

## MONASTIC NOTES: Chronicling the School for Spiritual Direction at Pecos Benedictine Monastery (June 19<sup>th</sup> thru July 17<sup>th</sup> 2011)

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[18JUNE2011]

It's hard to believe that a year ago we were almost set to begin our journey west to live in Olympia, WA. What we thought we were leaving to live for was not what it turned out to be. That is not to say that what has turned out to be is not what God has directed...on the contrary, it is exactly what God has directed. I believe this.

***Plant the good seeds of righteousness, and you will harvest a crop of my love. Plow up the hard ground of your hearts, for now is the time to seek the Lord, that he may come and shower righteousness upon you.*** – Hosea 10:12 NLT

Tomorrow I begin day one of a four-week adventure. This adventure takes me to New Mexico and the Pecos Monastery where I will enter into a cohort of followers who desire to learn more about spiritual formation and spiritual direction. You can learn more about what I will be doing and learning by checking out this link (SSD-Pecos Monastery). I would appreciate your prayers and thoughts while I am away. This school and time away is not only about learning, but about doing. I will be immersed in the Benedictine monastic experience practicing a rhythm that might help me to become even more responsive to our God who is always with us. I pray this will be one of the primary outcomes of these next four-weeks.

As a result of this “unplugged” time away, the iCrucified blog will be sparsely attended. I don't know what chance, if any, I will have to post to the blog. I am not taking my computer, but may have minimal access to the internet from time to time. If I am able, I will share updates and maybe some photos while I am away. I will be journaling my experience and plan to share as I am able upon my return. In the interim, I plan to schedule a couple of posts from the archives of the iCrucified blog.

***Now is the time to seek the LORD...*** (Hosea 10:12 NLT) ***God called me into His Light...*** (1 Peter 2:9 NIV) ***I am a friend of Jesus...He chose me*** (John 15:15-16 NLT).

**A Prayer of mine combined with a prayer from John Wesley:**

*O LORD and my God, I pray that you will receive me again with all my faults and failings. I pray you will remake me and teach me... reveal yourself to me in ways that will sear your truth into my brain, heart, and soul. Dear Lord, my heart wants to be wholly owned by you... and I desire to serve only you. I long, O LORD, to find, serve, and contribute to a community of followers who desire also for the same. Lord, be my Teacher –jeff borden*

*I am no longer my own, but thine. Put me to what thou wilt, rank me with whom thou wilt. Put me to doing, put me to suffering. Let me be employed for thee or laid aside for thee, exalted for thee or brought low for thee. Let me be full, let me be empty. Let me have all things, let me have nothing. I freely and heartily yield all things to thy pleasure and disposal. And now, O glorious and blessed GOD, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, thou art mine and I am thine. So be it. And the covenant I have made on earth, let it be ratified in heaven. Amen. –john Wesley*

***O GOD, do not be silent! Do not be deaf. Do not be quiet, O GOD. You alone are called the LORD; you alone are the Most***

### Monastic Notes (Pecos: Day 1—June 20<sup>th</sup> 2011)

This is my experience during my stay at Our Lady of Guadalupe Benedictine Monastery in Pecos, New Mexico. From June 19<sup>th</sup> 2011 through July 17<sup>th</sup> 2011 I was enrolled in the School for Spiritual Direction. During this time I studied and practiced the disciplines necessary to develop the art, skill, and experience for facilitating spiritual guidance and direction in others seeking deeper relationship with our Triune God. What follows are some of my journal notes shedding light on my experience during those four weeks.

***“Watch out! Don’t let your heart be dulled by carousing, drunkenness, and by the worries of this life. Don’t let it (the Day of the LORD) catch you unaware...Keep alert at all times.” (Luke 21:34-36)***

The passage above was one of my readings today from the Daily Office of the Book of Common Prayer (Year One). I find it providential as I move into the season spiritual formation and training, a healthy reminder to “keep alert” to where God is leading and what God is saying. It is so easy to become seduced by and distracted by the “worries of this life.” This time away at the monastery will help to focus and clarify next steps in my journey with Christ and surrender to His ministry for me.

### The end of day one (June 20<sup>th</sup> 2011)

I am entering into a new space... I don’t fully grasp all that it is and all that it may become, but I am crossing a threshold of sorts. It has been awhile since I have experienced silence at this degree...it has been over a year since I have “gotten away” for a silent retreat. I have forgotten how deafening silence can be. Each evening the monastery enters into the “grand silence” from 9pm to 9am. It is during this time that the silence sounds almost like the “sound of the ocean” when you put a conch shell up to your ear and listen... it is so quiet that the silence roars in a deafening non-sound. I wonder if this is what Elijah heard when he recognized the Presence of God in the **sheer silence** when he was standing on Mt. Horeb (1 Kings 19:11-12 NSRV).

There are a number of things I am hopeful will be accomplished during this month at the monastery. I’m trying to limit my expectations as I wish to be as open to God’s direction as possible, but I think the desires I have arrived with have been seeded into my spirit by the One who feeds my soul. It is hard to describe what I am feeling, perhaps the reason is because I **don’t know** what I am feeling... giddy anticipation, holy wonder, divine delight... all of these superlatives are floating around in my head and heart. I feel as though I have a blindfold on and I am being led by the Holy Spirit as my Guide. I know where He where He will lead is good, so I will follow and do my best to **“keep alert at all times.”**

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### Monastic Notes (Pecos: Day 2—June 21<sup>st</sup> 2011)

My Bible readings for this year are following the Book of Common Prayer found in the Daily Office (Year One). A statement from 1 Samuel 6-16 struck me on this particular morning; “Why should you harden your hearts as the Egyptians and Pharaoh hardened their hearts?” (1 Samuel 6:6). My thoughts follow:

*It's interesting to me how familiar the Philistines were with details of Israel's story, yet they attacked them anyway and then took the Ark of the Lord from them. What I find ironic is how often we fall victim to the same folly. I think many times we are just as presumptuous as the Philistines. We know the story of God, yet we act as though we are immune to the precepts of God's Word or we will often justify our actions thinking if we act against God's Law "this time it will be different" and we will not fall victim to our sin or disobedience. Sadly, this is never the case...there are always ramifications and repercussions for every action we take. We are blessed to have a fairly representative record of God's revelation to man in the Bible; we should live according to our knowledge of it and continue our pursuit of learning and living it even more intimately.*

**<sup>33</sup> Teach me your decrees, O LORD; I will keep them to the end. <sup>34</sup> Give me understanding and I will obey your instructions; I will put them into practice with all my heart. <sup>35</sup> Make me walk along the path of your commands, for that is where my happiness is found. <sup>36</sup> Give me an eagerness for your laws rather than a love for money! <sup>37</sup> Turn my eyes from worthless things, and give me life through your word. <sup>38</sup> Reassure me of your promise, made to those who fear you. <sup>39</sup> Help me abandon my shameful ways; for your regulations are good. <sup>40</sup> I long to obey your commandments! Renew my life with your goodness. (Psalm 119:33-40 NLT)**

I had several wonderful conversations today. I was sharing about my own experiences with some of my fellow classmates over lunch today and was surprised at how emotional I got as I recounted some of my journey. In particular, I was remembering and relating my revelation and awakening to the gravity and significance of Jesus' prayer in the Gospel of John chapter 17 (this occurred sometime around 6 years ago). I was awakened to the incredible promise and blessing that Jesus describes for those who are His disciples and I was equally astounded at the unity he invites his followers to share with Him in the oneness and intimacy of Triune fellowship. Finally, with clarity to these aforementioned blessings, it was clear to me how serious Jesus was about the plan for His Church-Bride to be unified as One body. As a subsequent consequence of these revelations, I truly believe in One Church also...just as Jesus prayed for Her and I believe that He fully equipped and empowered us to live as reflections of Trinitarian Love (as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit live in Triune Love). It is my opinion, anything less than this unity described in Jesus' prayer is an abomination in light of the redemptive work of our Savior-God. By the time I finished sharing this experience and story, I was pretty much reduced to tears.

There is something wonderful about telling and retelling our personal journeys with Jesus. It seems that almost without fail each time I share a portion of my story; I am able to glean an even more profound understanding of God's providence and grace being poured out on my life. His hand is ever upon me; guiding, shaping, disciplining, blessing, loving, and so much more...always drawing me into deeper relationship with Himself and greater understanding of who I am as I have been created in Him. What a wonderful Creator! It is my desire to share this truth with others—in some way, to perhaps be used to help other people "see" as I have learned to see. I know I am not unique. I am no more special or blessed than any other son or daughter of God, but sadly... so many of my brothers and sisters have not been awakened to this wonderful and glorious truth that our God invites us to participate in.

#### **VESPERS:**

Tonight as we joined together praying, Psalm 10 was speaking very loud and clear. The psalmist writes about the "wicked" in this song. What is hard for us to accept is the reality that people who are blind to the mercy and grace of our God, are most often those who are classified as the "wicked." We would be more want to classify the "wicked" as people who are malicious and hostile toward God, but the psalmist writes about the nature of the wicked "standing against God" because of their pride...thinking "God does not matter" (Psalm 10:4). This is what the blind and ignorant of

God's mercy do; they think God does not matter, because they do not know or they do not believe. In their arrogance of self they think God does not notice the way they live with little regard for others or God, but always living selfishly for themselves. They are wrong. It does matter and God notices and God does care. I pray that God will help me to help them...these wicked people the psalmist writes about are my sisters and my brothers and if I don't care about them, I am wicked too.

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### Monastic Notes (Pecos: Day 3—June 22<sup>nd</sup> 2011)

I've been reading and meditating my way through Thomas Merton's *New Seeds of Contemplation*. I've enjoyed Thomas Merton's writing for quite awhile now, but this is (in my opinion) one of his best works that I have read yet. I think it will easily rank in my top-ten reads for this year. Here is a quote I copied to my journal:

*What good does it do to say a few formal prayers to Him and then turn away and give all my mind and all my will to created things, desiring only ends that fall short of Him? Even though my soul may be justified, yet if my mind does not belong to Him then I do not belong to Him either. If my love does not reach out toward Him but scatters itself in His creation, it is because I have reduced His life in me to the level of a formality, forbidding it to move me with a truly vital influence." —Thomas Merton; New Seeds of Contemplation.*

### Thoughts from my Lectio—

*If you are returning to the LORD with all your heart, then put away your (idolatrous distractions). Direct your (whole) heart toward the LORD, and serve Him only, and He will deliver you... (1 Samuel 7:3)*

**My Thoughts**—I think what this passage speaks to me is affirmation of what I already understand. GOD desires to deliver us from ourselves... in order to do that we must consecrate ourselves wholly to Him. We cannot serve two masters...certainly not ourselves **and** God. He will not share us with ourselves. Our idols are many, but always can be distilled and reduced to the root of all idolatry: "me." Destroying the masks of the false selves I create is necessary to turn to God with my whole heart. It can always be summed up to the lowest common denominator: "I" crucified.

*Be sure to carry out the ministry the Lord gave to you... (Colossians 4:17)*

**My Thoughts**—Allow Him to be your all-in-all. Allow Him to live fully in and through you... In this, God will fulfill His purposes in your life and you will "carry out the ministry the Lord gave to you." Amen.

My first three days have been really great, making new friends and soaking up the atmosphere and the learning. The past couple of days we were immersed in the life and culture of Benedictine Spirituality as taught by Mother Catarina Boyer of Our Lady of the Rock Benedictine Monastery. Today we were hearing from Brother Todd, the guest master of Our Lady of Guadalupe Benedictine Monastery, and discussing the nature of Carmelite Spirituality.

I really enjoyed hearing from Mother Catarina with her "folksy" nature and many relational stories. She is a treasure and it has been a real joy to be in her company as she generously shared her experience and wisdom with us. Some of my "takeaways" from Mother Catarina's talks include the following:

- How you pray and what you pray is important
- Having a “sacred space” (a physical place to retreat to) is important
- Solitude: alone time with God without the risk of distractions is important

**Asculta** (*listen-hear*)

Another connection that I made with the talks on Benedictine Spirituality from my own spiritual journey is the importance in **paying attention to how we listen** (Luke 8:18). Mother Catarina told us that listening is paramount to the Benedictine mindset; what I heard her say (my paraphrased understanding), “We listen for and to God first ensuring we are open and hearing to what the Spirit of God would speak to us. We listen also to ourselves as we seek to practice discernment and we give honor to the “other” as we listen intently to the people that God brings into our life. Finally, we listen to the sum of all that we listen to as we seek to understand what all are saying...asking the question: ‘what is the collective word that God is speaking through all the devices He uses.’”

Today, our lesson was from Brother Todd (a member of the Pecos Community). He is teaching today and tomorrow about the essence of Carmelite Spirituality, its unique differences and what sets it apart from other aspects of Benedictine Spirituality. While I enjoyed today’s lecture and the information shared, I think what I most enjoyed was hearing Brother Todd’s personal story. I was intrigued and touched to hear how God has moved through the years of his life patiently drawing him ever closer in relationship and commitment unifying love of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. When I **pay attention to how I listen** I am always encouraged to hear God speaking to me through the lives and stories of others as God draws His creation and His people to Himself...just like Mother Catarina was sharing with us.

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**Monastic Notes (Pecos: Day 4—June 23<sup>rd</sup> 2011)**

**A Prayer of Abandonment:**

Father God, I abandon myself into Your hands; do with me as You will. For what You do, I thank You. I am ready for all; I accept all. Let only Your will be done in me. I ask nothing else my Lord. Into Your hands I commend my soul. I give it to You freely, with the love of all my heart. For I love You and so need to give myself to You; I need to surrender myself to You with a trust beyond all measure because You are my Father. Amen.

**“O Lord, let me use all things for one sole reason: to find my joy in giving You glory.”** –Thomas Merton

Lectio Divina Reading: 1 Samuel 8:4-22

This appears to be a clear account and an example that shows us God **will** give us what we want even when the object of our desire is harmful for us and our desire reveals rejection of relationship with God. In this particular case, the LORD had been incredibly patient with Israel and incredibly good to them (1 Samuel 8:8). As a result of Israel’s rejection and their desire for a King other than God, the LORD determines to allow Israel to suffer the consequences of their choice as well as administering discipline and justice through the granting of their (Israel) request for a “King like all the other nations.”

My “great conversations” continue to bless me with the wonderful participants here at the School for Spiritual Direction. I enjoyed spending lunch and dinner with a couple here who spend their time between Toronto, Canada and the Philippines. I enjoyed hearing their spiritual journey and delighting in the fact of their sharing they were “an ecumenical  
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couple,” the husband being Protestant and the wife having converted to Catholicism. I had the opportunity to share with them about my dream for a neo monastic community (see Kairos Community proposal). A little later, following our dinner, the couple approached me and said they had been inspired by the vision I shared with them and they were feeling led by the Holy Spirit to pray for me and the “future” Kairos Community. I was incredibly encouraged by their support.

Today was a second series of lectures from Brother Todd Barvinek on the practices of Carmelite Spirituality. My attention was grabbed very early as he started his teaching with a quote from Thomas Merton on contemplative prayer (I love Thomas Merton). The lecture progressed through more discussion on centering prayer (using “*The Cloud of Unknowing*” text as a tool) and then spending some time in an exercise of centering prayer followed by a group *Lectio Divina* reading.

***“God speaks to us through the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit illuminating the Sacred Text.”*** –Bro. Todd

**The Prayers of my heart today:**

*My soul waits for the LORD, more than watchmen for the morning, more than a watchman for the morning.—Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.—Give thanks to the LORD and call upon His Name. Glory in His holy Name; let the hearts of those who seek the LORD rejoice. Search for the LORD and His strength; continually seek His face. (Psalm 130:5, Psalm 105:1, 3-4).*

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**Monastic Notes (Pecos: Day 5—June 24<sup>th</sup> 2011)**

After four days of a mild-dull headache (suffering from elevation sickness I believe: Pecos is around 7200-7300 ft. above sea level), I slept through the entire night with no wake-ups or weird dreams. This morning I awakened with the chanting of the “Glory Be” ringing in my heart...

*“Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit; As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.”*

Last night began the observance and celebration of the Feast of John the Baptist. This is my first experience with actually participating in the festal observance with the Church and one of the “days of the Saints.” At the evening liturgy last night there was a procession of the monks with the burning incense, special vestments and robes, and more... my heart was warmed.

My realization as I pondered the celebration of John the Baptist’s birth was that in six months we would be celebrating the birth of Jesus! What a wonderful blessing the Christian calendar is...keeping the family and Church of the Living God rooted and grounded in the eternal clock of our Great God! Standing there in this new awareness, my eyes grew hot and misty as my heart skipped with anticipation and giddiness looking forward to the celebration of our Savior’s Day.

**Many highlights today...**

Our lectures today were SUPERB! [Dr. Paul Spilsbury](#) from Ambrose University (Calgary, AB) was our guest lecturer for the topic of “Scripture Study for Spiritual Direction.” The first two sessions were incredibly inspiring to me. I’ll be “unpacking” and reflecting upon my notes and thoughts for some time I am sure.

As Paul started his lecture, he said something to the effect of “*Scripture having layers of interpretation...*” He likened it to the imagery of sediment. A thought flashed through my mind: **Scripture interpretation is like (or can be like) layers of sediment compacting upon itself to ultimately create a firm foundation of “Biblical-God Inspired-Rock-Truth.”** Jesus said, “**The wise man builds his house upon the rock...**” **Indeed, he does.**

Not very far into our lecture, Dr. Spilsbury started to talk about the Parable of the Sower from the Gospel of Mark (chapter four). As soon as Paul started in this talk, I immediately thought about my own study from this Parable as it is retold in the Gospel of Luke (chapter eight). Echoing in my mind were the words, “Pay attention to how you listen...” (Luke 8:18). As Paul was framing his talk around Mark chapter four, the remainder of the lecture seemed to be filtered through Luke chapter eight for me.—I continued hearing everything through “**Pay attention to how you listen.**”

I’m not sure when it occurred, but at some point in the lecture the theme started to clarify for me. We were talking about hearing “The Voice” and God’s guidance through any number of ways He might speak...But always “The Voice”—so—again... “Pay attention to how you listen.”

Other great thoughts from Dr. Paul’s lecture today (these are interpretations of what *I heard*):

- We should become fully engaged when reading, studying, and praying Scripture
- “Hearing” Scripture is done will ***all*** our senses
- Scripture is “food for eating;” however, we cannot expect to be spoonfed
- Scripture is an invitation to share and explore the mysteries of God (Luke 8:9)
- Scripture requires a hermeneutic of obedience; “I know because I am willing to obey”
- Bible reading is a means of grace; it is **sacred and sacramental**

I left the lecture today with the following words ricocheting in my brain: ***Pneuma, Hear, Listen, God-Breathed, Speak, Spirit, The Voice***, and this concluding thought—“It is hard for me to believe that we can be people who understand the Scriptures if we are unwilling to obey them...” (Luke 8:18).

I had my second meeting with my spiritual director (during my time at Pecos), Ezra, and shared with him my vision for the Community Vision that I feel God has birthed in me. I gave him the prospectus for the Kairos Community Church and Spiritual Renewal Center; I look forward to the next time we chat, so I might hear what the Spirit would speak to me through him and our conversation.

I spoke at length with a couple more of my fellow students today (Jane and Ronda), wonderful ladies with fantastic stories of their journey’s with Jesus. I had a great time chatting with both of them and sharing what God is doing in our lives. Later this evening a few ladies who had heard me playing my guitar asked if I’d lead in a few praise and worship songs...so I did. Jeane, Charis, Beverly, and I had a delightful time playing, praising, singing, and worshiping Jesus. What a great way to end an AWESOME Day! I’m sure I missed some things that blessed me during the day, but it was so overflowing I just couldn’t keep up. Thank You, for a marvelous day Jesus!

**Monastic Notes (Pecos: Day 6—June 25<sup>th</sup> 2011)**

**Morning Praise:** Praise the LORD, O my soul! I will praise the LORD as long as I live (Psalm 146:1). My soul waits for the LORD, more than the watchmen for the morning, more than the watchmen for the morning (Psalm 130:5). Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

**Lectio Divina Reading** (Psalm 107:33-43):

***“Let those who are wise ponder these things, and consider the steadfast love of the LORD.”*** (Psalm 107:43)

*“...Let those who are wise ponder these things.”* I love to ponder the things of God. I love to consider His ways and examine the history of my life as I ask the Holy Spirit to reveal all of the places that God has taken interest in my life. I love when He answers my request with the response, “Everywhere.” “I have been interested and involved in every nanosecond of your life.” I think we are quick to forget this truth or we might not want to believe it at all, but the reality of God’s character is this: He is present and active in every moment of life; He is never not present or inactive. The thing I believe can be a little disturbing are the “silent” moments and the “difficult” moments. I think we might prefer that God is not present in those times, but the converse is actually true. He is even **closer** in these moments—we are usually the ones too preoccupied to notice or listen for His Voice in those times. I am challenged, inspired and encouraged to seek God, wait for God, and listen for God in every moment, every second, of every day. Oh the joy for those who dance and rest in His always-present-Presence.

My lectures were great again today... Paul Spilsbury led the way once more for us, opening the Bible to us as Story and sharing its **Narrative Coherence** (The connected network of stories that make up the Bible gives meaning and substance to our individual faith. For that matter, the Bible also gives meaning and substance to our collective faith). I have been a faithful supporter of this style of teaching the Bible for some time now. When I teach “How to Read the Bible,” I use a three-pronged approach (1) The Bible as Story (2) Inductive Bible Study (3) Lectio Divina. I liken this style of reading as a Bread of Life “Food Pyramid” and without a balanced diet of all methods our Bible reading will fall short of the mark that God intends for us. ...but back to the lecture notes.

Two particular elements from the lectures today that impacted me in a big way follow:

1. This was almost an aside comment, but it continues to thump in my heart and glow in my brain; Paul shared a passage from Ephesians 2:10 **“We are God’s workmanship.”** Workmanship is translated from the Greek **Poima**. We get our English word, Poem, from this Greek word. Check this out—“We are God’s **‘poem’**” Now check this out: when we investigate other definitions and synonyms for poem and poetry we stumble over the word “epic.” Here is the definition for **epic**— **noting or pertaining to a long poetic composition, usually centered upon a hero, in which a series of great achievements or events is narrated in elevated style.** In the Biblical Narrative, the creation of man and God’s redemptive Story is the Epic Poem of God in which He is the Hero and we are the saved.
2. Dr. Spilsbury used the Exodus Narrative as the grounding narrative for the metanarrative of God’s Epic Poem. The Exodus is the centering narrative for every story in the Bible and it is also the centering narrative for every story of every life outside of the Bible as well. We are able to overlay the Exodus narrative to any life (try it—overlay the Exodus to your life and identify the times of bondage, freedom, wilderness, and Promised Land).



Paul shared a visual for us to illustrate the Exodus Narrative. I recreated it in my notes and embellished it a bit as I was inspired with a few additional thoughts. He shared this thought: “The Exodus story is retold throughout Scripture to regroup and call people to remembrance of God’s salvation. After redrawing the chalkboard illustration, I added the following thoughts:

*The desert is the place of God’s Presence. It is God’s workshop and our school of divine apprenticeship. In the desert God provides all that we need. The wilderness has its many challenges, this is for sure, but it also is a place of incredible revelation and miracles. Best of all, God is **always with His people** in the desert...always teaching, always providing, always disciplining, always comforting, always leading, always protecting, always, always near, and always teaching and revealing the true identity of His children to them. The desert is a beautiful place.*

And, I continue to chew on and **“ponder these things, and consider the steadfast love of the LORD.”** (Psalm 107:43)

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### Monastic Notes (Pecos: Day 7—June 26<sup>th</sup> 2011)

#### Lectio Divina Reading:

***“He is not impressed with the might of a horse; He has no pleasure in the strength of a man; but the LORD has pleasure in those who fear Him, in those who await His gracious favor.”*** (Psalm 147:11-12)

***“Heaven is my throne and the earth is my footstool...All these things my hand has made, and so all these things are mine, says the LORD. But this is the man to whom I will look, he that is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word.”*** (Isaiah 66:1-2)

What does a “strong man” look like? The picture of a strong man that God describes here is very different than the picture that I grew up with...the prototypical American tough guy. We were taught that “big boys” don’t cry, “When the going gets tough, the tough get going.” We were taught that when you get knocked down, you get back up again or you pull yourself back up by your boot straps. We were taught to “stand up and fight.” These are just a few of the “tough guy” mottos I can remember. I also remember (and it stills stands true today) that to be “self-made” was or is a high praise. These Scripture passages from the mouth of God don’t seem to quite line up with these quotes from American ideology. I think the stigma and influence those ideas have on us are pretty deeply ingrained and are difficult to overcome. They have resulted in more false selfs that we try to live into because that is who we are told we are... or we are told we should be in order that we might be successful and highly accepted. The problem is that we spend our energy and our lives becoming the antithesis of what God desires for us. The things that impress our friends, family, and society are not the things that impress God. The things that we will measure as success are often just the opposite of what God deems a success. A healthy examination of our values might be the first step in the dawning of a new day and the beginning of freedom from the tyranny of a false self.

#### Reading—*New Seeds of Contemplation* by Thomas Merton

*“Mere living alone does not isolate a man; mere living together does not bring men into communion. The common life can either make one more of a person or less of a person, depending whether it is truly common life or merely life in a crowd. To live in communion, in genuine dialogue with others is absolutely necessary if a man is to remain human. But to live in the midst of others, sharing nothing with them but the common noise and the*

*general distraction, isolates a man in the worst way, separates him from reality in a way that is almost painless. It divides him off and separates him from other men and from his true self.”*

Today is Sunday; a week ago I was arriving at the monastery unsure of what to expect. After my first full week of “living in community” and getting acclimated to the environment (physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually), I am feeling more comfortable and “at home.” There are still quite a few things that are unfamiliar to me, but I’m learning quickly and I’m feeling less and less awkward with each passing day. Today is a day of silence and a day of rest, so I’m going to embrace this Sabbath day for the gift of grace that it is. Lectures resume tomorrow, so we’ll pick back up with more thoughts and conversation then.

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### Monastic Notes (Pecos: Day 8—June 27<sup>th</sup> 2011)

#### Lectures:

Lectures resumed today with [Mary Poplin](#) (author of *Finding Calcutta*) speaking to us about the spirituality of Mother Teresa followed by an introduction to Worldviews. Both of these topics today were discussed in the light of relationship to spiritual direction. Mary told us that the spirituality of Mother Teresa could be summed up as a “desire to serve Jesus in the distressing disguise of the poor.” She also gave us four main points that she took away from her time in Calcutta with Mother Teresa; these follow:

1. Prayer is always the first work of spiritual direction
2. Three prayers of Mother Teresa
  - i. To always be (and remain) humble and meek
  - ii. To share in Christ’s Passion
  - iii. To never refuse Christ anything
3. Do everything without grumbling or complaining
4. When you become discouraged it may well be a sign of pride because you are relying on your own desires

**My take away from the last few lectures we have heard**—*The job of a spiritual director is to seek the root cause (Biblically) to what ails people and then what presents the challenge to them preventing them from growing in deeper relationship (intimacy) with GOD, Jesus Christ. This is how we help people...then using the Biblical Narrative (Paul Spilsbury) as the source and device for restoration and healing.*

I really enjoyed Mary’s talks and had the privilege to converse with her some outside of the classroom. She spoke intelligently and passionately about the state of our contemporary society and the all out assault upon Christianity by Secular Humanists, Creation Scientism, and Pantheists. My studies in Post-Modernism have helped me to understand the context and flow of her teaching and she has been able to “connect many dots” as well as “fill in a few blanks” for me in the process. I am grateful for her experience and insight.

### Personal Reflections and Recollections...

One of the hopes I had upon arriving here at the monastery was that God might provide me with direction and next steps as I tried to understand what the last year has been about and what the future might hold for me...for Laurie, for us. While I feel good and I feel at peace about this place in my spiritual journey, I'm trying to discern the direction of my soul right now. I'm not sure what I "hear" at the moment with regard to my questions. I continue to feel sad about my lack of community and I long desperately to be a part of a loving, life-giving, group of people who are madly in love with God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. When I talk with Laurie about this, she reminds me of various books and authors we have read that tell us community is "where you are..." but where am I? With regard to community, I have little or no interaction with anyone or anything that resembles "community where you are." My family is the extent of my community and that is Laurie, me, and Joshua. We attend worship services regularly and we are part of a "life group" (aka small group) ministry in our local church, but these are not satisfying the hunger in my soul. I feel like a fish out of water sometime. I want to be where God wants me; this is the bottom line. For now, I think I am...where God wants me, but what next? Is it even fair for me to ask? This one thing I know: I am determined to see the remainder of my life through God's eyes and on His terms. So, for now, I suppose I'll just trust where I am and wait it out.

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### Monastic Notes (Pecos: Day 9—June 28<sup>th</sup> 2011)

#### Personal Reflections and Recollections...

Today was another marvelous "God-day!" My Lord continues to show Himself in evermore tangible ways. It's almost as if He is taking special delight in giving me beautiful spiritual presents that I have "secretly" longed for. Today, especially, He was bearing multiple gifts handed out to me throughout the day... just as I would be delighting in one, He would shower me with yet another. What a great and loving God!

The first gift was a blessing of affirmation and confirmation with regard to my own spiritual gifting. These affirmations usually come from other men and women of God who recognize God's gifts operating in you. While we are suspect of our own gifting, we can often be biased and are not the best judge to determine whether these gifts are real or not. When gifting is affirmed in you through your peers, it can be joyous and humbling in a delightfully encouraging way. This happened for me today and I am still reeling over it.

I also met with Ezra (my Spiritual Director while at Pecos) and he provided me with quite a bit of feedback regarding the proposal I shared with him about the Kairos Community Church and Spiritual Renewal Center. Every comment, suggestion, and observation was positive and affirming. He shared with me a number of helpful considerations and suggested that I speak with one of the monks here at the monastery about some of the aspects of intentional communities that might help me in the development of Kairos. He also thought Father Paul might be able to connect me with some additional resources that might be helpful to me with this endeavor. I considered this a second special gift from God today.

I continue to meet new people and make new friends and tonight was no exception. At the evening meal tonight we had a new arrival to the monastery, Kenny Mirman ([Kenny](#) is an artist, author, filmmaker, video producer living in Los Angeles, CA). Kenny will be teaching one of our sessions in the School for Spiritual Direction. His lectures will be on the subject of Life Scripts and how the stories of our lives connect with our spiritual journey. I believe our meeting on this particular evening was providentially ordained by God. I think there was a deep connection in the similarity of our life

journeys. Both of us come from very different places, but the passion and intensity of our search for truth is so very much alike. The time we talked and shared together seemed like it passed as a few seconds, but we chatted for over a couple of hours. It was a great time getting to hear his story as I also shared mine with him.

*Lectio Divina* and Scripture Meditations for the day...

**Psalm 19:1-14** → What great thoughts to remember: “The instructions of the LORD are perfect, trustworthy, right, clear, pure, true, desirable, sweet, and a great reward. They revive the soul, provide wisdom, bring joy, give insight, last forever, are always fair, and provide warning for those who obey.”

And how do we respond to the God shared in the Psalm 19:1-14? Peter writes that our response should be as follows:

<sup>5</sup> In view of all this, make every effort to respond to God’s promises. Supplement your faith with a generous provision of moral excellence, and moral excellence with knowledge, <sup>6</sup> and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with patient endurance, and patient endurance with godliness, <sup>7</sup> and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love for everyone. <sup>8</sup> The more you grow like this, the more productive and useful you will be in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>9</sup> But those who fail to develop in this way are shortsighted or blind, forgetting that they have been cleansed from their old sins. (2 Peter 1:5-9 NLT)

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**Monastic Notes (Pecos: Day 10—June 29<sup>th</sup> 2011)**

**The Lectures—**

Today’s lectures explored the question, “**What is Spiritual Direction?**” While the two daytime sessions were rudimentary, they weren’t boring. I was able to “connect a few more dots” and fill in a few more blanks from my personal studies through the past few years. I am thankful for the guidance I have been given with regard to building my personal library and organizing my reading schedule for the next coming months and year. I should give kudos to our lecturer today for providing an after-hours informal Q&A session where the students were encouraged to ask their questions that may or may not have been related to the day’s lectures. Pat (our speaker) talked at length about some of the more practical and logistical details involved with the ministry of spiritual direction that I did find very helpful.

Some highlights from the day’s notes follow:

- The ministry of hospitality sets the tone (atmosphere) for Spiritual Direction
- We “empty” ourselves in order to create a place of “welcome” for others to enter into; we create space for a holy place where others might share our soul.
- As spiritual directors we honestly and effectively welcome people into our heart
- We strive to help people find the “thin” places (where heaven and earth converge) in their world of dailyness
- Always pray with intentionality and expectation—participate with the Trinity in “Trinitarian Love” (Oneness of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—John 17)

### Personal Reflections and Recollections...

I'm on a roll... Today was another great day! The experience here at the monastery continues to be rich on so many levels; from the communal experience and atmosphere to the individual kairos conversations that occur every day, each moment continues to be an extension and enveloping of God's sacred Presence. I am awed. I am blessed. There is a part of me that genuinely feels at home here, but in reality I know that I am not. I know deep in my soul that God has a specific place, work, and people to be with and this is my reality. I continue to pray with laughter and tears for this place and day that I know as real in my heart to become the reality of my life. I will continue to live surrendered to His time and His way of getting there. This is the essence of trust and the truth of what Kairos is... ***"God's appointed and special time."*** Amen.

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### Monastic Notes (Pecos: Day 11—June 30<sup>th</sup> 2011)

I didn't take many notes in our lectures today. The material seems to be fine, but the information was taken directly from Barry and Connelly's book, *The Practice of Spiritual Direction*. There is nothing wrong with that, but there is no sense in me recopying something that I have printed in a book. For the most part, we continued to answer the question, "What is Spiritual Direction?" I did end up writing down a few points as I pondered spiritual direction through the lectures. I made a bulleted list that is a consolidation of the things I have heard (or put together from what I think I've heard) that have struck me as very important during the course of spiritual friendships; my points follow:

- There should be openness and ease in the conversation.
- Invite and enter into deep conversation using evocative questions
- Do not try to problem-solve
- The conversation should weighted predominately with conversation about relationship(s) with God
- The Biblical narrative should be used as an overlay to our lives whenever possible so we might bring clarity and focus to the Bible
- Confidentiality is paramount at every level. Always.

### Personal Reflections and Recollections

I had the chance to speak with Fr. Paul today, one of the monks here at Pecos, about my vision for intentional community, church, spiritual renewal center (Kairos) as originally suggested by Ezra. During our time together, I shared some of my own spiritual journey and the "why" and "where" I think the Spirit is leading me. Before ending our chat, I left him with a copy of my prospectus for the Kairos Community and made a date to talk again next week. I look forward to hearing his thoughts and learning from his wisdom.

During the course of the last week I've had the unfortunate conflict or two with differing ideas between myself and other people. These conflicts have not been earth-shattering, but they've caused me some varying degrees of discontent. I mention these moments because I've been sharing how awesome my experience has been and how wonderful the conversations have been that I've been having each and every day. I speak often about the joy of Christian community and how it should serve as an example to the greater human community-at-large. Many times in these monologues about community of mine, I am accused of being an idealistic dreamer or a person that has delusional visions of a utopian society. Maybe some of that is true, but I know that any community worth being a part of takes "work" to make it work; the sweetness doesn't come without tears. I think the point of this is that in the mix of  
Jeff Borden

developing lasting relationships there is the necessity of trust, truth, temperance, and travail; through these efforts are born the loving community I believe God desires for His people. These communities may not be “perfect,” but they are **perfected** through the love exhibited between their members. This means differences and diversity are respected where they do not interfere with the core tenets of the Gospel and core tenets are not to be confused with the doctrinal biases or traditions of men. When the Council at Jerusalem met concerning the non-Jewish believers they did not write up a lengthy charter explaining all the nuances of their doctrine. Ultimately, they accepted the Gentile believers because God had accepted them (go figure). There was evidence that the Holy Spirit was working in their (the Gentiles) lives, so the Christian Jews gave them a few simple guidelines to work with (Acts 15:28-29). They told them to abstain from eating food offered to idols, from consuming blood or the meat of strangled animals, and from sexual immorality. They said if the new believers did those things, “they would do well.” Why we don’t take a page from the “Playbook” of those who have gone before us is a mystery to me, but it seems that we could work past a lot off disagreements if we did. This doesn’t mean we might not still disagree, but these disagreements would be cause for division. This has been true for my experiences where I have disagreed with some of my brothers and sisters here at the monastery. I choose to look past some of the things we do not see eye to eye on and celebrate the things we do. It really is as simple as that. Amen.

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## Monastic Notes (Pecos: Day 12—July 1<sup>st</sup> 2011)

### Personal Reflections and Recollections:

I woke up this morning thinking about several things—the possibility of writing a book, a handful of personal relationships (some strained, some new, some friends and family with various needs) I am praying over and for, wondering what “next steps” might be for me, and curious if there are monasteries or retreat centers for sale...and pondering on how I could get the cash to purchase one if there are. Yeah, my mind is on fire it’s spinning so fast. I don’t know what all this activity in my brain is about, but I’m feeling restless and I haven’t felt restless like this in a long time. For that matter, I’m not quite sure how to interpret this new sense of restlessness. Like I said, I haven’t felt this way in a while, so I think it is worthwhile to explore as I continue to pray diligently for God’s guidance, clarity, and wisdom through it all. We’ll see what comes of it.

### A Morning Prayer:

*Let everything that has breath praise the LORD! My soul waits for the LORD, more than the watchman for the morning, more than watchmen for the morning. Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be; world without end. Amen. Glory to GOD in the highest, and on earth peace to people of good will. We praise you. We bless you. We adore you. We glorify you. We give thanks to you for your great glory. Amen.*

***“Let anyone with an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying: To everyone who conquers I will give a white stone, and on the stone is written a new name that no one knows except the one who receives it.”*** (Revelation 2:17)

So long, false self—hello self that God created. Amen.

**From Thomas Merton's *New Seeds of Contemplation*—**

*Christianity is not merely a doctrine or a system of beliefs, it is Christ living in us and uniting men to one another in His own life and unity. "I in them, and Thou, Father, in Me, that they may be perfect in One...And the glory which Thou hast given me I have given them, that they may be One as we also are One." In hoc cognoscent omnes quia mei estis discipuli, si dilectionem habueritis ad invicem. "In this shall all men know that you are my disciples—if you have love one for another."*

**Lecture Notes:**

Today we discussed St. Ignatius of Loyola. Second to Benedictine practices, Ignatian exercises are some of my most practiced disciplines (The Examen and the Prayer of Imagination aka Imaginative Prayer), so this series of lectures were of interest to me. Here follow some of the highlights from my notes for the day:

Ignatian spirituality seeks to invite people to observe God in their life. The beginning of discernment comes with practiced application and recognizing of "consolations" and "desolations" from God in our daily lives—an exercise for this "practice" is known as the Examen.

**Consolation:** is an experiential increase in faith, hope, and love

**Desolation:** is an experiential decrease in faith, hope, and love

An overview of the Ignatian Exercises:

- The exercises are grounded in the love of God (ref. Psalm 139)
- The general criteria for the candidate to assuming to participate in the exercises
  - Having a generous heart (spirit) open to God's transforming graces
  - Having a commitment to put in the effort for the duration of the exercises
  - Possibly in a place of crisis or "crossroads of life"
  - Should be familiar with and comfortable with the life of prayer
- The process of the exercises should always stress and focus on God's love
- The participant should have a realization of and take ownership of their own sin
- The exercises explore the reality of hell
- Emphasis on realizing that God still loves us in spite of our sin
- Continuous meditation upon the Kingdom of God

**\*\*My Assessment\*\*** The end goal of the exercises is to be able to recognize where you "see" God working to shape your life and then respond with obedient surrender to that work. Ultimately, this cause-effect-response leads to deep transformation (moving toward the image of Christ), relationship, and unity (Oneness—see the quote from Thomas Merton above) with the Godhead. This unity of person and purpose with the Godhead produces the fruit which brings God much glory (See Gospel of John chapters 15, 17).

**Monastic Notes (Pecos: Day 13—July 2<sup>nd</sup> 2011)**

**Lecture Notes:**

Today we covered the practice and application of my two favorite Ignatian exercises, the Examen and the Prayer of Imagination. I was delighted to hear we would be reviewing these exercises, but was disappointed the content of the lecture was more akin to a very high level review. We didn't go into detail with these exercises to the level that revealed how life-changing they can be for the person who becomes a skilled practitioner of the Examen and Imaginative Prayer. The content of my notes consists of thirteen lines... less than half a page. Sad. In fairness, I must add that my sparse note taking might be attributed to my lack of hearing anything "note" worthy. I may be the one at fault, but I will say that I was listening and paying attention for the very reason that these exercises, or practices, stand in the top-five spiritual disciple-exercises that I use in my personal rule of life. I say that to emphasize the point that my personal investment in these disciplines inspired my interest in the lectures today. Personally, I thought they merited more attention and detail.

**EXAMEN**

*There is much more that could be said about this practice, but since I didn't write down any acceptable notes on the subject, I thought I'd provide something with a little more substance from my own study and practice.*

With regard to the Examen, Ignatius himself considered it the single most important daily exercise a spiritual pilgrim could practice. The essence of the Examen is a reflection, observation, analysis, diagnosis, prognosis, and treatment. Even more simplified, this process might be considered a spiritual inventory. Ignatius describes two types of *Examen*. The first type of *Examen* will generally involve some milestone in life or big event. This event might be grand (a big job promotion, birth of a child, or other major achievement) or it could be tragic (a serious illness, death of a loved one, or other major loss). Major life events have a way of grabbing our attention and bringing focus to the things we consider that really matter in our lives. When we undergo this type of reflective accounting in our lives we ask hard questions of ourselves to determine if the things we have invested in have brought the results we have desired. When considered in the light of our spirituality and our relationship with God, these "crisis moments" can be an affective and effective means of prayer, repentance, and move toward Christ-like maturity. This type of Examen is about looking at the overall arc of our life. The second type of Examen is more specific in its approach as it reflects primarily on the past day.

While I have practiced both aspects of the Examen, this second style is what has become integrated in living every day of my life. I call it living the "i" crucified life...submitting always and continuously to the transformative ways of the indwelling Holy Spirit who desires that we be completely transformed into the image of Christ (Ephesians 4:13). Basically, there are five moments through this second style of the Examen. **The first step** is to ask God for wisdom, understanding, and insight to our day. This requires intentional time and focus. We believe that God is always present with us, always active in our day with us, and as such He will reveal to us where His actions were specifically directed toward our transformation. **Step one** is to acknowledge these truths and ask for God's assistance in our recollection and review. **The second step** is to be grateful for God's revelation and good gifts of grace and love to us through our day. God's intentions are only good for us regardless of how we might perceive them or others might perceive them. God has one primary desire; this desire is that we, His children, would be wholly reconciled and full restored to the image in which we were first created...**His image**, which is the image of Jesus Christ. No matter what the involvement of God is in our life, everything is orchestrated to bring us to this consummation. As such, "all things work to the good..." (Romans 8:28). Consequently, it is only natural that we would give God thanks for all the "good" things He has given us. I also like to consider the exhortation of the Apostle Paul in his letter to the Philippians 4:8-9 during this time. **Step three** gives



attention to our feelings throughout the day. Was there a time I was angry? Happy? Frustrated? Depressed? or otherwise? These feelings are not definitive ways of determining the state of our soul, but they can be used as diagnostic guidelines. **Step four** moves toward examining specific feelings, perhaps only one or two (if they are closely related). For instance, if I were angry and upset during my day, I might begin a series of questions to get to the root of that anger; “Why was I angry?” “Was I angry at someone?” “Was my anger over being offended?” “Why was I offended?” Ultimately, I might discover there were issues of pride or lack of confidence in my abilities that led to my anger. God may be revealing areas of my soul that need to go “in for spiritual surgery and repair.” This is a key part of the Examen process and no feelings should be censored or ignored. In this step, we trust God to reveal and expose what He wants us to know and work on in our spiritual life as we continue the journey to Christ-like transformation. The final steps begin with **step five** and acknowledging what God has revealed to us about our soul. Once we acknowledge God’s activity in our lives, we look forward to what He might be asking of us. I realized my example in steps three-four was corrective in nature, but this process might also be God’s affirmation of new habits that are being nurtured and revealed as Christ-like developments in our life too. This is important to remember. So, step five, acknowledges the work God is revealing to us as we look forward to the next day and how we will implement God’s will affecting the choices we make as we walk with Him in the day(s) that lie ahead. Finally, **step six** will close the Examen with intentional prayer acknowledging God’s work and our surrender to His will...asking for the strength and guidance of the empowering Spirit through the gift of the reconciling Son. A great prayer for this closing acknowledgment is the Lord’s Prayer or “Our Father.”

There is more that can be said about the Examen, but this is a good start. I can say the integration of the Examen with regular practice of *Lectio Divina* and the Prayer of Imagination (you can learn more about [Imaginative Prayer](#) here) have been absolutely life-changing for me...in the best of ways.

### **Personal Reflections and Recollections:**

I had a meeting with my spiritual director, Ezra, today and talked at length about some of my feelings of discomfort and conflict I’ve had in a couple of the relationships since coming to the monastery. He was very affirming to me and reminded me that the discomfort is a good tool to use toward focus on what God is doing and speaking to me through these very relationships (see the Examen workout above for more on this). It was a good reminder and something that I am familiar with. I can recognize how quickly we can become sidetracked in these life conflicts; our first response is almost always one of defense and “self”-preservation. It is for this reason that exercises and tools like the Prayer of Examen and having a trusted spiritual director are so helpful in our development as Christ-formed people of God.

The days seem to be really full this past week. I am looking forward to tomorrow (Sabbath-Sunday) for a day of decompression. I am enjoying the many conversations that I am having with folks although I have a sense or some reasonable realization that I’m an odd dude. I find myself often feeling as though I am standing at the outer edges of my faith...where humanity actually touches the reality of GOD. I was consoled after reading Thomas Merton’s thoughts on Jesus’ prayer from the Gospel of John chapter seventeen (quoted here). Merton seems to think in similar terms as I do. I believe the prayer of Jesus invites us to truly enter the relationship that is the Trinity. The illustration of the Branch and vine (John 15) gives support for this too, I believe. St Athanasius speaks to this end as well in his writings as do many others including my own tradition of Wesleyan Holiness and their view on sanctification, so I know I am not alone. I know this is what God intends for His people; the progression from unity-union with the Trinity should be the drawing of one man to another in real (1 Corinthians 13) fellowship of love. I have no intention of giving up on my pursuit of this understanding and belief.

My reading continues to be an encouragement to me. Most recently, Thomas Merton and Thomas Keating are providing me with language that describes some of my experiences through the past few years in the course of my spiritual journey. Although many of my experiences and exercises have been solitary in nature, I recognize the process both authors speak of in their writings as being experienced in my own process and progress. To date, I haven't found too many people that I can talk to personally who understand or identify with my experiences...this has been frustrating and part of the reason I feel like an "oddball" at times. I've found comfort in the experiences and writings of these men who have journeyed a similar path. So, I tell myself; "Journey on in Jesus, Jeff, Journey on..." Hallelujah!

**Prayer to end my day:**

*Oh LORD, You are amazing! You are a patient Teacher and wonderful Savior-Friend. I pray that You continue to do Your work in me as You reveal Yourself more completely in my life. I love You and freely offer all that I am to You. Have Your way in my life and with my life. To You be all the glory and praise for ever and ever. Amen.*

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**Monastic Notes (Pecos: Day 14—July 3<sup>rd</sup> 2011)**

**Sunday-Sabbath**

**Personal Reflections and Recollections:**

I've been here for two weeks now and I've really taken notice of something... The people that pass through this monastery are interesting and diverse. There seem to be people from every walk and season of life passing through here. I suppose this represents a reasonable cross-section of the family of God, but it has not been my personal experience in the churches I have attended most of my life. There just hasn't been the diversity that I've witnessed since arriving here. Denominational diversity is all over the map; there are Anglican, Lutheran, Episcopalian, Roman Catholic, Baptist, Brethren, Reformed Church of America, Methodist, Free Methodist, Protestant Non-Denominational, Jewish, Charismatic Pentecostal, and others I might not know by name. Ethnic and Cultural diversity is perhaps even more broad; there is representation from the Philippines, Korea, Singapore, Canada, Poland, United Kingdom, and all points of the United States... there are male, female, old, and young. Occupational diversity exists here as well... there are professors, a lawyer, artists, chefs, writer-authors, musicians, gardeners, nurses, a dentist, a midwife, housewives, grandparents, pastors, filmmakers, photographers, and more! So much diversity... there is just an incredibly beautiful mix-up of souls that are here. I'm pretty sure the New Heaven's and Earth will be even more diverse... I'm grateful for the glimpse I've been given during my short time here at the monastery.

Tonight we were treated to an especially beautiful gift. As I mentioned, there has been a constant coming and going of people here. A musician found his way to this oasis in the high desert a couple of days ago and tonight he treated us to a glorious classical guitar concert. He played for over an hour and a half as we soaked up his beautiful music. His playing was inspired and it was an awesome privilege to watch him as his soul danced with joy expressed by the notes played with his fingers and heard by our ears.

Later, I shared an excerpt from Merton's *New Seeds* with Laurie. This excerpt is about "entering the silence of God." It stirred some great conversation between us and we spent some time praying about it together. We asked God to help us and give us strength to enter the places that God desires to meet us when we are reluctant to go to those places. We realized there are uncomfortable places, circumstances, and situations that reveal the areas we are least willing to surrender to God and want to be in complete submission to Him. It is our prayer that we would, neither of us, hold anything back from our Heavenly Father who wants to heal and restore our true self.

I continue to pray for direction and clarity of understanding for our "next steps." I am content to be patient, but voice out loud that I desire to serve God in any capacity that He leads us...wherever, whenever, whatever He desires. We are His. Totally. I am sensing that our "Season of Waiting" is drawing to a close. Speak to us, I pray, O Lord, and make known to us your plans. Amen.

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### Monastic Notes (Pecos: Days 15-17—July 4<sup>th</sup> thru 6<sup>th</sup> 2011)

Entering into the third week of the School for Spiritual Direction we were treated to a series of lectures and workshops with Kenny Mirman who shared with us his spiritual journey and writing from our *LifeScripts*. This series of talks was inspirational in a very big way for me. I have been writing and journaling about my spiritual journey for over eight years now. Something during Kenny's talks helped to "uncork" some thoughts that turned into works of prose that shared in some earlier blog posts. The pieces that were inspired from the LifeScripts lectures follow:

- Breadcrumbs
- Clarity Past Prime
- The One Thing You Lack
- Celebrating My True Self
- Things I Love

I took no lecture notes during Kenny's sessions as he provided handouts. The work we did in the workshops is reflected in the links and prose as listed above. Following the LifeScripts Lectures we were given a day off to observe in silence and solitude. Before entering into this time of quiet listening, some of us shared in a ritual ceremony with Kenny to mark the end of our lectures and the beginning of living our "God-dreams." Kenny had asked us to write out the dreams that God had inspired in us as we had journeyed inward and sought Divine direction during those days. During the ceremony we read our dreams and planted them in the earth under an apple tree. Our symbolic planting of our dreams would become the nurturing elements of the apple tree as it grows...so will our dreams... as the tree bears fruit, so will the dreams God has planted in each of us...bear fruit for His glory. Amen. I am hopeful to one day return to the monastery and partake of the fruit of this apple tree as I share with the members of the community the fruit that God has bore in my life from the dreams planted during my time at SSD in Pecos.

The paper I planted and the words to my dream follow:

*My authentic self wants to live in unbroken communion with the Triune God. My authentic self desires to follow Jesus in the same manner that He lived His life.*

*My authentic self desires to do the things and say the things I see my heavenly Father do and say. I desire to lay aside myself, so the Spirit of the Living God might live wholly and fully within me.*

*I desire to realize on this side of eternity to see all the false “selves” that I have created for me to be put to death... I wish the same for the false “selves” I have tried to live into that others have created for me... This way, only the Christ-formed-in-me self—the one predestined before the creation of the world will live.*

*I desire to be a vessel of hope and healing, a person who can be a place of refuge and reconciliation to the most destitute and broken of peoples.*

*My true self desires to be hospitable, charitable, benevolent...and not thinking about my own needs over the needs of others.*

*My authentic and true self desires to be broken as Christ was broken in order that my brokenness might also bring life to people who have been placed in my circles of influence...and then multiplied through those who were touched and changed, propagating fruit of life through many generations.*

*My authentic self wants to fully realize what it means to be chosen by Christ and live out the command to bear much fruit—fruit that will last...last for the kingdom of God and to His glory, the glory of God our Holy Father, the Holy Son and Savior Jesus, and our Comforter-Guide Holy Spirit. Amen.*

It was an inspiring and meaningful ceremony. I will remember it always.

#### **Personal Reflections and Recollections:**

I feel as though I might be on the cusp of a turning point. I came to the monastery hoping to discern “next steps” for my life and the ministry for Laurie and I. I sense that some of those steps are becoming clearer. I will slowly press into these next steps as God allows and directs. It will be important for me to keep my ears and heart open to the Voice of God and the voice of others He will speak through as we navigate the coming weeks and months.

I enjoy having the sessions with my spiritual director, Ezra, he has been extremely helpful in my working through what God might be speaking and directing for the next phase of life for my family. I believe that as we put all of our trust and hope in God and concentrate all our efforts on living wholly for Him, the desires and motivations that “bubble up” from our hearts are the desires that He has planted in us to bring glory to Himself and fulfillment in life to us (Ephesians 2:10). Talking openly and honestly with someone about these unctions and urgings helps to discern the direction of God in our lives. I am grateful to have people in my life who I can share this season with.

#### **My Poetry During the LifeScripts Workshops—**

##### **Breadcrumbs ©**

(A Eucharistic Reflection)

*He said to me before I was; “Lo, I will never leave you.” It took me a lifetime to realize **He** was always there...marking a trail for me to find my way home.*

*I found **The Path** marked with breadcrumbs that were my memories. As I traveled backward through time, healing my present and making a way for my future, I relied upon the breadcrumbs **He** left for me to help me find my way and to physically sustain me. Moment by moment, little by little, I gained strength and renewed confidence... The more breadcrumbs I ate, the more strength I gained and the closer I moved to the **Light**.*

*Finally, one day I found myself immersed in and flooded with **Light**. My meal was complete and my lostness a thing of my past. Standing before me now was the great **Trailmaker**. On **Him** He wore a sash that had written upon it **Bread of Life**.*

*Suddenly the words of **The Book** made sense to me. In it He had said that **He** was the Bread of Life... **He** had said unless you eat my flesh and drink my blood, you will never know life. It was at that moment I knew—the breadcrumbs I had found in the memories of my life had been **Him**.*

*Indeed, **He** had never left me: **He** had been with me always. I had found the way to life by following the path—the trail of breadcrumbs, consuming the life of **Himself He** had left for me. Out of the dark of lostness I found the Light of Truth that brought me life—**Breadcrumbs** of saving grace.*

Jeff Borden

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Written at the Pecos Benedictine Monastery

### **Clarity Past Prime—Peace in Epiphany ©**

On the day I was ready to learn, ready to finally listen, I had already reached my prime. Bridges burned and hearts broken in my wake, I wore my regret like tattoos in full sleeve for everyone to see. I wondered, was my arrival at clarity poetic justice or existential irony? Here I stood, broken by the club of clarity...shattered upon the anvil of life's truths realizing the wounds I bore, inflicted by others, and wounds I had inflicted upon them might never be healed.

Where do I go? What do I do?

In the silence I cried as hurt poured out in rivers with my tears from places deep within my soul. I cried until my sobs turned to silence and in the cacophony of quiet I heard His Voice; *"Come to Me."*

My soul walked toward the Voice and He shared with me His water...knowing my soul was parched. He invited me to drink deeply and gave permission to take with me all the water I could carry. At that moment there was a refreshed sense of even more clarity; I realized my nakedness and I felt no shame. Seemingly unaware, I had discarded my garments of guilt and cast off my robe of regret as they stood now in a mound gathered at my feet. Relieved of my shame and free of my past, I started to gather His life-giving water... but was soon shocked with panic as these precious rivulets of healing slowly seeped from between my fingers, falling from my hands, to soak into the ground. A feeling of frustration fell upon me almost as oppressive as the shame that had so recently been lifted. As I looked up from the soaking ground, I caught the eyes of my Comforter. He looked at me with knowing in His eyes... He felt my frustration, understanding my weakness, and conveyed His reassurance to me as I stood before Him empty-handed, naked, and broken.

Looking deep within me, the Healer asked; "Why are you naked?" I answered; "My Lord, the wounds of my sins are many and deep. I could not bear wearing them any longer, so I removed them and cast them aside." He answered me saying, "My son, I dry the waters of the oceans, I bring rivers to the desert, and it is I who turn ashes to beauty." All this He said as we both looked upon the garments of my past that I had discarded into the heap on the ground.

I stood, looking around, trying to make sense of the thoughts swirling in my mind. I was free in my nakedness. I felt no shame in His Presence, but standing there I was slowly beginning to understand what He was making known to me with His not-words-words. And then...epiphany.

I realized my garments of shame were vessels of redemption in themselves. I was not able to carry His healing, living, water in my hands, but if I put on the clothes of my dread that had once held me in bondage they could be used to become the very vessels I would use to carry His healing water back to others! What had been used to accuse me before could now be proclamations of freedom!

Quickly, I put on my old garments...the dust of shame and regret still lingering on them; I put them on, every one. I jumped in fully clothed into the pool of water that was His redemption, His reconciliation, His restoration, and His Love. The waters of God consumed me—soaking into the sins and scars of my past. In an instant I was full; dripping to excess...no more was there dust of shame, no more reek of regret. My clothes were cleansed as was I. I stood by the pool of glory and started to walk, every step that I took leaving a puddle of His Passion in my footprints. And, Now I understood anew; There was clarity past prime and peace in my epiphany walking in newness with Him.

### **This One Thing That You Lack ©**

Why couldn't I follow Him?

Why couldn't I experience the fullness, the joy, and the peace that the words in His book promised? I had tried so many times all to no avail. I had failed my following efforts with each outing and with every endeavor... and still, I could not understand from my life where I had gone so very, very wrong.

It seems as if I have started to follow and then quit following for what must be countless times. Each time I had quit though, I was drawn back again for one more try... like moth to flame for one more terrifying and frustrating "begin-it-again" and "give-it-a-go." One. More. Time... just one. More. Time.

The last time, frustrated, downcast, and exasperated, I found the Teacher. I asked Him; "Master, what does it really take to follow you?" He looked at me with understanding and compassion leaking from His eyes and said; "This one thing you lack." As His voice trailed off into the silence a word appeared in the blank He had left in my mind... He had said not a word, but my head and heart were ringing with a ten thousand decibel explosion of the **one thing** and word I lacked—**TRUST**.

I didn't fully trust Him—I never had. I needed safety from a net of my own making. I needed a storehouse of my own provision. I needed the failsafe of providing for the protection of my family. Could I trust this God? Could I put the most important pieces of my life wholly and completely into His hands? Suddenly I realized... I would only get the answer to this question when I finally determined to obtain the one thing I lacked: **Trusting Him**.

Jeff Borden

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Written at the Pecos Benedictine Monastery

### **Realizing and Celebrating My True Self ©**

It is about Kairos; God's "special" and appointed time. It is about the life He has given to me and the destiny of my true self converging with the God who has created me.

I am a lover of all things with a purpose to express that love in tangible ways. I am an instrument of redemption, a life-ring of reconciliation, a living apothecary of restoration—a vessel overflowing with hope, promise, and the lived reality of life-everlasting.

Jeff Borden

<http://www.icrucified.com>

I am a song that sings praises to God with every second of every day...my breath, inhaling and exhaling, harmonies with a heart that beats for the will and purpose of my glorious Creator-Savior Jesus. Even my dreams are smudged with the fingerprints of the great God and Holy Spirit who guides and comforts me.

I am a tablet with words of grace chiseled into my soul—none of life's erosive elements can fade the promise and realization of God's love that dwells within me.

I am a temple of the Most High God. The Holy Spirit has claimed my soul, His banner pierced and planted deep into the soil of my heart...it flies unceasingly over all my life as I walk in bold surrender to my conquering King.

May all my praise and all my life be unto the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit who live in oneness and unity forever—thanks be to the Living God, the Defeater of Sin and Death, to the One whom I belong as an eternal child of His unfathomable grace. Amen.

Jeff Borden

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Written at the Pecos Benedictine Monastery

### Things I Love ©

I love the enormous and infinite depth of the clear night sky viewed from the deck of a ship in the middle of the ocean. I love pondering the mysteries held within the breadth, depth, and width of God's universe. I love taking huge gulping breaths of air as I consider the miracle by which God creates, recycles oxygen through His process of photosynthesis. I love knowing that every drop of water I drink, bathe in, or use otherwise has been resident on earth since it was first created by God. I love when my thirst has been quenched then remembering these things and realizing I have drunk from the well of the Ancient of Days.

I love my wife and I love how she loves me—even loves me with all my frailty and weaknesses...even loves me with the gore of all my imperfections. I love seeing the love of my wife and my love for her in the visible presence and magnificent wonder that are our sons. I dearly love witnessing the beauty of our individual imperfections as they become perfected in the persons that are our children. Surely, this is evidence proving our negatives can become positives.

I love cogitating and ruminating all these things and coming to an awareness, realizing, how great my love is for my Creator-God. I love walking "hand-in-hand" with Jesus as He reveals the *mysteries and secrets of the Kingdom of God* to me. I love that all the things I love are some of those secrets of His being revealed to me.

Jeff Borden

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Written at the Pecos Benedictine Monastery

**Monastic Notes (Pecos: Day 18—July 7<sup>th</sup> 2011)**

*This is a difficult post for me to write because it recalls one of the most difficult days I had during my stay at the monastery. I think we all like to present our best face when in the company of people and my blog is no different in that desire to present “my best self.” This is what makes this post difficult. It is an embarrassing confession of sorts, but I have tried to be faithful over the years to be as authentic and transparent with my writing on the icrucified blog (when it did not impugn the rights or privacy of someone else).*

**Personal Reflections and Recollections:**

Today we had a series of lectures concerning the “Gifts and Fruits of the Holy Spirit.” These talks were troubling for me. My understanding, teaching, and general Holy Spirit Doctrine didn’t fully align with the teaching I received today. After a little research and study, I found the teaching predominately in alignment with the Catechism of the Catholic Church and I am at a Benedictine Monastery, so that should not come as a surprise to me. Nonetheless, I didn’t connect with the teaching presented to me today. I have been disturbed. I think one of the bigger disruptions to my soul is the realization that I shouldn’t feel, or don’t want to feel, the discomfort I experienced today. What to do? What to do?

I’ve spent quite a bit of time praying about this “discomfort” and was reminded of a quote I had copied into my journal before I leaving for the School of Spiritual Direction. The quote, from St. Augustine, follows:

***“God is not what you imagine or what you think you understand. If you understand, you have failed.”***

Hmmm... Interesting reminder for such a time as this, considering the Holy Spirit is one of the Persons of the Triune Godhead. What this means to me is this; my understanding of God is incomplete. My understanding of God is lacking and however I might teach someone about God is most likely flawed in some ways too. This doesn’t mean I don’t try my best to give accurate representation of God, studying Scripture, respecting tradition, and sharing from personal experience, but no matter how accurate I follow those rules my interpretation and presentation of God is still going to be lacking and ultimately flawed. ***“If I think I fully understand, I have failed in understanding at all...”*** There was another reminder that came to me during this time of prayer and contrition... As I was agitated by this presentation of Doctrine about the Holy Spirit, I was also reminded of a quote from the book I am currently reading *News Seeds of Contemplation* by Thomas Merton. He writes; ***“If you love peace, then hate injustice, hate tyranny, hate greed—but hate those things in yourself, not in another.”*** Wow. My peace had been disturbed...I was “angry and hating” the one who had disturbed me. Merton calls me to examine these disruptions within me—spiritual pride, arrogance in my own knowledge, presumptuousness, and most likely a host of other deadly sins. This reminder seemed the most helpful of all in overcoming my issues with our lectures today. The lessons about (and from) the Holy Spirit were personal and very enlightening for me in a very real and humbling...and disturbing way today.

God was not finished with my “schooling” today. Following our gathering this evening for Vespers prayers, I was offered another slice of Humble Pie (my second for the day). As we were exiting the chapel, one of the brother monks tapped me on the shoulder to have a word with me. I was pulled to the side of the corridor and the dear brother asked me to “sing” at a lower volume because my voice was over powering the chant of the choir during our praying the Psalms. I felt as though I had been punched in the gut and for a brief moment thought I was going to be sick. I felt a rise of a thousand emotions: anger, defensiveness, offense, embarrassment, aggression, competitiveness, bitterness, and many, many more things stirred within me. I nodded with what must have looked like an ashen-faced, blank-gazed, surrender, but I was in total shock as I walked back to my room instead of proceeding on to the evening meal. By the time I reached my room, I was close to tears; I sat on the edge of my bed and cradled my head in my hands.



I couldn't understand why this older brother monk was feeling so hostile to me. For the past two weeks I had thought I was catching on to the rhythm and the melody of our chants during our fixed hours of prayer. I had even had several people tell me, "*Jeff, you're doing great...you sing so well.*" Perhaps this was the very problem... Since I was complimented, I would sing and chant as if I were leading...I mean, shouldn't everyone be inspired by how I praise and pray to God? or is it more accurate to say "praise Jeff." Ouch. Sitting here on the edge of my bed, feelings crushed, emotionally bruised, and on the verge of deep offense, I remembered several things from my study of Benedicts Rule. One of the predominant aspects of the Rule is teaching on the growth and maturity in the ways of humility. Other aspects of the Rule include obedience to authority and the purging of rebelliousness and stubbornness from our soul. I realized if I were truly living in Benedictine community I would be bound by these vows and would be sworn to live in accordance with the discipline of learning and acquiring these virtues. I would be bound to learning patience, obedience, submission to authority, and humility through living in this community. I tried to will myself and my heart to this "mean old" brother's wisdom and helpful direction...it wasn't working so well.

I was at a crossroads. I could choose to remain offended and push through it all and develop a "soul scar" from the cancer of my unrepented attitude or I could repent in full of my attitude and prayerfully ask God for complete cleansing and healing. I chose the latter and spent some time acknowledging my issues, taking responsibility and ownership of my attitude toward everything that had transpired for the entire day. I asked God for healing and forgiveness and then entered into a time of centering prayer. I rested in union with God for about twenty minutes or so and when I completed this time of prayer I felt completely purged of my harsh and hurt feelings. I realized that God had been in the words of this dear brother monk and there was nothing else in them but God. I felt grateful, thankful, and exceedingly blessed for the graces of God through this day. The way God speaks to me and directs me is beyond my comprehension. I know, I will never be the same for the lessons learned today, and this is in a good way that I'll never be the same.

I thank You, God, I praise You, Lord Jesus, for the promise and reality of Your ever-present Divine Presence in the Person of Your Holy Spirit. Thank You, Almighty God. Amen.

The perfect ending for this day could not have been planned any better. The School convened in the library for a special time of praise, prayer, and worship with the Holy Spirit. I had been asked to lead some worship songs before we invited people to receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit—it was a wonderful time and beautiful experience tonight. There was much prayer, praise, and adoration given to God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Many people were prayed for and prayed over as the Spirit led us all...some were filled with the Spirit of God and others were re-filled with the blessings and the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Personally, I felt as though I received double and triple blessings considering the work that God had been active in my life throughout the day. Ending the day with this service and this sweet outpouring of God's Spirit could not have been any better or more affirming for me as a testimony to God's love and grace.

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**Monastic Notes (Pecos: Days 19-20—July 8<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> 2011)**

**Personal Reflections and Recollections:**

**July 8:** —Today was full of great conversations... I had the opportunity to follow up with Father Paul, one of the brother monks here at Pecos Monastery, about my vision for a Church Community. He told me he **“read every word”** and from the looks of the copy I gave him he had; there were highlights, underlines, and margin notes on almost every page. It was a blessing to me that he would take the time to read it in the first place, but to make time to really study and then provide me critique and insight over each page was very meaningful to me. All throughout our conversation this afternoon he continued to affirm me with **“yep’s”** and **“you’re right’s.”** I don’t think I could have come away any more encouraged than what I was at this point. Besides the affirmation and encouragement behind the overall vision for the Kairos Community he also provided me with some direction that I intend to follow up on when I return home. In all, the time with Father Paul was a great privilege and I was honored to be gifted with his time and wisdom.

Following my time with Fr. Paul, I met with my spiritual director, Ezra. He had suggested that I speak with Fr. Paul in the first place. I spent some time talking with him about my follow up visit with Fr. Paul, but spent more time discussing the significance of my experience in the previous day (see here). It was a good time of confession for me and a well received blessing to be able to pray with someone and celebrate God’s work in my life.

**July 9:** —For the past couple days we have been discussing the healing and nurture of the **Inner Child**. While I did not personally experience a deep need for “inner child” ministry, I found value in the experience and am grateful to learn a needful toolset for this type and form of ministry. I don’t think the style of teaching and this particular ministry “tool set” would appeal to a large demographic of the male gender, but there was solid reasoning behind the methodology and the material presented that will be useful to me in my future ministry I am sure. I want to be especially sensitive to being close-minded to anything that does might not specifically apply to or resonate with me.

Near the end of these **Healing of the Inner Child** sessions our lecturer had a special surprise for us. There was a beautifully wrapped package (present) on the table next to the lectern. She unwrapped the package in front of the class and showed us a framed mirror with an etching of an “image of Jesus” in it. After showing the mirror to the class, she carried it to each student individually stopping to share a prophetic prayer over each of us. Her word to me follows:

***“Jeff, continue to walk with me in confidence and in love as you become all that I have called you to be.”***

**“...in confidence and in love.”** These words stick out to me particularly. It means to me that faith tempered and drenched in the love of god (AGAPE) are the words of encouragement to me from Jesus. Faith and Love...continue to follow with those as my pillars, as I follow Jesus. This is the way to fulfill the passion within me of becoming what HE wants me to be. **Continue to walk with me.** ME, Jesus, in confidence...**TRUST-FAITH**, and in love. I will, God empowering me, by HIS Holy Spirit, I will do this. Amen. Thank You, Jesus. Thank You, Theresa. Thank You, Pecos Monastery.

This afternoon we had the opportunity to have “items” blessed by one of the priests here. Since being here I had purchased a couple reminders of my stay here at the monastery. I purchased a Medal of St. Benedict as well as a small bronze cross with the words “I Am Always With You” inscribed on it. I wanted to have these items blessed along with a set of prayer beads I had fashioned for myself before coming to Pecos, New Mexico. I gathered up my items and set out to meet with Father Sam. It was a joy to listen to Fr. Sam tell about us his journey with Jesus. He is in his “eighties” and was celebrating sixty years in profession of vows (wow...60 years of being a monk). He prayed a blessing of St. Benedict over our medals and a prayer of blessings for things of special meaning over my prayer beads meant to help my focus

and meditations upon God when praying with the beads. He finished the blessing with an anointing and sprinkling of Holy Water and touching each item blessed with a Holy Relic. This relic was a special case in the shape of a cross which, when opened, revealed an ornate cross inside with a tiny splinter said to have been from the cross of our Savior, Jesus. I found this a pretty mind-blowing experience and difficult to wrap my mind around... but anyone is free to believe whatever they choose. I say I am blessed for the opportunity of a lifetime to receive a wonderful blessing from a beautiful saint. Thank you, Father Sam.

I closed out a wonderful couple of days with some very special and private prayer-time in my room this evening. While I was praying, I was doodling and drawing in my journal; this is something I do to keep distractions from my prayer. I will draw things that help my focus on Christ: crosses, ichthus fish, and other iconic symbols of Christian faith. While I was praying and worshiping...drawing a random scene, I was thanking Jesus for the journey He has shared with me over the years. And then, clear as a bell, I heard a Voice in my soul say; "You ain't seen nothing yet." Wow. Praise Him! Amen.

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### Monastic Notes (Pecos: Day 21—July 10<sup>th</sup> 2011)

#### Sunday Sabbath:

Today was scheduled as day of silence and solitude or we could use the day as free time for sightseeing and field trips. I chose to spend the day cloistered in my room for prayer, Bible reading, and hearing from God. I spent most of the day and into the late afternoon reading, praying, listening... and writing out the "words" that were "speaking" to me. The following Scripture passages and prayers are what were recorded in my journal.

*Hallelujah! How good it is to sing praises to our God! How pleasant it is to honor Him with praise! Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.*

*He is not impressed by the might of a horse; He has no pleasure in the strength of a man; But the LORD has pleasure in those who fear Him, in those who await His gracious favor (Psalm 147:11-12).*

*Thus says the LORD: "But this is the man to whom I will look, he that is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word" (Isaiah 66:2).*

*Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy Name; thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And, lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil; for thine is the kingdom, the power, the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.*

***Almighty God, the fountain of all wisdom, who knowest our necessities before we ask and our ignorance in asking: Have compassion, we beseech thee, upon our infirmities, and those things which for our unworthiness we dare not, and for our blindness we cannot ask, mercifully give us for the worthiness of thy Son Jesus Christ our LORD; who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.***

*Teach me your way, O LORD, and I will walk in Your truth; knit my heart to You that I may fear Your Name. I will thank You, O LORD my GOD, with all my heart, and glorify Your Name for evermore. For great is Your love toward me; You have delivered me from the nethermost pit. (Psalm 86:11-13)*

*I give You thanks, O LORD, with all my whole heart; before the gods I sing Your praises; I bow down toward Your holy temple and give thanks for Your Name, for Your steadfast love and Your faithfulness; for You have exalted Your Name and Your word above everything. On the day I called, You answered me, You increased my strength of soul. Though I walk in the midst of trouble, You preserve me against the wrath of my enemies; You stretch out Your hand, and Your right hand delivers me. The LORD will fulfill His purpose for me; Your steadfast love, O LORD, endures forever. (Psalm 138:1-3, 7, 8).*

**ME = Delighted and overjoyed – God knows me. ☺**

*O LORD, You have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I rise up; You discern my thoughts from far away. You search out my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways. Even before a word is on my tongue, O LORD, You know it completely. You hem me in, behind and before, and lay Your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is so high that I cannot attain it. Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your Presence? (No matter where I am or where I go it is not too far from You) Your right hand shall hold me fast; even there Your hand will lead me. **In Your book were written all the days that were formed for me, when none of them as yet existed.** Search me, O GOD, and know my heart; test me and know my thoughts. See if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. (Psalm 139: 1-7, 10, 16, 23, 24).*

**Genesis 28:14, 18, 24-25** *Know that I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you. (I love this...)*

**Romans 8:15** *All who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. I consider that the sufferings of the present time are not worth comparing when I consider what awaits us. For in hope we were saved... But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it in patience. **“...we wait for it in patience”***

**The “spiritual life” is then the perfectly balanced life in which the body with its passions and instincts, the mind with its reasoning and its obedience to principle and the spirit with its passive illumination by the light and love of God form one complete man who is in God and with God and from God and for God. One man in whom God is all in all. One man in whom God carries out His own will without obstacle. –Thomas Merton; *New Seeds of Contemplation***

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## Monastic Notes (Pecos: Day 22—July 11<sup>th</sup> 2011)

### Personal Reflections and Recollections:

This begins the final week of the School for Spiritual Direction. In many ways it seems hard to believe it has gone so quickly, hard to believe even that three weeks has passed already. On the other hand, it seems much longer than three weeks have passed. I’m sure it will take more than a few weeks for me to fully decompress and begin to realize the fruits born from this experience.

I continue to wonder in semi-patient curiosity what God has in store for Laurie and I in the way of future ministry. I am positive it is something that will utilize the collective gifts and experience of the both of us, but I can see no clear direction for the moment. This fact alone tells me that it will be by the hand of God...where we go and what we do. I pray for this day to come without ceasing.

***“O LORD, Open my lips, and my mouth shall proclaim your praise.”***

**“Let anyone with ears to hear listen!” “To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside, everything comes in parables; in order that—“they may indeed look, but not perceive, and may indeed listen but not understand, so that they may not turn again and be forgiven.”” (Luke 4:9-12)**

The Luke passage represents a terrifyingly sad commentary on the condition of the hardened human heart. I don't believe much has changed since the time these words were written. Jesus said there would not be many who follow the **narrow path**...and there appears to be few also who have **ears to hear**.

#### **Feast of Benedict:**

Today was the Feast of Benedict. The day itself was rather laid back. We had lectures, but they consisted primarily of our going over MBTI results (MBTI: Meyers-Briggs Trend Indicator). For what it's worth, I was trended as an **I N T J** (Introverted-iNtuitive-Thinking-Judging). The trend more or less means that my personality style is “introverted intuition” with “extraverted thinking” or something close to that.

Our evening meal was “benedictilicious” with steak, shrimp scampi, baked potatoes, steamed asparagus, and several awesome side salads. Happy St. Benedict's Day!

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### **Monastic Notes (Pecos: Day 23—July 12<sup>th</sup> 2011)**

#### **Lectures:**

Today's lectures were fabulous! I cannot begin to tell how wonderfully rich the teaching today was. I can only hope that my notes were sufficient to help jar my memory to help me remember the wisdom shared with us today from Father William Meninger. Fortunately, I had the opportunity to converse with Fr. Meninger after our lectures and discover the majority of the teaching material today can be found in two of his books (*The Loving Search for God* and *1012 Monastery Road*), both of which I purchased.

The main subject of the lectures for today and tomorrow is on the **Stages of Spiritual Development**. The flow of the teaching was laser sharp and focused almost exclusively on “prayer” as the means of relationship with God. My understanding was that prayer, the engagement of and fluidity of it is the substance of all spiritual development as it relates to God. Others in the class may not have heard this...but it was my interpretation of the lecture. I'll share my notes and you may judge for yourself.

- Every journey must have a destination point
- The destination point of the spiritual journey is God
- The end of the journey (the destination point) determines the nature of the Journey

- The end of the spiritual journey is God and it requires everything in us and of us. Likewise, this journey can only be started by invitation...
- The greatest gift God gives us is desire for Himself
- The goal of prayer is union with God

***“The Journey is about our hearts finding rest in God.”*** –Fr. William Meninger

***“Our hearts are restless until they find rest in you (God)”*** –St. Augustine

Fr. Meninger described the Contemplative experience (as it is understood in the Divinely supernatural sense) as follows:

1. Begins with awe
2. Is fueled by wonder
3. Renders the seeker speechless
4. The experience tastes for the first time real love (Agape)
5. Real love (Agape) unites the seeker with the created and Uncreated (God)
6. Real love (Agape) operating in the seeker-saint is catalyst for reconciliation and restoration of all things
7. The full unifying power of Divine love flows seamlessly from God through saint-child of God to all things

We talked at length about the nature(s) of prayer (**Kataphatic**: *according to form; via positive* and **Apophatic**: *without form; via negative*). Kataphatic (aka Cataphatic) prayer will never bring us completely to God. It will point us to God, and is necessary for our spiritual development, but it will never bring us to Him. The prayer that points to God is not God. Prayer that uses form (words, objects, music, song, etc.) is all limited by our own intellect. You can only know God by “not knowing.” Here we discussed *The Cloud of Unknowing* and John of the Cross and the teaching embraced by those works that God can only be known through the release of our personal metaphors—God is infinite truth and infinite love, and this cannot be described, explained, or contained by any human description or terms. You cannot “know” God intellectually; although we use our intellect to “seek” God. What the mind cannot comprehend...the heart is capable of and will embrace. Where Kataphatic prayer falls short of being able to completely embracing God (because the intellect cannot fully comprehend), Apophatic prayer engages the will and attempts to embrace God “leaping” directly to His Presence in faith. The will does not have to comprehend God fully in order to embrace Him fully. Our intellect is drawn to truth. In as much as you can understand something, you can accept it... Our will (or heart), on the other hand, desires love—true love—God love (Agape). This is how God created us. When our will (heart) is confronted with love—even if that love is Infinite—the heart (will) can embrace it.

Fr. Meninger closed out our lecture today with (what I thought was) a beautifully explained progression of prayer as a relationship. He described it in the form of four levels and used a metaphor (John and Mary—meeting, courtship, marriage, lifetime together: found in his *1012 Monastery Road* book). The four levels follow:

- **Acquaintanceship**—low depth; shallow; memorized prayer
  - **The Language of Acquaintanceship** is more memorized conversations like “small talk” and prayers read or recited from memory. It is important to remember we **need** these acquaintanceship tools! We must become acquainted before the relationship can advance.
- **Friendship**—intimacy develops; personal sharing
  - **Communication begins to occur in the friendship stage** and intimacy develops; feelings begin to be shared. This is where discursive meditation (rational thinking, logic processing, involves the memory intellect and will) begins.

- **Affective (Affection)**—physical; emotional; not a lot of words shared
  - **Physical—Consummation** stage begins; here there are not many words exchanged
- **Love**—contemplative
  - **The Pinnacle of the Relationship Ladder**; love (agape) is contemplative in nature. Here the participants enjoy one another's presence in silence without expectation or need other than to bask in the presence of one another.

### Personal Reflections and Recollections:

A Prayer of Psalms—

*Be my strong rock, a castle to keep me safe, for You are my crag and my stronghold. My God, my rock in whom I put my trust, my shield, the horn of my salvation, and my refuge; You are worthy of my praise. Be strong and let your heart take courage, all you who wait for the LORD. Jesus said, "Have no fear little flock; for your Father has chosen to give you the Kingdom." (Psalm 31:3; Psalm 18:2; Psalm 31:24; Luke 12:32)*

*Sing praises to God, sing praises; sing praises to our King, sing praises... Psalm 47:6*

Lectio Divina Readings—

**Acts 14:15-17** *Turn from worthless things to the Living God... In past generations He allowed all the nations to follow their own ways; yet He has not left Himself without a witness... (Therefore, turn to God).*

**Mark 4:23-25 NLT** *Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand... Pay close attention to what you hear. The closer you listen, the more understanding you will be given—and you will receive even more. To those who listen to (obey) my teaching, more understanding will be given. But for those who are not listening (obeying), even what little understanding they have will be taken away from them.*

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## Monastic Notes (Pecos: Day 24—July 13<sup>th</sup> 2011)

### Lectures:

A second great day of lectures with Fr. Meninger today with continued conversation in the **Stages of Spiritual Development**. We picked up where we left off yesterday after talking about the progressions and levels of a relationship. Today we discussed the "Levels of Love" described by St. William of Thierry.

1. **Attraction**—given to men by God; God gives men desire for Himself; it is a grace and it is gifted.
2. **Clinging**—a deeper level of love; we "cling" to God through distractions, disturbances, etc. (*I especially loved the example used for this level by Fr. Meninger when he was questioned about disturbances and distractions drawing us closer to God. He described the way a child, who is in the arms of a parent, tightens their grip when someone tries to pull them from the arms of the parent*).
3. **Enjoyment**—"faith with feeling," aka ecstasies; a type of joy experienced even in pleasure or pain.
4. **Union of Wills**—the highest level/experience of love; when we cannot love anymore, but to only experience the will or do the will of the other (in this case, God).

One of the concepts that is unique to the Christian experience is the way that God communicates Himself to humanity; He communicates Himself primarily through the virtues of faith, hope, and love. The experience of relationship with God is made available through these virtues and proves the ultimate goal, union with God, both possible and worth pursuing.

### **Personal Reflections and Recollections:**

I've been reading a book by Ronald Rolheiser, *The Restless Heart*, I've really enjoyed. There are great thoughts in it that help to shed light on the restlessness of our souls and why it exists. Additionally, I have gleaned inspiration from the book to develop a retreat program that is centered around this "restless and lonely" heart dilemma. A quote from the book triggered the following thoughts:

***"The pain of stopping our pursuit of activity and entering alone and in silence to ourselves is the very experience of purgatory."***—Ronald Rolheiser; *The Restless Heart*

It is in this silence that God begins to reveal the false self(s) we have created for ourselves or the false self(s) we have been given and attempted to "live into." It is in this silence that God reveals to us the places which need healing, surrendered, and matured... In all these revelations there is deep and difficult work; there is necessity for discipline and commitment. With this realization there is understanding for the fear that rises up in us when we approach or enter into this holy silence, but there is also infinite and divine hope; for it is God that draws us into this silence and it is God that embraces us in it. It is in this silence that the Master Creator-Healer-Restorer gently and lovingly restores His prized and cherished child—you and me. Trust and surrender to Him moves us ever closer to the ultimate fulfillment every human being desires, the rest and restored fellowship...eternal fellowship, with God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—eternal reconciliation with our Triune Creator.

### **A Prayer of Psalms—**

*I call with my whole heart; answer me, O LORD, that I may keep your statutes. Hosanna, LORD, hosanna! LORD, send us now success. For He Himself knows whereof we are made; He remembers that we are but dust. Remember your word to your servant, because you have given me hope. This is my comfort in my trouble, that your promise gives me life. I remember your Name in the night, O LORD, and dwell upon your law. You only are my portion, O LORD, I have promised to keep your words. I have considered my ways and turned my feet toward your decrees. Teach me discernment and knowledge, for I have believed in your commandments. Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep your word. The law of your mouth is dearer to me than thousands in gold and silver. Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be; world without end. Amen. (Psalm 119:45; Psalm 118:25; Psalm 103:14; Psalm 119:49-50, 55, 57, 59, 66, 67, 72).*

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### **Monastic Notes (Pecos: Day 25—July 14<sup>th</sup> 2011)**

#### **Lectures:**

Today our lectures (actually lecture) came from Fr. Sam Davies. I [mentioned him](#) the other day in my journal when I had a couple of my belongings "blessed" by him. The topic of his talk today was "Healing the Family Tree," but it was not what I expected from the title. I don't know if it was just me or if everyone was latching on to the central theme of "healing" coming from forgiveness, but this is what I heard in a major way. The notes I took were not verbatim, but



more of an interpretation of what I heard coming from Father Sam. The heading and notes in my journal are outlined as follows:

**Forgiveness—Forgiveness—Forgiveness**

1. Jesus is the source of all healing and all healing begins with forgiveness
2. God’s Kingdom is a matter of forgiveness (Matthew 18:21-35)
3. The prayer that Jesus taught his disciples (Our Father) includes indefinite and infinite forgiveness
4. Jesus insists on forgiveness. He is fully experienced in His forgiveness extended to us by His death on the cross
5. The verdict we pass to others, we pass to ourselves. If we pass unforgiveness, we will be not be forgiven. Likewise, if we pass forgiveness, we will be forgiven.
6. Unforgiveness unleashes torture on us and others (fear, loathing, anxiety, depression, self-hatred, etc.)
7. Forgiveness is divine, because it is first a work of God toward us and second, it is a work of God through us
8. Forgiveness comes through the ministry of the Holy Spirit
9. Forgiveness cannot be defined (or redefined) to mean a lack of hostility. Forgiveness embraces, reconciles, restores, and reestablishes love. It is truly loving mercy and cannot be redefined as anything less
10. True mercy has no strings attached...mercy with strings is not mercy at all
11. Confession is a non-negotiable if you want to get rid of the “soul trash” we are so want to accumulate

Father Sam’s lecture included much more than the above mentioned points, but these wonderful points on healing through forgiveness were the binding elements of the entire talk. A few more quotes from Fr. Sam that I found really insightful follow:

***“If you are not aware God has done something, He may not have...”***

***“Lord, help me to love immensely and intensely.”***

***“What is impossible can become HIM-possible...”***

Father Samuel Davies

**Personal Reflections and Recollections:**

My Bible reading this morning had me studying the Book of 1 Samuel 28:3-20 (Saul summons Samuel through the Witch of Endor—check it from [Biblegateway here](#)). My thoughts follow:

**(1 Samuel 28:3-7)**

This passage starts off with all kinds of wrong. It begins by telling us that Saul had expelled the mediums and wizards in the land, but as soon as he asks his servants to help him find one (medium or wizard) they know the exact address and location of a witch??? Seriously? Can we talk about fidelity and trust for a moment? Here are some people who are the closest to Saul in all the kingdom. They know he was trying to rid the kingdom of sorcery and those practicing it, but they know there are still mediums and wizards who remain and seemingly under protection.

The actions of Saul reveal his “fickleness” and double-mindedness when it comes to his relationship with God. Better said, I believe it reveals the true heart of Saul.

**(1 Samuel 28:5-7)**

We can only assume, from Scripture, but it seems that the character of God is to welcome true repentance and sincerity of heart (an example is the repentance of Manasseh, the most evil king of all Israel 2 Chronicles 33:1-20). So, if Saul's heart had been pure with full desire to trust God, perhaps God may have relented...we don't know the answer to this, but we do know as soon as "impatient" Saul doesn't "hear" from God—he forges ahead taking matters into his own hands and enacting his plan pursuing "what seems right" to him. This attitude was the reason the kingdom was stripped from him in the first place and it seems that Saul never learns the lesson nor turns (repents) to another way. Sad. How many of us fall into these same destructive habits?

**(1 Samuel 28:8)**

*"...So Saul disguised himself."* I think so much could be said about this, I don't even know where to begin. We (humanity) do this, disguising ourselves, in our sin and we do it in our "partially committed" relationships with God. Only in completely "naked and unashamed" relationships are we free to **not** disguise ourselves... we are, after all, "naked" then and need no covering or "disguise."

**(1 Samuel 28:10)**

So Saul exalts himself above God by granting impunity to the witch of Endor—"no harm will come to you for participating in sorcery." How can he say this? Only if he assumes authority over the person and precepts of God can he make such a promise to the sorceress.

**(1 Samuel 28:15-20)**

The evidence of how far Saul misses the mark in his understanding and fear of God is shown in his actions and confession to Samuel. He says; "God isn't talking to me anymore..." Samuel responds; "So, why do you ask me?" Samuel then goes on to explain to Saul that his own stubborn disobedience (which he continues to reveal) is the reason for God's silence. The greatest tragedy of this entire narrative is that Saul never ever truly repents or has a real change of heart.

**A concluding thought about Saul, Repentance, and "us"...**

Repentance is not an intellectual decision. Repentance begins or is birthed in the heart. Repentance moves from the heart and wills the intellect to action. The heart moves the will to action and the result are fruits of repentance being exhibited in the life of the repentant soul.

Repentance that comes from the intellect will not turn the heart; therefore, intellectual repentance is not repentance at all. This type of "false" repentance results in hardness of heart and deluded conscience. It reveals the lack of surrender of self. This is most obvious in times of crisis when the self reverts to "survival mode" exhibiting the most primal attitudes in exhibitions of "survival of the fittest" and "fight or flight" behaviors.

Repentance is the ultimate act of surrender to the Person and will of God.

**Monastic Notes (Pecos: Day 26—July 15<sup>th</sup> 2011)**

Our lectures are complete. It is hard to believe that four weeks have passed so quickly, but it also seems that I have gained so much more than a month of teaching and training. I am overflowing and cannot wait for God to “pour me out. We are scheduled for a special “Healing of the Family Tree” Mass this afternoon and I look forward to that time.

I sat with a friend during lunch today who shared with me that she “*saw me in a vision with the oil of anointing running down my head and beard...*” She gave me Psalm 133 to read.

*<sup>1</sup> Oh how good and pleasant it is, when the brethren live together in unity. <sup>2</sup> It is like fine oil upon the head that runs down upon the beard, <sup>3</sup> upon the beard of Aaron, and runs down upon the collar of his robe. <sup>4</sup> It is like the dew of Hermon that falls upon the Hills of Zion. <sup>5</sup> For there the LORD has ordained the blessing: life evermore.* Amen. And, Thank you, Sylvia. ☺

**Personal Reflections and Recollections:**

***“O LORD, come to my assistance; O LORD, make haste to help me.”***

This is my prayer and this is truly the cry of my heart. It seems one thing I have learned through the years; the closer I have grown in relationship with my God, the more I am reliant upon His sustaining grace and guidance. I want only to be His servant and to respond obediently and submissively to the draw I have sensed to the deeper life spent in unbroken fellowship with His Presence. I don’t know what the future brings and acknowledge my feelings of helplessness with regard to how it may unfold. I honestly believe the past half-dozen years of Laurie and my life have been spent preparing for the next chapter of our lives, but I’m not sure where or what that chapter is. I look at our history and experience and see two people who are qualified and gifted to serve in a number of ministry positions. It is really hard to predict or project where we will land. Oh, I know if given a blank canvas that we could present a wonderful plan we would delight in pouring ourselves into, but that is not the path we have decided to pursue. We have agreed to seek where God would delight most in having us serve Him and His people. This is not an easy pursuit; our prayer is that He would protect us from making choices that would cause us to deviate from His best assignment...whatever and wherever that may be. For the moment, I know that God has given me a few “next steps” and this is the step of faith He tests me with now. Therefore, my faithfulness in pursuing these next steps and my completing them to the best of my ability will be my primary concern. Moment by moment...and daily obedience spent in His Presence is the prayer of my faith becoming manifest in my life. I know that living this out today is the key to tasks of tomorrow.

***Thank You, O LORD, for your faithfulness to hear your servant and to speak to your servant. I am determined, by Your empowering grace, to praise You and worship You with my whole life. Amen.***

**A Prayer of Psalms—**

*I waited patiently upon the LORD; He stooped to me and heard my cry. He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God; many shall see, and stand in awe, and put their trust in the LORD. Great things are they that you have done, O LORD my God! How great your wonders and plans for us! There is none who can be compared with you. Oh that I could make them known and tell them! But they are more than I can count. In sacrifice and offering you take no pleasure (you have given me ears to hear you). In the roll of the book it is written concerning me; “I love to do your will, O my God: your law is deep in my heart.” Be please, O LORD, to deliver me; O LORD, make hast to help me (Psalm 40:1, 3, 5-7, 9, 14).*

***“O LORD, come to my assistance; O LORD, make haste to help me.”***

**Monastic Notes (Pecos: Day 27—July 16<sup>th</sup> 2011)**

Today begins the last day at the monastery; tomorrow I will leave. I don't really know what I'm feeling at the moment...somewhat emotionless although I miss my family terribly. I'm ready to go home, but I have mixed emotions about leaving this community. There are aspects of the monastery that I've come to love and cherish and I know it will be difficult to find them elsewhere. I'm also nervous about the "next steps" in my life. I've had some semblance of knowledge about things that are looming on the horizon for most of the time in my life...I can't say that I have this same sense of knowledge at this juncture. I think this is faith, to proceed with trust and confidence that God is leading. I do have a short list of things I feel God has instructed me to pursue upon my return. I feel as though I have a new understanding of the Apostle Paul's statement about how "we see through the mirror dimly" (1 Corinthians 13:12). I don't have a complete blueprint for tomorrow's journey, but I have daily direction from my God who will take me there.

I believe and trust that the Lord has given me what I need to work with. I can trust all that He is; God has been faithful and good to me. I'm sure that taking the steps He is giving me will lead exactly where we are supposed to be. I feel ready and I can only assume in confidence that the places and players on the other side are ready too.

***O LORD, come to my assistance; O LORD, make haste to help me.***

***Hear my prayer, O GOD; do not hide yourself from my petition. Listen to me and answer me; I have no peace because of my cares...I will call upon the LORD and the LORD will deliver me. He will bring me safely back from the battle waged against me... Cast your burden upon the LORD, and He will sustain you; He will never let the righteous stumble.*** (Psalm 55:1-2, 17, 19, 24).

Commencement and commissioning mass is now complete, and I feel as though I have succeeded in completing the primary list of things I hoped to accomplish during my stay at the monastery. I look forward to the coming year with curiosity and holy anticipation, truly expectant of the great things God will do in our lives and ministry. Our follow up session at the monastery will take place in August of next year. We have not been given a formal "between session" practicum or assignment. In light of this, I have designed and prescribed my own continuing development plan and have given an outline to the SSD administrators. This will ensure my own accountability and help me to mature as a spiritual director.

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**Monastic Notes (Pecos: Day 28—July 17<sup>th</sup> 2011)**

And so... my month in the School for Spiritual Direction is officially ended. I leave for the airport shortly following the mid-morning meal. Although I can say unequivocally this has been one of the memorable points in my life, I also know that I will be unraveling this experience for quite some time. I'm glad for notes I've taken and the discipline of journaling that have recorded many of the things I have learned, seen, and heard. It will be good to read and reflect on my memories once I've returned home.

**God's Word Speaking to Me as I Prepare to Depart for Home:**

*From Him and through Him and to Him are all things... Therefore, by the mercies of God, present your bodies as a living sacrifice holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to the world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect. To Him be the glory forever. Amen. (Romans 11:36-12:2)*

This is an incredibly high calling. It would seem the "bar" is set too high to reach or if we accept the challenge that there is the greater possibility that our lives will be filled with frustration because the measure of godliness is too high for human beings to attain. We push back against these thoughts: the ability of men to discern the will of God, the ability of men to be able to definitively define what is good and perfect, the ability of men to have transformed minds so they may be acceptable to God. It seems near impossible at a glance. But...God gives us hope we can believe in.

***"I will put my instructions deep within them, and I will write them on their hearts"*** (Jeremiah 31:33)

***"I will put a desire in their hearts to worship me, and they will never leave me"*** (Jeremiah 32:40)

***"I will give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit within you. I will take out your stony, stubborn heart and give you a tender responsive heart. And I will put my Spirit in you so that you will follow my decrees and be careful to obey my regulations"*** (Ezekiel 36:26-27)

I am encouraged. I have been blessed to have my heart replaced and my mind transformed. I am more than able to center and focus my attentions and affections solely upon the God who has saved me, Jesus Christ, the One who lives and reigns supreme through the guiding empowerment of the Holy Spirit who resides within my heart.

**A Prayer of Psalms—**

*O God, you are my God; eagerly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my flesh faints for you, as in a barren and dry land where there is no water. So I will bless you as long as I live and lift up my hands in your Name. For you have been my helper, and under the shadow of your wings I will rejoice. My soul clings to you; your right hand holds me fast (Psalm 63:1, 4, 7-8).*