

NEWSLETTER 28 : Jan Feb Mar 2010

Monastery of St. Barnabas the Encourager.

DIARY DATES

The Eucharist (Communion) will be celebrated on the third Sunday of each month and will be followed by Communion breakfast in the main kitchen.

Forgive us for not sending you news for six months. As you will see, these months have been a time of change for the life here and this has absorbed the time available to write to you earlier.

In October Rob and Joanna Brown moved into the house at Lower Brynmawr to share the life of the Monastery with Father Bryan and Dorothy. Thank you for your faithfulness in prayer and support over the years when the need for further help became clear. Rob and Joanna have come to be here for the long term and we are looking at ways that the demands of the life here and the work that needs to be done can be shared. This is not so much about how life can be organised but rather how we can share life together here, freeing each other for those things that are important for us to be involved with. Already Bryan has more freedom to visit folks and to support people and churches he knows both locally and in the Midlands. Dorothy has more time to concentrate on her teaching and painting and involvement in the parish church.

Rob and Joanna Brown have moved from the Mother House of the Northumbria Community in North Northumberland where they lived and worked for some years. The way of life here is, in many ways, familiar to them but they also will take time to understand the story and particular gift of this place. Although they are already sharing the work of day to day life no major changes are being thought about. However we are now able to invite more folks who come to stay to share meals with us. Some still choose to cater for themselves but it is good to be able to increase this way of hospitality again. We will have open house for Christmas and already we know of a number of people who will be joining us for the day.

Sadly, Rowan Wells died in July. She had requested that her ashes be brought to the Monastery for internment. With help from two of her friends the piece of ground designated as a cemetery, adjacent to the chapel was given a low wall and a fence was put around it. The casket containing her ashes has been buried there and a stone prepared to mark the place. Members of her family and friends have been to visit the chapel and the cemetery.

THOUGHTS FROM FR. BRYAN

Many apologies: This very overdue Newsletter should have been produced for July August September. But all Dorothy and I could manage to do was to just keep the place going.

On Pentecost Sunday I was reflecting on how the first believers reacted on the day of Pentecost. The behaviour of 21st Century Christians seemed so different from those early days: We are in danger of not properly appreciating the joy and significance of Pentecost. We must remember that it is normal for us Christians to be walking against the flow of this world. It is so tempting to swim with the tide and we can get swept along by what people around us are thinking and doing.

I am aware of the fact that in the Western Church we are free to pray and worship when and how we like. It is a sobering thought: What are we doing with that freedom? We all know that many Christians are risking their lives to do what we can so easily take for granted. For Christians in predominantly Islamic countries and those under dictatorships, going to church is a very risky business but

every precious moment in the company of fellow believers is treasured, often enabling people to carry on through the next week.

My second thought is regarding monasticism: There are a number of people coming together to live their lives in community and to have regular daily times seeking God together. These are inspirational resource units within the total church scene in the UK and other Western countries. I say Western countries because we are rather divided into close family networks or relationships and don't live corporately as many do in other lands. Recently I was made aware of the Northumbria Community; it is made up of groups of people, married and single, living in communities, rather like the early Celtic monasteries were. There are many of these, and the Northumbria Community is one of the better known ones. The quotation is from something that Deitrich Bonnhoffer wrote with regard to Church renewal. "The renewal of the church will come from a new type of monasticism which only has in common with the old an uncompromising allegiance to the Sermon on the Mount. It is high time that men and women banded together to do this"

My third thought is regarding Advent. I am writing this newsletter as we enter the season of Advent.

I have been reflecting upon God revealing himself in the person of Jesus. We are in the 21st Century; (a timing set in the Western world from the birth of Jesus) We all have to face the fact that we have a very short life span but that Christian teaching is centred around the concept that we are being prepared for life in eternity. David Watson, a well known evangelist of a few years ago is quoted as saying when he was terminally ill " The best is yet to be" So this is the understanding of people who have a personal relationship with God in Jesus Christ. Perhaps most people when thinking of eternal life think of heaven as the place where they will be. It is seen as a place of harmonious relationships, a community of people in fellowship, with God at the centre.

Personally, I am uneasy with those who lay down doctrinal requirements as a condition for people being accepted or not accepted in heaven.

How important forgiveness is in making harmonious relationships. The Lord's prayer, which is so widely said in churches, chapels and on many formal occasions, has within it this major sentence: Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. This contains the idea of trespassing on someone else's space; being insensitive to the needs of the other person.

The more I understand Jesus, particularly as expressed by St. John, the criteria, if any, is determined by our relationships with one another. And, as we read the life of Jesus in the scriptures we see that much of his teaching is based on our eternal hope; that this world is merely a school of preparation and that it all hinges on the relationships that are quoted above. I am of the personal opinion that there are quite a lot of conditions that, if not

created by are exacerbated by our relationships with one another.

I see eternity as a state in which we are in deep peace and harmony, aware of God's presence and at peace with all the people of the world.

In preparing ourselves for these relationships of eternity in which we have total harmony without losing our individuality, we need to fully understand repentance, and be able to seek forgiveness for our disharmony with our fellow human beings.

This may involve confessing to one another the wrong and misunderstandings we have harboured.

Forgiveness is a constant feature of the teachings of Jesus. We only have to read again the incident of the woman who was caught in the act of adultery* Jesus saw that the woman was going to be stoned, the normal practice in those days for women accused of adultery, the men of the town tested Jesus' reaction to the charge to see if he would join them in con-

demning her. Jesus shamed them by inviting any man who had not sinned to throw the first stone at her. When one by one the men left in shame-faced silence Jesus said to the woman "Hasn't anyone condemned you" and when she said that no one had Jesus said "Nor do I but go your way and sin no more. So this incident was healed at this particular time by forgiveness.

On another occasion when Jesus was teaching about forgiveness he said "If, when you are about to go up to the altar you remember that a person has some grievance against you leave your gift there at the altar and go and make peace with that person first.**

We can see why this theme of forgiveness constitutes as important part of the Lord's prayer.

* *St. John's Gospel Chapter 8.*

***St. Matthew Chapter 5 verses 23 and 24*



Father Bryan



the Chapel

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