IN THIS ISSUE:

In the second **Monastic Wisdom for Everyday Living** article, Br. Kevin meditates on Incarnation and what it means for God to be present to us in the flesh, every moment.

In an interview, Br. Tom looks back on his summer sabbatical, spent as intern working in the garden at Emery House, to share what he’s learned from the natural world and the “generosity of God.”

After having moved out of the Monastery, Br. Mark explores ways the Brothers and readers can make the most of the **Thick Places** in which we occasionally find ourselves.

In the Letter from the Superior, Br. Geoffrey shares the Brothers’ **vision for the future**, as they look forward to returning to the Monastery.

Construction News | Letter from a Member of the FSJ | Community News | Friends of SSJE | Open Letter to an FSJ Probationer

To follow the latest news from the Brothers, visit [www.SSJE.org](http://www.SSJE.org) where you can listen to weekly sermons and view photo galleries of construction at the Monastery.

*We would welcome hearing what you think of this issue of Cowley Magazine. Visit [www.SSJE.org/cowleymagazine](http://www.SSJE.org/cowleymagazine) to share comments, ask questions, or see Cowley Magazine in color!*

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**Cover photo:**

The crucifix on the grill in the Monastery Chapel casts a long shadow amidst the scaffolding and debris of construction.

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One of the most moving experiences of these past months of transition has been our Sunday morning Eucharists which we held in a tent! At first it seemed a strange idea. What would it be like to gather in the guest house garden, with no organ and a simple saw-horse altar which our workmen kindly offered to make for us? But on that first Sunday morning, with the tent filled with singing and the sheer delight of worshipping again together after the summer break, it was clear that the Lord had come to meet us, and that his Spirit was with us!

It was a powerful experience of Incarnation.

During the season of Advent we prepare our hearts again for the wonder of Christmas and the celebration of the Incarnation, the coming of God to meet us in Christ. St. John proclaims in the Prologue to his Gospel that “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” These familiar words could also be translated as “The Word became flesh and tabernacled among us,” or even “The Word became flesh and pitched his tent among us!” The worship in the tent helped us see in a new and powerful way the truth that God has indeed come into our lives, that he dwells in our midst, and will never leave us comfortless or alone, however challenging our circumstances. Making known this good news of Christ’s real presence in our daily life is central to the mission of our Society. As our Rule puts it, “Christ is already present in the life of...
everyone as the light of the world. It is our joy to serve all those to whom we are sent by helping them to embrace that presence in faith.”

We brothers are richly blessed by sharing our life and mission with so many others. In particular we rejoice in the growing number of members of the Fellowship of Saint John, who keep a rule of life in harmony with ours, and whose support, friendship and prayers sustain us in so many ways. I am delighted that Br. Eldridge Pendleton has been appointed the new Director of the Fellowship. His great pastoral gifts, scriptural wisdom and sensitivity as well as his lovely sense of humor will be a real blessing to our Fellowship members. In this issue he has written an open letter to an FSJ probationer.

During these past few months we Brothers have spent time praying and reflecting on the shape of our future life and mission. We had a particularly fruitful time of retreat and discussions in August at Emery House, and together we shared our own experiences of vocation and discussed how we felt God was calling us into the future. I have expressed some of our hopes and dreams in a letter which is printed in this issue. Also in this issue we have the second of our new Monastic Wisdom for Every-
day Living series, in which Brother Kevin offers a timely meditation on the Incarnation, the presence of God in every aspect of everyday life.

As we approach Christmas we are very aware of the many ways in which we have been blessed. The guesthouse at Emery House has been open since September, and we have been able to offer hospitality once again to those seeking the peace and beauty of that special place. Five Brothers are now in residence and it is a delight to be able to offer ministry again to our guests, as well as delicious home grown food! The construction on the Monastery is now well underway, and it is both amazing and exciting to see the changes taking place. At Christmas we are looking forward to welcoming our Brother Curtis back home after his sabbatical. He has enjoyed a time of rest and refreshment as well as ministry in the Middle East and Africa. It will be so good to see him again. Our Christmas plans include offering a Midnight Mass at 10:30 pm on Christmas Eve as well as a morning Eucharist on Christmas Day. (Please do check our website for more details as they become available.) The Brothers will be spending Christmas together at Emery House.

We are so grateful to God “who supplies all our needs,” and to you our friends and supporters for the gift of your friendship and encouragement. We wish you a blessed Advent and a joyful and peaceful Christmas.

Faithfully,

Geoffrey Tristram SSJE
Superior
At its core, being in the FSJ is all about relationship—being in relationship with God and with one another. It’s good to go to the Monastery when you can, but I wanted that tangible connection, that commitment to this Community. In joining the Fellowship of Saint John, I’ve committed to going back and being physically present, at least once a year. I’ve committed to supporting this community. I’ve committed to praying daily for this community. The Rule of Life has a daily connection to my life. It is something I hold in my being. It’s more than a book: rule, regla, it’s the guide for how to live.

I can’t see myself without this Community. I’m obviously not called to be a Brother; but I am called to the FSJ. For those of us who are associated with a monastic community, it becomes the beating heart from which helps us along.

Sarah Zygmunt, is a member of the Fellowship of Saint John and lives in Washington DC.

We welcome letters from Fellowship members and Friends of SSJE sent to voices@ssje.org.
I am writing to share with you some of the graces of our community time together this August. Amidst the beauty of Emery House we spent a week of retreat followed by a week of discussions. After all the disruption of these past months, culminating in our move out of the Monastery, it was wonderful for us Brothers to be able to spend this time together, to “be still and know that I am God,” and to reflect on our vocation and how we sense God is calling us into the future.

Above all, our time together was marked by a profound sense of thanksgiving: thanksgiving for the gift of one another as Brothers, for the gift of two wonderful properties, in Cambridge and at Emery House, thanksgiving for you, our friends and supporters, who have helped us so much with the gift of your finances, wisdom, counsel and encouragement, and thanksgiving for our immensely talented support staff who help sustain our life and ministry.

During our week of retreat each Brother had the opportunity to speak about his own experience of vocation. It was very moving to hear how God had called each of us from different countries and backgrounds to become, as our Rule puts it, “a company of friends…to live in union with God in prayer, worship and mutual love.” Living in community is the particular way in which God has called us to live the Christian Life, and we expressed our passionate desire to share this life in Jesus Christ with others. Our founder, Richard Meux Benson, wrote these words, “If only we let people see that we are living upon a truth, and loving it, they will soon catch the life.” I find them immensely inspirational as we plan our future mission.

Much of our discussions together were about how we might develop our ministry in order to reach more people. As our Rule puts it, “people are hungry for good news that life is full of meaning in union with God.” How do we extend our mission in breadth and depth so that more are able to “catch the life”?

First of all we expressed our amazement at how effective the internet has been in broadening our communication. We have a wonderful website which thousands of people world-wide use to access sermons, ‘monastic wisdom’ and generally to keep in touch with the Community. This is a great tool for mission which we will continue to develop and expand.
Secondly, with our newly renovated Monastery we are planning to develop and deepen our ministry to young adults. Over the past few years we have had an exciting relationship with the ‘Life Together’ program in the Diocese of Massachusetts, and its work with young adult interns. We would like to invite a number of young adults to live alongside us in our Guesthouse, starting in September 2011, as monastic interns. It would give them a real ‘monastic experience’ and also enrich our common life.

We would also like to have up to three men join our Community as ‘postulants’ for a year, with the option of becoming novices (as Luke Ditewig has done) after six months. We are planning to develop a network throughout the church to look out for those who might benefit from knowing about SSJE, our writings and workshops, as well as about spending time with us as a monastic intern or a postulant. At the same time we are also looking forward to reopening our Monastery Guesthouse for those coming on retreat with us, and sharing in this way in our life and worship.

Thirdly, we are excited by all the possibilities for ministry at Emery House. Our vision for the future is perhaps encapsulated by the phrase, “helping the land help people to know God.” We have been gifted with a 144-acre property, a place of silence and beauty where so many have experienced renewal and healing. As we go forward we are focusing on three areas: making Emery House more available and better known as a spiritual retreat center, developing our internship program as well as our organic homestead farming, and considering the sale of conservation rights to preserve the land and raise funds to maintain the property in perpetuity. We are currently in conversations with Mass. Audubon, who will be conducting a habitat survey over the next year. For many people a retreat at Emery House helps them see that “the world is charged with the grandeur of God,” a place to truly “catch the life.”

As we vision and plan for the future, we remain deeply committed to our ministries of spiritual direction and retreats both at home and throughout the United States and Canada and the UK. We are also exploring new ministries in places we have not been before.

As we move into God’s future we are very grateful for all your support and encouragement, for us and for what we are hoping to achieve. It is always so good to hear from you.

Please remember us in your prayers as we remember you.

Faithfully yours,

Geoffrey Tristram SSJE, Superior
Maintaining Connections:
Let’s Meet on Facebook
Using virtual tools to maintain real-time relationships

With the release of the movie, *The Social Network*, Facebook is more in the news than ever. Did you know that the Brothers are on Facebook? Are you one of the more than one thousand people who have joined the “Friends of SSJE” Facebook page?

Facebook has become a wonderful resource for sharing news between the Community and Friends of SSJE. The page works as a collective, virtual bulletin board, where the Society can post information to share with Friends, and Friends can share thoughts, comments, and photos with the Society. On Facebook, you can keep up to date with news from the Monastery—from big events, like the election of Br. Geoffrey Tristram as the new Superior, to smaller updates, like the book the Brothers are currently reading together in the refectory, or the newest photo gallery available online. The page is also an easy way to keep up to date with the newest sermons posted online, as a link to every new sermon is posted on the page—along with a synopsis—as soon as the sermon is available. During this year of renovations, visitors to the page can also track the construction progress, as photo galleries and updates are posted on the page.

In addition to sharing news of the Society, the Friends of SSJE Facebook page also enables Friends of the Society to share their experiences with one another. To date, Friends have contributed over one hundred photos of the Monastery and Emery House, with each photographer offering a varied and personal glimpse into their time at SSJE. The page’s Wall also invites Friends of the Society to share thoughts on diverse topics that the Brothers suggest. Recent conversations have touched on future workshop topics, useful spiritual disciplines, and collective reading lists.

For those who are already linked up with the Friends of SSJE page, perhaps you might consider inviting your other Facebook friends to “like” the page. A bit of Facebook evangelism could introduce someone new to the Society, or share the Brothers’ preaching with someone to whom it could be meaningful.

And whether you’re new to the page or you’ve been linked up a while, we invite everyone to join in the fun! Visit the page; listen to sermons; view photos; share comments. Friends of SSJE are scattered all around the world; until the next time we meet at the Monastery, Facebook gives us all a place to connect.
I don’t look at the clerestory windows so much as they look at me.

A line in our Rule, which speaks about our predecessors in the Society, says that “they are not dead figures from the past. Risen in Christ, they belong to the great cloud of witnesses who spur us on by their prayers.” Therefore just as we can pray for them, they pray for us. When I look at the clerestory windows, I experience this duality: I know that they are historic figures who have a place in history, a specific place and time. Yet as the Rule suggests, I also know that they’re not dead figures in the past, rather they’re risen in Christ. They continue to live. While I can gaze up at them, I experience them gazing down on me.

These windows are more than simply pictures on glass: We can actually have a dialogue with them and we can enter into the dialogue that they are having with each other as well.

This is what you do with an icon. You enter into dialogue with it. In an icon, you are in a sense looking through the icon into the light. With a window, the light shines through the window down onto you. In the Transfiguration, Jesus was clothed with light, which revealed his true nature. So too, when the light is allowed to glow through us, like windows, then our true nature is revealed. Thus the light streaming through these windows reminds us that the light also needs to stream through us, until we become windows ourselves.

The saints may be the windows up there, in the clerestory, but we need to be the windows down here, to reveal God’s glory on the ground.

This may be the reason that my favorite windows in the chapel are not the Monastic Fathers in the clerestory, nor the Rosary windows in the Lady Chapel, which are truly the most beautiful of all, but the Workmen’s Windows.

One of the Workmen’s Windows, whose border designs show tradesmen at their tasks.
Benedict and all those Fathers up there, in the grand scheme of things, are pretty cosmic. But the workmen in the Workmen’s Windows, are actually just carpenters and masons and plumbers. Along the borders of the Workmen’s Windows there is a stone mason and a carpenter, and my favourite, a plumber with a drippy tap. It reminds me that the ordinary guy, the ordinary woman are windows too—like these plumbers and masons and carpenters in the Workmen’s Windows, we can let the light shine through our lives as well.

So the windows teach us something about how the work of human hands is sacred and how it can be sanctified. The work of human hands can reveal for us, can be to us, the Body of Christ. It’s the work of human hands that becomes for us the Body of Christ and the Bread of Heaven at the Eucharist. I love the fact that something that I have helped produce—the honey from the bee hives at Emery House—ends up on the altar everyday and comes back to us as the Bread of Life. The whole Monastery Chapel is like that. Ordinary things that ordinary people produced come together to produce a transcendent reality.

The Chapel windows, made by the glass workers’ hands, contribute to the transcendent reality that this Chapel communicates. Cram’s original intention was to have not colored glass, but rather opaque glass and whitewashed walls.

Archival photographs showing workers from Connick’s studio installing stained glass in the Monastery Chapel.

A glimpse of the Monastery Chapel with its original, frosted glass clerestory.

You can get a sense of what the chapel would have looked like by visiting the Cram chapel at the Order of the Holy Cross in West Park, New York. It’s a very different experience, because the building is much brighter, much lighter, much airier. There’s a real sense here, in the Monastery Chapel, that you can go tuck yourself in a corner and be held in it. This is amazing because, of course, there are also lots of hard surfaces in the chapel, marble and stone everywhere. Even
the arches and the pillars are big and heavy and strong. There’s no delicate tracery, not miles of fabric hanging here and there. It’s a place of hard, strong surfaces. Yet the chapel is also filled with shadows, and the shadows allow you to tuck yourself away and be held by this strong force. In many ways, this chapel is very intimate, very womb-like. The windows help in this. They give us shadows, and color, and companionship, and a real sense of intimacy.

Because of the windows, there is a real sense of companionship in this Chapel. Even when you are in the Chapel by yourself, you’re not alone, because the folks in the clerestory are up there, looking down at you. When you enter the Chapel, think how you’re being companioned, encouraged, illuminated, and even held by those folks in the clerestory (and in the Workmen’s Windows, too). That for me is the one of the great joys of our chapel, that when we go in it to pray, we are upheld by its sheer beauty and supported by the prayers of all the ages and whether you are concerned with weighty matters of life and faith, or mundane matters like drippy taps, the windows invite you to offer all your cares to God in prayer.

Interested in Living in a Monastic Community for a Year?
Consider our one-year monastic internship program. Contact us at vocations@ssje.org
BOOK RELEASE:
STONE & Light
A Celebration of a Holy Place

We’re pleased to announce the release of a book about the Monastery Chapel!

STONE & Light celebrates the Monastery Chapel of SSJE through a kaleidoscopic portrait of its history and architecture, its beauty in liturgy and its power as a place of prayer.

Lushly illustrated with archival and art photographs, this book draws together essays and meditations by scholars, priests, architects, poets, musicians, and Brothers from SSJE, to ask and answer key questions about this sacred space: What message does the design convey? How has it changed? Why is God so present here?

STONE & Light is a resource for all of us who have entered this holy place and, as one visitor writes, “awakened to love.”

www.SSJE.org/store

Hardcover: $35.95 Softcover: $24.95

Please note: Books are available for purchase only on the web. SSJE cannot fulfill orders by mail, phone or email.
Thick Places
Finding the Holy in Everyday Life

Mark Brown, SSJE

The notion of “thin places” comes to us from Celtic spirituality: feeling in certain places that the “veil” separating us from the realm of the Divine is thin, that we might even reach out and just about touch God. A thin place can be a place of natural beauty or a landscape striking in some way. It can be a building. It can be certain music. It can be in the practicing of some spiritual discipline. It can be in prayer or worship or sacraments. But a thin place isn’t so much an objective reality as it is a subjective experience (and yet certain places do seem more powerfully thin than others....)

Our Monastery in Cambridge, especially the Chapel, is often experienced as a thin place, a place where even solid granite seems to have been worn thin by generations of prayer. Even while going about the most mundane tasks, knowing that someone, somewhere on the premises is drawing near the Sacred Fire changes the atmosphere somehow.

Some of us Brothers, having moved out of the Monastery for the renovation, find ourselves in a “thick place”! A small group of us are living in temporary quarters not too far from the Monastery to keep an eye on the project and to attend to the administrative work of the community.

It’s a very nice house, actually, much like one might imagine a house belonging to a professor of something or other at an Ivy League university. But, somehow, “thick”. Perhaps it’s unfair to say, but I suspect the house has not been prayed in—at least, not much. And I’m reasonably sure that before we moved in the walls had never seen a Eucharist celebrated or heard Gregorian chant sung.

We do the best we can to keep some semblance of our monastic horarium with the Divine Office twice a day, the Chapter Office once daily, and a weekly Eucharist or two. We’ve put up a couple crucifixes and have a few icons around. We’ve turned the entry foyer into a small chapel. God is as surely present there as anywhere else. And yet....

We who are so accustomed to an environment ordered for prayer and reflection, are finding we need to be much more intentional about our experience of the Divine. We’re living
as most people do, with very little in the environment to remind us of the Divine presence. We have to do more of the remembering ourselves. I’m appreciating more and more the privilege of living in a building (the Monastery) with dedicated sacred space where people come and go at all hours to pray. The privilege of living in a place, in a community that is so clearly oriented toward the Divine Presence. The privilege of “living and moving and having one’s being” in a place where so many come to approach the Sacred Fire.

The newly cleaned Rose Window sparkles with fiery brightness.

But, for the time being—and not a long time at that—we need for our spirituality to be more “on purpose”. The silver lining is a deeper appreciation for what we have and a better sense of how most of the world lives.

So, how do we go about making a “thin place” out of a “thick” one? The two basic coordinates are time and space. There is no substitute that I am aware of for carving out time for reflection and prayer. No shortcuts here, I’m afraid. Just more and less: the more time we’re able to set aside for devotions, the thinner the world seems to be. Prayer does have a way of leaking out into the rest of the day, making things seem more transparent. We can pray while we do lots of things not requiring full attention (exercising, gardening, riding the subway, etc.). Many of us find that’s the best we can do. But I have personally found no substitute for fully-dedicated time, even if it’s for just a few minutes.

Staircase leading up the Monastery bell tower.

With space we have a bit more flexibility. Prayer is portable, after all. But many find returning to a certain place for prayer and reflection greatly enhances our experience. It’s as if we wear the veil “thin” in that place with our repeated prayerful presence. Visual cues can be very helpful. At the Monastery we’re continually surrounded with images that point us in the right direction—our vernacular, our “textuality,” our identity in Christ, is in and on the very walls around us, even in the windows.
Creating a small personal prayer space can be an enjoyable exercise. Choosing just the right corner of a room where God can be remembered, finding just the right icon or image, gathering a candle or two, getting a few books together, maybe a small vase with a flower—a little spiritual interior decorating can be a fun thing to do. And if we share living space it’s a visible way of reminding those we live with that we value our times of prayer and appreciate their cooperation in keeping noise and intrusions to a minimum.

And don’t forget churches! Fewer and fewer churches are available for dropping in for prayer, but your own favorite spot in a church may be a possibility, especially in the larger cities. Many parishes, of course, offer contemplative prayer groups and quiet mid-week services. And if not, perhaps you could help get something started.

Is your world feeling a bit “thick” these days? It doesn’t have to. Even the Brothers’ Cambridge house may begin to feel thin eventually. Still, it will be good to go back home.
In this interview, Br. Tom Shaw reflects on his summer sabbatical at Emery House, which he spent alongside SSJE’s interns, weeding the gardens, threshing wheat, and looking after the pigs.

What makes Emery House a sacred place to you?

The physical beauty of Emery House, combined with the fact that it is a place where we work the land, helps us to move into the generosity of God. It’s a place where we’re drawn into a concrete, physical understanding of abundance and God’s huge generosity, because we see it all around us.

How was your experience of that abundance different when you took part in the physical work required to create it?

My experience of manual labor gave me a way to understand that I’m a co-creator with God, that God has made us stewards of this environment, and that God’s creation isn’t finished. God’s creativity is an ongoing thing in which we’re called to participate. This summer—when I actually had the chance to do the farming and take part in working the land—was a doorway for me into being God’s co-creator. It drove home this understanding that to care for the environment is not a passive thing, but something we have to do actively.

What are the spiritual dimensions of growing your own food?

To understand the Incarnation and the fact that all of creation is shot through with the resurrection of Jesus Christ is not an abstract idea we can hold in our heads. It’s something that we have to experience on a local, immediate level. One of the benefits that comes from being involved in growing herbs on the windowsill or planting a garden, or whatever you can do, is that you really begin to understand the reality of the Incarnation.

How is it different to pray in the open air than to pray under a roof?

For me, part of the difference comes from the issue of perspective. When I’m out in the open, performing some
kind of repetitive manual labor, like weeding, surrounded by all that majesty of God, the things that I pray about and the concerns that I have are put into a perspective that I don’t always have when I’m praying under a roof. The vastness of the natural world invites us into engagement with the deep cares of God.

Did you pray while doing the manual labor?
The combination of prayer and physical work has been honored since the very beginning of the monastic movement, when the desert mothers and fathers worked at manual labor. Repetitive manual labor really is a way into the contemplative life. This summer, when I would be given the responsibility of doing nothing but weeding one part of the garden for a whole day, when I’d be by myself under the blazing sun for all that time, I found that the repetitive manual labor took me deeper into my relationship with God. It really was a contemplative exercise.

You’re there and you’re working, and one thing comes through your mind, then something else comes through your mind, and something else. Repetitive manual labor, especially the solitariness of it, makes it easier to let go of the things that come through your mind — anxiety or concern about some person or some situation. It comes and then it goes, and you move on. In that movement, there’s a fluidity that I find really critical to deepening the relationship with God.

Did that manual labor cast any new light on the language of the Scriptures?
It reminds me of the first time I went to Palestine: I was able to walk around the northern edge of the Sea of Galilee, where we know that Jesus walked and which hasn’t changed very much since the time of our Lord. All of a sudden, in that place, I had an appreciation for the space in which he taught and where he carried out his ministry. Being at Emery House and working in the garden, I had a sense of how much the agrarian life really influenced Jesus’ parables. I hadn’t had that sense before, and now it was concrete, through the work I was doing. I had known about that influence intellectually, but to actually dig in the dirt and help thresh the wheat really gave me a physical involvement in those parables.

Did you have a favorite task on the farm?
I loved taking care of the pigs. For one thing, they’re really smart and fun to be with; they have real personalities. But also, I think that the experience of caring for something that eventually I will eat was a really important way
for me to be part of a life cycle, to understand my own mortality. I was talking to Mary Oliver about this, and Mary said, “You eat the pigs, they provide for you, and then you provide for the worms when you die. It’s all a part of the life cycle.” I think that’s true.

Truly, I enjoyed all of the work. I love weeding, because I love that feeling of a task completed. At the end of the day you can say, “Now that’s done.” And when you’re done, the garden looks different. Those plants that so desperately want to grow and provide food, now they can. I really loved every part of this experience.

One particularly gratifying day was when the B-Safe kids visited the farm. I loved seeing the enjoyment of those kids who were having this experience of Emery House and the natural world.

And I loved the fact that Emery House was being used in that way; it was the fulfillment of a long-term dream of mine.

Above all, it was amazing to watch our young interns educate and relate to those children about the environment and what we’re doing there—educating them and also drawing them into the spirituality of the place. The interns were geniuses in the way that they did that. I loved seeing that. Being there and seeing the enthusiasm and educational abilities of those interns, and working together with them, was really wonderful.

I have a tremendous sense of gratitude to the Community for letting me be a part of this work over the summer. I’m so grateful for the Community’s sense of vision in letting this experiment happen—the internship program, the sustainable agriculture, the livestock—and for letting me be involved in it over the summer. This summer was an experiment for us. We’ve learned some things and now we have to take more time to dissect it and pray about it. The experience of this last summer will inform us as we try to understand how to use that gift from God of Emery House. It was a great leap of faith on the part of everyone to try this new venture in the midst of all the moving and the renovations and everything else. I’d like to thank the Community for taking that leap of faith and giving me the chance to be a part of it.
Open Letter:  
A Place To Pray

Br. Eldridge SSJE

Dear Probationer to the FSJ,

Before I share with you some practical advice on developing your own space for prayer, I want to tell you about the place where this lesson struck home for me. Several years ago, in Rome, I made my way to the tiny apartment that had once been the home of Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Society of Jesus. Hidden on an upper floor of one of the buildings surrounding the baroque glories of “the Jesu,” the mother church of the Jesuits, it was, by contrast, austere to the extreme and barely furnished; a cell which also served as his study, and an small oratory.

I was fascinated by Ignatius’s writing table, which appeared to have been hastily knocked together from salvaged lumber with no concern for beauty. It was in these rooms that Ignatius lived and prayed the last fifteen years of his life and it was here that he compiled the Spiritual Exercises, his formula for spiritual retreat that has brought millions to Christ in the last 500 years. The holiness of the place was palpable. From the appearance of his rooms I was reminded of the advice of Jesus, “whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.” (Matthew 6:6)

As a probationer to the FSJ, you too are encouraged to “go into your room . . . and pray,” as you develop your own Rule and spiritual practice. The example of Saint Ignatius is a helpful model to all who desire a disciplined life of prayer. My advice to you, and to them, is this: Create a place to pray in your home and return to it each day. Jesus suggests a room where you will not be disturbed. Furnish it simply—a comfortable chair, where you can sit for thirty minutes or an hour without falling asleep; a table beside it for your books and coffee cup; and perhaps a small carpet, if you are limber enough for kneeling meditation. Most find helpful a focus as well. This might be an icon or holy picture, a cross, a candle, or some other spiritual symbol rich with meaning.
We are happy to make available for purchase both a 2011 Wall Calendar and the SSJE Ordo, Advent 2010 through Advent 2011. To buy copies please visit: www.SSJE.org/store

**The Ordo**, compiled and edited by Jonathan F. Maury, SSJE. We are proud to make the guide to our daily round of worship and prayer available to our friends. *The Ordo* is an in-depth and comprehensive schedule of the readings and prayers used by the brothers of SSJE each day, which will allow friends to follow along and pray with the community.

$20.00

**2011 SSJE wall calendar**
The SSJE brothers are pleased to make available a color wall calendar of images from our monastery in Cambridge, Massachusetts, complete with red letter feast days. We hope that you will enjoy watching the seasons at the monastery pass along with us.

$15.00

8.5” x 11” 22 pages, coil bound full color

Prayer transforms the setting and makes it holy ground. The more often you pray there, the more you will sense this change. Using such dedicated space for prayer may seem awkward at first, but it will become your spiritual home, the place where you struggle and also find your consolation. Since we all experience seasons of the Spirit, some days our prayer will be illuminating and rich, but we will also have periods of dryness and desolation when we will wish to dodge God. It is important to remain faithful and show up each day. Some of the most important spiritual breakthroughs come during those times we would rather not be there. Through such dedication to discipline, we grow in intimacy in our relationship with Jesus.

The Ordo, compiled and edited by Jonathan F. Maury, SSJE. We are proud to make the guide to our daily round of worship and prayer available to our friends. *The Ordo* is an in-depth and comprehensive schedule of the readings and prayers used by the brothers of SSJE each day, which will allow friends to follow along and pray with the community.

$20.00
The Society of Saint John the Evangelist
Please Join the Friends of SSJE

I love listening to Friends of the Society and hearing words like “cherish, restore, profound, healthy love, healed my heart.” For me these words speak to kindness, to a kinder world, not in the future, but now. Witnessing your kindness to the Brothers allows me to know that we can live in a cycle of kindness, something I wish we heard more about in the world. Thank you for your support, for being part of the cycle.

— Jamie Coats, Director, Friends of SSJE

What a joy it is to know that the holy place we cherish so much is being restored to God’s glory. With their home secured, and with our annual support, the Brothers will be free to carry out God’s work within and beyond its walls. “Praise God from whom all blessings flow.”

— Bill Kendrick, Co-Chair Friends of SSJE Annual Fund

I was living in New York during a very challenging time, crying a lot, when a friend who is quite important in my life mentioned the Monastery. I felt instantly moved. I remember talking to my mother about it, and she said, “Call them. Call them right now.” We both had this sense of urgency for me to get in a car right then and drive there. I called the Monastery, and they were able to get me in for a retreat at Emery House that very weekend.

That weekend began in me the most profound conversion of life. It was the beginning of seeing what healthy love looks like. The doors started to open within me to a profound relationship with Jesus. It was a healing. It truly healed my heart.

— Greta Ronningen

A member of the FSJ, Greta is chaplain to the incarcerated for PRISM Restorative Justice, a ministry of the Episcopal Diocese of Los Angeles, and is preparing to take vows as an Episcopal nun.

It is absolutely magic to go back to the Monastery now. I walk in that door and somebody else sneaks inside me—a younger me, the one who first walked through that door over fifty years ago. I don’t know any of the Brothers who are there now, don’t recognize their faces, and the Brothers I knew well are long gone. But, oh, the magic is still there. Walking back into the Monastery now, and feeling that magic again, well it makes me think that certain things really are permanent.

— David Hughes

A number of years ago during an August retreat I noticed that the courtyard was covered with sheddings from the large sycamore trees along the parkway. Those many-shapped layers of bark reminded me of the layers that I shed during the deep, palpable silence of my time of quiet there. Heaviness fades as I remember to lay my concerns on the altar, as I share my thoughts with one of the brothers. That has been my experience in over 20 years of visits. And I leave with a quiet that follows me for many days through the weeks ahead.

— Carol Kraft
Becoming a Friend

Please consider becoming a Friend today by supporting the SSJE’s Annual Fund. A tax-deductible contribution may be made by check (payable to “SSJE”), credit card, direct deposit or a gift of securities. Gifts may also be made online through our website www.SSJE.org.

Please remember SSJE in your will.

Tax Receipts: After the end of each calendar year receipts will be sent for Chapel gifts made by check and for all pledge payments received.

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Questions or Comments?
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Stone by Stone, Pane by Pane
An Update on Renovation at the Monastery

Robert L’Esperance, SSJE is the Facilities Brother, with oversight of the buildings and grounds at the Monastery. Each week he and other Brothers join the construction team (builders, architects accompanies and project manager) to review progress and work through the unforeseen that always accompany major renovation. Here, Br. Robert offers an update on construction progress at the Monastery.

■ Chapel Cleaned and Restored
Since the day the Brothers moved out, the Chapel has been a hive of activity. Once scaffolding was erected, the stone walls were washed clean of 75 years of coal soot, candle smoke, and incense. The Connick stained glass windows have been painstakingly cleaned by hand, one tiny pane at a time. This has been a long and slow process (taking a little longer than planned!) but the difference even on a gray day is amazing—and on a bright day it’s dazzling.

Hundreds of feet of scaffold have made it possible for construction workers and some Brothers to climb and crawl through the rafters and view up close the beautiful iron work and structure of the old covered bridge that forms the roof system of the Chapel.

■ Windows
All of the windows in the Guesthouse and enclosure have been removed and will be replaced with energy efficient windows. It was an eerie sight to drive past what looked like an abandoned building once the windows were out and plywood used to board up the openings. Thankfully all the windows should be installed before winter sets in.

■ Gardens
Both the Guesthouse and Cloister gardens were extensively pruned, prepared, and protected before heavy construction began. Sadly the Cloister garden has not survived the daily trampling. The flower beds have been destroyed and will need to be entirely re-landscaped. Many plants were transplanted to Emery House, where they have been replanted. After consultation with tree specialists some of the diseased trees were removed along Memorial Drive and in the parking lot, and the Japanese maple in the Guesthouse garden has been pruned and protected.

■ Watching the Progress
We’re pleased to announce a new online gallery, Renovation at the Monastery, where we will add photographs as the work progresses. Check out the progress at www.SSJE.org.
Emery House opened for guests in early September. For the latest retreat information, visit www.SSJE.org/emery. To book a retreat, please contact Br. Jonathan Maury, the Guest Brother, at (617) 876-3037, extension 11, or e-mail guestbrother@ssje.org.

Brs. Curtis Almquist and David Vryhof were chaplains for St. George’s College, Jerusalem, in the “Ways in the Wilderness” pilgrimage September 22 – October 5. The pilgrimage traced the development of Christian monasticism, with the pilgrims traveling in Israel/Palestine, Egypt, and Jordan. With the Brothers in Jordan at the site of Jesus’ baptism are members of the Fellowship of Saint John: the Rev. James Reed, the Rev. Gary Jones, Polly Chatfield, the Rev. Mac Murray, and Mary Anderson. Also in the group were our Cambridge friends Bill Snyder and Lydia Matthews.

The Monastery Chapel was closed during July and August for cleaning and repair. With access to the Chapel delayed (we were hoping for the end of August), in September the Brothers erected a “tent of meeting” in the Guesthouse Garden. That’s right—a tent, just like the ancient children of Israel in the wilderness, long before Solomon’s Temple was built in Jerusalem. Services were well attended, though sometimes chilly, and the four sermons—Wilderness, Shrine, Temple, Tent—are available online as part of Monastic Wisdom for Everyday Living.

In November, Br. Curtis led the annual retreat for students and faculty of St. Phillip’s Theological College in Maseno, Kenya.

The stone, mortar, and glass in the Monastery Chapel glitter and gleam after careful cleaning.

The SSJE “Tent of Meeting,” which served as worship space on Sundays during September and October.
Br. Kevin Hackett traveled to Montreal, Quebec to lead the mission in celebration of the 150th anniversary of Saint John the Evangelist Anglican Church. He also met with first and third year divinity students at McGill University.

Bishop Barbara Harris and our Brother and Bishop Tom Shaw both celebrated milestone birthdays over the summer. Tom is 65, and Barbara is 80.

The Diocese of Massachusetts celebrated a Day of Service to mark September 11. Emery House was selected as one of the sites for volunteering, and we hosted a crowd of volunteers, clearing trails through the forest and cleaning up the fronts along the Merrimack and Artichoke Rivers which border Emery House.

Workshops in Cambridge
The Brothers will lead a number of Saturday workshops in Cambridge during this year away from the Monastery. Check the website for more details and information on how to reserve a place.

Br. David Vryhof led a Discernment in Prayer workshop in November.
MARK YOUR CALENDARS!
SSJE WORKSHOPS IN CAMBRIDGE

- **Forgiving and Being Forgiven**
  
  **Date and Time:** Saturday, January 20, 2011  
  **Location:** Bunting Quad, 34 Concord Avenue, Cambridge MA  
  **Leader:** Curtis Almquist, SSJE  
  
  ‘How many times are we to forgive?’ the apostle Peter asked Jesus. Jesus’ response: endlessly. Forgiveness is at the very core of the Christian faith: to be forgiven, to be forgivers. This workshop will draw on biblical and psychological insights for what Jesus calls the experience of ‘unbinding and setting the captive free.’

- **Living Intentionally: Creating a Personal Rule of Life,**  
  
  **Date and Time:** Saturday, February 12, 2011  
  **Location:** to be determined  
  **Leaders:** David Vryhof, SSJE and The Rev. Dr. Stephen A. Macchia, founder and President of Leadership Transformations, Inc. (leadershiptransformations.org)  
  
  Christians of all denominations today are looking to the ancient discipline of a rule of life to strengthen their sense of living in Christ and participating in a wider community. This workshop will include information about the history and purpose of rules of life, and provide participants with the opportunity to reflect on and draft a personal rule of life of their own.

- **Seeking God Together**  
  
  **Date and Time:** Saturday, March 26, 2011  
  **Location:** Bunting Quad, 34 Concord Avenue, Cambridge MA  
  **Leaders:** Brothers of SSJE  
  
  In this workshop we will study and reflect on a number of ways of doing group spiritual direction, the skills that are needed on the part of the facilitator and the participants, and the usefulness of this spiritual practice in the life of the Church. It is designed for spiritual directors, pastors, educators and others who wish to help groups of people to listen to God in prayer.

**Workshop Details:** Fall 2010 - Spring 2011  
 
Workshops begin at 10:00am (check in begins at 9:30am) and end by 3:00pm. The normal fee for a Saturday workshop is $75 ($40 for full-time students), which includes lunch.

To register for a workshop please visit [www.SSJE.org/workshop](http://www.SSJE.org/workshop)  
**At this time we are unable to make reservations by phone.**
A Word from Br. Eldridge

When asked what he’d recommend for Advent reading, Br. Eldridge responded:

While I am reading all the time, most of what I have been reading is not specifically Advent related, though some things would fall into the category of “holy reading,” and deal with the major issues and themes of Christianity and discipleship which are part of Advent reflection.

- At the top of my list would be *Holy Longing* by Ronald Rolheiser. It is one of the most stimulating and provocative books on Christianity I have ever read, and one of the most honest. He examines and answers the real questions that most are afraid to ask about what it means to be a Christian, and provides a refreshing discussion of intimacy, sexuality, spirituality, living and dying.

- *Hannah’s Child*, by Stanley Hauerwas, the autobiography of one of the leading Christian theologians and ethicists in the United States. I had the privilege of studying with him when I was at Duke Divinity School.

- *Christianity, the First Three Thousand Years*, by Diarmaid McCulloch. The final section, which speculates about the form Christianity will take in the new century, is especially challenging.

- The sermons of John Henry Newman, especially those that focus on Mary, the mother of God. Our founder, Richard Meux Benson, on his first visit to Oxford heard Newman preach, and it was an experience that changed his life forever. Without it there would be no SSJE. James Joyce said Newman was the greatest prose stylist of the Victorian period. If you have never read his writing, you are in for a treat.

- Henri Nouwen, *The Return of the Prodigal Son*. This reflection on the parable reminds us who God is as opposed to the construction in our image we call God.

- Grace Jantzen, *Julian of Norwich*. Again, a reminder of who God truly is, as Julian describes him “completely relaxed and courteous, the happiness and peace of his dear friends, his beautiful face radiating measureless joy and love.”

Incarnation
Behold what you are
Br. Kevin Hackett

Monastic Wisdom
for everyday living
Monastic Wisdom for Everyday Living is a continuing series of sermons, workshops, and teachings from the Brothers that seeks to distill the collective wisdom of the past and offers practical timeless counsel for living in today’s world.

**Brother Kevin Hackett** is a priest in the Society of Saint John the Evangelist, a monastic community for men in the Episcopal Church in Cambridge, Massachusetts. He studied for ordination at the Divinity School, Duke University, in Durham, North Carolina. Prior to coming to the Society in 1997, he was a member of the Community of Celebration in Aliquippa, Pennsylvania. He is active as a retreat leader, spiritual director, and church musician, with a particular interest in hymnody and congregational song. He presently serves as SSJE’s Director of Communication.
Incarnation

Behold what you are

Not long ago, I met with a young man who had come to the Monastery on retreat. As he spoke, it was clear that he was mired in despair, convinced that no one could comprehend or share the sense of shame and desolation he felt as a result of a tragic circumstance in his life. His anguish was obvious, his sorrow was great, and his pain was real. As we talked about how he might pray his way through this “valley of the shadow,” he told me he’d tried to meditate on the suffering of Jesus, but he kept coming up against the idea that Jesus, being Jesus, the Second Person of the Trinity, was also God, and therefore possessed of internal powers and strength not available to mere mortals.

I made a mental note to address this point, but the conversation shifted and took a different turn, and I decided that then was not the time to engage in a discussion of one the great mysteries of Christian faith. We talked for a while longer, and then our time was finished. Eventually, with enough time, enough grief, and an abundance of grace, he emerged from his time of trial a stronger man. But I remember how sad I felt that what ought to be a source of great comfort—that in Jesus Christ, God has completely embraced and embodied the fullness of the human condition (a doctrine that theologians call the Incarnation)—could be so often misunderstood as a barrier rather than a source of grace and strength.

At a Sunday Eucharist shortly after that conversation, we sang “Crown him with many crowns.” As the second stanza rolled by, I couldn’t help but think of my young friend (and many others):

Crown him the Son of God
before the worlds began,
and ye who tread where he hath trod,
crown him the Son of man;
who every grief hath known
that wrings the human breast,
and takes and bears them as his own,
that all in him may rest.

What would happen, I wondered, if we lived as though we really believed that was true? Why is the notion that Jesus was (is) somehow immune to the ordinary pain and petty sadness of normal human life so persistent? Why is it that so many faithful women and men seem to believe that their circumstance, their suffering,

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their life is so different from what Jesus experienced here on earth? I’ve heard many variations of this complaint over the years, and to be honest, I’ve made it my own on more than a few occasions. But why?

**A God Among gods, a man Among Men**

Intellectually, I know the question has its locus in the early church’s attempts to comprehend who Jesus was (and continues to be). I know, too, that this same difficulty came to a head in a variety of forms in the Christological controversies of the fourth and fifth centuries, in which the nature and person of Jesus as a human being and as the Second Person of the Holy Trinity were debated and parsed (and as a result of which we have the Nicene Creed). I’ve returned again and again to Gregory of Naziansus’ pithy claim that “that which is not assumed is not healed,” and I know it to be true. And yet the thought persists: Jesus was fundamentally different from us, from you, from me. In one sense, of course, that is true, but the difference is not so great as many people suppose.

Christians have struggled with this almost from the beginning. Greek-speaking Christians, particularly, seemed ill at ease with the idea of Jesus-therefore-God becoming a human being. The idea of gods assuming human bodily form was certainly familiar in the Greco-Roman world, and classical Greek and Roman mythology was laden with accounts of various members of the pantheon taking bodily form and moving among mortals—but they remained immortal gods. But that God should actually become a human being, become subject to frailty and death? That God, beyond all space and time, could accept the stifling limitations of inhabiting space and time? That a serene, omnipotent, omniscient God would suffer, bleed, and die? These were entirely different matters, matters which would confound some of the brightest and best minds in the Christian community of the first century, and for several centuries after the fact of Jesus’ life, death, resurrection and ascension.

Saint Paul gives us the biblical warrant for belief in Jesus’ dual natures. Writing to the Galatians, he affirms the full humanity of Jesus saying that, “in the fullness of time, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law,” (Galatians 4:4) making Jesus subject to both the law enshrined in Torah and the laws of the natural order in conception, gestation, and birth. In his letter to the Philippians Saint Paul develops this point further:

> ...though he was in the form of God, Christ Jesus did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—
> even death on a cross. (Philippians 2:6-8)

By which he means that Jesus was not God-in-a-man-suit. Rather, he was fully human, willingly deprived of the qualities and powers he had known within the life of the Godhead in order to identify in every respect with the human condition.
For the Christians in the Colossian church he continues to develop his understanding of the fullness of Jesus’ divine nature, placing him inextricably in the Godhead, acting as an agent at Creation,

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross. (Colossians 1:15-20)

Other sources in the New Testament confirm Jesus’ experience as a man who was “tempted in every way as we are,” (Hebrews 4:15) that he was no mere apparition but flesh and blood “seen with our eyes…touched with our hands,” (1 John 1:1) and of course, the definitive text, found in the prologue to the Gospel according to John: “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.”(John 1:14)

It’s that simple, really, and yet, nearly impossible to comprehend.

**Face to Face with Heretics**

I remember sitting through a set of complex church history lectures when I was in seminary in which the various heresies of the fourth and fifth centuries were explained in painstaking detail. At one point one of my classmates asked why, if these heresies had been so roundly refuted by the ecumenical councils, was it so important to know them so thoroughly today. Our professor answered that they may have been overturned officially, but they had never gone away. Moreover, he continued, in the course of our ministries we would regularly find ourselves face to face with living, breathing heretics, who, of course, would not look at all like what one imagines a heretic to be. He went on to say that when we took our place to preside at worship, we would look out on a congregation populated with heretics of every stripe and claim, but among the most common:

- Pelagians (those who deny, implicitly or explicitly, the doctrine of original sin and therefore the need for grace in salvation, i.e., “we can earn salvation by our own hard work” -- extremely common among Western Christians);
- Arians (those who do not believe in the co-equality of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but rather a hierarchy of three gods);
- modalists of various kinds (those who believe that God is not three persons but one, simply acting in three different modes of being, using different personae, so to speak);
- docetists (those who believe that Jesus’ earthly body was some kind of illusion and that he therefore did not really suffer and die, meaning that he was not truly human 2).
- Our job, he said, as ministers of the Gospel, was to offer Gospel medicine—truth that would correct and heal error, administered with the greatest compassion in preaching, teaching, and pastoral care.

True Man Yet Very God
Most fundamentally, the Incarnation means that Jesus—the physical, flesh and blood body of Jesus of Nazareth—was conceived in the dark, damp womb of his mother Mary, and then emerged at birth with all the trauma, all the bodily fluids—blood, water, placenta—and pain that accompany that process. He was a fully functional boy-child, complete with all the requisite body parts that baby boys have, and he consumed and produced all the bodily fluids and excretions that every infant does.

His body grew and matured as boys do, passing through puberty into manhood, with all the changes that accompany that process, complete with the growth of body and facial hair, physical and sexual maturation, and all the bodily and emotional and hormonal urges and longings and desires that mark the passage from adolescent to adult. That same body was eventually flogged and beaten and stripped naked before it was nailed to two timbers where it bled and died. And it was that same body which rose from the dead three days later, gaping wounds still intact, and, at least on a couple of occasions, hungry. This man, Jesus of Nazareth, was the original “body of Christ,” to use a theologically rich phrase from Saint Paul who coined it (and to which I will return because there are two others).

This all seems fairly straight-forward and easy to understand, except for the fact that in Jesus of Nazareth, we profess to believe that God is somehow inextricably in the mix, that “being’s Source begins to be.” 3 But this is only the beginning. God’s presence in the world through the Incarnation of Jesus Christ has far-reaching implications, rippling from a cave in first century Palestine to our own time.

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2 Since the late 19th century, in the English speaking world, the seeds of docetism are sown and take root in many people’s minds and hearts during childhood through the agency of the children’s Christmas hymn, “Away in a manger.” Even allowing for poetic license, it depicts an idealized, perfect infant Jesus. Consider these two couplets:

The cattle are lowing,
the poor Baby wakes;
But little Lord Jesus
No crying He makes.

The little Lord Jesus was a human baby, and human babies cry. Were it not for the fact that singing (far more, I maintain, than praying) shapes believing, the stakes would not be so high and the damage so long-lasting.

3 Charles Wesley, “Glory be to God on high” (2), from Hymns from the Nativity of Our Lord, London: William Strahan, 1745.
God’s presence in the world through Jesus is mediated in two other forms which move us beyond the body of the historical Jesus, though both are also known as the Body of Christ. The second Body of Christ is not flesh and blood, at least in the conventional sense. Rather, it is one which begins as bread and which (here’s where things begin to get complicated rather quickly) through the agency of the Holy Spirit and prayerful, creative speech—first Jesus’ own (Luke 22:18-22) and later those who were set apart and ordered to repeat his words—becomes the Body of Christ, which believers then receive in the context of the Eucharist. In the consecrated Bread (and Wine), most Christians believe Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Mary and the Second Person of the Trinity, is somehow mysteriously, truly, and really present. Sadly, as with the attempts to explain the mystery of the first Body of Christ, no small amount of ink and no small amount of blood has been spilt trying to explain how the second Body of Christ gets to be what it is from what it was when it began. But then again, a paradox, by definition, defies rationality.

A Living Body

Body of Christ number three, in my opinion, is subject to even more ambiguity. Saint Paul uses this term in his first letter to the Christians at Corinth (1 Corinthians 12:12-27). The community of baptized believers, he says, baptized into Christ’s death and resurrection is now the physical, palpable presence of the Body of Christ in the world. This Body of Christ, like the original Body of Christ, is in full possession of the power of God to speak and teach and heal and touch and transform the ordinary lives of ordinary women and men for God’s most extraordinary purposes.

Paul takes a huge theological and creative risk here writing, as he was, to a group of Greek Christians, who were known to have certain dualistic tendencies, especially when it came to body/spirit and mind/body dichotomies, where spirit equaled good, mind equaled good, body—mostly—equaled neutral or bad. This is a most remarkable claim coming from a man who in other places in the New Testament has a less than positive outlook on the potential of human flesh, including his own.

Paul understood, I believe, that the Body of Christ in this context to be as real and truly the Body of Christ as that which he and we encounter in the Eucharist, and as real and truly the Body of Christ which he encountered in its risen and glorified state when he was on his way to Damascus. This makes his use of the term for the church all the more remarkable because it suggests, as did Jesus’ entry into the world through a vaginal canal, that God is not revealed and known most fully as a rational, logical system of belief or as a set of ethical standards or as an unchanging, immutable disembodied principle ordering the universe or as some magisterial, serene deity enthroned on high in distant heavenly places. No, God is known most fully and completely and gloriously as a vulnerable human being. And while I give glib ascent to the metaphor, if I think about it, I actually find it quite unsettling. It’s simply too close to home, too messy. Debbie Blue, author of Sensual Orthodoxy, observes that:
We live in a culture that gravitates toward the virtual. In almost every endeavor (business management, public relations, etc.) we tend to believe that success or salvation has to do with the mind or spirit transcending its physical support system. The vision is easier to pull off without the interference of flesh and blood. The immaterial idea is far more noble, far less ambiguous than fleshly, erring human beings.4

Paul would have been well aware that his use of this term would cause discomfort to his sophisticated Greek readers and, he doesn’t flinch from mentioning the unmentionable “un-presentable parts,” referring to those parts which I won’t mention either, but he does wax on and on about eyes, ears, noses, and feet—

which is a little surprising because the first three all have secreting mucus membranes and the fourth...well, the things that feet had to walk through in the first century are also best left unmentioned. His point, of course, is that a fully functional, functioning healthy body has it all, and by extension, the fully functional, functioning, healthy Body of baptized believers will be every bit as beautiful and wonderful and messy and clumsy as any other human body. Moreover, we need all the parts, even though we might not understand why.

I find it easy enough to go with this, as long as I don’t get too specific, as long as I think in the broadest terms I can when I apply this notion to the church. Catholic? Protestant? Sure. Of course. Men, women, gay, straight? Obviously. Liberal, conservative, orthodox? All right...it makes for a broad middle. Fundamentalists? Snake handlers? In theory, yes, but I start feeling uncomfortable. And when I start thinking of specific people, I get almost queasy.

But that is precisely what Paul intends. God calls whom God will. God chooses whom God will choose, and if I’m prepared for God to choose me, with all the ambiguity and internal divisions that I carry in my flesh, then I have to be prepared for God to choose anyone else. God is not so finicky as I am. The scandal is not that Jesus Christ now somehow inhabits the messy conglomeration of flesh and blood that we call church. The scandal is that the church is the most immediate and visible presence God has in the world, and that it is the church, the Body of Christ who is charged with carrying on the work which Jesus bequeathed to us in his charge to bring good news to the poor, to speak the word that frees the captive, that restores sight to the blind, that lifts the load of oppression, to let everyone know that God is for them and with them here and now.

If that seems like at tall order, it is, just as it was for Jesus, the original Body of Christ, and were it not for the sustenance and grace we receive from the second Body of Christ, it would be impossible.

**Behold What You Are**

When the Eucharist is celebrated at the Monastery, the Bread and the Cup are sometimes presented to the congregation from the altar as the presider says, “Behold what you are.” Which is to say, look closely, this is who and what you really and truly are, the Body of Christ, made up of grains of wheat ground so fine that it would be impossible to separate them now. “Behold what you are.” To which we respond, “May we become what we receive.” May we indeed. May we become willing to embrace the other, to serve the other, to wash the other’s feet, to suffer with the other, to suffer in place of the other.

That’s what the Body of Christ in the incarnate Lord Jesus did. That’s what the Body of Christ incarnate in us is still called to do.
Texts for Further Reflection

Mary’s Song

Blue homespun and the bend of my breast
keep warm this small hot naked star
fallen to my arms. (Rest …
you who have had so far to come.)
Now nearness satisfies
the body of God sweetly. Quiet he lies
whose vigor hurled a universe. He sleeps
whose eyelids have not closed before.

His breath (so slight it seems
no breath at all) once ruffled the dark deeps
to sprout a world. Charmed by doves’ voices,
the whisper of straw, he dreams,
hearing no music from his other spheres.
Breath, mouth, ears, eyes
he is curtailed who overflowed all skies,
all years. Older than eternity, now he
is new. Now native to earth as I am, nailed
to my poor planet, caught
that I might be free, blind in my womb
to know my darkness ended,
brought to this birth for me to be new-born,
and for him to see me mended
I must see him torn.⁵

Lo, how a Rose e’er blooming
from tender stem hath sprung!
Of Jesse’s lineage coming
as seers of old have sung.
It came a blossom bright,
amid the cold of winter,
when half spent was the night.

Isaiah ‘twas foretold it,
the Rose I have in mind,
with Mary we behold it,
the Virgin Mother kind.
To show God’s love a right,
she bore to us a Savior,
when half spent was the night.

O Flower, whose fragrance tender
with sweetness fills the air,
 dispel in glorious splendor
the darkness everywhere;
true man yet very God.
from sin and death now save us
and share our every load.

St. 1-2, German, 15th cent., tr. Theodore Baker;
St. 3, Friedrich Layritz, tr. Harriet Reynolds
Krauth Spaeth

⁵Luci Shaw, Accompanied by Angels: Poems of the Incarnation, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. p. 29, 2006. All rights reserved. Used by permission.
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