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Our Newly Renovated Seniors Wing

The old north wing

Among the projects initiated by Fr Simon McGurk during his years as our superior was the renovation of what we normally called “the old north wing” into an area suitable for older members of our community who can no longer readily climb stairs and would also benefit from having their own bathrooms. That wing dates from the early 1940s and was originally the site of a combined novitiate for both our community and that of our sister community, Portsmouth Priory in Rhode Island. Not long after its construction, however, the wing was converted into classrooms for our own high school and served that purpose from 1942 until 1955, when a separate school building was opened some fifty yards north of the monastery. At that time, the wing reverted to a variety of other uses: two of its rooms were long used by our library, one served as a storage space for books

and leaflets needed for our liturgy, another was our mail room, still another our vocations office, and several had for years been the cells of individual monks, such as Fr Aelred Walsh and Fr Daniel Kirk.

Perceiving the need for better accommodations for our more elderly monks, Fr Simon solicited plans from several architectural firms. We finally settled on the firm of Geier Brown Renfrow and, later, on the general contracting firm of Coakley Williams, which had previously done a lot of fine work for us. The actual work of renovation began last fall and was completed in time for some of our monks to move into quarters there in March. Unless and until all of the six residential spaces are needed for members of our monastic community, some of the rooms will be available for overnight guests, finally allowing us to have several women guests overnight inasmuch as almost all of our other guestrooms are within the monastic enclosure and so are available only to men.

This entire project would not have been remotely possible without the marvelous generosity of some of our longtime friends. Some of these have preferred to keep their donations anonymous, but we have honored others with a plaque placed at an appropriate location in the wing, which is being named in memory of Fr Hugh Monmonier, the third headmaster of our school. By the time this newsletter appears, invitations will have been mailed out for a dedication ceremony, tentatively scheduled for a Sunday afternoon in April.

*Fr Aidan,
distracted by
a book while
checking one of
the rooms in
the seniors' wing*



Ministry to the Sick and End of Life Care

So much of what we do in everyday life is habitual, repeated day after day without much thought given to what we are doing—actions we more or less perform on “automatic pilot,” so to speak. Such things as washing ourselves, getting dressed, eating lunch, and many other activities which we do as part of our normal everyday routine become second nature to us. Even certain thoughts, thought patterns and attitudes can become routine, automatic responses to often repeated stimuli throughout the day, such as the sight of a co-worker or the daily “Good morning” from the bus driver or coffee vendor, and we take comfort in the predictability and stability of such things. Aristotle, the great philosopher of ancient Greece, even speaks of virtue as something which can be cultivated into habitual action. We hold the door for someone behind us because as a small child we were taught to do so, even if against our will, and eventually that virtuous action becomes a habit which we practice all our lives. We learn to share and we learn to be patient and wait as part of the virtuous life.

But not all of what we do and think is habit. The ability we have to be creative, to make and experience something new that is outside the norm of habitual thought and action is what makes us human and distinguishes us from most of God’s other creations. For example, an unexpected and unique moment of love, trust and surprise between a parent and child may arise which strengthens their relationship. While such creative and new expressions of communication are possible in every relationship we have, too often we act out of habit even with those who are closest to us.

Creativity and newness are not limited to relationships. We are creative and step outside the boundaries of habit in many ways. Creativity comes to life in everything from cooking a special meal for a special occasion, to artistic endeavors which we explore, to creative ways of learning a new sport or language, to experimentation in the vast world of science. We are gifted by God as co-creators with the Divine who sustains all things in being.

Working as a priest chaplain at Providence Hospital in Washington, DC, has heightened my awareness about the distinction between habitual action and creative action. Each encounter with each patient and patients’ family members is unique. In most cases, I know little more than a patient’s name at the first meeting, but the interaction is very personal and focused upon the spiritual and corporeal needs present and my ability to show concern and bring specific comfort, care, and blessing to that particular person in his or her particular situation. Illness and suffering brings with it a sharp focus on what makes us truly human in the face of the “human predicament” which will touch all of us, the reality of sickness and death. How



Fr Philip at work

we respond to the challenges that arise in such circumstances says a lot about our basic response to the whole of our lives, be they rooted in trust and love or fear and uncertainty. The suffering patient often makes clear very quickly how he or she interprets an illness within the larger context of their whole life and set of experiences. A patient seeks to make sense of who she is as a total person with a unique set of values and judgments about the meaning of her particular life and the characteristics which have allowed her to know she makes a difference and has contributed to our world.

This is why as a chaplain it is necessary that I be attentive and truly, creatively listen to each patient’s story, and even when he is too sick to speak, to hear that story as related through a gaze or the squeeze of my hand. There is nothing habitual about such encounters. They are unique encounters with God’s grace and loving kindness toward all who suffer.

I have come to believe that love is the basis and primary mover that makes these encounters with the sick and dying possible at all. In his book *I and Thou*, Martin Buber speaks about the kind of interaction which I believe can and does take place between patient and chaplain in the pastoral care encounter. He makes the distinction between feelings and love in what he describes as an I-Thou moment. Buber explains it thus:

The significance of the effect is not so obvious in the relation with the *Thou* spoken to men. The act of the being which provides directness in this case is usually understood wrongly as being one of feeling. Feelings accompany the metaphysical and metapsychical fact of love, but they do not constitute it. The accompanying feelings can be of greatly differing kinds. The feeling of Jesus for the demoniac differs from his feeling for the

beloved disciple; but the love is the one love. Feelings are “entertained”: love comes to pass. Feelings dwell in man; but man dwells in his love. That is no metaphor, but the actual truth. Love does not cling to the *I* in such a way as to have the *Thou* only for its “content,” its object; but love is *between I* and *Thou*. The man who does not know this, with his very being know this, does not know love, even though he ascribes to it the feelings he lives through, experiences, enjoys, and expresses. Love ranges in its effect through the whole world. In the eyes of him who takes his stand in love, and gazes out of it, men are cut free from their entanglement of bustling activity. Good people and evil, wise and foolish, beautiful and ugly, become successively real to him; that is, set free they step forth in their singleness, and confront him as *Thou*. In a wonderful way, from time to time, exclusiveness arises—and so he can be effective, helping, healing, educating, raising up, saving. Love is responsibility of an *I* for a *Thou*. In this lies the likeness, impossible in any feeling whatsoever, of all who love, from the smallest to the greatest and from the blessedly protected man, whose life is rounded in that of

a loved being, to him who is all his life nailed to the cross of the world, and who ventures to bring himself to the dreadful point—to love *all men*.

It is in this place where love dwells between the *I* and *Thou* that suffering takes on its redemptive meaning, that is, its purpose in “making up what is lacking in the suffering of Christ.” Sickness and suffering not only help make us whole as persons ourselves, but also contribute to the making whole and redemption of others, sometimes unknown to us, who are in need of healing and forgiveness. The love made real and completely present in the *I-Thou* encounter reaches out to all of suffering humanity to bring the healing presence of God everywhere that it is needed. The relationship between the suffering patient and the chaplain, if it is open to this grace, allows these particular individuals in this particular moment to work with Christ, who suffered for us for our salvation, in his continual and ongoing healing of all humanity as it is drawn to himself.

This is the blessing of being able to work as a chaplain priest for me. May we all continue to pray and work to help the sick and dying and their families as participants in the continuous saving power of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

PHILIP SIMO, OSB

*Our beloved oblate,
Mary Catherine Roberts,
who died on February 11
of this year at the age of
92, will be much missed
by the senior members of
the monastic community.*



Reflections from the Vocation Director



Fr Christopher

Some interesting information has come from an extensive study of age cohorts and ethnicity of men and women entering consecrated life institutes in 2012. The Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) published these findings and even more data in its January News Release:

- The average age of those making profession is 39, the median age 37.
- Sixty-nine percent identified themselves as white, 15 percent as Asian, and 8 percent as Hispanic. The last two are

considerably different from the Catholic population percentages in the US: Asians about two percent, Hispanics about 33 percent.

- Most are born in the US. Others surveyed come from eighteen different countries of origin, with Vietnam highest at eight percent.
- The influence of Catholic education at all levels, whether just elementary, high school or through college, was significant in decisions to consider entering consecrated life.

- Encouragement to consider religious life came from parish priests and from brothers and sisters in religious communities. (No data was given in the news release on the example and influence of parents and other lay people.)

The statistics were based on a sample of 108 women and 24 men, so percentages for men's communities could vary significantly from the overall figures given above.

I receive inquiries from men in their twenties through fifties. They contact me mostly through Catholic vocation services, or by phone or personal email. The vocation service's information about an inquirer may be sent out to anywhere from fifty to one hundred communities and dioceses, so they are not specifically looking for monastic life (at least not yet). I sense that the average age is slowly lowering, with more requests coming from men in their mid-twenties to forty, but that needs statistical confirmation. Unlike the population in the study, almost all my inquirers can be identified as white, with Hispanics next. A few are converts or have annulled marriages or both, interesting factors not mentioned in the news release but perhaps noted in the data collected.

We would be enriched if we had more ethnic diversity in our community, given the diversity of the city and country we live in. Please continue to pray for new vocations to our monastic family so that our witness to the Benedictine way of Christian living may continue for generations to come.

CHRISTOPHER WYVILL, OSB

Meeting of Benedictine Superiors

During the first five days of February, approximately forty Benedictine abbots and the priors of independent monasteries in North and Central America met at Prince of Peace Abbey in Oceanside, California for their annual meeting, regularly held two weekends before Lent and at a monastery where there would be little chance of severe wintry weather. Although there is always a business session that allows the superiors to discuss and share recommendations on such important topics as vocations, liturgy, and strategic planning, most of the time is given over to what might best be described as a spiritual retreat. This year we heard six conferences by Br Simeon Leiva-Merikakis, a Trappist monk from St Joseph Abbey in Spencer, Massachusetts, who presented reflections on Matthew's Parable of the Wedding Feast drawn from the manuscript of one of Br Simeon's forthcoming

books. Among his most important points was that not only were we created for joy, but joy could actually be considered another name for God. After all, the New Testament tells us that God is love, and joy is perhaps best understood as the act of loving within the knowledge of being loved in return. Whereas traditional fairy tales contain narratives of deep human yearning, Jesus' parables say something instead about God's yearning for us and can lead us to recognize that our own yearnings are never extravagant enough. Having been a professor of literature and theology at the University of San Francisco before becoming a monk, Br Simeon was able to draw upon his rich knowledge of world literature to illustrate much of what he said, with references ranging from Georges Bernanos' *Diary of a Country Priest* to John Cheever's story "The Worm in the Apple."

The assembled superiors also had the opportunity to hear from Abbot Primate Notker Wolf, who reported both on current happenings at Sant'Anselmo, our international college and athenaeum in Rome, and on challenges facing houses of the Benedictine Confederation worldwide. On the latter point, Abbot Notker spoke of his conviction that members of our communities are often too individualistic in what they do, leading to a lack of a visible spirit of community. His report was followed by one from the prior of the Collegio Sant'Anselmo, Fr Elias Lorenzo, who said that the college is now fully occupied with 120 residents, including some students from the Eastern Orthodox Church. A thirty-day monastic-renewal program in April and May is being offered in English for monks who would like to have some updating in matters of liturgy and monastic spirituality and to experience something of the cultural life of Rome. Fr Patrick Regan, former abbot of St. Joseph's Abbey in Louisiana, is in charge of this program. Attempts are also being made to see that more courses are offered in English in the athenaeum during the regular academic year, this almost certainly being a way to attract more



The abbey church of Prince of Peace monastery

monastic students (for most of the current students at Sant'Anselmo are not Benedictine or Cistercian).

As always, Sunday afternoon was left free for those who wished to see some site of local interest. I myself joined about a dozen other abbots to visit the famous San Diego Zoo, about an hour's drive south of the abbey. On the previous day, I had the opportunity to have lunch at the abbey with our alumnus Albert Hansen, who lives with his wife and children in southern California and was happy to reminisce about his days as a student in the Abbey School.

JAMES WISEMAN, OSB

Book Publication Announcement

In association with our abbey, Lantern Press has published a new book for persons who wish to obtain a greater understanding of our patron, St Anselm of Canterbury. It is titled A Man Born out of Due Time: New Perspectives on St Anselm of Canterbury from the Monks of St Anselm's Abbey, Washington, DC, and Other Generous Contributors. Eleven authors have contributed articles in an anthology that looks at different facets and aspects of St Anselm's life and work, all with the aim of offering a better understanding of the context of St Anselm's own day and time and showing how his contribution should be seen as a turning point in our western culture and in Catholic theology and philosophy. From St Anselm's Abbey, we hear from Abbot James Wiseman, Prior Michael Hall, and Br Dunstan Robidoux; from St Wandrille Abbey in Normandy, Abbot Jean-Charles Nault; from Downside Abbey, Abbot Aidan Bellenger; from Belmont Abbey in England, Fr Simon McGurk; and from Ascension Priory in Idaho, Fr Hugh Feiss. A graduate of our abbey school, Dr Michael Gorman, presents a paper that had been originally read to an assembly of our students. In addition, there are papers from Dr Anne Inman, a lecturer at Birkbeck College of the University of London, and Dr Robert Kennedy of St Francis Xavier University in Antigonish, Nova Scotia, plus a book review by Patrick Madigan, SJ (another graduate of our school who is currently editor of The Heythrop Journal in London).

Copies of the book may be purchased in the abbey gift shop for \$20. An additional five dollars will be charged for postage and handling if you would like a copy mailed to you.

St Anselm: An Advance on St Augustine; a Precursor of St Thomas

Having edited an anthology of papers about the life and achievements of St Anselm of Canterbury, a work publicized elsewhere in this newsletter, I would like to offer some reflections on why anyone should attend to the life and work of this saint, the patron of our monastery. As a thinker, St Anselm is not ranked with the likes of St Augustine and St Thomas Aquinas. He is known among philosophers for an argument or proof about the truth of God's existence which has never been accepted by the Church's teaching authority. Against St Anselm's ontological argument, Aquinas had argued that a real distinction exists between ideal being and real being. The meaning of an idea is not to be confused with the truth of an idea. If we want to speak about truth and reality, we must speak about evidence which exists as something that is other than the meaning or the intelligibility of an idea. From evidence, we move toward the truth of an idea. The only kind of exception which we can possibly consider is the case of Aristotle's indemonstrables: the law of contradiction cannot be proved from an external point of view (from something which exists outside the mind) since every kind of argument which tries to prove the truth of these laws must work from premises that assume the truth of these laws. No contradictions can exist in any arguments which would want to be valid.

If, then, we want to speak about any contribution which comes to us from St Anselm and which has been confirmed by the Church's teaching office, we can perhaps do no better than to recall words that come to us *proximately* from the First Vatican Council and its teaching about the relation which exists between acts of belief regarding truths of faith and acts of understanding about the meaning which belongs to these same truths:

...if [human] reason illuminated by faith inquires in an earnest, pious and sober manner, it attains by God's grace a certain understanding of the mysteries, which is most fruitful, both from the analogy with the objects of its natural knowledge and from the connection of these mysteries with one another and with man's ultimate end.

Hence, while the Church proclaims truths of faith which always hold (no denials being possible), truths of faith are not to be confused with what can be grasped by the compass of our understanding. In conjunction with a faith which humbly submits to the truths of faith that are taught to us by the Church's Magisterium, the Magisterium also speaks to us about a faith which should grow in its own luminosity and meaningfulness. Besides growth in faith and belief, much more is needed. In the words of the First Vatican Council:

...let there be growth and abundant progress in understanding, knowledge and wisdom, in each and all, in individuals and in the whole Church, at all times and in the progress of all ages, but only within the proper limits, i.e., with the same dogma, the same meaning, the same judgment.

It is one thing thus to affirm and argue for the truth of a given teaching (here our understanding moves towards truth as a specific object) and, in determining what is true and what is false, we can encounter a very large number of truths. Truths suggest certitude. We want to be certain about what we want to believe. However, it is another thing to think about meaning and understanding and what we have when we think about how truths are joined to each other. Some understandings can encompass a large number of many different truths and if, in our understanding, we relate a larger number of truths than what we do if we use some other understanding, we prefer the first to the second. The greater an understanding, the richer our experience. In understanding, more elements or parts are put into an intelligible order and, whenever we put variables or truths into an order which we understand, conflicts and tensions are lessened. Hence, when things fit together within our understanding and when more things can fit together within our understanding, our world changes as it presents itself to us in a way which is more wondrous than what we had thought or known. Better decisions come more easily. Our attitudes soften. In our self-experience, we encounter less turmoil. We have inner peace. We are less troubled by the contradictions which so frequently appear within the course of our daily lives.

The firmness or hardness which thus exists in our knowledge of truth with respect to matters of faith is thus supplemented or enriched by a cultivation of mind which has often been referred to in a manner which speaks about "the milk of understanding." In our Catholic theological tradition, we argue and know that our human freedom is grounded in our understanding. In our ability to devise new ways of coping, in finding new ways of responding to problems and difficulties, we reveal to ourselves (and to others) a freedom that goes with the manner of our human existence, a freedom which informs our living in a way that differs from the living of other beings who exist in our world. In our inventiveness, in our new attitudes, in new possible courses of action, in our understanding, freedoms are enjoyed which can never be taken from us.

However, while, in the 19th century, the Church's Magisterium gives us a teaching about the importance of understanding in our faith lives, theological teach-

ing about the importance of understanding predates this teaching by some centuries. Consider, for example, what St Thomas Aquinas has to say in a text taken from the *Quaestiones quodlibetales* 4, q. 9, a. 3:

...every act should be performed in a way adapted to its end. Now an argumentation can be directed to either of two ends. One kind of argumentation is directed to removing doubts as to whether something is so. In such argumentation in theology, one relies especially on the authorities... But another kind of argumentation is that of the teachers in the schools. It seeks not to remove doubts but to instruct the students so that they understand the truth that the teacher hopes to convey. In such cases it is necessary to base one's arguments on reasons that go to the root of the truth in question, that make hearers understand how what is said is true. Otherwise, if the teacher settles a question simply by an appeal to authorities alone, the students will have their certitude that the facts are indeed as stated, but they will acquire no knowledge or understanding, and they will go empty away.

In Aquinas, we can have two kinds of inquiry in theology. We can move from what we obviously already know toward what we less obviously know, that is, toward what we can know if we can find proofs and arguments. This is the way of analysis. In this manner of procedure, we find the ways and means of dogmatic theology. However, if we move in a converse direction, we can begin with some kind of understanding that we propose and, from this understanding (as a kind of base of operations) we can propose a new possible order of things which can relate this dogmatic truth with some other dogmatic truth. A better understanding is able to reveal how a larger number of religious truths are related to each other, the truth of a given truth revealing more about what can be said or understood about the meaning of some other truth. In this approach, where the focus is on the comprehension of understanding, we have the ways and means of systematic theology. Instead of analysis, we have a way of thinking and understanding which is interested in synthesis, putting things together.

However, if in the conceptuality of Aquinas we have a focus on understanding and the value of understanding, and a distinction which can speak about two different kinds of theology or theological inquiry, we can ask about the origins of this insight in Aquinas. Does Aquinas's insight come from St Augustine? We know that, in the corpus of this works, Aquinas refers to Augustine more frequently than to anybody else.

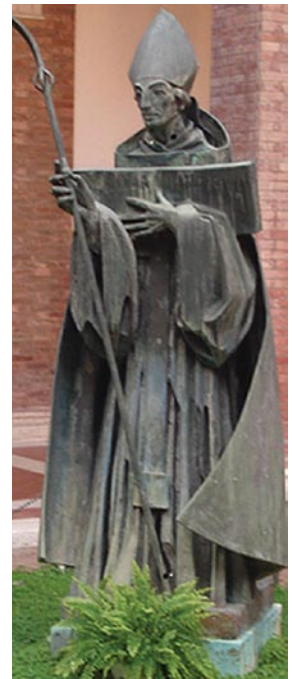
With respect, then, to what St Augustine says about understanding, we find in a commentary on the Gospel of John the following phrase: *crede, ut intellegas* or, in other words, "believe so that you may understand." Believing and understanding must differ from each other if you have to have one in order to have the other. However, if

belief must exist as a fundamental point of departure, we must first get to belief before we can go on from there to do anything else. In other words, as a kind of corollary, we say: *intellego ut credam*: "I think so that I may believe." We use our minds in order to move toward faith and belief and so, in the theology of St Augustine, we have an approach that jibes with the interests and the demands of dogmatic theology. The object is an understanding which affirms the reality which belongs to truths of faith and, if we are to move toward these truths, we must assemble every kind of evidence which can be used to elicit acts of rational assent. While acts of faith

need a kind of help which can only be given to them by God, in our human context, we do what we can to prepare ourselves for the kind of certainty which we want when we think about acts of faith and belief and how we should respond to them with that complete type of personal commitment which is needed if we are fully to give ourselves to truths that belong to a higher order of meaning and being.

In the life and work of St Augustine, however, we encounter a major concern with arguments which try to prove the truth of Catholic teaching and other arguments which try to indicate why other beliefs should be seen as false. In St Augustine, the theologian, we find St Augustine, the bishop. A bishop guards the truth of the Church's teaching although, in Augustine, we also find questions and reflections which point to a measure of interest in understanding (a desire for a growth in understanding which can attend to how one teaching is related to another). In his *On the Trinity*, analogies are taken from our human understanding of self and then they are applied to how we can think about the relations which exist within the Trinity: how God the Father relates to God the Son and how these two divine persons relate to God the Holy Spirit. However, in Augustine, despite a primary interest in settling questions about truth and a secondary interest in understandings which can add to our experiences of meaning, we find no articulation which clearly distinguishes between these two different objectives.

However, in St Anselm, for the first time, a clear distinction is drawn between truth and understanding. In the *Proslogion*, St Anselm speaks about "faith seeking understanding" (*fides quaerens intellectum*). The wording



The statue of St Anselm at Sant' Anselmo in Rome

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closely resembles words which we find in St Augustine. Belief leads to understanding and we believe in order to understand. St Anselm works with the familiar conceptuality of St Augustine. St Anselm says: *credo ut intelligam*. "I believe so that I may understand." However, in St Anselm's *Cur Deus Homo* ("Why God became Man"), we find a less ambiguous way of speaking. The context is a reflection which does not try to prove the truth of Christ's incarnation but a reflection which tries to find motives or reasons why explain why the Incarnation was as it was. Hence:

While the right order requires that we should believe the deep things of the faith before we undertake to discuss them by reason, it seems careless for us, once we are established in the faith, not to aim at understanding what we believe.

In other words, yes, we use our understanding in order to move toward faith and the truths of faith. But, once we have faith and have been informed by what is given to us in faith, another objective presents itself—a new responsibility which we should elicit our attention. Understanding becomes a focus which differs from any focus that deals with proofs for truths of faith. We start

with faith and then we allow our faith to work within our inquiry and understanding: expanding it, extending it, creating a new human culture that works from our faith in a way which can bring everything that exists in our natural and human world back toward God.

It is not without reason thus that St Anselm can be regarded as the first of the medieval theologians. If it is true that systematic theology emerged as an achievement of the 13th century, in the earlier work of St Anselm we find an individual achievement: a way of thinking which was matched with a new way of speaking and, from this point of departure, a desire which persons could now begin to speak about in the context of conversations which they could have with each other. The work of a single person shifts into a work that many persons could now do together. A new school of thought emerges and a development in Catholic theology which can work within a culture to transform it from within in a way that differs from what had been previously known. In attending to the person and work of St Anselm, we can begin to move into a discovery of our own which now also knows about the difference between dogmatic and systematic theology and what requirements need to be met before there can be any kind of flowering which can exist if we attend to the special kind of inquiry that exists within the work of systematic theology.

DUNSTAN ROBIDOUX, OSB