



## THERE ARE NO DOORS

There is a constant and deliberate building, in the Old Testament, of the unapproachable glory and might of God. In the book of Genesis, Pharaoh freed Joseph, one of the twelve sons of Jacob, and promoted him for interpreting his dream. He gave him his signet ring, making him only second to himself, put a gold chain around his neck and decreed that as Joseph's chariot passed "Bow the knee!" would be proclaimed before it (Gen 41:43). It wasn't long after this that the brothers who had sold Joseph to a passing caravan came begging Egypt for grain for their father Jacob and their own families. They entered into the presence of the Governor of Egypt, not knowing this was their own brother, Joseph. There they lay with their faces to ground.

Later on in Genesis, Moses flees for his life from the Egyptian palace, where he had grown up as a son to the daughter of Pharaoh. He was in the mountains of Midian now shepherding sheep for his father-in-law Jethro. There on Mount Horeb a flaming bush caught his attention. He heard his name called from within the bush: "Moses, Moses ... come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet. ... You are standing on holy ground" (Ex 3 ff).

The ark of God was constructed according to the instructions of God himself. This chest contained the Tablets of the Law, a pot of manna and the rod of Aaron. Before the temple was built, this holy ark was carried into battle, captured, and finally rescued. When King David was finally established in Jerusalem, he gathered 30,000 men to accompany him to bring up the ark of God to Jerusalem after a long absence. David himself danced before it with songs and music from lyres, harps, tambourines and more! While they traveled, the cart, being pulled by oxen, rocked and Uzzah, one of David's men, put out his hand to steady it. As he touched God's ark, Uzzah was struck dead on the spot (2 Sam 6:7).

God extended exalted power and eminence even to the earthly rulers he used in the work of salvation. God David's son became the great King Solomon. He built not only the Temple but also his own house that took thirteen years to complete. It

had a Hall of Pillars, the Hall of the Throne and a Hall of Justice; cedar and costly stones covered the walls. All of King Solomon's drinking vessels were of gold, his throne carved in ivory and covered in gold. His fame spread through the land even as far as the Queen of Sheba. She traveled to see for herself and said, "not even half had been told" of Solomon's wisdom and prosperity (1 Kgs 10:7).

Much later Esther, a young simple Jewish woman, was taken into the inner court of King Ahasuerus who ruled over 127 provinces from India to Ethiopia. His palace was laden with gold, silver and precious jewels. Esther was made queen and, Scripture records, "The king loved Esther more than all the other women." Yet even Esther could not enter into the King's presence unless she was summoned without risking her life. A mere lowering of his royal scepter meant death to that person. After fasting and prayer with all her fellow Jewish people in his kingdom she took this risk to intercede for her life and those of her people. "She had gone through all the doors, she stood before the king. He was seated on his royal throne, clothed in the full array of his majesty, all covered with gold and precious stones. He was most terrifying. Lifting his face, flushed with splendor, he looked at her in fierce anger. The queen faltered, and turned pale

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and faint, and collapsed.... God changed the spirit of the king to gentleness, and in alarm he sprang from his throne and took her in his arms.... He comforted her with soothing words, "What is it, Esther? I am your husband. Take courage; You shall not die.... Come near." Then he raised the golden scepter and touched her neck with it." (cf. Esth 5).

All these scenes highlight God's transcendent reality. The message is that God is Other! It is the intention of Scripture to bring that home to us. We are *not* like God; we are *not even like* those persons whom God used in his revelation.

And so when the moment came, that "all-powerful Word leapt from heaven, from the royal throne, into the midst of the land that was doomed" (Wis 18:15-17). The world hardly took notice. There was no mountain top covered in cloud and lightening for forty days. No one was struck dead merely steadying a rocking cart. There was no palace gleaming in gold and tapestries or a regent sitting on his throne, scepter in hand.

Oh, God did break the night sky with the song of angels! But only to a few shepherds in the back hills of Bethlehem watching their sheep. This message was not given to the heralds of a potentate dressed in livery. The message of the arrival of God's all-powerful Word was given to a few men, struck with fear and wonder. They ran to find what the angels had told them to look for: a Savior, the Messiah, the Lord! Those three words were not anything ordinary. A liberator, the anointed one that had been so long awaited and, the one who is called Lord! How could they find that one?

There were no moats to cross, guards to confront, protocol to be instructed in, like the kowtow performed in the past before the Emperor of China, bowing with a bounce of your head to the floor three times accompanied by nine prostrations. These shepherds merely ran and found the cave, a stable, the kind of place very familiar to them watching their flocks in those lonely fields when shelter was needed from harsh weather. Joseph may have rigged something to shield them from the cold of the night. But there was no door to bar their entry, hold them at bay. The shepherds found exactly what the angels told them: "This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in

bands of cloth and lying in a manger" (Lk 2:12). Suddenly they stood in the very space that Jesus, the Son of God, was. There, in a cave, dressed in the lowly woven wool and skins from their sheep, they stood in presence of the Almighty Word, Son of God and born of Mary. Oh my God! Yes, Oh my God.

This choice, this action by God is a part of his revelation. The Angels told the shepherds, "Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord" (Lk 2:10). *For all the people*. God gives Jesus to us in the most common characteristic of our lives—a family. The shepherds didn't see lineage, wealth or fame. There is that familiar scene of everyday life they encounter is God's Savior, Messiah and Lord.

Jesus is *the fullness* of God's revelation to the world. There in a family, Jesus lives the longest part of his human life. There he grew and learned from his parents while being the Son of God, all for love, love for his Father and love for us. He lived in the confines of what it means to be an infant, a baby, a little boy. Jesus spent thirty years in his home. Later, during his public life, when a message was given to him that his mother and brothers were looking for him, he responded by pointing to those in front of him, "Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother, and sister and mother" (Mk 3:34-35). Pope St John Paul II wrote, "The family constitutes the primary, fundamental and irreplaceable community for man. 'The mission of being the pri-

mary vital cell of society has been given to the family by God himself" (Apostolicam Actuositatem of Vatican II, 11). Jesus lived our ordinary life, the way we all lived before a career, a marriage: the kind of life that we live here at the monastery—simple living interspersed by times of prayer.

In our Chapter Room we have a picture hanging on the wall. It is not a great work of art. On the back of the image is a note: "From Mama Tieman." This was a wedding gift to our Sr Mary Herbert Walsh's parents, who married in 1910. At that time, it was a tradition to give a picture of the Holy Family as a wedding present to the new couple—their new vocation. And so too, your homes are this holy place, the place God called those shepherds find Jesus in! God is not far away—he is here, with us where we live, pouring grace for our journey to our "family home" in heaven! Merry Christmas! MMEK



Just such a great picture of Sr Maria and Br Jerome

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are men and women, popes and tertiaries, royalty and paupers, centenarians and teenagers, soldiers, writers, housewives, teachers, slaves, and martyrs from the 1st century to the 20th century.

Just like good friends, the saints and their stories can inspire, strengthen and encourage us. Having this collection is like being able to visit with and pay respect to an honored ancestor: relics of the saints can give us inspiration. "Wow! If this person was able to accomplish so much good through their simple life, maybe I, too, can do something to further God's kingdom on earth."

Relics can give us fortitude. "If that person was willing to die for his/her faith, maybe with God's grace I'll get through my present suffering."

Relics can give us hope. "If this person, with all his/her challenges, can get to heaven, then, with God's help, maybe I can too."

Relics can help draw us closer to God. And isn't that what friends are for?!

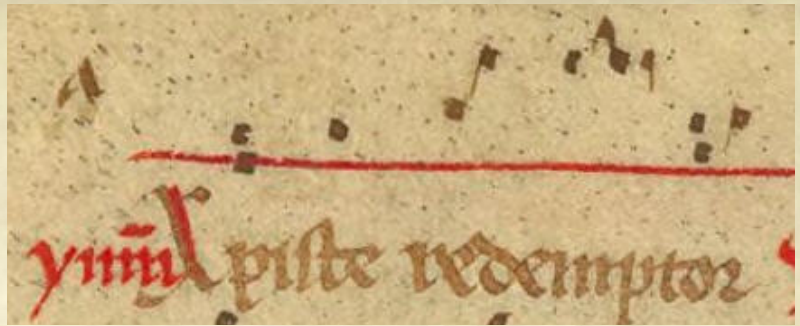
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## Christ Redeemer of All

Music, like the sense of smell, can trigger memory. I have only to hear a popular Christmas carol like "I'm Dreaming of a White Christmas," and I'm filled with nostalgia for my long-ago family home, with parents, siblings and extended family seated around the table laden with Christmas fare.

Another piece of music takes me back in time: the 6<sup>th</sup> century hymn "Christe Redemptor omnium" (Christ, Redeemer of all), sung Christmas day and throughout Christmastide. I had joined the community in late September, and my immersion into the liturgy and Gregorian chant was beginning. "Christe Redemptor omnium" is the first chant that took really root in me, and at Vespers of Christmas every year since then, the moment its first lilting phrase is intoned I'm transported back all those years ago: I'm a postulant sitting right under the big Christmas wreath in what was our small chapel, singing this lovely hymn to our newborn Savior.

The melody is a perfectly cut gem: the first verse fairly dances with joy, the second soars up to heaven and pauses in the clouds before the next circles gracefully downward, and then - as sometimes happens in chant hymns - the final verse is identical to the first, the two forming a perfectly balanced bracket. Is it any wonder I love this hymn?

And the words! Addressed to Christ, they form a perfect meditation on the gift of our salvation through his Incarnation, one you might want to use for Christmastide prayer. If you search the

internet for "Christe Redemptor omnium" you'll find performances of this liturgical treasure. I hope you love it as much as I do!

O Christ, Redeemer of all men,  
Only Son of the Father, alone  
born of the Father before the  
beginning of time in a wondrous  
manner.

You are the light, you the splendor of the Father, the lasting hope of all mankind; hear the prayers which your servants throughout the world pour out.

Remember, O Author of our salvation, that once you did take the form of our body by being born by a stainless virgin.

So this day, coming in the cycle of the year, bears witness that you alone did come from the throne of the Father, the salvation of the world.

Heaven, earth and sea, and all that is in them, praising the news of your coming, exult with song.

We also, who have been redeemed by your Precious Blood, sing a new hymn on account of the day of your birth.

To you, O Lord, who were born of the Virgin, be glory, together with the Father and the Holy Spirit forever and ever. Amen.

# HAPPENINGS

August 11-14 Sr. Christine surprised her Aunt Cathy and Uncle Harry for their 50th wedding anniversary. She had been a part of their wedding party as a junior bridesmaid! While there she spent time with her brother Kim and sister Heidi revisiting the place their parents used to take them - Disney World and Epcot Center.



August 18 A high school classmate from their days at Marian Catholic High School visited Mother Mary Elizabeth. It was a joy to have them experience the liturgy and community whom they have supported for years now. Alice and Paul gifted the community with a book written by their son, Nathaniel, a professor at St Meinrad Seminary, Indiana: *Authentic Liturgy: Minds in Tune with Voices*. It is delightful how often he cites St Benedict!



On August 22—The Feast the Queenship of Mary—The sisters kept the tradition of a procession from the church to the cemetery where six of the sisters who died in Tickfaw, Louisiana at Our Lady Queen Monastery are now buried, and ending at the statue of Our Lady Queen. At the end of Compline our two communities process out of church to surround that image all lit up with candles to sing our goodnight hymn to Mary, "Ave Regina Caelorum." The nuns, monks and guests linger after in the quiet prayer and wonder.



August 24-31 We had the joy of having three nuns from Our Lady of the Desert, New Mexico, with us. This is one of the communities we are intending to form a congregation with. It was a chance to learn more about one another and share a little bit of New England with them. They live in the high desert with red rock, shrub trees and wide open sky! Please pray along with us for the speedy approval of the constitutions that are presently at the Dicastery for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life in Rome.



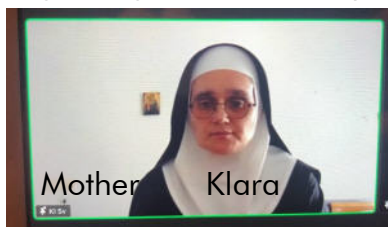
Above at the Quabbin Reservoir. New England Lobster and Good bves. So oood to have them with us!



September 3 We celebrated Fr. Gregory's patronal feast. The monks and nuns join together on the feast days of the superiors of either house for a celebration and meal. The theme was inspired from his own early artworks!



Sept 9 Mother Mary Elizabeth attended a Zoom CIB Meeting. During that meeting Mother Abbess Klara Swiderska, spoke from Ukraine and told about their ordeal of fleeing their monastery and how they are resettled caring for refugees in their monastery.



September 19 Covid hit St Mary's Monastery. Five of the seven monks were down with it. By a miracle only one of the nuns! For a week we were not able to have Mass with both of our priests sick. We all adapted and helped one another as we could. Slowly but surely all returned to their choir stalls and the liturgy returned to the normal times and ritual.



September 24—Was in the works to be an Oblate Retreat. But it had to be canceled due to the pandemic hitting us! We hope and pray we will be able to resume in the spring. We live in hope!



September 24 On the day Lynne Shaw, our "Priory Nurse" celebrated her birthday. But the day took a sudden turn and she became seriously ill. We ask your prayers for her full recovery.

November 7-8 Some of us saw the eclipse and the Blood Moon. We thought we would share one of the photos Sr Martha took bundled up in a jacket outside that frigid morning!



November 14 Sr. Mary Frances has begun a new series of organ lessons at Holy Cross Cathedral with our old friend Leo Abbott. She is thrilled to be playing the historic E. & G. G. Hook & Hastings organ.



October 7-9 Was our Monastic Experience Weekend. Eight women came to our delight. Please keep them in your prayers. We are happy to help listen to the Lord's call wherever that is and for us too.

## What Are Friends For?

When Sr Mary Herbert, Sr Maria, and Sr Christine arrived at St Scholastica's from Louisiana, they brought over 300 friends along with them. A benefactor from Baton Rouge had introduced them in the early 1990's, and they've been close ever since. They even reside in Petersham ... in four glass-fronted curio cabinets near our house chapel! "They" are a collection of saints' relics.

persecutions in the early Church, people wanted to honor those who died for their faith and to pass down their memory. A letter from the year 156 recounts that after the bishop Polycarp was martyred, his flock "... took up the bones, which are more valuable than precious stones ... and laid them in a suitable place, where the Lord will permit us to gather ... to celebrate the birthday of his martyrdom." Sometimes God was known to manifest his power through miracles which occurred when these places of burial were visited. This part of the story even has basis in Scripture: in II Kings 13:20-1, a dead man came back to life when the body contacted Elisha's bones; in Acts 19:11-12, the sick were cured when touched by cloths that had been touched by Paul.



October 23-30 Our annual retreat and we are having a retreat master from St. Procopius Abbey, in Lisle, Illinois area. His conferences were about the role and reforming emotions to help us on our journey. How often do our emotions give us a message that unleash a whole narrative in our mind from which we art only to discover later we were wrong.

Thanks to Sisters Emmanuel and Maria Isabel, we now know exactly who all our friends are! After an 8-year labor of love undertaken in their free time, the sisters have completed the daunting project of curating the collection, cataloguing the authentication documents, and compiling the stories of our sainted guests. As it turns out, the vast majority are "ex ossibus" (bone fragment) and, therefore, 1<sup>st</sup> class relics. Many others are 2<sup>nd</sup> class "ex indumentis" (from the clothing).

St Jerome sensibly reminds us, "We do not worship, we do not adore ... but we venerate relics ... in order to better adore him whose [saints] they are."

It's easy to understand why some people might be put off by relics, but consider: have you kept a lock of hair from your child's first haircut? Or the first baby tooth they lost? Can you just not let go of your grandfather's pipe? Do you treasure a ring left to you by your mother? Maybe an uncle's bowling league shirt? Or a game ball autographed by your favorite team? Then you've got relics too! - something you cherish because it belonged to, and reminds you of, someone you love. Our saints' relics are a tangible, enduring presence of those who have gone before us in faith, about whose lives we read and reflect.

Relics from saints remind us that they were flesh and blood human beings who led very human lives, with flaws and foibles, just like us. Within our collection is proof that they, indeed, came from a multitude of backgrounds, countries, cultures, historical eras. Among our 324 relics there

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November 5—Sr. Mechtilde's grandmother Patricia Howell died surrounded by most of her family at home in Florida. We had the joy of her visiting us several times!

That natural human desire to remember and draw strength from our predecessors is really how the Catholic custom of venerating saints' relics got started. During the

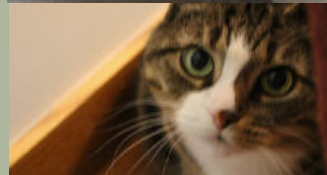


RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED



*Holy, Happy Christmas to you!*

*Our gift to you  
is a Novena of Masses for your  
Intentions during Christmastide!*



Dear Friends - Merry Christmas!

This newsletter is our Christmas card to your home. It carries our warmest Christmas wishes to you!

The Liturgical Year ( begins in Advent and ends with the week following Christ the King) is a great gift. It leads us through each year. It is constant - no matter what may be happening in the world. We return again to Christmas and the gift of Jesus to us all! He is our anchor, our hope and our joy!

On Holy Saturday night, when we stand in the dark to light the Easter Candle, it is prepared as the priest traces the Cross, the Alpha and Omega and the numbers of the new year. One of the phrases is "All time belongs to him." And so, we will be holding you and your loved ones in this New Year of the Lord of 2023 and ask him to draw you ever closer to him and in his love. Pray for us too! All our love and prayers,

*Mother Mary Elizabeth, Sr Mary Angela, Sr Monica, Sr Mary Frances, Sr Gemma, Sr Christine, Sr Maria, Sr Mary Paula, Sr Emmanuel, Sr Maria Isabel, Sr Mechtilde and Sr Martha!*