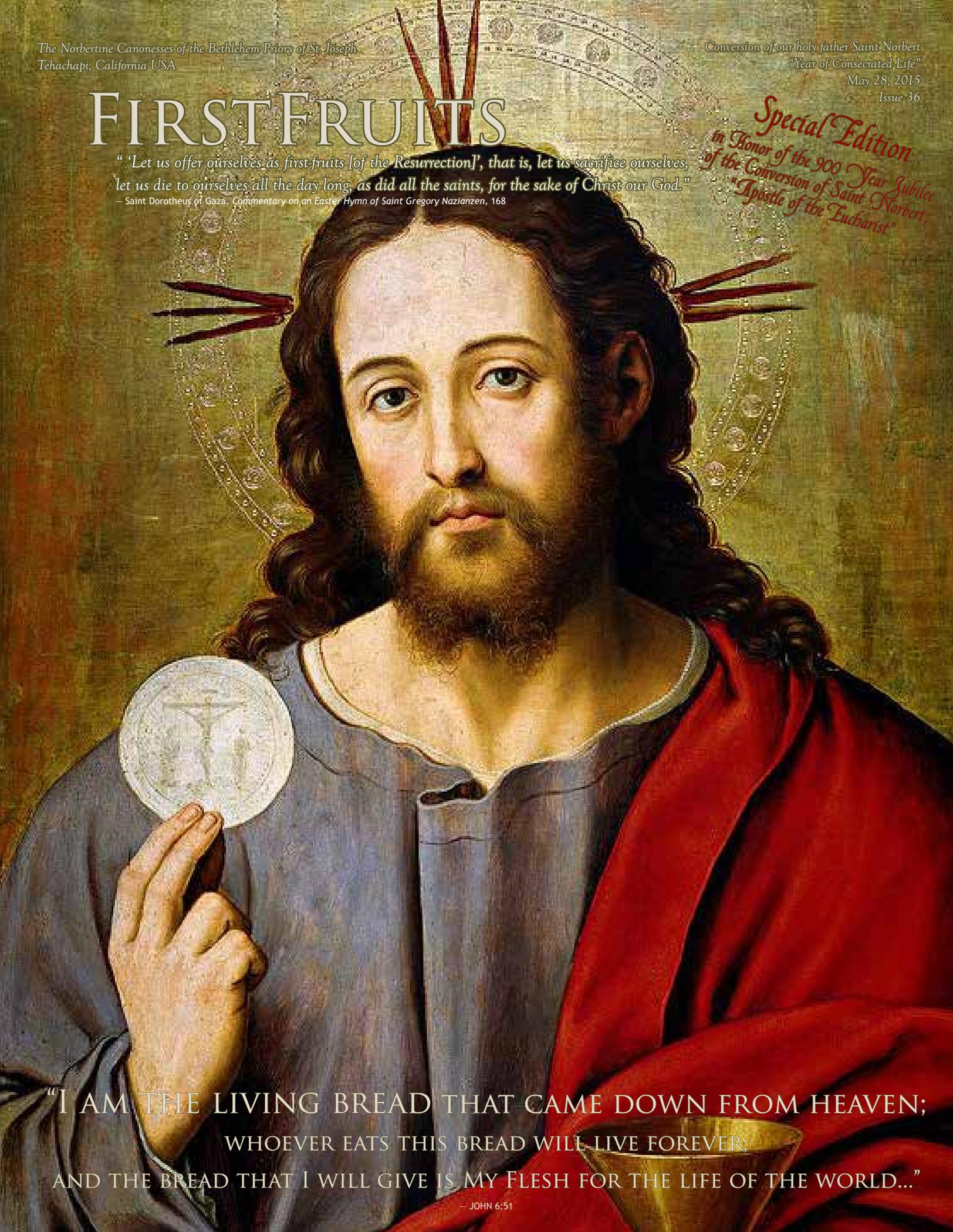


# FIRST FRUITS

"Let us offer ourselves as first-fruits [of the Resurrection], that is, let us sacrifice ourselves, let us die to ourselves all the day long, as did all the saints, for the sake of Christ our God."

— Saint Dorotheus of Gaza, Commentary on an Easter Hymn of Saint Gregory Nazianzen, 168

*Special Edition*  
*in Honor of the 900 Year Jubilee*  
*of the Conversion of Saint Norbert,*  
*"Apostle of the Eucharist"*



"I AM THE LIVING BREAD THAT CAME DOWN FROM HEAVEN;  
WHOEVER EATS THIS BREAD WILL LIVE FOREVER;  
AND THE BREAD THAT I WILL GIVE IS MY FLESH FOR THE LIFE OF THE WORLD..."

Lumen Christi!



Deo gratias!

Our Provost, Rev. Alphonsus Mary Hermes, O. Praem., leads the procession into the chapel during the Lucernarium of the Easter Vigil with the Paschal Candle, which represents the light of the Risen Christ

The gift of our contemplative vocation is not merely to know and enjoy God for ourselves, but we exist for you and for those you love, namely, to offer prayers and sacrifices for the salvation of all souls. Our lips move in prayer in union with the desires of our heart to the Father of Light for all those in need, but especially for those who reject Christ's Cross. We pray that the Eternal Father may cause to shine in all hearts a ray of that Light which once transformed Saul into Paul, and cast both him and, ten centuries later, Norbert off their proud steeds; that same Light which transfigured the wayward hearts of Magdalene and Peter into stalwart hearts of fidelity.

Beloved Confreres, Parents, Family, Benefactors and Friends,

Laudetur Jesus Christus! "Whoever remains in Me and I in him will bear much fruit, because without Me you can do nothing" [JOHN 15:5]. In this grace-filled "Year of Consecrated Life," we rejoice in another blessing, the 900th anniversary of the conversion of our holy father and founder, Saint Norbert, in honor of which Pope Francis has granted a special plenary indulgence. Thrown from his horse in a Saint Paul-like manner on May 28, 1115, Norbert heard the words of the Psalm, "Turn aside from evil and do good; seek and strive after peace" [PSALM 34:15]. After a time of preparation with much prayer and penance, on the day of his priestly ordination Norbert publicly donned the undyed woolen robes of a penitent, and soon began to go about barefoot around Germany and France, preaching the Word of God.

Guided by faith, the hallmark virtue for which he became known, Saint Norbert centered his life around the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, from which he received the strength to persevere in his life of conversion. Through the transforming power of our Eucharistic Lord Jesus, the Bread of Life [JOHN 6:35, 48], he bore fruit for the Kingdom. So completely did the Holy Eucharist change him, and so ardently did Norbert and his followers combat the Eucharistic heresy of Tanchelm – who denied the Real Presence of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament – that Saint Norbert later became known as the "Apostle of the Eucharist."

In this month of May, dedicated to Mary, we would be remiss not to recall the profound devotion of Saint Norbert to the Blessed Virgin, daily celebrating a Mass in her honor and entrusting Prémontré to her patronage. Mary always points the way to union with her Divine Son, as Pope Francis reminds us, saying:

*I entrust this Year of Consecrated Life to Mary, the Virgin of listening and contemplation, the first disciple of her beloved Son. Let us look to her, the highly-beloved daughter of the Father, endowed with every gift of grace, as the unsurpassed model for all those who follow Christ in love of God and service to their neighbor* [Apostolic Letter to All Consecrated People, III.5].

May Mary teach us to receive her Son in the Holy Eucharist with humility and love, allowing ourselves to be converted and transformed through His abiding Presence...

To Jesus, our Eucharistic Lord, through Mary, His Mother and ours,

*Mother Mary Augustina O. Praem.*

Mother Mary Augustine, O. Praem., Prioress & the Norbertine Canonesses of the Bethlehem Priory of St. Joseph



ART: Our holy father Saint Norbert, from the Norbertine Abbey of Csorna, Hungary, our "grandmother abbey"



*"Hold high the Eucharist over all the miseries and errors of the world."*

[Pope Saint John Paul II to the Norbertine Order, October 7, 1985]

When he divested himself of his goods, he kept only a Mass kit so that he could celebrate easily and everywhere. Contrary to custom [at the time], he celebrated Mass every day, and it was after offering the eucharistic sacrifice that he loved to preach, while his heart was overflowing with the love he had drawn from contact with Christ. Among his recommendations to the brothers, he liked to tell them: 'It is at the altar that we show our faith and our love of God.' This explains why the Norbertines took special care in the celebration of the Mass and the decoration of their churches. At Prémontré, the canons surrounded the altar with splendor and solemnity, since it was the place of sacrifice. Everything in the life of Saint Norbert and his first disciples highlights the central place of the Eucharist. Set in the divine office, it is the heart of the canonical community, just as it was for the first Christian community in Jerusalem."

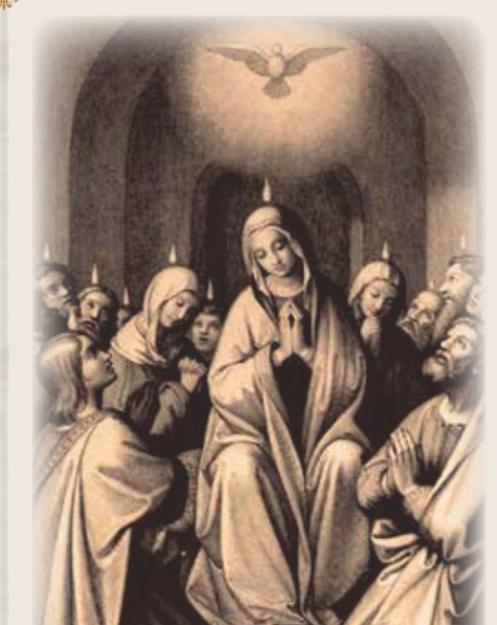
[Rev. Bernard Ardura, O. Praem., *The Order of Prémontré: History and Spirituality*, pp. 26-27]

# THE HOLY EUCHARIST

## IN OUR NORBERTINE CANONICAL LIFE

*Set in the Divine Office, the Holy Eucharist is the heart of the canonical community, just as it was for the first Christian community in Jerusalem.*

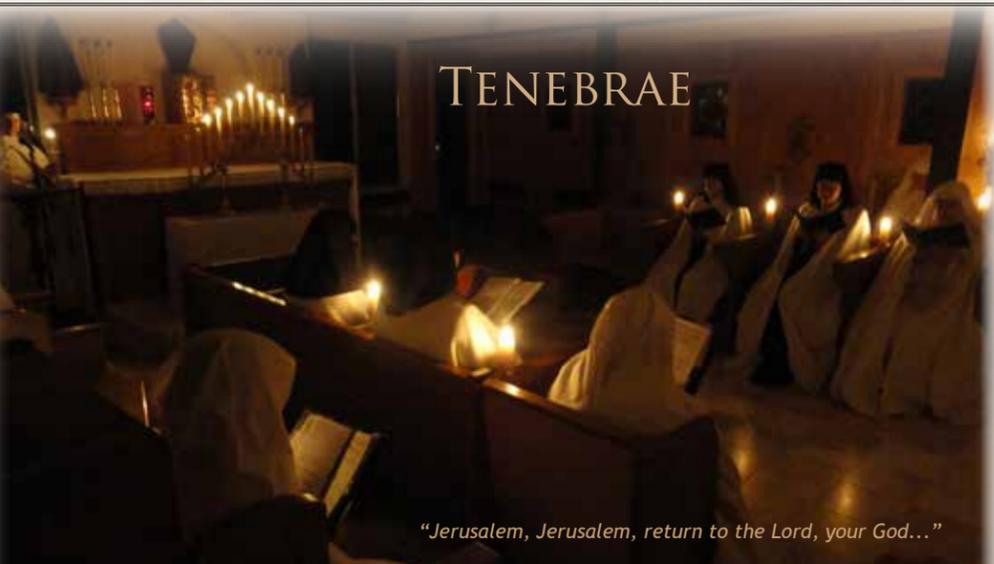
"The Eucharist, the heart of liturgical prayer, occupied such a place at Prémontré and in the life of Saint Norbert that later tradition made Norbert 'the Apostle of the Eucharist.' Reading the Acts of the Apostles, in which appears the early Christian community, Norbert discovered, in the words of Saint Luke, the characteristic trait of the first Christians: 'They devoted themselves to the breaking of the bread' [ACTS 2:42]. The Church has always regarded the Eucharist as the source and summit of its interior life and pastoral mission. Saint Norbert made the Mass the center of his spiritual life and ministry.



The early Church prayerfully gathered around Mary, the Mother of Jesus and Mother of the Church, is the ideal of our Norbertine way of life.

*Canons and canonesses regular are members of religious communities to whom Holy Mother Church has particularly entrusted the public and solemn celebration of the Sacred Liturgy. As a living image of the Church, the Bride of Christ, the canoness unites herself to the Divine Bridegroom in love before the throne of His Father, glorifying Him and interceding for the needs of the whole world. Participation in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and praying the seven canonical hours of the Divine Office in choir (i.e., chanted by the whole community together in our chapel) thus is the first and essential form of our apostolate. To do this work more perfectly, following the Rule of Saint Augustine, we are devoted to a life of contemplation and monastic observance, having all things in common and striving for one mind and heart on the way to God like the first Christian community in the Acts of the Apostles.*

## TENEBRAE



*"Jerusalem, Jerusalem, return to the Lord, your God..."*

## The Solemn Celebration of the Sacred Liturgy...

Tenebrae ("Darkness") is the combined Office of Matins and Lauds celebrated during the early morning hours of Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday. As the psalms and chants are sung, the candles are extinguished one by one, symbolizing the apostles and disciples deserting Our Lord. In our Norbertine tradition, we end with a special litany as the last candle, representing Christ our Light, is hidden behind the altar. On Holy Saturday, this last candle is blown out, in remembrance of Our Lord's death, and we await the lighting of the Paschal Candle at the Easter Vigil, which will announce His glorious resurrection.

## PLENARY INDULGENCE FOR THE 900 YEAR JUBILEE OF THE CONVERSION OF OUR HOLY FATHER SAINT NORBERT

*Jubilee Year: May 28, 2015 - June 6, 2016*

- May 28, 2015: Conversion of Saint Norbert, opening of the Jubilee Year
- June 6: Solemnity of Saint Norbert
- June 15: Saint Isfrid, bishop
- July 9: Saints Adrian and James, martyrs
- July 14: Blessed Hroznata, martyr
- August 13: Blessed Gertrude, virgin
- August 28: Solemnity of our holy father Saint Augustine
- August 30: Blessed Bronislava, virgin
- October 13: Blessed Peter Adrian, martyr
- October 20: Blessed James Kern, religious
- October 26: Saint Gilbert, abbot

- November 13: All Norbertine Saints
- November 14: Saint Siard, abbot
- January 14: Saint Godfrey, religious
- February 4: Saint Frederick, abbot
- February 10: Blessed Hugh, first abbot of Prémontré
- February 17: Saint Evermode, bishop
- April 24: Conversion of Saint Augustine
- April 26: Saint Ludolph, bishop and martyr
- May 7: Translation of Saint Norbert
- May 24: Saint Herman Joseph, religious
- June 6, 2016: Solemnity of Saint Norbert, closing of the Jubilee Year



We rejoiced to learn from our Father Abbot General Thomas Handgrätiger, O. Praem., that Pope Francis has granted the gift of a plenary indulgence on the occasion of the nine hundred year Jubilee of the conversion of our holy father, Saint Norbert (May 28, 2015 - June 6, 2016) to the Canons, Brothers and Sisters of our Order, and to the faithful who come to pray in our churches, motivated by authentic penitence and charity, and under the usual conditions of Sacramental Confession, Eucharistic Communion, and prayer for the intentions of the Holy Father. The plenary indulgence may be obtained in the principal church of each canonry by pausing in prayer before a statue or image of Saint Norbert, concluding this time of meditation with the Our Father, the Creed, and some invocation of the Most Holy Mary and of Saint Norbert, specifically on the days at LEFT (feast days of the saints of our Norbertine Order and of Saint Augustine, whose Rule we follow).

*We welcome you to join us for prayer in our lay chapel, as we celebrate this jubilee year. Please see page 6 for our horarium (schedule).*

✦ 1115: ROAD TO VREDEN, GERMANY

HOW THE GRACE OF GOD VISITED NORBERT

Norbert was a German from illustrious Frankish and Salic German stock. He was wealthy, handsome, thin and somewhat tall and full grown. Educated in both literature and the ways of the court and the world, Norbert was a good speaker, a cleric, a subdeacon. Well-known in the courts of the great and the emperor, he was loved and honored. He was pleasing to everyone and open to all. Norbert denied himself nothing and left nothing that he desired untried. He gulped down the past, devoured the present, anticipated the future. He moved forward with his eyes closed and his head turned backwards, ignorant of what the future held or what the next day had in store for him. Even worse, he almost did not care. Norbert had no time for piety and quiet. He was a slave to unrest and impatience.

The sound of human applause, so sweet to the ear, declaring, "well done, well done," expanded the hope of his longings and broadened the desires of his heart. By comparison, the promise of the kingdom of heaven or the threat of the burning fires of hell or other similar ideas sounded mild and unthreatening. Such words were unappealing and confusing, offensive and annoying, like the ravings of old men or childish foolishness. In a word, anything that did not double his approval ratings seemed to Norbert like empty words and a fabled story...

Accompanied by a single servant, Norbert hastened alone to a place called Frethen. But while he was riding along dressed in silk and on a fine horse, thunder roared and a bolt of lightning struck the ground before the horse's feet. It scorched the grass, splitting and opening the earth to a greater depth than that of a man's height. It was a crack no one could bear to hear. The powerful hand of the Lord cast down the rider. He lay there, as did the horse, unconscious almost to the point of death. The place and the man's clothing stank. It was the stench of sulphur, like the fire of hell.

After an hour the man rose as from a deep sleep. Coming to himself, he was touched with grief of heart and began to say to himself: "Lord, what do you want me to do?" Immediately, as if God were responding: "Turn from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it." Norbert went no farther. Nor did he cross the ditch the Lord had dug for him. Rather, reflecting on the Lord's mercies, that He is good, that His mercy is forever, Norbert returned home.

From this time on, the fire of Divine Love which had been ignited gradually expanded. Returning to his senses and strengthening his spirit and reflecting on higher counsels, Norbert changed all the efforts of his life into a completely other and altogether different direction...

[adapted from a 12th Century Life of Saint Norbert, *Vita Norberti B*, I.3-II.8, translated by Rev. Theodore Antry, O. Praem.]

✦ 1121: PRÉMONTRÉ, FRANCE

Christmas 1121 marks our Order's beginning in the cross-shaped valley of Prémontré, when Norbert and his companions professed their vows



✦ 1180: CSORNA, HUNGARY

60 years later, Norbertines founded our

"grandmother abbey" of St. Michael in Csorna (CHOR-na), Hungary, which survived three suppressions, most recently under the Communist regime, and still exists today



✦ 900TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE CONVERSION OF OUR HOLY FATHER SAINT NORBERT  
May 28, 2015



ART: Saint Norbert and the Family Tree of Norbertine Saints, from the choir of the Norbertine Canonesses, Zwierzyniec, Poland

**“O God,** Who made our holy Father Norbert, Your faithful pastor, an outstanding herald of Your word and through him have called many to a conversion of ways: grant, we beseech You, that with the support of his merits and with Your help, we may imitate what he taught in word and in deed. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, Your Son, Who lives and reigns with You in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God forever and ever. Amen.”

— Prayer in honor of Saint Norbert, as found in the *Hagiologion: Lives of the Saints, Blessed, and Memorable Personages of the Norbertine Order*, edited by Rev. Donatian DeClerck, O. Praem., with the cooperation of Rev. Gabriel Wolf, O. Praem., and translated by Rev. Hubert Szanto, O. Praem.



✦ 1961: ORANGE, CALIFORNIA, USA

Escaping from behind the iron curtain in 1950, seven Hungarian Norbertines from Csorna came to the United States. Welcomed and assisted by confreres of the Norbertine Abbey of De Pere, Wisconsin, they resumed common life in California in 1957, eventually founding St. Michael's Abbey in the Diocese of Orange



Six of the seven Hungarian founding fathers with some of their early American vocations, including our Father Abbot Eugene



Our first five Sisters chant the Office with the confreres at St. Michael's Abbey, Orange, prior to establishing our cloister in Tehachapi



✦ 2000: TEHACHAPI, CALIFORNIA, USA

The first house of Norbertine canonesses in North America, our community was founded in 1997 by St. Michael's Abbey, Orange, with five women and erected as a public association of the faithful, finding a permanent home in Tehachapi in the Diocese of Fresno in 2000. In 2011, the Bethlehem Priory of St. Joseph was incorporated into the Norbertine Order and erected as an independent canonry.



Our Pater Abbas, the Rt. Rev. Eugene Hayes, O. Praem., with our first five Sisters



The erection of our canonry and solemn profession of nine canonesses, held at the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist, Fresno, to accommodate our many guests

PHOTO BY R. BELCHER

ART: Conversion of Saint Norbert, from the Norbertine Abbey of Csorna, Hungary, our "grandmother abbey"



RIGHT: The Rt. Rev. Ladislav Parker, O. Praem., who would become the first abbot of St. Michael's Abbey in Orange, California, with a painting of his abbot of Csorna, the Rt. Rev. Eugene Simonffy, O. Praem.

**OUR HORARIUM (OR SCHEDULE)**  
(Please call for our Friday and Sunday schedules)

Midnight Vigils – Office of Readings (Matins)  
 6:00 am Morning prayer (Lauds) & Angelus  
 6:30 am Martyrology & Chapter  
 7:15 am Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament & Mid-morning prayer (Terce)  
 8:20 am Benediction  
 8:30 am The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass  
 10:00 am Work, Class, or Study  
 11:45 am Mid-day prayer (Sext), Angelus & Rosary  
 1:00 pm Mid-afternoon prayer (None)  
 1:30 pm Grand Silence - prayer, rest, exercise, etc.  
 2:30 pm Work, Class, or Study  
 5:15 pm Evening prayer (Vespers) & Angelus  
 5:45 pm *Lectio Divina*  
 6:30 pm Supper, followed by Recreation  
 8:00 pm Night prayer (Compline)  
 9:00 pm "Lights Out"



One of our Great Pyrenees, Grace, eager to help Sister with our baby animals

*Transformation in Christ...*  
 "PRAY FOR MY CONVERSION"

A strange request on the lips of religious? Not at all, and certainly not for spiritual daughters of the great converts Saint Augustine and Saint Norbert, vowing as we do at profession the conversion of our ways. Both saints knew well that conversion does not end with the initial rejection of sin and choice of God. Instead, this is only the beginning of a life-long journey toward the perfection of charity, with its daily dying to self, falls and rising again through the grace of the Risen Lord. Both saints emphasized this element of the Christian life in their communities. In his Rule, Saint Augustine declares pointedly: "An individual who absolutely refuses to ask pardon, or does so without meaning it [cf. MATTHEW 18:35] is entirely out of place in the monastery..." [v.1.2] while the daily chapter of faults was one of the three things Saint Norbert especially recommended (together with reverent liturgical worship and care for the poor) [vita Norberti B, Ch. XXV]. Is such an attitude neurotic and out-dated? Pope Francis does not think so. Prior to his pontificate, and inspired by writings of Saint Dorotheus of Gaza [cf. Liturgy of the Hours, Office of Readings, Week 9 of Ordinary Time, Monday and Tuesday], he wrote of what he called "one of the solid attitudes that needs to be formed in the heart of young religious." He said: "At the basis of self-accusation (which is a means to an end) lies a fundamental choice against individualism, a choice instead of the family spirit of the Church, which leads us to behave as good sons and daughters, good brothers and sisters, so as to become, in due course, good spiritual fathers and mothers" ["On Self-Accusation," in *The Way of Humility*, 64]. It is all about perfect love, the Love flowing from the pierced Heart of Jesus, through whom alone we can bear fruit for the glory of the Father [cf. JOHN 15:5].

✦ **Actualizing *Communio* by the Praxis of the Common Life**

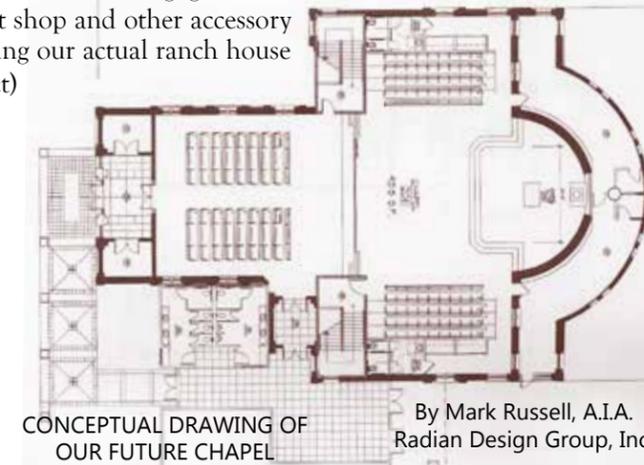
Our Norbertine Constitutions highlight some of the vital monastic traditions regulating our common life that help to actualize *communio* in our communities: ✦ **Asceticism of the Common Life** ✦ **Common Exercises** (Common Prayer, Meals, Work, Recreation) ✦ **Habit** ✦ **Cloister** ✦ **Daily Work** ✦ **Common Storehouse** ✦ **Courtesy** ✦ **Silence** ✦ **Day Order** ✦ **Care of the Sick** ✦ **Suffrages for the Deceased** [Constitutions of the Canonesses Regular of Prémontré, nn. 77-88]

*Bethlehem Priory of St. Joseph*  
**FUNDING UPDATES**

With much gratitude for your continuing support, we thank you in advance for your prayers and material help with our two most pressing capital projects:

**1. FUTURE CHAPEL & ACCESSORY AREAS**  
 (PHASE II OF OUR MONASTERY EXPANSION PROJECT)

To replace our current temporary chapel (located in the former living/game room of our converted ranch house), and including a wing 72 feet long for the gift shop and other accessory areas, connecting to a future building replacing our actual ranch house (Phase III of our monastery expansion project)



**2. PAYMENT OF OUR LAND TO ST. MICHAEL'S ABBEY**

With funds from your generous donations and our operations, in April 2015 we purchased our land from St. Michael's Abbey with a down payment of \$1,225,000 and a remaining balance of \$800,000



View of the monastery property located at 5,500 feet in the Tehachapi Mountains

Your tax-deductible\* monetary gift, of whatever amount, will continue to make a difference in our lives:

1. Make checks to: "Norbertine Canonesses" (Memo: Please specify "Chapel Fund" or "Land Fund")
2. Donate via PayPal on our website: [www.norbertinesisters.org](http://www.norbertinesisters.org) for on-line credit card donations

\* We are a 501(c)(3) religious non-profit organization.

One heart, one mind, and one voice!



Novitiate Chant Class

Learning to give external expression to *communio* by also becoming *una voce*, "one voice"



Constitutions Class

Drawing on his experience as former procurator general of the Norbertine Order and his involvement in the drafting process of the current *Constitutions of the Canonesses Regular of Prémontré*, our *Pater Abbas*, the Rt. Rev. Eugene Hayes, O. Praem., recently concluded his course on the *Constitutions* – our first classes on them since they were translated into English!  
 [Photo taken during a Christmastide class]

**OUR MILKING PARLOR MODIFICATIONS BEGIN...**  
*May God reward you!*

On April 22<sup>nd</sup>, the pouring of concrete marked an important step in our milking parlor modifications. A special thanks to Ron Vander Weerd and his crew for their generous assistance in this project!



Thanks to your generosity, we have reached our goal of \$75,000 for the required modifications of our milking parlor and surrounding areas. In April, we began the process of meeting these additional requirements, which are necessary to receive the licenses and permits for our Grade A Dairy for producing our cheese.



THE NORBERTINE CANONESSES OF THE BETHLEHEM PRIORY OF ST. JOSEPH  
17831 Water Canyon Road  
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A special thank you to our friends at Berchtold Equipment and Benz Companies for their generous donations of machinery and roll-off containers, respectively, for the demolition and foundational work of one of our current building projects

**- BETHANY GUEST HOUSE -**  
Sharing with you the Norbertine charism of prayer and hospitality



For parents visiting from afar, for those discerning religious vocations, for anyone seeking a time of

more intense prayer and solitude...it's for you. (Day visits and overnight stays are possible.)

Call now to schedule your visit and for details (weather, dress, etc.): (661) 823-1066

**ST. NORBERT MEDAL & STATUE**

Please see our website, [www.norbertinesisters.org](http://www.norbertinesisters.org), to learn more about the Saint Norbert statue and medals commissioned by the Norbertine Canonesses.

Now Available:  
Bronze Medal



**SACRED VESTMENTS**



If you are interested in purchasing our vestments made by the Sisters, please contact us at:

(661) 823-1066 or e-mail at: MotherMaryA@aol.com

**THE NORBERTINE CANONESSES' MONASTERY GIFT SHOP**

Welcome!  
Open 10-11:30 am & 2:30-5:00 pm daily (Friday 4:15 pm)

Our inventory includes religious goods & books; home-made biscotti, jam, honey, & apothecary items; aprons, baptismal baby blankets; & dried flower, calligraphy & other greeting cards.



Ask about our gift certificates & prayer enrollment cards.

**ART ON THE COVER:**

"El Salvador" (The Savior), c. 1550  
by Juan de Juanes

*It is said that Juan de Juanes never painted unless he had received Holy Communion, and that he accompanied his painting with prayer and fasting. This image of Our Lord was painted for the tabernacle of the high altar of the Church of the Nativity in Fuente de la Higuera (Valencia), flanked by paintings of Melchizedek and Aaron.*

A special thank you to the friends who funded this issue of our *FirstFruits* newsletter!

To learn more about our cloistered contemplative Norbertine way of life, make prayer requests, inquire about our vestments, gift shop, or Bethany Guest House, you are welcome to phone (661) 823-1066 or email us: [pray\\_req@cybersurfers.net](mailto:pray_req@cybersurfers.net) or [MotherMaryA@aol.com](mailto:MotherMaryA@aol.com).

Also, please kindly help us update our address & email database by sending us your current information.

Please check [www.norbertinesisters.org](http://www.norbertinesisters.org) for the downloadable version of this newsletter.

*May God reward you for helping to build this first North American foundation of Norbertine Canonesses!*