

## Monastic Scribe LI: May 12, 2023

### DYING WHILE WE LIVE

I recently celebrated my birthday. Now that is not news for I have celebrated many birthdays. Last year was just another birthday for me. But something about this year was different. I awoke with a consciousness that God has gifted me with life. Every breath I take is God's spirit breathing within me. I was also very conscious of my Mom and Dad who gave me life and so much more. My Dad died when I was 26 and I have always regretted not knowing him better. My mother died when I was 53 and was a giving person who had been hurt in some ways. I thought also of my older brother, almost five years older than me. He died nine years ago. He looked after me, loved me, protected me, and was so proud of me later in life. Wow, what a life I have been given! And how much I took it for granted as I was growing up.

Birthdays used to be occasions to feel good because people gave me presents. This year I received a total of two presents, one a box of chocolates and the other a book by Esther de Waal on aging and letting go. It must be difficult to give me presents for I have no idea what I want or need. I truly don't need anything though a little love is always appreciated and I do get that.

Growing older is growing more free. And that's where Esther's words about "letting go" come in. I think that all of us are very insecure and are full of insecurities, doubts and defenses. Life can be so overwhelming and I am not sure who I am to be in this drama of life. What a relief it is to let these go. I am a "One" on the Enneagram and tend to know what is right! This easily leads to judging others who don't live up to my standards (but, of course, neither do I live up to them). Now I am more prone to smile at other people's foibles as I accept my own. There are times that I still feel hurt by criticisms but I am better at recognizing these earlier and, guess what, letting them go!

There are other things I am challenged to let go of as well. I cannot ever get enough of going out to nature and enjoying my fellow life creatures of trees, birds, animals, as well as natural beauty and strength of mountains, rivers, flowers. But my legs don't cooperate anymore in any kind of strenuous walk and I often have to sit and just enjoy the company of trees. And very good company they are!

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For twenty years I led pilgrimages. This began with taking people to Ireland after I had begun to give retreats and workshops on Celtic Spirituality. Then we widened our travels to Scotland, Italy, Israel, Eastern Europe, France, Spain and many places in between. I am an introvert and need quiet times and solitude. But being with a group of fellow travelers for two weeks was wonderfully stimulating. During these same years I started vacationing with my friends Peg, John and Kel. We visited many of the National Parks – Grand Canyon, Yosemite, Yellowstone, Rocky Mountains, Zion, Bryce, Glacier Park, Arches, Smoky Mountains, Olympia Park and so many more. I fell in love with the beauty of these places and the sharing of them with good friends. In the early years I took a lot of pictures but I eventually gave that up to just enjoy what was before me.

Now these pilgrimages and vacations are behind me. I am not sure there will be any more. I am having to face letting them go. As Dag Hammarskjold used to say, “For all that has been, thanks; for all that will be, yes!”

Jesus preached, in the Sermon on the Mount, “Blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted.” This is beginning to make sense. Letting go, grieving, lamenting, accepting that some things pass or die. All this is freeing. I am not being sad or morose as I write these lines. There is more a sense of gratitude, and enjoying what I have now, and anticipation of still better things to come. I have time to write, to preach, to attend meetings. And I do relish times of stillness, not just quiet but real stillness. I know what Elijah experienced when in the cave at Horeb, he did not find God in thunder or earthquake, but in the stillness of a whispering touch of air. After all, the Holy Spirit is breath.

I am sure some of you readers will appreciate what I am saying. Others will sense that is the direction their life is taking them. And if you are not there yet, just be patient and enjoy life. For enjoying life is still what I like to do. I have less energy than when I was younger, but I have not withdrawn. I write more and enjoy interacting with people. Being older allows me to say what I think or feel. If I am wrong, who cares? In one sense I have never been so alive.

These are some thoughts that my birthday brought to me this year. They are not sad thoughts but good and satisfying realizations of what life is all about. I hope

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you can appreciate what I am trying to say. I am still alive at:  
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Please note that I do not speak on behalf of Glastonbury Abbey, the Archdiocese of Boston or the Catholic Church, though I hope my faith is in harmony with all these. Any error in judgment should be credited to me and not anyone else.