

FIRSTFRUITS

"Yet already we have the FirstFruits of the Spirit, and have we not also other reasons for rejoicing? For we are drawing near to the One we love, and not only are we drawing near — we even have some slight feeling and taste of the banquet we shall one day eagerly eat and drink."

— St. Augustine, Sermon 21, 1-4

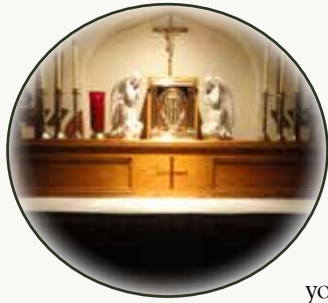
*Honoring the
Incarnation of Our Lord,
with Thanksgiving for
Our Lady's "Fiat"*

"What did Jesus actually bring, if not world peace, universal prosperity, and a better world? What has He brought?"

THE ANSWER IS VERY SIMPLE: — *God* — HE HAS BROUGHT GOD."

— Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth*

❄️ *And the Word, was made flesh, and made His dwelling among us* ❄️



Beloved Confreres, Parents, Family, Benefactors and Friends,

May the peace and joy of the Christ-Child fill you during this sacred season. As Holy Mother Church leads us from the grace-filled Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy to the blessings of Christmas, we invite you to reflect with us anew in this *FirstFruits* on the inestimable gift of the Incarnation. For when the Word

became Flesh and took on our human nature, the way God relates to man was forever changed. *"Jesus has brought God, and now we know his face and can call upon Him. Now we can know the path that we human beings have to take in this world."* [Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth*] Reconciling us with the Father, enabling us to share in His divine nature, to grow in union with God and His holy will, Jesus shows us the path to true peace and happiness, the peace that the world cannot give. And He founded His Church for this very purpose: so that we can unite ourselves, through faith and the Sacraments, to our High Priest in Heaven, and receive His grace and truth, in the human fashion the Incarnation implies.

With profound gratitude, we thank each and every one of you for your faith-filled friendship, support and prayers. May Mary, Mother of God, intercede for us all, that Christ's peace, grace and truth may reign in our hearts, in the coming Year of the Lord 2017, and always.

In the Christ-Child and Our Blessed Mother,

Mother Mary Augustine O. Praem.

Mother Mary Augustine, O. Praem., Prioress

& the Norbertine Canonesses of the Bethlehem Priory of St. Joseph



— THIS IS THE TIME OF MERCY —

"Each day of our journey is marked by God's presence. He guides our steps with the power of the grace that the Spirit pours into our hearts to make them capable of loving. *It is the time of mercy* for each and all, since no one can think that he or she is cut off from God's closeness and the power of His tender love."

— Pope Francis, Apostolic Letter for the close of the Year of Mercy, *Misericordia et Misera*, November 20th, 2016

❄️ *And we saw His glory, the glory as of the Father's only Son, full of grace and truth* ❄️



"We have been predestined by the decree of Him Who works all things according to the counsel of His will, so that we may be

THE PRAISE OF HIS GLORY."

— EPHESIANS 1:11-12

"In Heaven each soul is a praise of glory of the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit.... In the heaven of her soul, the praise of glory has already begun her work of eternity....

In the heaven of our soul let us be praises of glory of the Holy Trinity, praises of love of our Immaculate Mother.

One day the veil will fall, we will be introduced into the eternal courts, and there we will sing in the bosom of infinite Love."

— St. Elizabeth of the Trinity



He has brought the God who formerly unveiled his countenance gradually, first to Abraham, then to Moses and the Prophets, and then in the Wisdom Literature – the God who reveals His face only in Israel, even though He was also honored among the pagans in various shadowy guises.

It is this God, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the true God, whom He has brought to the nations of the earth.

He has brought God, and now we know His face and can call upon Him.

Now we can know the path that we human beings have to take in this world.

Jesus has brought God and with God the truth about our origin and destiny: faith, hope, and love.

It is only because of the hardness of our hearts that we think this is too little.

Yes indeed, God's power works quietly in this world, but it is the true and lasting power.

Again and again, God's cause seems to be in the death throes.

Yet over and over again it proves to be the thing that truly endures and saves.

The earthly kingdoms that Satan was able to put before the Lord have all passed away.

Their glory has proven to be a mere semblance.

But the glory of Christ, the humble, self-sacrificing glory of His love, has not passed away,

nor will it ever do so.

— Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, excerpt from *Jesus of Nazareth*

"JESUS CHRIST IS THE SAME YESTERDAY, TODAY, AND FOREVER."

— HEBREWS 13:8



November 23, 2016



LETTER OF HIS EXCELLENCY ARMANDO OCHOA,
BISHOP OF OUR DIOCESE OF FRESNO

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

As Advent begins, our minds and hearts are drawn towards Bethlehem. Let us imagine ourselves on a four-week journey approaching Bethlehem step-by-step reflecting along the way on what and Who awaits us there.

Of course, we know the outcome of this journey. We have traveled this path many times throughout our lives, always awaiting the moment of our Savior's birth. We have memories of the traditions of our families and cultures – always ending in the celebrations marking Christmas. Each year, Advent has unfolded amidst new concerns, new challenges, new unknowns both in our personal lives as well as in our nation and world.

Perhaps this year, our anxieties and our concerns seem more intense. Our world is in turmoil on so many fronts. Each day we hear of new wars, insurrection, earthquakes, floods – our hearts heavy with feelings of confusion and questions about the future. And we here in the United States have just completed a bruising presidential campaign that highlighted alarming and dangerous divisions among us as Americans, especially in the way we speak to one another and treat one another.

I believe Advent/Christmas offers us as Catholics and as members of our national family a unique and special challenge to put away the negative rhetoric, to calm our voices, and to quiet our partisanship in order to hear and to listen to the eternal invitation of our Savior to be instruments of HOPE for our world. No matter what side of the political aisle we championed, it is now (and always has been) our call as a Catholic Community to be witnesses to and instruments of HOPE in the name of Jesus.

I call on all our people to pray for unity, civility, and respect as we move forward to continue building on our solemn pledge to be a nation that honestly proclaims "Liberty and Justice for All." I wish you and your loved ones a hope-filled Advent and a Blessed Christmas.

MOST REVEREND ARMANDO X. OCHOA, D.D.

Bishop, Diocese of Fresno



Our Bishop gives his blessing at a visit to our Priory in November 2015.



— *Retreat 2016* —

VIRTUE IN THE MONASTIC LIFE

Our annual retreat was held in July, and led by long-time community friend, Fr. Gabriel O'Donnell, O.P., who greatly assisted us during the beginning stages of our foundation. Fr. O'Donnell spoke in his conferences on the virtues - Faith, Hope, Charity, Prudence, Temperance, Justice, and Fortitude - and how they are meant to be lived out in monastic life. Virtue, Father stated, is the firm disposition to do the strong thing, to do things God's way.



— *Ongoing Formation* —

THE SPIRITUALITY OF
THE SACRAMENTS

Our confrere from St. Michael's Abbey, Fr. Thomas Nelson, O.Praem, continues to graciously give classes to our community, the current theme being the "Spirituality of the Sacraments." In his opening lectures, Fr. Thomas showed that the Sacraments were instituted by Christ so that He could remain with us always, even after His Ascension. Jesus Christ is really and truly present in the Sacraments, personally working to sanctify and purify our souls.

The Sacraments of Christ

THE MASTERWORKS OF GOD'S LOVE

Baptism

Eucharist

Matrimony

Holy Orders



"Sacraments are 'powers that come forth' from the Body of Christ, which is ever-living and life-giving.

Confession

Confirmation

Anointing of the Sick

They are actions of the Holy Spirit at work in His Body, the Church. They are 'the masterworks of God' in the new and everlasting covenant."
— Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 1116

"You have Shown Yourself to me, O Christ, face to face; I meet You in Your sacraments."
— St. Ambrose



— CHRIST'S INDISSOLUBLE ALLIANCE WITH MANKIND IN THE SACRAMENTS —

"Behold, I am with you always..." [MATTHEW 28:20] So promised our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, who "so loved the world that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him might not perish but might have eternal life" [JOHN 3:16]. "Behold, I am with you always..." Our God, from the very beginning of creation, has never been content to to bestow the gift of life and then move on to other occupations. He remains with each and every soul He creates, permanently, with relentless devotion and unwavering fidelity, scrupulously molding all events around that soul for the good of her eternal salvation, as if that one soul was the only creature He had ever, or would ever, create. "Behold, I am with you always..." These words, spoken by Him who is called "Faithful and True" [REVELATION 19:11], resound with tangible certainty every time we approach the "river of life giving water, sparkling like crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb" [REVELATION 22:1], that is, the Sacraments. In the Sacraments (Baptism, Confession, the Eucharist, Confirmation, Matrimony, Holy Orders, and Anointing of the Sick), the all-mighty, all-powerful, all-knowing God comes to dwell in the soul, to really and truly remain in her.

O sweet union of the Infinite with the finite! O indissoluble alliance between Creator and creature, between Savior and sinner! He Who is "Faithful and True" will never turn away His loving gaze, will never commit any act of infidelity. This supernatural bond can be broken only by our adultery against God, by our sins and loss of His grace, by our rejecting Him Whom our hearts long for. But His love is never cooled, and "His mercy endures forever," and as long as we breathe and our hearts beat and blood pulses through our veins, He will never, never cease drawing us to Himself through these precious gifts of His undying love, the Sacraments.

"Behold, I am with you always..."

— THE INCARNATION CHANGES EVERYTHING —
FAITH AND THE SACRAMENTS: THE WAY TO UNION WITH CHRIST

The Incarnation – the Word made flesh, God made man – indeed changed everything. The humanization of the action of God in the world of grace was not just a passing interlude in the story of God's divine love for men; it established the permanent characteristic of the Christian economy. The Sacred Humanity of Christ became the instrument through which the Holy Spirit and God's grace comes to mankind. While Christ was on earth, men could see and touch His body, receiving His grace and truth. Willing to remain with us always, Christ founded His Church and instituted the Sacraments, especially the Most Holy Eucharist, supplying the means for us to come into bodily contact with our Mediator-Priest, now sitting at the right hand of the Father in heaven, to receive from Him, in the human fashion that the Incarnation implies, the grace which gives us the dignity of God's adopted children.

As St. Thomas repeats in the *Summa Theologica*, it is faith and use of the Sacraments that bring us into union, into spiritual and bodily contact with the Risen and Ascended Lord, in order to conform us to Christ and bring us into union with the Father, our goal and destiny. Since the Son of God became man, assuming a human nature, men can become children of God only by full exercise of our humanity, using our bodies as well as our souls. These are not two arbitrary associated bonds with the Redeemer; they constitute the normal conditions of encounter between human beings. Humans cannot communicate with each other by purely spiritual intercourse; we are not angels. Our most subtle ideas and intimate affections must be given bodily expression in words, gestures and common activity if they are to be made known to others. God became man so that we may encounter Him in this human fashion. The Christian's union with Christ is not purely spiritual; on the contrary, it is human; and this necessarily implies, that, while faith is at its heart, bodily contact is essential to its fullness. If no human words are spoken, there is nothing for faith to believe; it has no truth to assent to. If the believer cannot stretch out his hand to touch Christ's body to be healed by the contact, then the Incarnation, with all of its humanization of man's encounter with the God of holiness, affects his life only imperfectly.

The Sacraments are the instruments chosen by Christ for giving effect to the disposition of His will, the prolongation of Christ as He existed in the act of redeeming mankind through His earthly mysteries. They do for persons of succeeding ages what the body of Christ did for His followers when He walked the earth. Through faith and the Sacraments, we enter bodily into the heavenly sanctuary and become united to Christ really and objectively, bodily and spiritually, in a fashion that transcends the realm of symbolism and is brought about through the infinite power of God. [Inspired by the writings of St. Thomas Aquinas and Blessed Dom Marmion; "Meeting Christ in the Sacraments," by Rev. Colman O'Neill, O.P.]



"What great richness is present in the Church's prayer when she invokes God as the Father of mercies! In the liturgy, mercy is not only repeatedly implored, but is truly received and experienced. From the beginning to the end of the Eucharistic celebration, mercy constantly appears in the dialogue between the assembly at prayer and the heart of the Father, Who rejoices to bestow His merciful love. The celebration of divine mercy culminates in the Eucharistic Sacrifice, the memorial of Christ's paschal mystery, the source of salvation for every human being, for history and for the whole world. In the Church's prayer, then, references to mercy, far from being merely exhortative, are highly performative, which is to say that as we invoke mercy with faith, it is granted to us, and as we confess it to be vital and real, it transforms us. Even before the revelation of sin, there is the revelation of the love by which God created the world and human beings. Love is the first act whereby God reveals Himself and turns toward us. So let us open our hearts and trust in God's love for us. His love always precedes us, accompanies us, and remains with us...."

— Pope Francis, *Misericordia et Misera*



— THE LIFE OF VIRTUE: —
THE POWER TO ACT AS GOD'S CHILDREN

To those who did accept Him He gave power to become children of God...
— JOHN 1:12

"In the beginning" man was "constituted in a state of holiness, destined to be fully 'divinized' by God in glory." Tragically, "seduced by the devil, [our first parents desired] to 'be like God,' but 'without God, before God, and not in accordance with God.'" [Catechism of the Catholic Church, n. 398] The desire itself was not the sin, but the audacious attempt to become like God without God. Our heavenly Father has created us in His "image and likeness" [cf. Genesis 1:26] to "share in the divine nature" [2 Peter 1:4]; He is not "a God of jealous prerogatives" [CCC, no. 399], but a Father Who created us to sit at His right hand. Though we are in no way entitled to this destiny of glory, He nevertheless provides for us a way to be restored to it: the life of virtue. "The goal of a virtuous life is to become like God" [St. Gregory of Nyssa]. "A virtue is an habitual and firm disposition to do the good. It allows the person not only to perform good acts, but to give the best of himself. The virtuous person tends toward the good with all his sensory and spiritual powers, he pursues the good and chooses it

in concrete actions." [CCC, no. 1803] Through grace we are restored to our status as children of God and heirs of His kingdom; through the virtues we are given the power to act as children of God, as if living already in the Kingdom. The infused virtues are gifts directly from God, which give the soul an interior inclination and disposition to act according to reason enlightened by faith, and the acquired (or moral) virtues are habits attained by human effort (with the help of God's grace), by the repeated struggle to act as Jesus, God-in-the-flesh, would act. Our Father gives us everything: the internal promptings (infused virtues) to imitate Him as His children, which give us the strength to face the battle of consistently acting (moral virtues) as He would. His desire is satisfied and our hearts can be at rest in Him. We are raised from our wretchedness, clothed in His grace, restored to our filial dignity in the sacraments, and by the virtues are given the power to "be perfect, as your Heavenly Father is perfect" [Matthew 6:48].

The Adoration of St. Norbert

"IT IS AT THE ALTAR THAT WE SHOW OUR FAITH AND OUR LOVE FOR GOD."

— St. Norbert, *Life of St. Norbert, Vita A*

"Come to Bethlehem and see,
Him Whose birth the Angels sing;
Come, adore on bended knee,
Christ the Lord, the Newborn King!"

To the Norbertine, Christmas is an especially wonderful time. And to the Canonesses of the Bethlehem Priory, it would seem doubly so. For as daughters of St. Norbert we remember, at Christmas, not only the birth of our Beloved Savior, but also the birth of our beloved Order in 1121. "On Christmas Day at Prémontré, one by one [St. Norbert and the first Premonstratensians] voluntarily enrolled themselves into that city of blessed eternity" [Life of St. Norbert, Vita A] "in solemn profession to the perpetual service of the little Child Jesus" [Caption from the engravings by Theodorus and Cornelius Galle, 1622]. As we prepare to celebrate the 900th anniversary of our Order, therefore, we turn to Bethlehem, which means "House of Bread", and to the little, Eucharistic Child Jesus, to Whom our Holy Father St. Norbert pledged his life, love, service, and adoration. St. Norbert, whose faith was his greatest virtue, knew that the little God born in Bethlehem was the same little God that he lovingly cradled in his hands at Mass. On one occasion, while celebrating Mass in the presence of a possessed girl, at the elevation of the Sacred Host, the demon was forced to cry out, "Look, look how he holds his little God in his hands!" [Life of St. Norbert, Vita B] Our Holy Father knew how to adore his majestic God for, "to adore God is to acknowledge, in respect and absolute submission, the 'nothingness of the creature' who would not exist but for



God. To adore God is to praise and exalt Him and to humble oneself, as Mary did in the Magnificat, confessing with gratitude that He has done great things and holy is His name. The worship of the one God sets man free from turning in on himself, from the slavery of sin and the idolatry of the world" [Catechism of the Catholic Church, n. 2097]. By the witness of his life he has given us an example of a living, perpetual adoration: in his respect and care for the celebration of the sacred liturgy, his submission of faith, his humility, his total conversion of his worldly ways and his utter contempt for the things of this world, for "his entire hope was on heaven" [Life of St. Norbert, Vita A] . As followers of this "Apostle of the Eucharist", the Norbertine draws near to the Bethlehem of her chapel at the Liturgy of the Eucharist and at the Liturgy of the Hours, which "extends the praise and thanksgiving, the memorial of the mysteries of salvation, the petitions and the foretaste of the heavenly glory that are present in the eucharistic mystery" [General Instruction of the Liturgy of the Hours]. Thus, in union with the Church,

who "in her liturgy joins with the angels to adore the thrice-holy God" [CCC, no. 335], we, like St. Norbert, seek to give ourselves to the perpetual service of the little Child Jesus so that "from the Incarnation to the Ascension, the life of the Word incarnate is surrounded by the adoration and service of angels.... Their song of praise at the birth of Christ has not ceased resounding in the Church's praise:

"Glory to God in the highest!"
— CCC, no. 333



Ecce ancilla. Domini, fiat mihi secundum verbum tuum
"You have heard, O Virgin, that you will conceive and bear a Son by the Holy Spirit. The angel awaits an answer... The price of our salvation is offered to you. We shall be free at once if you consent. This is what the whole earth waits for, prostrate at your feet. It is right in doing so, for on your word depends comfort for the wretched, ransom for the captive, freedom for the condemned, indeed salvation for all the sons of Adam, the whole of your race. Answer quickly, O Virgin! Answer with a word, receive the Word of God!"

'Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it done to me according to your word.'
— Cf. St. Bernard of Clairvaux

— 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	Chapter (Martyrology, Reading the Rule)
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"



During the late fall Sisters collect an abundant apple harvest.



Whatever the weather, taking a brisk walk during Grand Silence is good for our physical *and* spiritual well being.

Sister teaches a class on the "Conferences of St. John Cassian" and the monastic tradition of the early desert fathers.



"A Night in the Vineyard"

TEHACHAPI, CA



"Imperishable Beauty"

LOS ANGELES, CA



"Sisters Helping Sisters"

AUTUMN
"UN-TEA PARTY"



With heartfelt gratitude, we share a special "thank you" to the three different groups of *Friends of the Norbertine Canonesses* for their charitable works in hosting fundraisers this fall for our future chapel: the second annual *A Night in the Vineyard* event here in Tehachapi (August 27, 2016); the first-ever Los Angeles *Imperishable Beauty* benefit (October 16, 2016); and the *Sisters Helping Sisters Un-Tea Party*. Through their generous efforts, and the charity of both new and long-standing friends, these events netted over \$160,000 for Phase II of our Monastery Expansion Project (see opposite page), with additional contributions continuing to be received. Although we cannot attend such events due to our cloistered vocation, we were especially blessed by Bishop Armando Ochoa's presence at the *Vineyard* benefit, as well as that of our Provost, Rev. Alphonsus Mary Hermes, O. Praem., and Rev. Mark Maxon of St. Malachy's. We give thanks to our *Friends* who brought Raymond Arroyo, Managing Editor and Lead Anchor of EWTN, to Los Angeles to be the main speaker for the *Imperishable Beauty* event, as well as Rev. Chad Ripperger, noted author and special friend of another guest speaker, Leo Severino, co-founder of Metanoia Films and dear friend of our community. May God bless all of our friends who volunteer to serve as our hands and feet, desiring to share their faith-filled understanding of our cloistered canonical Norbertine life of prayer and sacrifice with others, all for God's honor and glory, and the salvation of souls.

— Our Future Chapel —

By Mark Russell, A.I.A.
Radian Design Group, Inc.



THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT AND PRAYERS!



to share our vision with others, as we give thanks to God for the *Friends of the Norbertine Canonesses* and other dear community friends who are helping with this most pressing need. Every donation makes a difference. May God reward each of you who are supporting this project with your monetary gifts and especially your prayers.

— God Bless You! —

Monies Needed

\$12,000,000

Current Goal

\$8,000,000

Total Restricted &
Reserved Funds

\$840,000

\$12.0M

\$8.0M

\$2.0M

PHOTO by R. BELCHER





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A very special thank you to
— ALL OF OUR PARENTS —
"who take the first place among
our benefactors",
for their love, support,
sacrifice, and prayers,
for which we are
eternally indebted.

[Constitutions of the Canonesses Regular
of the Order of Prémontré, no. 25]



Mary is inseparable from Jesus

"In God's eternal thoughts, Mary belongs indeed to the very essence of the Mystery of Christ. Mother of Jesus, she is the Mother of Him in Whom we find everything. According to the divine plan, life is only given to mankind through Jesus, the Man-God. But Christ was given to the world only through Mary. This order was not meant only for the day when the Incarnation took place; it still continues as regards the application of the fruits of the incarnation in souls. Why is this? Because the source of divine grace is Jesus, the Incarnate Word. But as Christ, as Mediator, He remains inseparable from the human nature which He took from Mary."

— Bl. Columba Marmion, *Christ the Life of the Soul*

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✦ Our Horarium in photos

✦ Information on
Our Holy Founder, St. Norbert

✦ ... and more

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