



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

WATERED BY GRACE

Morning has broken like the first morning, Blackbird has spoken like the first bird, Praise for the singing, Praise for the morning, Praise for them springing fresh from the world.

Sweet the rain's new fall, sunlit from heaven, Like the first dewfall on the first grass, Praise for the sweetness of the wet garden, Sprung in completeness where his feet pass.

Mine is the sunlight, Mine is the morning, Born of the one light Eden saw play, Praise with elation, praise every morning, God's recreation of the new day.

If you are my age these words break into a song in your mind. If not, look it up! It is a wonderful song that perfectly describes this time of the year in the northern hemisphere. God has given us this great message of new life, not only in His Word of Scripture, but in our liturgy and in nature. The brown landscape is turning a delicate green, blades of new life pushing through piles of windswept dead leaves, earth fragrant with promise. I remember that smell from a home I lived in: we moved from it when I was five. The receptive inner sense grasps all these messages from God deep within us; it's a receptiveness that God created in us as much as He gave us our flesh! Coming to know Him, coming to wonder about Him, was not something He left to chance. But still.

But still we can attribute those stirrings to our own discovering. We often think that real life is a life not hampered by God, not straight-jacketed by this Supreme Being who is full of ... what? I don't

know! Of something that we think is against us, that wants to hedge us in, to hold us back. Why do we think that, when we see this new life every spring, as birds fly together in a glorious dance preparing to make their nests. The branches of trees tenderly bud out tiny new leaves, the frozen earth gleams and prepares to nourish whatever seed it finds, whether of weed or wheat.



Seeds are amazing. They hold so much within them: a great tree, a sweet violet, even a human being. But by themselves they can't sprout and grow what they contain. They have to undergo a sort of death to germinate. They have to die to what they are for what they can become. Seeds need soil and moisture. They respond to the longer days of light. Some germinate with the light and others need darkness, some like it warmer and some like it cooler. There is not a seed in the world though that can get life rolling on its own. Store the seed in a dry place and

there it will remain with a spark of life or turn to dust. A 2,000-year-old date palm seed that was buried in the ruins of Masada in the Judean Desert was regenerated in 2005. A seed that was from the time of Jesus! Then, in 2011, a Russian team discovered some seeds 124 feet below the permafrost that were radiocarbon dated to 32,000 years old. One of those seeds germinated! They survived all those years holding on to that life, but were unable to sprout by themselves.

Just like us. God plants seeds within our hearts: seeds of faith, His word, His guidance and providence. God is the Source of Life and of Light, who created us and draws us the fullness of our creaturehood.

I recently read the story of a man who was a darned good hockey player. In fact, he was so good that at nineteen he played on a tier-one team: he was a star there and had professional teams looking at him. But he wasn't big enough or good enough to make it any further, and at twenty-two it ended ... but not really. He loved the game and he had been so close – the pros! He didn't give up that dream. In fact, it became his obsession. It was the thing he measured everything against every day. And everyday life fell short. He got a job in a local grocery just "to fill in the gap." During this time he married, had four children, owned a home and he moved up in the grocery store ranks. But none of that held his attention, warmed his heart or lighted up his eyes. It all fell short of his dream to

Continued from page 1

return to the pros. His joy and excitement came from collecting the autographs of those who played the game; basically he didn't live in his life. This was sad for him, but tragic for the family that looked to him as the one who should find his joy in them. Thankfully, one day the seed God had planted in his soul was watered by grace, and the hard husk that had built up as he focused on a false dream was softened and dissolved. He began to realize that he had not been living the life God had placed in his midst, and that he had failed to recognize the abundant blessings God had poured out on him. He was forty-seven.

Jesus wants us to have joy. Of course, He wants us to enjoy the bliss of eternal life, but we're meant to have joy even here. This is not something that he sprinkles on the chosen few. In the Gospel of St. Matthew Jesus tells the story of someone who finds a treasure in a field and then "in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field" (Mt 13:44). But often we're focused on something we think will give us that joy, that life! It's as though we hold a sort of seed in our hand that we can't make germinate, because it lacks the will of God flowing on it, into it, over it. The Apostles didn't want Jesus' earthly presence among them to change; the man clung to his hockey dream. It could be a job, a house, a spouse, being in a holier monastery, or any of the other things that we cling to: they may be only an empty seed husk, something we cling to that needs to die in order that the embryo of the seed that God in His providence and will has planted in us can grow. So often those things are holy, good and advantageous, but they are chimeras – not real. Jesus

says to the Apostles at the Last Supper, "You have pain now; but ... your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you.... Ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be full" (Jn 16:22ff). And again, "I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full" (Jn 15:11). God doesn't fulfill our every dream, but that doesn't mean He doesn't give us a life of fulfillment. Often our problem is that we, like the ex-hockey player, are fixated on what *isn't*, rather than seeing the blessings that *are* there.

In St. Benedict's rule, he encourages the monk to do something during Lent beyond his normal way of living "so that each of us will have something above the assigned measure to offer God of his own will with the joy of the Holy Spirit" (RB 49.6). We are to be joyful *during* the time of penance as we look forward to Easter! Yes, every day we can sing, "*Mine is the sunlight, Mine is the morning, Born of the one light Eden saw play, Praise with elation, praise every morning, God's recreation of the new day, Morning has broken.*"

MMEK

Lyrics: Eleanor Farjeon, tune I love: by then Cat Stevens, now Yusuf Islam



The Petersham Town Hall Building ⇨



We are thrilled to share some wonderful news from St Mary's Monastery, our brothers. Their postulant became a novice March 18th, 2017 and took his new name - Br Luke!

PENTECOST

Is the moment when a heart of stone is shattered and a heart of flesh takes its place.

Father Raniero Cantlamessa

We are so grateful to you for your interest, prayers and support! We thank God for you every day and remember you in our prayers.

We will be offering here a Novena of Masses at Pentecost for you and all your intentions. God bless!

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

The Benedictine Bulletin is published by the nuns of St. Scholastica Priory.

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Our next Monastic Weekends are June 9-11 and October 6-8

HAPPENINGS

On December 12, both monastic communities attended the Petersham Town meeting. We usually don't attend them, but because this one so directly affected our communities - our request for our long-desired monastic cemetery on the property was on the ballot - we did. It's always moving to vote in our quintessential small New England town hall, with its pencil-and-paper ballots and old-fashioned voting machine. This meeting was every bit as impressive: a well-seasoned moderator, vocal discussions, and a hand vote at the end. We are grateful to the townspeople for their approval of our request by an overwhelming majority vote, and we hope soon for the relocation of the remains of our community's beloved dead.

On January 14, Sr. Maria Isabel's niece, Luna Maria Castillo, was baptized in our monastery church. A joyful reception with family and friends followed, with a traditional Dominican Republic meal prepared by the guests.



We were blessed with an observer in our midst, Elena, from January 23 - February 18.



During January and February, a much-needed music practice room was built in our basement. Rick Chaffee and his crew did a beautiful job transforming the space for our budding singers and musicians—and the veterans, too!



From February 17-19 we held our first Monastic Experience Weekend of the year. Two lovely young women came to experience our life firsthand, participating in the liturgy, *lectio divina*, meals and monastic work and hearing vocation stories from some of our sisters. We continue to pray for them as they continue on their journey with God.

In late February Sr. Mary Frances and Fr. Dunstan were at Christendom College in Virginia, attending their Vocation Weekend. Sr. Mary Frances gave a talk on prayer in our lives, and Fr. Dunstan was one of the judges at their talent show.

Both communities celebrated Fr. Gregory's jubilee on the 25th anniversary of his vows. Abbot Anselm was here, as well as Br. Joseph Carron, subprior of Pluscarden, who stayed two weeks.



A guest during this time was Tomal Hosain, a gifted 4th-year student of ethnomusicology at nearby Amherst College. He spent several days listening to the chant, recording the choir, and interviewing Sr. Mary Frances for two research projects.



Sr. Gemma and Sr. Monica have been hard at work reorganizing the original house and the basement. And along with the rest of New England, we've been shoveling our share of snow during the mid-March blizzard.



On March 25, Vivian Webster entered the community as a postulant. She's a librarian by training, and also a gifted artist. We are grateful to God for these young women discerning their vocation with us, and we ask your prayers for them.



Since the beginning of the new year Sr. Mary Paula has been working on a rug that is going to be woven from Alpaca wool. She has the generous help and experience of a Master Weaver and long time friend, Laurie Autio. We are so grateful!

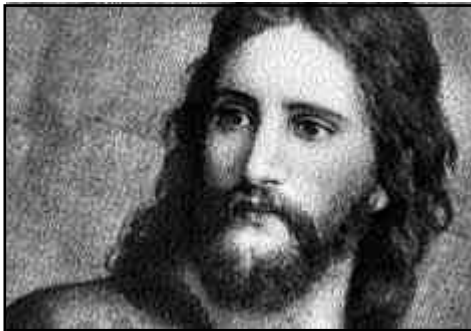


With all this snow, our early-blooming bulbs have gotten buried. The cold earth, holding such promise of new life, is a reminder to us of the Christ's resurrected life that awaits us at Easter. We pray that yours may be full of grace and blessing.

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It is Jesus that you seek
when you dream of
happiness;
He is waiting for you
when nothing else
you find satisfies you.

Pope St John Paul II



You might wonder what happens in the Priory on Valentine's Day. It was quite a day this year! The following is from a letter I wrote to a friend the morning after. "Yesterday was a day that we know God was using us for something. It started in the morning about 5:45 AM when Sr Mary Angela stopped in the refectory at her place and felt a plunk on her head! Flipping the lights on, she saw lots of water on the floor. A big leak had started and three big tubs were placed to catch the drips. After Lauds calls were put into Rick, the man who does a lot of work and maintenance for us. After Mass Sr Gemma headed out in her boots and gear and worked on digging out the cars from the huge storm. She was able to get them all moving except the big van that is still parked on ice and wedged in by snow on three sides. It may need to wait where it is for a thaw! Then when Sr Gemma and Sr Monica wanted to head back into the monastery they couldn't. The main door wouldn't open - not from the outside in or the inside out. So they turned around and headed over to the Church's front door and came back through the Church and cloister and that included Chaeli, our dog. It was her first time ever being in the Church! While all that was happening at the monastery Elena, a woman who had been with us to discern her vocation, was working up at the guest house. She noticed a puddle of water near the china

cabinet in the dining room. Following the dripping she discovered there was a huge leak was overhead. She emptied the cabinet, pulled it out from the wall, dried it inside and out and put a sign on it to let other guests it was being worked on. We all went to Sext, the Divine Office that we pray at 1:00 PM. After that we have our main meal of the day. We kept hearing a thumping sound. I went upstairs to investigate it. And there found Sr Monica trying to wedge something against the door that leads outside to a patio. The door kept blowing open with the wild winds outside and wouldn't latch shut! Rick eventually arrived and began to see what he could fix. He was working on the front door with Sr Monica and Sr Gemma. They asked me to come and help and while I was there Sr Christine came and said that Sr Maria Isabel needed me in the solarium. That is the area connected to our refectory where Chaeli's pen is. Sr Maria Isabel had been using the snow blower outside that area. She was standing in her boots and snow gear not looking happy but worried. I asked "Did a window break?" That is easy to have happen if you forget to direct the powerful snow blowing shaft. "Nope. BUT it did eat a rug and it is stuck in it!" Thank God - no one was hurt! Well, the two of us laid it back to get to the blade and pulled, yanked and cut the rug (not meaning dancing!) and pretty soon it was clear.

By the end the day the door to the patio was able to stay shut, the front door is able to be opened and shut but not locked and because it has no handle - that was the problem and with the snow removal Sr Emmanuel had done before Sext up on the patio the leak stopped and we ALL dropped dead into our beds. Thanking Him for such a heart-filled day!