



SAINT AUGUSTINE'S HOUSE

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NEWSLETTER

Fall, 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

Many years ago, I received a birthday card that listed about a half dozen famous people who were born in the same month and year as myself. I only remember one name from the list: Arnold Schwarzenegger. Knowledge of this coincidence created a casual and undoubtedly one-sided bond with him. This has made me more attentive than I might otherwise have been to his remarkable career: an immigrant from Austria, body building champion, movie star, and governor of California. Now I read in the news that he has publicly expressed doubts about heaven and eternal life. To his credit he did admit later that he is not an “expert” in these matters. Still, I thought his thinking here was a bit flabby and out of shape. I would like to give a little more muscular account of the Faith.

It is true that much talk about heaven can appear to be mere fantasy to soften the fear of death. Heaven is often depicted visually in cartoonish ways that no one takes seriously. There is a sense in which we need to bring our ideas about heaven down to earth, to ground our thinking, so to speak, in order lift our eyes again, and with more conviction set our minds on the things that are above. Serious thinking about heaven does not begin with wishful daydreaming; it begins and ends with God and must be integrated with the created reality in which we now live.

I grew up on the Great Plains, Big Sky Country where even the landscape is mostly sky. One of the ways of cutting through uninspiring, sentimental notions of heaven is to reflect on the created heaven that is right above our heads. It is this heaven that the psalmist has in mind when he says, “The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork” (Ps 19). This heaven, considered as God’s dwelling place, tells us a lot about God himself. On the one hand, it can seem high, remote, transcendent, and seemingly inaccessible. On the other hand, it can sometimes seem close, familiar, accessible, almost touchable. Sometimes it can even seem too close, as when we are in a thunderstorm. The earth and its inhabitants are nourished and sustained by what comes down from heaven in the form of sunshine and moisture. Heaven is omnipresent; wherever we go on the earth there it is right above us. Indeed, it surrounds and encompasses the earth. He who rules in the heavens rules over the earth as well.

The Kingdom of Heaven is the Kingdom of God himself, and this pertains very much to our lives here and now. We pray daily “thy



kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as in heaven.” When we acknowledge and live under the rule of God, we are citizens of heaven, citizens of the New Jerusalem, the City of God, as St. Augustine understood in his book of the same name. St. Paul speaks of believers as being already blessed in Christ with every spiritual blessing “in the heavenly places” (Eph. 1:3). Furthermore, in his High Priestly prayer our Lord defines eternal life as present faith in him: “this is eternal life, that they know thee the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent” (Jn 17:3).

We believe in eternal life, not in an afterlife in another time and place. What happens at death is not so much that we go to heaven but that we do not leave heaven. The eternal life we possess now in faith, hope, and love is not diminished at death, but perfected.

God’s plan in creating the world included his intention to bring it to fullness and completion, and when this plan was disrupted by rebellion, he sent his Son to redeem and restore it. It has been said that he who begins the Creed confidently with “I believe in God the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth” may just as confidently continue through to the conclusion, “the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.” There is a correlation between the creation of the world and the world to come. Both these events are beyond our comprehension, and both take place outside time as we know it. But if we accept God in his role as creator, we cannot deny him his role as finisher, perfecter, and restorer of his creation. If God can call all things into existence from nothing, he can call men from death into new life.

This faith ought to illuminate and fortify our lives here and now. Heaven, that is the life of the world to come, is on earth now in the form of hope. “In this hope we were saved,” writes St. Paul (Rom 8:24). Hope is not just optimistic daydreaming; it is a rugged and resilient virtue. Hope is related to faith, faith leads to confidence, confidence to courage, courage to the freedom necessary for engagement with and action in the real world in which we live with its unexpected ups and downs. It is true that we often speak of heaven and eternal life as the “last things” (eschatology), but this is in the sense that they are the ultimate things, the goal and objective of life, which give direction and vitality to our daily lives here and now.

But what about “the resurrection of the body”? Viewed as a reassembly of molecules and atoms, it is indeed hard to imagine. The Creed here is rejecting the overly spiritualized notion—then and now—that the body is unworthy of redemption, or even that liberation from our bodily nature *is* salvation. The body here is understood in a natural, common place way as when we speak of someone being *bodily* present or present *in person* or *actually* present. It is in this sense that we will be bodily present at the resurrection. The resurrection is not a discarding or sloughing off of

God’s bodily creation. However, to judge from St. Paul, it will be quite a makeover: “What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body” (1 Cor 15:42ff). To put it in terms appropriate to the present context, God is the great and original body builder, and its rebuilder as well.

We are not the first people to ask questions about the ultimate meaning of life or to confront the enigma of death. It is not inauthentic or lazy to take the in-

sights of the past as guides and even as authorities for our own pondering. As Christians we should be grateful for the Sacred Scriptures, the creeds and other teachings of the Church, and the examples of the saints. These not only give encouragement but also challenge us to embrace the mystery of life more fully. I have often appreciated Fr. Richard John Neuhaus’s observation that “thinking with the Church begins with thinking.” The Church’s teaching is not imposed on passive minds but proposed as rational answers to inquiring and open minds. It is nihilism and agnosticism that retreat from engagement with the profound mystery of life and existence.

Governor Schwarzenegger apparently still identifies as a Catholic Christian. He should call up his bishop—or vice versa—and ask for a little advice on how to get in better theological shape. St Paul exhorts “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for God is at work in you” (Phil 2:12f). Maybe the thought of a rigorous workout with God as his coach and spotter would appeal to him.

In Christo,
—Br. Richard

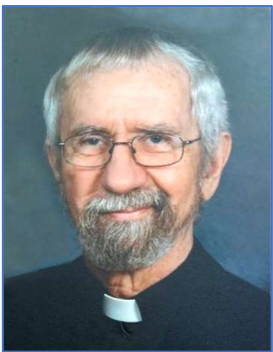


News & Notes

On St. Benedict's Day in July Br. Andy Kyongho Chang made his three-year simple profession as a member of our community. A native of South Korea he immigrated to the US as a teenager and lived in California. He is 49 years old and has traveled extensively. He made his first visit here in November 2018.

Another Fifth Sunday at Five organ recital was held on July 30th. The featured organist was Karl Osterland. He is Organist and Director of Music at Historic Trinity Lutheran Church, Detroit. The hymn "A Mighty Fortress is Our God" was sung by all and included the "Grand Partita on "Ein Feste Burg" written by Mr. Osterland. The next recital in the series is scheduled for October 29th with organist Katherine Nold.

This summer has seen a number of repairs and improvements to our property. A drainage system has been installed around the old Retreat House to alleviate leakage in the basement. The entrance to Brugger Hall which crosses the foundation of the old Quonset hut Chapel was made more accessible with the addition of stairs. The pole barn used to store equipment received a new roof and was upgraded with a concrete floor. Our thanks to neighbor Brad Froehlich for coordinating these improvements.



On July 5th Fr. Del Baier of Ontario, Canada died at 89 years of age. He was one of the first to join Fr. Arthur in residence here at St. Augustine's House in the late 1950s and remained a constant supporter and advocate for our community. For a time, he served on our pastoral council. May he rest in the peace and light of Christ.

The chimney of the Retreat House with its distinctive cupola (picture on front page) was refurbished this summer. The cupola was installed shortly after the completion of the building in the mid-1960s (picture at right). It has served as something of a landmark ever since. It was designed by the architect Carl Benkert. Later the artist



Br. Richard, Br. Andy, and Bp. Jeffrey

Catherine Guinn made a graphic design from it and the cross feature is still used on our letter head.

www.StAugustinesHouse.org
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Fellowship Day

The annual Fellowship Day will be held on Saturday, October 14th beginning with the Holy Eucharist at 9:30 a.m. followed by coffee. The Lecture will begin at 11:00 a.m. and a luncheon will be served at 12:45 p.m. All are welcome, but if you plan to join us for the luncheon, please let us know so we can be adequately prepared.

Fr. Rodney Eberhardt will speak to us on the subject "The Church after Christendom." Cultural expressions of Christianity can no longer be taken for granted. We are living in a situation much more akin to the church in the first three centuries than our parents did. He will examine this new/old situation for Christian discipleship including the role that the monastic movement can play.



Fr. Eberhardt is a pastor of the Lutheran Church-International where he serves on the Executive Board and as Dean of the Institute for Ministerial Formation. He is also Dean for the At-Large Members of the Society of the Holy Trinity. He is the former pastor of Lutheran Churches in Farmingdale and East Amherst, New York. He has also served on the Board of the American Lutheran Publicity Bureau. He and his wife Mitzi live in Cumming, Georgia and are members of St. Martin Lutheran Church (NALC).



Gifts are gratefully acknowledged in memory of

DELMAR BAIER
AAGE SOIBERG
JOHN R. COCHRAN
PAULL E. SPRING
GILL and ANGELA STEVENS
GILL JAMES STEVENS

and in honor of

DEVIN M. ANDREWS
BRAD FROEHLICH
DAN SMITH



The Monk Press

Our newsletters have changed in style and quality over the years. One thing has not changed: our printing has been done by the Monk Press at St. Benedict's monastery, our neighbor just down the road. As a young monk Fr. Michael Green became the monastery's printer and continued in this capacity for decades. When failing health forced him to give up the work, we were relieved that two of the younger monks stepped up to fill his shoes. Fr. Gregory David Jones and Br. Paul Culver now carry on the tradition. In fact, this very newsletter you are reading was printed by them, and the envelopes too!

The monks do not advertise, but if you are local and would like them to do any printing for you, you can contact them through the monastery website:

www.benedictinemonks.com



Br. Richard with Fr. Gregory David and Br. Paul

Love Strong as Death

From a sermon by Baldwin of Canterbury, Archbishop between 1185 and 1190.

Death is strong: it has the power to deprive us of the gift of life. Love is strong: it has the power to restore us to the exercise of a better life.

Death is strong, strong enough to despoil us of this body of ours. Love is strong, strong enough to rob death of its spoils and restore them to us.

Death is strong; for no man can resist it. Love is strong; for it can triumph over death, can blunt its sting, counter its onslaught and overturn its victory. A time will come when death will be trampled underfoot; when it will be said: "Death, where is your sting? Death, where is your attack?"

"Love is strong as death," since Christ's love is the death of death. For this reason he says: "Death, I shall be your death; hell, I shall grip you fast." The love, too, with which Christ is loved by us is itself strong as death, since it is a kind of death, being the extinction of our old life, the abolition of vice, and the putting aside of dead works.

Fellowship Day

Saturday, October 14th

Mass, 9:30 am

Lecture & discussion, 11:00 am

Luncheon, 12:45 (RSVP)