

The Norbertine Canonesses of the Bethlehem Priory of St. Joseph

FIRSTFRUITS

Month of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, August 2018 / Issue 44

"I RENOUNCE THE WORLD AND I PROMISE..."

— From the Vow Formula of First Profession, made in the hands of Mother Prioress



First Profession of Vows

Dear Friends of the Bethlehem Priory,

Laudetur Jesus Christus! This past June we were blessed to have two postulants enter the novitiate and three of our novices make their first profession of vows. During the rite of profession, the novice places her joined hands within the hands of the prioress, who receives her vows in the name of the Church. By this sacred gesture, she professes publicly that she places herself in a new and deeper way into the Hands of God and His Church. Like the Blessed Virgin Mary who totally offered herself for the work of redemption by her fiat, the nun, by her profession, promises to renounce the world in order to totally offer herself in prayer and sacrifice for the glory of God and the salvation of souls. In this newsletter, we share with you a glimpse into that beautiful day, and the many preparations that go into it, as well as information about our most urgent need, our future chapel – the center of our cloistered canonical way of life – where this self-offering daily takes place.

May God bless you for your prayers, support, and generosity.
In the Sacred and Immaculate Hearts of Jesus and Mary,

Mother Mary Augustine O. Praem.

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

THE Fiat THAT CHANGED THE WORLD

A young woman. An invitation from God.

A total, courageous, loving "yes." And our world was forever changed. In a tiny village some two-thousand years ago, God asked a very big leap of faith from a young woman named Mary, and with every fiber of her pure, virginal heart she gave God her "yes."

"Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord.

LET IT BE DONE TO ME ACCORDING TO YOUR WORD."

"And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us."

[Luke 1:38, John 1:14]

And through her "yes," a great flood of light burst with brilliant radiance upon the face of the earth: Jesus Christ, the fruit of her womb.

A young woman. An invitation from God.

A "yes" in union with Mary's. And our world is brought closer to God. In a tiny California town some two thousand years after that first "fiat," God asks for a leap of faith from ordinary young women, and with His grace and the encouragement of Mary, they strive with every fiber of their hearts to give God their own total, courageous, loving "yes," so that, through them, light can shine to all parts of the earth, and God can work hidden wonders in the souls of many.



My Soul Proclaims the Greatness of the Lord...



May Crowning after Rosary Procession

Spring at the Bethlehem Priory is a beautiful time.

"Bless the Lord, all you works of the Lord.

Praise and exult Him above all forever!" [Daniel 3:57]

In May, the whole community sets out in a Rosary procession around our lake and to an outdoor statue of the Holy Family, where the youngest novice crowns Our Blessed Mother, while the community chants Marian hymns, culminating in a renewal of our Marian Consecration. And on the great Solemnity of Corpus Christi, our Eucharistic Lord, the climax and center of our lives, is led in procession on the monastery grounds, and all the works of the Lord behold their Maker; and, in the presence of all creation, we adore His majesty on our knees.



Corpus Christi



Visiting in the Parlor

SISTERS IN ST. NORBERT

On May 26th, we were blessed with a visit from the active Norbertine Sisters from Wilmington, who spent a day at our monastery praying with us at Mass, the Divine Office, and the Rosary. As we visited them and met their newest Sisters, we rejoiced in the beautiful works they do, and the communio we are privileged to share with them.



Vestitions in the White Habit

On June 2, 2018, our two postulants were vested in the white habit and received new religious names ~ Sr. Maria Gabriella and Sr. Dina Marie ~ and three novices made their First Profession of Vows ~ Sr. Mary Bonaventure, Sr. Mary Josephine and Sr. Mary Francis. Family and friends came from near and far for this joyous occasion.



The weeks before are filled with preparations, material and spiritual. Sewing machines hum, turning out habits and veils that will be blessed on the eve of the ceremony, while those to be vested and professed enter into the silence of retreat. During meals, our table readings reflect on the habit and the vows, inspiring us all to strive to respond to our vocation with still greater generosity and fidelity.

Similar to the evening before a wedding, the eve of one's first profession is filled with much excitement, last minute preparations, and the promise of many prayers to be said on behalf of our Sisters. "My Sisters are my spiritual mothers," one nun said, as the whole community offers maternal hearts and hands in making the day special: some shine shoes, others iron habits, one teaches the postulants how to put together novice veils, black veils for the profession are pressed and folded and placed on a silver tray, and arrangements are made for a reverential celebration of the Sacred Liturgy and ceremonies.

*"She is led to the King with her maiden companions.
They are escorted amid gladness and joy;
they pass within the palace of the King." [Psalm 45]*

Older nuns have often said that they are almost as excited for the profession and vestition of younger nuns as they were for their own; and for at least a few weeks following, one can't help but smile and utter a "Deo gratias!" at the sight of the newly-professed with their black veils and the new novices with their white habits. Seeing these things, we evangelize each other, reminded of the great gift we have received in belonging totally to God and to the service of His Church. Our hearts leap for joy, as our sisters take their first steps in offering their lives to God, and He stoops down to receive them.

First Profession of Vows

*"BLESSED ARE YOU AMONG WOMEN,
AND BLESSED IS THE FRUIT OF YOUR WOMB ...*

... These words can be applied to Sr. Mary Bonaventure, Sr. Mary Josephine, and Sr. Mary Francis, who are about to profess their vows for the first time. And this is true of all religious women consecrated to the Lord under vows. They are most blessed among women and indeed the most fruitful.

The religious nun, like Our Lady, is overshadowed by the Holy Spirit and is espoused to God in a special way

through her vows, which makes her fruitful in the Spirit. Her children are not physical children, but spiritual children. And there's many of them. A hundred-fold.

These nuns are making their 'Fiat' today: their yes to God. And they will bear the fruit of Jesus in their souls, and in the souls of those they minister to through intercession."

*— Excerpts from the homily of our Provost,
The Very Rev. Thomas Nelson, O.Praem.*



*"RECEIVE THIS SACRED VEIL,
BY WHICH YOUR
total submission to Christ the Lord
and your dedication
to the service of the Church
WILL BE KNOWN."*
— Rite of First Profession of Vows

Sr. Mary Josephine & Sr. Mary Bonaventure

HORARIUM

(OUR MONASTIC SCHEDULE)

- 12:00 AM
Office of Readings (Matins)
- 6:00 AM
Morning Prayer (Lauds)
& Angelus
- 6:30 AM
Chapter (Martyrology & Rule read;
exhortation by the Prioress)
- 7:15 AM
Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament
& Mid-morning Prayer (Terce)
- 8:15 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,
followed by dinner
- 1:05 PM
Mid-afternoon Prayer (None)
- 1:30 PM
Grand Silence
- 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”



Farming



Prayer Requests



Feeding Sheep



Carpentry

LET IT BE
DONE TO ME
in all places,
at all times,
in all things,
ACCORDING TO
YOUR WORD.

“WILL THERE STILL BE ROOM FOR ME?”

A New Chapel: Our Most Pressing Need

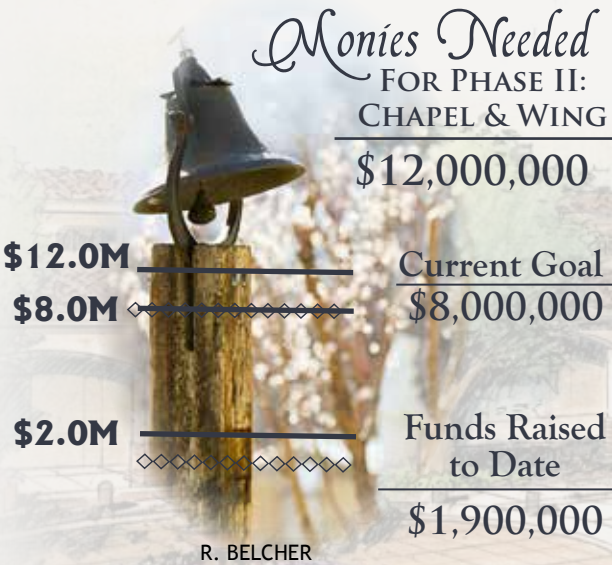
BURSTING AT THE SEAMS We have never turned away a vocation due to lack of space – we welcome them as God’s gift to us and to His Church, and somehow find room. Back in 2011, an eager aspirant watched five women enter within three months. Waiting until she would be old enough to enter, she peered into our little chapel, which was bursting at the seams, and began to worry, “Will there still be room for me?” With some creativity, we did make room for her—two nuns moved onto folding chairs in a narrow hallway outside the chapel.



Mother Instructing Sisters in
Tearing Down the Wall

SETTING TO WORK Growing in union with Christ, our eager postulant soon began to learn His trade. Just before her vestition the following summer, she helped, together with some of our other carpentry nuns, to tear down a large wall and expand our chapel, enabling our nuns in the hallway to move back into choir stalls, and providing space for a few more vocations. But it was clear this would not last long.

DRASTIC TIMES CALL FOR DRASTIC MEASURES Phase I of our Monastery Expansion Project was completed in 2013, allowing us to expand our chapel once more. Our eager sister, now a novice, joined our growing construction team, and with the help of a volunteer demolition crew, broke down yet another wall and wheelbarrowed away the brick and rubble, doubling our chapel size (our make-shift chapel is now the former ranch house family room and den combined). We laid tile, installed stained glass windows, brought in choir stalls. We now had plenty of extra space for many years to come – but God had other plans.



NO ROOM TO EXPAND Now just five years later, with seventeen new nuns, more aspirants peering into our little chapel, only a few choir stalls left, and no more walls to break down, we again find ourselves bursting at the seams. We still have the hallway, but it won't suffice for long. As God continues to send generous-hearted young women, desiring to pour out their lives night and day, in prayer and sacrifice for His glory

and the salvation of souls, our new chapel building project has become more pressing than ever.

OUR VISION Our still eager nun, now a junior professed, is preparing for the day when she will become a canoness



View into Current Chapel

at her final and solemn profession. On that day, she will pronounce her vows beginning with the declaration: “I offer and dedicate myself to the Church of the Immaculate Virgin Mary.” (Constitutions n. 41) This solemn vow is a promise to live out her canonical vocation as a member of our community and in the service of our monastery. Canonesses, following the Church's ancient tradition, need a proper place to carry out their liturgical apostolate, a sacred work centered around the altar. Having this in mind, our great hope is to build a new chapel, with ample and appropriate ecclesial space, designed in the Romanesque style and modeled after Norbertine monasteries of old: the cloistered nuns chant the divine praises from choir stalls close to the altar and the laity joins in from the nave.

WHAT'S NEXT? With a rendering and initial floor plan in hand, we continue to work and pray for the funds that will enable us to take the next step forward: a complete architectural design and blueprint, which is needed before we can break ground but which we cannot commission until we reach our current goal of \$8 million (we are nearly 25% there). After breaking ground, we will continue toward our goal of \$12 million, to complete our chapel and wing. May God bless you for considering our greatest need.

St. Joseph, pray for us...

Conceptual Drawing of our Future Chapel
By Mark Russell, A.I.A., Radian Design Group, Inc.



THE NORBERTINE CANONRY OF THE BETHLEHEM PRIORY OF ST. JOSEPH
17831 Water Canyon Road
Tehachapi, California 93561-7686 USA

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— A Special Thank You —

to our confreres at St. Michael's Abbey for their fraternal love and daily care for the spiritual needs of our community, and for the annual visit we receive from Rev. Ambrose Christe, O.Praem. (Novice Master), and the seminarians of St. Michael's, a foreshadowing of the communio we will share in heaven.

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

Norbertine Canonesses

— WEBSITE —

- ✦ Online Monastery Gift Shop
- ✦ Photo Gallery
- ✦ Horarium in Photos
- ✦ Information on our Holy Founder, St. Norbert

WWW.NORBERTINESISTERS.ORG

- ✦ MONASTERY GIFT SHOP HOURS:
Daily 10-11:30 am, 2:30-5 pm
(except Fridays, 2:30-4:15 pm)

- ✦ FOR ONLINE GIFT SHOP PURCHASES:
Please visit our website at
www.NorbertineSisters.org

- ✦ WE ARE HERE TO OFFER PRAYERS FOR YOU AND YOUR INTENTIONS:
You are welcome to call us:
(661) 823-1066 - or -
email us: pray_req@cybersurfers.net or
MotherMaryA@aol.com.

Please kindly help us update our address & email database by sending us your current information.



Rosary Procession before the May Crowning

"The greatest figures of prophecy and sanctity step forth out of the darkest night. But for the most part, the formative stream of the mystical life remains invisible. Certainly the most decisive turning points in world history are substantially co-determined by souls whom no history book ever mentions. And we will only find out about those souls to whom we owe the decisive turning points in our personal lives on the day when all that is hidden is revealed."

— St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross