

Stopping Short, Being Part, Finding Joy

—*brother Peter*



Crypt Falls, hike to Crypt Lake

BROTHER JOHN TELLS THIS DESERT-FATHERS-AND-Mothers-like story. As a young monk visiting our founding monastery in Jerusalem, he was given the task of sorting out by color the pieces of stained glass from a broken basilica window shattered during the wars. When he was just short of accomplishing the work, a senior monk came along and scattered the sorted pieces, mixing them all up again. Then he invited brother John to continue the task.

In our times, when individual accomplishment and success are of ultimate value, this is simply a story of absurd frustration and failure. Alternatively, monks and nuns hear it as a call to live humbly in the present, to value our common life more than the triumphs that distinguish, and then rank, winners and losers. On our visit to the Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park which straddles the Alberta-Montana border, two such stories played themselves out.

The hike to Crypt Lake is one of the more challenging experiences of the Waterton Park in Alberta—up to eight hours round-trip, a gradual climb of some 2,300 feet through two valleys accessed by progressively difficult switch-back trails, with the final approach to the lake high up along

a narrow cliff ledge, through a short natural tunnel and up a steep rock climb. Four of us brothers and several of brother Michael's family members attempted it. At the final approach I questioned my reserve of stamina and stopped short of reaching the lake—a disappointment. But I needed my energy for the trip back. From a facing vantage point I was able to photograph the others engaging the final leg of the trek.

More than just getting there, the journey itself was certainly the point of the experience—testimony to the monastic summons to live in the moment. The number and subjects of the photographs I took on the way there record the many wonders we encountered. There was an unexpected quantity and variety of wildflowers and butterflies for that time of year. There were four beautiful waterfalls at intervals along the hike—Twin Falls, Burnt Rock Falls, Hells-Torrent Falls, and Crypt Falls, cascading down six-hundred feet. There were surprising views of mountains and valleys. But most of all, there was the companionship of brothers and family, and our leisurely, fraternal conversations together.

Again in Waterton Park, on our walk from Red Rock Canyon to Goat Lake, an eight-mile round-trip hike, the same four brothers were invited into the freedom that comes from *not having to* get there, not needing to reach the destination. Is it not sufficient to savor the time spent together? We did not calculate our time precisely enough to complete the trip and chose to stop short and be back with the other brothers and not occasion their anxiety and worry. We missed seeing the lake but along the way we saw a very clear Cougar print on the path—Cougars are slowly making a comeback to the region—and a beautifully feathered ptarmigan that lin-



Hike to Crypt Lake



Mountain Goat, on Akamina Ridge



Ptarmigan, on Goat Lake trail



Grizzly Bear, at Lake Josephine

gered near us long enough to make friends and then move on.

Being on the Alberta prairies with its impressive panoramas and in the Rockies with its expansive vistas, getting a sense of how “small” we are in the context of the “big” of the rest of creation, calls us to ask the question of Psalm 8, “Who are we that You keep us in mind?,” and to receive the response of Psalm 46, “Yield, and know that I am God!” Is it not enough to be *part* of this wonderful creation? I muse on this when I see a photo of us, specks on the face of a majestic mountain cliff, and when the park signs remind us that we are in the home of the Grizzly Bear and the Mountain Goat and invite us to respect their habitat. We were graced in our time together in the park to sight, at a respectful distance, these bears and goats as well as some Bighorn Sheep and Mule Deer, some Bison on the prairies, various ducks—Mergansers and Mallards—and loons . . . And so I ponder: We are not alone on this earth!

Taking a walk around Swift Current Lake at the Many Glacier part of Glacier National Park in Montana we came across a boat moored on the shore. The name painted on its prow was “Joy.” Though there is joy in individual success, in winning, there is all the more joy in being part of a greater whole, in taking part, in being included. The boat has room for many. That all of us—twelve brothers, with a considerable range of ages and physical abilities—could enjoy this experience together, each within our given personal limitations, was a wonder and a blessing. Being *part* of the community's journey, taking part as we could, relishing each moment of grace, we experienced a way of being brother—and of finding joy. ■