



The Companion December 2025



The Newsletter of The Companions of St. Luke — An Offering

As we enter the close of 2025 and prepare our hearts for Advent and Christmas, this edition of *The Companion* gathers voices from across our Benedictine community in a spirit of reflection, renewal, and gratitude. Within these pages you will find messages of farewell and greetings, stories of convocation fellowship, and meditations on prayer, ministry, and the enduring wisdom of the *Rule of St. Benedict*. In the spirit of the season and of the monastic way, feel free to take the time needed to engage with the 15 different articles generously offered by our leaders and members:

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Pax, The Editorial Team: Br. John David, Br. Jérôme, Sr. Julian, and Abbess Martha

Messages of Farewell and Greetings

Under the Stairs (CSL Chapter Meeting Reflection, September 13th, 2025)

by +Bishop Alan Scarfe



These are difficult times in which we live, and I am struggling to discern God's role for us in all this. Liberal and conservative are not only current political divides but also carry clear theological and spiritual divides. Depending on your theological viewpoint, you respond differently to what is happening in the nation. This situation has come to the fore in the aftermath of the assassination of Charlie Kirk. And further, we may ask: what is the role of those called to the religious life? Sr Catherine is right to say that this is no easy thing to which people are applying, and to which you have already committed.

One image, however, that has come to mind stems from an experience from my early twenties, from my time in Romania. It involves an older woman praying under the stairs of her apartment, kneeling at her chair. I am reminded of her because last month my wife and I visited Romania to celebrate our 50th wedding anniversary. It is where we met as international students in the early 70s. But we had not been back for 45 years.

At that time, Nicolae Ceaușescu, a Stalinist socialist leader who combined an internal policy of strict control over his citizens with a relatively open external approach to foreign relations, governed Romania. In 1968, for example, he was noted for not sending troops to Czechoslovakia on behalf of the Soviet Union to put down the Prague Spring. He developed cultural exchanges with the USA and the UK, which helped bring Donna and me together.

I was a theological student, and the Romanian Orthodox Church was part of the cultural exchanges. I had also become quite concerned about life for Christians under a communist regime. So, it was not surprising that during my time in Romania, I encountered Christians seeking to resist the government's interference and control mechanisms. This involvement grew into a vocation to promote religious freedom and human rights. The call lasted from 1973 to 1982, when I decided to resume along a path that led to ordination.

As I explored my interest in the experiences of Christians under communism, I met a fellow theological student at Oxford University from Romania. This man was a Baptist pastor and Seminary professor. During my time in Romania, he wrote two papers exposing the government's machinery for infiltrating and controlling religious institutions and challenging the philosophical foundation of communism, which he argued was antithetical to the apparent altruistic goals of a socialist society – to each according to their needs, from each according to their ability. He promoted a relationship with Jesus as the essential methodology for achieving such a society! He called Jesus the New Socialist Man.

On October 4th, 1974, along with nine others, he woke up in the morning to find the secret police in his courtyard. And a ten-month interrogation ensued about his activities and connections. During this time, he was held under house arrest, allowed to preach on Sundays, but required to come for interrogation almost daily from Monday to Friday. I knew when he was at the Securitate headquarters for interrogation because, on approaching his apartment, I would see the little older woman kneeling against the back of her chair under the stairs in fervent prayer!

We might lose sight of where God might be in each situation, especially in global situations like Gaza, Ukraine, or Sudan, which stretch out for decades and seem so out of control, but the truth is, God does not forget. Fifteen years later, the Romanians took back their freedom. The dictator fled, only to be captured soon afterward. And Donna and I can never forget the sight on TV, on Christmas Day, of seeing Ceaușescu and his wife's executed bodies lying on the ground.

On our return from our fiftieth celebration in Romania, Donna and I were revitalized to renew our contact with our dear friend, who himself had been exiled to the USA in the 1980s, only to receive news one week later that he had died at the age of ninety!

My time in Romania had come to an end after I was arrested and expelled on a trip back in 1980. At least that was what I thought. I changed my focus, became a priest, and then, surprisingly, was elected Bishop of Iowa. Donna and I went back to Romania to celebrate where we first met, fifty-plus years ago. We discovered, however, that God had not

forgotten. We visited the Anglican Church in Bucharest, where I had once been a lay reader, where I had in fact decided to become a confirmed Anglican, and where Donna had been a greeter. And though they did not know us, they invited me to preside and preach, and they baked us an anniversary cake. We met a granddaughter of one of the outstanding Baptist leaders from our time there in the 1970s, whom I had met. And she more than encouraged us to tell our story. There are generations of Romanians who grew up shielded by their parents from the scourges of Ceaușescu's rule. And we still have a story to share, she encouraged us. I had thought this was just a significant phase of my life, and I had moved on. But God had not forgotten. I have been thinking about a captivating verse from Psalm 71: "Now that I am old and grey-headed, do not forsake me until I make known your strength to this generation".

Maybe we are being called to be the people under the stairs for our generation and those to come. That is why religious life and the preservation and practice of a spiritual rule are so important. We may forget, but God doesn't. God hears our cries from under the stairs, as we kneel at the back of our chairs. Finally, let me say that, however imperfectly, it has been an honor to accompany you as your Bishop Visitor for this little time along your way.

Greetings by +Bishop Dorsey McConnell

Dear Companions,

Since I joined you in Convocation this past summer, and every day since, you have been in my grateful prayers. I am delighted to begin my service as your Bishop Visitor, and thought you might like to know a bit about me.



I grew up in the military, beginning life at Offutt Air Force Base in Nebraska, not too far from the Priory of Christ the King in Schuyler. Among the earliest words I learned to read was the motto of the Strategic Air Command: "*Peace Is Our Profession.*" For years, I searched for peace, and finally found it in Christ, in my mid-twenties, on the Lower East Side of Manhattan, where I also began life with Betsy. We have now been married for forty-five years.

My search for peace was anything but peaceful. I felt the hand of God upon me since childhood, but it took years for me to surrender to the Lord's college. I taught in Paris, then worked at a polo club in California, and later, on ranches in Argentina. I came back to California when my money ran out and got a job acting in a dinner theater on the Central Coast. Finally, I moved to New York to be with Betsy, and gradually gave in. Like C.S. Lewis and Augustine before him, I was an unwilling convert, but that apparently did not matter to Jesus, and I am glad it still doesn't! (NB: I have a habit of comparing myself favorably to famous people. Please watch out for this!)

Since my ordination in 1983, I have served chaplaincies and parishes in five dioceses. I was elected Bishop of Pittsburgh in 2012, retiring in 2021 before volunteering to help in the diocese of Aberdeen and Orkney, where I served as Assisting Bishop from 2022 to 2023, then Acting Bishop until the summer of 2024. Finally, back at home in New Hampshire, I am now teaching in the Diocesan School for Ministry and serving as chaplain to the Bishop Search and Transition Committees here. I also serve as Bishop Visitor to the Theology Faculty of the University of the South. For fun, I play the fiddle, hike the beautiful White Mountains, fish occasionally, and try to translate the *Iliad*. My goal is five lines a day, which should only take me eight and a half years. I'm already hopelessly behind.

And, yes, I pray for you all, especially. My evenings are hectic, since our son Evan lives with us, finishing an apprenticeship as an electrician, and I am the cook in the family, which means dinner goes on the table promptly at 6:00. So, praying Vespers with you all may be a rare event. However, I hope occasionally to write to you with anything I think may be helpful, and I will daily follow the email thread across the community. I will try to reach out to you pastorally as I become aware of specific needs. Please do not be shy about contacting me directly by email at ironcitybishop@gmail.com or by my cell phone at 617-817-7774. God willing, I look forward to being with you again at both convocations in 2026.

Many blessings in Christ's peace,
+Dorsey

CSL Prayer Practice

CSL at Vespers by Abbess Martha, OSB+

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Appendix 1 of our CSL Customary, titled "A Summary of Community Expectations," states in the first section that, "Members are encouraged to participate at least once a week in online prayer services offered by the community." I know, I know, first, it says "encouraged" and not "required." We all have a myriad of reasons for not attending: timing, work or family obligations, disagreement with psalms translations, disapproval of online worship in general... the list is endless. Yet ask those who attend regularly, and I believe you will find that the main reasons are that it helps them stay connected and get to know each other.

The past few times I've attended, the dismal showing saddened me. An average of six seems to be the norm recently, when just a few weeks ago we averaged 10-12 or more. As we enter the Season of Advent, I would like to invite every member—me included—to take this expectation to heart. Make it a priority; put it on your calendar as a task if necessary. But set aside at least one hour a week to spend with your religious family. Come for fellowship, stay for silence and the Office; even remain after if some choose to continue a conversation. (Yes, unless a committee has scheduled a meeting, the room is always open and available after the Office.)

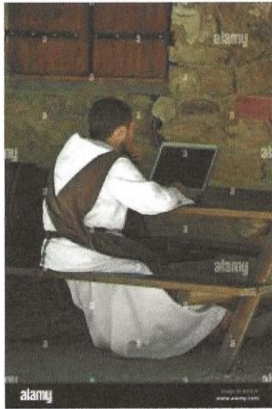
I know some of you have shared with me specific reasons and challenges that make attendance difficult, and I respect your concerns. However, I'm willing to discuss any individual concerns at any time. As we prepare to meet the Christ Child at Christmas, may we be ever mindful of the ongoing need to reach out and support one another in CSL. Our virtual *Opus Dei* services are just one opportunity. I hope to see you there!

Many Blessings,

Abbess Martha, OSB

Our Opus Dei, and its Evolution by Br. David, OSB

In 2009, our Guardian and the Council decided that the Breviary for The Companions of St. Luke would be the current Book of Common Prayer (BCP). We came to this decision because the BCP stems from the rites used by cathedral Benedictines in England. And it includes the services we use, including the Psalter.



As members began using it at home, some issues surfaced. The members needed the BCP and a Bible to do the services, especially Matins and Vespers. It took time to find and mark the readings and set up the prayer book for these services. Simplifying this setup and preparation process was the primary goal of our leadership. People should use preparation time to spiritually prepare for prayer, not necessarily setting up their books. We chose a web-based approach because it allowed us to leverage existing technology and programs.

To understand what this service needed to include, we polled the membership and found the following:

- The Divine Office provided for each day of the week should consist of:
 - The appropriate collects
 - The psalms and readings for each service
 - The service directions, as closely related to *the Rule* as possible
 - Major feasts and commemorations of the saints.
- The program should include a daily reading from *The Rule of St. Benedict*, as required for CSL members.
- Prayers for the sick and dying should be available for members, especially those who are visitors in their parish to the ill or housebound; and
- Readings about the saints of the church should be accessible. In addition, our members should be able to access our website on any device (PC, laptop, tablet, or smartphone) and they should be able to use it on any operating system without any special setup, at the time indicated by the device's clock.

We met all these early requirements when the site opened in 2012 and named it *Opus Dei* (Work of God) because, when we pray the Divine Office, read the readings, and do the special prayers, we are doing the work of God.

Over the years, we updated and expanded the *Opus Dei* by incorporating a new Vigils service into the Divine Office for people awake late at night; we added the Anglican Rosary for personal meditation, and daily readings by the Desert Fathers and Mothers, to illustrate their discipline of prayer and teaching that became the basis of Benedictine life and *the Rule*. We also added the four Eucharist services to the site, as well as special Benedictine rites for use within Matins, Vespers, and the Eucharist.

These changes in the *Opus Dei* reflect the growth and development of our community. It has gone beyond the initial purpose of providing prayers and readings for private use to a tool for community prayer as well. It has bound us together as a Benedictine community supporting our charism as a "monastery of the heart." For all of this, I am especially grateful for God's guidance and blessing.

Praying the Psalms at Offices by Br. William Marion, OSB

The Psalms are a significant part of our daily offices. The Psalter is actually a body of liturgical poetry, which can be either sung or read. There are several traditional methods for praying the Psalms. It is our tradition for CSL to use antiphonal recitation in our offices and Eucharist. Antiphonal recitation is defined in the Book of Common Prayer as a verse-by-verse alternation between groups of readers, between one side of the congregation and the other. The alternating recitation concludes with the Gloria Patri, or with a refrain called the antiphon, recited in unison.

An asterisk divides each verse into two parts for reading or chanting. In reading, a direct pause should be made at the asterisk. It should be long enough to say the words Lord, Jesus Christ silently, before proceeding to the second half of the verse. Some folks say 1,2,3 to themselves, and the reader should try to make it flow rhythmically. You may find it of interest to read the article *Concerning the Psalter* found on page 582 in the Book of

Common Prayer. With all of that said, how does this apply to our offices prayed in gathering of our community?

Regarding Vespers and Compline, the officiant will always call on two readers representing the two sides of the congregation to pray each Psalm. There are generally three Psalms at Vespers so this will require six people to be called upon. If fewer than six members are present, it is perfectly acceptable to call on the same people more than once. It does not matter if the Psalm is only four verses in length, we use two readers. In addition, we always ask the readers to PRAY the Psalms, not “do the Psalms” or “lead us in the Psalms.” We are praying the Psalms.

When the officiant asks two persons to Pray the particular Psalm, the first person reads the antiphon at the beginning and end, as well as leads by praying the first verse. The second reader alternates every other verse. The first reader then concludes with the Gloria Patri, head bowed, and the final antiphon.

For Matins, there is always an Invitatory Psalm with a recurring antiphon that is prayed before the Psalms Appointed. The Officiant will ask two readers to PRAY the Invitatory Psalm, one to pray the antiphon and one to pray each section of the Psalm, alternating to the end. For the Appointed Psalm, two readers will Pray the Psalm as in Vespers and Compline.

Following these procedures will help to make our Prayer offices more uniform and reverent. In addition, this follows the Antiphonal Recitation that we use at Convocation.

Convocations, 2025

Our dispersed Benedictine community is blessed to meet twice a year for in-person worship, prayer, and fellowship.

Our Summer Convocation. Beginning in 2025, our community began meeting at a new midwestern location. From July 21-25, we met for the first time at the Benedictine Center, Schuyler, NE. *The Benedictine Center* is a beautiful site surrounded by miles of



farmland, and a very well-maintained, well-appointed facility. Our hosts seemed genuinely glad to have us, and our worship and prayer services, dining, and meetings were all indoors and close by.

Reflection on Fall 2025 Convocation by Sr. Gianna, n/OSB. Our Fall gathering was at



Bon Secours Retreat Center near Baltimore, MD. The new location is a beautiful setting, and although it is on the outskirts of Baltimore and has the conveniences of nearby grocery stores, it offers a peaceful, secluded feeling that one wants for retreats and time away from the greater world.

The oratory (the chapel), meeting room, dining room, refreshment stations, and even the gift shop are all in the same building, with plenty of signage to keep one from getting lost for too long. Sister Fran and many of the staff of the retreat center welcomed us with open arms. I find fall convocation a more intimate gathering than summer, with more time for fellowship and introspection, which suited me very well.

I took time in the labyrinth and the peace garden. The fall colors were lovely. Sister Madeleine Sophie provided us with games and coloring projects to keep our hands busy as we got to know each other better. Two big highlights for me: more time for the community with Bishop Scarfe one last time, and the ability for the greater community to join those who were there in person, thanks to the Owl device that we tried out. Sadly, Klondike bars will not transfer through the screen.

I'm very pleased and grateful to Sister Madeleine Sophie for finding this place. Reviews from the attendees were very positive. We had a few people that I finally got to meet in person, Andromeda and Jason, which was excellent. While the drive from middle Georgia was long, Brother Ronan is a top-notch driver, and it went smoothly. Bonus: enjoyment of fall colors for hundreds of miles! I know we won't be back at Bon Secours for two years, but I encourage everyone who can to attend our Convocation there in October 2027, even if only for part of the week. I think you will come away refreshed and feeling connected. Pax

Companion Ministries

Reconnecting and Renewing: Highlights from My Diocesan Convention

by Br. Andrew, Obl/OSB

October 18th was the annual meeting and convention for the Episcopal Diocese of Western Oregon! As one who has moved about the state, I have made many close friends with Episcopalians from across our diocese, and it is a joy to reconnect with some of them at convention including my dear friends at Saint Luke's - Grants Pass and Saint George's - Roseburg.

One of the highlights of the convention for me was meeting Sr. Jana Lynn, who had recently become rector at Saint David of Wales in Portland! Both of us got to meet up with other members of monastic communities for a group photo with our Bishop Diana Akiyama.

As many of you are aware, Portland and the state of Oregon have caught the nation's attention. I won't get into the details here or share my opinions in this article. Nevertheless, I will say that the events of the past month have been on many minds as we gathered.

Regardless of your political persuasion, I hope we can all agree that these are tense times we are living in, and I ask for your continued prayers for peace and healing of divisions in our communities.

All in all, it was a productive and fun time together. As I write this piece, I am about to head to the airport to join in the fall convocation in Maryland. I look forward to this time with you all, either in person or in spirit. Pax

From Death to Life: Benedictine Journeys of Hope by Sr. Jana Lynn, OSB

Recently, I watched a movie called *The Last Word*, about a woman who commissions her own obituary and then works to change her life because, after hearing what others wrote about her, she is not satisfied. Suddenly, she seems to care very much about how she is remembered. When I worked as a hospice chaplain, I noticed that people who had previously had a "close call" with death or a serious diagnosis often had adjusted course to

build a life they could feel good about. I imagine some of my patients had experienced a scaled-back "real life" version of the movie.

It does seem true that reckoning with mortality can lead people to make different choices. They may treat people better, spend time differently, or seek, in some way, to leave a tangible legacy: after all, as the reasoning sometimes goes, "you only live once!"

I have been reflecting on Luke 20:27-38 and 21:5-19, which are Gospel readings that invite God's people to be children of the resurrection on the one hand, and promise that "by your endurance you will gain your souls," and that even though some may die, "not a hair of your head will perish." These are rich and complex readings which came soon after All Souls and All Saints in this year's lectionary. I have been thinking about what it means to be children of the resurrection, who, as Luke advises, testify even under challenging circumstances, in the confidence that though they may face death, they are yet unharmed. This reaction is not intuitive to me. I found myself thinking about line 4:47 in the *Rule of Saint Benedict*, which instructs, "Keep death daily before your eyes." What does it mean to contemplate our deaths as children of the resurrection?

Going back to the Rule, I reread the nearby verses. Entitled "Tools for Good Works," this section of the Rule is very much about making good choices. In one edition, Judith Sutura points out that this section focuses on inner motivations: not just what to do, but why. Line 4:46 reads, "Long for eternal life with spiritual desire." Which, to me, has the capacity to change how I hear what comes next. It is not so much a question of "getting it right because we might run out of time" as of building a relationship with God, who sees us wherever we are," that will endure beyond this life and create a good foundation. Maybe that's a subtle difference. But to me, it has felt like a shift of understanding that is helping orient me ever more closely to Christ.

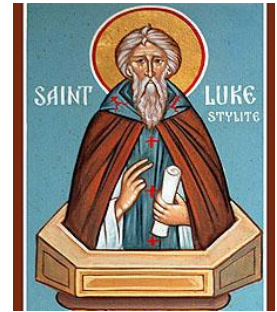
I am curious whether parts of the Rule have shifted in meaning for you recently as well. I marvel that ancient texts still hold so much to reflect on all these years later.

Holy Companionship: Finding Ministry in the Back Pew by Jason Lentz, nObi/OSB

At Convocation, Bishop Scarfe's homily on the Feast of St. Luke struck me. He spoke of this community's charism not only in terms of healing, as our patron is St. Luke the physician, but also of Holy Companionship—St.

Luke was also someone who accompanied St. Paul through trials and tribulations. I've spent much of my life seeking a vocation or my "calling", usually in a superficial sense. To say I am a late bloomer would be a gross understatement. In truth, I've never felt a powerful resonance with a particular calling the way I do with people I have

admired. I was expecting my calling to look more like an artisan, musician, or physical therapist; something with defined edges, about which I can learn and talk to others, in which I can have an endless interest, and which I can eventually master. Something that could be *my accomplishment*. But God, through my life, is telling me a very different story, one to which I am only beginning to listen.



When I first entered the Episcopal Church, I was rather cagey. Not many knew me; I didn't hang out for coffee hour or do any of the church outings or social events. But before long, I realized that the door to our nave had no lock on it. I could go in any time I wanted, and I very often did. I would sit in the dark and pray. It quickly became a habit, late at night, in the dark, to walk down the street to the church and just sit there in silence.

One night, as I was leaving the church, I noticed that a deluge of water was coming from the spicket by the front door. I called the chair of the Altar Guild. A few minutes later, she and the rector arrived with the keys. We looked through the building and ended up in the library, where the ceiling was ready to collapse because a water main had burst. We moved furniture and books, then brought in every type of container from the kitchen. By the following Sunday, the library had been repaired and painted, ready for use. The rector told me, "You saved our library!"

God saved the library. Maybe this little piece of God's work was meant to pull me deeper into the church community. There are no advanced degrees in Being. God is the one who

is there, and if I can get out of the way and trust God to be God, perhaps I can be a convenient conductor to close the circuit so the grace can flow where needed.

I serve on the Altar guild, adult formation, music, lay eucharistic ministry, and the like. But I have always felt that my most important ministry was to sit in the middle of the pew in the back of the church, leaving room for newcomers, late-comers, and those who aren't sure they want to be there. Being there, present for the Other, is itself a powerful form of healing ministry. It may well be the most important message I can impart to anyone about the gospel is, "You are not alone."

Our Radical Life by Sr. Clare, OSB

"What are we to do? This man is performing many signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and destroy our holy places and our nation." John 11:47,48.

To believe in Jesus and to truly follow him is to live radically. You live your life transcendent of the cultural norms and political structure. The council intuitively understood this. People who believed would begin to live a life different from the status quo. Their fear of people believing in is understandable. The status quo was safe.

As a follower of Jesus, am I living the radical life? Am I living the transcendent life? Does my life and presence cause others to look at themselves and their life choices and feel uncomfortable? This I believe is the call of Benedictine spirituality in the world—to witness, not necessarily by words or deeds, but by presence. So, my brothers and sisters, did your presence make anyone uncomfortable this week?

Letting Go to Grow: The Life Cycle of Ministry by John Mangels, nObl/OSB

In my first parish as a Priest, after I'd been there for a while, we had a mini crisis. The clothes closet outreach was down to three volunteers. One was the woman whose family donated the shed and materials. She ran the show—volunteers did what she said, period.

One was a lady who was almost too frail to help anymore. And the last was a woman in her thirties. None of the other ladies in the church, when approached, was willing to volunteer.

My Senior Warden came to see me about this time. She said that none of the younger women were willing to help in the current arrangement. It was dark, dreary, claustrophobic, and unorganized. Only one woman had any say in the operation.

But they had a plan. The clothes closet outreach was going to die. Then, after a suitable wait, the younger women were going to clean up the place (so that they could stand to work there) and reopen with a new board. The woman whose family had donated the building would be a board member, but explicitly, not the chair. The younger woman who had been one of her volunteers would also be on the board. And one of the new, younger volunteers would complete the board.

They asked me to bless the plan, which I did; I had no further role. And that's what happened.

After the clothes closet outreach closed, and after an appropriate wait, the new volunteers completely cleared out the building. They cleaned it. They painted it, inside and out. They put in new lighting and shelving, with space to get between rows of shelves, and bins to hold things as needed. They got rid of junk. They stored excess goods elsewhere. And they reopened, better than ever, with new volunteers and new energy to serve the community.

It needed time to die before it could be resurrected. It needed pastoral sensitivity so that the moving force behind the original outreach felt valued and included, yet unable to control the ministry on her own. It required a lot of work and coordination. I did nothing but bless the plan. But it remains the first real example in my ministry of allowing something that had reached its logical conclusion to die, and something new and better arising out of the ashes—a resurrection.

Blessed to Serve as a Benedictine by Sr. Marie Patricia, OSB

One of the most important results of my having become a Benedictine with The Companions of St. Luke is the way I have been able to serve at my parish of St. James'

Episcopal Church in Skaneateles, New York. I am lucky that my first Rector allowed me to help out at the services, be a member of the Altar Guild, and lead Evening prayer as well as continuing as a lector and Eucharistic minister. Being a Eucharistic minister allowed me to bring the Eucharist for members who were unable to attend church. It was a privilege to be with them and to spend time discussing their lives and how I could help them connect with what was happening at our parish. We would often discuss the sermon of the day or just whatever was on their minds as they remained home bound.

During the first years of my ministry at Church, my priest said that when I was not in my choir robes, I should be serving in my habit, so I was a very real presence for religious life and our Benedictine community. Because of our prayer-oriented life, it became natural for me to become a prayer leader, and I often helped when our Deacon was not able to assist our priest. So very often I would be at all three services.

Once our priest retired, and we had a transition priest, I was truly blessed that he wanted me to carry on just as I had for the previous four years. In fact, he gave me even more responsibility, and I led one service every week on Wednesday evenings.

Now, we have a new priest, and she has made it quite clear that she wants me very involved in the parish. I have been able to substitute at the Wednesday prayer service when she is not able to do it, and help at the other services as needed. The one additional part this year which will continue is she has added me to the preaching roster. This addition is a true blessing, giving me a chance to explore scripture in a completely different way. I have learned so much from preparing to preach.

One thing I know for sure is I am very blessed to have a parish where the priests and the laity accept me and allow me to be Sister Marie Patricia whether I am clothed in my habit or just there for a meeting or social occasion. My church truly gets how important religious life is to me, and their support and acceptance sustains me as I follow the Benedictine way of life.

Advent Blessings

On Advent by Sr. Genevieve Lynn, OSB

Advent is a special time of year for me. It's a precious time. You see, I was raised in a Pentecostal church, so I didn't find out about the season of Advent until I was in my late twenties. And even though my family was very religious, we went from Thanksgiving straight to Christmas without watching and waiting for the coming Christ. My sister and I mostly thought about what gifts would be under the tree. Now, as a monastic, I keenly feel the anticipation grow as Christmas gets closer, and then I feel such great joy in celebrating the birth of Christ with Christians around the world.

This year, Advent is a little different for me, because CSL isn't reading a book for the Advent Study, something I had gotten used to. I have gotten a lot out of the books we have read, but I'm excited by the change we've made. I like that we are focusing on Scripture and the *Rule of St. Benedict* to prepare our minds, hearts, and souls for the coming Christ Child.

I look forward to each of our Discussion Sessions, where we will examine ourselves as a community, and I can't help but wonder how God will use this study to shape CSL's calling to serve a hurt and wounded world.



O Come, O Come Emmanuel!
Blessings!

Gratitude and the Art of Seeing: A Benedictine Reflection by Br. Jérôme, OSB

"On ne voit bien qu'avec le cœur." Le Petit Prince, Antoine de Saint Exupéry.

"It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye." So teaches the fox in *The Little Prince*, Antoine de Saint Exupéry's luminous parable of love, loss, and perception. The Little Prince learns that true seeing requires more than vision—it demands attention, affection, and silence. In this way, gratitude is not merely a response to goodness; it is a way of rightly apprehending the world.

This theme of "looking the right way" echoes through Scripture. In the Gospel of Luke, for example, Jesus heals ten lepers, but only one returns to give thanks. Jesus asks, "Where are the other nine?" (Luke 17:17). Gratitude, here, is not a social nicety; it is a spiritual recognition. The healed man sees not just the gift, but the Giver. His return is an act of contemplative seeing, a movement from the surface to the source.

Saint Benedict understood this deeply. Though *The Rule* rarely uses the word "gratitude" (I checked), its spirit is woven throughout. Benedict repeatedly condemns murmuring or grumbling (RB 34 and 40), which he sees as a refusal to receive the gifts of daily life with reverence. In contrast, he urges the cellarer to treat even the most ordinary things, like "the pots of the monastery and all its goods," as if they were "the holy bowls of the altar" (RB 31.10, T. Kardong's translation). For Benedict, to see rightly is to approach the ordinary with awe. Meals, tools, guests, and time itself become occasions for Thanksgiving when received with humility and silence.

In Chapter 34, Benedict teaches that monks should receive according to their needs, not necessarily in equal measure, and that envy or complaint has no place in the community. The quiet acceptance of one's portion, marked by contentment and sufficiency, reveals a deep, implicit gratitude. Abbot Benedict was forming not just habits, but perception. He taught his monks to see in a new way; to recognize Christ in the guest (RB 53), in the sick (RB 36), and in the abbot (RB 2). This way of seeing cultivates the soil in which gratitude grows. It is the fruit of humility (RB 7) and the beginning of joy.

Silence, in the Benedictine tradition, is not emptiness but attentiveness. It is the space in which gratitude can arise—not as a reaction, but as recognition. In contemplative prayer, I have found this to be true. Gratitude does not come when I grasp for it, but when I let go and stop grasping altogether. In silence, I begin to see, not with the eyes of judgment or ambition, but with the heart. And what I see is grace: undeserved, unearned, but quietly present. Therefore, for us, Benedictine *Companions of Saint Luke*, it is not surprising that silence should be both a challenge and a gift. We do not share a cloister, but we share a rhythm. In our monastic solitude, we seek communion, not through noise, but through

attention. Gratitude becomes our common language, spoken not in words but in the way we look at the day, at the stranger, at the mystery of being.

If we are seeking a character in *The Little Prince* who mirrors the grateful leper of Luke 17, the one who returns, then I would suggest the Little Prince himself, because after journeying through different planets, he returns, not to a place, but to a *relationship* with the beloved rose he left behind. A shift in vision marks his transformation. He learns that "what is essential is invisible to the eye," and begins to see with the heart. This passage echoes the leper's recognition—not just of healing, but of the Healer. Neither despair nor a proneness to suicide fuel the Little Prince's final act—allowing the snake to bite him so he may return to his star—but it looks more like a gesture of self-giving that echoes the Eucharist in its surrender. It is his way of saying: *I have loved, I have seen, I am grateful.*

In contrast, the adults he meets—the king, the businessman, the drunkard—are like the nine in Luke's story who do not return. They fall into distraction, calculation, and self-concern. They do not see, and so they do not give thanks.

Saint Exupéry's *Little Prince*, the grateful leper, and Saint Benedict's silent monks all point toward the same truth: to see rightly is to give thanks. And to give thanks is to enter the contemplative heart of God.

A Thanksgiving Prayer*

O Lord our God and heavenly Father, in your indescribable mercy you have provided food and drink for the nourishment of our weak bodies.

Grant us peace to use these gifts from your hands with thankful, reverent hearts. Let your blessing rest on these your gifts, to our comfort and sustenance.

Grant, good Lord, that as we hunger and thirst for this food for our bodies, so may our souls earnestly long after the Bread of eternal Life, Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. *Amen.*

*Source: Modified from George Webb, "Short direction for the daily exercise of the Christian." London 1625.

