

1st Report. Aug 24th

I spent a week, from August 13 to 20, on a retreat at St. Gregory's Abbey in Three Rivers Michigan. St. Gregory's is an Episcopal monastery, and follows the Rule of St. Benedict. I stayed in St. Benedict's House which is about a ten minute walk from the other building at the Abbey. Since I was using St. Benedict's House I was responsible for my own meals rather than eating with the monks. Thankfully, Virginia helped me plan a week's worth of simple meals so I did not have to spend much time in preparing my meals. Of course, for those who know me, I did make sure there was a coffee maker in the house. I might be able to go a week without talking much, but I don't think I could go a week without coffee.

The monks at St. Gregory's keep the seven traditional offices (or services) of monastic communities. They begin with Matins at 4:00a.m. followed by Lauds at 6:00 a.m. and then Terce and Holy Eucharist at 8:15 a.m. There were also services at 11:30 a.m. (Sext), 2:00 p.m. (None), 5:00 p.m. (Vespers) and 7:30 p.m. (Compline). I joined the monks in worship several times each day. One day I decided to worship with them for all of the services, beginning with Matins at 4:00 a.m., which meant I had to get up about 3:40 a.m. After one day, I decided my body would have to readjust totally to be able to get up at that hour on a daily basis. I felt I was sleepy most of the rest of that day. Most days I prayed Morning Prayer and Compline by myself on the porch of the house. That was a wonderfully peaceful way to begin and end each day. I did worship with the monks at the Eucharist and other services during the day. Since I had a ten minute walk before and after each service, I often used these walks as times for meditation.

I spent significant time reading. I was able to finish several of the books that were on my reading list for the renewal leave. (A copy of my reading list is available in the church office, and I have asked Peter Fischer to post it on Nativity's website.) I completed one book on Celtic Christianity that I had begun earlier, and was able to read another one on Celtic Christianity. I also read one of the books about pilgrimage, and completed most of the other book about pilgrimage. I was able to read parts of some of the other books, including the anthology of Celtic prayers and writings.

The weather while I was at St. Gregory's was beautiful, and so I was able to take a couple of long walks. One day I found a patch of ripe blackberries, and picked blackberries. I realized this was the first time I had picked blackberries in over 30 years. I was able to pick enough blackberries to give the monks some, and to bring some to Virginia to make a cobbler. This also gave me significant opportunity for reflection. I spent time reflecting about relationships (such as how I went blackberry picking with my mother most summers as I was growing up) and about our relationship with God (the abundance of God's creation in something as simple as a blackberry). I think we often we miss these kinds of happenings or events in the busy nature of our lives, and miss the opportunity to reflect in a meaningful way.

I was reminded of how much of a "city dweller" I have become. I saw a number of deer – that were more skittish than those we see at Nativity. I saw a variety of small animals, including frogs, snakes, a flock of wild turkeys and what I thought was a ground hog. There was also an abundance of insects including more butterflies than I seen in a long time. Of course, there were gnats and mosquitoes too – but God did make them all. We can miss seeing the fullness of God's creation depending on where we live.

This week, August 22 to 26, Virginia and I will be visiting our family in Kentucky. Then, we will be making our final preparations (like packing our clothes) to leave for Scotland on Thursday, August 28th.

Peace,

Bruce +