

Surface Changes

- *brother Peter*

I DELIGHT IN THE WONDER WROUGHT ON THE SURFACE OF our back pond. A breeze or wind will ripple or wave the smooth, plate-glass mirror of still water into a variegated and undulating reinterpretation of the world above that it reflects—aspects of earth, air, fire and water. The motionless, mirrored world is already turned upside down and now is refracted into a scintillating, alternative reality. From below, fish and salamanders swimming to the surface catch some air or bug and pierce what is their ceiling of light to create circular irruptions seen from above. The deep, feeding springs of the pond arouse the cold channels that form rivulets evident on the surface.

I marvel at these happenings, observing them from my west-facing, second story room in our dormitory building. My window offers me a particular point of view and a singular angle of vision. I know that, viewed from any other point or angle, the whole scene would change.

The time of day, the seasons of the year in their variety of colors, the weather, the temperature, the place and angle of the sun—or the moon—all have their play on this serene surface. Misty mornings, their light diffused through fog, reveal a light-absorbing, opalescent plane; clear, cloudless, bright skies with no air moving, a sharp, high-gloss reflection. Spectacular sunsets are doubly so! Gentle raindrops create small, slowly-growing, circle designs; heavy, driving rain, a roughened, silvery, mat veneer.

Once, in early wintertime, the freezing of the water gathered the flakes of the first snowfall into islands of fuzzy, gray-white shapes surrounded by the blue-black of deep waters—an abstract of winter wonders. At another time, further into the season, the pond's opaque-gray ice was covered with numerous star-like, black-water cracks formed where the surface was weak.

A heavy-antlered moose, on one occasion, swam across the pond to emerge at the far bank, all wet and shiny, leaving in its wake on the water



an upside-down and broken-up image of color and waving motion. In another incident, a great blue heron—a large, slim and elongated bird—flew off from the other bank, tipping its down-turned wing, almost touching the up-turned tip of its reflection, to form a beautiful, elliptical arc. More commonly, the small tree swallows and barn swallows seem to be constantly dive-bombing their mirror images on the surface. But they are really feeding on bugs in the air or wetting strands of hay or beaks full of dirt, preparing materials to build their nests. They, too, make circular dents where they dip.

The surface of our back pond is always there and is ever exposing changes. The changes reveal life rising up to it from below, from the depths within, and reflecting down on it from above, outside and around it. For me the pond surface has become a parable of our life and monastic profession.

Each brother has a place in our dormitory building. From there, each has a different vantage point onto this pond surface. We are committed to integrate all our differences in peace and in brotherhood and to spend our lives together. Our “surface” is our monastic brotherhood, lived in this monastery, as we listen to and honor the authority of the Gospel of Jesus and the Rule of Benedict as manifest in the community—the commitment to Stability and Obedience. This assures our constancy.

It is what happens on this surface of monastic life and brotherhood that is awe-inspiring. Our world is ever changing. Humans themselves are made for change. Our unique profession as Benedictine monks is to the Common Life (*Conversatio Morum*). In good times and in bad, we promise to change and transform our lives together, with each other, in search of wisdom and new life, seeking God together. We view life and the challenges of life from the common perspective of our brotherhood. Such a life is ever new, ever open to surprise, and we rejoice in it. ■