

Learning in the Kin-dom, the Journey of Disciples

Many things continue to amaze me, even well into the sixth decade of my life. I'm startled or taken aback when people walk up to me and tell me they are Christians. My first response is the question "Already?"

– Maya Angelou¹

A LREADY?"... WHENEVER YOU FEEL A SMILE EMERGE deep from within, you know a spark of insight is awakening a profound truth! How could we ever want to think that we have made it? We are always on the way to become faithful Christians, persons fully-alive. We search! Joy is the fruit of that search.

As monks living the Gospel under the inspiration of the Rule of St. Benedict, we know that we are continually learners on this journey. Even if we are tempted to pretend otherwise, we have to happily acknowledge that we remain simply beginners. Jesus told us that what may be hidden from the clever and learned is revealed to the simple and pure of heart. (cf. Mt. 11:25)

In the experience of Easter and Pentecost unbelieving, despairing, and fearful disciples were transformed into hope-filled learners. They confronted their fears. By so doing, they enlarged their hearts and lives. Conversation, prayerful *lectio*, gracious hospitality, and risky travel are tools that have helped our community begin to unfold God's vision of an emerging kin-dom among us. The encounter with the other has been the path that has enlarged our thinking and who we are as community.

The Latin root of the word "conversation" means to turn around with/to change with. On the road to Emmaus, in the garden, around the table of broken bread, it was conversation that opened these learners to become aware of their deepest hopes and desires. Distance and division

evaporated. Simple conversation inspired their trust and pilgrimage.

Our monastic prayer and *lectio* invites us to read and listen to God's word in scripture, in one another, and in all created reality. It challenges us to look beyond the external world of factual knowledge and to give breath to an inner world of intuition, imagination, and purity of heart—the convergence of intellect, emotion, and spirit. It is the way of *vacare*², the “emptying” of ourselves to make room for the O/other. It is also the path of *educare*³, the “leading out” from a self-enclosed world to discover the core of wisdom that emerges within and around us as a gift of life.

Over the years, our community has learned and been educated (*educare*) through hospitality to the many diverse persons who have come into our life and visited our monastery. We have been enriched by the gift of reciprocal hospitality through a sensed connection to land and forest, to our resident and non-resident animals and creatures, and to the earthly materials and tools that give form to our creative crafts. We have felt the challenge to *vacare*, to empty ourselves/let go of our fears and venture into the experiences of “the other” through travel together.

Leaving aside our comfortable securities, we have ventured to learn from the poor in the mountains of Appalachia and the barrios of Latin America; from the struggles of the peoples in Israel/Palestine and those of our inner cities; from the hope birthed anew in prisoners and others living with addictions. The journey has engaged us with the natural world, from the wondrous depths and terror of the ocean to the majestic heights and beauty of mountains. Our learning draws us out and beyond to so much more!

We are born with a deep love of learning. We author words of communion with one another and speak of our connectedness with all creation. It is the “naming of creatures” of Genesis; it is the unexpected recognition, amidst utterly distinct languages, that resonates in our hearts, igniting the Pentecost flame.

These conversations of heart, among us and with others, put us in contact with “what really matters.” We seek to go beyond arrogance and stagnation, with humility and a sense of humor, to unearth a creative encounter of unity and blessing with one another. Benedict, in his Rule, invites us to continually become beginners so that even what may initially seem little and insignificant can be transformed into a magnanimity of the heart.

In the articles that follow in this bulletin, brothers reflect upon their/our experience of the generous gift we have received in the beauty and movement of life together. We continue and never stop learning to open our hearts through prayer and work, to accept and transform our fears for what lies ahead, and to delight in the spark of truth that arises from a simple yet engaging query: “Already?”! ■

¹ Maya Angelou, *Wouldn't Take Nothing for My Journey Now*, Bantam Books, NY 1994, p. 73

^{2 *3} The Latin is the root of significant English words: “vacate/vacation/rest” and “education.”