

On Tuesday April 14th, Sr Mary Angela entered the church for Mass wearing a mask securely on her face but obviously with a smile a mile wide, as the rest of us returned the same. It was so good to have her among us!



We had Bugs Bunny warning us to be careful over the serving table



On Wednesday she went to take a Covid test, and on Thursday about 4:00 PM we got the results. She was still positive. Uh oh!

Not only did Sr Mary Angela have to return to her isolated room—the rest of us had to begin a new phase of our own.



We are so grateful that in our experience of the Covid-19 virus, Sr Mary Angela's symptoms were mild. We know for many that is not the case. All those who have died, those who suffered it severely, all the families, all who took care of them and are helping the families, those serving in jobs that need to be going for what can't be shut down and all those who are struggling financially because of not being able to work—for all, all, all— we prayed and continue to pray!

We called and found out all the rest of us needed to get the Covid-19 test. Three cars full of nuns looking like they were about to rob a bank set out for the drive to the testing site. Thankfully, none of the rest of us tested positive! We still had to keep in place our masks and the other safety measures in the monastery through Saturday April 25th. We went ahead with a pizza party to celebrate our eventual reunion! Don't worry she had a heaping plate too!



St. Scholastica Priory
271 N. Main Street
Petersham, MA 01366

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Our Gift to you is
A novena of
Masses at
Pentecost.
Pray for us!
We do for you!

A PEACE THE WORLD CANNOT GIVE

"How much do you believe in the Resurrection?"

This was a question posed to me some years ago at a time when life's challenges seemed insurmountable, and it was a good question indeed. Today, as the world encounters its own hardships in the wake of a global pandemic, it seems all the more relevant to ask: What is the saving event of Christ really doing for us in the here and now? *Do we really believe in the Resurrection?*

The echo of this question haunts us as news of a growing death toll, disappearing jobs and crumbling economies permeates the collective human consciousness. In the face of these various forms of death and decay, it is easy to feel the psychological burden of suffering—if not just the physical one. So many social conventions and structures are changing—an indication of their impermanence—and yet perhaps in the midst of it all is the greatest blessing. In the chaos of a faltering material world, God calls us to seek the permanent and unchanging structures of a spiritual one. As St. Paul says, "Here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come" (Heb 13:14).

In the Gospels, there are multiple passages in which Jesus says, "Your faith has saved you" (cf. Lk 7:50, Mk 10:52). Clearly it is God who saves, and



yet, again and again, Jesus makes a pointed accreditation of the role of faith. In a sense, it is faith that galvanizes the power of God to heal and restore the dead to life. Without it, there is a missing link—a kink in the hose, so to speak—that prevents God from imparting the full power of his Resurrection. "He could do no mighty work there... and He marveled because of their unbelief" (Mk 6:6; cf. Mt 13:58).

True, perhaps all Catholics believe in the Resurrection in some way or another, at least to the extent that we can recite the Creed without falling into outright hypocrisy. Perhaps we believe that the Resurrection was simply an historical occurrence that happened two millennia ago. To be sure, this is the bedrock event. And yet, we are forced ask just how far we are willing to let that event affect every moment of every day. After all, the resurrected Christ is now beyond death, and at each moment He stretches out His hand to take us with Him—through faith—in spirit, in heart and someday in soul, at the hour of every man's death. For the one who makes Christ the highest goal, "He shall be peace" (Mi 4:5).

Even in the course of events through time, believing in the Resurrection mean, seeing beyond the darkness of the Cross. The whole world moves

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THERE ARE NO EXCEPTIONS

"Lord, the one whom you love is ill" (Jn 11:3). Martha and Mary had the confidence in Jesus' love to state this as a fact: "The one whom you love." Yet whenever there is a disaster of nature or of man's making we often think that that God is punishing us. The sisters of Lazarus did not consider that. They simply sent the message to Jesus, "Lord, the one whom you love is ill."

How often do we hear about the sick in the Gospels? In the very first chapter of Mark, Jesus, who had just begun his preaching, and after healing a man with an unclean spirit went to home of Peter. He learned that Peter's mother-in-law was ill. He didn't flee out of the house; rather, he approached her and grasped her hand. He became a magnet when he would go into a village, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news and curing "every disease and sickness among them." In Matthew's Gospel alone, this phrase is used at least nine times. It vividly describes what would take place: "the people at once recognized him, and rushed about that whole region and began to bring the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was. And wherever he went, into villages or cities or farms, they laid the sick in the market-places, and begged him that they might touch even the fringe of his cloak; and all who touched it were healed" (Mt 6:53-

55). The mission was spelled out in Luke, "Then Jesus called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal." (Lk 9:1) And finally Jesus describes the judgement when the Son of Man comes in his glory and how the people will be separated according to what they did during their life, "Come,



you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me" (Mt 25:34-36).

It is no wonder then that Martha and Mary didn't hesitate to call on Jesus as they did. Jesus was drawn to those who needed him. He states simply, "Those who are well have no need of a physician,

but those who are sick" (Mk 2:17). And we are all frail—there are no exceptions.

The new year of 2020 began with reports of the virus that we are now living in the midst of. Up until then, for most of us it was hardly on our mind at all. But soon there were "no exceptions." Whoever you are—prince, prime minister, senator, movie star, doctor, priest, nun, mother—it makes no difference. If we live in China, Africa, the UK, the USA—it doesn't save us. There are no exceptions. The world shrank in a matter of weeks to being a neighborhood. What happens elsewhere affects what happens here, wherever "here" is. There are no exceptions. From the government down to our own community planning an Oblate Retreat, plans cannot be made because no one, no one knows when the situation will change for the whole neighborhood—our world. To that there are no exceptions either. We are not used to living like this: waiting, seeing so many sick, dying and just laying low.

You could say that God is the Eternal Opportunist. He gets good from every situation, including these terrible things that happen. We are too close to see most of those blessings yet to see them ourselves. The symbol of the starkness of the empty piazza of St Peter's as the Pope lead the world in prayer stands out now in our mind's eye. That there is more than that, we can count on, because "the one

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SR MECHTILDE AINLEY SIMPLE VOWS JANUARY 17TH, 2020

"When I got here, the road to the church was pitch black. I couldn't see my feet or the ground in front of me in the darkness. I had a flashlight of course, but I chose to keep it off because there was something so symbolically beautiful about the trust it takes to walk into the darkness with no telling where your next step will land."

I made this entry in my journal on my first visit back to St. Scholastica Priory after attending a Monastic Experience Weekend. I had only a vague inkling at the time that this moment of trust was only a foreshadowing of the life to which Jesus was calling me. Living by faith means stepping out into the darkness – indeed, it means pitching a tent in the darkness and comfortably making oneself at home, because I've quickly realized the lights are few and far between. I'm also beginning to see that if it was any other way, there would be something very superficial about this life, and it might cheapen the radical renunciation Jesus calls us to make.

During the silent retreat leading up to my simple profession, I was initially very anxious. Everything I read in *lectio* had the same message: abandon yourself to His will. The more I let go of my reservations, the greater my peace became. Jesus has gotten me here – Jesus will bring me all the way through!

The ceremony of going from a white veil to a black veil seems a little strange in the context of Christian tradition. The baptismal gown is white. With monastic life being inspired by a deeper following of the call made at baptism, wouldn't switching to a white veil be a more fitting image?



Sr Mechtilde's family on her profession day!

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whom you love is ill." Jesus came after Lazarus died and he saw the sorrow of all those who mourned him. He knew what he would be doing, yet, "Jesus began to weep" (Jn 11:35). No matter what God desires to bring about through this great trial, he always brings good, he still mourns with us, weeps with us.

The stone at Lazarus' tomb, the virus, or whatever illness debilitates us, holding us all somehow in a dark place, will be ordered to be moved: "Take away the stone.... Come out! ... Unbind him, let him go!" Yes, God is getting good out of

I've heard that monks and nuns wear black because it's the color of humility – *humus*, the dirt, in Latin. It's also the color of darkness, and maybe for me it's become a reminder of the darkness that's necessary for true faith to grow in.

Faith and humility go hand-in-hand to form the bedrock of monastic life – making us empty so that we can be filled with Christ's Spirit. Peter's faith, despite his boundless enthusiasm, was still shaky enough for him to deny Jesus three times on the eve of the Passion – it wasn't until he had been humbled and subsequently filled with the Holy Spirit that his faith became strong enough for him to in turn "strengthen the others." (LK 22:32)

I'm realizing that fewer things are more humbling than being content to simply wait in faith. And yet, isn't this exactly what Mary did for most of her life?

Victor Hugo has been one of my favorite authors since I was a teenager, though I don't agree with all of his opinions. After a lengthy condemnation of monasticism in one of the appendices of *Les Misérables*, he nevertheless goes on to say that he thinks "there is no more sublime work" than the contemplation of cenobites – "and perhaps none more useful." Earlier: "To think of the Unknown is a serious matter." He says the following of nuns in particular, which I have always found moving: "For our own part, not believing in what those women believe, but living by faith as they do, we have never been able to contemplate, without a kind of tender religious awe, a sort of pity filled with envy, those devoted, trembling, and confiding creatures, humble and noble souls who dare to live at the very edge of mystery, to live suspended between a world which is closed to them and a Heaven which is not yet open, their faces turned towards a light which they cannot see, possessing simply the happiness of believing that they know where it is, yearning for the unknown, their eyes intent upon obscurity, kneeling motionless, lost, stupefied, and trembling, but at certain moments half exalted by the deep breathing of eternity." SMdA



even this for most of us: a chance to live our lives more mindfully, relationally and lovingly here on this earth; for others reaching, please God, the home we all are heading to. Jesus' words in that same Gospel are meant for both, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" A transformed world, an awareness of our oneness and that our lives impact each other is for the glory of God. To have reached that Kingdom that Jesus has gone ahead to prepare for us is for the glory of God. We have come to know how the smallest of things can change us all. Let us pray that the good that

only God can bring to us, his children, may come in overflowing abundance for the good of all, for we are one. MMEK

The Benedictine Bulletin is published by the nuns of St. Scholastica Priory. Contact us to receive a copy or with an address change. www.stscholasticapriory.org Facebook: St Scholastica Priory e-mail: sspriory@aol.com

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HAPPENINGS

December 7 — Sr. Monica attended the Petersham Craft fair with her bowls. Many people stopped at her station to purchase her work and inquire about our community.



December 15—Sr Andrea Savage, OSB, the former abbess of Stanbrook Abbey, arrived at Petersham. She remained with us through Christmastide. She is now stranded in Australia on what was to have been her last part of her sabbatical before returning to England! During that time, Sr Lynne McKenzie, OSB, came to see her and share with us her CIB travels in the monasteries of Spain some of which are 1,000 years old!



January 17—Sister Mechtilde made her First Vows of Profession. Her family and friends came from all over the country.

February 5—We voted for Sr. Maria Isabel's solemn vows and she was accepted. This will occur in June.

March 20 - Fr. Gregory's mom, Lorraine Phillips, passed away at 96. He is still in Wisconsin due to the lock down across the country.

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toward the Cross, and yet death does not have the final word; the darkest moment of the night comes before dawn. St. Julian of Norwich summarized her belief in the Paschal Mystery beautifully when she remarked: "All shall be well, all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well." Perhaps we can know her statement as truth when we believe and internalize the words of Christ: "Be not afraid, for I am with you" (Is 41:10)... "I am with you always, until the end of the age" (Mt 28:20). Faith can then triumph over fear, for resurrection truly awaits us. SEW

A Prayer of Solidarity: USCCB

For all who have contracted coronavirus
We pray for care and healing.

For those who are particularly vulnerable
We pray for safety and protection.

For all who experience fear or anxiety,
We pray for peace of mind and spirit.

For affected families who are facing difficult decisions between food on the table or public safety,
We pray for policies that recognize their plight.

For those who do not have adequate health insurance,
We pray that no family will face financial burdens alone.

For those who are afraid to access care due to immigration status,
We pray for recognition of the God-given dignity of all.

For our brothers and sisters around the world,
We pray for shared solidarity.

For public officials and decision makers,
We pray for wisdom and guidance.

Father, during this time may your Church be a sign of hope, comfort and love to all.
Grant peace.
Grant comfort.
Grant healing.
Be with us, Lord.
Amen.



Would you consider remembering us in your will or charitable remainder trust? Our legal title is: St. Scholastica Priory, Inc. Our tax I.D. # is 222-617-059

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COVID 19 IN THE MONASTERY

Our spring newsletter was ready to be printed, but small printers were not on the list of essential services. While we waited a new reality came about that we want to share with you. We had been uniting our thoughts and prayers to all the world dealing with the virus, but suddenly we were able to share our own experience of having it in our midst.

Sr Mary Angela had been in the hospital and was healing up brilliantly. We were all looking forward to April 7th, the day set for her discharge, but a call came from the hospital four days before—she had a soft cough so she was put into isolation while they waited for the results of a Covid-19 test. Our hearts stopped as we began to experience what so many had been dealing with. On Monday the 6th, we received the news that she had tested positive for the virus.



We got into action to set up a place for Sr Mary Angela to be isolated. How grateful we were to have a perfect room with a little window that faces out, where we could put a chair to visit with her through the glass! We asked Lynne Shaw, our "Priory nurse" to come and teach us what we needed to know about keeping her safe, and us too.

All was ready by the next morning when I drove up the driveway to bring Sr. Mary Angela home from the hospital. We greeted one another with big virtual hugs and with masked faces. She sat in the back seat and we talked up a storm as we traveled back to the monastery. When she arrived all the sisters were outside, plenty of feet away, to welcome her with big smiles and cheers. She waved like a queen as she made her way up the walkway, on into the elevator and up to her new home till she is cleared.

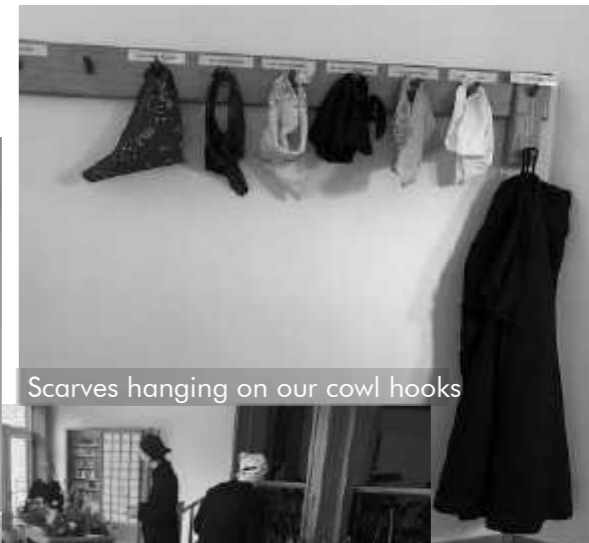
Thankfully, other than a couple of days of a slight temperature she didn't have other symptoms. We are so grateful to God for that!



We had a system of masking, gloves, disinfecting, deliver food, remove trash, laundry the all the rest. It all went well.



Window for visiting and even confession, Fr Anthony is her brother!



Scarfes hanging on our cowl hooks



Hallway outside her door

Meanwhile, the rest of us put into play other precautions: cutting down the whoosh of our veils and scapulars in the monastery. We forged ahead preparing for Easter.

Offering the ordinary prayer and special prayers for all who were suffering - that continues on.



For the first time we had Easter dinner separate from the monks and spread out!



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The Department of Public Health called and collected the information they needed and gave us instructions on how to know when Sr Mary Angela would be able to leave quarantine. We followed that to a "T."



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