

## PETER'S RETREAT REFLECTIONS, AUGUST 24-31, 2014

Last year Anna and I went on retreat to Our Lady of the Genesee a Trappist Monastery in Piffard, NY, near Rochester, NY. This year, however, I needed to be in solitude, without having to follow any schedule of meals or prayer.



So at the end of August, I decided to go to The Prayer House in Dingmans Ferry, PA this year for my annual retreat. [[www.theprayerhouseatdingmansferry.org](http://www.theprayerhouseatdingmansferry.org)]. I made my own schedule, prepared my own meals and spent time reading, in silence and outside in nature each day.

The house, a refurbished mobile home, was perfect for what I needed, and God spoke to my heart through the silence, the Scripture, the waterfalls & streams I visited and also in the circumstances of each day.

One of my daily companions through his latest book, *Eager to Love*, was Friar Richard Rohr OFM –(I highly recommend it). I think this place of rest and prayer could be a blessing to many people, not only for “retreat” but for rest and quiet, a time for writing or even just as a base for receiving the blessing of being close to God’s beautiful creation and praising God as Francis did.

I have included a few photos of my time of retreat, reflecting the beauty of the area and a few creatures I met. Because of a defect in our camera the time stamps are not correct in the pictures.



The Prayer House

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### Some of the entries I made in my journal that week:

#### Sunday, August 24

I preached for the foreign missions of Holy Name Province at Assumption Parish in Maybrook, NY on the weekend just before I came to retreat. I had the rectory to myself and only one Mass on Saturday and another on Sunday. It was a restful, prayerful time – a good beginning for being on retreat. The pastor was an Irish comic with a good heart.

A woman, who was part of the music ministry, remembered me from a charismatic prayer group that I helped lead in Callicoon, NY in 1977, while I was at St. Joseph’s House of Prayer. She had become a Catholic through that prayer group. I also met a family who had been at a Mass in Glens Falls, NY, where I was covering for the pastor on the previous weekend.

After having brunch with a family I knew from my time in Warwick, NY, I drove to Dingmans Ferry and got settled in at The Prayer House.

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#### Monday, August 25

During the week I read *Eager to Love* by Richard Rohr. He will be my spiritual companion for the week. I worked on Evangelium Gaudium [The Joy of the Gospel, an “apostolic exhortation” by Pope Francis] to make it into a word document. I was moved by the courage of Pope Francis in challenging both the economies of nations and the institution of the Church. The document needs more study. He will be another spiritual companion for me this week.

I listened to a CD of William Johnston at meals – another companion on my retreat. I had learned centering prayer from him in 1969. In the afternoon I took a trip to Tom’s Creek, and meditated while on the trail. In the evening I visited with George & Tilda next door. Together with their guest we entered into some deep conversation. The guest does “rolfing” and he shared about how three areas need to be in harmony: **body, emotions** and **the chemistry** that causes or flows from emotions. He talked about “entraining” – which is about one person’s energy matching someone else’s.

I realized that my energy at Eucharist when I am presiding affects the whole congregation. They are lifted up! [or not] But it is not my doing, it is grace flowing through me. I only let it happen. And it does happen when I (or grace) am not blocked by resistance from a pastor or congregation.

I prayed with Anna at night over the phone. Kelley (a mutual friend she was staying with while on the road) had asked about the future of Bethany Ministries. Anna told her that we were only trying to live our ministry, not create an institution that would go on after us. Whatever happens will happen. I need to wrestle with that.



View from the front porch of the Prayer House

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## **Tuesday, August 26th**

Today is the 42nd anniversary of my ordination as a priest. I reflected on words of Therese of Lisieux “Whoever is willing to serenely bear the trial of being displeasing to herself, that person is a pleasant place of shelter for Jesus.”

I read Anthony Fedell, OFM’s homily for my first Mass, edited it for our Bethany Ministries website. [[www.bethmin.org](http://www.bethmin.org)]. It can be found on the ‘**Resources Page**’ under **Sunday Homilies/First Mass/ Aug. 27, 1972**. I reflected on the part where Anthony talked about the call – “to behold, to lift up, to intercede.”

When I was praying over the call to “**Behold,**” I took some time with the song, “Gaze Upon the Lord.”

*Gaze upon the Lord; Gaze upon his face. Gaze upon the one who holds you in his embrace.*

*Gaze upon his life; Gaze upon his love; Gaze upon his coming poor from heaven above.*

*Look upon your Lord; Look upon his way. Look upon his heart which opens to each day.*

*Though he was despised, the lowest of our race, Look upon his sacred cross which brings life and grace.*

*If you open to life’s pain, then with him you shall reign. And allow your heart to weep, then with him you’ll rejoice.*

*Open to his cross the wounds of each day’s love, Then you’ll know the splendor of his kingdom above.*

-[Words from the Letters of Clare of Assisi to Agnes of Prague as set to music by Sr. Briege O’Hare, OSC]

Then I went to the words “Lift up” & “Intercede” and became aware that this call includes the call to lament. I spent some time in prayer at the Rwanda Memorial which recalls the genocide that took place there in 1994. We (The Prayer House Community) created & dedicated it behind the Prayer House in July, 1997.



The Rwanda Memorial

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### **Wednesday, August 27**

I am still reading *Eager to Love*. I found myself wanting to write to the author [Richard Rohr] about liturgy. I wanted to let him know that I shared his disappointment with the English translation of the New Missal and ask for his ideas about how to respond to my anger and frustration. I also wanted to share the 1998 translation of the Missal that was rejected.

I was deeply moved by the words he quoted from Joseph Pieper, “*The proper habitat of truth is human relationships.*” [p. 183] He also wrote that when the mind is in charge, we can “*love humanity but not any individual people.*” That reminded me of what I had said when I gave the salutatory address at my graduation from Siena in 1967. I quoted the comic strip Peanuts, I think it was Linus who said, “*I love mankind, it’s people I can’t stand.*” I was amazed when a Friar who was there as a young professor reminded me of those words many years later at a meeting of our Emmaus Fraternity-Without-Walls (7 Friars who live singly & gather regularly).

I quoted the book in my journal at some length today – writing that Richard had said we need to learn the rules so well that we know how to break them properly. “*...which, of course, is not really to break them at all. For example, I often change the wording of many of the official orations of the Catholic Mass, after I find myself praying for my own or our own salvation 65% of the time (count them yourself). This is not disobedience but, in fact, obedience to the essence of the Gospel itself.*” [*Eager to Love*, p. 90].

Where am I right now? I am full of joy at being present to creation, reading the Word of God as part of the Liturgy of the Hours, walking with Richard Rohr, William Johnston & Pope Francis. I reflected on the word “entraining” that I had learned during an earlier visit to Penn House, and felt it as a call to be a “mentor” or an “exemplar.” I reflected that I was something like that in my weekend preaching in Rhinebeck, Glens Falls & Maybrook, and so was Anna who at the same time was preaching for the IHM Sister’s mission in Sicuani, Peru.

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## Thursday, August 28

Today, as often I do each day, I am discerning between (among) the many paths I could take. What should I do next? – I sometimes become afraid that I have chosen dead ends or negative paths. My journaling is interrupted by Tilda's phone call. She is ready for our spiritual direction appointment in the small chapel.



The Small Prayer Chapel near 'The Prayer House'

When I was praying with Tilda, I just let the words pour out about where I am in my life. It was not easy to put into words. I am at peace but also restless. I am never satisfied yet full of joy at God's gifts. Am I shining my light too brightly? Lord, are you calling me to dim my light a little so your light, The Light, can shine through the ones I am talking with or preaching to? "You, Jesus, must increase, I must decrease." Does that mean that I should leave the violin home sometimes? I do that already, but it is a part of my color and my beauty. "Let your light shine, so others can give praise to Abba." I guess I am called to live in that tension and to discern when to let my light shine, and when to call forth the light in others.

We ended with my latest fish dream – about a pike/trout with sharp teeth and beautiful colors. We prayed for discernment. This is the dream:

*I am fishing in Oakdale (a pond in Hudson where I grew up). I hook a large fish. It fights and stays under water for a long time. I almost slip on a part of the shore (white earth that looks like ice and extends into the water). I right myself and land the fish. It is shaped like a pike or muskie with a mouthful of sharp teeth, but it has colors on it like a trout (not like a pike). I am careful not to get bitten, and put the fish in a bag to bring home.*

Tilda affirmed the choices Anna and I have made to do some of our ministry "singly." This had happened because of her IHM call to preach for her congregation on some of the same weekends that I was preaching for the Diocese at the **Franciscan Missionary Union** of my **Holy Name Province**. The gift of a 2<sup>nd</sup> car has made that possible. Lord, keep the Subaru running.

I also shared that the “interruptions” & the ministry “on-the-side” have become my/our primary ministry –a much more local ministry of presence. And the Lord is sustaining it through spontaneous and unexpected donations, like the one I got in Maybrook on the weekend before I began this retreat.

Today (Aug 28<sup>th</sup>) is the 3<sup>rd</sup> anniversary of Hurricane Irene, which caused a flood that uncluttered my house by the creek and took most of my belongings. After the chapel session, I did my exercises, took a nap and went to Raymondskill Creek. I got to the bottom below the lower falls and meditated there. I was truly alone in the beauty of creation. It was a challenging climb, both down and back up, but I was able to do it by going slowly and carefully. What beauty! What power! Praise God!



The Lower Falls at Raymondskill Creek from below

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### **Saturday, August 30**

I thought my retreat was over last night, but I guess it is not.

As I prayed this morning on the porch of the Prayer House, I heard a Pileated Woodpecker first pecking on a tree [slower in rhythm than smaller woodpeckers] then I heard his or her call, finally I saw my brother/sister Pileated with binoculars through the trees, still half hidden.

You, God, are like that – only giving hints of your presence, always with several manifestations.

- Is the slow pecking your “Abba”[Father] or “Amma” [Mother] face?  
.....Promising sustenance and revealing life?
- Is the cry of joy or warning or communication your “Spirit” face?  
.....Borne on breath, revealing your presence?
- Is the vision of your form your “Christ” face?  
.....with the redness of your crest and the movement of your incarnate flesh?

Thank you, Lord, for revealing yourself to me today.

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## Concluding Thoughts

As I read the scriptures today, completing a week of praying the Liturgy of the Hours and the readings from the Mass of each day, two new insights burst forth.

First, from the reading from Jeremiah in the Office of Readings [Jeremiah 7: 1-20] –

*“The Temple of the Lord”* repeated over and over, became *“The One True Church,”* and confirmed that salvation is greater, bigger & more inclusive than many believe.

This insight was also confirmed over and over in my reading of *Eager to Love* by Richard Rohr.

Second, when I re-read the parable of the talents from the Gospel of the Mass of that day, [Matthew 25:14-30] I saw/heard/understood two things in a way I never really did before.

1. The phrase, “to each according to their ability” can refer to their level of consciousness of who God is, and is not. The one with the lowest level of ability is given one “talent,” which the master believed he or she could handle. But, after burying it, that person describes a false god, one that was “a hard man” who inspired fear. In this description the person is totally missing the love and gift of the talent and the sensitivity to his or her ability to receive.
2. Then I read the phrase, “come, share your master’s joy” in a new way. It meant not only *receive* the joy of the love of the living God, the God who is an overflowing “fountain-fullness” as Bonaventure writes. It also opened to meaning “Go – spread the joy of your master’s love. Go and do with your gifts, the *“talents”* I have blessed you with – as I have done by giving them to you. Go, share the joy of the Gospel as Pope Francis exhorts all to be evangelists.”

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So, I hear the call to keep sharing the joy of your Good News, always returning to the well,  
on a daily, weekly, monthly, bi-monthly, quarterly and yearly basis.

Daily – at prayer and meditation in the Morning – both alone and with Anna.

Weekly – at the 11<sup>th</sup> step contemplative prayer group & at public Eucharist.

Monthly – at our Franciscan Spirituality group.

Bi-monthly – at the Emmaus Fraternity gatherings.

Yearly (or even every six months) – on retreat, in solitude or with others.



Some of the Neighbors at The Prayer House