

## Praying with the Anglican Rosary

Sister Linda Elston, OSH

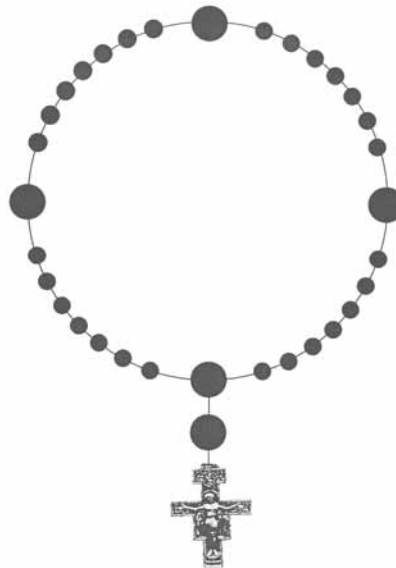
### *Introduction*

The Anglican rosary, created for a contemplative prayer group at Good Shepherd Episcopal Church near Dallas TX, came into being in the mid 1980s. This group of people had been praying the Catholic rosary and wanted to honor the prayers typically said with the Catholic rosary, yet strongly felt the need to experiment with praying the Divine Office on a rosary and to develop other prayers from scripture and their own experience. Through immersion in the symbolism of sacred time and much prayer, the Anglican rosary emerged. From what I see and hear and experience among prayerful folks, this prayer form is capturing people's attention as a tool for deepening relationship with God.

The word "rosary" is derived from the Latin word, "rosarium," which means rose garden. In medieval times, the rose garden was often a place for prayer. In Christianity the red rose is often associated with the blood of Christ, and the white rose is associated with Mary and purity. Interestingly, in the Western world, the rose ever climbing toward the sun is also seen as a symbol of enlightenment.

### *History*

Scholars agree that prayer beads originated with the Hindu faith, possibly as early as the eighth century BC. Praying with beads spread through all faith traditions up into the current era.



Records from as early as 659 CE reveal the Christian use of rosaries, with numerous saints choosing to be buried with their prayer beads in hand. Lady Godiva, prior to her death in 1040, willed her precious stone rosary to be placed on a statue of the Virgin Mary.

In the mid sixteenth century, Pope Pious V decreed that St Dominic (1170-1231) was the original inventor of the rosary, hence the name "Dominican" given to Catholic rosaries. However, with the dawn of the Reformation, also in the sixteenth century, most Protestants began to exclude rosary practices.

A prayer practice which spans faith traditions, as the rosary does, indicates a meaningful way of praying. At

present, all the major faith traditions use some form of praying with knotted ropes, beads, or rosaries. Christian use of the rosary is again emerging as a significant form of prayer and meditation. The Anglican rosary is assisting in the resurgence of its use in modern day and in alleviating Protestant fears concerning the rosary's appropriateness in their prayer.

### *Why Pray a Rosary? A Meditation on the Cruciform Beads*

Simply put, for me, praying a rosary creates a bridge into inner stillness. With my fingers, I am walking my way into a still, restful state. This alone is reason enough for me to pray with prayer beads, for in this inner quietness, I find myself "in Christ." And while I am not aware of any communication between the Divine and me—all I experience is the "sound of sheer silence"—in truth, God is communing and informing my heart directly, bypassing my mind's interference.

As you and I rest in these deeper waters, much is going on. In that state of inner stillness, God is rearranging and reorganizing and transforming our very being, much like the caterpillar which liquefies in its process toward becoming the butterfly. In silent prayer, God reorders our insides. As our inner being is reordered and realigned with Divine Being, our outer life begins to mirror that inner stillness, and order comes to our outer life as well.

*Continued Pg 2*

Prayer and meditation are God's gold mine for our transformation. The quietness of our own souls becomes "original medicine" for the souls of others. As you and I connect deeply with God, we gain the ability to help others connect with their true selves and with the Divine.

At the convent, we chant the Divine Office four times daily. I have been taught that the purpose of the Office is twofold—as intercessory prayer for the world and to lead one into inner stillness. In my experience, this movement from the Office into stillness is rare. But when I go into chapel or the gazebo prior to evening prayer and move into silence with a rosary, that often transforms our discursive liturgy into still, inner quiet. I find it amazing that such word-filled prayer can become so still.

### **Presence**

About holding the beads and cycling around the rosary as we chant: the concrete feel of the beads and the one-by-one movement holds our attention to the experience of this moment – and this moment – and this moment. The rosary is *most definitely* a practice of learning attention, of cultivating our awareness to The Presence—the ability to attend to and live in the Divine Presence in the present moment. The present moment, often called the Eternal Now, is the only moment which contains both horizontal time and the vertical eternal. It is the moment of the Divine indwelling.

In praying a rosary, we also develop an ability to give attention to love—to attend to someone, whether that be oneself, another, or God as a potent way of loving. You and I listen one another into existence, into the true you and the true me.

Our presence changes everything. You've probably heard about the butterfly flapping its wings in your garden energetically affecting life in the Far East. Our presence does likewise. Presence is a very compassionate form of attention, of consciousness.

With a rosary, as you and I practice inner stillness, we begin to practice staying present in the moment. And when we live in the present moment, we allow what is, to be. That means we can begin to be present to emotional pain and stay present to it, allowing our inner state to be present even when we are in pain. And in that compassionate stance, we become co-healers in Christ. After all, that is who Jesus is: the Compassionate One who allows the pain to be.

Our presence becomes a caress, an inner mercy, and in that caress, blocked energy is released and begins to flow again, negative energy "receives



Eucharist" and is transmuted to *barakah* (blessing). Ever-present mercy is received and grace flows. One second we can't stand it, the next second, "all shall be well."

### **Peace**

Anything we allow completely takes us into peace. Our emotional struggles become an ally, a path of transformation, if we can allow and attend to them.

I find living in community challenging. I often wake up afraid that I'm just not adequate for another day of extroverted relating with my sisters. That fear creates difficult side-effects. As I have prayed the rosary more regularly lately, I notice new emotional freedom. Early one morning recently, it was my angry character inside who woke up. Instead of stuffing her down and saying it's

wrong to be angry, I journaled a conversation between me and her, letting her say whatever she needed. The release was so complete that I sat in my bed and cried for 45 minutes, relaxing tears that seemed to complete some process of release.

That which we allow—surrender to—takes us into peace. Presence mediates pain, often transforming it into peace. The great Russian saint, Seraphim of Serov said, "There is nothing higher than the peace of Christ. Acquire inner peace and thousands around you will find salvation."

This peace is available to all of us. Jesus told us that he gives a peace that the world cannot give, and I believe he offers it abundantly to you and me NOW.

### **Reconciliation**

Jesus also said, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God." This saying is the next to the last Beatitude in Matthew, and Jesus probably said it next to last because to be a peacemaker is a high call. It takes much inner stillness, much presence, much inner peace. To be a peacemaker is to be a mediator of reconciliation between our pain and ourselves, between ourselves and another, between others, and for the world. The world could use us all as peacemakers.

The Christ stands in the gap between all the seeming opposites in this world, leveling out the playing field, bringing harmony and reconciliation. The Christ invites you and me to stand in the gap, too, as partners in peacemaking. As we move from one bead to the next, we stand in the gap of peace, again and again.

*For further information, see [www.praxisofprayer.com](http://www.praxisofprayer.com), the website of Praxis, The Christian Contemplative Tradition. Their publication, The Anglican Rosary, contains instructions and prayers for praying the "Little Offices" as well as other creative prayers. Sister Linda contributed several prayers to the book.*

# Community news & views

The sisters extend gratitude to family and friends who celebrated Holy Week and Easter at the convents.

In March the sisters of the Order of St Helena gathered in Vails Gate for their semi-annual discussions. During this time the sisters decided to publish their book of worship, the OSH breviary, within the year.



*Srs  
Ellen  
Francis  
and  
Carol  
Andrew  
at Vails  
Gate*

On Feb 3 **Sr Magdalene** was with her daughter at the Cleveland Clinic where Melissa underwent successful open-heart surgery to repair her mitral valve. Magdalene thanks the community, friends, and family for prayers and love. **Magdalene** has received permission to begin discernment for the priesthood in the Diocese of GA. She has been elected as a lay deputy to General Convention in 2006, representing the Diocese of GA.

**Sr Mary Michael** participated in the Mass of Collegiality at the cathedral in NYC on Tuesday in Holy Week, was at Vails Gate for the Triduum, and had Easter dinner with members of the Manhattan convent. She attended the Priests' Conference of the Diocese of NY during April.

In April **Sr Jean** attended the meeting of the Council of Associated Parishes for Liturgy and Mission in Estes Park CO. The Rt Rev Mark Sisk presided over the Celebration of a New Ministry as **Jean** was installed as the 29<sup>th</sup> rector of Trinity Episcopal Church in Fishkill NY.

**Sr Linda** led two centering prayer

retreats during the last quarter. In March, she became the Order's health insurance administrator. **Linda's** sister-in-law, Karen Elston, visited from Louisiana. More recently, **Linda** attended Healing Touch level one instruction.

**Sr Ellen Francis** is working on a second Li Tim-Oi icon, this one commissioned by the 2005 graduating class at General Theological Seminary in NYC. She continues to enjoy doing Sunday supply work, leading quiet day programs, and corresponding with Associates.

**Sr Mary Lois** continues her work with the poor at St Bartholomew's in NYC. In February she conducted a quiet day at the cathedral in Portland ME and another in April at the Church of the Good Shepherd in Dunedin FL.

**Sr Cintra Pemberton** spent February and most of March convalescing from surgery and in finalizing revisions to the Order's breviary. She and **Sr Carol Andrew** are grateful to two long-time friends and Associates, Louise Abbott and Carole Johannsen, for their assistance. In February **Cintra** gave an address on Celtic spirituality for the Adult Forum of St Paul's Augusta, and in April she led a weekend retreat at the Augusta convent.

In April **Srs Linda Julian** and **Ellen Stephen** offered a poetry-writing retreat at Vails Gate.

In February **Sr Claire** completed her long-delayed move to the Manhattan convent. In April she traveled to Santa Fe NM for meetings of The Episcopal Network on Science, Technology and Faith and The Ecumenical Roundtable on Science, Technology and the Church.

**Sr Clare** attended an ecumenical service at the time of the Pope's death. She continues her ministry of telephoning people who are ill or lonely.

**Sr Ann Prentice** continues to enjoy her ministry of spiritual direction, oversight of the Vails Gate chapel, and occasional

preaching.

**Sr Rosina** is home recuperating from her right knee replacement. She appreciates the numerous expressions of care received.

**Sr Elsie** is glad to be home to Augusta. She spent the last three months in California and Seattle taking care of her son, Bill, who died of lung cancer on March 9. **Elsie** feels grateful for the time with Bill and her daughters and with the Sisters of the Transfiguration in Eureka CA.

In February, **Sr Barbara Lee** participated in the "Crash Course in Hebrew Reading"



*Srs  
Veronica  
and Linda  
celebrated  
their fifty-  
something  
birthdays  
in March.*

at the Torah Learning Center. On her birthday, she enjoyed dinner out with friends in Seattle, and in late March, she joined **Sr Elsie** and **Elsie's** daughters at the Space Needle for **Elsie's** birthday dinner.

**Sr Veronica** will begin the CPE (Clinical Pastoral Education) program this fall. Rather than working in the hospital as expected, she has decided as her CPE internship to join her mentor in prison ministry.

**Sr Benedicta** is planning a trip to Toulouse, France, in May, courtesy of her family, to assist with and attend the wedding of her niece, Isabelle, and fiancé, Jonathan. Benedicta asks prayers for the happy young couple.



*Sr Claire Joy, CHS; The Rev J D Clarke; and  
Sr Mary Lois work together at the St Bartholomew  
Episcopal Church homeless shelter.*



*Srs Benedicta and Rosina  
enjoy one another's company  
at March discussions.*



*Three of OSH's ordained sisters  
live in Manhattan—  
Srs Mary Michael, Ellen Francis, and Claire Lofgren.*

# Born From Above

A Sermon by Sister Deborah Magdalene, OSH

Preached February 20, 2005  
Lent 2, Year A: John 3:1-17  
St Gregory the Great  
Episcopal Church  
Athens, Georgia

In the Book of Common Prayer is a catechism full of all the things you would ever want to know about the Christian faith and spiritual life. According to Funk and Wagnalls, a *catechism* is a short instructional manual framed in a question-and-answer format. Early converts to Christianity studied similar catechisms as they prepared for baptism at the Easter Vigil service. This long, mysterious vigil, the oldest service in our liturgy, moves the congregation from the darkness and fear of night into the morning light of resurrection. We move from separation from God into the joyful daybreak of God's living presence in our lives.

The dialog between Nicodemus and Jesus in today's gospel is in the form of a baptismal catechism. Nicodemus asks the questions for us, and Jesus answers with good news and surprising vocabulary. No matter how long it has been since our own baptisms, we all need review of our Christian vocabulary. The words Jesus uses in his answers to Nicodemus are full of double meanings intended to awaken us to new understanding and new life.

In the 4<sup>th</sup> gospel, John teaches with metaphor, irony and double meanings. His texts are many-layered, designed to deepen our understanding and move us into intimacy and immediacy with our Beloved. Today's gospel takes us on a journey into three frequently misunderstood concepts of our Christian faith: born again, the Holy Spirit, and the cross.

Modern study of the original Greek in John's gospel has yielded surprises about these fundamental words of our Christian creed. When we study the Greek meanings of born again, Holy Spirit and lifting the cross, we find that each has at least two meanings. The two would have been understood by the Greek and Hebrew speaking populace

but have been lost to us in Latin and English translations. Because we don't have equivalent words in our language, the second meaning of each has been relegated to footnotes or omitted entirely.

When Nicodemus travels surreptitiously under the cover of night to seek answers from Rabbi Jesus, we go with him. We come to Jesus at night with a desire to know the truth of his words to us. We come to Jesus feeling our separation from truth and our yearning for enlightenment. Nicodemus is bright and curious and asks probing questions which allow us to hear Jesus' transformational language of love.

Nicodemus assumes that the key to understanding Jesus is to accept what is visible to the eye: Jesus' signs. Nicodemus says, "We know you are from God because of the things that you do." Jesus teaches us not to look at his signs, but to immerse ourselves in the world that those signs represent. Jesus invites us to experience the entire kingdom of God by being *born again*.

In Greek, the word translated as "born again" is *anōthen*, which has a double meaning of "born anew, or again, from above." Jesus does not say that being born again is a dramatic charismatic experience separating Christians into those who have had an experience and those who continually live into their birth from above.

Jesus challenges Nicodemus to "Be born again from above, *anōthen*, and then you will begin to understand. Move beyond surface meanings to a deep understanding." In essence he says, "Nicodemus, the signs you speak of represent the intimate relationship I experience with our God. I invite you to share this intimacy. The relationship into which I invite you is new life, a resurrected life that requires a spiritual birth from the present into eternity. The birth I speak of unites the physical with the eternal."

Nicodemus' reply reveals his stubbornness. "How can anyone be born after growing old?" His thinking gets in the way. He insists on remaining logical and analytical, while Jesus invites him to let go and accept a new way of living.

Nicodemus protests that the only way to be born is from a woman. He protests, hoping against hope that Jesus will testify to a God that he can experience without having to change. He doesn't want to let go of his own ideas because that would threaten the very ground on which he stands. He is afraid.

Jesus tells him that entrance into God's kingdom requires a double birth. "You must be born of water and spirit." When we are baptized we emerge from the baptismal waters as we emerge from the waters of the womb. We are born of flesh **and** accept our heavenly calling. We are born into the Holy Spirit of God claiming our full humanity. Our bodies are 65% water and 100% divine. We are children of the earth who are destined for heaven. And Jesus teaches us to release our controlling and fearful grip of all that holds us down and let the Holy Spirit blow us where it will.

Jesus challenges us to look deeper than the surface of what we see and think. The Greek word for spirit is *pneuma*, which actually means both "wind" and "spirit." The Hebrew *ruah* means both "breath" and "spirit." God's Holy Wind blows through our lives in a gale of the unknown. Like the wind, we don't know where it comes from or where it is taking us. But we are reassured that we can count on Holy Wind's heavenly origin.

We are asked to believe that God's Spirit Wind takes us closer to God's heart, even as we leave the comfortably familiar ways we think life should be. God's Holy Wind is a powerful storm of change and a heavenly Spirit of Love. We are born again from above by trusting in that howling Wind which is the gentle breath of God. We trust and become part of that Wind. We trust because we believe in the loving source of our change.

Nicodemus remains incredulous. "How can these things be?" Jesus continues to teach about God's ingenious incongruities. He explains that just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so must the Son of Man be lifted up. Here again, the Greek word for "lift up," *hypsōō*, has the additional

*Continued Page 5*

meaning of "exalt." As Christ is lifted up on the cross, we exalt the power of his surrendering love. The overlap of crucifixion and exaltation is the point of our baptismal journey. Christ's death, resurrection and ascension are one continuous act, meant to pull us out of ourselves and into God's heart. "God so loved the world that he gave his beloved Son, that all who believe in him may have eternal life."

The journey we begin in baptism as we are born again from above, *anōthen*, continues by the gift of God's *pneuma*, God's windy Breath/Spirit, as it lifts us up in exaltation, *hypso`o*, with Christ into the mystery of death, resurrection and ascension. It is a journey from separation into intimacy – from kindergarten fundamentalism into post-doctoral studies of incongruity and mature faith. Jesus guides us all from a comfortably routine, ordinary, and deceptively safe life to an eternal, incarnational, and living faith.

Nicodemus struggles with Jesus' teaching. His questions become our window of truth and acceptance. Nicodemus' hesitance to follow God's call into the wilderness of new life and resurrected love allows us to move in his stead. Where Nicodemus stumbles we begin to run.

He never quite got it, but Nicodemus' questions open the door for us to move into the mysterious borderlands between heaven and earth. We are invited to travel with God's Holy Wind at our backs into the unknown territory where Christ continually holds our hand. We are invited to The Dance; we are taught her steps, and finally we are asked to make a choice. Jesus asks us to choose Love and then turns to walk toward the cross and certain death. Jesus' walk to the cross makes sense when we let go and attempt to see the world with God's eyes—with the embracing love of mystery, ambiguity and truth.

The last question in our Catechism is: "What, then, is our assurance as Christians?" The answer: "Our assurance as Christians is that nothing, not even death, shall separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Amen.

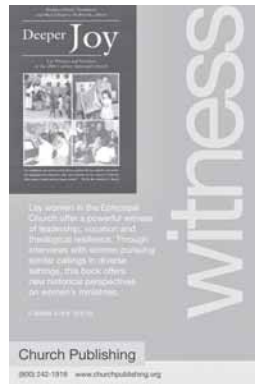
## More news...



The Order of St Helena requests your prayers and your presence at a festal Eucharist in honor of the fortieth anniversary of the Life Profession and the eightieth birthday of **Sister Ruth Juchter** on Saturday, September 10, 2005 at 11:00 in the morning in the Chapel at Vails Gate

Buffet luncheon following the service  
RSVP 845-562-0592  
VailsGateConvent@osh.org

**Diana Moore** was received into the postulancy on Saturday, April 2nd in the Vails Gate chapel. **Diana** comes to OSH after two years in the Peace Corps in the West Indies and two months alongside the Augusta sisters. She said of her entrance into community: "I am discovering that the landscape at Vails Gate, coming alive with spring, is mirroring my inner experience of coming into community. A wonderful growth and blossoming experience with new discoveries everyday!"



In a new book, *Deeper Joy*, **Sister Ellen Stephen** has written a chapter about the history and purpose of religious vocation as experienced in the Order of St Helena. The chapter covers the Order's pioneering beginnings and its innovative development into a contemporary lifestyle of prayer and ministry. *Deeper Joy* contains the stories of lay women in the Episcopal Church and the powerful witness of leadership, vocation, and theological resonance they offer. Contact Church Publishing 800-242-1918 or [www.churchpublishing.org](http://www.churchpublishing.org) to order.

From the Alumnae Newsletter, February 2005, Wells College Alumnae Association: "**Cornelia Ransom**, class of '51, now **Sister Cornelia Ransom** of the Order of St Helena, will receive the 2005 Wells College Alumnae Award for her outstanding achievements within her religious community and in the world outside. She is a leader, mentor, teacher, a staunch believer in the role of women in our society, and a woman who can successfully stand with one foot in the spiritual world and the other in the secular. She will receive the award on Saturday, June 11, during Reunion Weekend."

### BULLETIN BOARD

Costs for producing and mailing the **saint helena** have increased significantly. We would be grateful for a \$10 annual contribution from readers, when possible, to offset costs. Please mail your check to OSH, Newsletter Editor, P O Box 5645, Augusta GA 30916-5645. Note "newsletter donation" on memo line.

Please remember us in your will.

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*The Order of St Helena is a religious community for women  
 in the Anglican Communion, founded in 1945, which witnesses  
 to a contemporary version of traditional monasticism.*

St Helena sisters  
 gather at Vails Gate



## Programs 2005

### Augusta

**JUN 24-26 – Associates Weekend: *Prayer and Spirituality, Communicating with God***

led by Sr Rosina, OSH. A weekend for Associates of the Order and those who may wish to become Associates.

*Prayer may be seen as the communication link or bridge which connects us to the Divine when the material world seems to be pulling us away. Prayer is the act by which we close the gap or separation between the human world and the Divine. Prayer is also a microscope through which the Divine is made visible. Explore with Sr Rosina different ways of looking at prayer.*

**SEP 17 – St Helena Series #1**

***Natural Spirituality: Dreams and Christian Life***

led by Joyce Rockwood Hudson, Georgia Author of the Year in Fiction

*In the Bible, dreams are a highly visible aspect of Jewish and Christian spiritual life. In the 20th century, dreamwork began making a comeback in Christianity, and the movement to include dreamwork as a vital part of a balanced Christian life is steadily growing. Joyce will talk about the living Christ as the "light in the darkness," showing how dreams are related to this powerful image of divine activity in our lives. She will also lead the group in dreamwork.*

**OCT 7-9 – *Making Prayerful Choices***, a silent retreat led by Sr Cornelia, OSH

### Augusta

**NOV 11-13 – Associates Weekend: *Litanies for Life***

led by Felicia Smith, Associate of OSH

**DEC 2-4 – *Praying with Icons***, an Advent silent retreat

led by Sr Magdalene, OSH

### Vails Gate

**Oct 21-23 – Associates Weekend: *Praying with Icons and Scripture***

led by Sr Ellen Francis, OSH. A weekend for Associates of the Order and those who may wish to become Associates.

*During the weekend, we will explore several different prayer practices including praying with icons, lectio divina, and contemplative prayer. There will be discussion time and renewal of Associates' commitments.*

**Dec 2-4 – Advent Retreat** led by Sr Veronica, OSH

+++

**You are welcome to add extra retreat days to a program.**

**See [www.osh.org](http://www.osh.org) for more programs and details.  
 Contact the appropriate house's guest coordinator with questions and to register.**

**Email [augustaoffice@osh.org](mailto:augustaoffice@osh.org)  
 if your mailing information changes.**

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