



FROM THE HEART OF

# The Pelican

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*The Chicken Whisperer*

DEAR FAITHFUL FRIENDS,

RECENTLY, WE MADE A novena to Our Lady with some friends leading up to the June 25th anniversary of her appearances in Medjugorje.\* During the novena, I was pondering Our Lady's messages, and especially her request that we "pray from the heart." How does one "pray from the heart"? At the same time, I recalled words that were given to me at crucial moments in my life, such as "You must immerse yourself in prayer" and "You must go deeper into prayer and find my Son" or "Meditate deeply before the crucifix daily." In all these situations (and many others), prayer—deep prayer—was the answer to my particular crisis. But how does one pray effectively? Reflecting on this, I have come to some tentative suggestions that I offer here.

At a very basic level, praying from the heart seems to refer to prayer with attention and devotion, that is, with the mind focused and the heart engaged. Or, to put it another way, to mean what we are saying. Those of us who say the Divine Office or a rosary every day are being asked to focus on what we are saying so the words on our lips resonate in our hearts (cf RB 19:7). Since our prayers are directed to God and his heavenly court, we are also to be aware of being in his presence, or better yet, to be aware that he is present to

\* Always of course bending to the decision of the Church—though if it is the work of Satan, he is undoing his own kingdom by the hundreds of thousands of conversions, the renewal of their faith and spiritual life in forty million pilgrims, and the large number of vocations to the priesthood and religious life that have been the fruit of Medjugorje!



us within our own hearts. So these three—an engagement of mind and an engagement of heart on the prayers we are saying, along with an awareness of God's presence—seem to be the bare minimum for praying with the heart.

How does one then "go deeper" into prayer? Does it mean to let what we are saying or reading bear fruit in meditation, to dwell on the words in order to find greater depth in them, and then to apply what we find to our own life? Does it mean to pray longer? Or with more intensity? When inspired by the Holy Spirit, assuredly. But I'm not sure Our Lady is talking only about what our own efforts can accomplish. They help to a degree; we certainly need to put effort into our prayer, both in making time and in disciplining our wandering thoughts. But I suspect that "deeper" refers to the work of the Holy Spirit, who leads us into deeper prayer so that we can find Jesus at a more profound level. When the Holy Spirit leads, our place is to surrender and allow ourselves *to be led*. In this state of yielding to the Spirit, we find Jesus as the One who has already surrendered to us.

What is it that we surrender? Ultimately everything, but in the beginning we don't even know what *everything* means. Once when I was upset that I was not handling a particular situation well, I told my spiritual director: "But I surrendered to the Lord, what's my problem?" He wisely responded: "You surrendered at the level of consciousness

where you were at that moment. The Lord continues to create new situations in order to highlight those areas where you still need to let go of something. You are then asked to surrender again, and in so doing, drop down to a new level of submission. Life is a series of such surrenders until the final and total abandonment of yourself to the Lord in death." So in prayer, I surrender where I am today and the Lord accepts me where I am. Tomorrow is another day to do it all over again. What I learn in these moments is a greater understanding of the Lord's own surrender to me. I find him there before me, urging me to let go of whatever I am clinging to. When I yield, allowing him to do with me as he wishes, he pours peace into my soul. I know as I get closer to the pearly gates, that the surrender asked will be deeper and more complete. I'm even told that a time comes when you cannot pray consciously anymore because the pain that comes with illness is so consuming that it is all one is aware of. At those times, our whole being becomes the prayer of Christ on the Cross. Then, one can truly be said to be praying from the heart, from the heart of Christ.

Let those of us who are not yet at that point in our life strive to pray as Our Lady asks, with intention, attention and devotion. St. Bernard assigns the first step of pride to curiosity, which he describes as a kind of negligence of, or lack of attention to one's interior life. A person gets bored with keeping a watch over his interior life and so willingly looks for a distraction. The problem is that when we go outside of ourselves, looking for some interesting tidbit to soothe our interior boredom, we open ourselves to all kinds of distractions that aren't harmless. We find ourselves lured by things, ideas, people, entertainment, and actions that feed on our emptiness and begin to drag us away from God and into

sin. We lose something of ourselves in the distraction. Although every distraction is not sinful, there is a powerful insight in what St. Bernard teaches. The good zeal which St. Benedict puts before us, the purity of heart that is the goal of each one of us, is not gained by giving in to distractions at prayer. Although we may have to battle this demon for the rest of our lives, a great deal of the battle will be won if we zealously take to heart Our Lady's invitation to "pray from the heart." The result will not only be a deepening of your own prayer life, but will have consequence for the whole world, as a recent message of hers says: "I am preparing you for the new times that you may be firm in faith and persevering in prayer, so that the Holy Spirit may work through you and renew the face of the earth."

Amen! +



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The Benedictines of Mary,

Queen of Peace

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## News & Updates

**THE FARM.** The big news since our last issue of the PELICAN has been the growth of our small farm.

In November we bought fifteen baby chicks, among which was a rooster included by mistake! The fourteen hens started laying in late March and give us about six dozen eggs a week. We try to sell a few dozen every week to break even on their feed.

In March we welcomed our then-ten-week-



old Maremma sheep dog, Abby, whose purpose is to keep predators away, but who is far more interested in playing with the Sisters than in keeping watch over other animals! We trust her presence on the farm is a deterrent to foxes, coyotes, racoons and the like.

Early in May arrived thirty meat chickens. We chose the Freedom Ranger breed, which takes longer than the more popular breeds to reach maturity (12 versus 8 weeks) because they are supposed to give us more dark meat. We are looking to process them around July 22nd.

To prepare ourselves for that step, in mid-June we assisted a local Catholic family in processing their 150 meat chickens. It was quite a learning experience! We can say this much: although the process hasn't changed much from the time we used to help our grandmothers' on their farms (does anyone else remember plucking chicken feathers as a child?), nevertheless, the use of automated equipment certainly speeds up the whole enterprise. With about seven people working, the whole batch went from crate to freezer in about five hours. Our mere thirty chickens should be a snap, right? Stay tuned! Sr. Scholastica, who is our "chicken whisperer," will conveniently be away (for her triennial trip to St. Lucia) when we are processing our own batch in the latter part of July!



Our final addition to the farm, for the time being anyway, are three black Angus steers. These beautiful eight-month-old creatures arrived on June 1st, and immediately took themselves to the lower pasture. We were encouraged to make friends with them, feed them goodies and ring a bell so that at the sound of it they will come up to us. Well, these three want nothing to do with us. They make an odd appearance once in awhile at the watering trough to let us know that they are alive and well, but other than that they fend for themselves and just want to be left alone. Sr. Scholastica is however determined to woo (moo?) them into a friendlier relationship. She wryly concedes that an advantage to their present attitude is that it will be a lot easier to eat them!

In the future, we'd also like to add a pig to our menagerie, but that'll have to wait till next year as we feel we have enough to handle at the moment.

**THE GUEST AREA.** The other area that we have expanded and improved upon is our guest/retreatant space. We fixed up a second bedroom, painted all the walls and cabinets in the kitchen and main area and with the very nice gift of furniture from a friend who is moving, we were able to create a private

living and dining room area for our guests to relax in. We also use the space when a Sister has family visiting so she can entertain them in a personal area where they can relax, visit, and have lunch, and where children can play games, etc. Guests and retreatants will find the area much more pleasant and comfortable than the former accommodations we had. Come and check them out!



**VISITORS.** In April, we had 28 students from Belmont Abbey College come for a mini-retreat. They were a joy in their enthusiasm for all things Catholic and monastic! Go Crusaders! In May, we welcomed an old friend and a renowned author from our Ave Maria University days, Joseph Pearce, who kindly told his dramatic conversion story to the visitors who come for our First Saturday Devotions. We thank God for bringing Joseph back into our lives again. +







(LK 2:22–40)

## The Presentation IN THE Temple

**A**T THE CENTER of the scene, we see Mary and Joseph enter the Temple with the Child Jesus. This recalls a prophecy of Haggai. The Israelites had come back from Babylon and over time they built for themselves another temple. It was not a glorious piece of architecture, as Solomon’s temple had been. When the building was dedicated, some of the people must have been disappointed, thinking of their former place of worship and comparing it to the newer but much less splendid building, for the Lord delivered this message to the prophet Haggai:

Who is left among you that saw this house in its former glory? How do you see it now? Is it not in your sight as nothing? Yet now take courage... I will fill this house with splendor, says the Lord of hosts. The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, says the Lord of hosts. The latter splendor/glorious of this house shall be greater than the former, says the Lord of hosts (Hag 2:3-4, 7-9).

No doubt many thought the prophecy pointed to the work of someone who would come and make their new temple a physically glorious place. And indeed, the 1<sup>ST</sup>C. leader, Herod the Great, did just that. He spent

many years and much money improving it. It was finally finished around 64 A.D., only to be destroyed by the Romans in 70 A.D. The Lord, however, did not have the work of Herod in mind when he spoke through Haggai. The real splendor of the Second Temple was not its physical appearance, but the Lord himself. Into this temple the Lord of the Universe came in person, the first time at the Presentation, carried in the arms of his mother.

When the Holy Family arrive at the Temple, they are met by the priest Simeon, to whom the Holy Spirit had revealed that he would not die until he had seen the Messiah. As soon as Simeon saw the Child, he recognized Him as the fulfillment of his revelation. He was elated, and sweeping up the Child in his arms proclaimed his willingness to die since his hopes had been fulfilled. He had completed his mission, he—like John the Baptist many years later—pointed out the savior of the world for anyone who happened to be within hearing distance and had a heart open to receive the news. Scripture tells us that the news fell on only one person: Anna, an elderly widow known for her fasting and prayers. She in turn spoke of it to “all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem” (v.38).

In declaring this Child to be the long-awaited Messiah, he took his wording from the prophet Isaiah (see 42:1,6; 49:6), calling Christ the “light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory of your people Israel” (Lk 2:32). Christ was a “light to the Gentiles” because he would bring salvation to them as well. But how is he the “glory of Israel”?

The presence of the Lord seen in the physical form of a cloud was known as the *glory cloud*. This cloud would appear periodically during Israel’s history. A famous instance of the cloud of glory coming down on the temple took place during Solomon’s

dedication ceremony (1 Kgs 8:11). The cloud descending on the temple was a sign that the Lord was taking up residence, so to speak, in his house. This same cloud would depart some 400 years later, when Ezechiel sees the inner court of the Temple filled with the glory of God, but at the same time, the cherubim appear like wheels of a chariot rising and as it were ushering the Lord in his glory out of the temple as he ceremoniously abandons his earthly throne (Ez 10:18f). The prophet is also shown the terrible abominations committed in the Temple, which brought about the Lord’s departure. The Temple is subsequently destroyed by the Babylonians and the ark was hidden away, never to be found again.

When the Israelites return after the exile and rebuild the Temple, although they too dedicate it, the cloud of glory never appears again. It was the desire of all Israel to see and welcome God’s presence among them as of old, but it was not to be. From our Christian perspective, this too was part of God’s plan, for to the Second Temple would come his own beloved Son in the form of visible flesh and blood. Thus when Mary and Joseph brought the Christ Child into the Temple, the glory of Israel was entering it again at last, this time borne in the arms of his mother—the new ark of the covenant.

On seeing the Child, Simeon said to Mary:

Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is contradicted, (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed (Lk 2:34-35).

In the Old Testament the sword was a sign of war, of destruction, bloodshed and death. Swords were used to kill the enemy. A person made swords to go to war. Mentioning that

the Child will suffer from the sword is predicting for him a violent death, fulfilled when his side was pierced on the cross. The sword that would pierce Mary's soul was watching the death of her Son. But what does the "sign that is contradicted" (or "sign of contradiction") mean, and what does "that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed" refer to?

First, Jesus is destined to be a sign of contradiction. The contrariness of sin will attack him who is most holy. He will be the victim of others' mean words, his truth will be rejected and denied; he will suffer the cruel blows in a very painful passion and death. He who is all holy, all truth, all goodness, will be contradicted and rejected. Yet, as he hung on the cross, his love and majesty shone through so gloriously that the Centurion cried out: "Truly this man was the Son of God" (Mk 15:39). The contradiction between goodness and evil, between holiness and sin are portrayed in Christ's humanity.

Secondly, in the Hebrew world, the heart was the center of the person. To strike at the heart was to strike at the deepest part of who the person was. Jesus received all the evil blows and insults allowing them to go as far as to pierce his physical heart, a symbol of the inner heart or center of his person. From there, he worked the miracle

of all miracles, reversing the evil thrust and turning it into compassion and mercy. The picture of Divine Mercy comes to mind here. It was as if Christ caught the arrows of evil thrust at him, dipped them in his own blood of compassion and sent them back to us full of love and mercy in order to pierce our own hearts with deep conviction. What started as evil—our sins wounding him, ends in love—God's love melting our hearts. The Lord's mercy in the sacrament of Confession allows many to reveal their thoughts. What is more hidden than a man's own thoughts? And yet, the Lord's love for us on the Cross has made us come before him with all our weaknesses, all our shame, all of our hidden and deceitful ways of thinking and open them up to his healing touch. We do this in Confession. This is what the mercy of God has done and it has become possible because he became a sign of contradiction, a sign of our sins and his love, all in one. We can own our sin, our weakness and our negative impulses and then surrender them to his mercy and receive instead all his love. Do you know how freeing this is? There is nothing worse than to have to hide something from ourselves, from God and from our loved ones. Likewise there is nothing so freeing as to walk in the mercy of God with joy. ✚



## THE SOWERS' CLUB

WE WOULD LIKE TO THANK ALL OF YOU WHO HAVE been so kind to us this past year. 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. *We invite those of you who have not yet joined the Sowers' Club to please consider doing so.* You who are Sowers already are planting the seeds which God in due time will turn into a harvest. Thank you all again for thinking of us this year.

Please make your checks payable to *Benedictines of Mary, Queen of Peace*, and mail them to: 687 Moss Rd, Rutherfordton, NC 28139. God's gracious blessings upon you!

— *The Sisters*