



SISTER MARTI OF STARCROSS

On this day three years ago our Sister Marti peacefully crossed over the river of life. Her death made a huge difference to us here at Starcross and in the lives of her many friends. However Marti's ripples continue to spread everywhere – down the street, in Europe, the Middle East, Latin America, Africa, over sick beds near and far — and very much here in our chapel and on the land she loved. People who live and work with us for a while often remark that they feel they know Marti, even though they never met her. And they do! Once when she was terminally ill, she said, "If I am still here then..." And someone shouted, "You will always be here!" Marti laughed and said, "Yes, I will be."— And she is! So I thought it appropriate on this day to share some words Marti wrote which still resonate in many hearts — and always will.

Brother Toby



In the garden . . . We were weary that afternoon. A house full of children here and 140 in Romania and Uganda! So I suggested we go out to the garden. We found some shade to sit in, and looked at the beauty around us. Beauty is such an important element in life. I sometimes think one of the worst deprivations of poverty is the lack of beauty.

We read some poems and sat quietly. There was something encouraging about the new life all around us; the soft green of the trees, the birds building their nests, the feeling that everything is going along as it should. I guess being in our garden or our olive grove evens out the wild swings in our life, and brings some perspective.

I have been thinking of a quote Brother Toby mentioned from Henry David Thoreau,
I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to confront only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived.

Keeping our balance is one of the hardest tasks we all have. Oddly, it is hardest to do what is most refreshing; take a break, go outside, do nothing. I remember once being on a retreat all by myself where I set my own schedule, and I found myself running to get to meditation on time! I guess it is not always outside events that get in our way.



The meaning of the Starcross symbol is that hope (the star) and suffering (the cross) are one. If we separate them we find despair. We cannot wait until the suffering is over to experience the hope. We cannot wait until the work is over to experience the beauty.



For those in need of solace — a look outside ... Several letters this week have contained the phrase, “The world is a mess. . .” I can’t argue with that but that isn’t the whole story of life. Like any group of people, we here at Starcross have also been facing some difficult times these past few weeks, but that also is not the whole story. There are many other stories going on around us.



The summer here begins with great activity — the swallows arrive and build their nests, the garden is plowed and seeds planted, the olive trees are pruned. In late August we will be busy again with harvesting and preserving, preparing for the olive harvest and the wreath season.

But in between these busy times there is space for quiet growth; a time of promise and mystery. We are not required to do anything as the plum blossoms turn to fruit and the tiny olives begin to grow. It is a time of wonder, when walking in the fields brings awe rather than things to add to the “to do” list.

For people, too, this can be a season for renewal. Sure, the world is a mess. After a year of meeting one crisis after another, Starcross was also in a spiritual mess. Maybe your life is like that as well. We chose mid-summer as a time to refresh and renew our spiritual vision. It is a good season for doing that. One glorious day after another unfolds in front of us, inviting us to remember that in many ways we already have what we are looking for.

July 11 is St. Benedict’s Day, a time for us to appreciate the contemplative aspect of life. July 22 is Mary Magdalene’s Day. She is our patron saint — no, you will not find the secret of the Da Vinci code in our chapel. Well, not easily anyway! Both Mary Magdalene and Benedict followed the Gospel, the Tao of Jesus as some call it, in times of great stress when the world seemed ethically anchorless. When power and wealth become the gods, more and more people are marginalized. Both Mary and Benedict chose a simple life, and welcomed all who wanted to break loose from the mess the world was in. That is still a good suggestion.



On our front porch is a nest with three young swallows. They fill it completely as they ponder the miracle of flight. Any day now they will give it a try. In late summer they will join their parents in a journey to the tip of South America where they will stay until they return to Starcross next spring. How can these klutzy fuzz-balls

possibly perform such a fantastic feat in just a few weeks? But they will. And, whatever it takes for each of us to live, harvest, and share that which is sacred in our life — we will each do it also.

This year we chose a statement from Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906–1945) to share with our friends as a bookmark. It was written just before the Nazis murdered him. It is something to remember when we encounter the mess in our lives and in our world,

The impossible is a blessing from God, for the world can only be renewed by the impossible.

That is something we can also learn from those three little swallows on our front porch.



A festival of stars . . . Our path has had many remarkable spiritual gifts, and yet they are all just part of our life. Suzuki Roshi, at the Zen Center, talked about spiritual gifts as “something wonderful” and “nothing special.” He compared it to having children. Having a child is something wonderful and it is also everyday – nothing special.

When wonderful things are flowing through your life you just accept them and move on – nothing special. Yet looking back over the years this morning, our presence here today and all that led to it is something wonderful.



When you are following a spiritual path each step you take leads to something else. It is a never-ending path that leads somewhere you were meant to go. With the help of our many friends, Brother Toby, Sister Julie, and I have done that, and we all know we are just where we were meant to be and, unless we interfere with the process, we are going where we are supposed to go.

I would like to dwell on some of the “something wonderfuls” from our path for a few minutes. Each of us is so very

different, and yet together with our children and our friends we have a spirit that could move mountains, and sometimes I think it has.

I remember Julie at 25, dancing in her sailboat T-shirt in the attic of our first home in San Francisco; opening the door and seeing our first child on the porch; the wonderful talks and classes Toby gave.

I remember Good Friday in the chapel when the curtains moved and we felt a divine spark; seeing Starcross the first time and knowing “This is the place;” laughing in the corn field with Toby and Julie.

I remember holding up each child to the stars and dedicating them to God; Julie on the hilltop the night before she took her vows, dancing with the stars; all the beautiful Christmas Eves in the chapel.

I remember the stars here – how extraordinary they are and how they are still as awesome as the first time I saw them. They have meant something wonderful to us from the beginning.



Going through the seasons, in a rooted place we learn from nature about ourselves and about life,

*Under the same tree
that showered me with petals —
red and yellow leaves.*

For ourselves, and for many we do not even know, we are keeping this sacred place for the future.

