



SAINT AUGUSTINE'S HOUSE

3316 Draher Road, Oxford, MI 48370-2506 • 248-628-5155
office@staugustineshouse.org

NEWSLETTER

Lent, A.D. 2023

The Congregation of the Servants of Christ, St. Augustine's House, is an ecumenical Christian community whose life of discipleship is inspired and shaped by the Holy Rule of St. Benedict. We identify with the Lutheran tradition, understood as a movement within and for the one holy catholic and apostolic Church of Jesus Christ.

We are committed to the growth of the permanent resident community, to the pursuit of ecumenical understanding, and to the provision of retreats for members of the Fellowship of St. Augustine and others. We seek to serve the whole Church by our life of prayer and by the use of our facilities.

✠ PAX

Psalm 119 with 176 verses is by far the longest psalm, although it is conveniently broken up into 22 sections corresponding to the letters of the Hebrew alphabet. It is a single-minded hymn of praise to the Law of God. In every verse there is a reference to the Law using a variety of synonyms: testimonies, precepts, ways, statutes, commandments, ordinances, word, promise. For me this psalm has a very personal meaning. When I left home for the first time to go to college my grandmother made a point to show me this psalm and to suggest that each day I could pray one of its 22 sections and then begin the series again. I think she specifically had in mind the beginning verse of the second section: "How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word."

The author of this psalm seems to be a joyful and confident—and perhaps young—man. He is thankful for the guidance that knowing the will of God provides, and that even in the dark times can serve as a lamp to his feet and a light to his path. He exemplifies the freedom that comes from having secure guideposts in life. In the weekly schema of psalms here at St. Augustine's we pray part of this psalm every morning at Terce. It reminds me of my grandmother and her concern to arm her grandson for life on his own with the words of this psalm.

Eighty years ago, C. S. Lewis addressed what he saw as a loss of confidence that there can be any secure and stable signposts for living a good life. In 1943 he gave three academic lectures which were published the following year as a small book with the arresting title *The Abolition of Man*. This does not refer to a physical catastrophe but to the abolition of the principles and values which constitute and define humanity and humane behavior. A relentless modern subjectivism considers *all* moral truths and indeed *all* value judgments to be merely the emotional responses of the people or communities who hold them. This moral relativism means there is no way to objectively distinguish right from wrong or to praise or condemn any particular acts; there can be only our emotional or aesthetic reactions to them. This also means that there is not and



cannot be any single moral or ethical code that distinguishes humanity and possesses universal authority.

Lewis says that this is not in fact true. Although we do observe rich and varied expressions of it in different places and times, there is a discernable moral code common to all. It is represented in religious and philosophic writings from ancient times to the present and continues to inform and shape the lives of people the world over today. There is a common moral standard that presents itself simply and self-evidently as the way human beings ought to live. It is “the belief that certain attitudes are really true, and other really false, to the kind of thing the universe is and the kind of things we are.” If there are no truths that are self-evident, how can any other truths be established?

To emphasize the universality of this natural, common moral law Lewis uses the Chinese word *Tao* (or *Dao*). This term denotes the natural order of all things, a wisdom grasped by intuition and experience; it is the way, the path, the road. Lewis is speaking to a secular and perhaps skeptical audience and probably felt the use of this more disinterested term would gain him a better hearing than if he had used more overtly Christian language. Perhaps he hoped in this way to draw some of his hearers to a reconsideration of the Christian doctrine. Perhaps this had been a part of his own earlier return to Christian belief and practice.

In any case, in Christian theology the usual expression for what Lewis is referring to as the *Tao* is the Natural Law which is derived from the writings of St. Paul. In his letter to the Romans (2:14f) he notes that even though the Gentiles do not possess the revealed law of Israel they nevertheless “do by nature what the law requires” and this shows that “what the law requires is written on their hearts.” The existence of this common moral sense or memory might also be inferred from the biblical accounts of the origin of the human race from a common set of parents and also from the covenant with Noah and his sons after the flood.



The content of the *Tao*, which varies in expression across the world’s cultures, can broadly be recognized as the Ten Commandments. In this context we can view these familiar biblical mandates in a new light. These are not arbitrary orders but rather the laws, principles, and behaviors, that are necessary for human civilization. It is noteworthy that these laws were given to the Israelites precisely at the moment of their liberation from slavery in Egypt. This was not to restrain their newfound liberty but to define and protect it: this is the way human beings who are truly free ought to conduct themselves before God and toward each other. In this regard it is also the basis for humane and just governance. It provides a common human law to which *all* are answerable, one that stands equally over the strong and the weak, the rulers and the ruled, the rich and the poor. As Lewis says, it “is necessary to the very idea of a rule which is not tyranny or an obedience which is not slavery.”

The *Tao* or the natural law is not a biological drive or reflex like instinct in animals. It reposes in human communities themselves and must be passed on in various forms of tradition, custom, and ritual. In most cultures the primary institutions for preserving and passing on the *Tao* are what we would describe as religious. Lewis does address this issue in his short book, but one might conclude that belief in God or a “Power greater than ourselves” (to use a term in the Twelve Step Program) is a part of the *Tao*, the way of the universe. Like the *Tao*, belief in God presents itself as a fundamental, self-evident truth. You can take it or leave it; but there is no third, half-way option you can substitute. If you take it, you also accept the *Tao*, the Way, the Path, and to be a seeker of the truth and a doer of the good, to live as a rational creature within a moral and ultimately just universe.

Now in Lent we are invited to examine our lives in the light of the *Tao*, the moral and humane life God willed for his human creatures from the very

beginning. We have been referring to this Way as the *Tao*, but we know there is another, better, and higher name that we could use: the Word or Logos made flesh who said, “I am the way and the truth and the life.” In these days we are being called not so much into conformity with a written code as into union with a living person, to be buried with him and to rise with him “so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life” (Rom 6:4).

In Christ,
Br. Richard

News & Notes

The renovation and expansion of the kitchen in the retreat house has been completed, although we are still in the process of adjusting to the new space and appliances. This project has tripled the working space and has opened up access between the kitchen and dining area. Both areas have been painted with a pleasing combination of light grey walls with white trim. In addition, the bathroom near the dining area has received a makeover. We are thankful to John Berney who served as the project manager and to his wife Sandra for guidance in cabinet, appliance, and color selections. See photos on the back page.

Our postulant, Daniel Patrick Johnson continues his studies at Concordia College Chicago but keeps in regular contact. He visited at the end of January and brought two of his classmates with him to introduce them to our community.

For three days in February, we hosted a retreat of the Indiana Chapter of the Society of the Holy Trinity. The Society (www.societyholyltrinity.org) is a ministerium



for Lutheran pastors which, among other things, sponsors these retreats for worship, study, and mutual conversation.

We were happy to welcome Deacon Eric Frank here for a retreat. We are grateful to him because his service at Zion Ev. Lutheran Church in Mt. Montpelier, Ohio frees up more time for Bp. Jeffrey and his ministry here at St. Augustine's.



We look forward to Br. Andy's return here the end of March. He has been in Korea for a year assisting his parents in their retirement in his responsibility as the oldest son.

www.StAugustinesHouse.org

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We are Meant to Rely on Receiving

The following is an excerpt from Introduction to Christianity (pp. 201-3) by Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI).

Man is redeemed by the cross; the crucified Christ, as the completely opened being, is the true redemption of man—this is the central principle of the Christian faith... In the last analysis of man, it expresses the primacy of acceptance over action, over one's own achievement.

Accordingly, from the point of view of the Christian faith, man comes in the profoundest sense to himself not through what he does but through what he accepts. He must wait for the gift of love, and love can only be received as a gift. It cannot be “made” on one's own, without anyone else; one must wait for it, let it be given to one. And one cannot become *wholly* man in any other way than by being loved, by letting oneself be loved. That love represents simultaneously both man's highest possibility and his deepest need, and that this most necessary thing is at the same time the freest and the most unenforceable means precisely that for this “salvation” man is meant to rely on receiving. If he declines to let himself be presented with the gift, then he destroys himself. Activity that makes

itself into an absolute, that aims at achieving humanity by its own efforts alone, is in contradiction with man's being.

The primacy of acceptance is not intended to condemn man to passivity; it does not mean that man can now sit idle. On the contrary, it alone makes it possible to do the things of this world in a spirit of responsibility, yet at the same time in an uncramped, cheerful, free way, and to put them at the service of redemptive love.

Schedule Holy Week

- Palm Sunday, April 2nd** 10:00 a.m.
Palm Procession, St. Matthew's Passion Narrative
- Maundy Thursday, April 6th** 6:00 p.m.
Mass of the Lord's Supper, Washing of Feet
- Good Friday, April 7th** 4:30 p.m.
Solemn Liturgy; St. John's Passion Narrative
- Holy Saturday, April 8th** 9:00 p.m.
Vigil and First Mass of Easter
- Easter Sunday, April 9th** 10:00 a.m.
Mass of Easter Day



Gifts are gratefully acknowledged in memory of

BERNIE BRADY
BERNARD and ELEANOR BUCZEK
JOHN R. COCHRAN
DAVID CROSS
MARY FROEHLICH
PATTIE HEINLEIN
PAUL KOKENDA
ARTHUR CARL KREINHEDER
THOMAS KNUTSON
NORMAN NETHING
FREDERICK OVERDIER
RALPH E. PETERSON
LESLIE C. SCHULZ
DIANE SEELEY
KENNETH SMITH
and in honor of
GEORGE WECKMAN

Below are pictures of the renovated kitchen.

