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Our Lady of Dallas Cistercian Abbey
Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year B
February 4, 2018
Gospel: Mark 1:29-39

At morn — at noon — at twilight dim —
Maria! thou hast heard my hymn!
In joy and woe — in good and ill —
Mother of God, be with me still!

Those are the first four lines of a poem written by Edgar Allan Poe. He published this poem (simply called “Hymn”) in 1845 in a small book entitled *The Raven and Other Poems*. The book was 36 pages long, and back then, you could get a copy for 33 cents.

The story goes that Edgar Allan Poe was walking around his home city of Baltimore one evening when he heard the church bells start to ring. The bells surprised him because he had no idea why they were ringing. So he went inside the church and asked. The priest explained to him that the bells ring every day at 6:00 am, noon, and 6:00 pm to remind people to pray the Angelus.

Edgar Allan Poe, who was an atheist, was not familiar with this Catholic prayer. So the priest explained it to him. The Angelus is essentially three verses from the Bible and three Hail Mary’s prayed three times a day in order to commemorate the Incarnation. Poe was moved by this practice of praying three times a day. So he moved that he wrote a poem about it, as we can see in the first line: “At morn — at noon — at twilight dim”.

All of the monks here follow this medieval tradition and pray the Angelus three times a day. The morning Angelus is the first official prayer of our day. I like to use the morning Angelus as a transition from the silence of sleep to the silence of prayer. I use the Angelus to push away all that happened the day before and start a new day with spiritual calmness and solitude.

The silence of prayer at the morning Angelus reminds me of today's Gospel. Saint Mark tells us: "Rising very early before dawn, Jesus went off to a deserted place where he prayed." Before Jesus did anything important, He would step aside and pray. The morning Angelus helps me follow Christ's example. It helps me rise early before dawn. It helps me enter into that deserted place with Christ in today's Gospel.

During the morning Angelus, I enter into the deserted place of silence by focusing on the first verse of prayer: "The angel of the Lord declared to Mary. And she conceived by the Holy Spirit." I try to imagine the Holy Spirit descending upon me like He descended upon Mary. Imagining the Holy Spirit coming to me at the beginning of my day puts me in that place of spiritual silence and spiritual solitude. Imagining the Holy Spirit coming to me makes me feel close to Mother Mary, helps me be calm and still with her as we see in the fourth line of the poem, "Mother of God, be with me still."

The noonday Angelus comes at the middle of our busy schedule. Even though I have a pretty low stress job, I tend to feel really overwhelmed by the middle of the day. I know I shouldn't, but at noon, I tend to be distracted with all my work. Distracted with all the emails I have to write and all the classes I have to teach.

The distraction of work at the noonday Angelus reminds me of today's first reading. "Job spoke, saying: Is not man's life on earth a drudgery? ... He is a slave who longs for the shade." Drudgery. I really feel like most of the work that I do is drudge work. Tedious and annoying. And while I normally don't complain about my vow of poverty and my lack of paycheck, at noon, I sometimes do feel like Job, a slave who longs for shade.

During the noonday Angelus, I find that shade from drudgery by focusing on the second verse of the prayer: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord: Be it done unto me according to Thy

word.” I try to imagine Mary’s humility and obedience. And I try grow in that. I look at the drudgery of my life. And with Mary at my side, I tell God: “Be it done unto me.” All the tedious emails. All the annoying classes. All of them be done unto me. And in that tiny bit of obedience, I find that tiny bit of shade for which Job longed. And in that combination of drudgery and shade, I find my Mother as we see in the third line of the poem, “In joy and woe — in good and ill —.”

The evening Angelus is the last official prayer of our day. And since I try not to work at night, the evening Angelus marks the end of my long day of work and prayer. I like to use the evening Angelus as a moment of thanksgiving. I like to use it as a recap of all the prayers and works of the day.

The thanksgiving recap at the evening Angelus reminds me of today’s second reading. Saint Paul tells us, “All this I do for the sake of the Gospel.” When I give thanks for all the ups and downs of the day. When I offer all my prayers and works one last time. When I pray the evening Angelus, I tell God through Mary that I do all this for His glory, for the glory of His Good News, for the glory of the Gospel, for the sake of the Gospel, like Saint Paul before me.

During the evening Angelus, when I offer everything for the sake of the Gospel, I like to focus on the third verse of the prayer: “And the Word was made Flesh: And dwelt among us.” As I give thanks at the end of my day, I think about the Word dwelling among us. And I remind myself why we monks do what we do. Why we say all those prayers, why we write all those emails, why we teach all those classes. We do it for the sake of the Gospel. We do it so that the Word may dwell among us just a little bit more. So that the Word may dwell with all the people for whom we pray, all the people who receive our emails, all the people who are in our classes, that the Word may dwell among them all just a little bit more. And as I think about the Word

dwelling among us more and more, each and every day, I attribute that growth to Mary. She has heard and answered our prayers as we see in the second line of the poem, “Maria! thou hast heard my hymn!”

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I hope this poem can inspire you as it has inspired me. If you don’t already pray the Angelus, try praying it once a day. If you already pray it once a day, try praying it three times a day. If you already pray it three times a day, find someone who doesn’t pray it and share it with him or her.

Amen.