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2021-10

Sandy and I arrived in St Andrews, Scotland on September 3. Our experience here is a bit like living in a medieval village and a college campus at the same time. In the evenings, we hear the strong cold winds of the North Sea blowing over our tiled shingles as bells chime the hours nearby and students sing school songs or shout in drunken slurs as they walk by in clusters. In the mornings, we are often awakened by sea gulls. Our flat is located 100 yards from the ruins



of St. Andrews Cathedral and from a window on our upper floor we can see the tower of the ancient site. The cathedral, the largest church ever built in Scotland, is on a precipice where each day we witness a dramatic rise and fall of the ocean's tide. Built in 1158, the cathedral became the center of the medieval Catholic Church in Great Britain. Because according to tradition the bones of Andrew were buried under the nave, the cathedral became a major pilgrimage destination. For centuries, Augustinian monks conducted the daily office and later their Franciscan and Dominican brothers replaced the Augustinian monks. In 1559 during the Reformation, a Protestant mob incited by

the preaching of John Knox attacked the cathedral, resulting in the destruction of its interior. The cathedral fell into decline following the attack and became a source of building material for the town. Shortly afterwards, it was abandoned. Nearly every day, I walk by the ruins of what was once one of the holiest of sanctuaries in Western Christendom where the psalms were chanted daily. Now, all I can hear is the constant wind, the ever-hungry sea gulls, and multiple languages from tourists taking photos.

What will the sanctuaries of the Oriental Orthodox Order in the West be like in 50 years or longer? Will our website still be running? Will the forest have consumed our chapel at the Elwood Priory? Or will it be standing and pristine? Will our chants still be sung? And by whom? Will our publications be used? What countries will our monks reside in?

I attended an opera on the St Andrews campus a few weeks ago that was written by two professors from Wyoming. An American tour group performed the piece, and I had a chance to talk to some of them afterwards. I am not an opera fan, but I loved this. I invite you to take an hour and listen to this incredible performance about the extinction of the Rocky Mountain locusts in 1887 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=03QofaRPVyc>)

I didn't realize until I saw the opera that there are no longer any locusts in America! The opera is ingeniously dramatized as a murder mystery with the ghost of a female locust as guide for a scientist who is trying to determine why her species vanished. A farmer also plays a leading role in the inquiry. I won't spoil the ending by providing you the answer to why they went extinct, but the answer is something that the Order well understands. It is something we talk about often. And, perhaps, it relates to the demise of St Andrews sanctuary.

Ahh, and now that I've added some intrigue to the opera's title: "Locust: The Opera: An Environmental Murder Mystery" you will be ready to take an hour and listen to this. The YouTube has subscribing so you can easily follow the singing. Operatic singing to me is sometimes not understandable. So I invite you to put yourself in a contemplative place and watch this. After viewing, ask yourself: What happened to the Rocky Mountain locusts? What might the ghosts of a monk from 16<sup>th</sup> century St Andrews say to us about what happened to them? What is the purpose of the Oriental Orthodox Order in the West during this time when churches are fading into history, a history that will someday be investigated as a murder mystery?

Later today, I will walk past the cathedral ruins and on to the oceanfront where I will look out at the eternity of water in the distance. And I know that medieval monks used to gaze into that same endlessness where dolphins, seals, and whales played. And, they must have often been transported beyond the ever-changing tides of political, ecclesial, and environmental changes into a calm horizon that they could glimpse, always glimpse, just there.

~~~ Abbot Blake Burleson