



## WHAT LOVE IS THIS?

Did you smell it? That tang in the air, the autumn, the fallen leaves, decaying plants? Our part of New England lies nearly on the 40-degree latitude line. I have always lived in this latitude. Chicago, Boston and New York vary only by one degree, but those cities share their latitude with Dubrovnik, Rome and Madrid, along with many others. Our sense memories include these atmospheric settings that weave into the cyclical events of life, from our parents' birthdays, the Fourth of July, to the sacred times of Advent, Christmas, and the entire Church year. God has made our humanity so creative and adaptable that those who live below the equator have different sense memories for these

exact same days of the Church year. How rich the human heart is! How good God is!

In fact, *goodness* was the very noun that launched this article. I sat with our formation sisters using a wonderful article by Abbot Jerome Kodell, OSB, on Chapter 72 of the Rule of

St Benedict. Just a tiny phrase began my wondering about God's view, "Authentic Christian asceticism depends on a healthy view of humanity..." Abbot Jerome was saying that we *humans* need a healthy view, but what about *God's* viewpoint of humanity? What did God think of humans?

If we immediately leap to the news of *today*, well, it won't be too good. We can't help asking how God can bear to see what we do with our lives and to others? But that is not

the question that has rumbled in my brain since that class. Rather, what did God see in humankind that St John could write in his Gospel, "For God so loved the world that he gave his Only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life" (Jn 3:16). God "so loved the world" *before* he gave us his Only Son. Yes! Astounding!

Can we know anything about that? God is God and we are just us! But we can. That is what Scripture is: God's Word, God's thought, God's way of conveying to us Who he is and who we are. At class that day I asked the formation sisters to go to Scripture, especially the Old Testament, to see if there is anything there that would reveal the vision that the Author and Creator had of our humanity from creation.

How about at the very beginning? "Then God said, 'Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness.... God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good'" (Gn 1:26, 31). In God's image and likeness, and it was very good! Well, that says it in a nutshell, right? The problem is that in only a very short time our image and likeness took a turn: the fall of humankind and the expulsion from that paradisaical life into the sweat, labor and wandering of humanity.

God did not stop, though, in his love of humanity. We hear our ancestors crying out to God, "When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established; what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?" Despite the sufferings they experienced and straying from God again and again - they still knew! They still knew that

*Continued on page 2*



I have been asked to write  
 some words  
 on the occasion of my Simple Profession.  
 But what words suffice  
 to explain how I have launched  
 or should I say been launched  
 further into a life of mystery.  
 Been and am being launched  
 is more precise,  
 for all I see in me,  
 is weakness, foolishness and need.  
 But I have been and am being called.  
 So in faith, not in myself, but in him.  
 I go forward into darkness and confusion  
 not to something known but to the mys-  
 tery.  
 and so I fumble along searching for words  
 To describe the way  
 and the vows I have made.

Relinquish  
 Surrender  
 Hope  
 Trust

nothing suffices in the face of mystery.  
 Yet the mystery calls me and urges me on.  
 In blindness, obeisance and awe  
 I fumble and trip, lose my grip.  
 The words get jumbled and mixed  
 SILENCE SILENCE SILENCE  
 BRINGS PEACE.

*Continued from page 1*

God looked on them with love! "Yet you have made them a little lower than God and crowned them with glory and honor. You have given them dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under their feet..." (Ps 8:4-7) .

It is God's own word that says to us, "You are precious in my sight, and honored, and love you!" (Is 43:4). "See, I have inscribed you on the palms of my hands" (Is 49:16). And in Jeremiah he proclaims, "I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore, I have continued my faithfulness to you" (Jer 31:3). This is our God speaking to our human race – fallen, but still his beloved creation. What a great mystery this is! God conceived us out of his steadfast love.

There are other words for steadfast: adamant, relentless, stubborn, true, unswerving, and more. All describe God's intent about humanity. The breach that the Fall caused never separated us from his unwavering love, but that rupture was beyond our ability to repair or leap over. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son" to do even this for us. What kind of love is that? A love beyond anything we can imagine! But still not enough. God's fierce love required him to bridge that chasm himself.

And that is what he did. God sent his Son (in the greatest mystery of the Triune Unity) to us incarnated. Growing in the womb of a mother, like the rest of us. Born as a frail infant, a baby, who needs every care: to be held, fed, loved and deeply cherished. God gave us a way to him that evokes our humanity, body and soul, just as our bodily senses help us recognize the special times of the year. We see, touch, smell and feel the swell of our heart, sharing in the depth of our response which a helpless newborn awakens in our fleshy hearts!

"For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" (Is 9:6). This Child is that Mighty God, Prince of Peace and Repairer of the Breach, our Redeemer! For now, and for every Christmas, he is that Babe that encompasses the Infinite Love and Goodness of God who calls to each one of us, "Come! I want your tender love! I want your heart!" Merry Christmas! MMEK

*Manuscript on front: The Morgan Library & Museum. MS S.2. Bequest of E. Clark Stillman, 1995.*

## TWO DOCUMENTS AND A CANON LAWYER

Cor Orans ("Praying Heart") is the title of the Vatican Instruction which implements the Apostolic Constitution *Vultum Dei Quaerere*, which was written about in our last newsletter. The current document delineates specific norms that apply to all monasteries of contemplative women. Understanding and implementing these instructions has been an overwhelming task for us and for many monasteries. God in his mercy and generosity has blessed us with the help of Sr. Lynn McKenzie, OSB, a canon lawyer from Sacred Heart Monastery in Alabama. Sr. Lynn has been extremely generous with her expertise, answering our many questions and, most recently, visiting us here to provide conferences on Canon Law and Cor Orans. Sr. Lynn clarified the new norms for us and made the task ahead less daunting.

Changes for our community include: more authority for the superior, an adjustment of our enclosure statute, the lengthening of the period of formation, and the requirement of membership in a congregation. From her own experience Sr. Lynn provided examples of how congregations work with autonomous monasteries, clarifying Cor Oran's requirement that the purpose of membership in a congregation is "that monasteries which share the same charism do not remain isolated but keep it faithfully and [give] each other mutual fraternal help" (Cor Orans, 86). Her conferences truly encouraged us and helped us see that this is not only feasible but could be a source of growth in our way of life.

The beginning words of the document, "Praying Heart," are fundamental in a fount of other words that depict contemplative life in the Church. The greatest benefit of having Sr. Lynn here was our sharing in this life. We heard stories of her community, of the work that she does internationally, and of the way of life of those communities all around the world. Her time with us provided a larger perspective and enabled us to delve into the true intent of Cor Orans—to enhance monastic life through one another, something that we lived those few days Sr. Lynn was here. We were one praying heart, sisters and nuns, together praying for the world, for that mystical body of Christ. Pray for us and Sr. Lynn and all women monastics as we embark on this journey together. SMIG

Obedience  
 Conversatio  
 Stability

Let us settle on just these three  
 pray that they be lived with love  
 through God's grace by me.

Sr Mary Gertrude Webster, OSB  
 MADE SIMPLE VOWS  
 October 20th, 2019

An added Christmas gift to you from us is a spree  
of pictures of our community to you from the past year.  
It has been a full one!



Open wide your door to the one who comes. Open your soul,  
throw open the depths of your heart to see the riches of simplicity,  
the treasures of peace, the sweetness of grace. Open your heart  
and run to meet the Sun of eternal light that illuminates all men.  
St Ambrose







To experience Christmas is to allow oneself to be shaken by its surprising newness. The Birth of Jesus does not offer reassuring coziness by the fireside, but rather the divine shudder which shakes history. To celebrate Christmas is to do as Jesus did, who came



for us needy ones and to *bend down* to those who need us.

It is to do as *Mary* did: to *trust* God with docility, even without understanding what he will do.

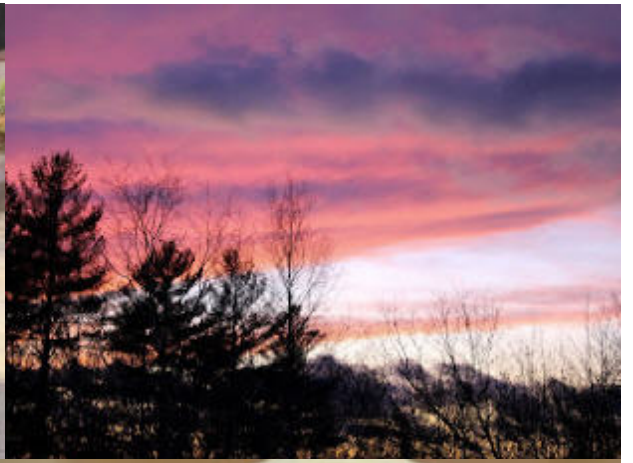
To celebrate Christmas is to do as *Joseph* did: to *arise* in order to do what God wants, even if it is not according to our plans.

This is an invitation for Christmas, take some time. Go before the nativity and stay in silence.

Pope Francis

A day of joy with Sr Mary Gertrude and her family as she made vows!





It is Christmas every time  
you let God love others through you...  
yes, it is Christmas every time  
you smile at your brother  
and offer him your hand.  
Saint Teresa of Calcutta



# HAPPENINGS



August 22. Memorial of the Queenship of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Following our custom, after Mass the nuns processed to the statue of Our Lady in front of the church singing the Litany of Loreto. At the end of Compline, both communities sang the Ave Regina Caelorum ("Hail Queen of Heaven") in the same place.



September 3. Fr. Gregory's feast day meal at St. Scholastica Priory. A favorite novel of his is *The Lord of the Rings*, so the novices decorated the refectory accordingly and performed a delightful skit wearing capes and crowns.



September 10. Mother Mary Elizabeth and Sr. Monica left to attend the Provincial

Chapter Meeting, held this year at the historic monastery of Montserrat in Catalonia. They traveled first to England, staying at Stanbrook Abbey and attending the blessing of their new abbess Mother Anna Brennan. After visiting Mother Winsome, SBVM and her community at Kingstanding, Birmingham and the monks of Farnborough Abbey, they continued to the Chapter (see p. 6.)

September 26. Mother Mary Elizabeth gave the community a report of the meeting with canon lawyer Sr. Scholastika Häring, OSB of St. Scholastika Abbey, Dinklage, Germany concerning recent legislation for contemplative nuns.



September 28. The fall oblate retreat had a large turnout. One woman and three men made their final oblation.



October 2-4 Sr. Gemma's family came to visit with her and us for a few days.

October 11-13. Eight young women participated in our fall Monastic Experience Weekend.



October 17-19. The "bomb cyclone" that hit the Northeast caused the town of Petersham to lose power from early Thursday morning to late morning on Saturday. The generators

installed on the property provided enough power to supply basic lights and heat.



October 20. Sr. Mary Gertrude made her First Vows. All of her family and many close friends traveled from around the country to celebrate the day with us. (see page 2)

October 28. Sr. Lynn McKenzie, OSB visited. (See p. 2)

November 2. All Soul's Day. In addition to the three Masses, we had a procession to the cemetery, singing the Litany and other chants and prayers. The boundaries for the cemetery had just been marked, bringing to completion this long dreamed-of project.



November 10. Phil and Carol Zaleski arranged for UMass Amherst English professor Stephen Harris to present a talk on St. Bede's hymn. It was wonderful!



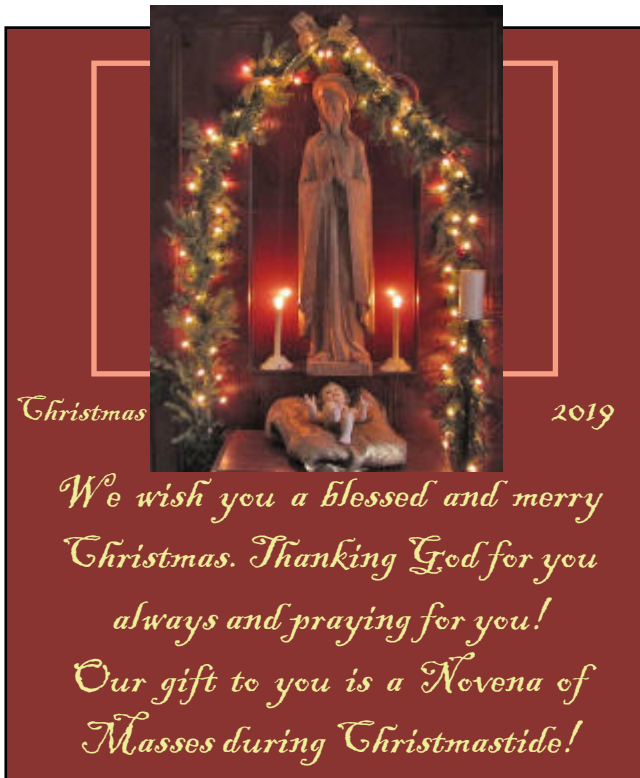
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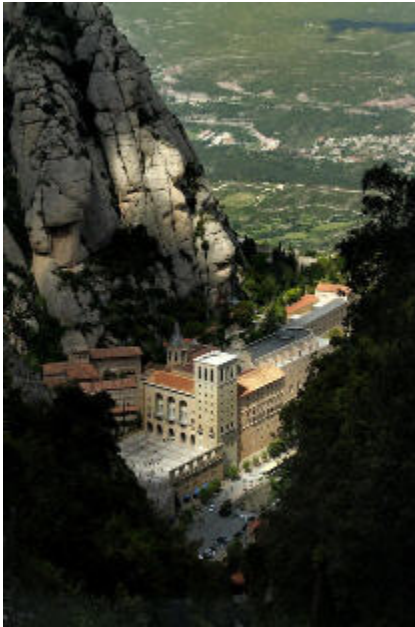
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## A TRIP TO A MOUNTAIN TOP



Our journey to Montserrat began on September 11<sup>th</sup>. We flew into the north of England to visit Stanbrook Abbey, located in Wass, Yorkshire after thirty plus hours with no sleep the nuns greeted us with open arms. Mother Mary Elizabeth renewed friendships with many in the community, while I, Sr Monica, enjoyed meeting them for the first time.

Mother Anna, the newly elected abbess, took us out for an afternoon to see the ruins of Rievaulx Abbey and the very much alive Ampleforth Abbey. Stanbrook was in the throes of

preparing for her blessing ceremony to be held two days later! We extended our stay in order to attend her beautiful ceremony. M. Mary Elizabeth and I slipped out immediately after the festive meal to continue our journey to Birmingham, the home of Mother Winsome and her Community at Kingstanding.

Wonderful women of strength and courage, they treated us as long-lost family. Not twenty-four hours later we arrived at Farnborough, St

Michael's Abbey, to continue our journey with Abbot Cuthbert. He and his community had a BBQ meal waiting for us. It was such a touch of home! We left there before dawn to attend the English Provincial Chapter meeting at Montserrat in Catalonia.

As you can see the Abbey, built in 1025, is literally built on the side of a mountain – they even have mountain goats! Their hospitality was stupendous. Br Xavier, an English speaking monk, was always with us to guide us in the right direction. The abbey is like a little town. They have over 2.5 million visitors a year. There is a train station, two hotels, museum and restaurants around a beautiful plaza for all. Groups come to celebrate important occasions there. The church is glorious with the statue of our Lady and Jesus sitting on her lap, from the 12<sup>th</sup> century: that is the heart of the shrine. It is placed above the sanctuary where a stream of pilgrims climb stairs to venerate the Madonna. The liturgy is beautiful. The 50-60 monks are joined by their very famous, Escolania, boys choir, at Vespers.

Our meetings went well. A new Visitor of the English Province was elected. Abbot Anselm served us in that office for 16 years! Abbot Cuthbert of Farnborough is now the Visitor. Sr Scholastika Haaring, a canon lawyer, from Dinklage, Germany, gave a presentation to help the nuns and monks understand more fully Cor Orans. (see page 2) The women's communities who were present agreed to move forward and create a monastic congregation: St Scholastica Priory, St Mildred's, Minster, UK, Our Lady of the Desert, New Mexico and Kingstanding (whenever that is possible for them). This will mean writing a constitution for which we need your prayers! We are in good company. The many stairs in the monastery were well worth climbing to reach our goal! SMK