



AUTUMN 2002

# ST. GERTRUDE'S Canticle

A JOURNAL OF OUR LIFE

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## An Open House for God

by Sr. Judith Brower

While thinking about what it means to be “contemplative” in this day and age, *hospitality* kept coming to mind. As I thought about “temple” nestled there within *contemplation*, I looked out at the Hospitality House nestled against the hillside next to the monastery and realized, “That’s it!”

I think each of us is asked to be a “hospitality house” attentively expecting God. For me, hospitality means deliberately choosing to leave space empty – in my house, calendar, and self. When my life is too full of things, commitments, and whatever distracts and keeps me from some quiet empty space, then I’m not able to wait and watch eagerly for anyone or anything. I’m altogether inhospitable. Makes for quite an examination of conscience!

For me contemplative awareness is simply hospitality toward all that God places in my life, including God’s own self. St. John of the Cross described contemplation as “welcoming God with open arms.”

Contemplation is a way of living, of existing, of being in which we are, in the words of Gerald May, “watchful, attentive and welcoming of the presence of a Loved One beyond all sense and comprehension.”

So ... if we don’t sit around all day having visions, we’re not contemplative, right? Wrong!

In fact, it’s just the opposite. Benedictines believe that God uses our everyday lives as the primary locus of transforming action. Each day contains gifts from God that invite me to conversion and

serve as God’s “converting” agent. God’s voice is spoken to me through the people with whom I live and work, through phone calls and e-mails, through the unexpected request, the daily schedule, visits with those who share their God-journey with me, evenings with ABC’s *Nightline*, my own struggle with dryness and fidelity in prayer ... and lots more. In all these, God is present.



Sr. Judith Brower

Haven’t we all known moments when we’re with a good friend, when neither talk nor action is necessary, and the only thing really needed is our presence? That’s a universal experience – and the best proof that we’re all called to be contemplatives.

During my prayer, especially in *lectio divina*, the thoughtful reading and praying of Scripture, as well as the events of my day, may lead me to a stillness that is very simple. God asks me to be hospitable: to be expectantly empty so that God may fill me. Simple? Yes, but it means that I must be willing to give God space and time. Am I?

See “Open House” on page 4



# Greetings from the Prioress

Dear Friends of the Monastery,

Greetings to all of you! Our summer is giving way to autumn as crops are harvested and fruits are gathered. The raspberries are done and the gardens are yielding beautiful vegetables and fruits. It's a season of plenty. It makes me realize how fortunate we are compared to so many in our world who do not have enough of anything. And that causes me to reflect on how I respond to Christ's call to create a world of peace and justice.

That brings me to the focus of this issue of *The Canticle*, **Contemplative Awareness**. Awareness and contemplation are the foundations of the Benedictine monastic way of life. The Rule of Benedict is concerned with life: what it's about, what it demands, how to live it. The first words of the prologue to this rule are "listen carefully ... and attend with the ear of your heart."

Benedict asks us to live life consciously, to live in the present moment, open to God's movement in our lives. Years ago, my novice director explained contemplative awareness as the "sacrament of the present moment."

You know what moments I mean: gasping at an outrageously beautiful sunset, gazing into the eyes of someone you love deeply, or reading poetry or scripture. Being aware of present moments such as these can be "graced" with God's presence.

Try this: sit quietly and be open to the sights and sounds around you as well as to the feelings and thoughts within. Take a deep breath and **be here now** in the present mo-

ment with whatever prayerfulness naturally arises in you. This is contemplative awareness.

I think we have all experienced a contemplative dimension in our lives at one time or another, that point at which we are wholly involved in a moment's flow of living. Such moments move us deeply and prayerfulness enters in.

Contemplative awareness is "openness to what is." It is grounded in the present moment, yet it embraces all possibilities. This kind of contemplative awareness makes it possible to "pray always." We can be contemplative even while thinking analytically or trying to complete a task under pressure. The key is that we be grounded in the present moment, open and aware of God's movement in our lives.

Contemplative awareness leads us into contemplative prayer, or prayer that we engage in when we are alone and silent. This is the prayer that leads into that experience of deep communion with God, a resting in God's love. When thoughts and words help us meet God in that communion of love we must use them.

For many who pray, however, words soon reach their limit and we sense that we can get closer to God without them. Contemplative prayer goes on like an undercurrent, like something a person sees out of the corner of the eyes without fully turning to look at it. Ultimately this kind of prayer takes us into the very Heart of God.

Through contemplative prayer the transforming power of God lays hold of our lives and leads us out of ourselves into a social consciousness that demands that we seek justice and peace for all people in our world. This is what happened to Jesus. His prayer and union with the Father led him into his very active ministry with the suffering, the poor and the dispossessed. It will likewise do the same for us.

That's the challenge!

Enjoy your further reading! Know that we are grateful for who you are and for all you do to further God's presence in our world. May our gracious and tender God bless each one of you.

# God Abiding in Human Hearts

by Sr. Evangela Bossert

The spiritual journey is a life-long adventure that takes us along many paths of prayer and of understanding who God is in our lives. The word CONTEMPLATIVE is used to explain certain aspects of the journey, and to be truthful, there are many understandings and definitions of this word.

As I study the history of my own Benedictine tradition in prayer I am surprised to learn that very early monastic writers did not spend much time trying to put their contemplative experiences into words. They didn't talk much about how to pray. For them, reading the Scriptures was ordinarily the prelude to prayer because it nourished an awareness of God's presence and fostered relationship with God. To memorize Scripture and carry it in the heart throughout the day was "praying constantly."

St. Gregory the Great in the 6<sup>th</sup> century appears to be one of the first Christians to use the word CONTEMPLATION. For Gregory contemplation meant "a loving knowledge of God that one comes to in reading of the Scriptures."

Early Christianity rooted the human soul in the heart. Although St. Benedict doesn't speak directly or specifically about contemplative awareness, there are elements in his Rule that show an understanding of it, especially in his many "heart" references, such as: "Attend with the ear of your heart;" "Do not harden your hearts;" "Speak the truth from your heart;" "Fling the evil one from the sight of your heart;" and "Run with expanded hearts in the inexpressible delight of love."

The human heart is the deep center of the self where God abides. God initiates awareness of this self in us and makes possible the conscious entry into God's presence. It leads to ever deepening reverence for the universe and all that dwell within.

Contemplative awareness can never be an object of ambition. It cannot be a goal to achieve or a task to perform. It is not a project to do or something to be achieved by practical intellect or reason. Coming into contemplative awareness involves a process, a spiritual journey, and nurtures the flowering of the gifts of faith, hope and love.

Contemplative awareness is first of all a gift – the gift of being able to sit still and be quiet before "Reality." We cannot give this gift to ourselves; we can, however, open ourselves to the gift of God when we are able to love someone more than ourselves.

How can we do this? One beginning point may be a deliberate simplification of ourselves by moving our seeing, feeling, wanting self toward the focus of a deeper self in touch with God. The driving power in the deeper self is open to the Spirit and leads away from ego-centeredness. As we identify and follow the deeper attractions and desires of the Spirit in our lives, we are able to gather the "whole" of ourselves into a kind of oneness. This unity opens up to the action of the Spirit of God.

Sometimes it is a very painful life crisis which demands that we move to a different level of awareness. Or, we may come into contact with some powerful force of love, beauty or goodness that causes us to claim the primary values in our life

As we reach a new awareness we lose our preoccupation with surface realities like appearances and details and begin to un-

derstand that all of creation is endowed with a deeper, hidden reality. We stop viewing everything in terms of how useful or beneficial it may be for ourselves.

Entering into contemplative awareness requires a certain detachment from accidentals in order to be free to reverence



Sr. Evangela Bossert

ourselves and others. Gradually we become more inclusive and able to reverence the whole universe – to recognize ourselves as part of a larger picture. Contemplative awareness enables us to look at a person, an event or situation as one that bears the hidden Word of God.

*Sr. Evangela Bossert is the author of Gertrude of Helfta: Companion for the Millennium, available for \$11.00 plus postage and handling from the Monastery of St. Gertrude.*

# Making Room for a Contemplative Life

by Sr. Margie Schmidt

In the Book of Genesis, Chapter 12 God tells Abram that he will be blest, and not just for himself. God tells Abram that he will be blest so that that he might be a blessing to others!

This passage has been a guiding light in my life for many years. Since I first read it I have taken its call seriously. It has become the basis of my contemplative awareness in both my private and professional life.

Contemplation gives us the time and space to become quiet, even in the midst of activity. It teaches us that we are one with God, and in that oneness we are empowered to let go of all that binds or disturbs us.

Contemplation at its highest level sets us totally free. It makes us completely in tune with God – harmony and melody!

Contemplation is not a privilege of a few people, but a gift to everyone. It demands reflection on and awareness of our surroundings, of God's presence, God's call and God's gracious gifts in our lives.

## Open House, from page 1

As I companion others in their faith-journeys, I try to listen with them to the ways God is present in *their* lives. Margaret Guenther says that in spiritual direction "we attend to the holy." These times of reverent presence speak deeply to me that each person is called to holiness. Each person is loved by God far beyond imagining, and the place of redemption is our everyday lives.

Those with whom I visit in prayer teach me that nothing is "unspiritual" and that each encounter with someone is an act of expectant hospitality with our God. They have my deepest thanks, for their sharing is teaching me to be a more hospitable host for God in my own temple.



Sr. Margie Schmidt

I have learned to be contemplative through my years as a Benedictine sister and also through my many years of parish community life. From my first memories, instilled in me by my parents' example, my parish community has been of very great importance to me.

In Greencreek, ID, where I grew up, the parish community was the **only** community, and I loved it! During the last 24 years I have served as a staff member in parish ministry and have been a vital part of parish relationships.

It seemed quite natural to me, and ordained by God, that I was appointed as the Parish Director of St. Stanislaus Parish in Lewiston, ID. It is here that I now live out my Benedictine commitment and the values of peace, hospitality, simplicity, justice and prayer in a contemplative spirit.

In my professional position I try to do small things to help create a contemplative awareness of God's presence. One small example at the parish would be the good quality music we play before the liturgy so that people

entering the church might experience a change of space and environment. As people enter a quiet church the music helps make the transition from the secular to the holy, from chronological time to holy time.

It is in this holy space and time that contemplation happens. People recognize that they are loved for their own sake and as they are. In this quiet atmosphere they are enabled to put aside their concerns and conversations and enter into God's presence.

My office is another area that I maintain as a safe, comfortable and contemplative place. Many people who enter my office have great concerns, some have been hurt deeply, some are grieving and some are searching. I pay attention to how my office is arranged and decorated so that whatever be the person's need, the space in which we meet will facilitate healing.

There's a tension in my life, as in everyone's, between "being" and "doing." There is always plenty to do in a parish; the challenge is how to accomplish the tasks with a contemplative attitude, even when times are hectic and pressured.

Keeping aware that God has made a home within me keeps me centered and focused on what needs to be done, and also on Who really is the One who does the work – God.

Contemplative awareness pulls us outside ourselves and enables us to see a broader vision – God's vision revealed to Abram:

*I will bless you so that you will be a blessing. All the communities of the earth shall find blessing in you"*  
(Genesis 12:2-3b).



# Seeing Eye to Eye With God

Sr. Josephine Vincke hasn't always seen eye to eye with God. In fact, the week before her final profession in 1932, she asked everyone – the priests, her superior, herself and God – whether she should go ahead and become a nun.

"I thank God that the Lord kept me in the monastery," said Sr. Josie, eyes twinkling. "I think if I hadn't been a sister, I would have been in trouble all my life!"

Sr. Josie (Katherine) was the fifth child of ten born to Frank and Katherine Vincke in rural Louisiana. Her parents had been the victims of land-grabbing, get-rich-quick salesmen and were forced to relocate South from their family farm in Ohio.

Her mother died when Sr. Josie was 11 years old, and the family was split apart: The two youngest children and two brothers were sent north to live with an aunt and uncle in Michigan, and four remaining girls, including Sr. Josie, were sent to a convent in Louisiana where the two oldest Vincke girls were already professed Benedictine sisters. Two years later, her father died. "They say he died of a broken heart," Josie remembers.

Sr. Josie was a natural in the classroom and taught grade school for the next four decades, mostly in Louisiana. She earned her B.S. in Education from St. Mary's Dominican College in 1949. She wonders, still, what effect her teaching might "have had on those first student of mine. I hope I didn't ruin them forever!"

For years she had no idea what had become of her siblings taken north by her aunt and uncle. Communication with nuns in convents was next to impossible, so her family up north didn't know where to find Sr. Josie and her three sisters.

Sr. Josie was eventually reunited with her family through the help of another nun in the convent in Louisiana. This woman had

a sister in Ohio who wrote and asked if she knew or could find out what ever happened to the Vincke family that had once lived in Ohio. Much to everyone's amazement, four of the Vincke girls were sisters in the convent!

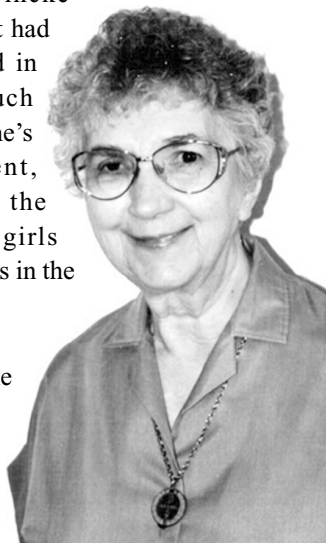
In 1988 the Benedictine community in Louisiana had to

close its doors. The sisters scrambled to find other places to live. Sr. Josie was familiar with St. Gertrude's in Cottonwood; she had participated in the InnSpire Program in 1987. Before deciding to move here, however, she visited monasteries in Pittsburgh, Chicago and Oklahoma. On August 12, 1988 she began her probationary period and was fully incorporated into the Monastery of St. Gertrude in 1990.

Sr. Josie recalls that her early life was hard as a boarder at the Louisiana convent. She didn't want to be there and she missed her family deeply. To fill her lonely times, she memorized poetry and Bible verses, sowing the early seeds of a contemplative life.

She recalls that at times throughout her life she was put into positions she was not equipped to handle but got through them with God's grace and help. "When my heart was way down on the ground, I would recite poetry and Scriptures I had memorized. They would make me think of God and then I could go on.

"The hard times helped increase my faith and developed in me a strong prayer life. I can be grateful for them, now – maybe they put a little polish on my soul!"



## Vocations News

In a simple ceremony on September 14, we welcomed our two affiliates, Mary Mendez and Carla Fontes, as Postulants. During the next year Mary and Carla will continue to explore their desire to seek God within this community.

Mary was born in Des Moines, IA, and lived in California before moving to Idaho last year. She is a registered nurse and most recently worked in hospice. Mary has been a live-in volunteer since May working in the infirmary, the gardens and the old kitchen. Mary is a classical guitarist.

Carla was born in Taunton, MA. As an Air Force family they had the opportunity to live in Japan for four years before settling in Boise in 1974. Carla worked in the computer industry for many years. She was active at Sacred Heart Parish in Boise, singing in two choirs and serving on the Evangelization Committee. Carla, too, has put time into the gardens and old kitchen during the last month.

Please join your prayers with ours for these women as they take this next step in faith.

## W

I had a wonderful time at World Youth Day. Check out [www.geocities.com/benedictine\\_srs\\_vocations/](http://www.geocities.com/benedictine_srs_vocations/) for photos.

There's lots of energy among young people searching for a deeper relationship with God. The gift of contemplative life that typifies Benedictines seems a gift they are readily willing to accept. Young people echo that question of the Apostles, "Lord, teach us how to pray."

We "professional" prayers can help by sharing our experiences of personal and communal prayer. We do this through our Come and See Weekends scheduled throughout the year. The next weekend is scheduled for November 22 - 24.

# In Loving Memory

Sr. Augustine (Elsie) Uhlenkott, OSB, 98, died at the Monastery of St. Gertrude in Cottonwood, ID on August 27, 2002.

Sr. Augustine was born in Cottonwood to Joseph and Amalia Frei Uhlenkott on October 21, 1903, the third of six children. She made her Monastic Profession as a Benedictine Sister at the Monastery of St. Gertrude on August 15, 1921.

She earned her degree in education from Lewiston Normal School and Mt. St. Scholastica College in Atchison, KS, and a Masters in music at the University of Idaho. She taught in the parochial schools in Nezperce, Keuterville, St. Maries, and Cottonwood, and was a teacher and principal at Greencreek High School and St. Gertrude's Academy in Cottonwood.

These educational and leadership roles served her well during her years as Prioress of the Monastery of St. Gertrude from

1955 - 1967. Among her special accomplishments was a renewed emphasis on praying and singing the Divine Office daily in the name of the church for the whole world.

With the increase in the number of new members in the 1950's and 60's Sr. Augustine persuaded the community to establish St. Gertrude's College and to expand the number of schools they staffed throughout the diocese. She also lead several building projects: a gym for St. Gertrude's Academy, a rectory for the chaplain, St. Benedicts Nursing Home in Jerome, ID, and St. Mary's Hospital in Cottonwood.

During her second term as Prioress she was elected President of the Congregation (now



Federation) of St. Gertrude. It was in this role that she gathered Sisters from several communities, including St. Gertrude's, to begin missionary work in Colombia, South America.

From 1971-87 Sr. Augustine taught music at St. Mary's and Sacred Heart Schools in Boise. The last 14 years she

was retired at the monastery where she spent most of her time praying.

She is remembered as a strong, intelligent, caring woman with a charism for effective leadership and a zest for life. No one can count the number of afghans she crocheted nor the number of pinochle games she won.

Memorials may be made to the Monastery of St. Gertrude, HC3 Box 121, Cottonwood, ID 83522-9408.



## DEVELOPMENTS

*by Sr. Mary Kay Henry, Director of Development*

How did you mark the anniversary of September 11? How has that event changed you and your family? your work? your faith? your budget?

We stand as peers with you who have to stretch your creativity to meet your budget in the economic turbulence following 9-11. We search for ways to make fiscally responsible choices for the future during this time of uncertainty. Such world and regional events have a definite impact on our community's prayer, outreach and strategic planning.

To commemorate the anniversary we invited the public to join us for our daily prayer schedule during which we had special reflections and petitions for the US and the world. The day rubbed us against the polishing stone of our mission statement which calls us to respond to significant events with healing hospitality, grateful simplicity and creative peacemaking.

The war on terrorism has heightened in us the choice to pray steadfastly that God will bless the world's peoples and leaders with new imagination and persevering courage to seek a non-violent path to resolve seemingly irreconcilable differences.

Although we are aware of the complexities of choosing non-violence over violence, hospitality over hostility, and simplicity over consumerism, the memories of September 11 spur us to renewed resolve in living these values for the sake of the people and the planet.

We count on your forgiveness for the times that our failures in living out these values have caused you suffering. We count on your support and encouragement as we begin over and over to walk the path of discipleship. We offer you the same support on your journey to wholeness.

# So, What IS Helfta, Anyway?

On November 16 we celebrate the Feast of St. Gertrude of Helfta (the “Great”), our patron saint. Not surprisingly, here at the monastery, this is one of our major feast days. This year’s celebration is particularly special because it marks 700<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Gertrude’s life (1256-1302).

The story of how the monastery was named St. Gertrude goes something like this: “Sacred Heart” was the favored name; however, as there was a plethora of Sacred Hearts at the time, the Bishop suggest “St. Gertrude.” St. Gertrude the Great is credited with beginning the devotion to the Sacred Heart, so it was a perfect fit.

Why Gertrude *of Helfta*? Helfta is a town located in the former East Germany. The monastery itself was established in 1229 on the grounds of Mansfield castle. By the time St. Gertrude entered the convent in 1260 at the age of four, the monastery was located in the village of Helfta near Eiselben, birthplace of Martin Luther. In 1342 the buildings and grounds were de-

stroyed by Duke Albrecht of Brunswick, then rebuilt within the town of Eiselben in 1343. The monastery met its final destruction in 1525 during the New Reformation. Eventually it passed into the hands of the Prussian government and then the East German (GDR) government to be run as a state farm.

To celebrate the new millennium, a group of people known as The Friends of Helfta (<http://www.kloster-helfta.de>) purchased the ruins and transformed them into a beautiful modern monastery. Much of the new construction was placed within the original stone walls. The group was able to persuade a group of Cistercian nuns (a form of Benedictine life) from Bavaria to take up residence there and make the monastery a center of healing prayer again in a country where so much pain has happened through the centuries.



The Friends of Helfta are now beginning the process of petitioning the Vatican to declare St. Gertrude a Doctor (L., teacher) of the Church. This title is given to certain church writers whose doctrine is beneficial for and enhances the church. The three requirements for receiving this title are great sanctity, eminent learning, and proclamation as Doctor of the Church by a pope or ecumenical council.

Gertrude’s two best-known writings are *The Herald of God’s Loving-kindness* (1289) and *Spiritual Exercises*. If this effort is successful St. Gertrude will be one of four women Doctors of the Church, joining Saints Teresa of Avila, Catherine of Sienna, and Therese of Liseaux.

We will remember you specially in our prayer on November 16 and invite you to send us any petitions you have for that day.



## The Historical Museum at St. Gertrude

Mark your calendars! It’s time for the annual Fall Lecture Series to begin! These much-anticipated lectures focus on the history of North Central Idaho and provide participants the opportunity to learn about the history of our area.

With the upcoming Lewis & Clark Bicentennial commemoration, the lectures will assist us in understanding the importance of north central Idaho in the settlement of the state specifically and the West in general.

The free lectures are held each Thursday evening in October. They begin at 7:00 pm in the Monastery’s dining room.

**October 3, 2002, 7:00 pm**

**“Sgt. Ordway, Pvt’s Weiser and Fraser and Their Journey Over the Camas Prairie” with Carole Simon-Smolinski**

On May 27, 1806, three members of the Lewis & Clark Corps of Discovery were dispatched from Camp Chopunnish (Kamiah) to Lewis’ River (Snake River). Hear a discussion about that journey.

**October 10, 2002, 7:00 pm**

**“History of the Clearwater River Log Drive” with Dr. Sandra McCollister**

A slide lecture focusing on the famous log drives down the Clearwater River in the years 1928-1971.

**October 17, 2002, 7:00 pm**

**“Archaeological Excavations in North Central Idaho” with Dr. Lee Sappington**

A slide lecture that explores the archaeological digs at Tolo Lake and sites along the Salmon and Snake Rivers.

**October 24, 2002, 7:00 pm**

**“The History of Mining in the Buffalo Hump” with Julian Davis**

Mr. Davis has been a miner and geologist his entire life. He will discuss the history of mining in the Buffalo Hump country.

# Come Away to a Retreat

## Dancing in Creation:

### Explorations About Women and Nature

Oct. 11 - 18, 2002 (Fri. 7:30 PM to Fri. 1:30 PM)

*Sr. Alexandra Kovats, csjp, Ph.D. (11 - 13) & Staff (13 - 18)*

Explore the call to live in right relationship with all of creation and practical responses to that call. The connection between the plight of women and nature will also be considered. Body prayer, silence, presentations, sharing and rituals will be part of our time together.

*Weekend Presenter: Alexandra Kovats, csjp, Ph.D., is a lover of creation, a dancer of life, educator, retreat facilitator and spiritual companion who has journeyed with a rich diversity of humans for over thirty years.*



Visit us on the web: [www.StGertrudes.org](http://www.StGertrudes.org)  
Email: [retreat@camasnet.com](mailto:retreat@camasnet.com)  
[outreachretreats@hotmail.com](mailto:outreachretreats@hotmail.com)

## When Darkness Comes:

### Praying Through Loss, Grief & Suffering

Oct. 25 - 27, 2002 (Fri. 7:30 PM to Sun. 1:30 PM)

*Sr. Stephanie Wardle (Certified Grief Counselor),*

*Sr. Teresa Jackson & Kathy McFaul*

When we experience loss or grief, it is often hard to know where God is, how to pray or even who God is for us. In this retreat we will explore how to pray and hold on to the reality of God in the dark times.

## Daring a Glance Into the Heart of Christ

Nov. 15 - 17, 2002 (Fri. 7:30 PM to Sun. 1:30 PM)

*Sr. Mary Kay Henry & Sr. Evangela Bossert*

Celebrate St. Gertrude of Helfta's 700 year legacy! A retreat for men and women seeking courage to live the Gospel more fully. How can St. Gertrude's insights fire our own hearts to be Good News to the poor in our own "terror-able" and sacred world? St. Gertrude had profound experiences of God's saving power abiding in and flowing from Christ's loving heart. Sr. Evangela's book, *Gertrude of Helfta: Companion for the Millennium*, will be available to purchase in The Book and Gift Shop.



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**Monastery of St. Gertrude**

HC 3 Box 121, Cottonwood, ID 83522-9408

## Look Inside ...

Contemplation:

There's a temple in the  
midst of it

Eye-to-Eye With God:

Sr. Josie Vincke's  
vocation story

St. Gertrude of Helfta ...

What *IS* Helfta, anyway?



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