

Book List from the Brothers of SSJE (Society of St. John the Evangelist)

Dear Friends,

Today, the Brothers gather at Emery House to begin their annual Community retreat. Before they left for this important time of reflection, community discussion, and prayer, we asked several Brothers to share the titles of the books they're currently reading. We hope you might enjoy adding one or more of these books to your own summer reading pile.

On Br. David Vryhof's Bookshelf:

The God-Possessed by Jacques Lecarrière. A thorough yet very readable history of monasticism in the deserts of Egypt and beyond during the third and fourth centuries. Insightful descriptions of the motives of these "God-possessed" men and women who left their families and possessions to whole-heartedly seek God.



The Desert of the Heart by Benedicta Ward, SLG. A pocket-sized collection of stories and sayings from the desert fathers that invites deeper reflection.

If a Tree Falls by Jennifer Rosner. Reflections of a mother of two deaf girls on her struggle to come to terms with their deafness and to determine the best way to raise and educate them. Rosner skillfully reports on her thoughts and feelings as a parent of children with disabilities.

Once a Runner by John L. Parker, Jr. "The best novel about running ever written," according to *Runner's World* magazine. The story of one man's quest to be a champion, capturing the essence of what it means to be an elite athlete and to devote one's entire existence to the single-minded pursuit of excellence.

On Br. James' Bookshelf:

The Pillars of the Earth by Ken Follet.

A radical departure from Follett's novels of international suspense and intrigue, this chronicles the vicissitudes of a prior, his master builder, and their community as they struggle to build a cathedral and protect themselves during the tumultuous 12th century, when the empress Maud and Stephen are fighting for the crown of England after the death of Henry I

Our Magnificent Bastard Tongue: The Untold History of English by John McWhorter.

This evolutionary history of the English language from author and editor McWhorter (*The Power of Babel: A Natural History of Language*) isn't an easy read, but those fascinated by words and grammar will find it informative, provocative and even invigorating. McWhorter's history takes on some old mysteries and widely-believed theories, mounting a solid argument for the Celtic influence on English language that literary research has for years dismissed; he also patiently explains such drastic changes as the shift from Old English to Middle English (the differences between written and spoken language explain a lot).

On Br. Jonathan's Bookshelf:

The Backyard Beekeeper: an absolute beginner's guide to keeping bees in your yard and garden by Kim Flottum. I'm aspiring to be an apprentice apiarist with Br James.

The Wisdom Jesus: Transforming heart and mind-- A new perspective on Christ and his message by Cynthia Bourgeault. Transformation of consciousness in prayer using traditional contemplative practices from a sometime-Cowley author.

Divas and Scholars: performing Italian opera by Philip Gossett. Indulging myself in the history and transmission of this musical repertoire which I so enjoy!

On Br. Curtis' Bookshelf:

Christianity: The First Three Thousand Years by Diarmaid MacCulloch of Oxford University. MacCulloch spent his childhood in a rectory and now looks on Christianity respectfully, but from outside. His writing is brilliant, critical, inspiring, humorous.

Desert Christians: An Introduction to the Literature of Early Monasticism by William Harmless, a Jesuit. This is a very accessible and interesting introduction to the desert abbas and ammas - their lifestyle, teaching, and followers in the Egyptian desert and beyond.

In Pursuit of Silence; Listening for Meaning in a World of Noise by George Prochnik. "...More than money, power, and even happiness, silence has become the most precious - and dwindling - commodity of our modern world..." Very compelling.

On Br. Mark's Bookshelf:

I'm enjoying ***Christianity: the First Three Thousand Years*** by Diarmaid MacCulloch!

On Br. Kevin's Bookshelf:

Following Jesus in a Culture of Fear: the Christian practice of everyday living by Scott Bader-Saye. An elegantly written account of the neglected doctrine of providence, advocating a recovery of the practices of hospitality, generosity, and peacemaking. Five stars.

Letters to Jackie: Condolences from a Grieving Nation by Ellen Fitzpatrick. Billed as a "glimpse into the character of the nation," 250 of the millions of notes, letters, and cards sent to Mrs Kennedy in the wake of JFK's assassination distill with heartbreaking poignancy both a lost era and a lost mode of courteous public discourse. I can only read a few pages at a time.

In This House of Breed by Rumor Godden. A signal novel for me, it's a story of vocation, lodged in the oh-so-ordinary "changes and chances" of the common life shared by the Benedictines of Brede Abbey in southern England.

The United Cakes of America by Warren Brown. One part cookbook (at least one recipe for every state - from Baked Alaska to Key Lime Pie), one part food history (did you know angel food cake pans were made almost exclusively by the Pennsylvania Dutch?), and one part Trivial Pursuit factoids (T or F: Steam is an essential ingredient of most cakes), makes for scrumptious reading.

On Br. Luke's Bookshelf:

The Help by Kathryn Stockett.

What perfect timing for this optimistic, uplifting debut novel set during the nascent civil rights movement in Jackson, Miss., where black women were trusted to raise white children but not to polish the household silver. Eugenia Skeeter Phelan is just home from college in 1962, and, anxious to become a writer, is advised to hone her chops by writing about what disturbs you. The budding social activist begins to collect the stories of the black women on whom the country club sets relies and mistrusts enlisting the help of Aibileen, a maid who's raised 17 children, and Aibileen's best friend Minny, who's found herself unemployed more than a few times after mouthing off to her white employers.

The Shattering Sound of Amazing Grace by David Schlafer. Highly recommended - great to use as a devotional with family or friends. "In this book, acclaimed preacher and writer David J. Schlafer weaves words and ideas like a Celtic braid. He places us in the company of some of the people who populate the Gospel of John."

Jesus Freak by Sarah Miles. In these moving, empowering reflections, which challenge ordinary people to follow Christ's model and engage in extraordinary ministry, Miles—writer, cook, and founder of San Francisco's St. Gregory's Food Pantry—explains not only gospel texts but stories from her life and the lives of neighbors touched by St. Gregory's mission. Miles's obvious homiletic gifts infuse the narrative: startling metaphors (Jesus as promiscuous Boyfriend who'll go with anyone) combine with honest self-reflection and a wry sense of humor, prodding the reader to take ownership of Christ's commands to serve, feed, and heal.

Introverts in the Church by Adam McHugh. Introverts are called and gifted by God. But many churches tend to be extroverted places where introverts are marginalized. Some Christians end up feeling like it's not as faithful to be an introvert.

Adam McHugh shows how introverts can live and minister in ways consistent with their personalities. He explains how introverts and extroverts process information and approach relationships differently and how introverts can practice Christian spirituality in ways that fit who they are.

Introverts in the Church is essential reading for any introvert who has ever felt out of place, as well as for church leaders who want to make their churches more welcoming to introverts. Discover God's call and empowering to thrive as an introvert, for the sake of the church and kingdom.

Review

"Introverts, take heart! As an introvert myself--an off-the-chart 'I' on the Myers-Briggs--I find certain aspects of church life, like speaking to other human beings every Sunday, really taxing. McHugh thoughtfully explores the gifts introverts bring to the church, and he considers both how introverts can live well in the church and how churches can be more hospitable to us." --Lauren F. Winner, Duke Divinity School, author of *Girl Meets God*

Many thanks to the Brothers for sharing their summer reading lists.