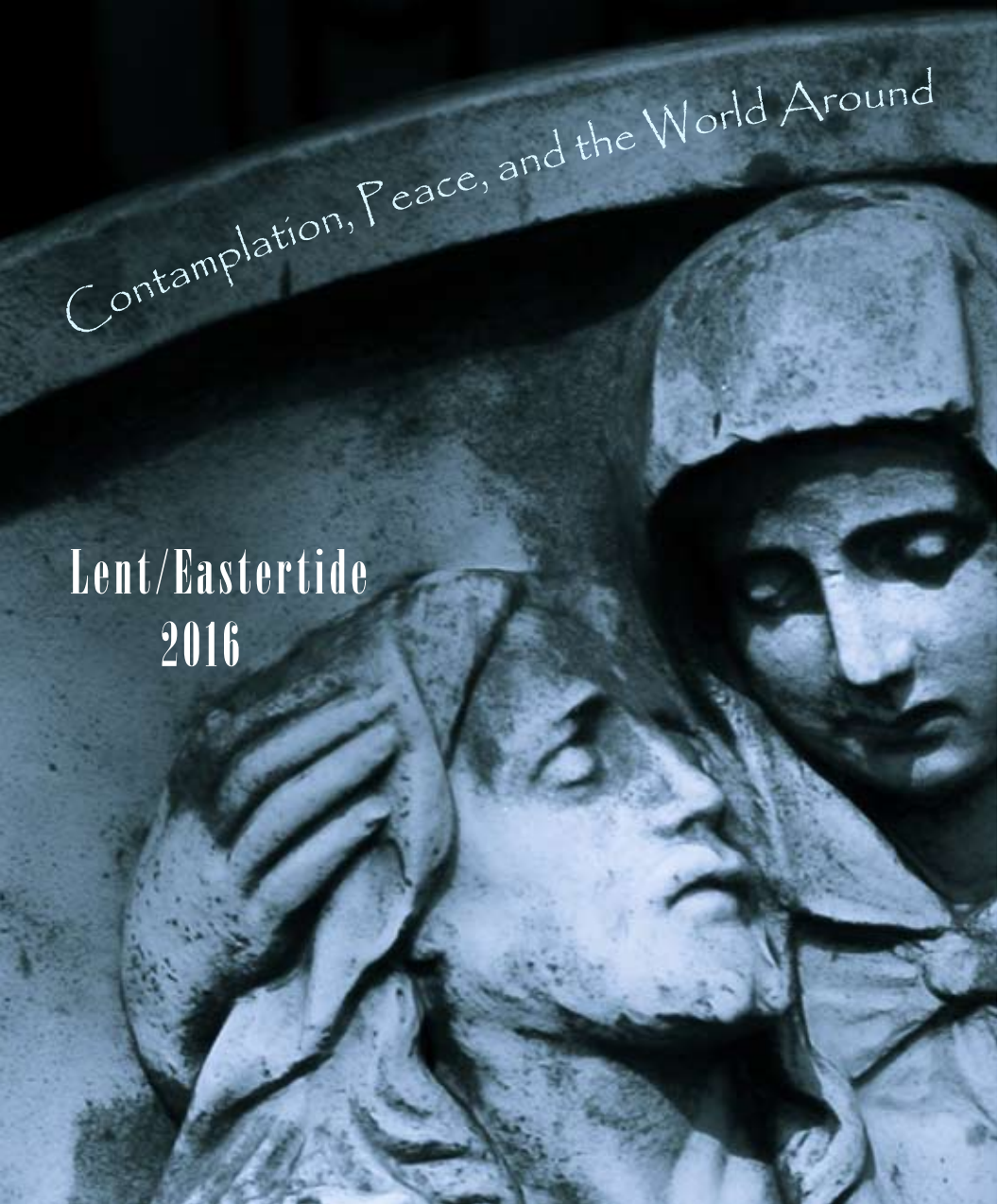


Voice of the Cloud
the newsletter
and program catalog
of
MONS NUBIFER & SANCTVS

Contemplation, Peace, and the World Around

Lent/Eastertide
2016





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Theoria, Leituorgeia, Diakonia, Koinonia
(Contemplation, Liturgy, Service, Communion)

Vision Statement
All in the fullness of Christ.

Mission Statement
Mons Nubifer Sanctus is a place set apart for the meticulous study and practice of contemplative Christianity. Our programs emphasize wholehearted discipleship grounded in the fullness of the catholic faith, fostering truly Christian character, wakefulness to divine love, and union with God.

Our Core Values
We encourage Authenticity and Maturity
For the development of Virtue and Clarity;
We seek Reconciliation and Renewal
For the realization of Flourishing and Fullness
Consummated in the Love of God which sets creation free
from the bondage of sin.

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President's Epistle

A sermon delivered by Fr. James at this year's New Year's mass.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God.

Matthew 5:9

When certain milestones of time come upon us they tend to inspire us to look back and reflect about our past. At the same time, because our past and our future are intimately connected, these milestones cause us also to look ahead and wonder about times yet to come. Birthdays, anniversaries, holidays and, perhaps one of the more outstanding of these, New Year's, all have about them this quality of nostalgic reflection. Over this past week and into the next, countless television features and news articles will report on the events of the past year. Alongside technological advances, notable personalities, weather events, and the usual Hollywood fripperies, these articles and news shows will also be featuring a great deal of unrest, burgeoning violence, fierce persecutions, and catastrophic shifts in population. The tones that such remembrances cast on our reflections for the future are dim: certainly they give me a sense of unease and uncertainty, not only for the future of the Middle East, but also for our own future here in the West. I suppose this is nothing new. One hundred years ago, when 1915 became 1916, World War I was one and a half years in the going and would last another two. It was a war so horrible and futile that it should supposedly have been the war to end all wars.

We gather tonight to celebrate this New Year's Eucharist with intentions and prayers for peace and healing. We've read the news, we've interpreted the signs of the times; looking back on the year that is past, we look ahead with some concern. Therefore, we hope and we pray that peace and sanity will prevail, while at the same time we actively seek peace and sanity in that which only has the power to grant them: a life in God.

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The Church celebrated her new year on the 1st of Advent; what we as the Church are in the midst of celebrating now is not New Year's but Christmas: the mystery of the incarnation of God; the reconciliation of the broken, alienated, and stranded human being with the divine reality; the union of the human, created nature with the uncreated Word of God; our adoption as God's children in the only begotten of the Father; our nuptial union with the beloved bridegroom which makes us partakers in the divine life. No matter how you say it, all of it means peace: true peace; deep peace; everlasting peace. The Church's teaching is shot through

with allusions to peace. In fact, if one really searches the scriptures and listens to the liturgy one realizes that peace is the very end and goal of the Christian life.

It is not the peace which is the absence of open conflict; it is not the peace of being walled-off by the passing securities of wealth, arms, or being the toughest guy on the block. Rather, it is a peace that is fundamental and foundational to the whole of life, to the whole of creation; a peace within which everything, including the violence of our world, subsists; a peace that is an essential aspect of the Godhead. Therefore, peace is not something we can create or make. Rather, peace is something that we must enter; something that we must discover and uncover; something that we must be reconciled to and united with. In order to do this, we first have to renounce, deeply -- down to the marrow of our bones -- all

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disorder, all agitation and all revolt. This is why an orderly existence, silence, stillness, and obedience are fundamental aspects of the Christian spiritual life. This is why we practice contemplative prayer. In the orderly and obedient stillness of prayer, in the whole contemplative schedule practiced here, our bodies and minds are allowed to settle, facilitating a certain transparency and receptivity which we do not have in the midst of constant activity. It is like silt settling in still water; as the water grows clear the sun's light can penetrate and illuminate it. But when we first try to remain still and silent we tend to get more agitated than we were in the liberty of our activity. We get frustrated, rebellious, bored, dreamy, depressed, even silly; we clutch and grasp for something to chew on and take hold of; all of the feelings and thoughts we've stuffed down become transparent to us, and this can be frightening. We are forced to accept and not deny our brokenness, our helplessness, our dependencies. Where the water was once opaque, now the light penetrates through and begins to reveal something of the quality of the muck that is floating around in it. This is good because we are then empowered to take responsibility for our secret sin and make atonement, setting it free into the amnesty of God's forgiveness.

When we begin to relax into this purgative work of the Spirit, not struggling against the light but rather allowing ourselves to be exposed, is when true prayer can really begin. Ultimately prayer is a gift from God, as it is a surrender to God. “Thy kingdom come; thy will be done” is the essence of prayer. Prayer is also, then, a surrender to being as we are, as God has made us, rather than struggling to make ourselves in the image of our fantasies or struggling to maintain a self that has been designed for us by our fallen parents, teachers, society and even (dare I say) religious

teachers. All these masks begin to fall away, and we find ourselves exposed and naked. When we can again be naked before God, unafraid and not ashamed, then we are healed and at peace, resting in Paradise in the bosom of God's loving care, God's great peace. And, when we can bring this nakedness into our relationships we will find that they will go much better; that we are becoming a true human being. So let us nail ourselves to the cross of prayer; let us remain even though it be painful, even though the cherished things of this life should fall away. Trust the peace of God and fall into it. Without making this leap of faith, there can never be peace on earth.

If God is truly God, and so the highest reality, then we will never be at peace until we are reconciled with this reality; in harmony with, and united to, it. If God were an endless river and we spent our lives paddling upstream, we'd be pretty worn out by the time that life was over, and when it was over we'd just be washed down along that little stretch of river we spent our whole life trying to overcome! Our whole life would be toil and struggle, with little peace at all, and would in the end be quite futile. But if we learned to paddle downstream, with the river, what a ride that would be! We still have to paddle; we still have to maneuver our boat and pay attention; there's still work to do; but we're no longer working against what is ultimate; no longer working against God. This is what is revealed and opened to us in the Incarnation; this is what we celebrate at Christmas: the union of the human will with the divine will; not a union where one is swallowed up and annihilated by the other, but a union that is like a good marriage, where two persons remain two persons but yet are one, subsisting together, remaining in communion not out of fear or neuroses, but of their own free choice made in love.

Without love there is no peace. And love, true love, depends on sacrifice. True love requires surrender; it requires risk-taking and showing up for the sake of another, which is why the spiritual life can only be authentically practiced in the context of a community, the Church. Above all, true love requires boundless forgiveness. In the Eastern liturgy there are numerous times when the priest turns to the congregation and sings, "Peace be to all." The Congregation replies, "And to your spirit." In the Western liturgy this happens only once; it is called, appropriately, "the Peace". Traditionally this happens right after the Fraction, as we do it here. The bread is broken, signifying the sacrifice of Christ on the cross, and the priest declares, "May the peace of the Lord be always with you." Christ is sacrificed, and peace is the result because true humility, true love, has been exhibited and forgiveness is realized. The passing of the peace which follows is an orderly liturgical act. Beginning at the altar, the symbol of Christ's sacrifice, a kiss of peace is passed throughout the congregation signifying that, as we have been forgiven, so we also forgive our brothers and sisters; we are in love and charity with one another. In some of

the newer liturgical forms the peace comes after the confession. It still represents the peace of forgiveness, but its placement here is somewhat regrettable because it is now connected with a vague, general confession of sorts recited by the congregation rather than being directly related to the sacrifice of Christ, which is what the Eucharist is all about. Add to this that it usually explodes into at least five minutes of social time, a sort of pre-coffee hour conversational, the whole thing winds up, in my perhaps not so humble opinion, being a liturgical and theological travesty because it loses its liturgical and theological significance. Be that as it may, my point here is that peace and forgiveness are intimately connected in the liturgy, and we should appreciate this fact. Whether the peace is after the general confession or at the fraction, it is still connected to a humble handing-over of the self to God and the forgiveness and healing that is realized by such a movement of the soul.

As we reflect on the year that is past and anticipate the times to come, there may seem little that we can do to change the international situation. Certainly, as we look at the strained relationships between the various cultures of the world we must be led to reflect upon our own culture. If my wife and I were struggling I would certainly need to look at how I am contributing to the situation. We are undoubtedly exuberant and self-congratulatory about what we perceive as our accomplishments in freedom, though from my standpoint we are ever more clearly exhibiting the symptoms of a worldly empire in decline: social and personal decadence, an economy of debt and finance as opposed to labor and production, an outright rejection of the institutions of the past, and so the degradation of families, communities, local economies, politics, and any sense of a shared common vision and direction as a united people. Much of this seems the natural outcome of having learned, as I have learned, to put our own individual comforts, conveniences, pleasures, ambitions and opinions first, making them, as it were, absolute in the absence of any common absolute, such as God. I used to lament that we've relativized everything, but more and more I realize that what we've done is make absolutes out of what should be understood as relatives. My desires and opinions are relative, and so must be measured against a greater truth. But when my desire is my truth and your desire is your truth then we each become gods in a universe of one. It is ultimately a lonely, isolated universe, but at least we get to be sure about our own absolute truth! This is really the basis of insanity, which is to mistake one's own hallucinations and fantasies for reality. Unfortunately, we export this program with great zeal, and many other peoples in the world, Islamic Middle Easterners in particular, are not entirely wrong to perceive this as a great threat, whether or not their own program is satisfactory.

Be that as it may, we find here that the action most needed is the action of the contemplative life, which is order, obedience, stillness,

surrender, an unlearning of this kind of atomized and broken subsistence. Recollection and prayer have to be central if we are to realize a transfigured world. We must never forget that we have Jesus Christ, who is the revelation of God's kingdom among us, the Prince of Peace, and in and by him we are empowered to enter into union with God and bear God's peace and healing wherever we might be. We do not do this of our own selves, but in and by him, because in and by him this world is sought, loved and, indeed, saved. This is a fact already established. For the love of him, and in his love, let us then seek and realize this fact, entering his peace in our own small and imperfect ways. Do you harbor anger? Bring it to God that you might have a spirit of forgiveness. Transform retaliation into a blessing; self-centeredness into self-giving; suffering into a life of compassion and mercy. Let us be willing to undergo such a change.

I will never stand here and tell you that any of this is easy; it is not. It is a distinctively difficult and often painful path, partly because the more we become aware of God's love the more we become aware of the world's (and so our own) alienation from that love. We become dissatisfied with this alienation, with our own lives, love-sick and longing instead to enter into God more fully, to leave the pigpen and return to the Father's house. Wonderfully, our pining approach towards God in our engagement of the Christian life reveals to us that it is he who makes an approach towards us, and our meeting, even if a fleeting rendezvous, is consummated as salvation for the world. This way can be difficult also because commencing to turn and follow the river of God we begin going against the river of the world; the more nimbly we flow downstream the faster those struggling upstream seem to pass us by. But we are armed with the gospel and the teachings of the Church; we stand among the saints; we have one another; and we have this most amazing and bottomless living tradition: we should search it and trust it and love it and keep it and practice it. Through all the difficulties we must believe what it tells us: that this whole creation is circumscribed by God's love, a love so great that it can hold within itself even the gravest of sinners as they strive and scuffle against him. This is the love we must seek in the years to come; this is the love we must call upon and manifest in our own relationships, for each of us is created in, by and for this love; it is the deepest truth of our lives.

The world may be going upstream, but that is all the more reason why we must cease the madness, cease the upstream battle, and rather shoot the river's mighty waters unto the open seas of God's peace. May this be our work in 2016, and unto all ages of ages. Happy New Year to all of you, and may the Peace of the Lord be always with you.

Fr. James Krueger+

News & Happenings

We had a busy summer and fall at Mons Nubifer Sanctus. Our new garden beds produced some of the largest kale we've ever seen, with plenty of fresh herbs, a lasting crop of fine potatoes, and pickling cukes enough to enjoy through the winter. The finest harvest this year was the apples; people around these parts are still trying to figure out what to do with all their applesauce. Here we will be enjoying apple jelly and apple chutney through the cold of winter, which has come upon us very hesitantly. We cannot say this for Advent and Christmas, however, which just blew by. The highlight was our annual New Year's program culminating in a midnight mass for healing and peace. See the program catalog for details for this year.

Nashotah House Seminary student Margaret Brack was with us for a spell as an intern this summer. We are putting out a call for others who wish to study and serve here on a longer-term basis as an intern or work-scholar. We can house such people for a month or more, and might even consider a full year. While here one would train in the contemplative life, gain an appreciation for rural parish ministry and mission, and help this ministry to thrive by lending a hand in areas of need. If interested please inquire, or pass the word along if you know someone who might be attracted to such an opportunity.

We have also recently received a generous donation that will help us to more effectively reach new program participants and students within a wider geographical area. It has become apparent that our programs not only serve to refresh, strengthen and equip the faithful for ministry in their communities, but we are a place where connections are made, ideas shared, and new ministries are envisioned.



The Desire of God: A Personal Reflection on Evangelism and Contemplation

by the Rev. Paul Hunter, Treasurer of MNS

I. Arbor Hill

Arbor Hill is an Albany, New York neighborhood not too far north of the Cathedral of All Saints, where I serve as a priest. The Cathedral is located downtown, and between us and Arbor Hill there is fixed a not-so-great chasm, a developed ravine cradling the little tiny neighborhood of Sheridan Hollow. I usually walk down into Sheridan Hollow once a or twice a week, then up the other side, into Arbor Hill.

Albany's own bard, William Kennedy, described Arbor Hill as "the most mercurial of Albany neighborhoods, a place of Arcadian wealth, gentility and beauty, that became a slum" (*O, Albany!* New York: Viking press. 1983. 96). While shades of former elegance remain, it is a classic inner city neighborhood, possessed of classic inner city problems. Block after block of cracked and uneven sidewalks on Clinton Avenue, the main thoroughfare, are littered with boarded up buildings, scraps of paper, nickel bags, and the occasional bit of rusted metal. It was ever a hub of commerce at the best of times, and now virtually the only businesses are derelict and disreputable-looking convenience stores with sun-faded advertisements pasted to grimy windows. Two years ago, I fell in love with this neighborhood. Arbor Hill is the reason I moved to Albany. This is where God wants me to be, and I love it.

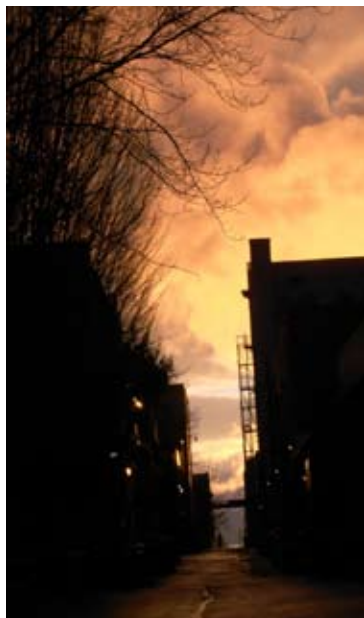
There is no Episcopal church in the neighborhood, and I came here to serve as missionary priest, sponsored and supported by the Cathedral. The ministry has taken many shapes in the last two years, from working with kids to door-to-door ministry. I have always felt an unlikely missionary and evangelist. I am no revivalist preacher, no Billy Graham. Missionaries are people of action (according to my imagination); at heart, I am a contemplative; I am bookish, awkward, and even withdrawn. I love nothing more than reading Christian mystics on the life of prayer.

Slightly to my own surprise, contemplative prayer has turned out to be foundational for my ministry as an evangelist. Even more surprisingly, it is the mystics who have given me the words to explain to myself and to others what I love about this neighborhood. In particular, I have found assistance in what might seem like the most unlikely source, the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite (henceforth, Dionysius).

II. Dionysius

We know almost nothing about the author who wrote under the name of Dionysius the Areopagite. The "real"





Dionysius was one of Saint Paul's Athenian converts, whom tradition says went on to be the first Bishop of Athens (Acts 17). The unknown author who wrote under his name was almost certainly a fifth century Syrian monk, well acquainted with Greek philosophy. Despite his anonymity, Dionysius has had a wide-ranging impact on the history of Christian theology. Thomas Aquinas cited him more than any other theologian besides Augustine of Hippo, and his works influenced Byzantine theology mainly through the writings of Maximus the Confessor.

His numerous works on angels, the liturgy and theology proper established the lexicon of negative, or apophatic theology. Dionysius is a very abstract writer, who uses the language and a not a few of the concepts of Neo-Platonism, and he favors poetic and paradoxical ways of expression. His corpus

of writings takes the reader on a sort of tour of the cosmos, from the sacred order of the Church, which reflects the celestial order of the Angels, up to the heights of contemplation, where we draw near to God who dwells in "light inaccessible." Through the worship of the Church, encountering Jesus Christ in the Sacraments and Scriptures, we enter into contemplation of the 'divine names,' the way that God has revealed himself to men, and finally coming to know God as beyond even being and non-being. For what are probably obvious reasons, he was not someone I initially read to be encouraged about urban ministry, but mainly to satisfy more academic and personal interests.

He surprised me though. For the first year I lived in Albany, I had no washer and dryer, so I would go to the laundromat on Clinton Avenue, and try to strike up conversations with other customers in the hope of maybe doing a little evangelism. Sitting there on a chilly fall day waiting for a load of clothes to finish the spin cycle, I had brought along a book to read in case there was no one else at the laundry. I was struck by this passage from Dionysius's *The Divine Names*.

The very Author of all things, by the beautiful and good love of everything, through an overflow of His loving goodness, becomes out of Himself, by His providences for all existing things, and is, as it were, bewitched by goodness and charity and love, and is led down from the Eminence above all, and surpassing all, to being in all... Wherefore, those skilled in Divine things call Him even Jealous... (*Divine Names* IV. 13)

The metaphysical background of this text is complex, and the meaning has to be carefully parsed. But that background is not what I am interested in right now. I cannot say why such a dry text should strike me so powerfully. At the

time, reading this was like a lightning bolt. It struck me, not as a theoretical description of providence or the relation that obtains between the world and God, but as a vivid reality; the terrifying and beautiful truth that God is ecstatically, extravagantly in love with what he has made.

The rest of the afternoon walking around Arbor Hill, I felt the chill of the day. Fall was turning to bitter New York winter, and the bare trees were skeletal against the sky. But it was beautiful; light might as well have streamed up through the cracks in those uneven sidewalks. Dionysius had put words around something I already knew on an inarticulate level, and in so doing, made it possible for me to know more deeply: God desires this neighborhood. The Father delights in and longs for this neighborhood, and his longing makes it lovely. God is present to whatever he loves, with, in and through the objects of his love, transfiguring them with the light of Christ. This is “love to the loveless shown that they might lovely be.” (“My Song is Love Unknown”, Samuel Crossman, 1664.)

Of course, this is true of any person, any place, any neighborhood. Each thing that is, is because God has desired it, and desires it still. All love is ecstatic. It carries the lover outside himself to the beloved. This is true of God and his creation. God, says Dionysius “descends by means of an ecstatic and super-essential power while remaining within himself” in order to have communion with his creatures (*Divine Names* IV.13). God’s love for the world is not a dispassionate benevolence, but a fiery longing, even a jealousy. Dionysius does not hesitate to use the language of the erotic to describe God’s love. God desires his creation, his people, his Church, the “Bride of the Lamb.” Likewise, the heart longs for God, for an intimate communion with her Lord that carries her upward, even as God “bewitched by goodness, charity and love” descends to meet her. The transcendent creator and his creature meet in reciprocal ecstasy.

There are times and places when God allows us to perceive this general truth with peculiar intensity. I think that’s why I love Arbor Hill. God has let me get a little glimpse of his own transfiguring love for this place and these people, a taste of his desire and his delight. That same transfiguring love must be at

work in our own hearts for this to happen. God must work upon our hearts, minds and imaginations, so that we can see with his eyes.

III. Contemplative Prayer.

Zen Buddhist tradition hands on many anecdotes of how a monk, after many years sitting in silent meditation may be suddenly enlightened by the most inconsequential happenings: a pebble falls, the master speaks a word, holds up a hand and the world is made new without changing in the least. Sitting in that laundromat, I felt a little bit like one of those Zen



monks.

An archaic translation of ancient words from an anonymous Syrian monk were like a pebble falling, resulting in a disproportionate rapture and insight. Of course, God had already been at work in me, and like a boulder balanced on a precipice, only a little push was required. The pebble had to fall, I had to run across a few words in an old book, and that was enough. The preparation had been long and gradual though, and a primary element in my preparation was the practice of contemplative prayer.

Contemplation, which the Saints tell us is not so much a human action, as a gift of God, is a way of practicing that ecstatic love that carries the soul up to God. Now, the actual mechanics of contemplative prayer are remarkably dull. When I practice contemplative prayer, I typically sit in total silence for about 20 minutes, praying either the Jesus Prayer or repeating “Abba, Father.” I fidget frequently. My foot falls asleep. I get a crick in my neck. My mind wanders and I get bored.

This, however is all part of the process. To sit in silence, for minute after dull minute, we must be propelled by a deep longing to see God, to press beyond the boundaries of our finite selves into the unapproachable light of God. Even more, we must accept it on faith that God desires to meet us there, and that the longing in our hearts is only an echo of God’s own longing for us. Really, to pray in silence is to trust that God, in his love, is drawing us toward himself. We are not ascending to him on our own power but are carried by his love. It is only this act of faith that makes contemplative prayer bearable or justifiable.

Even in the dull and mundane practice of contemplative prayer, God is at work upon our hearts, reshaping our imaginations and renewing our minds. After a time, we begin to perceive what we at first accept by faith: God’s longing for us, and our longing for God. For some people, this process may perhaps be thoroughly gradual. For myself, the gradual growth has been punctuated by moments like the one I experienced in the laundromat on that cold fall day. In that moment, and others like it, God’s desire became a fact of experience, not just an axiom of faith. Contemplative prayer prepared the way for those moments of insight, and nurtures the insight still. Even when I have little empirical feeling of God’s love, I have the memory of it, and contemplative prayer helps to keep that memory living and active.

Further, it is this sense of God’s desire for each person that compels and enables me to be an evangelist. What more powerful motivation for ministry could there be than to know that God desires each person I meet? He desires them, whether they are smart or dumb, prosaic or interesting, courteous or rude, good or evil. To know that is to see people differently; to see them with the loveliness that God desires for them, and which is already – in some mysterious way - theirs in his eyes. A rough person can become beautiful as easily as a rough neighborhood can become an Eden for a moment. The more evangelism finds its wellspring in this deep sense of God’s love that contemplative prayer fosters, the stronger it will be. I know that has been true for me.



Signs of the Saints

This section features highlights from the writings of the saints which address various aspects of the Christian spiritual life and the general topics of the newsletter.

An excerpt from Saint Leo the Great's

Sermon 26:

The Savior then, dearly beloved, is born not of fleshly seed but of the Holy Spirit, in such wise that the condemnation of the first transgression did not touch Him. And hence the very greatness of the boon conferred demands of us reverence worthy of its splendor. For, as the blessed Apostle teaches, "we have received not the spirit of this world but the Spirit which is of God, that we may know the things which are given us by God" (1 Corinthians 2:12): and that Spirit can in no other way be rightly worshipped, except by offering Him that which we received from Him. But in the treasures of the Lord's bounty what can we find so suitable to the honor of the present feast as the peace, which at the Lord's nativity was first proclaimed by the angel-choir? For that it is which brings forth the sons of God, the nurse of love and the mother of unity: the rest of the blessed and our eternal home; whose proper work and special office it is to join to God those whom it removes from the world. Whence the Apostle incites us to this good end, in saying, "being justified therefore by faith let us have peace towards God." (Romans 5:1). In which brief sentence are summed up nearly all the commandments; for where true peace is, there can be no lack of virtue. But what is it, dearly beloved, to have peace towards God, except to wish what He bids, and not to wish what He forbids? For if human friendships seek out equality of soul and similarity of desires, and difference of habits can never attain to full harmony, how will he be partaker of divine peace, who is pleased with what displeases God and desires to get delight from what he knows to be offensive to God? That is not the spirit of the sons of God; such wisdom is not acceptable to the noble family of the adopted. That chosen and royal race must live up to the dignity of its regeneration, must love what the Father loves, and in naught disagree with its Maker, lest the Lord should again say: "I have begotten and raised up sons, but they have scorned Me: the ox knows his owner and the ass his master's crib: but Israel has not known Me and My people has not acknowledged Me." (Isaiah 1:2-3).

The mystery of this boon is great, dearly beloved, and this gift exceeds all gifts that God should call man son, and man should name God Father: for by these terms we perceive and learn the love which reached so great a height. For if in natural progeny and earthly families those who are born of noble parents are lowered by the faults of evil intercourse, and unworthy offspring are put to shame by the very brilliance of their ancestry; to what end will they come who through love of the world do not fear to be outcast from the family of Christ? But if it gains the praise of men that the father's glory should shine again in their descendants, how much more glorious is it for those who are born of God to regain the brightness of their Maker's likeness and display in themselves Him Who begot them, as says the Lord: "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven?" (Matthew 5:16). We know indeed, as the Apostle John says, that "the whole world lies in the evil one" (1 John 5:19), and that by the stratagems of the Devil and his angels numberless attempts are made either to frighten man in his struggle upwards by adversity or to spoil him by prosperity, but greater is He that is in us, than he that is against us, and they who have peace with God and are always saying to the Father with their whole hearts "your will be done" (Matthew 6:10) can be overcome in no battles, can be hurt by no assaults. For accusing ourselves in our confessions and refusing the spirit's consent to our fleshly lusts, we stir up against us the enmity of him who is the author of sin, but secure a peace with God that nothing can destroy, by accepting His gracious service, in order that we may not only surrender ourselves in obedience to our King but also be united to Him by our free-will. For if we are like-minded, if we wish what He wishes, and disapprove what He disapproves, He will finish all our wars for us, He Who gave the will, will also give the power: so that we may be fellow-workers in His works, and with the exultation of Faith may utter that prophetic song: "the Lord is my light and my salvation: whom shall I fear? The Lord is the defender of my life: of whom shall I be afraid?" (Psalm 27:1).

Saint Leo the Great, *Sermon 26*, III, IV

Upcoming Programs

2016

Programs at Mons Nubifer Sanctus are open to all. Each program is aimed at enhancing the appreciation and practice of the Christian life. We emphasize the costliness of Christian discipleship, encouraging spiritual maturity and union with God. Whether of an academic, practical, or spiritual nature, every program takes place within our unique training environment designed to embolden us towards these ends, where prayer is central. Each day consists of an early morning period of still prayer, followed by sung morning, noon and evening prayer services. The day ends with another period of still prayer and the nighttime service called “Compline.” The daily schedule also includes a period of silent work, wherein we complete the chores that are necessary to make our time together possible while practicing the safeguarding of a prayerful heart in daily activity.

Unless otherwise noted, overnight retreats begin with arrival and registration between 2 and 4 pm on the starting day, and end at 2 pm on the final day. Each portion of the schedule represents an integral part of the curriculum and is essential to the contemplative formation on offer at Mons Nubifer Sanctus. All participants, then, are asked to be present for the duration of the scheduled activities from beginning to end. More information can be had by reviewing our “Attending a Program” page under the “Programs” heading on our website.

We are located at Saint James Church Lake Delaware, 55 Lake Delaware Drive, Delhi, NY 13753, on southbound State Route 28 halfway between Delhi and Andes. We are two hours from Albany and three hours from New York City, and are accessible by Trailways bus line from New York City and points southeast, and from Oneonta and points northwest. Unless otherwise indicated all programs require pre-registration. Most of our programs are offered for a freewill donation according to your ability to give, though you must give something. We suggest \$50 per night. If you are unable to offer a cash donation work scholarships are available; please inquire. See our website www.monsnubifer.org, or contact us for further information or to register for a program.

+ Sat Feb 13 (or stay from the 12th to the 14th): **The Bride of Christ: Salvation and the Nuptial Mystery. 9:00am to 1pm.**

And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband ... Revelation 21:2

This program explores human salvation and the work of Christ from the standpoint of nuptial, or matrimonial, imagery. The nuptial character of salvation hails back to Genesis 1 and its history to the earliest of Old

Testament times. Nuptial imagery continues through the writings of the Prophets, and finds its fullest Old Testament expression in the Song of Songs. All of this points forward to Christ as the bridegroom of the Church as expressed in the writings of Saint Paul and in Revelation. In fact, the nuptial symbol of the Christ event subsumes even the symbols of victory, sacrifice and atonement, and one cannot fully appreciate the Christian spiritual life without a rounded consideration of this fact. A brief survey is also made regarding the conjugal character of the mystical experience, and Christian marriage as the sacramental sign of these spiritual realities.

+ Tues Feb 23 – Fri Feb 26: Mid-Week Lenten Prayer Vigil

The Prayer Vigil is at the heart of the contemplative training on offer at Mons Nubifer Sanctus. Participants enter into a deep and regenerative silence, spending many hours together each day engaging the practice of still prayer (Christian meditation). This is punctuated by the chanting of the psalms at morning, noon, and evening prayer services, and a daily period of silent work helps us to carry our prayerfulness into everyday activities. All participants have an opportunity to take advantage of the Sacrament of Reconciliation (confession) and/or to receive individual spiritual direction during the program.

+ Fri Mar 4 - Sun Mar 6: Introduction to the Theology and Practice of Contemplative Prayer

Dip your feet into the ocean of contemplative practice in the classical Christian tradition. Through an engagement of scripture and patristic and liturgical texts participants gain a solid theological and historical foundation in Christian spirituality, put to work through a guided immersion in contemplative prayer. Learn how contemplative practice touches, deepens and unites all aspects of the Christian life: serving the Liturgy, study, serving others in our livelihoods, and in the Christian moral and ethical life. Learn the essentials of Christian prayer and how prayer can be deepened; how to chant the daily prayer offices in morning, noon and evening prayer services; how the Christian sacramental and communal life supports and deepens contemplative practice, and how to maintain prayer in activity and to make activity prayer. Participants have the opportunity to avail themselves of individual spiritual direction and/or the Sacrament of Reconciliation (confession) during this retreat.

+ Fri Mar 18 – Sun Mar 20: Darkness, My Companion: Transforming Fury, Grief & Lamentation into Prayer

In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard for his godly fear.

Hebrews 5:7

This program explores the ancient art of lament in Hebrew culture. Participants search into the scriptural literature of outrage, grief, and lament which gives expression to this art-form, focusing mainly on the Psalms, the Book of Lamentations, the prophetic books, and John's Apocalypse. With this as our base, we will discuss our own struggles with anger and grief related to both personal and broader injustices and losses, investigating what place such feelings have in the life of prayer, how they might be properly enjoined, and how they might lead us into greater wholeness, trust, union with God, and service to the world.

+ Wed Mar 23 – Sun Mar 27: Paschal Triduum Prayer Vigil

Celebrate the central mystery of the Christian faith with focus and intention. Immerse yourself in the poignant liturgies of the Three Holy Days through which one loves, suffers, dies, and rises again in triumph in union with Christ, culminating in the stirring and lovely Easter Vigil service and the Easter morning mass. See page 14 above for description.

+ Sat Mar 26 – Sun Mar 27: Easter Program. TBA See website.

+ Saturday April 30 (or stay from the 29th to the 1st): Secrets of the Kingdom: The Parables Unlocked. 9:00am to 1pm.

To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God ... Mark 4:11

The parables of Jesus represent about one third of the recorded teachings of Christ in the four canonical Gospels. An essential grasp of the parables is paramount if we are to understand the person behind them and his teaching. On the surface, Jesus's parables can seem deceptively simple, a creative and enjoyable way of teaching certain moral and religious truths. Rather than being a collection of fluffy moral illustrations, however, the parables of Jesus communicate profound and often shocking social and spiritual realities. What is more, some of Jesus's parables are not easily penetrated, and much of their subtlety is lost on the modern person who is unfamiliar with their cultural and religious context. Join us as we unlock the parables of Jesus and bring out their genius, helping us to gain a deeper appreciation of their meanings and significances for us today. Gain a deeper appreciation for Jesus as a spiritual and religious teacher, a shrewd and daring communicator, and a master storyteller, and see in a whole new light some of the most familiar and time-honored stories in Western civilization.

+ Mon May 2 – Thurs May 5: Ascension Prayer Vigil

See page 14 above for description. This vigil culminates in a late-night mass

of the Ascension on Wednesday and a brunch on Thursday morning.

+ Fri May 6 - Sun May 8: Introduction to the Theology and Practice of Contemplative Prayer

See page 14 above for description.

+ Fri May 20 – Sun May 22: Lord and Giver of Life: The Holy Spirit in the Life of the Church

A central mystery of the Christian faith is the seeming paradox of God's triune nature: God is one God in three divine persons. This program explores the persons of the Trinity from both an ontological (what God is) and economic (God's activity in creation) standpoint with particular emphasis on the person of the Holy Spirit. From creation to Revelation the dynamic energy of the Holy Spirit works for the salvation of mankind and the sanctification of the world, and this is reflected in his role as consecrator of the Church at Pentecost, as guide of the Church in history, and as both consecrator and guide in the Church's on-going sacramental and spiritual life. Reviewing scripture, patristic texts, and the creeds, our exploration culminates in a reflection regarding the Holy Spirit's work in contemplative prayer. This retreat is offered in commemoration of Pentecost (5/15) and Trinity Sunday (5/22).

Sat May 28 (or stay from the 27th to the 29th): Guard What Has Been Entrusted to You: Surveying the Interdependence of Scripture and Tradition in the Historic Christian Faith. 9:00am to 1pm.

... *O Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to you.* 1 Timothy 6:11-20.

According to a report of the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life there are an estimated 41,000 different Christian denominations worldwide. These can range from worldwide communions to single churches run by lone-ranger pastors. The exceedingly great number is due, largely, to the latter. All scripture reading requires interpretation, and there can potentially be as many different interpretations as there are individual readers, which is why there are so many denominations worldwide. The "deposit of faith" entrusted to subsequent generations of Christians by the Apostles and, indeed, by Jesus himself, included a tradition of interpretation. In other words, a tradition of teaching shaped how scripture was read and understood. The Book of Isaiah, for example, is treasured by both Christians and Hebrews, yet each group derives a very different meaning from the text. For the Christian Isaiah speaks of Christ. The New Testament writings themselves grew out of this tradition rather than the other way around, and they themselves interpret the Old Testament in a very particular way. In this program, then, we look at the

uniquely Christian tradition of scriptural interpretation as evidenced in the New Testament and in the writings of the early Church, the development of the New Testament canon, and from these backgrounds explore the necessity for both scripture and tradition in the Christian life and their interdependence from the beginning.

+ Fri June 10 – Sun June 12: The Human Person, Fully Alive: Explorations in Christian Anthropology

The glory of God is the human person, fully alive, and the life of man consists in beholding God. Saint Irenaeus (130-202 A.D.), *Against Heresies*, 4. 34. 5-7

Christian anthropology is that branch of theological reflection which articulates a vision for the human person as she relates to, and reflects, the personhood of God. Issues of anthropology are the chief concern of contemporary Christians, from the raging debates about human sexuality and abortion to the human's relationship with his environment. Through reading, commentary and discussion participants in this program explore both classical and contemporary Christian articulations of human personhood, relating anthropology to the other concerns of theology such as creation, sin, spiritual knowledge, and salvation.

+ Thurs June 23 – Sun June 26: Nativity of John the Baptist Prayer Vigil

Stir up the prophetic spirit of John the Baptist and enter into the wilderness of contemplative prayer. See page 14 above for description.

+ Fri July 8 - Sun July 10: Introduction to the Theology and Practice of Contemplative Prayer

See page 14 above for description.

+ Thurs July 21 – Sun July 24: Mary Magdalene Prayer Vigil

Mary Magdalene is the subject of much conjecture both within and without the Christian tradition. One thing is sure, she is the emblem of the love which wells from a forgiven life. This prayer vigil is in honor of her feast day on the 22nd. See page 14 above for description.

+ Wed Aug 3 – Sun Aug 7: And God Said: Creativity & Art as Sacrament

The nature of man demands the sacramental. If he's denied the deep and the real, he'll fall for the trivial, even for the ersatz. David Jones.

God's creative activity is envisioned in Genesis 1 and throughout scripture as a communication and sharing of his life, which is unborn and so undying,

throughout the multiplicity of created forms. The human being, made in the divine image, shares this communicative, creative impulse. But when art and human creativity are divorced from the vision of God – of his majesty, wholeness and peace – art becomes a regurgitation of brokenness and alienation rather than a revelation of healing. This program allows artists of all kinds – writers, visual artists, photographers, musicians – a period of time set apart to work creatively in the context of contemplative practice. Punctuated throughout by many periods of formal silence and presentations on the sacramental nature of art, the program will culminate in a showcase of each participant's work in a public forum on Sunday afternoon. This program will end at 4pm on Sunday.

+ Fri Aug 19 – Sun Aug 21: O That You Would Kiss Me with the Kisses of Your Mouth: Intimacy, Sex, and the Christian Spiritual Life

Awake, O north wind, and come, O south wind! Blow upon my garden, let its fragrance be wafted abroad. Let my beloved come to his garden and eat its choicest fruits.... Song of Solomon 4:16.

Union with God, which is the goal of the Christian life, is described by the saints in the most intimate of terms, and much of the language of Christian mysticism is taken from the language of romance. Scripture, too, uses sexual language to describe salvation in God: God is the husband of Israel, Christ is our bridegroom, the New Jerusalem descends from heaven like a bride adorned for her husband, that is: adorned for their wedding night in which their union will be consummated. In fact, union with God has been experienced as such a pinnacle of ecstasy that the union of a man and a woman only dimly compares. At the same time, human love reflects this spiritual union in the flesh, lending to the human marriage a profound significance for the Christian. This program highlights the language of intimacy and sex in scripture and in the works of a few select Christian spiritual writers, focusing especially on Saint Bernard of Clairvaux's series of sermons on the Song of Songs. This program is offered in honor of Saint Bernard's feast-day on July 20.

+ Wed Sept 28 – Sun Oct 2: Holy Guardian Angels Prayer Vigil

Take up the sword of God's Word and commemorate the Feast of Saint Michael and All Angels in the unseen warfare of contemplative prayer. See page 14 above for description.

+ Thurs Oct 13 – Sun Oct 16: Creation and the Christian Life: Walking the Wilderness in Prayer

This retreat commingles contemplative prayer with day hikes in the Catskill Mountains and reflections on Genesis 1-11 as it relates to the Christian

spiritual life and our relationship with the earth and its Creator. Creation and salvation are unequivocally linked in the biblical narrative. The Bible begins and ends with creation stories and is punctuated throughout with allusions to the narratives of the first few chapters of Genesis, constantly bringing our attention back to God as the font, and so the finale, of all creation. As such, the salvation so deeply hoped for in the Christian tradition is not the truncated concern of isolated individuals but a redemption and renewal of cosmic proportions. What do the creation stories of Genesis have to tell us about the human's place in the created order, and so about the nature of salvation itself? What is sin and how does it affect creation and our relationship to it? Participants must be able to hike at an intermediate level (elevation gains and difficult terrain, such as rocky trails) for up to 6 miles.

+ Fri Oct 28 - Sun Oct 30: Introduction to the Theology and Practice of Contemplative Prayer

See page 14 above for description.

+ Mon Oct 31 – Wed Nov 2: All Saints Prayer Vigil

See page 14 above for description. This short prayer vigil culminates in a late night mass for All Saints on Tuesday night, and ends with brunch on Wednesday.

+ Fri Nov 11 – Sun Nov 13: Lift up Your Hearts: Appreciating Christian Liturgy

The Eucharist, Divine Liturgy or Mass, has been the principal action of the gathered Church throughout its history. In fact, it is in the Eucharistic assembly that individual believers are constituted as the Church of God, the Body of Christ. In this one-day intensive we will look at the origins of Christian worship in pre-New Testament and New Testament times, and its development through the post-Apostolic period up to our day. We will look at the “institution narratives” in scripture which relate the actions of Jesus and his words at the Last Supper. We will then study various Christian writings throughout the Post-Apostolic and Patristic ages which deal with, or allude to, Eucharistic worship. Participants will come to understand both the development of Christian liturgy as well as its surprising uniformity throughout time. With this as our background we will spend the afternoon walking through the various actions of the mass so that we might better appreciate their profound significance and our interdependent and mutually supporting roles in worship as both clergy and lay people.

+ Wed Nov 30 – Sun Dec 4: Advent Prayer Vigil

See page 14 above for description.

+ Wed Dec 21 – Sun Dec 25: Heart of Christmas Prayer Vigil

Enter the heart of Christmas during four days of silence and worship. The Prayer Vigil comprises the core of the contemplative training at Mons Nubifer Sanctus. This retreat crests in the midnight mass of the Nativity of Our Lord in celebration of the mystery of the Incarnation and concludes with a Christmas dinner on Christmas Day. See Christmas Program below for details.

+ Sat Dec 24 & Sun Dec 25: Christmas Program

No pre-registration required unless you plan to attend supper on Christmas Eve and/or to stay overnight.

Dec 24: 4:30 pm: Solemn Vespers, 5:30 pm: Light Supper, 8:00 pm: Still Prayer Vigil (two 35 minute periods), 10:30 pm: Mass of the Nativity of Our Lord, reception following. Dec 25: 11:00 am: Christmas Day Mass, 1:30 pm: Christmas Dinner. All are welcome.

+ Thurs Dec 29 -- Sun Jan 1: New Year's Prayer Vigil

Enter 2017 with wakefulness and purpose while continuing the celebrations of the Christmas season. See page 14 above for description. This prayer vigil culminates in the New Year's Eve Midnight Mass for Healing and Peace, see below for details.

+ Sat Dec 31: New Year's Program: Midnight Mass for Healing and Peace

No pre-registration required unless staying overnight.

Though the Church begins its new year with Advent, the secular holiday of New Year's is a time when we reflect as a culture on the past and make resolutions for the future. Despite these intentions, just about everything about New Year's and our celebrations of it seem to distract us from these intentions. Mons Nubifer Sanctus and Saint James Lake Delaware invite you, then, to enter 2016 with wakefulness and purpose. Not blinding ourselves to the great sufferings of our time but engaging human pain and offering it up to God for healing, this will be the aim of our time together this evening. Let us together pledge to live 2017 in the love of Christ. 9:00pm: Still Prayer Vigil; 10:15pm: Break/prepare for mass. 11:00pm: New Year's Mass, reception and New Year's toast following. Overnight accommodations available, please inquire. Sunday January 1: 11:00 am: 1st Sunday After Christmas Mass; 12:30 pm: New Year's Brunch.

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THE intent of contemplative Christian practice is to move beyond discursive and imaginative forms of meditation and prayer into a simple, restful, intuitive, and intimate communion with God. Before this can be achieved the Christian disciple must first deal with all of the sinful habits of mind and heart which divide the soul, and distract it from integration and intimacy with God. The contemplative disciplines are designed to foster this process of deep inner healing and to help to cultivate the unity of intent – which the early church writers identified as “purity of heart” – by and in which we experience union with Christ, and so with the Father in the Spirit.