

**April 4, 2010**

Pascha

### **Father Pat's Pastoral Ponderings**

Sitting at the wheel of my rented car in the San Francisco airport the other day, I plugged in my GPS and entered the data that would take me 226 miles north to the city of Redding. That's when the trouble started.

I must be patient with the GPS lady. It does not pay to argue with her, I've learned, nor does it ultimately matter, since I control the steering wheel. So I don't grumble on those occasions when she directs me to "continue four miles" on a two-block cul-de-sac, or endeavors to send me in the wrong direction on a One-Way street. I recognize the symptoms: the GPS lady hails from Nineveh, that famous city where---according to Jonah 4:11---there prevails a high rate of dyslexia.

Dyslexia was the least of our problems in San Francisco, however. Almost at once the GPS lady began showing symptoms commonly associated with severe psychosis. For nearly 20 minutes she insisted that I "continue west on I-57." This was impossible, of course: I-57 extends only from Chicago to Miner, Missouri.

I tried to humor her. "Look," I said, "I don't blame you. If I were in Chicago, I would certainly prefer to be in Missouri. But you see, dear, we are in San Francisco, and we need to go north." She paid me no heed.

Finally, I determined to ignore her and, hoping for the best, I took the first road going north (US-101). Well, after about 5 miles, the GPS lady abandoned at last her illusion that we were on I-57 going west. Sniffing slightly, probably with embarrassment, she instructed me to proceed east on I-80. We were okay after that, and I never again mentioned the incident.

After spending the night in Redding, I headed southwest the next morning, searching for the Orthodox monastery at Platina. It took a couple of hours to find it, high in the mountains and far from the haunts of men.

Pilgrimage was my sole purpose: I wanted to pray at the tomb of Father Seraphim Rose, who died there in the odor of sanctity in 1982. I was able to fulfill that wish. Indeed, one of the monks also took me to visit the tiny cell where Father Seraphim lived, prayed, wrote, and studied. I observed that his bed consisted of plain wooden planks, with no mattress. Over the years I have visited monasteries past counting, but I confess that the Platina monastery, dedicated to St. Herman of Alaska, is far-and-away the most ascetical place I have ever been in my life.

As for Father Seraphim, I think he has had no equal---this side of the Atlantic--  
-as a Christian apologist and critic of modern thought. My intellectual debt to  
him is past calculation. For instance, it was from Father Seraphim that I  
became familiar with the writings of Rene Guenon, who (along with Richard  
Weaver and Eric Voegelin) transformed my whole approach to modern  
philosophy.

That said, however, *non possumus omnia omnes*: Father Seraphim is mainly  
important as an apologist and philosophical critic, not a theologian. He was self-  
taught in theology and did not read Greek.

Father Damascene, Father Seraphim's biographer, graciously conversed with  
me for an hour or so, mainly about the teachings of Saints Irenaeus, Maximus  
the Confessor, and Nicholas Cabasilas.

After Platina, I came back south to San Francisco, where I paid my reverent  
and deepest respects to Saint John Maximovitch, whose incorrupt body lies in  
the Russian cathedral. (It was in this cathedral that Father Seraphim joined the  
Church.) Afterwards I was taken to a nearby house to visit the cell of St. John.

On Sunday I preached the annual retreat hosted by the Russian cathedral,  
where the large number of retreatants came from several western states.

Those few days in California were filled with blessings, not the least of which  
was the opportunity to meet with several friends. The best known among these,  
I suppose, is Philip Johnson, arguably the most able critic of Darwinian theory.  
Johnson, like Father Seraphim, has been a powerful opponent of  
methodological naturalism and a forceful apologist of the Christian faith.

Returning to Chicago very weary, I put the GPS lady back in the glove  
compartment she normally inhabits. I later needed her for another short trip,  
and I wondered if she had gotten past that strange obsession about going to  
Missouri. Well, yes, she had, I suppose, but she did direct me toward the  
airport, some five miles from where I wanted to go.

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