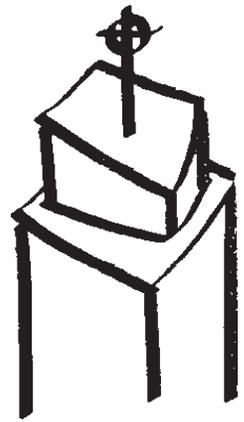


OUR FAMILY NEWS

For Oblates of St. Bede Abbey, Peru, Illinois

November &
December, 2019



The following article by Fr. Hugh Feiss, O.S.B., of the Monastery of the Ascension, Jerome, Idaho, is the second piece of writing by Fr. Hugh to grace the pages of Our Family News. He previously contributed the essay "Care is to be extended with the greatest solicitude," written specifically for this publication, to its Summer, 2013 issue.

The present article originally appeared in the March, 2018 issue of The Desert Chronicle, the house organ of Fr. Hugh's own monastery. Although the complexion of the geographical area about which Fr. Hugh has written has changed since then—and continues to do so—we have thought it best to reprint the piece exactly as it first appeared. Indeed, the continuing evolution of the fortunes of the peoples who inhabit that area only serves to poignantly heighten Fr. Hugh's message.

BORDERS

The Flight into Egypt

When I was a teenaged freshman and sophomore in the seminary college, there were some newly-arrived post-graduate students taking prerequisites before admittance to the theology school. They were a godsend, opening my eyes to things I did not hear about in the classes I was taking. One of them introduced me to the art of Georges Rouault, who has been my favorite modern painter ever since. He was born in Paris in 1871 to a poor family. At fourteen he began a five-year apprenticeship with a stained glass artist. He was then admitted to the prestigious Ecole des Beaux-Arts. He became a painter both of religious subjects and of the people at the margins of society, such as clowns and prostitutes. Rouault later dedicated himself to religious subjects. He became a lifelong friend of Jacques Maritain, a Catholic philosopher. Rouault's religious paintings centered on the Passion of Christ. Among other themes that he painted was the Flight into Egypt of Joseph, Mary, and the child Jesus, who emigrated to escape the murderous rule of Herod the Great.

The Flight into Egypt (Mt 2:13-23) is an incident that tends to be overlooked in our thinking and preaching about the birth of Christ. In escaping to Egypt, the Holy Family followed a path trod by other Jewish people. The sons of Jacob went to Egypt during a famine (Gen 42-50). After they settled in Egypt under Joseph, the Israelites were mistreated and enslaved. God rescued them at the Exodus. God commanded them, once settled in Palestine, to treat resident aliens in their land kindly. God had taken pity on the Israelites in their exile, and they were to do the same with exiles who sought refuge in their midst: "When an alien resides with you in your land, do not mistreat such a one. You shall treat the alien who resides with you no differently than the natives born among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you too were once aliens in the land of Egypt. I the Lord am your God" (Lev 19:33-34; cf. Num 15:14-15). Another Jewish refugee to Egypt was Uriah, a prophet who delivered the same unwelcome message from God as Jeremiah did (Jer 26:21-23). Uriah was kidnapped in Egypt by agents of the Jewish king, Jehoiakim, taken back to Jerusalem, and executed.

Border

Kapka Kassabova, a native Bulgarian whose family emigrated from Communist Bulgaria to New Zealand, now lives in Scotland. She recently spent two years in Strandja and Rhodope, the mountainous area where Bulgaria, Turkey, and Greece meet. Its edges reach to the Aegean and the Black Seas. She describes her experiences there in *Border: A Journey to the Edge of Europe*

(2017). This was an area settled long before Christ by the Thracians. Under the Ottoman Empire (dissolved after World War I), Greeks, Turks, and Bulgarians, Muslim and Christian, intermingled there. After World War I and the creation of the nation-states of Greece, Turkey, and Bulgaria, there was a vast ethnic cleansing, so that members of the other two ethnic groups in each country were sent across the border to be with their own kind. In one incident a shepherd boy on one side of the border waved, then shouted hello across to a shepherd boy on the other side. For that treacherous act he was sentenced to fourteen years in prison. During the Cold War, the Bulgarian border was very closely guarded. East Germans and others who tried to escape to the West across the Bulgarian border were routinely executed. The Cold War is over, but now Syrians and Kurds trying to cross the border are detained in refugee camps.

The Spring

After two years exploring the area, Kassabova found it hard to pull herself away. Finally, she went to a spring in the cave dedicated to Saint Marina, which has been a sacred place since Thracian times: “I lay under the dripping rock which is really—when you look up—a mountain of living stone, and washed my changing face in the water that doesn’t change, crazy with love for this earth where everything begins with a spring.” Kassabova is not an overtly religious person, but a Christian can think of the infinite, generous love of God, which makes the Trinity three in one, and freely overflows into the being of the universe, each thing sustained by bubbling goodness of God’s gift. The young priest in Bernanos’ *Diary of a Country Priest* (1936) experienced few joys in his ministry, but he persevered, and as his death approached, he realized how much he loved this sorrow-drenched, grace-given world.

An Iranian literary critic pointed out the similarities between Bernanos’ country priest and Pastor Ames in Marilynne Robinson’s *Gilead* (2004). As Ames seeks to forgive and accept his wayward godchild, he discovers that “Wherever you turn your eyes the world can shine like a transfiguration. You don’t have to bring a thing to it except a little willingness to see.”

Glad the Present Exists

The Strandja that Kassabova immersed herself in is changing rapidly: depopulated villages, ruthless mining, developments along the beaches that could turn the forests into dumps for garbage, and worse. Tensions are mounting along the three-sided border, exacerbated by events far away. As she left, a healer named Marina told her, “Living here I’ve learnt the futility of planning for the future. You are glad if the present exists.”

The present is always on the border of nothingness whence it was created, and of eternity, where our faces and the faces of the world will no longer wrinkle, but will be transfigured always in the excitement of the infinite good flowing over and around them, erasing every border that separates and serves as a killing field. Meanwhile, we need to think about borders. They serve to buffer local cultures from the homogenizing forces of progress as defined by powerful, sometimes greedy, sometimes well-meaning elites, a progress that uproots, depopulates, and in many ways oppresses. However, borders can also stultify and imprison. None of us has a permanent home here, and none of us has an unconditioned right to the goods of the world, which God destined for all of us. Like the shepherd boy who hailed his counterpoint across the river, we need to reach across the border; and we need to demolish the border of our selfish, fearful selves and be washed in a spring of grace that the other represents. Whoever it is, it is a member of the Holy Family.

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Our Family News is published in the special interest of the oblates of St. Bede Abbey. Please send changes of address and comments to The Editor, Our Family News, St. Bede Abbey, 24 W US Highway 6, Peru, IL 61354.

We welcome your submissions to this publication, either instructive or reflective, whether prose or poetry. They should in some way relate to the **Rule of Benedict**, Benedictine spirituality, and/or the oblate program. The editor reserves the rights to choose material for publication and to edit as necessary.

SCHEDULE OF UPCOMING MEETINGS

Meetings are held in the abbey church from
1:30 P.M. to 4:30 P.M.

Sunday, November 10, 2019
(*Oblate Day*)

Sunday, December 8, 2019
Sunday, January 12, 2020
Sunday, February 9, 2020
Sunday, March 8, 2020
Sunday, April 5, 2020
Sunday, May 3, 2020



Passages for *Lectio* at the December Meeting

God so loved the world that he gave
his one and only Son,
reconciling the world to himself in
Christ, not counting the sins of
human beings against them.

Dear friends, since God so loved us,
we also ought to love one another.

Bear with each other and forgive
whatever grievances you may have
against one another. Forgive as the
Lord forgave you.

Jn 3:16a
2 Cor 5:19
1 Jn 4:11
Col 3:13

Abbey Prayer Schedule

Visitors are welcome to join the monks for Mass and for the hours of the Divine Office. Conventual Mass is celebrated on the first level of the abbey church, the hours of the Divine Office on the second level. The monks' schedule is as follows.

5:45 A.M. Morning Prayer*
7:45 A.M. Conventual Mass**
12:00 Noon Midday Prayer
5:30 P.M. Evening Prayer***
* on Sunday, 7:00 A.M.
** on Sunday, 10:00 A.M.
*** on Saturday & Sunday, 5:00 P.M.

