

Ecumenical Order of Charity

Community Newsletter

Online Edition – November 2002

A Letter from the Editor

Dear Sisters, Brothers, Associates, and Friends:

Without a doubt, October was a month of changes. Some expected, some unexpected. [On Making a Graceful Exit](#) addresses one of these unexpected changes and my personal opinion about the manner in which it was done. I do so remembering something an est trainer told me years ago that I've never forgotten: "Dogs piss all over everything, and people give their opinions about everything. It's the same thing." Humbled by this analogy, I nonetheless go forward. After airing my opinion, I thought it probably wouldn't hurt me to read a lesson in [Forgiveness](#) from *Spiritual Literacy* by Frederic and Mary Ann Brussat.

We begin another series of articles on community from Fr. Jean Vanier's book *Community and Growth*. This month's excerpt, [Community, A Place of Healing and Growth](#), is taken from his chapter entitled "One Heart, One Soul, One Spirit."

Steve Hagen, author of [Buddhism Plain and Simple](#), gives us an short explanation of the true nature of Buddhism.

The arguments we are hearing from our government today about why we should declare war on Iraq are familiar arguments. Br. Dale reminds us of this fact by his submission [Goering at the Nuremberg Trials](#).

Since we could use a little serenity in the wake of last month's events, Br. Henri provides us with the [Ten Commandments of Serenity of Pope John XXIII](#) to ponder.

[Dorothy Day on Community](#) reminds us that communities link us with others through time. We discover these connections through religious rituals, special observances, and the occasional surprise.

Dates to Remember:

November 1, 2002 -- All Saints Day and **November 2, 2002 – All Souls Day**. Each November 1, people throughout Mexico take time to honor and commemorate the family, friends, and loved ones that have passed from this life. The celebrations involve the creation of altars, made up of objects that were important to the one now gone or that serve as reminders of their lives to those left behind. Octavio Paz, Mexican poet and Nobel Prize laureate, *The Mexican* is familiar with death, jokes about, caresses it, sleeps with it, and celebrates it. It is one of his favorite play-things and his most steadfast love.”

Mitch Finley in *Whispers of Love* says, “The Christian doctrine of the communion of saints is simple really. All it says is that once you buy the farm you still live on the farm. All it says is that those who have gone before us are still with us. All it says is that past generations still count and must be taken into account. In other words, we’re all in this together. All of us.”

November 13, 2002 -- Frances Xavier Cabrini (+1917). Mother Cabrini founded the Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart, left her native Italy, and worked for immigrants in the New World, where she attained citizenship. After serving the needy and providing hope to the destitute, she was the first United States citizen to be canonized. The infamous Cabrini Green public housing project in Chicago was named in honor of Mother Cabrini.

Well, he’s no Mother Cabrini, but we do have one community birthday this month. Br. Dale came into the world on **November 13** in only God knows what year. Since there are no written records, this is what is we call **prehistory**.

November 23, 2002 – Saint Columban. Columban lived from the middle of the 6th century until 615. Born in Ireland, he was one of the greatest of the Irish monks who carried Celtic Christianity throughout Europe at a time when paganism threatened to extinguish the faith.

When he was 40, Columban and 12 companions left their monastic school in Ireland for France to preach the Gospel. Within 10 years, three monastic foundations had been established. The court and the local bishops felt threatened by their power. Columban and those who were Irish were compelled to leave, but the monasteries were permitted to carry on. Columban spent the rest of his life in Europe preaching and building new foundations, which survived for centuries. Many Irish monks followed his example.

November 28, 2002 – Thanksgiving Day. A remnant of the harvest festival. Many cultures have one, including the Egyptians, Greeks, Chinese, Hebrews and Romans. George Mackay Brown in *Magus*, writes: “Man offers the first-fruits of his labor to the creator of everything in the universe, stars and cornstalks and grains of dust. This is not to say, however, that man is simply a brutish breaker of furrows. But he labors well in a variety of trades also, with stone and with loom and with oar and with harp and with law-book and with sweet ordering of words and with prism, towards some end which is likewise a kind of harvest. Well he knows that he could not call himself man at all unless he labors all his time under the sun to encompass the end for which his faculties were given to him. This end, whatever the nature of his occupation, is his harvest time; and he would be a poor laborer that would not wish, among all that broken gold, to offer back a tithe or a hundredth into the hands that formed the original fecund dust.”

It is a month in which to be thankful for so many things, including the great gift of consciousness and of each other. I am going to take some time to sit down and write a Gratitude List. I wish each of you a very Happy Thanksgiving!

Peace,

Br. John

Nothing can bring you peace but yourself.
~ Ralph Waldo Emerson

Editorial – On Making a Graceful Exit

I am sure I am not the only one upset by last month’s e-mail from Br. Benjamin telling us that he was leaving the community. Perhaps my reaction speaks more about who I am, than who he is. I write with that caveat in mind. **The point I want to make here, of course, is not that someone chooses to leave, for that most certainly is his/her absolute right, but rather the manner in which the leaving takes place.**

Br. Benjamin was a long-standing, life-professed member of this community, our Vocations Director, and a personal friend. As far as I am concerned, the fact that he chose to leave the community has nothing to do with the continuance of his per-

sonal friendships; and I believe that the community, as well as his friends, deserved a more graceful exit than “it is just not a good fit.”

Brother and I often discussed the fact that, when someone is ready to leave – they are ready to leave -- the facts notwithstanding. It is much the same in a divorce. The person who makes up their mind to leave without discussing it with their partner is always the one who has the “power.” In fact, Br. Benjamin’s leaving filled me with the same emotions I had when my ex-wife informed me she wanted a divorce: anger, embarrassment, fear, loss, resentment, and a sense of abandonment. There is no discussion, no closure – simply a hole where something once was. It is a form of death.

I am sure we all have times when we feel the community isn’t perfect. **No relationship is perfect.** Some might also have the feeling that change is slow, too slow. Some fear we will lose ourselves, if we change. Some feel there is not enough cohesiveness or communication, with everyone is doing their own thing with no regard for the big picture. And on and on. But still, if people leave without confronting the issues that disturb them, then nothing will ever change. Certainly individuals must feel some **internal protocol** about leaving a situation, whether it be a relationship or a community. Give me a list of your gripes. Tell me what you don’t like. I may change; I may not. Whether I agree with you or not, there is at least integrity in the action.

I am truly sorry Br. Benjamin chose to leave without confronting his issues with the community. Surely it must be possible to choose another path without leaving so many hurt feelings and such sadness. **Once again, however, I want to clearly affirm Br. Benjamin’s right to leave and to wish him the best on whatever path he has chosen.** We leave our brother with this blessing:

May the road rise to meet you;
may the wind be always at your back.
May the sun shine warm upon your face
and the rain fall softly on your fields.
Until we meet again
may God hold you
in the hollow of Her hand.

~ Br. John Bowdle

There comes a time when one must take a position that is neither safe, nor politic, nor popular, but he must take it because his conscience tells him it is right .

~ Martin Luther

Forgiveness

“Life is an adventure in forgiveness,” declares writer and editor Norman Cousins. This spiritual practice is manifested in our relationship to the Source of Peace, in our perception of self, and in our dealings with others.

“If you want to see the brave, look at those who can forgive,” we read in the Hindu sacred poem *The Bhagavad Gita*, “If you want to see the heroic, look at those who can love in return for hatred.”

Jesus, a very brave man, prays while hanging on the cross of death, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

Love of enemies is a crucial part of Indian freedom fighter Mahatma Gandhi’s philosophy of nonviolence. And Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., the African-American civil rights leader, adds, “Forgiveness is not an occasional act; it is a permanent attitude.”

More recently, black South Africans, many of whom are Christians, have tried to follow in King’s footsteps. “We witness,” Anglican Bishop Desmond Tutu proclaims, “by being a community of reconciliation, a forgiving community of the forgiven.” Those who have felt the liberation of being touched by the grace of the One Who Embraces All can take that feeling to the streets.

“When you forgive somebody who has wronged you, you’re spared the dismal corrosion of bitterness and wounded pride,” Protestant minister Frederick Buechner writes, “For both parties, forgiveness means the freedom again to be at peace inside their own skins and to be glad in each other’s presence.”

What sweet release it is to let go of the burden of a nettlesome grievance or a long-lived grudge. Forgiveness is an invitation to start over again. And receiving forgiveness from someone we have wronged is equally uplifting.

Then there is the issue of self-inquisition. D. Patrick Miller, senior writer for *Yoga Journal*, offers this thought: “Never forget that to forgive yourself is to release trapped energy that could be doing good in the world,” says popular speaker Marianne Williamson. This practice covers all of our relationships and is an indispensable step in the renewal of both our public and private lives.

Writer David Augsburger concludes: “Since nothing we intend is ever faultless, and nothing we attempt ever without error, and nothing we achieve without some measure of finitude and fallibility we call humanness, we are saved by forgiveness.”

We always know that society is full of folly
and will deceive us in the matter of humanity.
It is an unreliable horse, and blind into the bargain.
Woe to the driver if he falls asleep.
~ Albert Schweitzer

Community, A Place of Healing and Growth

When people enter community, especially from a place of loneliness in a big city or from a place of aggression and rejection, they find the warmth and the love exhilarating. This permits them to start lifting their masks and barriers and to become vulnerable. They may enter into a time of communion and great joy.

But then too, as they lift their masks and become vulnerable, they discover that community can be a terrible place, because it is a place of relationship; it is the revelation of our wounded emotions and of how painful it can be to live with others, especially some people. It is so much easier to live with books and objects, television, or dogs and cats! It is so much easier to live alone and just *do* things for others, when one feels like it.

As we live with people daily with people, all the anger, hatred, jealousies and fear of others, also the need to dominate, to run away or to hide, seem to rise up from the wounds of our early childhood when we felt unloved and abandoned or over-protected. All the dirt seems to come up to the surface of our consciousness from the tomb in which it had all been hidden. We begin to experience terrible anguish because people are clutching on to us, asking too much of us, or simply because their presence reminds us of authoritarian parents who did not have time to listen to us.

Community is the place where our limitations, our fears and our egoism are revealed to us. We discover our poverty and our weaknesses, our inability to get on with some people, our mental and emotional blocks, our affective or sexual disturbances, our seemingly insatiable desires, our frustrations and jealousies, our hatred and our wish to destroy. While we are alone, we could believe we loved everyone. Now that we are with others, living with them all the time, we realize how incapable we are of loving, how much we deny to others, how closed in on ourselves we are. And if we are incapable of loving, what is left? There is nothing but despair, anguish, and the need to destroy. Love then appears to be an illusion. We are condemned to inner isolation and death.

So community life brings a painful revelation of our limitations, weaknesses and darkness; the unexpected discovery of the monsters within us is hard to accept. The immediate reaction is to try to destroy the monsters, or to hide them away again, pretending that they don't exist. Or else we try to flee from community life and relationships with others, or to assume that the monsters are theirs, not ours. It is the others who are guilty, not us.

Self-knowledge and self-improvement
are very difficult for most people.
It usually needs great courage and long struggle.
~ Abraham Maslow

Buddhism Plain and Simple

Buddhism is not a belief system. It's not about accepting certain tenets or believing a set of claims or principles. In fact, it's quite the opposite. It's about examining the world clearly and carefully, about testing everything and every idea. Buddhism is about seeing. It's about knowing rather than believing or hoping or wishing. It's also about not being afraid to examine anything and everything, including our own personal agendas.

Not least of all, of course, we must examine the Buddha's teaching itself. The Buddha, in fact, did invite people on all occasions to test him. "Don't believe me because you see me as your teacher," he said. "Don't believe me because others do. And don't believe anything because you've read it in a book, either. Don't put your faith in reports, or tradition, or hearsay, or the authority of religious leaders or texts. Don't rely on mere logic, or inference, or appearances, or speculation."

The Buddha repeatedly emphasized the impossibility of ever arriving at Truth by giving up your own authority and following the lights of others. Such a path will lead only to an opinion – whether it's your own or someone else's.

The Buddha encouraged people to “know for yourselves that certain things are unwholesome and wrong. And when you do, then give them up. And why you know for yourselves that certain things are wholesome and good, then accept them and follow them.”

The message is always to examine and see for yourself. When you see for yourself what is true – and that's really the only way that you can genuinely know anything – then embrace it. Until then, just suspend judgment and criticism.

The point of Buddhism is to just see, that's all.

Do not be idolatrous about or bound to any doctrine,
theory, or ideology, even Buddhist ones.
Buddhist systems of thought are guiding means;
they are not absolute truth.
~ Vietnamese Buddhist Precept

Goering at the Nuremberg Trials

“Naturally the common people don't want war: Neither in Russia, nor in England, nor for that matter in Germany. That is understood. But, after all, it is the leaders of the country who determine the policy and it is always a simple matter to drag the people along, whether it is a democracy, or a fascist dictatorship or a parliament or a communist dictatorship. Voice or no voice, the people can always be brought to the bidding of the leaders. That is easy.

All you have to do is tell them they are being attacked, and denounce the peace-makers for lack of patriotism and exposing the country to danger. It works the same in any country.”

If someone tells you he's going to make a
“realistic decision,” you immediately understand that
he's resolved to do something bad.

~ Mary McCarthy

Ten Commandments of Serenity of Pope John XXIII

1. If only for today, I shall live exclusively this day without seeking to resolve the problem of my entire life.
2. If only for today, I shall devote my greatest efforts towards my courteous appearance and manners; I will criticize no one and will not pretend to scold or discipline anyone other than myself.
3. I shall be happy, if only for today, in the certitude of having been created for happiness, not only in the other world, but equally in this one.
4. If only for today, I shall adapt myself to circumstances, without pretending that they shall bend to my desires.
5. If only for today, I shall consecrate ten minutes to good reading, while remembering that, as food is necessary for the life of the body, good reading is necessary for the life of the soul.
6. If only for today, I shall do a good deed and won't mention it to anyone.
7. If only for today, I shall do one thing that I didn't want to do; and if I have been offended, I will endeavor not to let anyone know of it.
8. If only for today, I shall establish a detailed program for my day. I may not complete it entirely but I shall still draw it up. And I shall protect myself from two calamities: haste and indecision.
9. If only for today, I shall believe firmly, even if circumstances prove the contrary that God, in his good providence, looks after me as if nothing else on Earth existed.
10. If only for today, I shall not fear. And especially, I shall not be afraid to appreciate what is beautiful and to believe in goodness. I am able to do good for twelve hours, which shall not discourage me, as if I thought that I had to do it for the rest of my life.

~ From the web site of the Trappist Abbey of Tamie in France

Those who really seek the path to Enlightenment
dictate terms to their mind. Then proceed
with strong determination.

~ Buddha

Dorothy Day on Community

“We are communities in time and in a place, I know, but we are communities in faith as well – and sometimes time can stop shadowing us. Our lives are touched by those who lived centuries ago, and we hope that our lives will mean something to people who won’t be alive until centuries from now. It’s a great “chain of being,” some one once told me, and I think our jobs is to do the best we can to hold up our small segment of the chain. that’s one kind of localism. I guess, and one kind of politics – doing your utmost to keep that chain connected, unbroken.”

~ Dorothy Day quoted in *Dorothy Day* by Robert Coles

One of the simplest things about all the facts of life
is that to get where you want to go, you must keep on
keeping on.

~ Norman Vincent Peale