

The Canticle

DECEMBER 2001

O F S T . G E R T R U D E ' S

Leisure in God's Icon

By Sister Carolyn Miguel



Holy Leisure

We have all experienced them – those mystical, magical moments where we are completely rested, ready for the next adventure. Sometimes they happen in the midst of intense work, study, play or family time; brief glimpses of pure leisure as Benedict imagined it.

Leisure is an essential part of Benedictine spirituality. Benedictines know that life is not only lived in doing. To be balanced humans we need to allow time to rekindle and refresh the light within. Holy leisure does just that.

Benedict envisions leisure as more than a break from work or a vacation. Leisure is the pursuit of holiness through Christ-centered living, playing, study and contemplation.

Sr. Joan Chittister describes leisure as that which

... makes the human more human by engaging the heart and broadening the vision and deepening the insight and stretching the soul.¹

Does your leisure stretch your soul? broaden your vision? engage your heart? Or is leisure just a specialized form of work for you?

I am realizing a life-long dream by having the time and a studio for being an artist. I repair statues, saw wooden plaques and figurines, paint saints and other images on river rocks, etch glass, and more. My other “studio” is the monastery beauty parlor where I do another kind of art.

For me the creative process is an expression of leisure, and the greatest leisure is the ancient art of iconography.

Iconography is the art of illustrating religious subjects. I have studied this art form for the past three summers at the Iconography Institute at Mt. Angel Abbey near Portland, OR. Now I spend hours in this sacred practice.

Writing an icon requires significant periods of unbroken time, silence, and study. It is a deep time. I sit and look at what I am painting, let it talk to me, and then move ahead with it.

This process calls me to pray about what image to paint. My heart must be pure in order to allow the icon to be created with integrity.

I ready the materials, contemplate the subject of the icon, study, visualize what I want to bring forth, draw the

geometric sketch of it, and work and work on it. All this draws me to the deep place at the center of my being. I know it is God who puts the vision

in my mind. I feel exhilaration as I come close to letting the vision take shape on my panel.

Having raised three children before entering the monastery, I liken writing an icon to giving birth to a child. After my babies were born and when I finish

an icon I say, “Ah, I did it. Thank you, God. It’s over, and it’s beautiful.”

Leisure means to be fully awake to the present moment, to the deepest realities in one’s soul. Creating an icon is just that. I get lost in what I am doing, and emerge from sacred inner space both exhausted and jubilant.

The attention to detail, especially laying gold leaf, is an exacting and absorbing process. As the shapes start forming an image and then come together into a captivating picture, jubilation courses through me. I feel whole as I see how good the work is.

Christmas has become a special time to me because I am so much more aware of Jesus as the Icon of God.



Sr. Carolyn Miguel working on an icon at Mt. Angel Abbey.

¹ *Wisdom Distilled From the Daily: Living the Rule of St. Benedict Today*



Greetings from the Prioress

I can hardly believe that Thanksgiving is past, and we are deep into the season of Advent and Christmas!

Regardless of how quickly life moves, we joyfully set aside time to express gratitude for all God's blessings to us, particularly for you, our friends and our families, who have blessed us in so many ways.

The theme for this issue of *The Canticle* is LEISURE. What do you imagine when you think of leisure? I picture myself sitting by the ocean, basking in the sun, fishing at Winchester Lake, or reading a good book.

Webster defines leisure as "the condition of having one's time free from the demands of work or duty; free or unrestricted time; unoccupied or disengaged; without haste."

How many of you feel like you have leisure according to that definition? Even our vacation times, theoretically free from the demands of work or duty, are not all that leisurely.

Leisure is actually one of the core elements of our Benedictine spirituality. In fact, in

The Rule St. Benedict specified three hours of time each day for the practice of *Lectio* – reflection and contemplation on the Scriptures.

It is through faithfulness in allowing time to listen to God and be in God's presence that our monastic life is centered on God. Time "doing" *Lectio* focuses us for mission, just as Jesus' life was guided by his time with his Father.

Another form of leisure is play, and children are our teachers in this. They become completely focused on and absorbed in their play. They allow their imaginations full rein, creating situations, even friends, to play with. Imagination and creativity flow out of leisurely activities like play.

Artists, writers, poets, and yes, you and I, all need to have leisure time to touch in with the creativity inside us where art, new ideas, and new creations are born.

When I think about the Christmas Season and the meaning of the Incarnation, I think God must have taken a long, loving, leisurely time imagining such a gift to humanity as Jesus, our God made flesh.

This great gift is not a one-time gift; it is on-going. Jesus continues to be made flesh in us, in our time, every day, here and now! We are the Body of Christ. And we are to be gifts to one another as Jesus is to us.

I wish you a blessed and joyous Advent and Christmas Season. I pray that God will bless you with leisure – time to smell the flowers, enjoy the sunsets – and especially, with time to spend with the God who desires to spend time with you.

Sr. Jean Zelander

Increasing Membership

The Feast of St. Gertrude, November 16, is usually a pretty big deal here at the monastery. On that day we celebrate beautiful, splendid liturgies, enjoy delicious food and visit with "homecoming" sisters.


This year was especially meaningful as Jean Ihli and Michele Bateman became postulants to our community in a simple ceremony.

Surrounded by the entire community, Jean and Michele claimed their desire to "seek God with this community." The sisters professed that they, as a community, would support the postulants in their effort. Jean and Michele were presented with *The Liturgy of the Hours Books* and *On the Way*, the history of the sisters of St. Gertrude.

Jean believes that becoming a postulant is the first formal step to realizing her long-time dream – becoming a member of this Benedictine community. "I desire to grow in love," said Jean. "In the sisters I see the depth of Christ's love reaching out to people. As a single woman I was deeply committed to God and to service but I believe I can grow even deeper in that love within the support of this community."

"I have been seeking God for a long time," Michele said. "Becoming a postulant is the next step in answering God's call. I feel in unity with the sisters and have positive feelings about the future for myself and for the community. I know God believes in us and that we are striving to do God's will. We will be blessed as God chooses, and I trust it will be with life."

As Jean and Michele continue their discernment process, we ask you to pray for them, for us, and for our affiliates who are also exploring possible membership with our community. Pray too that Catholic women making vocation choices will explore whether God may be leading them to a commitment within a religious community.



The Canticle
OF ST. GERTRUDE'S

The Canticle of St. Gertrude's is published quarterly by the Development Office at the Monastery of St. Gertrude, and is distributed to our friends, families and donors.

Sr. Mary Kay Henry, OSB
Director of Development

Darla Anglen-Whitley
Editor

TEL: (208) 962-3224 • FAX: (208) 962-7213
EMAIL: develop@camasnet.com
www.StGertrudes.org

Fun As a Nun

The Sisters at St. Gertrude's are well-known for their active and fervent prayer life. Less well known, however, is how well they know how to play.

Here are some examples of "nun fun" as sisters answered the question, "I experience leisure by ..."

... casting a line while fishing, sitting by the lake, enjoying the great outdoors.

... playing in the dirt while gardening, raking leaves

... playing cards, pinochle and bridge, with a special partner (in order to win!)

... sitting by a lake, a stream or the ocean, watching the water, feeling the rhythm of the waves, being surprised when the surf soaks me, experiencing the harmony of the space and being refreshed by the place

... reading a good book, making music, singing and dancing, doing handcrafts, fine needlework, sewing, solving puzzles, sculpting clay, photographing nature scenes, cooking, designing clothes



... camping without an agenda, backpacking in the wilderness, a Sunday afternoon drive or hike, visiting a National Park hiking trails and learning something new, sunrise walks

... attending a backyard barbeque or sharing a nice meal with family and friends

... taking a day of solitude with time to pray and read, contemplation; doing something worthwhile for the needy

Frenzied Leisure

by Sr. Mary Kay Henry

Ads and ambience are luring me into the holidays. My nose, mouth, eyes, ears, hands and calendar all say it is Christmas! Time for leisure. Really now! "Frenzy" and "leisure" simultaneously?

Yes, they often twin in our urgent efforts to care. To please our loved ones and bring pleasure to those who are lonely, homeless, hungry. To delight in the beauty and surprise of gift exchanges.

To gaze at the crèche with wonder at how God has come among us to play out the sacred dream of all creatures having life to the full.

To gratify our passion for unity, peace and healing by gathering our families, embracing diversities, imagining and implementing new economic, political and ecclesiastical systems that include participation and abundance for everyone.

We know Luke's story of Mary giving birth to a son and John's poetry of the Word made flesh dwelling among us. Do we remember Wisdom's glad tidings in Proverbs? "I was by God's side, a master crafter, delighting God day by day, ever at play in God's presence, at play everywhere in God's world, delighting to be with the human beings" (Proverbs 8:30-31).

Play that awakens me to the mystery of life within and around me includes such things as creating and participating in plays, attending professional theater, preparing and presenting a class, horseback riding with friends in beautiful places, taking a silent "gawk walk" in nature, bowling with my siblings and 98 year old dad, sharing profoundly or goofing around with friends, praying liturgy and sitting in silent prayer.

On the seventh day God leisured from all God had been doing (Genesis 2:3). And for

fifteen billion years God has gone on leisurely working on the masterpiece. Freely pouring out divine life in colors, motions and sounds that so totally seize the attention of us human creatures that we can dream of a world where the wolves live with the lambs, the bulls and bears make friends, the children play unharmed with rattlers.

We dream of leisure's license to act without compulsion, with freedom from constraint, freedom to choose; of leisure's world of play, deep joy, fun. A world with a centered way-of-being out of which we are all artists creating masterpiece lives.

We long for leisure's pleasure which refreshes, energizes and moves us out in service.

We long for Saving Wisdom to play out God's dream in us: to craft the march of refugees into a pilgrimage to the House of Bread (Bethlehem), the rivalry of governments into a mutually enhancing gift exchange, the smoggy sky into a hostel for the heavenly hosts.

Christmas leaps onto the trampoline tautness of the darkest night of violence, greed, apathy, legalism, trivialization. Jesus as Divine Wisdom comes laughing and playing with the Creator calling forth a universe that delights us humans who wonder, create, fight, forgive, unite, play, work, make love, and lay down our lives for each other.

Evening News's daily despair screams how far away Christmas is. With faith's assurance that joy transforms that cry, I wrap our planet in hope by calling a friend, writing a congress-person, seeking God with 70 other sisters, fasting and praying, inviting God to make up my face as a glimpse of Promise fulfilled. In the simple mystery of daily life the flesh becomes Word.



Experience Leisure ~ Experience A Retreat

Letting the Lord Build the House

February 15 - 17, 2002

Chotard Doll & Bernard Fenik

Break down the gender specific roles we easily assume by encountering Jesus in Scripture, early Church teaching and prayer and discussion.

Finding God in Simple Ways

February 22 - 24, 2002

Sr. Carol Ann Wassmuth

Begin Lent by exploring the why's and how's of a simpler lifestyle.

The Spiritual Journey of a Lifetime

March 15 - 17, 2002

Sr. Barbara Jean Glodowski

A pro-active model for retirement for those nearing retirement or in retirement. Transform this stage of your life into a soul adventure.

Death & Resurrection

March 23, 2002

Sr. Carol Ann Wassmuth

For catechumens, profession of faith candidates, sponsors, spouses and RCIA team members. Focused on the Paschal Mystery as celebrated in the Sacraments of Initiation.

Sacred Meal, Liberating Memory

April 12 - 14, 2002

Sr. Teresa Jackson & Kathy McFaul

Explore how the central symbols of the Eucharist – body, blood, food and memory – have special meaning in women's experiences.

Mother & Adult Daughter Retreat

April 26 - 28, 2002

Sr. Judith Brower & Mom/Daughter Friends

Explore together the marvels God is doing in your life these days. Experience anew the mystery of your relationship with each other and with God.



Visit us on the web: www.StGertrudes.org
Email: retreats@camasnet.com



IDAHO CORPORATION OF BENEDICTINE SISTERS

Monastery of St. Gertrude

HC 3 Box 121 • Cottonwood, ID 83522-9408

Transforming the World!

**CHANGE
SERVICE
REQUESTED**



Befriend the Earth!

This document is printed on recycled paper using soy-based inks.

Nonprofit Org.

U.S. POSTAGE

PAID

Permit No. 10
Cottonwood, ID

