

FIRSTFRUITS

*"If these are the firstfruits,
what will the full harvest be?"*

- St. Basil the Great, *On the Holy Spirit*

Christmas

*"is also really a Norbertine feast, since it is on
this day that St. Norbert pronounced
his vows and founded his Order."*

- Mère Marie de la Croix, O. Praem. Norbertine Virgins and
the Eucharistic Life, Ch. IV, II, "The Feast of Christmas"



*"This is my Christmas wish this year under this mission of peace as the
angels sang it on that 'Holy Night.' We should first give glory to God, the
Most High, through our life and work, through our prayer and devotion, and
sing our praise to Him each day, in the course of the day, in our common choir
prayer and in the private lifting up of our contemplation. And may this vertical
extension of our canonical life then also correspond to our horizontal reaching
out, so that we may set about making everything 'Peace on Earth'..."*

- The Rt. Rev. Thomas Handgräter, O. Praem.,
Abbot General of the Norbertine Order, Christmas Letter 2013

The prophet Isaiah exultantly salutes the awaited Messiah:

'You have multiplied the nation, you have increased its joy' [9:3]. He exhorts those who dwell on Zion to go forth to meet Him with song: 'Shout aloud and sing for joy!' [12:6]. The prophet tells those who have already seen Him from afar to bring the message to others: 'Get you up to a high mountain, O herald of good tidings to Zion; lift up your voice with strength, O herald of good tidings to Jerusalem' [40:9]. All creation shares in the joy of salvation: 'Sing for joy, O heavens, and exult, O earth! Break forth, O mountains, into His people, and will have compassion on His suffering ones' [49:13].

- Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 4



Dear Parents, Confreres,
Friends, Family and
Benefactors,

Laudetur Jesus Christus!

On behalf of all the Sisters, we send you our warm and prayerful greetings during this sacred time of year, as we rejoice with you in the coming of the Christ Child: Emmanuel, God-with-Us. *Christmas*. "A Child is born to us" [ISAIAH 9:5], a Child who is God, born of a Virgin Mother. *Christmas*.

It is also a graced time for all Norbertines, for it was on Christmas Day in 1121 that St. Norbert and his first followers made their profession, marking the official founding of our Order. The connection between St. Norbert, Apostle of the Eucharist, and this holy feast is providential. *Christmas*.

"The tender Lamb is come; *the Child is born unto us*, and even now is on the Altar of His Sacrifice" [Guéranger, *The Liturgical Year*, Vol. 2, Ch. 5]. On His entrance into the world, Jesus said to His Father: "*Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me. Then I said, 'Behold, I come to do your will, O God'*" [HEBREWS 10:5-7].

As members of His Body, we are called to "enter the House of God in the dispositions wherewith the Shepherds and

From our Photo Archives:
Procession into Midnight Mass



Mother Mary Augustine and our "Pater Abbas", the Rt. Rev. Eugene Hayes, O. Praem., on the occasion of the blessing of our monastery expansion building

Magi were animated, when they went to Bethlehem, the *House of Bread*. ...We must come to the Altar as to the Crib of Jesus, and in the joy of this Mystery, offer our whole heart to the New-Born Babe. Then, uniting ourselves with Mary and the Church, we must offer the Lamb of God to the heavenly Father, and ourselves together with Him." [cf. Guéranger, Ch. 5]. In the Mass, we, too, are called to say to God: "*I come to do your will.*"

As we recall the birth of our Order, our thoughts turn to our own first days as Norbertines at the Bethlehem Priory, and in this issue of *FirstFruits* we share with you the stages of religious life, and in particular the formative periods of postulancy and novitiate. Now that we have settled into the expansion building, formation classes have commenced again, even as work around the priory continues: our hearts are full of gratitude toward all of you whose generosity made this possible.

May the grace-filled "Year of Faith," just ended, continue to bear fruit in our lives, drawing us to realize that "Christ is the center of all, the center of creation, the center of His people, the center of history." [Pope Francis, Homily at the Closing Mass of the "Year of Faith," Solemnity of Christ the King, November 24, 2013]

Prayerfully in the Christ Child, the Immaculate Virgin Mary, St. Joseph, and St. Norbert,

Mother Mary Augustine O. Praem.

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

2013 VISITS FROM OUR INTERNATIONAL CONFRERES

1) Our provost, Rev. Alphonsus Mary Hermes, O. Praem., with the Rt. Rev. Ambróz Martin Štrbák, O. Praem., Abbot of Jasov, Slovakia

2) Our holy father, St. Augustine, looks upon his sons (LEFT to RIGHT) Rev. Stephen Boyle, O. Praem., of Orange, currently Rector of St. Norbert's College in Rome, Rev. Arul Amalraj, of Jamtara, India, and Rev. Charbel Grbavac of Orange

3) Rev. Pierino Bregoli, O. Praem. (LEFT), of Sant'Antimo, Italy, concelebrates Holy Mass with Rev. Thomas Nelson, O. Praem., of Orange



(1)



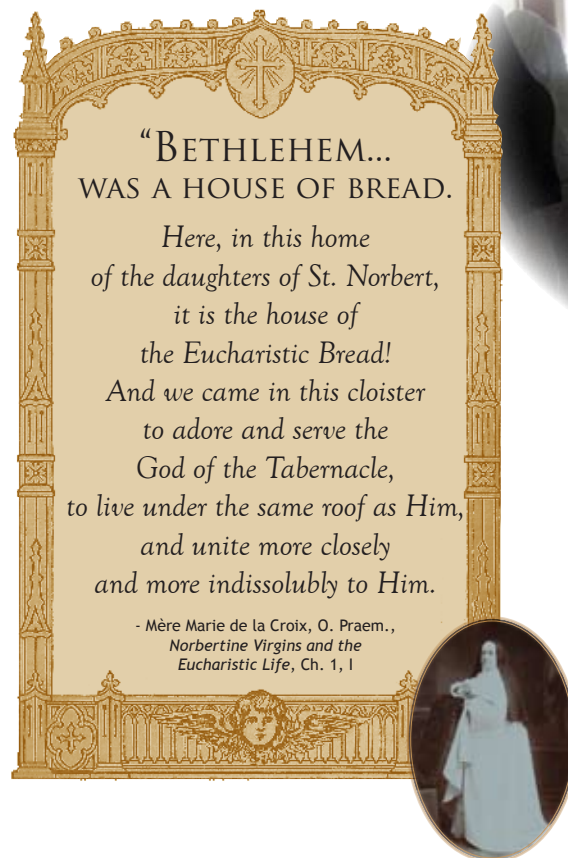
(2)



(3)

The Holy Eucharist is the glory of your Order. Your Order is gloriously Eucharistic and Eucharistically glorious.

- Pope Pius IX to Abbot General Gummarus Crets, O. Praem.



"BETHLEHEM...
WAS A HOUSE OF BREAD.

Here, in this home
of the daughters of St. Norbert,
it is the house of
the Eucharistic Bread!
And we came in this cloister
to adore and serve the
God of the Tabernacle,
to live under the same roof as Him,
and unite more closely
and more indissolubly to Him.

- Mère Marie de la Croix, O. Praem.,
*Norbertine Virgins and the
Eucharistic Life*, Ch. 1, I



Our Holy Patron St. Joseph

"When Saint Joseph learned [that Mary bore her God in her womb], from the angel, his faith acquiesced at once in blind submission...If Saint John leaped in the womb at the approach of Mary, what feelings must have coursed through Joseph during those six months when he had at his side and under his very eyes the hidden God! ...Can we doubt that Joseph must often have adored Jesus hidden in the pure tabernacle of Mary? How fervent that adoration must have been! ...No one can describe the adoration of this noble soul. He saw nothing, yet he believed; his faith had to pierce the virginal flesh of Mary. So likewise with you! Under the veil of the Sacred Species your faith must see our Lord. Ask Saint Joseph for his lively, constant faith." - St. Peter Julian Eymard, *Month of St. Joseph*, Sixteenth Day



"...behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home. For it is through the Holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her. She will bear a son and you are to name Him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.'" [MATTHEW 2:20-21]



Act of Adoration of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament:

"O Jesus, great God, present on the Altar,
I bow down before Thee. I adore Thee."

"In the priesthood man is elevated to an almost staggering height, a mediator between a world in travail and the celestial kingdom of peace. ... Heir to the priestly and kingly offices of the divine Redeemer, he is commissioned to carry on the task of salvation, bringing souls to God and giving God to souls. ... Modeling his life on that of Him he represents he will gladly spend and be spent on behalf of souls. Souls he seeks everywhere and always, not what the world can offer him."

- Ven. Pope Pius XII, October 14, 1953, Speech at Opening of North American College in Rome



Fr. Nathaniel gives us his "first blessing."



Fr. Alan celebrates the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass in our chapel.

"We raise a fervent prayer to Mary Immaculate...that she would always show a mother's loving care..., and guide you, beloved seminarians, bearers of such high hopes, along the way that leads to that holiness which will bring her to recognize in you a greater and greater resemblance to her own divine Son."

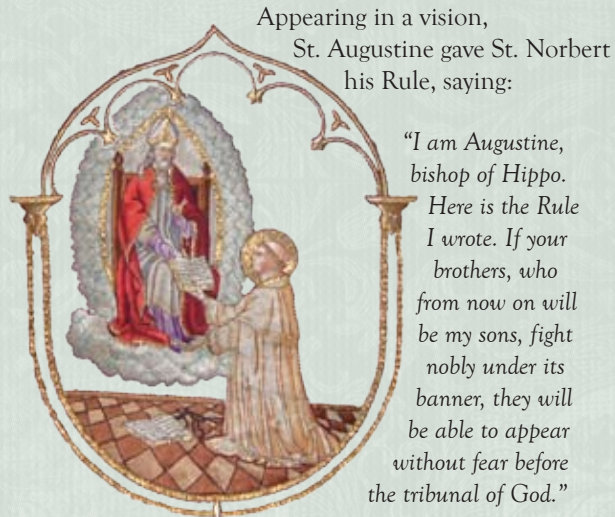
- Ven. Pope Pius XII, October 14, 1953



The Novices of St. Michael's Abbey visit, deepening the bonds of charity, and mutual prayer and sacrifice which unite us with our mother abbey.

“O Lord Jesus Christ, You have said, ‘Ask and you shall receive; seek and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you”; mercifully attend to our supplications, and grant us the grace of Your most divine love, that we may love You with all our hearts, and in all our words and actions, and never cease to praise You.”

- Collect, Litany of the Holy Name of Jesus



[As cited in Rev. Bernard Ardura, O.Praem., *The Order of Premontre: History and Spirituality*, 1.2. Detail of a cope from the Norbertine Abbey of Tongerlo, Belgium]

THE CALL TO THE RELIGIOUS LIFE

is an initiative coming wholly from the Father Who asks those whom He has chosen to respond with complete and exclusive devotion. The experience of this gracious love of God is so deep and powerful that the person called senses the need to respond by unconditionally dedicating his or her life to God, consecrating to Him all things present and future, and placing them in His hands.

- Vita Consecrata, 17

When 892 years ago St. Norbert on Christmas Day 1121

with about 30 companions placed his profession document on the altar of Prémontré, he was completely in the tradition of the Gregorian Church reform and wanted to assist, with the foundation of his monastery, in renewing and changing the Church. He saw the thrust of this renewal in the return to the origins, to the life of the first Christians, in the Apostolic lifestyle of the early Church, basing it on the ‘one heart and mind’ [ACTS 4:32] from the Acts of the Apostles: ‘All who believed were together and had all things in common ... they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple ... breaking bread in their homes ... and ate their meals with exultation and sincerity of heart’ [ACTS 2:44-46]. The Reform Chapter 1968/70 in Innsbruck summarized this statement in the word ‘Communio.’ It contains community, unanimity, living, praying, and working with one another, a changed lifestyle and engagement, that of sharing, of solidarity and standing up for one another.

- The Rt. Rev. Thomas Handgrätinger, O. Praem.,
Abbot General of the Norbertine Order, Christmas Letter 2013



THE FIRST STAGE: POSTULANCY

On the day of her entrance, the postulant receives the Rule of St. Augustine, her black postulant veil, and a Crucifix lapel pin. She will wear this on her clothing until Vestition, as a reminder that we are all called to follow in the footsteps of Christ Crucified.



On August 28, 2013, the Solemnity of our holy father St. Augustine, we welcomed our two newest postulants, Jennifer and Bernadette

THE NOVITIATE

The purpose of the novitiate is to deepen the novices’ understanding of their calling, to enable them to experience the life of the institute and be formed in its spirit. Because the goal toward which religious life aims is the consecration of the whole person to God, the universal law of the Church (Canon Law), prescribes the program of the critical period of novitiate as geared to the integration of the spiritual, intellectual, and affective qualities of the novice:

The novices are to be led to cultivate human and Christian virtues, they are to be introduced to a fuller way of perfection by prayer and self-denial; they are to be instructed to contemplate the mystery of salvation and to read and meditate on the Sacred Scriptures; they are to be prepared to cultivate the worship of God in the sacred liturgy; they are to be trained in a way of life consecrated by the evangelical counsels to God and humankind in Christ; they are to be educated about the character and spirit, purpose and discipline, history and life of their institute; and they are to be imbued with a love for the Church and its sacred pastors. [Canon 652, §2]

THE RELIGIOUS NAME

We see in the Scriptures that the very word of God’s call to the mission of salvation confers a divine power making the called one a suitable instrument of God. The call is frequently expressed in a new name given to the one who is called, and the giving of the name creates in the one called the grace and qualities he needs for the mission signified by his name. Thus, Simon is called Peter, Rock, and the grace of his call, as it develops in him, makes his faith firm as a rock so that he can “strengthen his brethren” as Christ’s vicar on earth. [JOHN 1:42, LUKE 22:32, MATTHEW 16:18]

THE SECOND STAGE: NOVITIATE (ENTRANCE INTO RELIGIOUS LIFE)

A postulant begins her “life in religion” when she is received into the community as a novice. At that time, our novice is clothed in the religious habit and is given her new religious name ~ signs of her consecration. She also receives the Norbertine Constitutions, which together with the Rule of St. Augustine are means to the perfection of charity.



On June 6, 2013, the Solemnity of our holy father St. Norbert, Sr. Mary Elisabeth (Veronica) and Sr. Mary Dismas (Christina) received the white habit of our Order and entered the Novitiate

THE THIRD AND FOURTH STAGES: PROFESSION OF VOWS

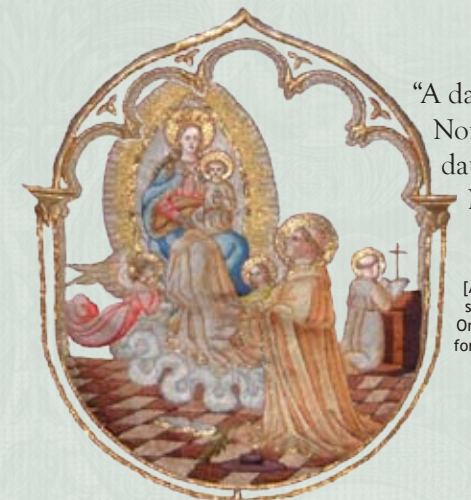
Postulancy and Novitiate seek to prepare the sister to make a complete gift of self to Jesus as her Spouse through the profession of vows: first in simple vows for three years, which may be renewed twice, and at last, to give herself to Jesus forever in solemn vows. At this time, she signs her vows on the altar and receives the wedding ring of the Bride of Christ. Look for more on the grace of religious profession in a future newsletter!



From our Photo Archives: Sr. Mary Raphael’s Solemn Profession, January 14, 2012

“The purpose of the religious vows is to scale the heights of love: a complete love, dedicated to Christ under the impulse of the Holy Spirit and, through Christ, offered to the Father.”

- Bl. Pope John Paul II, Nov. 2, 1994



“A daughter of Norbert is a daughter of Mary.”

[A traditional saying in our Order, adapted for canonesses]

[St. Norbert receives the habit from the Blessed Virgin Mary. Detail of a cope from the Norbertine Abbey of Tongerlo, Belgium]



St. Frederick

“...he named that place BETHLEHEM, in honor of the Blessed Virgin. There was always such great accord with the pious teachings of the blessed Father, mutual charity, voluntary poverty, extraordinary humility, and single-hearted devotion in this place, that you would say you were looking at the beginnings of the early Church.”

- From the Life of St. Frederick Feikone, 12th Century Abbot and Founder of two Norbertine Houses in Friesland: Mariengaarde (Mary's Garden) for Canons, and Bethlehem, for Canonesses

Our Priory is not the first monastery of Norbertine Canonesses to be named after Bethlehem, Jesus' birthplace. Through St. Frederick's intercession, may Almighty God bless our efforts, as we strive to follow Christ as faithfully as our elder sisters did.



Formation Classes Resume

After a long hiatus due to the expansion building, we resumed our formation classes, taught increasingly by our sisters, as well as by our conferes.

The classes currently offered are Sacred Scripture (this cycle focusing on Worship and Liturgy), the Catechism, Faith (for the “Year of Faith”), Canon Law for Religious, Norbertine Spirituality, Gregorian Chant, Latin (our Advanced Latin Class is currently translating the Life of St. Frederick), and Logic.

Our beloved “Pater Abbas” teaches our Sisters Canon Law for Religious.



“Religious are not only ‘called’ to an individual personal vocation. Their call is also a ‘con-vocation’ – they are called with others, with whom they share their daily life. There is a convergence of ‘yeses’ to God which unites a number of religious into one single community of life. ...Obedience is a ‘yes’ to God’s design, by which He has entrusted a particular task to a group of people.”

- Fraternal Life in Community, n. 44

OUR LIFE OF PRAYER & WORK AT THE BETHLEHEM PRIORY CONTINUES...

OUR HORARIUM (OR SCHEDULE)

12:00 am	Midnight prayer (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”



Fr. Michael Gaitley, MIC, gave our annual retreat in September, based on his book ‘The One Thing’ is Three.



Last Spring, we were blessed to welcome our friend, Dr. Catherine Tkacz, who gave us several conferences on typology.

Some of our work includes... accounting ♣ administration ♣ archiving ♣ correspondence & thank you's ♣ logging prayer requests, prayer enrollments ♣ phones & reception ♣ Bethany Guest House ♣ gift shop ♣ apothecary ♣ artisan cheese-making ♣ sacred vestments ♣ wreaths ♣ bees/honey ♣ chickens, baby cows & goats, cats & dogs ♣ preparing the Liturgy ♣ sacristy ♣ class & study

♣ library ♣ preparing for teaching classes ♣ cleaning ♣ cooking & dishes ♣ housekeeping ♣ ironing & laundry ♣ sewing & mending ♣ building ♣ maintenance & upkeep ♣ firewood ♣ gardening, harvesting, mowing, planting, lavender, pruning ♣ ...and more!



Our former dormitory trailers are removed and demolished.

As the snow arrives, we thank God all the more fervently for the expansion building...

GOD REWARD YOU!

Be assured of our daily prayers and sacrifices for all of you, with hearts full of gratitude for your ongoing generosity -- spiritual and material -- in building up this first North American foundation of Norbertine Canonesses.

And a special thanks to all who generously offered their time, talents, and monetary gifts for this project, particularly the large donations needed at critical moments, so that we did not have to stop the construction of our expansion building.



OUR CURRENT PRESSING FUNDING NEEDS: OVER \$1 MILLION FOR MILKING PARLOR MODIFICATIONS & LAND

We are grateful to all of you who are helping to make our convent expansion project a reality, and we thank you in advance for your prayers and material help with our current pressing funding needs, for which we will have to raise over \$1 million:

1. We are in the process of addressing additional requirements for our milking parlor and the surrounding areas. These modifications are necessary to receive the licenses/permits for our now-required Grade A dairy for producing our cheese.
2. The purchase of our land from St. Michael's Abbey.

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

1. Make checks to: “Norbertine Canonesses” (Memo: “Expansion & Land Fund”)
2. Donate via PayPal on our website: www.norbertinesisters.org for on-line credit card donations

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





Thank you to the local Boy Scouts, Troop #3, who built some sturdy goat paddocks for us!

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

NON PROFIT
U.S. Postage
PAID
Bakersfield, CA
Permit #110

- 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, to learn more about the medals and statue of St. Norbert especially commissioned by the Norbertine Canonesses, available through our Gift Shop.



SACRED VESTMENTS

If you are interested in purchasing our vestments made by the sisters (RIGHT), please contact us at: (661) 823-1066 or e-mail at MotherMaryA@aol.com



THE NORBERTINE CANONESSES' MONASTERY GIFT SHOP



Welcome to our gift shop.

Our hours are: 10:00-11:30am & 2:30-5:00pm daily except Friday, when we close at 4:15pm.

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.

ON THE COVER: St. Norbert Makes Profession of Vows at Prémontré. Art by the Norbertine Canonesses of the Bethlehem Priory of St. Joseph, inspired by a painting at the former Norbertine Abbey of Roggenburg in Germany.

A special thank you to the friends who funded this special 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 or MotherMaryA@aol.com. (If you do not receive an acknowledgement of your message, please resend it or call.)

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

Please check www.norbertinesisters.org for the downloadable version of this newsletter and for references.

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