

From the Heights: Monastic Musings from the Mountains

Newsletter of the Holy Monastery of Our Lady and Saint Laurence

Ash Wednesday & Lent, 2023

Volume X, Issue 1

Miserere mei, Deus...

*Have mercy upon me, O God,
after thy great goodness:
according to the multitude of thy mercies
do away mine offenses. (Psalm 51 (50), verse 1)*

This familiar penitential Psalm of the Prophet King David features in the ancient morning services of the Orthodox Church, in both the East and West.

In the Holy Rule of St. Benedict (c. 542 A.D.), it is specified to be sung during Lauds, the service at dawn, before the variable Psalms for the day of the week. In the Benedictine Divine Office for the Sacred Triduum (Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday), it is said quietly at the conclusion of all the Day Hours with all present kneeling in humble prayer for the mercy of God.

One of the most famous musical settings of Psalm 51 in the western world was originally



*The Holy
Prophet and
King, David,
singing Psalms,
from the
Westminster
Abbey Psalter,
c.1200 A.D.*

*Now in the
British Library.*

composed in the 1630's by Father Grigorio Allegri, for the Sistine Chapel Choir in Rome. There are several legends surrounding the history of his composition, which has been altered and rearranged by other composers through the ages, including Felix Mendelssohn and Franz Liszt. It became world-renowned when the Choir of Kings' College, Cambridge recorded it in March of 1963 for their album, *Evensong for Ash Wednesday*. It now ranks as one of the most performed and recorded pieces of sacred choral music.

Here is a performance on YouTube by the English choral group *Tenebrae*, in the original Latin; grab a Bible and follow the text in English, which is easy to do – each verse alternates the musical style:

[Miserere mei, Deus by Grigorio Allegri; Tenebrae, conducted by Nigel Short](#)

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Benedictine Wisdom – St. Gregory the Great

[The] Gospel, calling to our mind the forty days and forty nights of fasting spent by our Lord in the desert, entirely agrees with the fast we observe during this holy season. But why was this number of forty days fasting sanctified? We read in the history of the Israelites that Moses prepared himself for the reception of the Law by fasting forty days; that Elias observed the same fast; that Jesus, before beginning His public life, abstained from food for forty days and forty nights; and lastly, that we also, as far as lies in us, observe this abstinence and fasting during the time of Lent. Though several motives may be set forth to explain this law of the Church, we can say in all truth that, by observing this commandment, we offer to God the tenth part of the year granted to us for satisfying our corporeal necessities. After living solely for ourselves during the course of the year, we now in Lent live for God, offering Him by our abstinence a part of that year. Now, after deducting from the six weeks of Lent the Sundays on which we do not fast, we find that there remain thirty-six days, so to speak, the tenth part of the year that we offer to God. The Lord God, beloved brethren, commands you in the Old Law to offer to Him the tithe (tenth part) of your possessions; it is, therefore, just that you should give Him the tithe of your days.



For this reason it is everybody's duty to mortify his body, according to his strength, to crucify his desires and subdue his sinful passions, that he may be, as St. Paul says, *a living sacrifice* (Rom 12:1). For we are a living sacrifice when, as long as we live, we mortify the desires of the flesh. Just as the lust of the flesh led us to commit sin, true penance must bring us back to God. Consider, again, that since by the eating of the forbidden fruit we were shut out of heaven, so we must endeavor to re-enter these gates by that temperance and abstinence which will atone for all the offences against God committed by our intemperance.

– Homily on the First Sunday of Lent



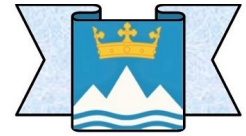
*Ash Wednesday:
Blessing the Dust**

*So let us be marked
not for sorrow.
And let us be marked
not for shame.
Let us be marked
not for false humility
or for thinking
we are less
than we are
but for claiming
what God can do
within the dust,
within the dirt,
within the stuff
of which the world
is made,
and the stars that blaze
in our bones,
and the galaxies that spiral
inside the smudge
we bear.*

– Jan Richardson



*An interesting perspective, reminiscent of St. Benedict's vision of all the world present in a speck of dust, as related by St. Gregory in Book Two of his *Dialogues*.



News and Events

- ◆ January 13 – 14: Abbot Theodore attended the Special Convention of the Antiochian Archdiocese to nominate three candidates for Metropolitan Archbishop. Father was blessed to have a few minutes to talk with Metropolitan Antionios, the Patriarchal Vicar, about the monastery.
- ◆ On Sundays, from January 28 through February 19, Abbot Theodore covered Sunday Services at St. Mark's Parish, Denver, during the protracted illness of the Very Rev. John Connely, Rector and Provost of the Benedictine Fellowship of Saint Laurence. Thanks be to God, Father John has made great progress in his recovery and is now "back in the saddle," at St. Mark's, to whose support the Monastery owes a great deal.
- ◆ February 24 – 26: The Retreat Center hosted a Women's Retreat, led by Fr. Stephen Close, an Assistant Priest at St. Luke's Antiochian Orthodox Church in Erie, CO. Ten women joined in the retreat and the monastic services.
- ◆ Beginning on March 7 and continuing on Tuesdays of March, Abbot Theodore, in connection with St. Athanasius College, will present a Lenten Conference: *Sanctify a Fast*, drawing upon the Festal Letters of St. Athanasius of Alexandria. Registration is available at [2023 Online Lenten Retreat – St. Athanasius College \(stacollege.org\)](https://2023.Online.Lenten.Retreat-St.Athanasius.College.stacollege.org). The cost is \$40.00.
- ◆ March 4: The Brotherhood will be attending a Lenten Retreat at St. Spyridon Greek Orthodox Church in Loveland, CO. The retreat, led by Fr. Andrew Stephen Damick, will explore the relationship of Demons and Angels to the Gospel, and of Pagans to Christianity. It promises to be very interesting!
- ◆ April 22 – 23: Dom Joseph-Marie has been invited to participate in a session of Misfits Theology, an ecumenical discussion group that meets in Grand Junction, CO. Father will, be presenting an Orthodox perspective on *Sin, Monasticism, and Ecology* as part of an exploration of the spiritual dimension of the natural environment.
- ◆ April 29 – May 30: Back in 2019, Father Abbot received a blessing from His Grace Bishop John to arrange a sabbatical leave. Then, came COVID and travel restrictions, which made it obvious that the sabbatical would have to be postponed. It is now scheduled for after Holy Pascha this year, when Father will be visiting a series of monasteries in Europe and this country, beginning with the Benediktinerkloster Eisbergen, Germany, which is the only other canonical Orthodox Benedictine Western-rite Monastery in the world! Like Ladyminster, they are a small brotherhood, so it will be of great interest to learn how they approach life under the Holy Rule.

Our Lady of Glastonbury and Saint Laurence, pray for us!

The Oblate Corner: A Reflection from the Abbot

Time. What is time? Is it real? Is it an illusion? It turns out that the quest to understand time is an ancient one that has sparked considerable scientific research in our day. Just ask YouTube and you will be introduced to a whole slew of videos seeking to explain the non-reality of time. Truth be told, the science is way above my head, and I haven't watched any of those videos since: a) I am not likely to "get it;" and, b) Of what practical use would the information be to me?



But, whether or not it is "real," there is no doubt that time plays an important part in our lives. We often have either, "to much time" on our hands, or, "not enough time," for all that we "have to" do.

In the Western Orthodox liturgical tradition, during the blessing of the Paschal Candle on Holy Saturday, we hear: "All time belongs to him," meaning, of course, to God. In continuity with Second Temple Judaism, the Church, from its earliest days in Jerusalem, has enacted this belief through fixed hours of prayer throughout the day.

St. Benedict cites two Psalm verses as a basis for his arrangement of those fixed times in a monastic context: "Seven times a day have I given praise to thee" (Ps. 119:164); and, "At midnight I arose to confess unto thee" (Ps. 119:62). The observance of these eight times of formal worship and prayer is our way, as disciples of Christ and monks of St. Benedict, of acknowledging God's claim upon our time, which in reality is actually his time – not because he is within time, for he is not – but because he has given it to us as a gift and a challenge to place him at the center of who we are, and what we do. Thus, in our "Offices/Hours), we always begin with a plea for God's grace to accept this gift and rise to this challenge: "O God, make speed to save me/O Lord, make haste to help me" (Ps. 70:1).

We do not expect all our oblates to pray all eight of the canonical hours. While commendable, it is too much for some to manage in either the Western or Eastern forms. But, in keeping with the spirit of the Holy Rule, we do expect that the prayer rule you submit for approval before making your oblation will center of the praying of the Psalter using an approved cycle and that it will, in one way or another, be arranged so as to "sanctify the day," and reclaim a portion of each day given you by God. We cannot expect to "find time," for this; we must, with determination and commitment, "make time." For real.

How you can help!

- Give [Lancelot Andrewes Press](#) icons or books as gifts.
- Donate towards the support of the Monastery and Retreat Center. Donations may be made by check or through the Paypal button on our website. Consider purchasing a plot in the St. Laurence Cemetery or a vault in St. Sophia Mausoleum.

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