



St. Scholastica Priory, 271 North Main Street, PO Box 606, Petersham, MA 01366

## SOURCE OF LIFE

"The first thing to understand about the Rule of Benedict is that the entire rule is oriented toward liturgical living." This is a line from a book, *Authentic Liturgy Minds in Tune with Voices* by Nathaniel Marx. A good question to ask might be: what is liturgical living? What does liturgy mean? The word's origins are from ancient Greece in regard to public service. It was the duty, service owed to the public, by citizens who possessed property. At that time to have more personal means meant the person was called upon to provide public service for others at their own cost. It could be for music or dramatic performances, festivals or outfitting a ship for war. This term was adopted into ecclesiastical language even in the Old Testament to mean ministering to public worship or religious ceremonies.

This Old Testament reading may sound familiar from a Mass during Lent, "Between the vestibule and the altar let the priests, the *ministers* of the Lord, weep. Let them say, "Spare your people, O Lord" (Joel 12:17). The ministers were those that assisted in God's service, to his temple, his altar. The first time the same word is used in the New Testament is in chapter one of Luke's Gospel about John the Baptist's father, Zechariah, who had been "delay(ed) in the sanctuary ...he could not speak to them [those waiting outside], and they realized that he had his time of *service* was ended, he went to his home" (Lk 1:21-23). Here it is service. Then that same word for *minister* λειτουργός, is the word used in the book

of Hebrews in regard to Jesus himself: "We have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a *minister* in the sanctuary and the true tent the Lord ...has set up" (Heb 8:1-2).

From that time on the word liturgy, meaning to minister to public worship or religious ceremonies, would develop and

the development that underpins our life here at St Scholastica Priory.

Our juniors are studying the history of the Divine Office. Like anything human it is not simple or just in a nice straight line. Elements from the different hubs of the Catholic Church made their additions. There were highs and lows and highs and lows! Liturgy is a bit like the pilings holding up a pier. They gather barnacles and liturgical additions - periodically over time they need to be scraped down.

The barnacles I mentioned are the new feast days and devotions that a particular time in history needs and inspires. Over decades, maybe centuries the liturgical year (Ah! Another use of that word!) is so filled with celebrations of saints or events that the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ are lost. We are

blessed to live over and over each year God's salvific work which is the substance of the liturgical year. Our lives are joined to that yearly cycle to the actual saving actions of God bringing us ever deeper into our call as children of God.

Anyone who regularly attends Mass has experienced the liturgical year. This year begins with the First Sunday of Advent. It flows into Christmas, Epiphany and slows into some of the Ordinary Time before the beginning of Lent. Those six weeks usually feel very long before the glory of Easter! Easter is not numerically the center of the Liturgical Year but it is certainly the pivot, the core of our liturgical life in or outside the monastery. Even



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though there is a beginning to the liturgical year and an end, the Resurrection of Christ is that reality that changed everything. Pope Benedict XVI wrote in *Introduction to Christianity* that "this new life begot itself in history and had to do so, because after all it is there for history, and the Christian message is basically nothing else than the transmission of the testimony that love has managed to break through death here and thus has transformed fundamentally the situation of all of us." It is that LOVE, the love of God for us, his children, that Jesus' rising from the dead shone on us! And so after the season of Paschaltide we re-enter the liturgical time called Ordinary again.

Ordinary Time has nothing to do with our understanding of the word ordinary now. Its root is in the sequence of ordinal numbers. Pope Benedict wrote, the liturgy "lifts us up out of our narrow sphere." Pope St Paul VI said of the liturgy, it is the "primary source of that divine exchange in which the life of God is communicated to us; it is the first school of the soul." Our Ordinary Time is that spiral of God's work of salvation drawing us in ever deeper and nearer to him to eternal life as we listen to his word, are fed his body, blood, soul and divinity at the Mass. GOD IS, always PRESENT, always in the ETERNAL NOW. We all live the liturgy; we all participate in that liturgical living in our public worship. It is a proclamation that GOD IS! He is the source of life, the blessings in our lives, the ONE who gives meaning to our sorrows and promises life beyond the here and now.

Our liturgical living in the monastery begins with the bell ringing twenty minutes before the Divine Office starts. The rest of the day is formed by the skeleton of the hours of the Divine Office with the bell always calling, "Come!" We do this with our bodies and souls. And for those outside the monastery: running out of your homes to the car, pulling into the church parking lot and entering the building can be, IS, part of that public worship of the liturgy, the Mass. With your bodies you too proclaim publicly that God is calling and you are coming! A bit like the cloister that joins our monastery to the church – yours is just longer!

We have become aware of something else about our liturgical living – about the seasons of the liturgical year. Reflecting as a community we have noticed that the

Lenten season, Holy Week and Sacred Triduum have been filled with an amazing list of events in our individual lives. Mostly events that we had no idea about being on the horizon. It calls to my mind something my own mother would often say shortly after the first few days of Lent. "I told the Lord what I planned to do and then he told me what I would do." In 2006 one of our sister's fathers died on the third Sunday of Lent. In Holy Week of 2015 a sister had back surgery, and in 2016 a sister had a rough bout in the hospital and spent Holy Week in a rehab. That same year one of our sisters' mother had a stroke on Wednesday in Holy Week. In 2018 in Holy Week one of the sister's father received a diagnosis that required her to go and help. In 2019 a sister was tied up with a knee replacement during the Triduum! This year we "celebrate" this way again with one of us in rehab after breaking a leg. It seems undeniable that the Lord asked us to share on even a physical level the liturgical season. God is watching for us to join in this great work, Christ is our High Priest and takes us into his prayer! All we need to do is show up and he'll help us with the rest! Happy Easter! MMEK

## HAPPENINGS

December 4—Jon D. Levenson, author and Professor of Jewish Studies at Harvard (Sr Mary Frances and Fr Gregory studied with him and became friends), came with his wife Beverly to give us a talk on "The Love of God in Deuteronomy." He is not only brilliant but a man of deep faith and hilarious!



December 10—Two sisters came down with COVID but that pesky bug went no farther.

December 31—It was our annual end-of-the-year retreat day. We spend this day thanking God for all the graces of the year and pleading with him for the world for the new year.

January 4—We celebrated Mother Mary Elizabeth's feast day. The students from her Rule class put on a "Family Feud" game show and the questions were on monastic life.



Abbot Anselm arrived November 23 and intended to leave December 16th but travel was uncertain in the UK and we had the joy of his presence till December 31st!



January 16th—Sr Mechtilde renewed her simple vows. Pray for her as she continues her journey.

January 21—We had the honor of attending the oblation of Amanda to our monastery.



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January 22—Brian Stone, the master cheesemaker who has helped our sisters learn the process, generously gave his time to talk about the next step. Pray for this!

February 3—Mother attended the Conference of Benedictine Prioresses at Sacred Heart Monastery and meetings at St Bernard Abbey in Cullman, Alabama.



Sr Nancy Bauer, OSB and Sr Lynn McKenzie, OSB spent their free time working on our Constitutions. We have been so blessed by the generous gift of their skills including Sr Scholastika in Germany. Pray for them!

February 21- We received 2 King Cakes for Mardi Gras from Gina who lived with us at Our Lady Queen Monastery after Katrina.

March 15- We got 2 feet of snow from the storm that went across the country. All who could went out for snow removal. The ones that were unable prepared hot drinks and kept things going indoors.

March 22—Lynne Shaw, our great friend and "Priory Nurse" came to Mass for the first time after being in critical condition for months. There has been miracles. Thank you for praying for her! Keep it up.



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The Paschal Mystery and contemplative prayer have something in common: they reveal the power of God. "My power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor 12:9), said Our Lord to St. Paul, indicating that the God who made everything out of nothing can use the most lowly and seemingly inefficient means to complete the divine plan. The Cross—the moment where Jesus was transfixed, motionless, performing no miracles, set in the weakest human position—was the pinnacle act of salvation. Similarly, even a simple soul loving the person of Christ through prayer, seemingly doing nothing, can move God to convert hearts, heal wounds, bring peace to a warring world, and ultimately lead others into eternal life.

The French philosopher Blaise Pascal once wrote: "The heart has reasons that reason knows nothing of". God's loving reasons easily eclipse those of the human mind, only to be fully revealed in heaven. So the next time someone tells you they rowed across one of the Great Lakes in a kiddie pool... *because it was for a charitable fund-raiser*, you might find yourself smiling and feeling glad that you suspended judgment until hearing the end of the story.

SEW



**Monastic Experience Weekend**  
**JUNE 2ND - 4th**  
 If you have wondered about religious life and would like to share a weekend praying and living with us - see our website: [www.stscholasticapriory.org](http://www.stscholasticapriory.org)  
 For details. **Come and see!**

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RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED



Thank you for your prayers and support!  
Our Gift to you in this Eastertide time is  
a Novena of Masses for you and your  
Intentions to end on Pentecost!

## THE INEFFICIENCY OF GOD

Suppose someone came up to you one day and said, "I just rowed across Lake Ontario using a kiddie pool as a boat and a rake as a paddle!" You might be a bit surprised, and perhaps even shocked or incredulous. It would be only natural to ask, "Goodness, why on earth would you do that? Wouldn't you have preferred to use a sailboat or take a ferry?"

At first glance, the rower's approach doesn't seem to make a lot of sense. The human spirit, with all its evolutionary drive, generally looks for the most straightforward path from point A to B, finding the means to accomplish the most with the least amount of expended energy. One might call this self-preservation in its most basic form. Would you try to cut a pork chop with a comb? Would you wear slippers when mountain-climbing? And yet, when it comes to the plans of God, human efficiency gets turned on its head.

During the Sacred Triduum, the celebration of the death and resurrection of Christ, we recall the gruesome, bloody scenes of a case of capital punishment. On the human level, it was heinous, cruel, unjust, and unwarranted. The apostle Peter, when he heard the Lord predicting His passion, instinctively cried out, "This will never happen to you!" (Mt 16:22). It pained the depth of his soul to think of a torture so malicious, and yet Jesus asked his disciples to think differently about the matter. "You are thinking as men think, not as God thinks" (Mt 16:23). This was Jesus' response to Peter, indicating that in order to align with the divine will, sometimes our preconceived notions and judgments of "good" and "bad" have to change.

St. Paul later echoed, "Do not be conformed to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind" (Rom 12:2). In order to "discern what is good", he saw that common pathways of thought have to shift. In the world, the objective of efficiency is often paramount, and through that lens, God's plan of salvation would likely be judged as thoroughly inefficient. God was born as a weak and helpless child subject to the human condition (Gal 4:4-5), grew in wisdom (Lk 2:52), traveled on foot as a preacher and was subjected to persecution and death by the elders of his religious tradition. *But why?? It could have been so much easier*, one might say.

In the contemplative tradition, time is spent seeking God in prayer, often long hours of prayer. Imagine someone who knew nothing of what was going on observing a person sitting simply in silence. What was accomplished? What was that all about? Was that not a waste of time? Even within the mind of the one praying arises the common temptation that something "more important" could be done. And yet, Pope Francis provides a warning against a prominent danger: "[T]he danger to be caught up in the frenzy of doing things, to fall into the trap of activism where what is most important are the results that we obtain and the feeling of being absolute protagonists. [...] Let us beware, brothers and sisters, of efficiency" (*Angelus*, 18 July 2021). For it is not human action which accomplishes the mission of the Church, but the power of God residing in man. Without a spiritual union with God, human effort is in vain. "Without me, you can do nothing" (Jn 15:5). In contrast, when the divine Heart and a merely human heart are united, a veritable explosion of grace occurs.

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