



St. Scholastica Priory, 271 North Main Street, PO Box 606, Petersham, MA 01366

## NEVER TO BE THE SAME

I think it was November 25<sup>th</sup>, 2018 when one of my siblings called about our younger sister who was rushed to an emergency room with something going on that was serious. That began the waiting – waiting for the phone to ring and, God willing, the assurance that things are fine. Then waiting to know more, waiting for the results of a particular test, waiting for Monday when the main doctor would be back in, and on and on. There is waiting for the dawn during a sleepless night. Waiting for that last driver to return home when there is an ice storm. And even now, as our whole world waits for the vaccines to be created, tested and, please God, administered to enable us to be with one another again. But still waiting to see just what that will be like. Who among us doesn't know waiting like this?

But this is not the only kind of waiting that pervades our days. The expectation of a vine grower as he watches his vines grow heavy with grapes, ripen in the sun and finally, waiting for the first sip of the aged nectar of wine! The anticipation of parents longing for the first glimpse of their newborn's face reflecting their love. The joy and patience of praying a new vocation through the steps of monastic life to life-long vows and so much more. It might be the most common state for us as humans - waiting.

It attests to a deep truth in our being, planted there by our Creator, that there is always *more* than this moment holds, than this time holds, than this life carries within itself. Recently we plugged in an old portable air conditioner. It ran but we couldn't change any of the settings.

It had a remote but it no longer communicated with the machine. The receptor for that signal was broken. God has planted a kind of receptor in us at our creation.

Years ago I was driving down a lane dense with trees so thick that only a little glimmer of sunlight filtered through. Suddenly a flame of orange-red fire



blazed across my vision. My eyes opened wide in wonder; joy rose in my heart and exploded at the beauty! It was a bird, a gorgeous bird that I never knew existed! That flash, so sudden and out of nowhere, touched the depth of my soul! And then it was gone. But from that moment - I have never been the same. I know now that Scarlet Tanagers exist and I am always scanning the forest edge for one to show itself again.

We all know too well that there are those other ways through which God brings us to know there has to be more than *this life*. And they are not always beautiful and uplifting, but hard and broken. For a time we had a bakery and some employees. One of our very first workers was a faith-filled and lovely person. She was married to a good man but a man who was an atheist. She never ceased praying for him and asking prayers for him. Some years after she had been with us she suffered a virulent case of rapid onset Alzheimer's disease. A few years later she died not yet sixty years old. Her husband came to see us. To our amazement, that devastating experience and loss for him actually gave him faith. He said he realized that this could not be all there was to their love. Mother Mary Clare used to say, "God uses anything to draw us to himself."

These are the receptors within us that God uses to touch us and make us aware of the immortality that is latent in our humanity, the humanity of every person. Latent – but not to be left to chance, this is God's work to waken that dormant response in our lives. But it's not only that we are created for unending life: the Creator wants us to delight in him, to know him and to love him.

We truly cannot imagine what God has in store for us, as St Paul writes, "What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived—the things God has prepared for those who love him—these are the things God has revealed to us by his Spirit." The Spirit searches all things,

*Continued page 2*

even the deep things of God. For who knows a person's thoughts except their own spirit within them? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God" (1 Cor 2:9-11). Experiences of beauty, like the Scarlet Tanager, like a newly-turned furrow of sparkling black Illinois dirt turned unto bright spring grass, like a baby catching your eye - are all ways God touches our souls - something that forever changes us.

That receptor's purpose is not to simply connect with beauty, a bird, a baby or pain, but with THE ONE we glimpse through them - like the disciples sharing a meal with a stranger who walked with them on the road to Emmaus. At table, when that man "took the bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them," only then were their eyes opened and they recognized Jesus, "and he vanished from their sight...Were not our hearts burning within us" (Lk 24:30-32). So began their waiting, with lives forever changed.

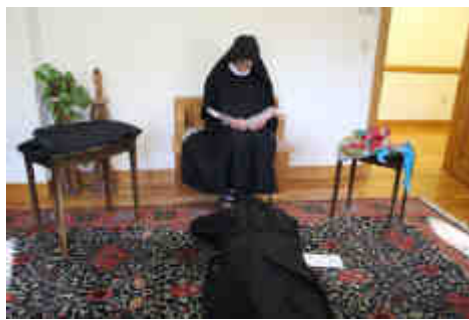
These are ways God shows himself to us. That wakens in us the knowledge that "there is more than this," after which we are never the same, but always waiting for the Presence to be present in our today and longing for that Presence to-be-forever, with the beauty and love we could never have dreamt of except for that flash. MMEK

### Our gift to you

**A novena of Masses to be offered for your beloved deceased for the Feast of All Souls.**

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](http://www.stscholasticapriory.org) Facebook: St Scholastica Priory e-mail: [sspriory@aol.com](mailto:sspriory@aol.com)

**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**



*Tacit profession choosing what clothes to wear*

## SOLEMN VOWS SR MARIA ISABEL GOMEZ

*What do you seek?* This is the question that is asked a Benedictine at every step of formation: when the postulant first receives the habit to become a novice, when she makes her simple profession, and finally when she profession her solemn (final) vows. *What do you seek?* The answer to this question is St. Benedict's first and main qualification for receiving a candidate: "Let [the abbot] examine whether the novice is truly seeking God" (RB 58).



What *do* we seek? The novice and the simply professed sister answer "the mercy of God." During ceremony the nun is asked by the prioress, "Are you now resolved to unite yourself more closely to God by the bond of monastic profession?" She answers "I am" and the



heart echoes her voice saying, "It is your face, O Lord, that I seek; hide not your face from me" (Ps 27:9).

Far from being an end to the journey, solemn profession is only the beginning of a lifetime commitment to God, which necessitates a never-ending search for God alone. Fittingly, the Mass for my own monastic consecration and profession of solemn vows began with the exhortation of Psalmist, "Let the hearts that seek the Lord rejoice. Turn to the Lord and his strength; constantly seek his face" (Ps 105:3-4).



As I pondered what it means to seek the face of God, I couldn't help but think of the glorious feast we had recently celebrated, the Transfiguration of the Lord. Peter, James, and John who had been waiting for the Messiah, seeking to behold his face, received a gift, a glimpse of the glorified face of Jesus Son of God. Although they didn't know it then, they were beginning the journey of "hardships and difficulties that will lead [them] to God (RB 58)," to their eventual martyrdom, and to the birth of the Church. They walked with Jesus healing, preaching, taking care of the poor, fishing, eating. Living an ordinary life. Then they went up the mountain and beheld the face of Jesus shining "like the sun" and his garments "white as light" (Mt 17:2). They did not want to leave behind this glorious vision. Jesus exhorts them not to share what they saw and they leave the mountain as Jesus once again speaks to them of his death. It is a heavenly moment in order to strengthen and help them through the inevitable passion and death of Jesus.



Like the three apostles, we too seek the face of God, in both the ordinary and extraordinary times of our lives. We recall those “transfiguration moments”—times in our lives where the presence and joy and love of God is palpable, visible to us in our daily mundane tasks. Because the way is narrow at the outset (RB, Prol 48) as we carry our cross daily, God grants us instances of beholding his glory and presence in our lives. This is not just for monks and nuns. It is rather the process of life for all human beings, mortal, fallen, and in endless need of God’s mercy. In his mercy God helps us in our weaknesses and sufferings by giving us moments filled “with unutterable and exalted joy” (1 Pt 1:8).

In marriage, the day of a couple’s wedding is exciting and joyful. The days and years after that, however, are filled with humdrum tasks, working, taking care of the children, arguments, disappointments, sufferings, etc. In those days remembering the joy and love lived on the wedding day keeps hope alive and love burning. A mother experiences this too, for “when she is delivered of the child, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a child is born into the world” (Jn 16:21). The mother and family are overjoyed at the newborn. Then the days are a monotonous routine of diaper changing, lack of sleep, constant

washing clothing and more. Teachers too experience this. They work to educate and build a skill in their students. The days go on as they attempt every mode of expression possible to help the pupil master a lesson. Weeks can go by, months even, working on one particular instruction. Then one day all of a sudden the student gets it. Their face lights up in relief and pride. The teacher too is glowing, knowing that all the hard work, the endless hours spent finding innovative ways to reach the student, has paid off. It is times like these that keep teachers planning and researching after school, at their homes, and on weekends.

Prayer too, follows this course. We go through periods of dryness where all seems futile, until one day we hear God speak to our hearts. Our lives as Christians are marked by this alternation of difficulties, suffering, death, and excitement, joys, and life. For we follow a God who chose to “empty himself” of his glory and riches and take “the form of a servant...born in the likeness of men” poor and humble (Phil 2:7). He hid his glory and revealed it at the Transfiguration. The rest of his days on earth were the ordinary life of suffering and sacrifice of all humans, albeit lived extraordinarily. We are called as Christians to be like Christ, to live our crosses, ordinary, mundane days. Yet, far from being useless

our days are joined to Christ. For us as consecrated religious every breath we take is united to Christ, given to him, and thus every act becomes fruitful and redemptive.

When the pragmatist in me wonders, *is this possible*, the memory of my grandfather Papá Pedro comes to my aid. My paternal grandparents were married for over 75 years. Similar to profession of final vows, a wedding is only final in the sense that it is an eternal, unbreakable commitment. Nevertheless, it is really a launching into the long, arduous journey toward total union with God. It takes a lifetime of sufferings, joys, falls, and fidelity for any true lasting union to develop between husband and wife.

So it is with us religious consecrated to God. Union with God takes a lifetime of suffering, joys, and fidelity. It means looking into the heart and asking it every moment of every day, *what do you seek? Whom do you*

*Continued on page 4*



Continued from page 3

seek? Jesus himself tells us, "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Mt 6:21). We fall, we turn our gaze away, our fervor dampens, we lose track of our purpose. The vow of *conversatio morum*—fidelity to monastic life—helps us to reorient our gaze back to God, get back up, and ask the heart over and over again, "Whom do you seek?" The memory of those "transfiguration moments" strengthens our faith, hope, and charity. It reminds us that he whom we seek "remains faithful" even when we are not "for he cannot deny himself" (2 Tm 2:13). I live in hope of one day reaching that blessed union that Papá and Mamá lived. At 108 years of age Papá turned his face continually to Mamá, recited sonnets to her, and if she was not within sight, he loudly called out her name until he could see her. That is where I hope my journey will end—to not be able to endure life without him whom my heart loves (Song 4:3) and one day not just to experience brief moments of glory, but to live eternally in his glory. It is my hope for all of you too!

SMIG



Continued on page 4



Acorn Squash of dark green and yellow, peachy stout butternuts and striped green and creamy orange heirloom Delicata, now warm themselves in the mellowing summer sunshine. There is one emerald green oblong watermelon sitting happily on the porch of its pole bean tepee, and maybe grows all the better thanks to its companions the beans.

So I sat, eating my breakfast and drinking my coffee, gazing out upon this garden aflutter with life. Butterflies,

Goldfinches, bees, and on my most recent saunter through the vegetable garden I even saw swallow-tailed caterpillars munching contentedly away on the fennel and dill. Oh how good it all is. I mean there are the problems, the pests, the powdery mildew, but over all, how very good it is.

For a moment I worry that I shouldn't be in such rapture. Since all this will soon pass away, should I not rather be contemplating those things which will last unto eternity? But then I think of The Virgin Mary, at work in her small kitchen garden, with the Christ Child sitting in the dirt not far off, watching a fuzzy caterpillar slowly making its way up a blade of grass, his little eyes filled with wonder and puzzlement at this little creature which he himself had created out of nothingness, which he had created by speaking it into existence. Now in little baby sounds of delight he calls to his mother to behold the wonder he had wrought. I wonder how much he knew of the work of his hands, did he know that he sat in the dirt, in a land on a planet in a universe which he himself had made, or did he take it all in with the wonder of any other child? And only

Mary knew and saw God sitting in his diaper in the dirt with the sun shining on his little head and chubby cheeks, taking delight in a little caterpillar inching its way up a blade of grass.

The things of heaven were wed to the things of earth with Mary's "Yes" and the enclosed garden became the dwelling place of God made man, has been assumed into heaven on this day. That which was sprung from the rich humus of this earth has entered into the realm of God's Heavenly Glory. May she not forget us, her children, but shower us with an abundance of Grace so that we too might bring forth fruits worthy of the children of God, and so one day enter into the abundant life with Him in Heaven. SMGW



# HAPPENINGS

May 16. Around 8:00 pm we received an alert for a tornado warning. The community gathered in the basement and stayed there until 9:45pm. Story-telling and word games helped to pass the time. Even Sylvester joined us!



May 24 We celebrated our first public Mass. Since Covid pews and floor in the guest section are marked with tape for distancing.



June 13. A day of great joy on which Sr. Maria Isabel professed her solemn (final) vows. Because of Covid 19 the guests were limited to Sr. Maria Isabel's immediate family and a few cousins. The rest of their large Dominican family was united spirit. (page 2f)



This summer we've been and not the only ones enjoying the bounty of our fruit trees. A family of porcupines wreaked havoc on some of them, but left us the peaches: 500 on one tree alone.



Because the guesthouse is empty, we've used the opportunity to paint and make other renovations. Dead trees and brush on the property are also being cleared.



Be assured that during this time we are continuing to pray with all of you for each of you and our world:

*Jesus Christ,  
you traveled through towns  
and villages "curing every  
disease and illness."  
Come to our aid now,  
that we may experience  
your healing love.*



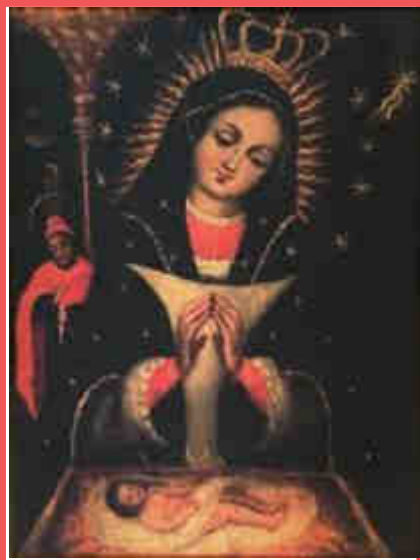
August 13. Another joyous day as Sr. Martha Gagnon made her simple (first) vows. Some of her friends were able to be here for the celebration. Our Christmas newsletter will have more pictures and her own words! Here is a sneak peek!



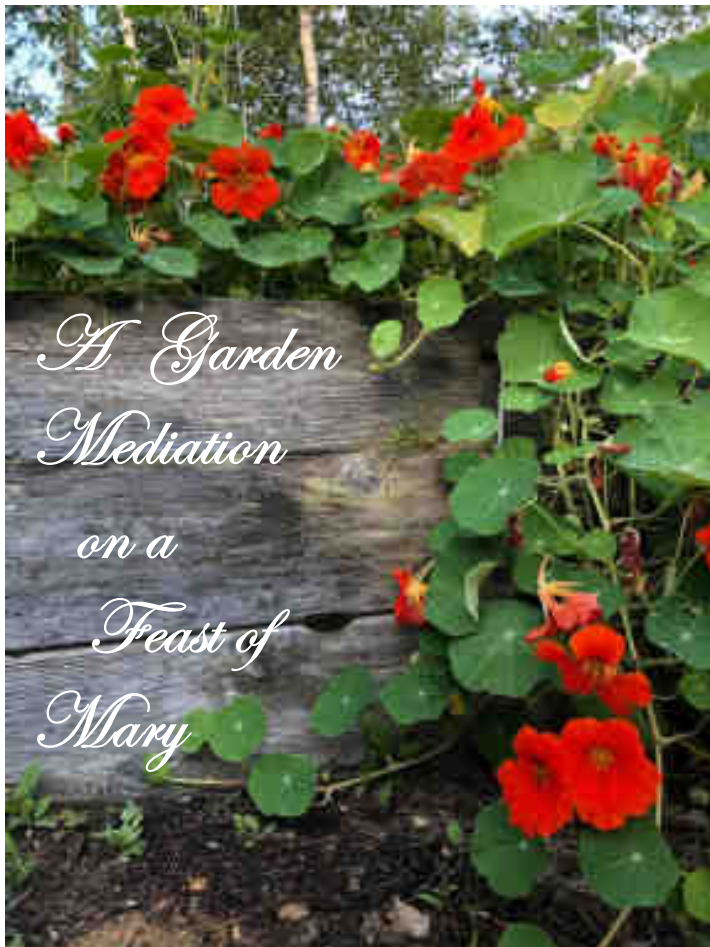
St. Scholastica Priory  
271 N. Main Street  
Petersham, MA 01366

NON PROFIT ORG  
US POSTAGE  
**PAID**  
PERMIT 183  
GREENFIELD, MA

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED



*Nuestra Señora de la Altagracia  
Patroness of the Dominican Republic and  
beloved by Sr Maria Isabel -  
Pray for us all! ¡Ora por nosotros!*



On the Feast or more correctly the Solemnity of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary. As I was eating breakfast in our Solarium (that is the lower windowed area off of our refectory) I was gazing at the vegetable garden, I want to say "my" vegetable garden, but it is not mine, I just work it. I am not sure why I prefer vegetable gardening to flower gardening, but I do. Yet this vegetable garden is brimming over with flowers. Cascades of Nasturtiums flow out over garden beds in hues of red, orange, salmon pink, yellow and combinations of all those colors put together. Colossal sunflowers tower over the garden paths, their great big blooms buzzing with bees, never planted, but springing up from the compost which their parents helped to make rich last fall. The Marigolds I planted by seed in late spring which have grown almost, and unexpectedly, as tall as their cousins the Zinnias, are now blooming. The colors and varieties of interesting textured velvety petals make my heart flutter with wonder and delight. Such variety, such beauty, and all of it unexpected. . The Vegetables have had to step aside this year to make room for an abundance of beauty, which I cannot or will not contain.

Fortunately, there are some vegetables determined to stand their ground. The tomatoes, great big Brandywines looking rather voluptuous in their green leafy gowns, and little cherries of yellow gold and orange, may be more reserved than their showy flower companions, but they add a healthy substance to a vegetable garden almost over run with frivolity. The squash vines are showing signs of decay, but their shriveling leaves reveal a number of rich fruits.