



FROM THE HEART OF

The Pelican

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PRAISE THE LORD FROM THE EARTH (PS 148:7).

DEAR FAMILY AND FRIENDS,

HAVE YOU EVER FELT the need to receive a word from the Lord in prayer? Wouldn't you love to know which thoughts in your head are whispers from heaven? We know that God is always inspiring us, as we know that our thoughts are pretty ordinary and often neutral from a moral standpoint, and that the demons are forever tempting us. But to immediately know which category our thoughts fall into takes some practice and attentiveness. What helped to sharpen the inner ear of my heart to hear the Lord was a teaching I received from a retreat director a few years ago, which might be called "spiritual texting." Let me briefly explain the process for anyone eager to hear the Lord speak to his or her heart.



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First of all, many of you are perhaps familiar with the monastic prayer called *lectio divina*. In this prayer, we read what the Lord is saying to us in the scriptures, we meditate on these words, we enter into dialogue with the Lord and ask him what he means by this or that and wait for his inspirations to help us go deeper into the text and apply it to our own life. Finally, we contemplate what we learned anew in our prayer time, perhaps just resting in the Lord's love and presence.

Now, to take this one step further, let me remind you of the connection between the hand and the brain. Have you ever noticed that when your thoughts are cloudy, your pen knows what you want to say? That's not accidental. Writing sharpens the mind, it clarifies the diverse thoughts in your head and puts order in them. In an amazing way, the same clarity can come into play in prayer. Here are a few steps to try:

To start, choose a passage of scripture which speaks to your heart, for example, Jer. 1:4-5 or 29:11-14, or Is 43:1-4. Be conscious of the fact that the Lord is speaking to you in this passage, and not simply to the prophet in the past. Read it through a number of times. Then take your pen and in one sentence, ask the Lord a question about the text, perhaps how His words apply to you personally. Then, to begin the Lord's reply to your question, write how you think the Lord would address you, or how you would like Him to address you; perhaps: "My dear child" or "My beloved" or "My little one." Next, put down your pen and with your eyes closed, in stillness, putting every thought out of your head, wait in silence for the Lord to respond to your question.

News & Updates



After about 20–30 seconds, some thoughts will come into your head...write them down. Don't worry about whether they are coming from the Lord or from you. Over time, you will be able to distinguish your thoughts from His. You will notice, for example, that his words usually come with deep peace, a loving embrace and are always encouraging, even when the Lord is challenging you. Any words that are discouraging, negative, and lead to unhealthy doubt are not from Him. Personally, I have found this type of prayer most beneficial when I notice myself annoyed or frustrated over some issue in my life. I will take up my pen and “text” the Lord, asking for his advice and help. In response, the Lord most often speaks to me about virtue, revealing to me the cause of my inner restlessness, and gently inviting me to surrender more deeply to His will, learning to embrace humility as I let go of my own will. The whole experience is one powerful moment of His love and care. Sometimes I have to laugh: I just got chided and never for a moment felt embarrassed or humiliated! What love the Lord uses in His training sessions!

Also, don't be discouraged if nothing seems to happen at first. Sometimes there are blocks that need to be removed before one can hear His words, blocks such as anger or unforgiveness or poor self-esteem. Just take your feelings about any of these to Him and continue to write. Over time you will experience the sense of the Lord's presence heightened in your prayer, and your whole being more attentive to hearing him. These thought-words are not the dramatic kind known as locutions—unforgettable communications from the Lord that belong to the mystical dimension—but they are nonetheless life changing on a smaller daily basis which can in the end be just as formative and transforming. May the Holy Spirit open the ears of your heart!

If you are interested in more details, please email us at qopbeneditines@gmail.com and we'll send you a fuller explanation of what has been briefly outlined above. +

Although the year in retrospect seems rather uneventful, nevertheless, there are a few updates which we would like to share with you all. First, we developed a website with the help of a friend who is both computer savvy and a photographer. Please see: www.qopbeneditines.com. The trail bars we developed last year sold quite well during the Fall season, so much so that Sr. Gertrude was actually a bit pleased when the orders started tapering off! We have not advertised since because Sister is trying to develop a non-peanut trail bar and better packaging before proceeding further. She will, however, continue to fill any orders which come in.

Sr. Gertrude taught Theology and Latin to the 10TH graders at Christ the King High School. This coming year, she will continue teaching Latin, and perhaps Theology as well, if they need her. She also continued to teach a Bible study to an avid group of women called Women of Joy at our local parish of St. Mark's. While Sr. Gertrude tended to the adults—several of whom were young mothers—Sr. Scholastica was lovingly attending to their little ones, freeing up the mothers to attend the Bible Study. The children loved her!



through Lake Norman Park has become our favorite pastime which we take advantage of as often as we can, weather permitting. The isolation of the trail, the beauty of being in God's creation and the vigorous walk are all good for the soul!



A year ago, we moved into a townhouse in Davidson, North Carolina, which has suited our needs wonderfully. The formal dining area serves as our chapel; the living room/informal dining area is large enough to fit our refectory tables, and the rest of the house is roomy and quiet—perfect for our monastic life at present. It is also conveniently located between the high school and the parish where Sr. Gertrude

Sr. Gertrude was invited to give a workshop on lectio divina to the religious education leaders in the diocese in May (see photo). Also in May, we held First Saturday devotions to Our Lady in our chapel for the first time with a good number of visitors joining us. It was so successful that we also held a Prayer Meeting on the Vigil of Pentecost to praise the Lord and open our hearts to whatever graces the Holy Spirit wished to pour out on us. No one went home disappointed!



teaches, and has the convenience of nearby shopping which Sr. Scholastica takes care of. The only drawback is the lack of a yard. To our wonderful surprise, during the Christmas break we discovered a spacious park with good hiking trails located at the northern end of a local lake. A short drive to the park takes us into a world, surrounded by woods, with trails that skirt the lake and meander up and down hills. A hike

As this newsletter is being readied for the printers, we are preparing to set out on our annual retreat. This year, we will visit our dear Sisters at Our Lady of the Desert in New Mexico. We have chosen to drive there so that we can visit several other monasteries along the route, including the Olivetan Benedictine Sisters in Jonesboro, Arkansas, the monks of Subiaco Abbey, Arkansas, and the nuns (and nearby monks) of the Solesmes Congregation near Clear Creek, Oklahoma. We should have more to report on that trip in our next missive, God-willing, at Christmas. In the meantime, a happy and blessed summer to you all! ✚

More Teachings on

ANGER

FROM THE WRITINGS
OF ST. AUGUSTINE

BY SR. GERTRUDE GILLETTE

FIFTH IN A SERIES ON AUGUSTINE'S TEACHING ON ANGER

WE CONTINUE OUR SERIES ON Anger in St. Augustine's works, by turning in this issue to his *Sermons*, and in particular to his annual Lenten sermons. These sermons are peppered with the usual exhortations to give alms, to increase one's prayer to God, and to curb the desires of the flesh through fasting and through abstaining from delights of taste. In a delightful play on words, the Bishop of Hippo suggests that above all else, his "brothers and sisters" should "fast from quarrels and discord." If they are tempted to raise their voice, they should raise it to express their love for God in praise, not in angry shouts against another. Augustine reminds his people, that while an angry man is fuming about an external enemy, the real enemy is in his heart. Whatever anyone does to his neighbors cannot really hurt them; his anger against them might inconvenience them or ruin them financially, or even physically cause them pain, but he cannot truly hurt another person. Only individual sin truly harms a person, and the cause is always one's own will. For this reason, the one who is angry and hates his neighbor is the one who is inflicting evil on himself: "Internally, you see, you are your own enemy, if you hate someone else. But because you don't feel the bad damage you are doing to yourself, you rage against the other guy, and put

your life in all the greater danger precisely to the extent that you don't realize how badly you are treating yourself; because in fact by raging like that you have lost your senses."

Thus, stored up anger is the true enemy, not the person with whom you are angry. "What could be sillier than to avoid your enemy outwardly and retain a much worse one in the depths of your heart?" The transposition of the "enemy" from outside to inside is poignantly presented in a homily where Augustine says: "Do not expect to be avenged. What is being avenged but feeding on somebody else's misfortune? Some people come and pray in the church banging their heads on the ground and asking God to kill their enemies! Yes, let God kill your enemy, i.e. your [own] enmity and animosity and let him save this human being, restored to you as a brother." Anger, then, inflicts far worse tribulations on its subject than ever it does on the object of its wrath.

As always, the first step is identification: An angry person should acknowledge that he or she has a problem. The fact that anger is a human emotion is merely the starting point in learning to control it: "In our discipline (Christianity), the question is not whether the devout soul is angry, but why." The Christian learns not to be swept away by the emotion but to reflect on what it does to oneself. In a sermon delivered in his maturity, he says: "You can't destroy her, you can restrain her." Mature and deliberate inquiry into its origin and effects and one's proper response to its arousal are the way forward.

Wrong ways to respond to Anger

In Augustine's list of ways in which a person can respond to his or her own anger, three ways are spiritually inappropriate and harmful while five are proper and beneficial. Because of our space limitations, we will focus on the three negative ways in this issue and present the positive responses in a future issue. The three

negative reactions to anger are: a) denial, b) nurturing resentment and c) seeking revenge.

a) **Denial.** Speaking to his congregation, Augustine bemoans the fact that some of them think that their sins, including anger, are too trivial or insignificant to mention to God for pardon. We might label this today as a state of “denial”—when repeated sin has made someone blind—to the real state of affairs. A first step out of the darkness is to reflect honestly on one’s behavior.

b) **Nurturing resentment.** If anger is allowed a foothold in the heart, it increases and turns into hatred. In this context, Augustine compares anger and hatred to the speck and beam of Matthew’s parable (cf. Mt 7:3–5): “Anger grown chronic becomes hatred, the speck that is nursed becomes a beam.” Simple, not-attended-to, anger has the lethal potential of hardening the heart which is at the core of hatred. Anger is also fueled by self-righteous indignation. Who, after all, doesn’t believe that his anger is justified? But this very righteousness is a subtle temptation not to deal with it and so it grows.

In the context of going from anger to hatred, Augustine cleverly explains that the inspired text “Be angry and sin not” (Ps 4:4) is an injunction not to let the first half “be angry”—which arises because we are human—turn into sin (“sin not”) by nursing the anger in the heart. Thus it is not the emotional reaction which is sinful, but the decision to allow wrath to remain in the heart. Note that the very fact of choosing not to do something is doing something.

Let us also note that resentment can actually change the quality of anger turning it into hatred. Therefore, the vast difference between the two vices involves more than mere magnitude ... as if anger were only a lesser degree of hatred. The radical difference is caught in the comparison between a sore eye and one that has been poked out. The two vices might be related, as both types of eyes are, but the qualitative effect on the personal subject is radical: anger causes an

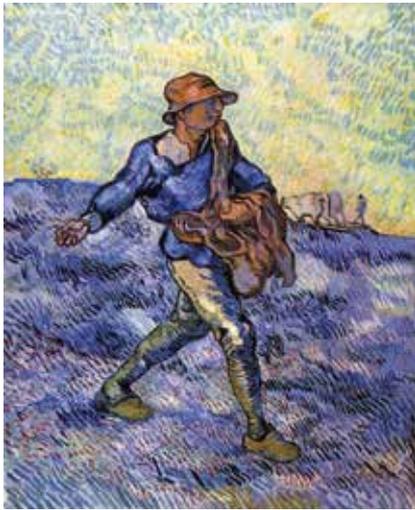
inner disturbance, while hatred kills. A further illustration drawn from family life highlights their distinction: a father may feel anger while disciplining his son, but he certainly does not hate his son; he disciplines him rather out of love. The context shows that anger and love are compatible, while hate and love can never be.

These examples illustrate that what is lacking in anger which is always present in hatred is the deliberate and vicious desire to maintain the animosity; furthermore, with hatred often goes an intensity of vengeance which far outstrips that of simple anger. This leads us into our next evil response to our own anger:

c) **Seeking revenge.** Resentment can easily turn into a desire for revenge. In fact, Augustine says, it is commonplace to want to repay an insult with some sort of retaliation. However, the “feeding on somebody else’s misfortune” is not a sentiment which God endorses. One who professes to be a Christian must instead imitate the Master who did not seek revenge against his enemies. We must ask ourselves:

Who am I, brandishing menaces against another human being? I may well die before I get my own back. And when I depart from the body in a rage, breathing out fire and slaughter, thirsting for revenge, that one [Christ] who did not wish to be avenged won’t receive me. No, he won’t receive me, the one who said, *Give, and it will be given you, forgive, and you will be forgiven* (Lk 6:38.37). So I will restrain my anger, and return to calmness of heart.

In conclusion, Augustine teaches that anger, although “human,” is a dangerous passion of the human heart. Unless it is eradicated promptly, it grows (sometimes almost imperceptibly) into many different strains of animosities. The good news is that anger does not have to have the last word; with the help and example of Christ, all enmity can be put aside. How this can be done, according to Augustine’s teaching, will be taken up in our next issue of THE PELICAN. ✚



Thank You!

WE WOULD LIKE TO THANK all of you who have been so kind to us this past year, since our last issue of *The Pelican* (summer of 2012). Your prayers, support and kindness have touched us deeply. Please be assured that you are in our daily prayers. We would also like to express our gratitude to all our dear friends and readers who belong to the Sowers' Club — thank you for the generous donation of \$100 which you send to us once a year. Your generosity is a terrific help to us at this time when we have only part time employment. For those of you who have not yet joined the Sowers' Club, please consider doing so. You Sowers are planting the seeds which enable

"A Sower went out to sow.... Some seed fell upon good ground and yielded grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty." Mt 13:3,8

our community to grow and flourish. Thank you again — all you "old" and "new" Sowers — for thinking of us this year. God's gracious blessings upon you! — *The Sisters*

TO OUR BELOVED SOWERS: Please fill out and detach the form below, including your prayer intention(s). When you return it with your donation, please use the following address: Benedictines of Queen of Peace, 363 Armour St., Davidson, NC 28036 God bless you much!

TO ALL OUR BELOVED BENEFACTORS: Whether you are a Sower or not, your support is infinitely appreciated. Among other things, your donation makes it possible for us to continue publishing *The Pelican* without charge. Be assured that there awaits you in heaven treasures beyond comprehension. God is so good!

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