

Monastic Musings

News and Views of the Eastern Rite Monastics
of the
Ohio Orthodox Catholic Church

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From the Idle keyboard

by: schema-Archimandrite Barb



Ah, October has arrived so that means it is officially Fall. The hot weather will be slowly moving out to be replaced with the freezing cold! But then that is all part of the rhythm of the seasons. It means that the animals and plants are starting to prepare for their long winter sleep. Actually I like this time of the year as it is more comfortable to travel to the different local areas. The leaves are starting to turn wonderful shades of colors. With having had all the floods from Irene and Lee, we will probably have fewer tourists in

the area to view the foliage. Many New Englanders depend on the tourists for their livelihoods. Time will tell just how much damage the floods will have done to the apple crops that started in late September to early October around here. I can only hope that they are not damaged. Locally we have several wonderful apple orchards along with their little farm stores selling so many different items made from apples. The fresh apple pies are so large and so full of apples. It is so much fun to walk into the stores and smell the apple fragrance!

Last month, Mother Myrella and I purchased several books on monasticism and spirituality to read during the winter. Yes, we collect books in the Fall like a squirrel collects nuts for the winter. The books were written by several writers who present different aspects of monasticism both in monasteries and outside of monasteries and present different spiritualities. We tried to focus our purchasing of books around the idea of monasticism within the world when possible. That is monasticism that is practiced outside of a monastery. We both are going to keep our eyes open for more books to read over the next few months. We are very fortunate that we have a friend who is a reviewer of religious books and who sends us books at times that she feels we might enjoy. So far she has really been successful. Some of the books have in some ways challenged our thinking and in other ways affirmed our thoughts. Over time both of us will share some of the thoughts we glean from the books we are reading. Hopefully we will be able to tweak your interest to want to learn more on the subject.

As monastics, we are called to challenge your spiritual thinking and to help you develop a strong spiritual walk with God. At times our writings may seem a little “off the wall” or may even make you uncomfortable. But in all of this “distress”, please don’t stop reading and learning as that is

how you will grow in your love of God and be able to spread the Gospel to others. All of us need to be willing to question that which we have learned over the years and thus be open to growth. At times we will be presenting ideas from other faiths to help illustrate ideas to you. Yes, we as Christians like to ignore ideas if they do not come from our faith backgrounds, but then that limits us in our learning. Jesus was a person who learned from all the faiths around him and taught from what he learned. We can do the same by keeping an open mind and heart. We need to remember there is only one God who goes by many different names depending on the religion/faith. We can learn much from other religions/faiths around the world that can actually help us grow closer to God. We can learn to walk with others within this world in joy and happiness, serving God together.

Desert Wisdom

A hermit used to say, "Ceaseless prayer soon heals the mind."

The Elephant in the Room: Forgiveness on the Tenth Anniversary of 9/11 *By Rev. Myrella LeClair*

This will be the first in an occasional series of articles intended to stimulate and challenge our spiritual beliefs regarding how we practice Christ's Message of Love, Forgiveness, and Mercy in our daily lives. Because of that challenge, I've chosen to call this series "The Elephant in the Room", which is an idiom "for an obvious truth that is being ignored or goes unaddressed. The idiomatic expression also applies to an obvious problem or risk no one wants to discuss. It is based on the idea that an elephant in a room would be impossible to overlook; thus, people in the room who pretend that the elephant is not there have chosen to avoid dealing with the looming big issue."



I dedicate this series to my first mentor and good friend, Bishop Martin-Henri, who taught me to challenge the status quo and to at all times exemplify Christ in my life. He also taught me that Christ's basic message – taken down to its lowest common denominator – is Forgiveness – that I have to be willing to forgive the sins and failings of others as well as my own sins and failings. My spirituality was forged on the anvil of Forgiveness when +Martin-Henri was murdered by a man he was trying to help.

Friends and church members had gathered in the monastery to console one another and to plan +Martin-Henri's funeral when someone mentioned that we needed to write letters of forgiveness to the accused murderer and to pray for him. We all knew that's what +Martin-Henri would have wanted us to do. While I had written a letter to the accused stating that I had forgiven him and would continue to pray for him, I was still feeling bitterly angry, betrayed and confused – certainly not feelings that I would equate with Forgiveness. (Forgiveness did eventually come and with that came Peace.) With his dying breath and despite the brutality inflicted upon him, +Martin-Henri would have forgiven the person who murdered him. If he could do so, could I do any less? Forgiveness is the legacy that I am committed to learn, teach, and practice.

That being said, the elephant in the room then that we refuse to see regarding the tragedy of 9/11 is the issue of Forgiveness. The media bombards us with images of 9/11 that serve only to promote hatred and fear. Yes, the terrorists who committed the atrocity were Muslims, but they were radical extremists first and foremost, who misinterpreted their religious faith. A person of any Faith can be an extremist, choosing those scriptures or beliefs that either agree with their viewpoints or that justify their desires to commit acts of hatred and violence toward those who are different or who they believe to be their enemies. Look at what happened in Norway this past July when a Christian extremist murdered many people. Therefore, we must remember that the violence that occurred on 9/11 was the “work of zealots, disconnected from the heart of their religion’s foundations”.

As Miroslav Volf, Professor of Systematic Theology at Yale Divinity School wrote,
“9/11 plunged us into in a moral struggle for our soul as a people. What I hope for those of us who consider ourselves Christians is that we will learn to live positively rather than reactively, guided by our own moral vision of life sketched for us in the teachings and example of Jesus Christ, rather than fighting evil with its own methods. Jesus Christ taught: ‘in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you’ (Matthew 7:14); ‘love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you’ (Matthew 5:44); ‘blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God’ (Matthew 5:9).”

When violence occurs, hatred overtakes our minds and hearts, and we want only to attack those who committed the violence. In other words, we sink to the level of the aggressors, and the first thought that surfaces is revenge against those who attacked us. Hate, however, is a poison which permeates our spirits in much the same way that a drug-resistant antibacterial infection infects our bodies. Newer and stronger drugs must be used to slow and stop the bacteria. Healing does not happen instantly; it takes time to eradicate the infection.

It is much the same with healing our spirits. Forgiveness is the antidote, but as with the treatment of a bodily infection, it takes time and much spiritual effort. True forgiveness does not happen just because we say or write “I forgive you”. It can be a very long process. It took many years for me to forgive the man who murdered +Martin-Henri, but almost 15 years after his murder, I can truly say “I forgive you” without harboring any hatred in mind or my heart. Many times, I would progress three steps forward on the path to Forgiveness and then take two steps backward. I did not want to stop hating “John Doe”. To cure my hate-infected spirit, I had to fully surrender all vestiges of the anger and hatred I still felt to my Comforter and Wise Counselor, the Holy Spirit. His Grace transforms Hatred to Forgiveness if we completely surrender it to Him, through which all things are possible.

Monkey Mind – Overactive Mind *by: schema-Archimandrite Barb*

How many times have you found yourself not able to focus your thoughts? How many times have you found yourself lying awake at night with your mind just racing about everything under the sun? How many times have you sat down to pray and found your mind wandering? All of us have gone through this at some point in our life.

Buddha described our minds as being filled with drunken monkeys that just love to jump around, screeching, chattering and carrying on endlessly. If you sit and watch monkeys, you will realize

that Buddha was very correct in his description of our minds. We have dozens of monkeys in our minds. But it is the fear monkey that seems to be the loudest one of all of them!

Have you noticed that the more you try to fight through your mind issues, the worse they get? Well, that is how the mind works actually. The psychologists describe our mind as having several control areas: the Id, the Ego, and the Super-Ego. Each has an important function in our lives, but they have to have their controls and place within our lives. Let's take a quick look at these three control areas to see how they affect us in our spiritual life.

The Id is the pleasure seeking monkey and even the fear monkey and thus will do anything to avoid pain or displeasure. It is responsible for our basic daily drives. It is an unconscious part of our psyche

The Ego is the reality principle monkey. It will do what is necessary to please the Id. It is the conscious part of our psyche although it does not always function at the conscious level. It includes defensive, perceptual, intellectual-cognitive, and executive functions to help us to live in the world. It is greatly affected by the world we live in.

The Super-Ego can be thought of as a type of conscience that punishes misbehavior with feelings of guilt. You could think of it as the parent monkey! This is the monkey who tries to bring all of the other monkeys into the "proper" way of acting.

So what does this all have to do with our spirituality? Well, go back to my opening paragraph for a moment. Does any of that sound really familiar to you in your life? If you are constantly having Monkey Mind, you are not able to really sit and meditate or even concentrate your life in a way that is God centered. There is a constant fight within you trying to prevent you from what you need to do to move forward in your walk with God.

Now that we know what is happening in our minds, what can we do to overcome these dastardly monkeys? Buddha tells us not to fight with them. Instead, you have to learn to work with them in a way that you gain control over them with their help. Meditation becomes a wonderful tool to quiet the voices of the monkeys. If you sit quietly and listen to the different monkeys, especially the fear monkey you will learn what you need to say to them to quiet them down. They will quiet down when you have helped remove their fear, anxiety, worry and other negative emotions, and then you can then start concentrating on your spiritual meditation and talking with God. One of the best ways to work with the monkeys is to have a conversation with the monkey who seems to be giving you the most problem. Usually this is the fear monkey! Talk calmly with the fear monkey helping him realize that there is nothing fearful about you wanting to walk with God. Ask him to be a partner in the walk. Don't force the issue, but invite him to be a partner with you. You will be surprised at the peace that you will start to feel. Suddenly you will realize that your monkeys are no longer yelling and screaming but listening and prodding you along the spiritual walk. Please know this is does not happen overnight, but will take some time to get the monkeys to cooperate, but it is really worth it.

The next time you cannot fall asleep because the fear monkey is upset, ask him what the problem is and work with him to calm him down. Remember your monkeys are like little children; so, handle them gently and calmly! It will take time for the "temper tantrum" to calm down, but it will and you will fall asleep. Over time it will take much less effort to get the monkeys to be quiet.

Monkey mind is a way to prevent you from being the child of God that you are. The monkeys are afraid that you will not need them if you really live your life following God's directions. But

you will always need the monkeys as they are truly a part of you. They just don't need to control your life, but help you calmly in your life. Help them learn the peace of God as you learn it. You will find the peace and love you are looking for on your spiritual path.

Prayer Requests

Mom LeClair
Br. Yossi and Jim
Bill and Monica
Linda and Wayne
Fr. David and family
Fr. Rick Hobbs
Our Archbishop -- +Charles Smith, OSF

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