey. This peace continues to envelop me, but even more as each day passes by. Not a day goes by that I don't thank Our Lord for my vocation to be a Benedictine monk in Washington, DC at St Anselm's Abbey. Please, God, may this always be the case, and may others who feel a similar stirring in their souls step out in faith and begin to encounter You here with us.

IGNACIO GONZÁLEZ, OSB

Winter Fantasy

From January 15 to 29 we had as our guests a Korean family of three: Professor Kim Tae-ki, who is a professor of Japanese studies at Honan University in Gwangju, Korea, his wife Moon Ju-youn, and their daughter Kim Geon-jeong (who had already studied for several years in the US and usually goes by the name Tiffany in our country). Professor Kim was in Washington primarily to do research at the National Archives downtown, but the family also had the opportunity to visit various sites in our area. They are now back in Korea, from where Tiffany wrote the following article about their stay with us. To show their gratitude for our hospitality, they prepared a tasty Korean meal for us on the evening of Sunday, January 26; the photograph shows them preparing the meal in our abbey kitchen.

Our stay at St Anselm's Abbey began on January 15, 2014, and for us it was the beginning of a wonderful two-week journey. We had gone to Washington DC because of my father's research. He is a professor and his major field is Japanese politics, especially as conditions existed during the period of the US occupation of Japan after the end of the Second World War, so he needed to visit the National Archives. Our stay at the abbey turned out to be extremely refreshing, exotic, and heart-warming. In my family's point of view, our first impression of the abbey was that "it is just like a Harry Potter movie!" It was an experience of living in a world of fantasy. All of the brothers and fathers were so nice to us even though, initially, we were strangers to them. This was very heart-warming. They made us feel as if we were in our own home.

The experience that my parents and I remember the most was the vespers service that we attended every night. At first, my father, who is a very scholarly person, tried hard to understand all the words that were being sung. My mother, who cannot speak English, was feeling as if she were in a Harry Potter movie or in the middle of *Les Misérables*. However, as time went by, we were surprised by the fact that we were able to organize our days, one day after another, and plan what we were going to do on a given day. We appreciated all the experiences that came our way. My mother went to early morning mass the last day of our stay and she told me later that she burst into tears of gratitude for all the experiences that had been given to her during our time at the abbey. The religion was without borders, and the difference in language seemed unimportant to her.

In addition, the way one monk would read aloud from the book *I Am Malala* during the main meal each day was actually quite nice, and all the places that Br Dunstan took us to see were absolutely breathtaking: Mount Vernon, teatime with Kathy Fliger, and Annapolis. It was super fun, educational, and beautiful. We thank Br Dunstan for all these experiences even though he was tired. The two weeks, the fourteen days, went by like a breeze and we were soon back in Korea. We reminisce about the things that we did at the abbey when we gather for meals at our home and we think that "it was such a wonderful two weeks." Thank you very much, and we hope that we will be able to visit the abbey again at some future time. Best wishes and good luck to you all.

TIFFANY KIM



Tiffany Kim (right) and her parents in the monastic kitchen preparing a splendid meal for the monks

Textual Criticism Made Easy

OR: What Have I Been Up To?

If someone should be so industrious as to compare Deuteronomy 32:8 in several translations, she would find some surprising differences. For example, the King James Version (1611) has: “When the Most High divided to the nations their inheritance,..., he set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel”; the Douay-Rheims (1914, translated from the Vulgate) gives, likewise, “children of Israel”; the Revised Standard Version (1952) has “according to the number of the sons of God,” with a footnote indicating the translator has followed the Greek rather than the Hebrew (though the Greek literally says “angels of God”); the New Revised Standard Version (1989) has, “according to the number of the Gods”; the New American Bible (1970), “after the number of the sons of God,” with a footnote: “The sons of God: the angels.... Here the various nations are portrayed as having their respective guardian angels”; the Contemporary English Version (1995), “assigned a guardian angel to each of them”; the New American Bible Revised Edition (2008) has, “after the number of the divine beings,” with a footnote: “Divine beings: literally ‘sons of god’; members of the divine assembly. The nations are portrayed as having their respective tutelary deities.”

Wow! How do you explain all that? There are actually only two choices: you either go with the Hebrew (“sons of Israel”) or you go with the Greek (literally “angels of God”). The Old Testament was written in Hebrew, therefore you go with the Hebrew. Right? Not necessarily. The Canon of the Old Testament (i.e., the books that belong to it) may not have been finally closed until the second century AD, and the text itself (i.e., the one most widely accepted, the Massoretic text) was not finally fixed until around the ninth century AD. There is a long tradition behind it and many variant texts (for example, the Dead Sea Scrolls found at Qumran—some as early as the second century BC), as well as many translations far earlier than the fixation of the Massoretic text (especially the Greek Septuagint, translated in the third and second century BC).

No original Old Testament texts have come down to us. They have been preserved only by copying and recopying, several copies existing at the same time, each with its own history of transmission. A long text, copied by hand, will rarely be without error. In addition to ordinary copyists’ errors, a scribe might “correct” something he thought was wrong and so introduce a change, or deliberately make a tendentious change. This is where textual criticism comes in. By comparing the best manuscripts, sometimes using early translations, scholars attempt to establish which is the more original reading; often this will differ from the Massoretic text.



Dead Sea scrolls. Right: Qumran manuscript of the Manual of Discipline

In the example given above, Deuteronomy 32:8, the plethora of translations given stems from reading either the Hebrew (“sons/children of Israel”) or the Greek (“angels of God”). The presumption of most of these translations is that the Greek translator read “sons of God” in the Hebrew and understood it to mean “angels.” “Sons of ...” often means pertaining to such or such a group; for example, the expression “sons of the prophets” means “belonging to a group of prophets.” Or it can characterize; for example “sons of thunder” suggests people given to violence; “sons of Belial” means “worthless people.” “Sons of God” can thus mean “members of the God group” or “godlike beings.” From that come the broader interpretations found in some of the examples above, such as “guardian angels.” Or it can be understood as referring to lesser deities, as when Psalm 82:1 says, “God rises in the divine council, gives judgment in the midst of the gods.”

Here most modern translators presume that some ultra-conservative copyist thought such language not sufficiently orthodox and substituted “sons of Israel” for “sons of God.” But the Greek text stands as witness to an earlier Hebrew text which it translated. However, it is no longer necessary to rely on the Greek because a Hebrew text has been found in Cave IV at Qumran with this verse which has “sons of God” rather than “sons of Israel.”

The number of variants throughout the Old Testament that one could come up with, considering the many ancient manuscripts that have been recovered and the many ancient translations (Syriac and Aramaic, in addition to Greek, even the Old Latin, and many others), is huge. The New American Bible of 1970, when it was first published, carried an appendix of 126 single-spaced pages of textual variants that the translators thought worth adopting or at least presenting as instructive. These pages were not of much interest to the average reader, but they are of tremendous interest to the scholar and the teacher working with graduate stu-

dents, and therefore the Catholic Biblical Association kept them in print as a separate booklet. When the revised edition of the New American Bible was published, no such appendix was provided, so while I was CBA Executive Secretary I undertook to provide it. This involved gathering together the text critical notes of all the books of the Old Testament done by individual revisers, adapting some of them from one word processing system to another, standardizing them, putting them into canonical order, and providing a page and a half of abbreviations. Turning them into pages of text for publication was not commercially feasible, so they

needed to be prepared for the web page display. All this (except this last stage) I had done before I stepped down as CBA Executive Secretary in 2012. Recently, urged by our members, I have spent some time completing the job. Turning these computer files into a PDF file is relatively simple, but such a file per se is not searchable. However, the CBA works in harmony with the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, which is now prepared to put it in searchable format on their website and make it available on the CBA website—where all of you will soon be delighted to find it!

JOSEPH JENSEN, OSB

Barriers

Then they said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping?” She said to them, “Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him” (John 20:13).

On February 5, the Church celebrated Saint Agatha, a virgin and martyr who lived and died in Catania, Sicily in the third century. She is the patroness of both Palermo and Catania. A year after her death, the halting of an eruption of Mount Aetna was attributed to her intercession, and the faithful continue to pray to her for protection to this day. A huge three-day celebration, with a long procession carrying her relics through the streets, takes place each year in Catania.

When I was studying and living at Sant’Anselmo in Rome, a Canadian monk named Hervé, from St-Benoît du Lac in Quebec, decided to go down to Catania to witness this great celebration of the saint firsthand. Upon his return, a week or so later, we sat together at lunch and I asked him about his trip and the festival. His immediate response was at first puzzling. The first words out of his mouth were, “They have a very difficult relationship with their saint.” They have a very difficult relationship with their saint? “What in the world does that mean?” I asked him.

He went on to tell me about the procession of her relics through the streets, the crowds of people packed together like sardines along the route hoping to get a glimpse and a blessing from the presence of their saint as she made her way through the city. What perplexed him most was not the amount of money being tossed in the direction of the saint’s body as she passed, or the abundance of flowers being offered to her, for this was all to be expected. What most took him by surprise was the amount of weeping and wailing and crying out, the



The relics of Saint Agatha carried in procession

enormous force of emotion erupting from the swaying and pressing faithful at the sight of their saint passing by. He had been witness to many processions, but none like this.

Finding his way to the church of Saint Agatha’s tomb, Hervé found a priest and asked him about this great outpouring of emotion toward the saint during the procession. He asked the priest if it was like this every year. “No, it isn’t,” the priest said, and he went on to tell him this story.

It turns out that the relics of Saint Agatha, which had been preserved under the main altar in the church since time immemorial, had been moved by the bishop to an altar in a side chapel for reasons unknown to the faithful. The chapel had a gate at its entrance. This gate was locked by the bishop and was rarely if ever opened except to bring the relics out for procession on the feast day. The “difficult relationship with their saint,” as Hervé put it,

was the people's experience of a sudden lack of immediate access to Saint Agatha which they felt they had when her relics were under the main altar! There they could approach and come close to the saint and whisper their prayers and supplications in an intimate manner. They could be in her presence on a daily basis in a way that they couldn't be once she was removed to the side chapel behind a locked gate! The procession therefore, with the immediacy of the saint being present again to the people in a way that had been lost to them, evoked a tremendous outpouring of emotion, a combination of joy, weeping, lamenting, and longing for the closeness they had known. Saint Agatha may have lived more than 1,700 years ago, but she was still very much alive and listening to their prayers and supplications, and her physical presence among them through her relics played no small part in this. As one participant told Hervé, "We love our saint. We need her to be near us. She helps us."



The image of Saint Agatha being carried out of the church

Closer to home, when I was a teenager a friend of mine lived with his parents in a very large and beautiful house. They were a wealthy family, his father being a successful New York lawyer while his mother worked in advertising for a prominent Madison Avenue advertising agency. His sister was older than he by about six years, and she too had already begun a successful career as a young lawyer thanks to their father's connections. At their house lived my friend and his parents, his sister having already moved out on her own.

He rarely saw the rest of his family. Both his father and mother worked long hours. He would go home from school, then go out to socialize for a while, and upon returning home he would heat something up for supper that his mother would have prepared earlier that week. Then he would retreat to his room to do some homework or watch TV and listen to music. This was the pre-computer age! His mother would come home about sev-

en-thirty, pop her head in at the door of his room to ask how his day had gone and just as quickly pop her head out again. His father would return from work quite late in the evening and wouldn't even pop his head into the room. On Saturdays his parents went to the club for tennis, golf, and social life.

My friend's parents were very proud of their son. He was very intelligent, and they expected great things to come for him. They would eat Sunday dinner together, the only meal they ate together, and his mother and father would then praise him for his good grades and talk about how he should probably follow in his father's and sister's footsteps and become a lawyer, or maybe a doctor. They praised him for his success in all that he attempted to do.

My friend missed his parents. The barrier between them, which he was at a loss as to how to breach, was more than the bedroom door which his mom would pop her head through momentarily each evening. Of course he didn't want to be smothered by his parents' attention or inquiries or control, since no teenager wants that. But he used to say to me, "I wish things could be different. I love my parents." I was at a loss as to what to say but would sit and listen to him, and he was grateful.

In his new book, *The Examined Life: How We Lose and Find Ourselves*, Steven Grosz, a psychiatrist, speaks about the importance of being present to one another and how this gives us a sense of worth. Listening and being attentive, and giving time just sitting together, is worth more than the greatest gift. He writes, "Being present, whether with children, or friends, or even with oneself, is always hard work. But isn't this attentiveness—the feeling that someone is trying to think about us—something we want more than praise?"

I think the people of Catania and Saint Agatha, along with my friend, more than make the point. God fully understands, too! When the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, Jesus during his ministry to the sick, the outcast, the despised and the lonely, the rich and the poor, the powerful and the powerless, in fact to all the people who were like sheep without a shepherd, came to realize how important it was to be present to each. He listened, comforted, healed, and taught right from wrong. He became so convinced that being present and attentive matters that he truly made real his promise, "I will be with you always, even unto the end of the world." To show how important this was for Him and for us, Jesus gave us His body and blood to eat and drink, His real presence as a sign of God's love for us always! Let us pray that we may follow his example and teaching by breaking down the barriers that keep us from being attentive and present to God, His saints, and all people—our families, our friends, our communities, our world!

PHILIP SIMO, OSB



On the feast of the Epiphany, celebrated on Sunday, January 5, we rejoiced to have ten members of our Oblate community who had been candidates for at least a year make their final oblation during conventual Mass. This represents a special way of being affiliated with our monastic community. A key part of the formula of oblations was each person's promise "to dedicate myself to serving God and others according to the Rule of St Benedict insofar as my state in life permits."

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