

The Norbertine Canonesses of the Bethlehem Priory of St. Joseph

# FIRST FRUITS

The Solemnity of St. Joseph, March 19, 2020 / Issue 49



*"The Lord has made me a father to the King..."*

HE RAISED ME UP, THAT HE MIGHT SAVE MANY PEOPLE."

— cf. Genesis 45:8



*“What then is St. Joseph’s position in the whole Church of Christ?”*

*Through him, and, yes, under him, Christ was fittingly and honorably introduced to the world.  
Holy Church in its entirety is indebted to the Virgin Mother  
because through her it was judged worthy to receive Christ.  
But after her we undoubtedly owe special gratitude and reverence to St. Joseph.*

REMEMBER US, ST. JOSEPH, AND PLEAD FOR US TO YOUR FOSTER-CHILD.”

— St. Bernardine of Siena

Dear Confreres, Family and Friends of the Bethlehem Priory,

*Laudetur Jesus Christus!* In this issue of *FirstFruits*, we share with you our gratitude for St. Joseph, spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary and foster father of Our Lord Jesus Christ. St. Joseph has played an important role in our community since its earliest days, and he continues to watch over and guide us.

Confident in his powerful intercession, we bring to Our Lady and to him all of the intentions entrusted to us. We pray that he may extend his strong protection to all of our confreres, family and friends, and lead the whole world to his Son, Jesus Christ.

We wish you a blessed Lenten Season!

Prayerfully in the Holy Family,

*Mother Mary Augustine O. Praem.*

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



*Our community with our Abbot General, the Most Rev. Jos Wouters, O.Praem., and the Rt. Rev. James Herring, O.Praem, Prior Regimine of Bayview Priory in Delaware.*



— *St. Joseph* —  
OUR PATRON  
AND PROTECTOR

When St. Teresa of Avila was called by Christ to reform the Carmelite Order, she had a vision in which our Lord placed the first reformed monastery under the patronage of St. Joseph, “for he would watch over us at one door, and Our Lady at the other; that Christ would go with us” (Life of St. Teresa).

Following the example of this great saint, our community has depended on St. Joseph from the beginning, especially when we took him as the patron of our Tehachapi home, and began to build our current monastery by his intercession. We remember him in various devotions every Wednesday, the day specially dedicated to him, by praying his litany, an act of dedication to him, and often celebrating the votive Mass of St. Joseph.

The Church honors St. Joseph with many titles, but as cloistered nuns, “St. Joseph, Guardian of Virgins,” holds a special place. God entrusted to St. Joseph the Blessed Virgin Mary and Our Lord while they were on earth, and St. Joseph continues to care for those who follow them in this special way. With his

protection, we can live our vows of total dedication to God in security and peace.

As daughters of St. Joseph, we strive to imitate him in our daily lives. When we pray, we learn from St. Joseph, who prays kneeling beside the Mother of God, adoring the Infant Savior. He teaches us, as Christians, and especially as canonesses, to pray without ceasing and to always grow in love for God and neighbor. When we work, we lean on St. Joseph, and let him teach us the joy of working for God alone, as we fulfill all the duties required to keep our monastery running. In our needs, both spiritual and material, we go to St. Joseph, and with his help, we know that we can overcome every difficulty.

A life lived with St. Joseph is a life lived with Christ and His Blessed Mother in the quiet joy of Bethlehem; it is a hidden life of poverty, silence, obedience, and great love.

This is the life that we strive to live and to deepen with the help of our heavenly protector, St. Joseph.

FIRST  
PROFESSION  
OF VOWS

On December 8th, 2019, Sr. Mary Gabriel, O.Praem., made her First Profession of Vows, promising conversion of her ways and life in community especially in poverty, chastity and obedience for three years, and received a black veil.





# The Work of God

## UNION WITH CHRIST IN PRAYER & MANUAL LABOR

*“Whatever you do in work or deed,  
do everything in the name of the Lord...”*

— Communion Antiphon for the Feast of St. Joseph the Worker, May 1st

A contemporary of our Holy Father, St. Norbert, once recorded that although he much admired the life of prayer and penance led by St. Norbert’s first followers, he was taken aback by one aspect of their life: these white canons, who were specially deputed by Holy Mother Church for the worship of God through the sacred liturgy, also spent much of their time working the land and milking the cows. It is indeed a part of our founder’s plan: the same individuals who were dedicated to the contemplation of divine realities, also condescended to toil amidst the baser things of earth.

Striving to be true daughters of our Holy Founder, we rejoice in the blessing that our first duty as Norbertine Canonesses is the celebration of the Sacred Liturgy and prayer, to which responsibility we devote the best and greatest number of hours of our day. However, our daily schedule also sets aside

times for manual labor, be it household chores or tasks on the farm. In this balancing of prayer and work, monastic tradition recognizes a deep unity. These are not two separate spheres, but one harmonious action: with prayer informing work, the two become one sacrifice offered to God in love.

Every action of Christ on earth was taken up into His one great work, His great act of self-emptying love. From the most seemingly insignificant things like eating, sleeping, and the tiring labor of a carpenter, up to the great Sacrifice of His life on Calvary, every action was carried out in obedience to the Father’s will: *“I do what the Father has commanded me, that the world may know that I love the Father”* (John 14:31).

In the same way, every action of the religious (and of every member of Christ’s Mystical Body) is also meant to be taken up into one great work, one great act of self-emptying love in union with Christ. At Holy Mass and in the Liturgy of the Hours, we unite ourselves and all our actions to Christ; with Him we form one Sacrifice offered to the Father. In the

times set aside by our *horarium* for manual labor, we continue to strive to live out that offering as we unite our duties to Christ’s supreme work. We ask Him to take up every task — laundry, cooking, dishes, cleaning, correspondence, animal work, cheese-making, gardening — into His Sacrifice, into His one great work. Every action, however small, gains an infinite value when united to Christ’s Sacrifice and is changed into a work of redemption.

St. Joseph is a model of this total integration of one’s actions in union with Christ: every work he carried out was done in union with Jesus and Mary, for their sake, and for the sake of the great mission He knew his little Foster Son would accomplish. His every action was an offering to the God Who stood before him, and so he became the model and guardian of Christian workers. St. Joseph helps to reveal the great dignity of labor when performed in a spirit of supernatural faith and charity, and teaches us to make our work an expression of prayer.

With St. Joseph, we are united to Christ both in our prayer and in our work. Our love for God leads us to obey His will as it is revealed from moment to moment: loving obedience brings us to prayer in the choir, and loving obedience brings us to the carrying out of our daily tasks. *Everything* is united to Christ’s perfect Sacrifice. The canoness who milks the cows, even in the very moment that she is milking the cows, is sharing in the great redeeming work of the Lord.

### — OUR HORARIUM —

*(Please call for our Friday and Sunday schedules.)*

Midnight	Vigils – Office of Readings (Matins)
6:00 am	Morning prayer (Lauds) & Angelus
6:35 am	Chapter (Martyrology & the Rule)
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
11:40 am	Mid-day prayer (Sext), Angelus & Rosary
12:20 pm	Dinner
1:05 pm	Mid-afternoon prayer (None)
1:30 pm	Grand Silence - prayer, rest, exercise, etc.
2:30 pm	Work, Class, or Study
5:10 pm	Evening prayer (Vespers) & Angelus
5:40 pm	Lectio Divina
6:25 pm	Supper, followed by Recreation
8:00 pm	Night prayer (Compline)
9:00 pm	“Lights Out”

*“Whatever you do, work at it with your whole being.*

*DO IT FOR THE LORD RATHER THAN FOR MEN,  
since you know full well you will receive and inheritance from Him as a reward.”*

— Colossians 3:23-24

Top, Left to Right: Milking cows; Receiving Holy Communion; Working in the garden  
At Left: Praying in the choir; Tilling the ground



# Events at the Bethlehem Priory of St. Joseph

## IN DECEMBER

- 1) On the 8th, Sr. Mary Gabriel, O. Praem., made her first profession of vows, with her family and friends joining us for the celebration. (See also photos on page 3.)
- 2) On the 15th-17th, we were honored by a first visit from the The Most Rev. Jos Wouters, O. Praem., Abbot General of our Norbertine Order, who was joined by the Rt. Rev. James Herring, O. Praem., Prior Regimine of Bayview Priory in Delaware.
- 3) Christmas evening brought us a surprise snowfall of two full feet. Despite our priests' desire and efforts to make it here to our monastery, for the first time in twenty years, we went two days without the Holy Mass celebrated here at the Priory, as we waited for the roads to be cleared.



## IN JANUARY

- 4) In late January, we were blessed to have the Rt. Rev. Philip Anderson, OSB, Abbot of Clear Creek Monastery in Oklahoma, preach our annual community retreat with the theme of monasticism and "climbing the spiritual mountain."
- 5) On the 29th, we celebrated the 9th anniversary of our canonical erection as an independent canony of the Norbertine Order. (Photo from our archives of the Erection Mass at the St. John the Baptist Cathedral in Fresno.)
- 6) In late January, the nuns began pruning our young trees, that they might bear abundant fruit and nuts in due time.



## IN FEBRUARY

- 7) On the 2nd, we celebrated Candlemas (the Feast of the Presentation of Our Lord) with a candlelit procession at dawn, with Rev. Stephen Boyle, O.Praem., presiding.
- 8) Though still winter, our community has been blessed with new life on the farm.
- 9) On the 26th, Ash Wednesday, in union with Catholic faithful throughout the world, we received blessed ashes during the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, marking the beginning of the solemn season of Lent.



Our Mother Prioress shares photos with her spiritual daughters.

## Monastery Expansion AND Our Current Needs

We invite you to help with Phase II of our Monastery Expansion Project and other pressing needs:

### COMMUNITY LIVING EXPENSES:

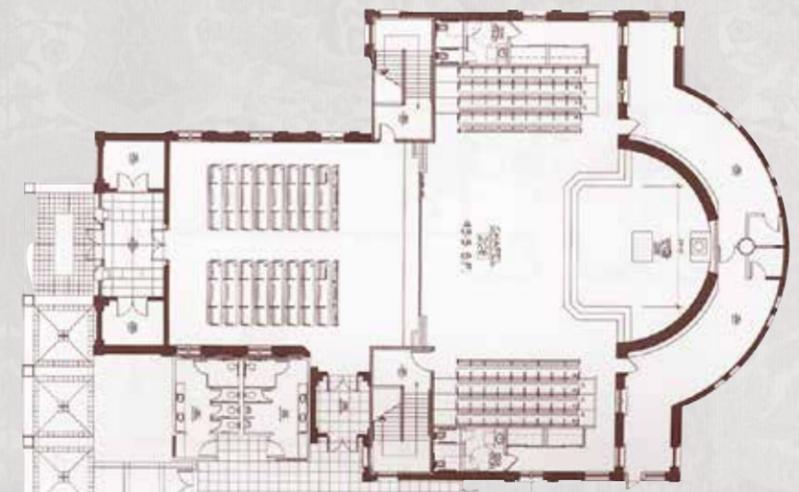
Not unlike a large family, our community's household, kitchen, dairy kitchen, farm/animal, garden, vehicle, maintenance, utilities, office, clothing, medical, insurance, and other needs are significant. Your support is deeply appreciated, whether by check or cash, online credit card donations via PayPal ([www.norbertinesisters.com/donate/](http://www.norbertinesisters.com/donate/)), or donations which we can arrange in-house for you. Please call (661-823-1066) or email us if you have questions ([norbertinecanonesses@gmail.com](mailto:norbertinecanonesses@gmail.com)).

### PHASE II OF OUR MONASTERY EXPANSION PROJECT:

We remain deeply grateful to all of you who are helping to build our future chapel, which will replace our current chapel, still housed in the twice-expanded converted game room and living room of the property's original 70-year-old ranch home. The estimated cost of Phase II's chapel and wing construction is \$12 million, with \$8 million required to take the next step of commissioning a complete architectural design and blueprints. We continue to place all in God's loving providence, trusting that He is blessing all of our benefactors and will raise up our chapel in His perfect timing and according to His good pleasure.



R. Belcher



Conceptual Floor plan of our future chapel



THE NORBERTINE CANONESSES  
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 many “St. Joseph” friends who generously help us with plumbing, welding, carpentry, maintenance of our cars and appliances, and much more, often at the same time kindly instructing the nuns in these trades.

God bless you!

*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](http://www.norbertinesisters.org)

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

♣ FOR GIFT SHOP PURCHASES:  
Please visit our website at  
[www.norbertinesisters.org](http://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



— BLESSED IS THE MAN WHO TRUSTS IN THE LORD —

*“He is like a tree planted beside the water: it fears not the heat when it comes, its leaves stay green; in the year of drought it shows no distress, but still bears fruit.”*

— Jeremiah 17:7-8



Cover: St. Joseph and Jesus with St. John the Baptist, by Melchior Paul von Deschwanden, 1811-1881

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