

CANTICLE OF ST. GERTRUDE

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GRATEFUL(?) SIMPLICITY

Grateful simplicity sounds so nice in theory. I can envision myself living with only a few necessary possessions, frequently walking rather than driving, living an uncluttered life while offering prayers of thankfulness.

That's the theory. The practice on the other hand... I'm sure I'm not the only one who owns too much stuff (which I'm going to clean out any day now, honest!), who can enter deeply and easily into an attitude of entitlement whenever I can't quickly or easily get what I think I need.

I have to say that St. Benedict doesn't seem to be much help in this regard. In his chapter on "Private Ownership" he says: *"Above all, the vice of personal ownership in the monastery must be cut out by the very root. Without the superior's permission, no one may presume to give, receive, or keep anything as one's own... since monastics are not allowed to have even their bodies or their wills at their own disposal."* (RB 33:1-4)

From the Prioress

My first reaction is to think, "Whoa! Harsh, dude!!" But, as usual, Benedict knew what he was talking about and, also, knew that being subtle does not work with most of us.

Benedict is trying to make his monks (and us) see that everything we have is a gift. We don't easily understand - or fully appreciate - that everything we have and

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Applying Grateful Simplicity to Daily Life

by Carrie Barton
Mission Advancement

Use it up, wear it out,
Make it do or do without.

I grew up hearing my dad recite that saying from the Great Depression.

These wise words - use it up, wear it out, make it do or do without - can guide us in practicing the Center for Benedictine Life's core value of grateful simplicity. It's not difficult to find books, newspaper and magazine articles, and podcasts focusing on simplifying our lives. Eliminating clutter, limiting screen time, purchasing only what you need, and keeping healthy snacks on

hand, are just a few suggestions I found with a quick browser search. They're not bad ideas but let's go deeper.



Sept. 23-25

A Watercolor Journey II

Sept. 26-Oct. 2

*Spiritual Discipline of
Contemporary Iconography*

Nov 7-9

An Attitude of Gratitude Yoga Retreat

Advent

Silence the Christmas Noise

Upcoming Retreats

Register at: www.spirit-center.org

Living into grateful simplicity requires that we ask ourselves:

1. What are my values?
2. Based on my values, what is most important to me?

When we answer those two questions for ourselves, it becomes more manageable to limit everything that doesn't align with what we value and consider most important. Do what you love, spend time with people you love, spend time alone, and spend time with God.

That, my friends, is what living a life of grateful simplicity is all about.

Here's one more idea: Limit media consumption. That includes this newsletter. If you prefer not to receive the Canticle, let us know and we'll take you off the mailing list.

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own is ultimately a gift from God. We're not entitled to anything. Very few of us even grow, make or in any way produce what we own or use. We have to remind ourselves over and over and over again that everything is gift and ultimately a gift from God.

To help his monks understand this basic concept, Benedict's monastery was set up so that the monks would have to ask for what they needed. How quickly would your attitude change if you needed to ask someone for a new blouse or a tool to replace the one you broke? Even if the answer will certainly be "yes," it will require some humility to go and ask for what you need rather than just going out and getting it yourself.

Benedict is asking his monks to reflect on whether they really need something versus whether they just *want* it, and then to be grateful to receive something they are simultaneously not entitled to and probably did nothing to earn or produce. Benedict made his monks ask permission as a way to cultivate an attitude of profound gratitude and to clear our soul of the weeds of entitlement that grow so easily and prolifically. The concept is simple, but most of us probably belong in the remedial class as we try over and over again to learn it.

So, what's next? I would like to say that writing this compelled me to immediately minimize my accumulation of "stuff" and to be more grateful for the too much that I already have. I also know that - for myself, and most of us - the journey of conversion is long and slow. I will probably try to begin (again!) by pausing the next time I think I "need" something, and to give thanks that I already have all that I need, remembering



that everything, even my life, is truly a gift. I will, however, have to keep working on the idea that Benedict might think I don't really need so many books!

Sister Teresa Jackson OSB

Sister Teresa Jackson, OSB
Prioress



Sister Mary Marge Goeckner Celebrates 70 Years of Religious Life

For Sister Mary Marge Goeckner, OSB, 2025 marks her 70th year as a Benedictine Sister of the Monastery of St. Gertrude.

Since entering the monastery in 1955, Sister Mary Marge has had a wide and varied history of ministries and educational attainments. She served as a teacher at St. Gertrude's Academy and other schools in Idaho, along with studying at St. Martin's University, Lacey, Washington, and earning a master's degree from Seattle University, before traveling to Rome where she focused on Monastic Studies.

When St. Gertrude's Academy closed in 1970, Sister Mary Marge was instrumental in starting the Release Time program, which offered public school students an



opportunity to receive religious education as part of the school day, though not on school property.

Sister Mary Marge returned to the monastery in Cottonwood in 1977 when she was elected prioress - superior - of the community. The second youngest prioress in the community's history, she served in that capacity until 1985. She followed her term in leadership by embarking on a course in Clinical Pastoral Education, becoming a chaplain at Holy Family Hospital and Sacred Heart Medical Center, both in Spokane, Washington, over a 20-year period. During her summers, she studied in Zurich, Switzerland, earning a counseling degree.

Sister Mary Marge served as assistant prioress twice over the years, and in her retirement enjoys more time for embroidery, a skill at which she excels as evidenced by the beautiful tablecloths and other items that she has completed.



Sister Mary Marge received a lovely bouquet of 70 roses in honor of her jubilee.

Nurturing Grateful Simplicity at Spirit Center

by Sister Betty Schumacher, OSB
Spirit Center Director

Many spiritual writers remind us of the importance of beginning each day with a prayer of gratitude. When we utter the very simple words, “Thank You” our day tends to unfold in a richer and deeper way. We become more aware of how blessed we are. We begin to savor the simple and small things of life. We find ourselves pausing and reflecting on the various moments of our day that either bring a smile to our face or possibly a tear to our eye. We may find ourselves standing in awe and wonder of all that we have been given and all that we are invited to share.



One of the core values of the Spirit Center is grateful simplicity, which is visibly expressed in the beauty of creation that surrounds it. Grateful simplicity can be experienced and savored when sitting in the Spirit Center quietly gazing out the window and seeing the vast expanse of farmland or watching the deer peacefully grazing in the nearby field. Grateful simplicity is ever present when walking up the hill and finding oneself standing among the many trees that are part of a large forest or walking to the meadow and, on a clear day, seeing the various mountain ranges.



We welcome you to an Open House

Come tour the monastery

Please join in a tour of the monastery that will include visiting many of the rooms on the first, second and fourth floors - and a couple of bedrooms! – and hear the stories that are part of their history. The tour will end at Spirit Center with a look at the retreat facilities and refreshments.

Saturday October 11th

From 1:30pm - 4:00pm



For several years, I lived next door to Seeya, an African American woman who, when asked, “How are you today?” always responded the same way: “Blessed.” Every time I heard her response, I found myself stopping to ponder this inspiring, uplifting attitude.

As we live out grateful simplicity, may our reply be, “Blessed,” when asked, “How are you today?”

The Quiet Strength of Simplicity

by Carla Wilkins
Museum Director

In a world often driven by noise and novelty, the spirit of grateful simplicity invites us to pause. At the gift shop and museum, we are surrounded by reminders that beauty doesn't require extravagance. A crocheted dishcloth, a jar of our homemade jam, vintage jewelry or a worn prayer book — each tells a story of care, purpose, and presence.

Simplicity here is not about doing without. It is about seeing clearly. It means taking joy in the rhythm of a well-lived day: a kind greeting at the front desk, the scent of Sister Carlotta's soap, and simple museum panels with fewer words. These moments, often unnoticed, are where simplicity thrives.

This spirit is also central to our Living History event, where volunteers embody the lives of those who came before us — starting a museum, running a household or business, building a trail. These were not easy tasks, but there is beauty in the focus, the hands-on connection, and the willingness to serve. At the August 2 event, our archivist, Jean Melching, played the beleaguered Kentucky mare of an early pioneer. She never said a word but made an impression. That's simplicity at work.

As stewards of history, we honor not only grand achievements but also the gentle lives that shaped this place. May your visit to the museum inspire a bit of that same grateful simplicity in your own life.



Jean Melching portrayed a Kentucky mare during this year's Living History event at the Historical Museum.



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Grateful Simplicity in the Monastery

by Tim Oberholzer
CBL Executive Director

Grateful Simplicity finds expression in communities living the Rule of St. Benedict. This story is set in a monastery, but the Benedictine value extends beyond walls and vows. Perhaps you've lived a similar experience.

Schrack, schrick, schrick

Brother Charles deliberately scrapes emerging weeds away from the sprouting corn. Sweat drips from his nose and beard. His overalls stick to him in the Midwest heat and humidity.

Schrack, schrick, schrick

The story of an unnamed novice who rooted up rows of beans while leaving the weeds undisturbed haunts the young monk. Didn't Jesus tell a parable about letting the weeds grow alongside the wheat? Charles lives the danger of uprooting the good crop with each stroke of his hoe.

Schrack, schrick, schrick

What happened to Brother Maurus? Pausing to look up, he sees the hunched figure already at the end of the adjacent row, turning for the return on the far side. Short of halfway, inadequacy and inferiority flood Charles.

Schrack, schrick, schrick

Trying not to compete with the old monk, the city-boy become monk considers the parable of the farmer planting, sleeping, waking as the crop grows "he knows not how." The mystery of these little sprouts growing out of the dirt into towering corn stalks captivates him.

Schrack, schrick, schrick

Squeak, rattle, squeak

The sound of Brother Maurus' ancient pickup breaks Charles' reflection and rhythm. He's reached the end of the row! "Get in," says the gardener. Charles obeys, pitching his hoe into the truck bed and climbing into the cab. The door bangs closed as Br. Maurus shifts into gear. They proceed in silence. Or, what passes for silence in the squeaky rattletrap.

Squeak, rattle, squeak



Circling the carpentry shop, Brother Maurus pulls up to a patch of something Charles does not recognize. The pickup coughs and shudders as the old man shuts off the ignition and slides out his door. Curious, Charles follows as he shuffles over to the patch and extracts a large watermelon. Returning to the pickup, the tailgate grudgingly bangs down. Using the makeshift table, Brother Maurus deftly cuts two watermelon pieces with his pocketknife. Taking a big, slurping bite of one, the old man leans against the truck and squints at his helper. "It's too hot to keep working in the garden today." With a wink, he offers the other piece.

Watermelon never tasted so good.

Tidbits from Tuxedo

Editor's note: Meet Tuxedo, our new Canticle correspondent. Tuxedo's primary job is to patrol the monastery grounds and banish unwanted visitors, i.e., mice. He and Father Meinrad are best friends.

What a day! I was minding my own business when suddenly I heard the most terrifying noise! Quick as a wink, I hid behind the refrigerator. It took Father Meinrad a long time and many reassuring words to coax me out. I was a little embarrassed when I found out that the noise was caused by the roofers scrapping the roof off the Solitude House where Father Meinrad and I live. The roofers said that it's a miracle the old roof hadn't leaked because it was a mess! Now we have a new roof. We're grateful to the roofers for their hard work and to the organization Support Our Aging Religious for the generous grant that made the new roof possible. Meow!

