



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

## ARMOR OF GOD

I am going to tell you the truth. One of my most un-favorite appellations as a nun is "the good sisters" or worse, "the good little sisters." I smile but my heart rises in foment! I know religious sisters are not the only ones who have become a kind of kitsch. Think of the cookie jars you see of Franciscan friars! Actually, I think they are cute too! And I realize the kernel of that endearment is a love of the symbols of one's faith experience growing up.

One day recently I honed into the fact that our earliest prayer of the day is pretty darn violent! Not in how we pray. The Sisters are sitting and praying as one voice in a quiet presence before the altar. BUT what we are praying. Our first period of the Divine Office is called Vigils. Most of the year this office is prayed in the dark. We start with, "O Lord, open my lips and my mouth will proclaim your praise!" We say this three times in honor of our Triune God! And then, every day, no matter what day – a Tuesday in Ordinary time or Lent, Christmas or Easter – we pray Psalm Three.

How many are my foes, O LORD!  
How many are rising up against me!  
How many are saying about me,  
"There is no help for him in God."

We aren't saying, "How lovely are your courts, O Lord!" or "Praise the Lord all you nations!" Psalm verses that are said at other times. But immediately, first thing in the morning we are on the lookout for the foes! This first period of prayer is aptly called Vigils – be vigilant, be on the lookout! "Get your dukes up!" as my Dad would say.

It made me think of the "watchmen of the City" the firefighters and police of ancient Rome that Augustus set up in 6 AD to patrol the streets and outside the walls. We wake in the dark to cry out to God for all those who are surrounded by foes, physically and spiritually.

Isaiah writes that the Lord looked



down and was displeased that there was no justice, righteousness or truth. And God saw that there as no one who would right that situation, or better could! And so, Isaiah continues "He put on righteousness like a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on his head; he put on garments of vengeance for clothing, and wrapped himself in fury as in a mantle...And he will come to Zion as Redeemer, (Is 59:17f) Jesus was that breastplate, helmet and garment that God was wrapped in. But not wrapped and contained but "IS!" He came and dwelt among us even now having ascended to the Father, "I will remain with you always, even until the end of the world! (MT 28:20)

One of the ways he dwells with us is in our prayer of the Divine Office. "He came to give the life of God to men, the Word who is the radiant light proceeding from the Father's glory, 'Christ Jesus, high priest of the new and eternal covenant, taking human nature, introduced into this earthly exile that hymn

which is sung throughout all ages in the halls of heaven." (SC n.83) The psalms make up the majority of this prayer. These very psalms were ancient and revered even at the time of Jesus. Mary and Joseph would have prayed with him in their home as all Jewish families did. The Gospels recount Jesus praying with psalm verses spontaneously, in the ceremonies in the synagogue, temple and nearly, word by word, at his last Passover meal. These psalms were not simply "prayers in the prayer book." His last words were from Psalm 50(51) "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

So we roll out of bed for that first Hour of the Divine Office and we get ready. It may look like a tunic and veil. But it is not. St Paul, inspired by Isaiah gives us instructions. "Put on the whole armor of God! Take it up...stand firm! ...fasten the belt of truth around your waist, put on the breastplate of righteousness, put on your feet shoes so that you may be ready to proclaim the gospel of peace." This peace that St Benedict set before us in the Prologue of the Rule, "seek peace and pursue it!" (RBP:17) Just about now, we glance at the clock and see we need to hurry! He continues the drill for the battledress needed for the Work of God. "Take the shield of faith...to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the

Continued from page 1

helmet of salvation, and the sword of Spirit, which is the word of God." (Ep 6:11-17) St Benedict's call to the monastic life follows this vein in the beginning of his Rule, "fight for the Lord Christ, the true king, by taking up the strong and bright weapons of obedience." (RBP 4) Every postulant entering the monastery begins immediately to "serve one Lord and fight under one King." (RB 61:10) But the only equipment have is our Antiphonal Monasticum, the book for the Liturgy of Hours. The troops are our fellow Sisters and Brothers, and the place to serve is the Church building.



What makes the prayer of the Divine Office so powerful is not dependent on the holiness and fortitude of those who pray, thank God. Rather, it depends on "The Son of God [who] has become the Son of Man, one God with the Father, one man with men; so that when we speak to God in prayer, the Son is not separated from the Father; when the Body of the Son prays, the head is not separated from the body. It is the one savior of his body, our Lord Jesus Christ, who prays for us, prays in us, and is prayed to by us. He prays for us as our priest. He prays in us as our head. He is prayed to by us as our God. Let us recognize therefore our voices in him and his voice in us." (SC n.7)

These cries for help recur every day during the Hour of Vigils, I chose a verse from each day thinking of what is hap-

pening in our world today: "Relieve the anguish of my heart and set me free from my distress...see how many are my foes. Preserve my life! Rescue me!" (Ps 24) "For my life is spent with sorrow and my years with sighs...my bones waste away." (Ps 30) "He drew me from the deadly pit, the miry clay...I am beset by evils too many to be counted!" (Ps 39) "...protect me from those who attack me...save my life from blood-thirsty men." (Ps 58) "I was filled with the envy of the proud when I saw how the wicked prosper, for them there are no pains...I was stupid and did not understand" (Ps 74) "Your enemies plot against your people, conspire against those you cherish..." (Ps 85) "In return for my love, they accuse me, while I am at prayer for them. They repay me evil for good, hatred for love." (Ps 108)

These personal pronouns are every individual including us. And these cries, the revealed Word of God, prayed by Jesus, our head. God encompassing all his little ones, all the fragile, vulnerable, hurting and seemingly forgotten. Our voices praying these psalms in God are those deep groanings of the Holy Spirit, "sighs too deep for words." (Rm 8:28) God is the defender, the wall, the victor and, even avenger. "Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." No, "if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." (Rm 12:19-21) The Lord telling us what to do to our enemies. Not to do to any other the evil that has been done - but do good. Is this a cliché? No. Just look how Jesus lived and died. So, by doing this, is how we become God's partners in letting his sun shine on the good and the bad. Is this his revenge? The revenge to turn the bad into good? Both are won, both changed. God's wrath is not ours. He always chooses FOR US. But we are left with the ability to refuse. Lord help us! And bring the ending of Psalm Three to be in our poor world who needs you Arise, LORD; save me, my God,...

Salvation belongs to the LORD;  
may your blessing be on your people!  
Your Resurrection is your mighty arm  
that saves us!

MMEK



Illumination page 1:  
Book of Hours, use of Utrecht, folio 46r  
Wellesley College Special Collections

Dear Jesus,  
help me to spread Your fragrance  
everywhere I go.  
Flood my soul with Your spirit and  
life.  
Penetrate and possess my whole being  
so utterly,  
That my life may only be a radiance of  
Yours.

Shine through me, and be so in me  
That every soul I come in contact with  
May feel Your presence in my soul.  
Let them look up and see no longer  
me, but only Jesus!

Stay with me and then I shall begin to  
shine as You shine,  
So to shine as to be a light to others;  
The light, O Jesus will be all from  
You; none of it will be mine;  
It will be you, shining on others  
through me.

Let me thus praise You the way You  
love best, by shining on those around  
me.

Let me preach You without preach-  
ing, not by words but by my example,  
By the catching force of the sympa-  
thetic influence of what I do,  
The evident fullness of the love my  
heart bears to You. Amen

St John Henry Newman

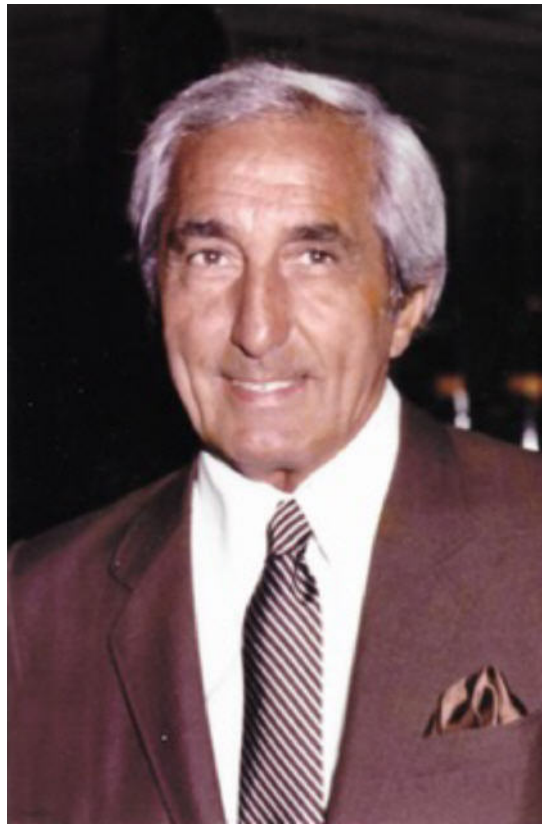


# Our Peter

On Christmas morning we received a phone call from a beloved friend, Florine. She was calling from Michigan only months after her husband had died at age 98. She wanted to give us a gift. Her voice was full of happiness. "I want to allow you to tell Peter's story now."

Where would we be without Peter? Only God knows. Which is a silly thing to say because God was the one who brought Peter into the life of St Scholastica Priory. We first met him in Michigan in 1979. Years ago, the sisters would go two by two, and ask the owners or presidents of companies to sponsor a box of Catholic books for the hospitals, nursing homes or prisons in their own local area. This helped to support the community as well as print. Later, many of these friends continued as our benefactors when we could no longer travel because of our monastic enclosure.

Back in 1979, two sisters of our community sought him out by slogging through a muddy building site looking for the owner. He was out there checking a job for his company, Ministrelli Construction. It was an encounter that changed our lives and Peter's too. From then until 1984 there was a yearly visit as friendship deepened on both side. That last visit in his office was different though. His sister Mary Ann was his assistant; she kept everything running well in his office. She was there with Peter the day the sisters told him that they would not be able to visit Michigan again like they had: the life-long vows they would soon be making required monastic enclosure, and from then on the sisters could only keep in touch by phone and mail. He also learned of another requirement the community had been given in order to make their solemn profession: St Scholastica Priory would need to move to a quieter place more conducive to the contemplative monastic way of life. Since Peter knew us very well by then he knew we did not have much financially. He asked them, "Where are you going to get the money for that?" The sisters laughed and said, "God will provide!" After they left,



Mary turned to Peter and said, "Peter, maybe you are how God will provide for them." It is only just now striking me how perfect this is in our history. St Benedict and St Scholastica were siblings helping one another to reach the heights—and here was another brother and sister!

Not long afterwards Mother Mary Clare, our foundress and superior, received a phone call from Peter who told her that when we found the property we needed to move to he would buy it for us. We searched for two years, and after some deep (but providential) disappointments, we visited the Petersham property. Again providentially, this first visit was a few days after the first group of us made our solemn vows, when our families were here from all over the country – as well as Peter. As soon as we walked around the house and surrounding land, we knew that God had directed us here – it was exactly what we had hoped for. Peter turned to some sisters and asked if this was it. It certainly was!

On the day we closed on the Petersham property, when we entered our refectory we found a rose at each of our places, with a thank you note from Peter. It's we who are eternally grateful to him.

Peter was one of six children whose parents emigrated from Italy. He

served in World War II as a member of the Army Air Corps in Italy and, once back in the United States, set out to help support his family. In 1951, he borrowed \$300 and a Model-T from his parents and grabbed a wheelbarrow and two shovels as he and his brother, Marvin, began their long and amazing careers in construction. By the time Peter bought the Petersham property in 1984, his Ministrelli Construction had become Michigan's largest paving contractor, and he was branching out into major residential building developments.

St. Scholastica Priory [and St. Mary's Monastery?] were not the only beneficiaries of Peter and his wife Florine's generosity: among many recipients of their generosity were Pope John Paul II Center in Washington D.C., the Ministrelli Women's Heart Center, and Urology Institute, both of Beaumont Hospital, Royal Oak, Michigan, helping establishing Xavier Preparatory High School in Palm Desert, California, and so many more causes.

When in the mid-1990s we were finally able to build a church here, many wonderful people contributed, but mostly Peter. He had his whole family flown to be with us for the dedication. And then, not too many years after, it was found that the construction on that church was compromised and it would have to come down. It was a terrible blow, and Mother Mary Clare later said calling Peter to tell him was one of the most difficult phone calls of her life. Peter's response to Mother Mary Clare? He said that mistakes sometimes happen, and we'll start over. And Peter did help another dear friend build the church we have been praying in since 2000. These two men made sure the materials and choice of construction company would build a church that would last centuries. We will always be grateful for their watchful and generous love.

We are so thankful that Peter stayed to greet those first two sisters make their way through that muddy building site. His first gift has given not one but two monasteries that offer God's praise every day. Thank you Peter and Florine!



**Fr. Brian Daley, SJ**

Brian Daley, SJ, acclaimed patristic scholar and winner of the prestigious 2012 Ratzinger Prize for Theology. His accomplishments, if all were listed they would fill this page. He has shared his knowledge and wisdom with the monks and nuns of Petersham over the years in talks and homilies. We can hardly think of Holy Week and Easter Vigil without memories of Fr Brian. Carol and Phil Zaleski, longtime friends invited Fr Brian to give a talk via Zoom to the twin community this past March.. He offered his perspective on Augustine's view of the end of time.

Around 419 or 420, St. Augustine received a letter from Archbishop Hesychius asking for his contemporary's opinion on whether the end of the world was imminent, since the Roman empire seemed to be nearing its end, and consequently, human history as they knew it. In light of the worldwide disasters of our times, many today perhaps wonder the same.

Augustine gave a brief reply based on Jesus' words in Scripture that nobody knows when the end of the world will come. Hesychius thanked Augustine for his reply letter, but insisted that Augustine give his full opinion on the matter – which Augustine then did, in his typical way, with a lengthy tract on the end of the world.

In the tract, Augustine didn't focus on trying to calculate the temporal end of history. Instead he insisted we should strive to live always prepared to meet the Lord, whether at our own death or at the end of history (whichever comes first!). Augustine pointed out that the Lord will come at the end of time, but that God's presence is also immanent in all of creation, and that we can live here and now in a meeting with the Lord. As Fr. Brian stated, "We all live in the last hour, as Augustine confessed to Hesychius, because we all are called to move, even now, beyond the cumula-

tive hours of the history that makes us disciples here in time, and into the timeless peace of God's own life."

Fr. Brian went on to explain, not just in the context of this tract but also in many of Augustine's works, that through the Incarnation of the Word, "God has made himself uniquely and irrevocably available in time." Through the Scriptures and through Jesus' earthly life, especially in his suffering, death, and resurrection, the Lord gave us an example (exemplum) to follow in our own lives of how to meet God beyond the confines of this material world as we hope for the resurrection of the body. Not only that, Christ also gave us a sacrament (sacramentum), "an avenue of ritualized, spiritual integration even now into the process of transformation... pointing us now to God's timeless, merciful presence."

Contact with the risen Jesus in faith through the Scriptures and the Church's sacraments allows us to view the cares of this world through the eyes of faith, hoping for our eternal union with God at the end of our own lives and of human history. As Fr. Brian concluded, "To love the Lord's coming... was simply a matter of loving him as he had already come... to know that however far away in time and space the risen Lord might seem, in fact, for the wakeful heart, he is always near... already with us as our Lord."

May our hearts always be wakeful to the presence of the risen Lord! -SMDA



Have you wondered if God could be calling you to something different? **June 10th-12th** and **October 7th-9th** we will share our life with you. Check our website for details!

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# HAPPENINGS



November 29th – Our accessible walkway was furnished with a radiant heat system to keep it free of ice and snow. It was finished on this day just in time for the first snowfall of the season! Thanks to Daniel Young of Partridge Hill Services and Rick Chaffee for completing the installation.

December – The shop was in full swing for the Christmas season. The sisters have been busy creating new items to sell, including rosaries, wood crafts, greeting cards and knitted wares. Sr Mary Paula has been weaving again and you'll soon see some of her works of art!



January 14th – The sisters began meeting every Friday afternoon for several months to review our new Constitutions which will soon be submitted to the Vatican. This document was drafted to meet the new requirements put forward in the Papal instructional letter Cor Orans. We are learning about our Constitutions

more than ever, using our pencils and highlighters to get into the nitty gritty!



February 23rd – Karol Del Real and Carlene of the Vincent Genovese Foundation made a visit to Petersham while in New England for a benefit dinner. As long-time friends and benefactors, we enjoyed a festive supper together and an evening of story-telling and faith-building.

March 3rd – The twin communities gathered for a Zoom conference with Fr. Brian Daley, Professor Emeritus of the University of Notre Dame. Fr. Brian was a former retreat master for our communities and was well-acquainted with our founders Mother Mary Clare Vincent and Fr. Cyril Karam. He has also given college-level instruction to several of our current and former community members. For a detailed review of his

conference topic, the eschatology of St. Augustine, see the article on page 4.



March 24th – Our industrial convection oven, known to the sisters as “The Blodgett”, was installed after the former oven retired to its eternal rest after 40 years of service. We realized how essential this piece of equipment was during its three-month absence from the kitchen! We are extremely grateful to our benefactors for making this purchase possible.

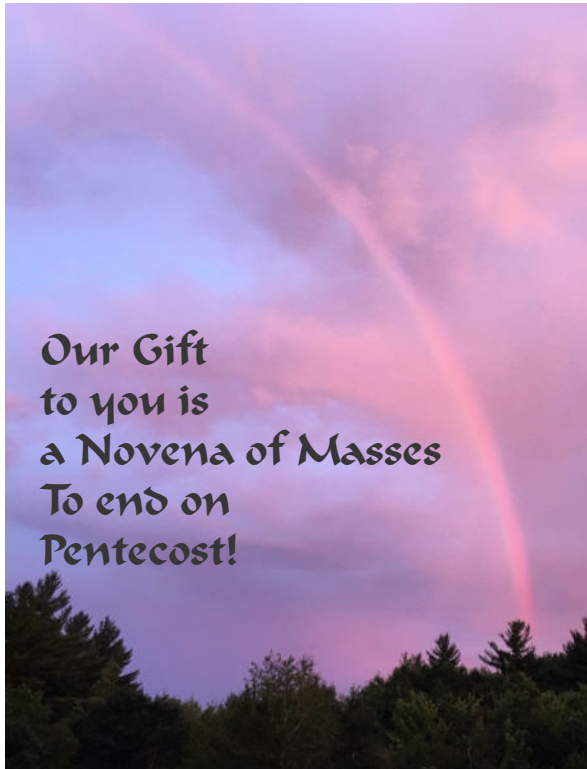
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Our Gift  
to you is  
a Novena of Masses  
To end on  
Pentecost!

## OUR PASCHAL CANDLE

The Easter Exultet exhorts us to joy and jubilation: "Let now the heavenly hosts of angels rejoice let the living mysteries be joyfully celebrated: and let a sacred trumpet proclaim the victory of so great a King. Let the earth also be filled with joy, illuminated with such resplendent rays" And as the Exultet continues it tells us why we can rejoice even in the midst of a grieving world, it is made known to us: "that the darkness which overspread the whole world is chased away by the splendor of our eternal King." And that the sanctification of this night "blots out crimes, washes away sins, and restores innocence to sinners, and joy to the mournful. It banishes enmities, produces concord, and humbles empires."

As Christians we can say "O truly blessed night" for "Christ, yesterday and today, the Beginning and the End the Alpha and the Omega", is and shall be victorious. "For all time belongs to him, and all ages forever".

Evil will never have the final say. Right now our brothers and sisters in Ukraine continue their passion, and are facing unimaginable suffering. We are united to them most especially through *this* night when the Lord God "lead our forebears, Israel's children from slavery in Egypt and made them pass dry-shod through the Red Sea." May he come into all our hearts this Easter to "shed his peaceful light on humanity."

In a desire to be united in solidarity with peace in Ukraine and Russia this Paschaltide, our candle design was inspired by the painted pillars in one of the churches in Kyiv, Ukraine.

SMGW