

# Holy Ground

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A quarterly reflection on  
the contemplative life



## A REFUGE AND A SHELTER



*Then the Lord will create over the whole site of Mount Zion and over its places of assembly a cloud by day and smoke and the shining of a flaming fire by night. Indeed, over all the glory there will be a canopy. It will serve as a pavilion, a shade by day from the heat and a refuge and a shelter from the storm and rain. Isaiah 4: 5-6*

*Something there is that doesn't love a wall*, begins Robert Frost's poem, *Mending Wall*. Frost describes how the frozen ground swells, forcing gaps in the wall, and how careless hunters knock down stone fences in search of rabbits. Each spring Frost and his neighbor meet *to walk the line and set the wall between us once again*. As they work on each side to replace the

stones, they come to a section where Frost sees no need for a fence. *He is all pine and I am apple orchard. My apple trees will never get across and eat the cones under his pines, I tell him. He only says, good fences make good neighbors.*

The poet presses. *Why do they make good neighbors? Isn't it where there are cows? But here there are no cows. Before I built a wall, I'd ask to know what I was walling in or walling out. And to whom I was like to give offense. Something there is that doesn't love a wall.*

Frost thinks his neighbor is mindlessly conforming to ignorant notions passed down to him. *But his neighbor will*

*not go behind his father's saying.  
And he likes saying it so much that he  
says it again: good fences make good  
neighbors.*

For years I was in sympathy with the poet. Now I side with his neighbor. Good fences do make good neighbors.

Creating, maintaining, defending, and respecting appropriate boundaries are fundamental and ongoing tasks of our relationships with each other and with The Holy One. We do not need to build walls and fences. We do need to treat each other with dignity, simple courtesy, respect, and modesty.

*Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive  
those who trespass against us, and lead  
us not into temptation, but deliver us  
from evil.*

The prayer Jesus taught his followers refers to knocking down fences and entering forbidden territory. Boundaries relate to personal power and authority, and how we use or abuse our power.

The paradox of mortals is our immense worth and holiness on the one side and our pervasive sinfulness and brokenness on the other. It is because

we are both so holy and so profane that we need boundaries. The Beloved knew this and mercifully gave us guidelines and protection in the form of commandments. Do this. Do not do that. So, you can be fit for love. So, you can love without destroying each other. God said, "Here is how you can love and not leave chaos in the wake, or broken hearts strewn around you."

Dignity, courtesy, and modesty are characteristics missing from our public and private discourse and behavior. This has not always been the case. In the 1300s, courtesy was expected. Whether or not our manners are refined in accordance with cultural etiquette expectations, I do believe with Frost that there is something that doesn't love a wall.

We encounter trespasses every day. The yellow journalism that fuels the media, eager to report scandals, bad behavior, the private lives of celebrities, and one disaster or horror after another, seeks sensation and lurid overstatement to draw our attention and sell ads which keep our economy rolling.

For many of us, rules and regulations



are a troublesome nuisance, something to ignore or rebel against, something that controls and hampers the freedom of the human spirit. Arrogant and selfish mortals chafe against the goads of Christ. We duck the harness and refuse to be tamed. We shrink from discipline and obedience. We worm through the loopholes. We use tricks, manipulation, and self-deception to persist in the illusion that I am somehow an exception and that these rules and limits do not apply to me. Ask any parent. It takes time to appreciate boundaries. We need to internalize, integrate, and claim for ourselves the often-painful process of our own experience of disobedience, sin, and simple foolishness before we discover the worth of boundaries. As we test the limits and bump up against real-life consequences, we come to understand the wisdom, comfort, and absolute privilege of the protection in the law of God for us. Boundaries do not inhibit our freedom. They protect it. When we do not appreciate our power and feel powerless and unable to meet our needs, we are most susceptible to being on the giving or receiving

end of boundary violations. When we are in possession of our authority, we appreciate how powerful we may be to work good or evil in this world.

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Glory be to God for bounds and limits.

Thanks be for fences  
and for barbed wire  
padlocks, bolts,  
and abrupt  
unmoving  
dead ends  
for stop signs  
ramparts split  
margin, hedge and rim  
shore, bank and brow.

For prohibition  
inhibition and command.  
I praise Thee for enclosure  
circumference, courtyard  
croft, crib, corral and coop  
pen, balustrade and fold

For chamber  
hutch and manger and stall  
for palisade and parapet  
trellis, enclave, wall.

“To be properly bound



is to be properly free,”  
Says Luther of his God.

So blessed be Thee  
for bindings, wraps,  
and swaddling cloths  
for all quilts, covers  
counterpane  
for lids, roofs, tents  
hulls, shell, and pod  
and all that partitions  
holy from profane.

Thank you  
kind and gentle God  
for edges, parameters  
and the delicate beauty  
of borders thin  
that separate this  
from that  
yes from no  
the skin  
from the juice  
and Thou, Sweet Trinity  
from me.

Oh, Mighty Fortress  
glad hosannas raise to Thee  
for the secret custody  
of house, stable, shrine,  
temple and fountain sealed  
where Love tabernacles

under Thy bright wing  
In shielded sanctuary

Praise and laud  
forever until Thee  
Oh Thou art a most exalted Canopy!

In Thy strong shelter  
sleeps the virgin  
safe and free.  
All creatures  
great and small  
be wary.

*A garden locked is my sister, my  
bride, A locked, a fountain sealed. Song  
of Solomon 4:12*

The symbol of an enclosed garden is often used to describe Mary, or the church as the bride of Christ. All images associated with the precinct – an enclosure, a walled garden, a city, a square, a castle – correspond to the idea of temenos, or a sacred and circumscribed space, which is guarded and defended because it constitutes a spiritual



entity. Such images may also symbolize the life of the individual, and particularly the inner life of their thoughts. A walled garden, which can be entered only through a small portal, symbolizes the difficulties and obstacles that must be overcome prior to a higher level of spiritual development. A fountain sealed in a walled garden symbolizes constancy and truth under difficult circumstances.

The Dictionary of Symbols.

We learn the most about ourselves when we come face to face with the consequences of our actions and behavior. A culture which thrives on sticking their noses in other people's business and critiquing, shaming, and demonizing others defiles the God-given worth and beauty of human souls.

How dare we meddle with and demolish an exquisite irreplaceable human being? For in our disrespect for

each other's dignity, we also disrespect our own God-given worth. What is missing here is not only compassion for our neighbor but also for ourselves.

Jesus has come from Love and is Love incarnate. However, many of us do not love ourselves. We love an image of ourselves which we work very hard to present to those around us. We curate, polish, and maintain this self-image amid ever-shifting cultural trends. Yet waiting deep within us is a cramped true self, hiding. Here is the self who knows its God-given worth and is suffering under the constant demands of the part of us that is busy comparing itself to others, passing judgment, blaming, and shaming. This inner self is exhausted, angry, wounded, and afraid to show itself as it really is. This is not a self that needs a new look, a new brand, or a new logo. This is a self that loves and is afraid to express itself because someone will not approve of it or make fun of it. It has been neglected, kicked around, humiliated so many times. And it is longing for your love, attention, and faith in it. Your true self does not need to change to meet your fussy self's standards.



This self is whole and holy and dwells in the heart of the Love that created it. It is shy and may not trust you right away, but it yearns to join with you in the dance, wonder, and playfulness of this world. Our fussy, controlling self may complain and feel embarrassed by messy self shamelessly showing off. But it, too, is exhausted from constantly trying to prove its worth and value.

When we see our own deep-rooted goodness, defiled by ourselves in our efforts to find acceptance and love, and see ourselves as Christ sees us, compassion and love for others streams out from our hearts like a river.



# STOP

**The ten commandments  
are not multiple choice.**

## FOR REFLECTION

*Do you have a safe place, a walled garden or a refuge where you feel safe and loved?*

*Do you see a difference between your critical self and your true self?*

*The more love and compassion we have for ourselves, the more love and compassion we will have for others. What could you do to show compassion and love for yourself today? Watch how your loving-kindness for yourself ripples to the people in your life.*

Dear readers,

I am sorry for the delay with your Spring issue of Holy Ground. Some exciting things are going on here. At the same time, I have been having some health issues, normal for

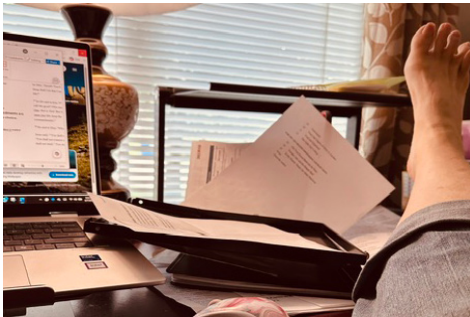


someone my age, but require rest and my attention. I need to keep one of my legs higher than my heart.

Just to show you that I am not making this up. Here I am writing this issue. And working on my new book, which will be published by Wild House Publishing in the coming months!!!

Your prayers are appreciated.

*Loretta F Ross*



Portions of this issue were previously published in the 2003 Summer Issue of *Holy Ground*.

**Author's note:** The poem, *In Praise of Boundaries*, was also previously published in *Hope Against Darkness*, 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> editions, by Richard Rohr, St. Anthony Messenger Press

## THE Sanctuary Foundation for Prayer



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Thank You!

Holy Ground readers are amazing. Thank you for your generous support of this Wayside Fruit Stand. The Sanctuary and its programs are open to serve a wide range of people. And we have a great assortment of the fruits of the Spirit ready for you.

### Stories From Those We Serve

*I am always grateful for the chance to meet with Loretta. She unfailingly stirs new ideas and brings me hope, steadiness, and awareness of the Spirit's nearness. She makes me laugh—especially last month when I thought she was telling me I might be having a “dogfight of the soul.” You just never know. -Katherine*

**Do you have a story or experience over the past 35-40 years related to the Sanctuary ministry? If so we would love to hear from you and share it with others.**



*Long lay the world in sin and error pining, Till he appeared  
and the soul felt its worth.*

-Oh Holy Night

*Love others as well as you love yourself. ' There is no other  
commandment that ranks with these. Forget about the wrong  
things people do to you, and do not try to get even. Love your  
neighbor as you love yourself. I am the Lord.*

Leviticus 19:78



*Holy Ground* is published by The Sanctuary Foundation for Prayer.

*...the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.* Revelation 22:2-3

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