



Monastery of the Ascension

THE DESERT CHRONICLE

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Caring for Fellow Pilgrims

THE ARTICLES IN THIS ISSUE ARE ABOUT CARING AND ABOUT PILGRIMS. THE TWO TOPICS ARE intimately connected. Pilgrims, especially medieval ones who walked hundreds or thousands of miles with just a staff and a pouch, were much in need of care. Along the pilgrimage routes to Compostela, there grew up a dense string of hostals to meet their needs. Many of them were provided by monasteries, but towns and hermits and other individuals also cared for them.

To be a human being is to be a pilgrim: we all pass through a brief span of time, and even the most stable of us are temporary occupants of the places we are. Christ entered our world to be a pilgrim with us: he too passed through a single life-time and a limited space, though by his Resurrection and Ascension he now is present to all times and places. One of the renowned carvings in the cloister of the Benedictine monastery of Santo Domingo de Silos shows Jesus as a pilgrim to Santiago de Compostela (wearing the scallop shell emblematic of that pilgrimage). One might think as well of Christ the Good Samaritan, who put wounded Adam on his donkey and took him to the inn of the Church.

And so we are all pilgrims in need of care, and we are called to provide care for our fellow pilgrims. The saints are people noteworthy for the way they cared (and from beyond time still care) for their fellow pilgrims. Caring is another name for agape/caritas, the love which seeks to promote the good of others. •



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Jesus as Pilgrim to Santaigo de Compostela and the Disciples on the Road to Emmaus (Santo Domingo de Silos)



From the Prior's Pulpit

"SOMETHING TO WORRY ABOUT"

by Fr. Kenneth Hein, O.S.B.

Question: What do "care", "cure", and "charity" have in common?

Answer: Besides sharing in some common characteristics about the nurturing behavior we should display toward one another, these terms share a common origin in the Indo-European root, "gar", meaning "to cry out", giving us the English word, "garrulous", and ultimately returning to the original root form in my favorite and frequent cry of exasperation when things go wrong—"Garr!". But "crying out" also implies anguish. Thus Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language gives "something to worry about" as the fifth definition of "care". Perhaps this should really be the first definition of "care", at least as it applies in religious communities nowadays.

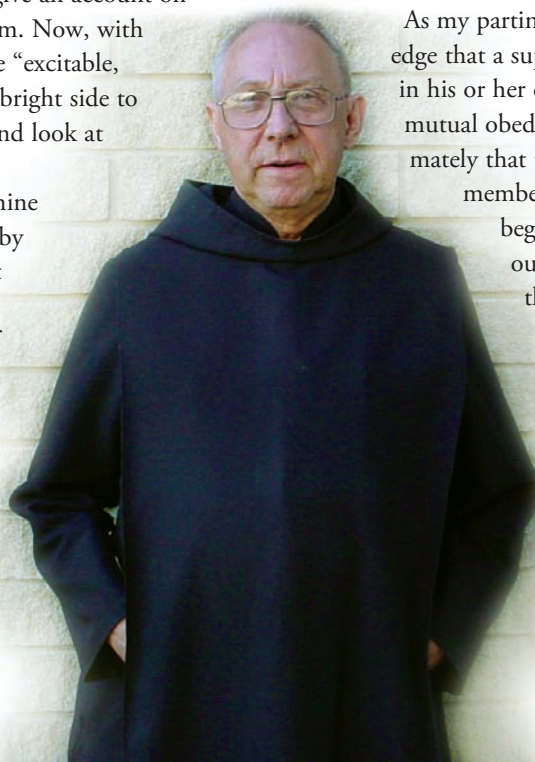
St. Benedict tells us in his rule that the man chosen as abbot should not be "excitable, anxious, extreme, obstinate, jealous, or oversuspicious"; for "such a man is never at rest" (RB 64:16). Sigh! Sometimes I think that it would take an Alfred E. Neuman of Mad Magazine fame ("What? Me Worry?") to be at rest in the role of abbot. After all, St. Benedict repeatedly reminds the abbot that he will have to give an account on Judgment Day for every soul entrusted to him. Now, with that thought in mind, try to relax and not be "excitable, anxious", etc. Good luck! But there is also a bright side to this picture. So let's put on our sun glasses and look at the bright side.

Now that we have moved into the sunshine (which, incidentally, has been hard to come by this spring), I want to begin by bragging just a little bit—certainly not about myself, but about my confreres here at the Monastery of the Ascension. They are great as individuals and great as a group—two "greats" that are not always found together in communities of any sort! But when they are found together, then, well, that's really great! This means that we do care about each other. There are ups and downs in our relationships, to be sure. But the "ups"

have the upper hand by far, and giving a helping hand to one another is commonplace in our common life as monks living by the Rule of St. Benedict. Let's review some of the elements about "care" in the Rule that guide us in being caring people.

In our review, we would do well to note "right off the bat" that the entire rule is concerned with the care and the solicitude that the abbot and the monks are to give to one another in coming to "prefer nothing whatever to Christ, that he may bring us all together to everlasting life" (RB 72:11). Putting our care and solicitude into practice obviously means being obedient to one another—in the root sense of "obedience" as ob-audire, "to listen heedfully". This heedful listening is especially incumbent on the abbot and the community's superiors as the abbot calls the monks together to give his counsel and to receive their counsel (RB 3). But "mutual obedience" is also incumbent on the members of the community, "since we know that it is by this way of obedience that we go to God" (RB 71:2). In many ways, this mutual obedience is at the heart of the Rule, which was written for a praying, working community and not for hermits. Consequently, it is no accident that St. Benedict places the chapter on mutual obedience, chapter 71, immediately before what he has to say about "the good zeal of monks", which he defines as the fervent love that the community's members should foster as "they each try to be the first to show respect to each other" (RB 72:3-4; Romans 12:10).

As my parting pulpit remark, I would like to acknowledge that a superior should strive to bring out the best in his or her community members. However, the mutual obedience that the Rule prescribes means ultimately that the task of bringing out the best in the members of the community is everyone's job, beginning with oneself. Otherwise, "bringing out the best" comes to mean, "Bring out the best in Brother So-And-So; but leave me alone." As we reflect on that point, we will better understand care not so much as "something to worry about", but of sincerely seeking "first the kingdom of God and his justice, and all these things will be given to you as well" (Matt 6:33; RB 2:25). Amen? Amen!•



Caring

Fr. Hugh Feiss, OSB

IN THE EARLY 1970S, I WAS TEACHING PHILOSOPHY AT MT. ANGEL SEMINARY, MILTON MAYEROFF, WHOM I HAD NEVER HEARD OF, sent me a copy of his book, *On Caring*. I read it and was impressed by his thesis that caring for what is other than ourselves, helping them to grow and actualize themselves, gives meaning to our lives, orders our values and activities, and locates us “in place.” According to Mayeroff, caring is not domination, but devotion to the flourishing of the other, and ultimately helping the other person care for himself and for others. Such caring fit well with the personalist phenomenology that I was studying and teaching then. It seemed to be a secular way of describing Christian love, agape, which one philosopher described as unselfish, caring concern for the good of the other. Then, I was assigned to other tasks, left philosophy behind, and forgot about Mayeroff’s book. Recently, I read an essay by a nursing student on “care” and I thought the idea was worth exploring, so I have asked her and a number of people connected with the monastery and involved in “caring” professions—health care, pastoral care, child care, foster care, home care—to write their reflections on caring.

As part of this project, I ordered a used copy of Mayeroff’s little book (\$0.01 + postage) and reread it. In the first part of his book, Mayerhoff identifies eight major ingredients of caring: (1) Knowledge of who the other is; his powers, limitations, and needs; what will help him grow; how I can and should respond to his needs. Such knowledge is explicit and implicit, knowing that and knowing how, direct as well as about. (2) Alternating rhythms of involvement and reflection, of narrower and wider frameworks. (3) Patience to allow the other (person, idea, sculpture) and myself to grow in our own time and space. (4) Honesty to see the other and myself as we truly are and to be present to the other in a way that rings true. (5) Trust, which appreciates the other’s (and my own) capacity to choose and



Santo Domingo de la Calzada

grow, even through mistakes. (6) Humility, in willingness to learn; realization that my caring is not the only caring; absence of self-display and pretentiousness; honest appreciation of my limitations and my capacities and achievements. (7) Hope in the possibilities now present for the other to grow and my caring to contribute to that growth. (8) Courage to stand by the other in difficult circumstances and to go into the unknown.

Mayeroff expands on these points in the rest of his book. Caring focuses attention on something other than the self and by that fact the self is expanded and grows. Caring requires constancy in both the one giving care and the one receiving it, and at times caring continues indefinitely. To care for another person I must be with her, that is, see and feel the world as she does and regard her as an equal. *Mutatis mutandis*, I can and should care for myself as well as the other. Caring puts me in place in the world, at a nexus of relationships and values that orient my life and give it direction. The number of people and things for which I actively care must be limited and appropriate. By focusing my attention and effort, caring serves to eliminate clutter from my life and help me become gratefully aware of the unfathomable depth of existence.

Mayeroff’s book has some of the limitations of the 1970s.



*Veruela Male Saint
Holding Christ*



*Pamplona Cathedral
Madonna and Child*

There is no explicit mention of God, and no emphasis on the need of grace if one is to achieve the sort of generous caring love that Christians call agape or charity. It does not face the tragedies that are part of life. Nevertheless, what he says fits very well with the theological ideas that charity is what enlivens and connects all the virtues, and that ultimately charity is the work and presence of the Holy Spirit. •



Pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela

Fr. Hugh Feiss, OSB

THE OBLATES OF THE MONASTERY SPONSORED A PILGRIMAGE TO SANTIAGO DE COMPOSTELA, MAY 18—JUNE 2. We stayed at three monasteries following the rule of St. Benedict, before finishing with three evenings in a hotel in downtown Madrid. Our mixture of religious journey and sightseeing mirrored rather closely a medieval pilgrimage.

The story of Santiago de Compostela is rich and complicated. It begins with the report (e.g., by St. Jerome, ca. 400 AD and Beatus of Liebana, 8th c.) that Saint James (the Great, son of Zebedee) went to preach the gospel in Spain. He returned to Palestine, where he was beheaded by Herod Agrippa about 44 AD.

His disciples then took his body to Spain by boat, where it was buried. The burial site was rediscovered about 820 (9th c. documents). A church was built on the site and became a pilgrimage destination. The pilgrimage church was destroyed by the Moorish leader al-Mansûr in 997, rebuilt, replaced in 1078, and then replaced again by the present church, which was dedicated in 1211. In the 12th century 500,000 pilgrims came to the church Santiago each year; the number now is back to about 200,000.

We spent much of our time exploring about 150 miles of the pilgrimage route between Pamplona and Burgos. Our first base was the monastery of Santa María de la Caridad, a wonderful community of Cistercian nuns at Tulebras. It was founded in 1147, the first monastery of Cistercian nuns in Spain. It has existed continuously ever since and has made many foundations, including the royal monastery of Las Huelgas in Spain, and most recently a community in Ecuador. The nuns sing the liturgy of the hours beautifully in their renovated 12th-century church. From Tulebras we went out to visit Zaragoza, surely one of the nicest cities in the world to visit. According to legend, Santiago was preaching in Zaragoza. He



*Santa María la Real (Nájera)
Reredos and Nave*

was discouraged. The Blessed Virgin Mary appeared to him on a pillar, bolstered his spirit, and asked him to build a shrine there around the pillar. Like other pilgrims, we touched the pillar in the great basilica that surrounds it. After visiting Pamplona and the very impressive restoration of the Cistercian monastery of Veruela, we traveled to our second base, the Cistercian monastery of the Annunciation in Santo Domingo de la Calzada.

The Santo Domingo for whom this town is named was a shepherd who became a hermit. In that guise, he devoted his life to helping pilgrims traveling to Compostela. He improved the roads and offered hospitality. Many miracles are attributed to him. The most emblematic is that of the hanged/unhanged. A young German pilgrim spurns the immoral advances of a young woman, who in revenge accuses him of theft. He is hanged. His bereaved parents continue on to Santiago. On their way back they visit his still hanging body; he tells them he is alive, because St. Dominic has held him up. They go to the magistrate, who remarks: “Your son is as alive as this rooster and chicken that I was feasting on before you interrupted me.” At

that moment the two birds jumped from the plate and begin to sing. In memory of that miracle, a hen and rooster are kept in the cathedral year round.

From Santo Domingo de la Calzada we also visited the monasteries of San Millán de Cogolla (from which another Santo Domingo migrated to Silos); the great cathedral of Burgos; the royal monastery of Las Huelgas on the outskirts of Burgos, and the nearby Benedictine monastery of Santo Domingo of Silos, famed for its magnificent



*Santiago de Compostela
Cathedral*





Visigothic Church of Quintanilla de Las Viñas

12th century cloister and its chant recordings. Our driver maneuvered our bus on a narrow country road to Quintanilla de las Viñas, which according to most scholars is the remains of a seventh-century Visigothic church. We spent half a day at San Millán de Cogolla, the location of the former dual Benedictine monasteries of Yuso and Suso. San Millán lived around 475-575. He was a hermit, who became a priest and then an abbot. St. Braulio wrote his life (ca. 650), as did the important thirteenth-century poet Gonzalo de Berceo, a priest who was closely connected with the Monasteries of San Millán, and used saints' lives put to Spanish poetry to meet the religious needs of the laity.

Leaving Santo Domingo de la Calzada, we drove some 400 miles to San Xoan do Poio, a former Benedictine abbey (now in the care of the Mercedarian order) about 30 miles west of Compostela. From there we traveled to our goal, the great cathedral of Santiago. We attended Mass, watched the 180-pound incense burner (“botafumeiro”) trace a more than 180-degree arc from one transept to another, went behind the high altar to venerate the image of Santiago, and visited his tomb in the crypt.

If I remember correctly, in the church of the former monastery of Santa María la Real, the reredos behind the main altar had a depiction of García of Nájera (d. 1054) at the bottom and the coat of arms of Charles V (d. 1558) at the top with pictures of various saints and events in between. Thus, it spanned 500 years of the history of Western Christendom—a European society officially united in the Catholic faith. Now the last vestiges of Christendom are fading, as society becomes much less homogenous and more secular. We were thrilled to visit the artistic expressions of the faith of those centuries, but it is clear that the society that produced them is no more. At the end of the pilgrimage we return to a secular world in which faith has little public presence. Hopefully, we return strengthened to face the challenges of being Christian in this very different world. Whatever those challenges, they are probably no greater than those that Santiago and Santo Domingo de la Calzada or Santo Domingo of Silos met and overcame in their devotion to Christ and their dedication to their neighbors' well-being. •



Santo Domingo de la Calzada with Chickens



Zaragoza Basilica of El Pilar



Caring at Home for Adults with Special Needs

Patty Button, Oblate

I RUN A CERTIFIED FAMILY HOME IN JEROME IDAHO. I SPECIALIZE IN THE CARE OF ADULT MENTALLY ILL INDIVIDUALS. NO STORY WOULD be complete without an explanation of how we made it to the good part, or for me, where I am today. So here is a little background information that will help you understand why I do what I do.

As a registered nurse, mother, and grandma, I have pretty much spent all of my adult life caring for others. When I was young and just starting out in college, I did not plan on embarking on a career in the caring field. I was pretty determined that I wanted to be a marine biologist. The problem was a lack of funds for out of state tuition. I was accepted into the registered nursing program at Boise State University straight out of high school. I saw this as a great opportunity to get a good paying job in order to finance my real priority! Things did not turn out so well for the education in marine biology, and about ten years later I realized I actually liked being a nurse. I was also getting a vague sense that nursing might mean more than just a steady paycheck. Inside me there was a hint of an idea that perhaps in the big scheme of things I might truly be doing something that mattered.

In 1989 life found me single again. I still had two children at home and financially I was unable to keep my home. I did not want to disrupt my kids' lives with a move right before they graduated high school. A good friend of mine was taking care of her Down's syndrome brother at the time. She suggested I consider taking in a couple of special needs adults for the extra income that the state paid for their care. I had the room but it would mean a BIG commitment as well as adjustment for the whole family. I really had strong doubts I wanted this kind of responsibility. I spent a lot of time playing around with the idea, but was unable to make a decision. I was counseling with Fr. Norbert at the time so I bounced the idea off of him and asked for a bit of advice. He gave me a book to read



Maria on her swearing in for US citizenship ceremony

entitled "Becoming Human" by Jean Vanier. It was this book that became a turning point in my nursing career. I changed my whole outlook on why I did nursing and how I saw the people I cared for. I was able to make a good decision for the right reasons to open a Certified Family Home and begin a new adventure in my life of "caring".

That brings me to where I am today. I live with and care for four mentally ill individuals, two of which are also developmentally delayed. I choose to do this because making a difference in even just one person's life is important to me. For most of the persons that I take care of my house is the first place where they feel safe from physical, sexual and emotional abuse. I share every aspect of life with them. I try to let them have as normal of a life as possible. I treat my clients as everyday people and as a part of my family. I try to make them feel worthwhile and valued for who they are. I encourage them to grow and become the best people that they can be. I teach them to give back to society, not just to always be on the take. These four individuals have enriched my life in as many ways as I have assisted them. I have learned through them how difficult it is to be mentally ill and how much hurt is caused by other peoples' fear and prejudices. I have learned that my clients are no different than any other person and they want to be treated that way. I have had many opportunities to grow in patience and many more opportunities to practice forgiveness and genuine caring. I am frequently asked why I continue with this type of care that demands all my time every minute of every day. Wouldn't it be better to go back to an 8 to 5 job with vacation time and sick leave? I think that kind of questions would be similar to asking a mother "Why do you continue raising your children who are so demanding?"



Outside of our yurt on the Oregon coast

See "CARING AT HOME", cont. on page 7



To sum it up, there is a song by Amy Grant, a popular Christian artist, titled “My Fathers eyes”. This song pretty much sums up the whole reason why I do anything in my life anymore, but especially why I do what I do now. If you are not familiar with the song the words are as follows:

*I may not be every mother's dream for her little girl,
And my face may not grace the mind of everyone in the world. But that's all right, as long as I can have one wish I pray: When people look inside my life, I want to hear them say,*

*She's got her Father's eyes,
Her Father's eyes;
Eyes that find the good in things,
When good is not around;
Eyes that find the source of help,
When help just can't be found;
Eyes full of compassion,
Seeing every pain;
Knowing what you're going through
And feeling it the same.
Just like my Father's eyes,
My Father's eyes,
My Father's eyes,
Just like my Father's eyes.*

*And on that day when we will pay for all the deeds we
have done,
Good and bad they'll all be had to see by everyone.
And when you're called to stand and tell just what you
saw in me,
More than anything I know, I want your words to be,*

*She had her Father's eyes,
Her Father's eyes;
Eyes that found the good in things,
When good was not around;
Eyes that found the source of help,
When help would not be found;
Eyes full of compassion,
Seeing every pain;
Knowing what you're going through,
And feeling it the same.
Just like my Father's eyes,
My Father's eyes,
My Father's eyes,
Just like my Father's eyes.
My Father's eyes,
My Father's eyes,
Just like my Father's eyes.*



Robin Boies, Contact, NV

I LIVE ON A RANCH IN NORTHEASTERN NEVADA. WE HARVEST THE SUNSHINE THAT GROWS THE GRASS THAT FEEDS OUR CATTLE. WE RAISE MOST OF THE horses that we use which is a substantial number; we have to cover a lot of country and much of our cattle work is done on horseback.

There are many challenges in our life these days, not the least of which are the weather, global markets and the politics of the public land use issues. To help us through what has become an ongoing struggle to stay on the land, we formed a collaborative management group made up of all the government stakeholders and any interested public that wanted to participate. We have been meeting three times a year for the past eleven years to work out the management of our grazing patterns and yearly grazing schedule on our ranch with our district Bureau of Land Management, Nevada Department of Wildlife, Cooperative Extension, Natural Resources Conservation Service, US Fish and Wildlife Service and other interested individuals and groups.

In many ways what we try to do isn't so much different from what you might do if you owned a house with a yard and a vacant lot next door. The only difference might be that we have a much bigger yard. We make the choice whether to care for the house and the ground surrounding it or to treat it disrespectfully. There might even be a relationship between how you treat your house and yard and the empty lot next door and how you treat yourself and other people.

We each have a choice. We made a choice eleven years ago to step to the side and form our collaborative group so that we could attempt to treat with respect not only the land but also one another. That respect is grounded in listening to the one that you think is the other. We don't always get it right, but we use the knowledge available to us and do the best we know how. We plan, observe and monitor and then adapt our management if our monitoring indicates that we should. Caring for the land is only possible if we care for one another and develop trusting relationships. Those relationships are the foundation that makes caring for the land possible, profitable and sustainable. Isn't that what we are supposed to be doing anyway, caring for each other and all the creatures and the earth that is home to all of us?•



Upcoming Events at the Monastery

July 10, 2011

Oblate picnic: 12:15

contact Fr. Hugh: hughf@idahomonks.org; 208-761-9389)

August 8-14:

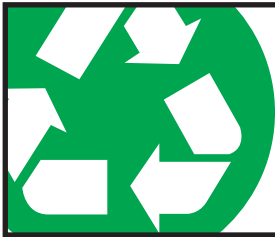
Road Scholar Program: Quilting

August 19-21:

Centering Prayer Retreat (contact Fr. Norbert: norbert@idahomonks.org; 208-324-2377 x 210)

August 29-June 4:

Road Scholar Program: Hiking the Snake River Plain



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