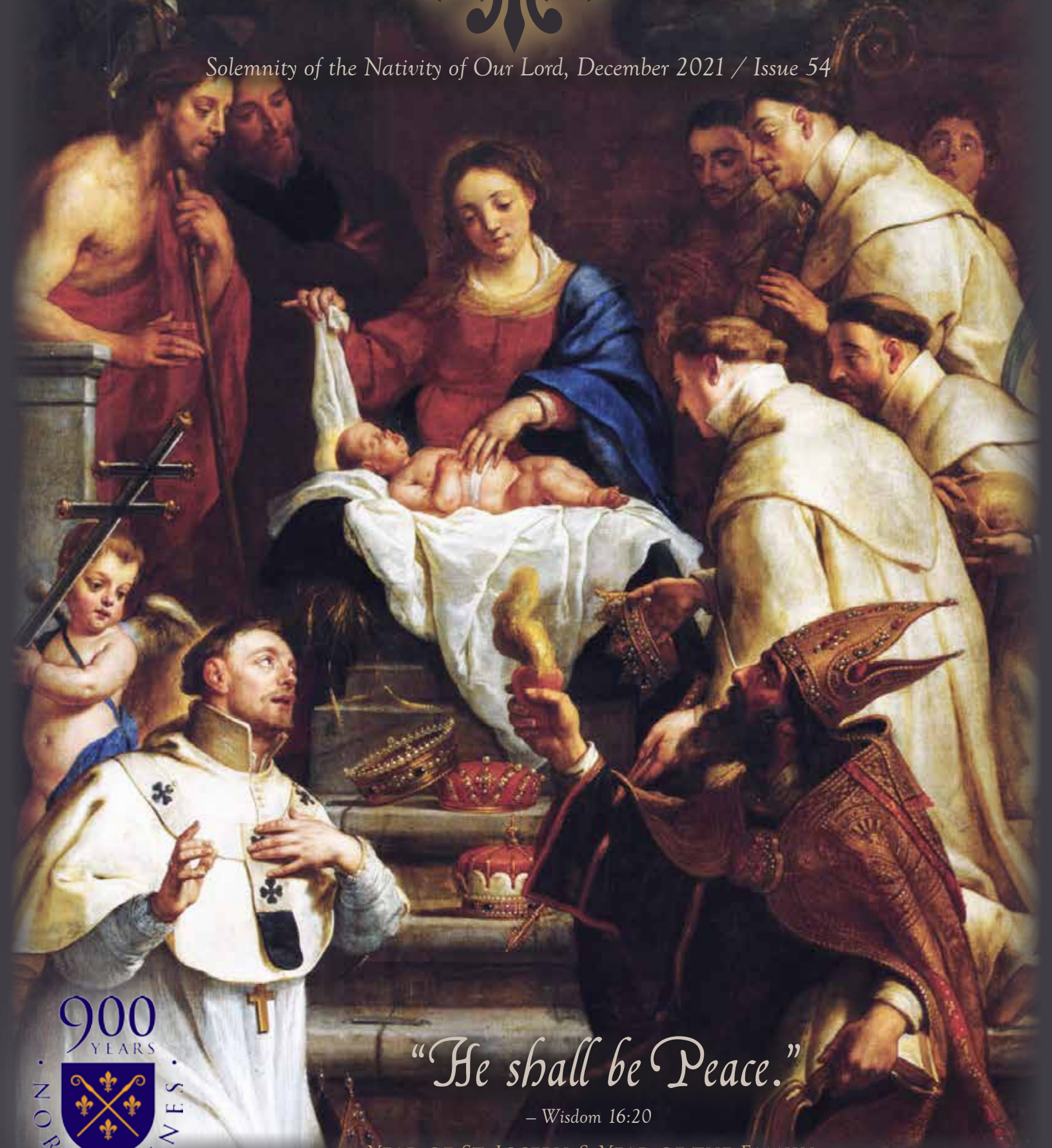


The Norbertine Canonesses of the Bethlehem Priory of St. Joseph

FIRST FRUITS

Solemnity of the Nativity of Our Lord, December 2021 / Issue 54



“He shall be Peace.”

— Wisdom 16:20



YEAR OF ST. JOSEPH & YEAR OF THE FAMILY
900TH JUBILEE YEAR OF THE NORBERTINE ORDER — 1121-2021

Dear Confreres, Family and Friends of the Bethlehem Priory,

“For the peace of Jerusalem, pray.

May peace reign in your walls, in your palaces, peace.

For love of my brethren and friends, I will say, ‘Peace upon you.’”

– Psalm 122:6-8

This Christmas marks the 900th anniversary of the day when, in the cross-shaped valley of Prémontré, St. Norbert made profession under the Rule of St. Augustine, along with a band of men who had followed him. They were not seeking to establish a religious order that would withstand the ravages of nine centuries; they were simply seeking to follow Jesus Christ more closely and to serve His Church, which was so much in need of prayer and reform.

In this issue of *FirstFruits*, we share with you our Order’s dedication to seek and strive after peace, following in the footsteps of our Holy Founder St. Norbert, and the great St. Augustine, whose Rule Norbert chose to follow. The times may have changed, but the needs of the Church and the world remain strikingly similar to what they were on that graced Christmas Day nine hundred years ago. And the answer to those needs is also the same: *Jesus Christ*. For He who is the way, truth and life is “*the same yesterday, today and forever*” (Hebrews 13:8), and the offering of oneself to Him in prayer and penance remains the only solution.

We pray that you and your loved ones may receive the peace of Christ this Christmas and always, and that your New Year will be filled with His grace and blessings.

In Christ, Our Lady, St. Joseph, and St. Norbert,

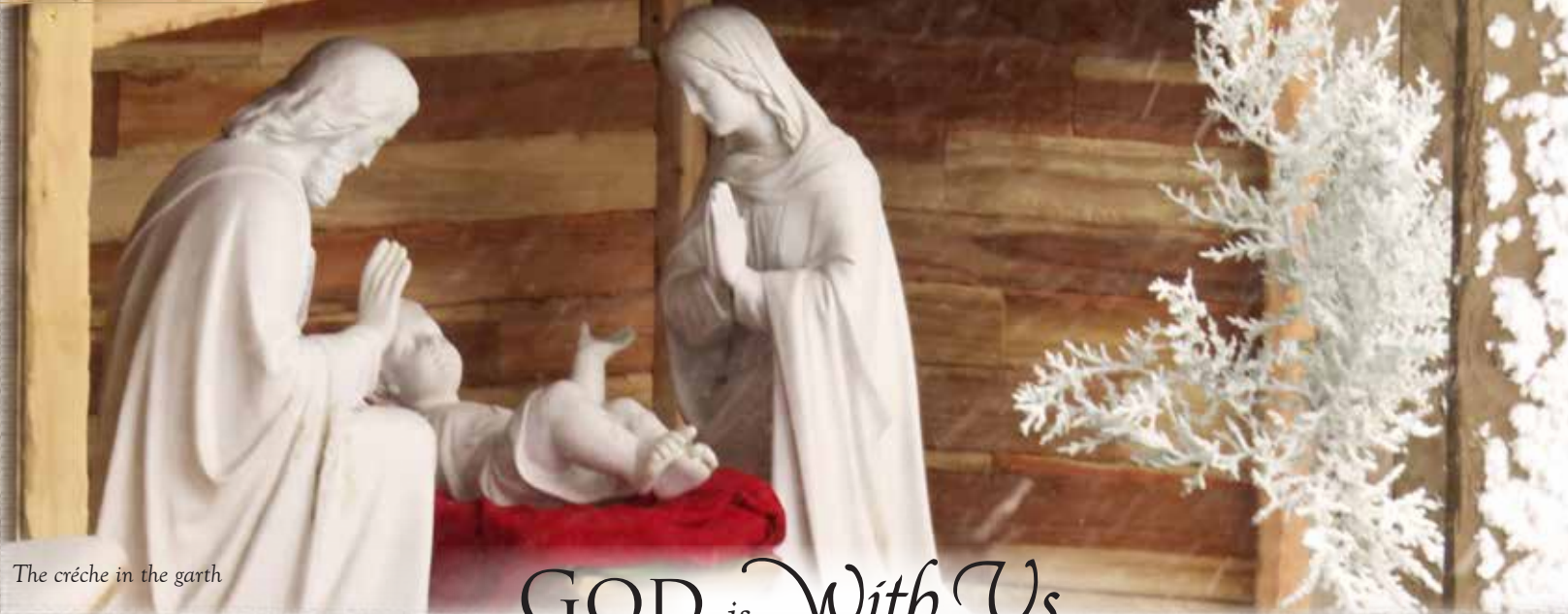
Mother Mary Augustine, O. Praem.

Mother Mary Augustine, O. Praem., Prioress

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



On the Cover: Christmas at Prémontré: St. Norbert, St. Augustine, St. John the Baptist, St. Joseph, and other Norbertine Saints surround the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Infant Jesus. (By Caspar de Crayer, 1655, Averbode, Belgium)



The crèche in the garth

GOD is With Us

In the heart of our convent, there is a little monastic garden called the garth, which sees much activity throughout the year: the beginning of liturgical processions, prayer and *lectio* beside the pond, celebratory recreations after big events, brisk walks when it is raining or snowing, landscaping, fish feeding, and the growing of many flowers and plants.

In this garth there is a stable wherein lies the Child Jesus, adored by His Mother and St. Joseph all year around: rain or shine, night or day, heat or chill.

Far from being a decoration relegated to the Christmas season, the crèche is a beautiful reminder – day in and day out – as we go about our lives. Just as He is in the heart of our convent, so in the heart of each individual lies the Little Child Jesus, the Word of God, “*in [Whom] everything in heaven and on earth was created*” (Colossians 1:16). In the heart of all our activity, He is present, desiring to share it with us and to be with us in all we do. In our hearts, we can always build a little garden, and, with Our Lady and St. Joseph, adore God there in silence and peace, especially at the times when He really and truly enters within us in the Most Holy Eucharist.

But this God, this Little Child, Who is the Prince of Peace, also promises to bring the sword (cf. Luke 12:51). He challenges us to sever all ties with those things that keep us from Him, no matter what they are. As we ponder Him lying in a bare stable, on an unwelcoming manger, it is a stark and severe confrontation to our own lives, and is meant to elicit examination and conversion.

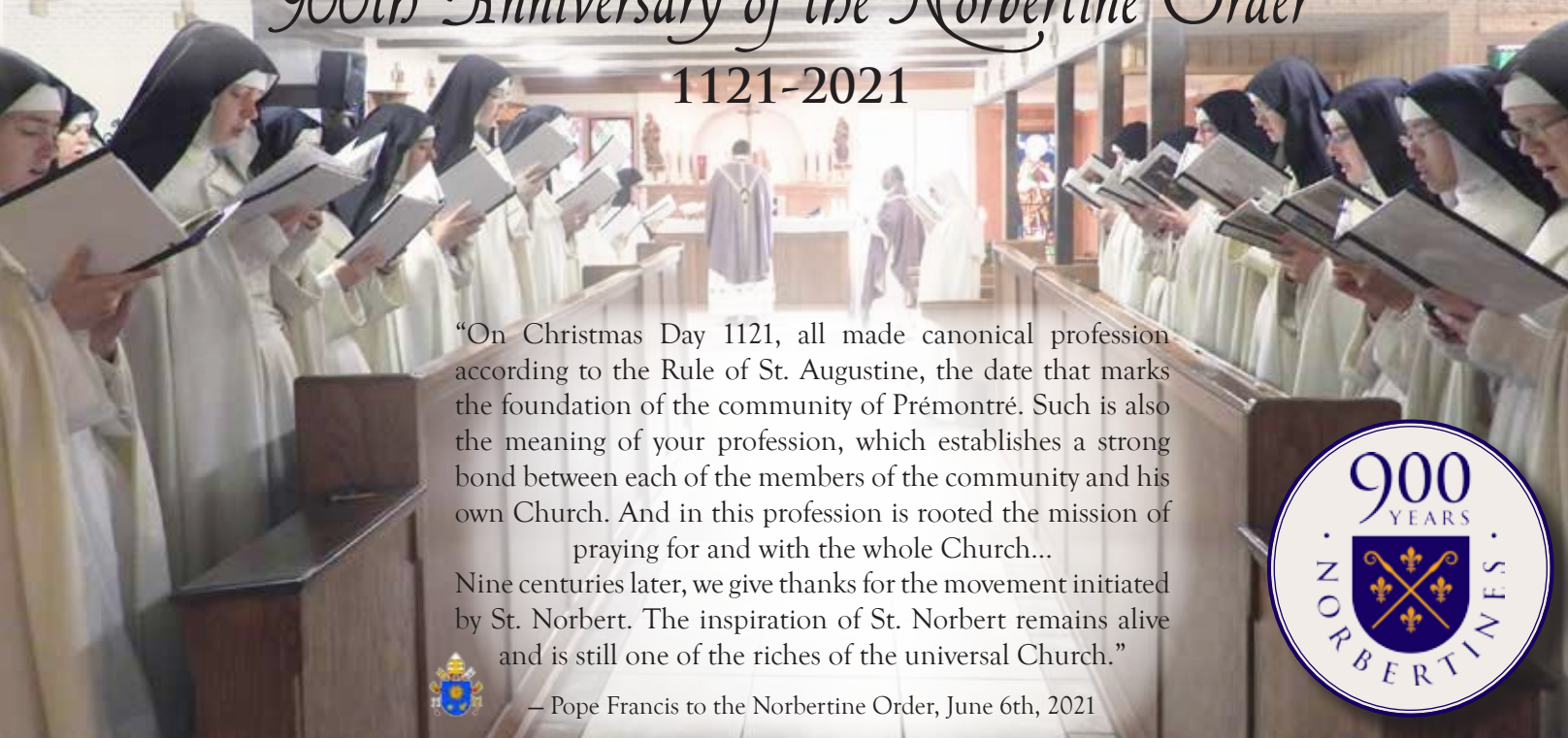
He does not, however, make demands on us and then leave us on our own to struggle (cf. Luke 11:46). Rather, His little foot is raised to kick down the barriers we have built in our hearts, so that we can dwell with Him, and He can work in us, if we but let Him and cooperate with Him.

In the heart of all of us then, in the heart of what constitutes our lives, we have this constant Companion Who is ever with us, Who is intimately at the heart of all we do, and Who actually enters us, Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity in the Eucharist.

With this truth in mind, we can face any uncertainty, any suffering, any difficulty that will inevitably arise in our lives: for if God is with us, who can be against us (cf. Romans 8:31)?

CELEBRATING THE 900th Anniversary of the Norbertine Order

1121-2021

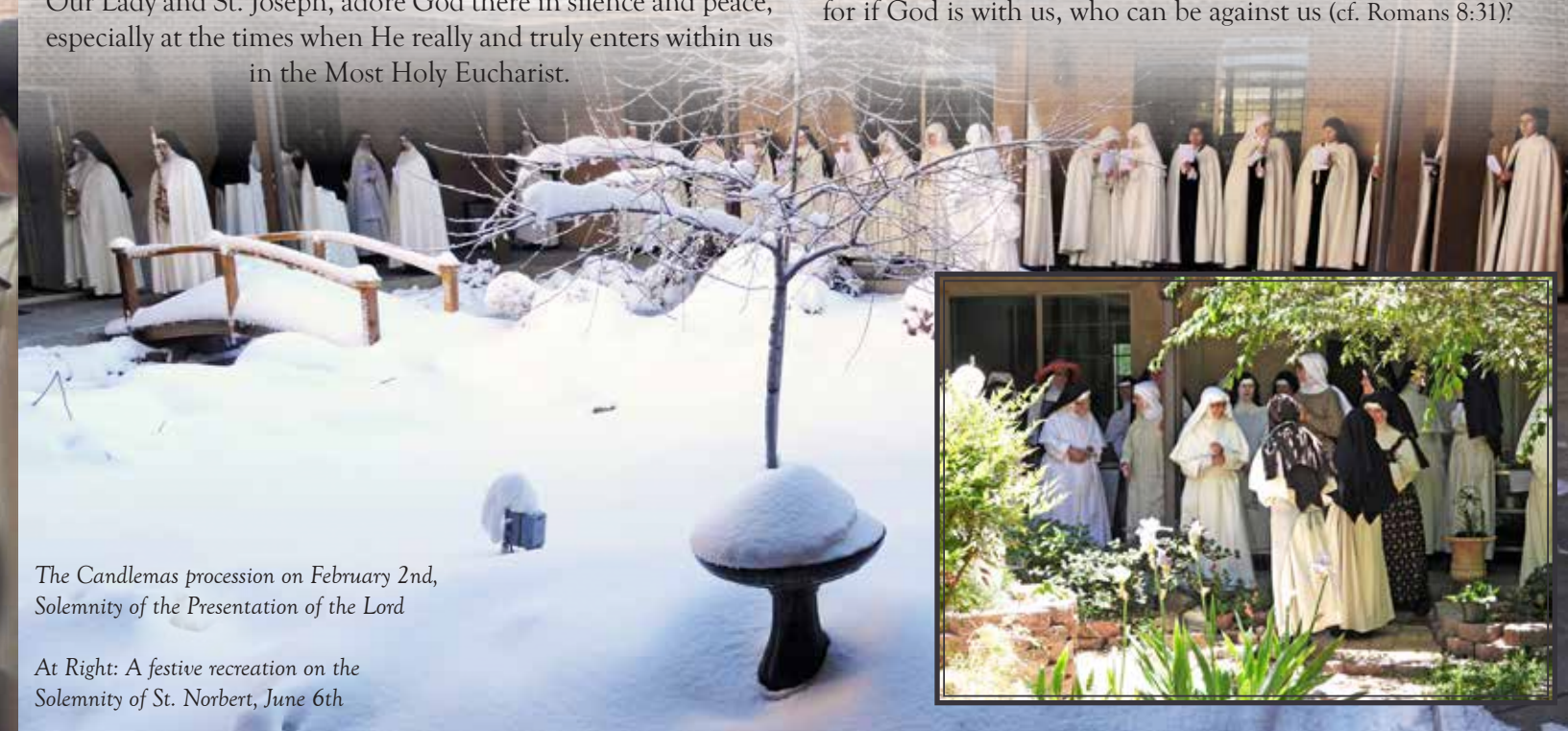


“On Christmas Day 1121, all made canonical profession according to the Rule of St. Augustine, the date that marks the foundation of the community of Prémontré. Such is also the meaning of your profession, which establishes a strong bond between each of the members of the community and his own Church. And in this profession is rooted the mission of praying for and with the whole Church...”

Nine centuries later, we give thanks for the movement initiated by St. Norbert. The inspiration of St. Norbert remains alive and is still one of the riches of the universal Church.”



– Pope Francis to the Norbertine Order, June 6th, 2021



The Candlemas procession on February 2nd, Solemnity of the Presentation of the Lord

At Right: A festive recreation on the Solemnity of St. Norbert, June 6th





“AND YOU
Bethlehem-Tphrathah,
too small to be among the clans of Judah,

FROM YOU SHALL
COME FORTH FOR ME

One Who is to be
Ruler in Israel;

Whose origin is from of old,
from ancient times.

Therefore the Lord will give them up,
until the time

WHEN SHE WHO
IS TO GIVE BIRTH

Has Borne,

and the rest of His brethren
shall return to the children of Israel.

HE SHALL STAND FIRM

and shepherd His flock
by the strength of the Lord,

in the majestic name
of the Lord, His God;

AND THEY SHALL REMAIN,

for now His greatness
shall reach to the ends of the earth;

He shall be Peace.”

— Micah 5:1-4

GLORY TO GOD IN THE HIGHEST

— *And on Earth Peace* —

TO MEN OF GOOD WILL

St. Norbert, the holy and illustrious founder of our Order, was known by his contemporaries as a “minister of peace and concord,” for during his life, he had a special gift for reconciling people and bringing about a Christian harmony in the most unnerving circumstances.

However, St. Norbert’s own life was far from the conventional notion of “peaceful.” Soon after founding Prémontré, and making Solemn Vows there on Christmas Day in 1121, the new community suffered an onslaught of diabolical attacks, which had to be met with much prayer, courage, and prudence. Soon thereafter, St. Norbert set out to preach, and through this, was unwillingly elected bishop of Magdeburg, a diocese in Germany that had become lax and corrupt. When he tried to promulgate necessary reforms, he was met not only with loud cries of protestation, but with several assassination attempts at the hands of clerics, members of his own household, and local nobles, who stirred up the populace into an angry mob. When those trials had at last subsided ~ due to his patience, kindness and prayer ~ a grave schism occurred between two men who both claimed to be Pope. St. Norbert set out for Rome with the Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, King Lothair III, to cast out the anti-pope (with the force of arms, if necessary) and to restore the true Pope to the Holy See. During his return journey from this tumultuous, yet successful, mission, St. Norbert became seriously ill. He died soon thereafter.

While most of us do not have such exciting and action-packed lives, we may still encounter many situations and circumstances, both interior and exterior, that do not fit the conventional notion of what “peace” ought to be. The question then is: what is true peace? And how could St. Norbert, with a life such as his, be so filled with it that it could overflow to others?

St. Augustine tells us that, “Peace is the tranquility of order.” The desire for true order is written into the very heart of man, and if it is lacking, we can have no true peace.

Order in our individual souls cannot exist apart from our existing for God – for, as is often quoted from St. Augustine:

“You have made us for Yourself [O Lord],
and our hearts are restless until they rest in You.”

— Confessions, Book 1, Chapter 1

When our hearts rest in God, when we see our existence as coming from and flowing toward Him, our lives can be interiorly properly ordered in all areas. Then we can have peace ~ even in the midst of tumult and difficulties of all kinds.

The call to acquire and live this supernatural, unshakable peace is an essential aspect of our vocation as Norbertine canonesses, called in our own way to be ministers of peace, following in the footsteps of our Holy Father, St. Norbert.

Monasteries of contemplatives, especially cloistered nuns, are sometimes likened to the “heart” of the Church, pumping the sap of grace to the other members of Christ’s Body through lives of prayer and sacrifice, and a deep union with the Lord. When lived in an intensified and concentrated way, God’s grace and peace flows and spread to the rest of the faithful. If there is right order and peace in the spiritual heart, it will be diffused throughout the Mystical Body of Christ.

Thus, the horarium (monastic schedule), the choir rubrics, the regulations of silence, the rank of sisters and superiors, the asceticism of monastic life, and the very vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, are not arbitrary medieval customs. Rather, they are the safeguards and custodians of peace, which is brought about through order. If monasteries are meant to be intensified centers of peace for the sake of the whole world, then they must in themselves be concentrated centers of supernatural order and harmony.

We again return to St. Norbert, the Minister of Peace and great ascetic, who began his Order at the very time and place where he knew it could find true peace – on Christmas Day in 1121, at the crib of the Infant Christ, the Prince of Peace.

It is from Him that we will attain true peace for ourselves and for the world, He alone Who is the source and end of all peace and harmony. This little Child will grow to become the Crucified and Risen One, Who will one day proclaim to His Apostles,

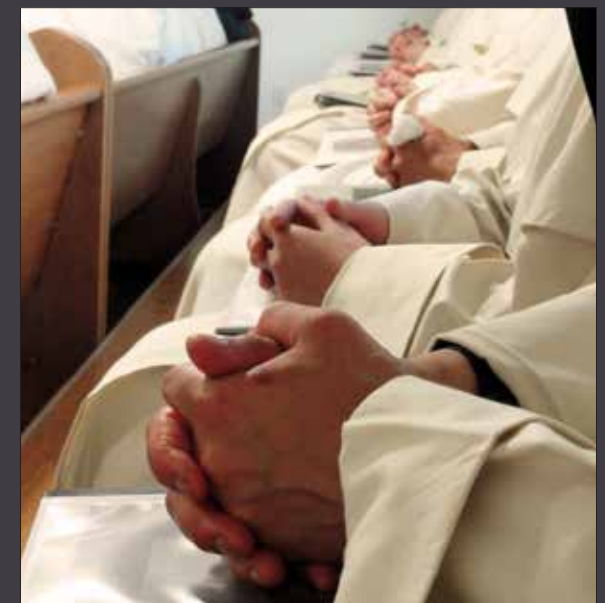
“Peace be with with you.”

— Luke 24:36

It is from this little Child, True God and True Man, that St. Norbert found his peace, even in the midst of his difficult life. And it from this little Child that we, too, will find it, even in the midst of our difficult lives and times. Resting in Him, we can diffuse Christ’s peace to the rest of the world.

— *To God be Glory Forever* —

AMEN.



Events at the Bethlehem Priory of St. Joseph



1)



2)



3)



4)



5)



6)



7)



8)

✠ IN AUGUST

- 1) With great joy, we welcomed His Excellency, The Most Rev. Joseph Brennan, Bishop of our Fresno Diocese, for a few days of retreat, with the special grace of his offering Holy Mass for the community during his visit.
- 2) During this month, we also cleared, leveled, and enriched the soil in our greenhouse.

✠ IN SEPTEMBER

- 3) On the 15th, Memorial of Our Lady of Sorrows, one of our aspirants, Sr. Angela entered the community as a postulant.
- 4) Throughout this month, we were able to send home many of our AKC Labrador Retriever puppies and also welcomed a litter of TMSF McNab puppies.

✠ IN OCTOBER

- 5) On the 13th, the feast day of Bl. Peter Adrian Toulouge, Norbertine Priest and "Martyr for the Truth," and the anniversary of the "Miracle of the Sun" and apparitions at Fatima, another postulant, Sr. Kathryn, entered the community.
- 6) We were blessed with an abundant grape harvest this year, allowing us to make more concord grape jelly to sell in our gift shop, with plenty of grapes leftover to eat in the refectory.
- 7) After taking a sabbatical last year, we resumed taking orders for our popular fresh balsam Christmas wreaths in this 900th Jubilee Year, selling out of our limited quantity very quickly. We have been gifted with the volunteer help of many groups

of friends, who have painted and wired pine cones, and we ourselves have had a few "pine cone parties" in preparation for the assembling of our wreaths in November and December.

✠ IN NOVEMBER

- 8) We again offered a Novena of Masses for the Holy Souls in Purgatory, praying especially for those deceased loved ones shared with us by you, our dear family and friends.

— 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"



Monastery Expansion & Our Current Needs

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

COMMUNITY LIVING EXPENSES:

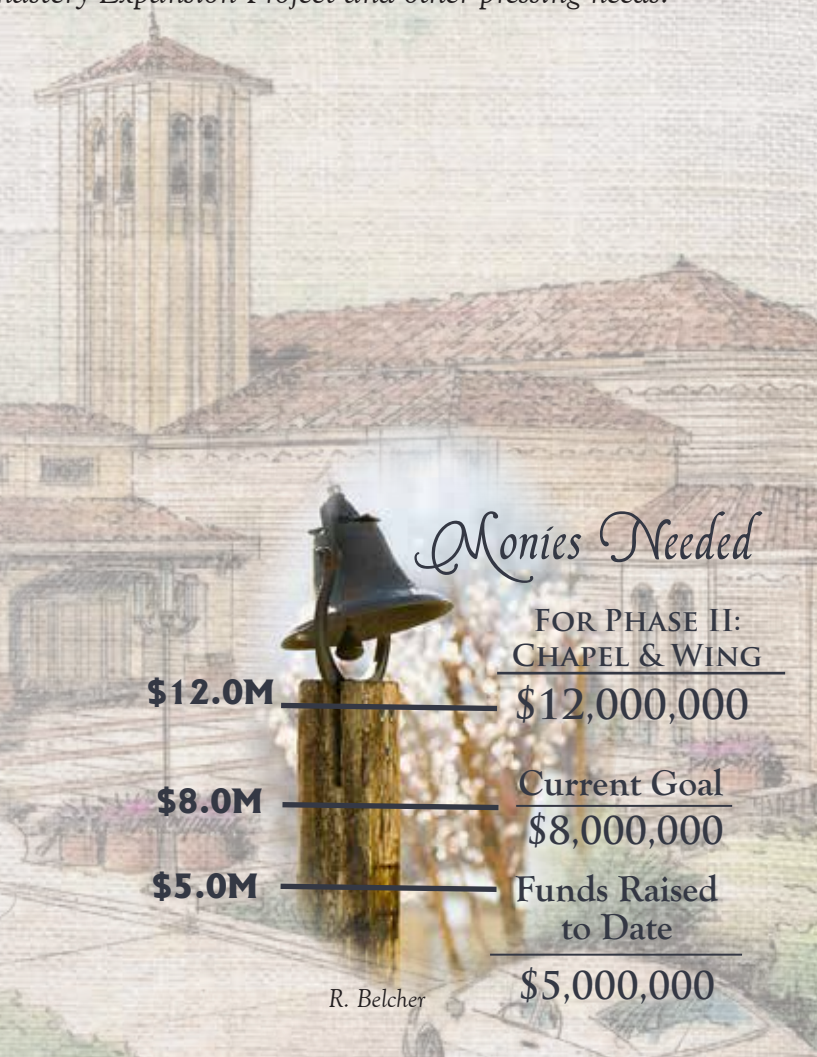
Not unlike a large family, our community's household, kitchen, dairy kitchen, farm/animal, garden, vehicle, maintenance, utilities, office, clothing, medical, insurance, and other needs are significant. Your support is deeply appreciated, whether by check or cash, online credit card donations via PayPal (www.norbertinesisters.com/donate/), 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).

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. With almost \$5.0 million raised to date, thanks to the continuing generosity of our dear friends like you, we continue to place all in God's loving providence, trusting that He is blessing all of you, and will raise up our chapel in His perfect timing and according to His holy will.

www.norbertinesisters.org

God Bless You!



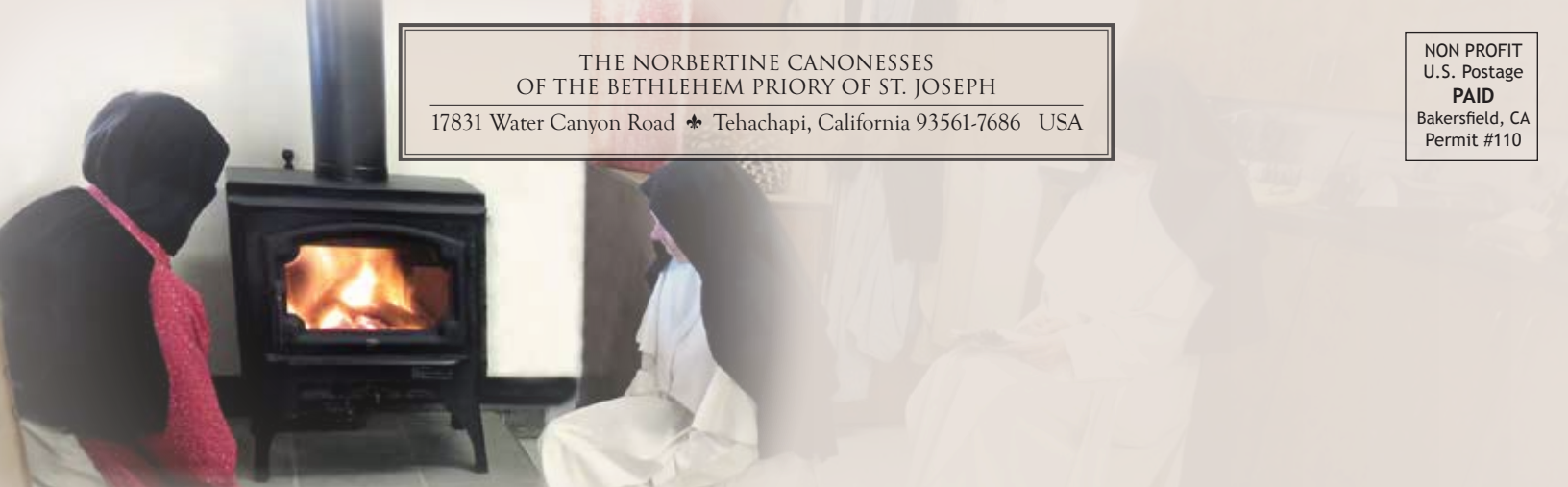
Monies Needed

\$12.0M	FOR PHASE II: CHAPEL & WING	\$12,000,000
\$8.0M	Current Goal	\$8,000,000
\$5.0M	Funds Raised to Date	\$5,000,000

R. Belcher

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 Fr. Mark and our beloved friends at St. Malachy Catholic Church, for their generous Christmas and Jubilee Year gift of a new wood stove for our convent “workroom,” with additional funds donated over their goal being gratefully used toward the purchase of pellets and a new pellet stove for our greenhouse—enabling the nuns to keep warm and continue to grow fruits, vegetables and herbs throughout the winter.

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 GIFT SHOP PURCHASES:
Please visit our website at
www.shop.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.



“Many religious men had ADVISED NORBERT about his community, one suggesting the eremitic life, another that of the anchorite, still another to take up the lifestyle of the Carthusians.

But Norbert, whose plans depended on heaven, entrusted his foundation to Him who is the beginning of all things.

Finally, Norbert ordered that the rule be accepted which the BLESSED AUGUSTINE had established for his followers.

The apostolic life, which was ordained and renewed by this blessed man after the apostles, Norbert now hoped to live.

On Christmas day one by one they enrolled themselves under that rule into the city of blessed eternity.”

— From the *Life of St. Norbert, Vita B*