



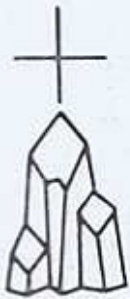
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THE BROOKLYN BRIDGE

MT. SAVIOUR MONASTERY

THE HUMAN CONDITION

A number of things in recent months engaged our imagination. Many things "capture" the imagination and tie it down, but it is rare to find something which grounds it in such a way as to let it roam free in the realm of images without getting lost.

One of the most engaging things was the 100th anniversary of the Brooklyn Bridge. We read, during the noon meal, an unsophisticated little book by Judith St. George entitled *The Brooklyn Bridge: They Said It Couldn't Be Built*. John, Washington and Emily Roebling were for her heroes of truly mythical dimensions and she felt compelled to tell the story of their achievements. The human authors of the Scriptures must have felt a similar motivation. St. Gregory uses practically the same phrases to explain why he writes about St. Benedict.

So it is, as a follower of Christ and a monk in the Benedictine tradition, that the Brooklyn Bridge, the Roeblings, and the countless unknown people and factors of that event struck my imagination. On the 17th of March I had walked across and back over its unique promenade and experienced exactly what the architect intended people should experience. It was only two months later that I heard read John Roebling's purpose in designing a raised boardwalk above the traffic. "This part I call the **elevated promenade**, because its principal use will be to allow people of leisure, and old and young invalids to promenade over the bridge on fine days, in order to enjoy the beautiful views. I need not state that in a crowded commercial city, such a promenade will be of incalculable value." A finer day in New York than St. Patrick's Day is hard to find. The view

that brisk clear day was beautiful. I did not indulge my imagination trying to identify myself with the variety of promenaders. It was like experiencing the joy and surprise that is ours when we walk according to God's plan. However we fear things will turn out, they turn out according to the Architect's Plan and it is wonderful indeed. Of course, we have to do it, and not just read about it, or wonder about it.

There is also the image that arises as we behold the bridge silently and humbly serving millions of people, birds, animals of all sorts, cars, bicycles and the like, day and night, summer and winter throughout a century. Unnoticed until you notice it, it blends with the beauty and grandeur of the city in the day and in the night. The truth is that its beauty and grandeur became the inspiration for the city's architecture since it was the first structure there to use steel and granite. Its presence gave planners the courage and vision to use these materials in building higher and higher. Gladly and humbly it yielded to other structures the skyline it once dominated. At this any Benedictine soul is filled with the image of the followers of St. Francis of Assisi and Ignatius of Loyola building a more magnificent skyline in history and the Church than we have. Yet it is not a source of sadness, but a cause of great joy. "His will is our peace" as Piccarda Donati told Dante in Canto III of the *Paradiso*. Our peace and service, like that of the great bridge, is in accord with the Plan of Architect. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven as we are all wont to say.

The evangelists conclude the various miracle accounts of Jesus with the words "everyone was amazed". Thank God for the ability to be amazed, and so in a very special way, thank God for this bridge which amazes us! Granite and steel yet a gossamer thing. Power and strength almost bow you over, but they are not its foremost qualities. It is rather like meeting a gladiator who radiates care and gentleness. It is very serious and full of fun, like a child with its feet wet delighted to be standing in a muddy puddle. It is not too hard to imagine this bridge as something like ourselves.

The story of its building is also amazing. Integrity and heroism in the extreme with graft and sinning on both sides and in the middle. But integrity and heroism won out. The anticipated cost was already beyond most people's imagination and the actual cost more than doubled that. The same was true of the time it took finally to construct it. Everything seemed to go beyond what was expected: the effort, the obstacles, the number of people involved, yet none of the assistant engineers quit. In this, the bridge is an image for me of the monastery. The effort, the cost, the number of people who have and who still labor with the Lord in building the house are more than we expected. And our assistant engineers, Fr. Damasus, Fr. Gregory, Br. Christopher, Br. Lawrence, Fr. John Main, didn't quit either, but are still with us.

The building of its towers and the work on the cables are truly fascinating. But the success or failure of the bridge depended on solid underwater foundations which supported the towers. For this, Roebling designed caissons or chambers which were really upside-down wood and iron boxes, half acre in size, open on the bottom, and weighing 3000 tons. These were sunk into the mud of the river bottom and compressed air was continually pumped in so the men could work inside the caisson slowly and laboriously removing the mud, rock, sewage, and junk from underneath

and so letting the caissons sink further down until they reached bed rock. The caissons were almost destroyed by fire. The rocks required dynamite which had never been used in a compressed air atmosphere. The "bends" were an unknown disease and nearly put an end to the project. Leaks developed so the compressed air exploded with terrifying effects. Money ran out. New York City reneged on its payments. Roebling became so ill and weak he couldn't leave an upstairs room for years and his wife had to be his presence to the world.

Washington Roebling, son of the original designer, was all but destroyed by injuries suffered working under the river in the compressed air of the caissons. He had to be physically absent from the project during the last years of its building. In these and in other ways, he is not an unworthy image of Christ. We don't appreciate how difficult it was for Christ to ground his human nature in the divine plan. It is described as an agony, but most of us seem not to have noticed it. The enormous labor involved in building the Brooklyn Bridge is an apt image of the work of Christ in our humanity and the job was not unlike removing the mud, rock, and debris from within the caissons enabling them — and in this case us, to settle down once again on our Rock and our God.

Our being reunited in friendship with God is accomplished by first grounding us in the humanity of Christ. It is only in that unique humanity (and 'unique' here means sinless-humanity not divine-humanity) that the bonding in love occurs. Scripture says: "He was like us in all things except sin." Somehow we imagine that the unique dimension of the humanity of Christ comes from being divine. There is no question that Jesus Christ is a divine and human person, but his humanity was human. We seek to be divinized and we should, but the first step is to be united with Christ's humanity and that means to be sinless as he was and still is! The humanity which spans ourselves and God is a unique humanity in that it is sinless. If we are to be a part of that bridge, we too must be sinless. That is a bridge many say "cannot be built." We can't do it, true. But God in Christ can do it, has done it, and continues to do it twenty 100 years. Forgiveness is built into the structure of our sinlessness. "To give his people knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins" is the way St. Luke puts it. We receive it through the humanity of Our Lord Jesus Christ "by whose stripes we were healed" and we in turn "forgive one another as God in Christ has forgiven you." (Ephesians 4, 32)

We are "living stones" and God is the builder. Our humanity in the beginning was sinless and grounded on the rock of God's friendship for us. When we say the prayer: "Oh Lord, you sent your Son to share our humanity and give us your divinity . . ." we imagine right away that the divinity of God and our humanity are bridged by Christ. Accurate in a way, such an image sees the bridge without noticing it. It is to be unaware of the beauty, the grandeur, the uniqueness of this bridge. Nor does it empower us to put forth the effort and energy needed to get the mud, rocks and debris out of our lives. This requires both an interior conversion at the core of our being, a change of heart, and the effects of that conversion visible in our lives and in society. Not to notice this is like still waiting for the Ferry Boats.

As it is with the bridge, so it is with Christ and ourselves. Many people must have dreamed of a bridge between Manhattan and Brooklyn. It was the unique plan of one man

and a unique bridge that was actually built. Just as one man was architect of the Brooklyn Bridge and his wife had a share in his work, so it is with Christ and his Church. To work with him, we must be willing to labor to build the unique bridge of a sinless humanity wherever we are called. We may labor seemingly out of sight in submerged caissons, or very visibly on the cables, towers, and roadways. In any case we must die to our images of limit and possibility and rise, or allow ourselves to be raised, to the imagination of the One whose sinless humanity and spirit we share.

Finally, we can take pride and joy in the many bridges without lessening our pride and joy in the Brooklyn Bridge. We can take pride and joy in the many religious communities and Christian families without lessening our pride and joy in Mt. Saviour. We rejoice for everyone who ever lived and still hold a unique amazement for the One who promised us his own joy that ours may be full, Jesus Christ our Lord. Pontifex Maximus — the magnificent builder of the Bridge

which is ourselves uniting God with his beloved creatures. Imagine that!

J. Martin

NEWSNOTES

- Br. Luke, our Sub Prior this year, represented the Community at the Abbatial blessing of Abbot Jacques Garneau OSB at St. Benoit du Lac Abbey near Montreal. The monks of St. Benoit agreed to look after us during our early days. They sent experienced monks to help us get started and took our Novices for several years until we were able to establish a Novitiate here. So for Br. Luke it was also a 30 year reunion celebration when he brought our thanks and congratulations to Abbot Odilo Sylvan, retiring after 31 years as Abbot, and to Abbot Jacques Garneau and the Community. When Br. Luke came back he returned to his painting and roses and a million other duties here. In the Southern Tier Rose Show in June he managed 11 first prizes, 3 seconds, 2 thirds, and the Best in the Show of Old Garden Roses and the same for the best Shrub Rose.
- Br. Pierre attended the Benedictine Musicians meeting at St. Martin's Abbey, Lacey, Washington. This group meets every two years and shares new music, presents musical arrangements being used in the numerous communities of Benedictine men and women, and encourages one another by singing on key, at the proper pitch, and on the proper note. This doesn't always happen at home!
- Br. Gabriel was in St. Louis for some sessions with the religious in that area and the monks of Weston Priory. Some repairs were necessary on our car, but that enabled him to have a few days of well earned rest and retreat with the monks of St. Louis Priory. Shortly after his return home, he supervised the insulation project which coated some of our roofs and the inner court of the East Building. We were thinking of energy conservation, and especially of the cold in winter when Br. Gabriel began investigating and planning the best method to use. But the boiling temperature of July has been kept outside the building since the insulation went on a few weeks ago. It bodes well for winter.
- Professor Giuseppe Mazzotta, lately of Cornell University and now of Yale, gave the Community a talk on Canto XXXIII of the Paradiso. It is the prayer of St. Bernard the Dante be granted the Beatific Vision before his earthly life ends. And so began the paradox of the humility of Dante expressing itself with singular splendor in his pilgrimage which goes from Hell and back to the memory of the vision and returns to begin again in ever deeper humility and heroic faith and hope and love. Professor Mazzotta has promised to return this summer and spend more time with us.
- The Benedictine Abbots and Priors of North America gather for a workshop each spring. This year Abbot Thomas Keating

also, retired Abbot of St. Joseph's Abbey, Spencer, Mass. spoke on prayer in the formation of those beginning the monastic life. Many of us began again with Dom Thomas to sit at the feet of Antony and St. Athanasius, whose *Life of Antony* gave such impetus to the beginnings of monastic life. Faith and prayer supported the resolve of the early monks, and it looks like it will do it again in our day.

- It is still sad, tho' hardly recent news, that Fr. John Main OSB, Founder and Prior of the Benedictine Community of Montreal died last December. We had such great hopes for all that Fr. John would do, and drew such encouragement from his vision and enthusiasm. If we got stuck in our sadness, he would get permission from God to appear in a dream and give us the dickens for not focusing on Our Lord, reminding us to remember he was only a friend of the Bridegroom — although a very good friend — and he hadn't abandoned us, and we shouldn't abandon our prayer and good zeal. Abbot Francis Rossiter OSB of Ealing Abbey was here for the Mass and burial. It is really due to the generosity and apostolic vision of the Ealing Community that the foundation was made in Montreal. In fact, the Community there is the result of so much generosity and apostolic vision that it is a permanent witness to all of us. The Archbishop of Montreal, and especially Bishop Leonard Crowley, so many Oblates and friends in all walks of life show us what can be done by trusting in the Lord and one another and by prayer — especially prayer in an atmosphere of mutual support.

- We ask you to remember Mrs. Assumpta Arévalo, Br. Alberto's mother, who died last week in Venezuela. He has been helping his sister Julia take care of her during the last three months. He expects to be back by mid-August.

- The gypsy moths were kinder to us this year than last. We could do without them altogether!

- The wool continues to go well and the sheep do also. We had 180% lambing this year which means each ewe had 1.8 child. Some of them got together so the lambs were intact. Others had two and three by themselves with the help of a ram earlier. We intend to put up some permanent fence which will enable us to section off smaller grazing areas so they can always have fresh grass during the seasons. It will also help us to rotate lambing fields and prevent accumulation of worms and parasites which stunt their growth and make us nervous.

- And for the most part, it has been a daily round of prayer and work like in Nazareth ... and your house.

JUBILEE

It is with great joy and thanksgiving that we celebrate the 80th birthday of Fr. Placid Cormey on 30 September, 1983, and his 50th year of monastic profession on 10 August this year.

Fr. Placid was born in Waltham, Massachusetts. He graduated from Boston College in 1925 and worked for the Charles Connick Studio in Boston. One of his assignments was the research for the Dante windows at the University Chapel in Princeton, N.J. Fr. Placid studied fine arts in Paris for a year before entering monastic life as a postulant for Portsmouth Priory in Rhode Island. Thus from Paris he entered St. Benedict's Abbey, Fort Augustus, Scotland, where the novitiate was located, on 17 July, 1931. He completed his Novitiate there and made his monastic vows on August 10, 1933. He returned to the United States that same month and devoted himself to the building of that young community. Ordained to the priesthood on 22 May, 1937, he remained at Portsmouth Priory until September of 1950 when he helped in the preparation of the new monastic foundation which became Mt. Saviour. With Fr. Bernard Burns, he arrived to take possession of our property on 29 March 1951. He went to Abiquiu, New Mexico to help inaugurate monastic life at our new foundation of Christ in the Desert with the founder, Fr. Aelred Wall and Fr. Basil DePinto. He returned four years later on the first of May, 1968.

Those are the bare statistics. We could fill many pages with stories and more details and many anecdotes. But none would surpass in beauty, simplicity, and accuracy his own appraisal. "If I am asked how I feel about my years in the monastery, I will reply that, in the first place, I have a deep feeling of gratitude. I am grateful to God for everything I am and have, especially for the precious gift of faith: For my monastic vocation and the example of my brothers at Mt. Saviour: for good health of body and mind: for my friends and the love they have shown me: for the discipline of work and the pleasures of study and recreation: for whatever experiences and opportunities the Lord has granted me: and for the hope of eternal life. Thank you, Lord Jesus Christ, for everything." *Ad multos Annos* — may Fr. Placid be granted many happy years!



BOOK SECTION

We have many books that we don't mention here. You might write Br. Luke for titles you desire.

Br. David Steindl-Rast osb *A Listening Heart*. Great expectations. This is Br. David's 1st book. We are eager to read this as soon as our order arrives. \$5.95

Avery Dulles sj *Models of Revelation*. This is an excellent book any educated Catholic or Christian can understand and you aren't an educated Catholic if you haven't read it. \$16.95

John Dunne csc *The Church of the Poor Devil*. Fr. Dunne's books are hard to read, but if labor ever paid off, it's the labor of reading a book like this. \$14.95

The American Bishops Pastoral letter *The Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and Our Response*. We just want you to know we have it in stock, you are the one who should be looking for it. National Conference Catholic Bishops edition. \$2.00

Maria Boulding osb *The Coming of God*. (For Advent) One of Br. Luke's favorite writers. \$9.00

Marjorie Holmes *I've Got to Talk to Somebody, God: A woman's conversations with God*. Recommended by Catherine Marshall, Mary Martin, Margaret Chase Smith, and me. \$8.95

David Stanley sj *Jesus in Gethsemani*. This is on the prayer of Our Lord in the Garden before his passion. Begin in the middle with the account of St. Mark. \$7.95

Abbot Alban Boultwood *Christ in Us*. A sleeper; these are excellent reflections on Redemption. \$5.95

Robert Alter *The Art of Biblical Narrative*. \$13.95

Samuel Terrien *The Elusive Presence*. This may be a bit difficult to get into. But when you are in it, you are into Scripture with a marvelous guide like Virgil to Dante in *The Divine Comedy*. \$20.00

Abraham Joshua Heschel *Quest for God*. Studies in prayer and symbolism. \$5.95

Edmund Flood osb *Parables for Now*. The unique feature of Christ's teaching is the Parables. We can't ponder them enough. \$4.95

William Shannon *Merton's Dark Path: The Inner Experience of a Contemplative*. One of the best on Merton with valuable teaching on classical spirituality. \$15.00

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Helen Luke *Woman, Earth and Spirit*. \$9.95

Fr. John Main osb *Word into Silence*. *Letters from the Heart*. \$5.95

Louis Dupre *The Deeper Life*. Introduction to Christian Mysticism. \$4.95

Douglas Steere *Together in Solitude*. \$12.95

Raymond E. Brown and John Meier *Antioch and Rome*. A study of the early Church. \$4.95

Roger Corless *I am Food: The Mass in Planetary Perspective*. \$8.95

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FALL FESTIVAL

Our Day of Hospitality will be Sunday, 18 September beginning with Mass at 11:00 a.m. VOLUNTEERS NEEDED from our local area to help on Sunday. Please call or drop a note giving your name, address and telephone number. We also need trading stamps for next year and you can send them in anytime.



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