



STAVROS[©]

Contemporary Monasticism
within the
Orthodox-Catholic Church of America
as practiced by the
Monastics of the Skete at Crosswood Centre

Fall Quarter 2008

From the keyboard of hieroschemamonk Barb:

The Fall Season has arrived. That means that everything is preparing itself for a few months of rest. For me, it is probably the most colorful season as the leaves change their colors in preparation of the trees going into hibernation. I love the



rainbow of colors that can be found in the leaves. But then it is also a wake up call that winter is on the way. Time for the world to take a little rest so that it can come bounding back in the spring. Fall is like the last “party” given by mother nature for all of us to enjoy. Here in Massachusetts, there are many tours given along the Mohawk Trail (MA Route 2) for people to enjoy the wonderful colors of the trees. It means that the

roads are so full of the “sightseers” and thus many accidents on the road. It is just too hard to drive and really enjoy the beauty. But fortunately there are several places that you can just pull over and enjoy the beauty. For the communities along the Mohawk Trail, it also means an increase in their economics for a few weeks. But with the economy as it is this year, who knows how many people will take the time to get out and see the beautiful colors of fall.

This is the time of the year that I personally take the time to complete what ever projects I started during the year. Then get myself ready to do a personal evaluation during the winter months of all that has happened over the last year. What have I done and where do I want to go/be in the next year is what I look at. Fall is a time to be able to do a deep introspection of ones life both physically and spiritually. This has been a habit I have had for many years. One habit that I have not given up since I was a young postulant, as it helps me start the new year out with a new perspective.

You will noticed that I have updated this newsletter to reflect some of the changes passed by the Synod of Bishops concerning titles and the way one handles names. I will retain when writing, my eastern title as I am comfortable with it.

I once again thank all of you that have sent kind comments concerning the Summer newsletter. It is your input that keeps me putting them together. Thanks!

Well, we are coming to the close of the first year as a family. For me personally, I want to say it has been a wonderful year. Thanks to all of you who have taken the time to share in depth with me. It has really helped me get to know you on a new level – you personally and not just a name! It is through this process that I am able to think about what more I can do for each of you as individuals, monastic and as a group. May this next year be a year of growth spiritually for all of us. May we continue to grow as a family and share with one another without any fears and judgments. We all have been called to a “unique” path within the church. A path that so many times seems full of stones, maybe even boulders, uncertainty and loneliness. But it is through our joining together as family that we can hold each other up and walk the walk together. Thanks to all of you for being with me on my spiritual walk. I look forward to our walking together in 2009! Next newsletter will be at the end of January!

Monastic Life Story
by: Brother Michael C. Oboza

I am a survivor of incest, childhood sexual abuse, clergy and ritual abuse, domestic violence, child pornography and child prostitution. After I "misplaced" my calling to be a Roman Catholic Priest after my abuse, I thought, "why me?" Then I learned in 12 Step Recovery that "surrender" is a "blessed assurance." I surrendered and lived in hope that I maybe one day become a "something," I always had a longing to be more than a Child of God, ego or not; however, I longed...

For over the last fifteen years, I have been an advocate for children and fighting the good fight. I help give a voice to survivors. Ever waiting to explain, a God-given truth. "A survivor is not a criminal. A perpetrator is a criminal." One has choices. To survive. To abuse, self and/or others. Or thrive... I am one who survives by the mercy of The Holy Spirit, The Lord, The Giver of Life.

To be honest, when I was about to have my Monastic Vows and Life accepted through the Skete and under the authority of the Metro, I wanted to run away. I was in a room with five priests, and I a survivor, a survivor of even clergy abuse. The Holy Spirit, The Lord, The Giver of Life had prepared me and has continued to prepare me for this earthbound moment in God-given time. My Post Traumatic

Stress was having a spat, because I was not respecting my sorted past that many do not survive or recover from. Once again, I surrendered against my better judgment, and became a Monk. A monk is not clergy, yet, closer to clergy than a Child of God happens to be.

I am a Monk now. To later find out, a "habit does not make a Monk." In other words, I could have walked away from becoming a Monk and still have had my calling respected as a Child of God as it was for the last fifteen years or so. Regrets? No. Humble? More than I may ever need to question, more than I may ever need to comprehend.

Therefore, I do not question the "mystery," my calling, and my recovery. I embrace the blessings for I breathe and live that I am blessed more than I may ever know. Finally, I am able to lay down my burdens, "down by the riverside." I am a Monk that is home to Eastern Tradition, without question. No pun indented.

I have begun my second ministry with the grace of God. I have begun a Homeless Ministry with Homeless Shelters through out Chicago and the Northshore Area. With the dedication to his Homeless Ministry, I have heard and understands the mere importance of my God-given calling through the word with help from The Holy Spirit, The Lord and Giver of Life, while bearing fruit, one hundred fold. I have embraced my soul by allowing myself to become the seed that has fallen on good soil to bring forth grain, one hundred fold. (Editor's note: Please note that Monk Michael is no longer aligned MSSM. He has taken his monastic vows as a Riasaphor monk and is an extern of the Skete, so I have moved him under the Eastern tradition listing. May God continue to bless him and his ministry.)

Ideas on Monastic Teachings by hieroschemamonk Barb

Over the next few newsletters, I will be sharing with you some of the teachings from ***The Philokalia***. ***The Philokalia*** is basically a collection of texts that were written by Orthodox spiritual masters, most of them monastics, from the 4th to the 15th centuries. ***The Philokalia*** was compiled by two Greek monks: St. Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain of Athos and St. Makarios of Corinth. ***The Philokalia*** is the basis of the Eastern tradition of monasticism directly and Western tradition of monasticism indirectly. ***The Philokalia*** is available in 4 English volumes. It gives us a good look into the different teachings that were shared with the monastics of the past ages and which are still used heavily today within the Orthodox monasteries.

At first, I will be picking a topic to share with all of you to hopefully cause you think more deeply about your monastic life and where you want it to go spiritually with your monasticism. In the process, I would hope that it will bring forth some

“sharing/thoughts” from each of you to share with the rest of us. What I would like to strive for is that we become a “family”, growing together spiritually. In this we do not “function” as “lone rangers” within our monasticism but rather we learn how to bring our monasticism into the world that we live in. We learn how to share with one another and raise up each other as we walk the spiritual pathway we have all been called to walk. We have a unique form of monasticism - one where each of us lives outside of the monastery, functioning in the world, supporting ourselves financially and yet striving to live as monastics. We have not chosen to pull ourselves away as hermits but instead to live within this world though not be of this world. We are called to be the Gospel proclaimers to all whom we come into contact with daily. But we still need the “tools” and “fellow spiritual walkers” to help us. We cannot see our monasticism as “islands” within the sea of this world, but instead as a solid continent that is built upon each of us working together as a team.

I hope in time that our monastics who practice the Western tradition will also take time to “teach” the rest of us about their spiritual walk. It is through this sharing that we gain understanding and knowledge that we can then share with those with whom we come into contact. I am constantly striving for the balance within the Skete of both the Eastern tradition and the Western tradition. I want everyone to feel that they have a home within the Skete. No one is left out spiritually just because they might prefer one “style” of monasticism over another. I personally am familiar with both, but am much more comfortable with the Eastern tradition. That being said, you will often find that I will teach from the Eastern tradition, but I try to find topics that are useful to all of us as monks. Since the Orthodox-Catholic Church of America is “Orthodox in Theology”, I believe that we all need to be well grounded in what the Orthodox teach their monastics. Monasticism is a constant learning process. There is not a monk in this world who can say “I know everything there is to know about being a monk”. God constantly talks with each of us, that is if we are willing to take a moment and listen to Him!

More Thoughts on Prayer by hieroschemamonk Barb

In the last newsletter I shared some thoughts on Prayer. I would like to do a little more sharing in that area since I feel that this may be an area about which many have some questions.

Prayer is the basis of our lives no matter whether we are monastic or not. God wants to communicate with us and He wants us to communicate with Him. It is through this communicating that we learn how to live a life that is pleasing to God and what His will is for us.

I would like to share some teachings from Evagrius the Solitary concerning Prayer. Evagrius lived during the 4th century. His last 16 years of life were spent

living in the Egyptian monastic desert. He was also ordained a deacon by St. Gregory the Theologian (Gregory of Nazianzos) and attended the 2nd Ecumenical Council. I will not be sharing all 153 texts that he wrote on Prayer, but sharing those that might be of some help to you as you seek to develop a stronger prayer life within your daily life.

Evagrius wrote that the way of prayer is twofold: it comprises practice of the virtues and contemplation. Prayer is communion of the intellect with God. If you wish to behold and commune with God who is beyond our sensual perception, you must then free yourself from every impassioned thought. Persevere with patience in your prayers. Repulse the cares and doubts that arise within you (and yes they do arise to prevent you to effectively communicate). These cares and doubts will disturb and trouble you and thus will cause you to slacken the intensity of your prayer. *“When the demons see you truly eager to pray, they suggest an imaginary need for various things, and then stir up your remembrance of these things, inciting the intellect to go after them; and when it fails to find them, it becomes very depressed and miserable. And when the intellect is at prayer, the demons keep filling it with the thought of these things, so that it tries to discover more about them and thus loses the fruitfulness of its prayer. Whenever a temptation or a feeling of contentiousness comes over you, immediately arousing you to anger or to some senseless word, remember your prayer and how you will be judged about it, and at once the disorderly movement within you will subside.”* (*The Philokalia*, vol. I, page 58)

Some descriptions that Evagrius gives concerning prayer:

1. the flower of gentleness and of freedom from anger
2. the fruit of joy and thankfulness
3. a remedy for gloom and despondency

“Sometimes as soon as you start to pray, you pray well; at other times, in spite of great exertion, you do not reach your goal. This is to make you exert yourself still more, so that, having gained the gift of prayer, you keep it safe. When the angel comes to us, all who trouble us withdraw at once; then the intellect is completely calm and prays soundly. But at other times, when the attacks of the demons are particularly strong, the intellect does not have a moment’s respite. This is because it is weakened by the passions to which it has succumbed in the past. But if it goes on searching, it will find; and if it knocks, the door will be opened” (*The Philokalia*, vol. I, page 59-60)

Evagrius teaches that we should not pray for the fulfillment of our wishes, for they may not be the will of God. *“But pray as you have been taught, saying Thy will be done in me. Always entreat Him in this way – that His will be done. For He desires what is good and profitable for you, whereas you do not always ask for this. Do not be distressed if you do not at once receive from God what you ask. He wishes to give you something better – to make you persevere in your prayer.”*

For what is better than to enjoy the love of God and to be in communion with Him?" (The Philokalia, vol. I, page 60)

In prayer you should first pray for purification of passions; secondly, for deliverance from ignorance and forgetfulness; and thirdly, for deliverance from all temptation, trial and dereliction. In your prayers you should only seek righteousness and the kingdom of God – virtue and spiritual knowledge; and everything else will be given to you as needed.

When you pray, whether by yourself or with others, pray not simply as a routine, but with conscious awareness of your prayer. Conscious awareness is actually concentration accompanied by reverence, compunction and distress of the soul as it confesses its sins with inward sorrow. Not an easy thing to do, but with practice, you are able to achieve this. In other words, pray with complete awareness of what you are saying, thinking, and feeling at the moment. Prayer should become an emptying of your thoughts so that you can receive the gifts God has for you. Know that when you are praying as you should, the demons will be very upset with you and do all that they can to disturb you and/or distract you. So always be on guard to protect the fruits of your prayer.

One of the gifts of true prayer with God is the gift of tears. These tears are twofold – tears of anguish and tears of joy. Anguish at the errors in our lives and the tears of joy for all that God has given us.

And one of the many teachings that Evagrius has that I love so much is: *"Pray gently and calmly, sing with understanding and rhythm; then you will soar like a young eagle high in the heavens. Psalmody calms the passions and curbs the uncontrolled impulses in the body; and prayer enables the intellect to activate its own energy. Prayer is the energy which accords with the dignity of the intellect; it is the intellect's true and highest activity. Psalmody appertains to the wisdom of the world of multiplicity; prayer is the prelude to the immaterial knowledge of the One."* (The Philokalia, vol. I, page 65)

There are many more teachings concerning prayer that Evagrius wrote that I could share. Hopefully some of these may stir and develop a new thought concerning prayer. Without prayer, we are empty shells that are filled with much of the world. With prayer, we are filled shells from all that God has to offer each and every one of us. May our prayers rise like pleasing incense to God so that we may yet know God in all of his glory and love!!

Ramblings of a hieroschemamonk by: hieroschemamonk Barb

As I look back at my visit in June with Bp. Doug and his wonderful congregation, I realize that it was a very defining moment in my life. +Skip had granted me the elevation to the monastic rank of hieroschemamonk in November, 2008, but the entire reality hit when I was in Maine. It was the first time I had attended any church function in my complete schema monastic habit. It was through one of the congregational members who created this reality.

“Annie” (not her real name) came over to me and asked me to explain what I was wearing and why Lynn+ was dressed somewhat differently. Was that a challenge trying to explain the meaning of everything. Sure, I knew what everything meant, but here I had to teach something that was foreign to another person. You have to remember that Bp. Doug’s congregation is western in tradition; so, Lynn+ and I must have looked very strange to them! I finally became very aware of the monastic stole I was wearing and the weight that it carries. I took the time to explain the monastic habits to the inquirer. Then came the hardest question of all – What is your role then within the monastic movement in OCCA? How does one explain what a hieroschemamonk is to someone who is seeing orthodoxy for the first time. The only saving light at the moment was that both of us had spent of time talking with one another throughout the weekend, and we had developed a rapport. The best way I could explain my “role” to her was to liken it to being a parent or the elder of a family: the monastics are my children and I am to help them grow and mature spiritually. Yet, that does not mean that I am perfect or know everything as I too am continuing to grow spiritually.

“Annie” sat there looking at me with an odd look on her face for a moment and then smiled. Then very calmly, she took my hand and said, “You must continue to be just you. Don’t let others decide for you what you should or should not be doing. You came visiting with the willingness to pitch in and help us as though you were truly a part of this congregation. You truly give of yourself forgetting any limitations that you have.” Wow! Was I thrown for a loop for a moment! I did not know if I wanted to laugh or cry, hug this woman, or run like mad from everything. I must have sat there with a blank stare on my face since the woman just took my hand and said, “You are who you are in your goodness and in your faults. Know that you can never run from it”. To be honest I had to go for a walk after we finished our talk since I needed a moment to collect myself. I knew my “safety” for the moment was being alone outside with the dogs....

A couple of weeks after this conversation had taken place, I realized that ideas were starting to “percolate” in my mind. Basically, what was happening was that I was questioning what more could I do for my “monastic family”? How can I help them grow stronger mentally and spiritually through all that has taken place in their lives? Then it hit me: in your brokenness you have grown and so will they – that they have to feel “safe” in who they are, just as I have to feel “safe” in who I

am. It takes the help of those around us to help us “feel safe”, that is to accept us despite our faults. I know I have my faults. +Skip lovingly likes to point out to me: “you can be harsh with your words”. Well, yes to some it seems harsh, but really my words are not meant to be harsh.

What I think, what I say, and how I write and/or speak are the result of growing up within four generations of a large, extended Pennsylvania Dutch (*Pennsilfaanisch Deitsch*) family, whose native tongue was *Deitsch*. English was used in school only! Speaking English only in school created some disadvantages. Even to this day, I sometimes have problems finding the exact English word I want to use. Translations often have to be done in my head before I write or talk. At times when I am reading, I either skip over words or have to dig out the dictionary to understand what is written. No my accent is not usually heard as I worked very hard since my 20’s to rid myself of it, though I do realize that I easily slip back into the accent when talking with family.

Also, growing up in a large family (I am the oldest of over 50 grandchildren!) means you better get your words in there faster and louder if you want to be heard. Another thing that I learned from my family is that you call a spade a spade when you hear/see it. That’s not always a good thing, but still I have always been very upfront with and truthful to those I communicate with. I have never learned how to “couch my words” with sugar (not the German way to “sugar-coat” words), but rather to say exactly what I think. Yes, that gets me into a lot of trouble with some people.

So, if I make a mistake, you are free to correct me or better yet, seek clarification of what I am saying/writing. Better that we understand one another in the long run and not just say, she is harsh and I will not listen to her. I grow and change with the help of those around me. I know that I can reach out to my spouse for help with writing things – and I do it frequently to try and take the “edge” off of my writings. But then there are times that I don’t ask for help with my writings and just let the words hang out there....

I know that I am far from perfect, but as the eastern tradition teaches, I am working hard on my theosis! It’s not an easy path, but it is through the support of this family that walking the pathway is a little less terrifying for me. I believe that all of our paths have crossed and “joined” for a purpose in this life: to **live** the Gospel so as to bring it to others, helping them in their walk to theosis. May the Holy Spirit guide us in our journey.

Monastics and their selected tradition attached to the Skete:

Metropolitan Skip Carsten

<u>Western</u>	<u>Eastern</u>
Fr. Bill Payne, OSB	Mother Barb Martzall
Fr. David Moore, OEF	Fr. Basil Donadio
Fr. Donn Mielke	Fr. Bob Zahrt
Fr. Francis Fontenot, OFMO	Fr. Craig Dunn
Br. Matt Davis, MSSM	Mother Lynn Walker
Br. Michael William Barkhorn, OSF	Mother MariaAlene VanValkenburg
Br. Michael Kierpiec	Br Michael C. Oboza
Br. Richard Lounsbury	Mother Myrella LeClair
Fr. Richard Parker, OFM	

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