

The Norbertine Canonesses of the Bethlehem Priory of St. Joseph

FIRST FRUITS

Month of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, August 2022 / Issue 56



“REJOICE, FOR THROUGH YOU ALL MEN
Will be gathered to the Lord.”

— Liturgy of the Hours, cf. Tobit 13:8-15



“AND YOU, O LORD,
never cease
to gather a people to Yourself,
so that from the
rising of the sun to its setting
a pure sacrifice may be offered
IN YOUR NAME.”

— From Eucharistic Prayer III at Holy Mass

On the Cover: *The Virgin of the Grapes*,
Pierre Mignard, 1640

Dear Confreres, Family, and Friends of the Bethlehem Priory,

In this month dedicated to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, we turn our eyes with her towards her Son, Who came among us, and is still truly present with us, that He may gather all souls into His Mystical Body, the Church, and so share His life with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

In this edition of *FirstFruits*, we share with you our own living out of that mystery as Norbertine Canonesses, specially dedicated to the Liturgy and, in the footsteps of our Holy Father St. Norbert, Apostle of the Eucharist, particularly devoted to the Eucharist. It is in and through this Real Presence of God in the Eucharist and our union with Him, that all of our other actions, many and diverse as they are, derive their meaning and efficacy — whether it be praying, attending classes, caring for convent property, working in the garden or with our growing number of dogs, cooking, cleaning and doing the laundry, thanking benefactors for their generous gifts, or responding to prayer requests — through Christ’s sacrifice, perpetuated in the Holy Eucharist, all these things serve to bring about not only our own sanctification, but also that of others.

We give thanks to God for having gathered us all with you into a bond of unity through our Eucharistic Lord and in prayer, as we assure each and every one of you, our beloved confreres, family and friends, that you remain in our prayers — whether we are in the choir or at our daily tasks.

With prayerful gratitude in Christ, Our Lady, St. Joseph, and St. Norbert,

Mother Mary Augustine, O. Praem.

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

“IT IS ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY TO CONFESS ACCORDING TO THE CATHOLIC FAITH,

THAT THE ENTIRE *Christ is Present* IN THIS SACRAMENT.”

— St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, III.76.1

“In the
Most Blessed Sacrament
of the *Eucharist*,
THE BODY AND BLOOD,
together with
THE SOUL AND DIVINITY,
of our Lord *Jesus Christ*
is truly, really and
substantially contained.
This presence is called
‘real’
because it is presence
in the fullest sense:
CHRIST, GOD AND MAN,
makes Himself
WHOLLY AND ENTIRELY
present.”

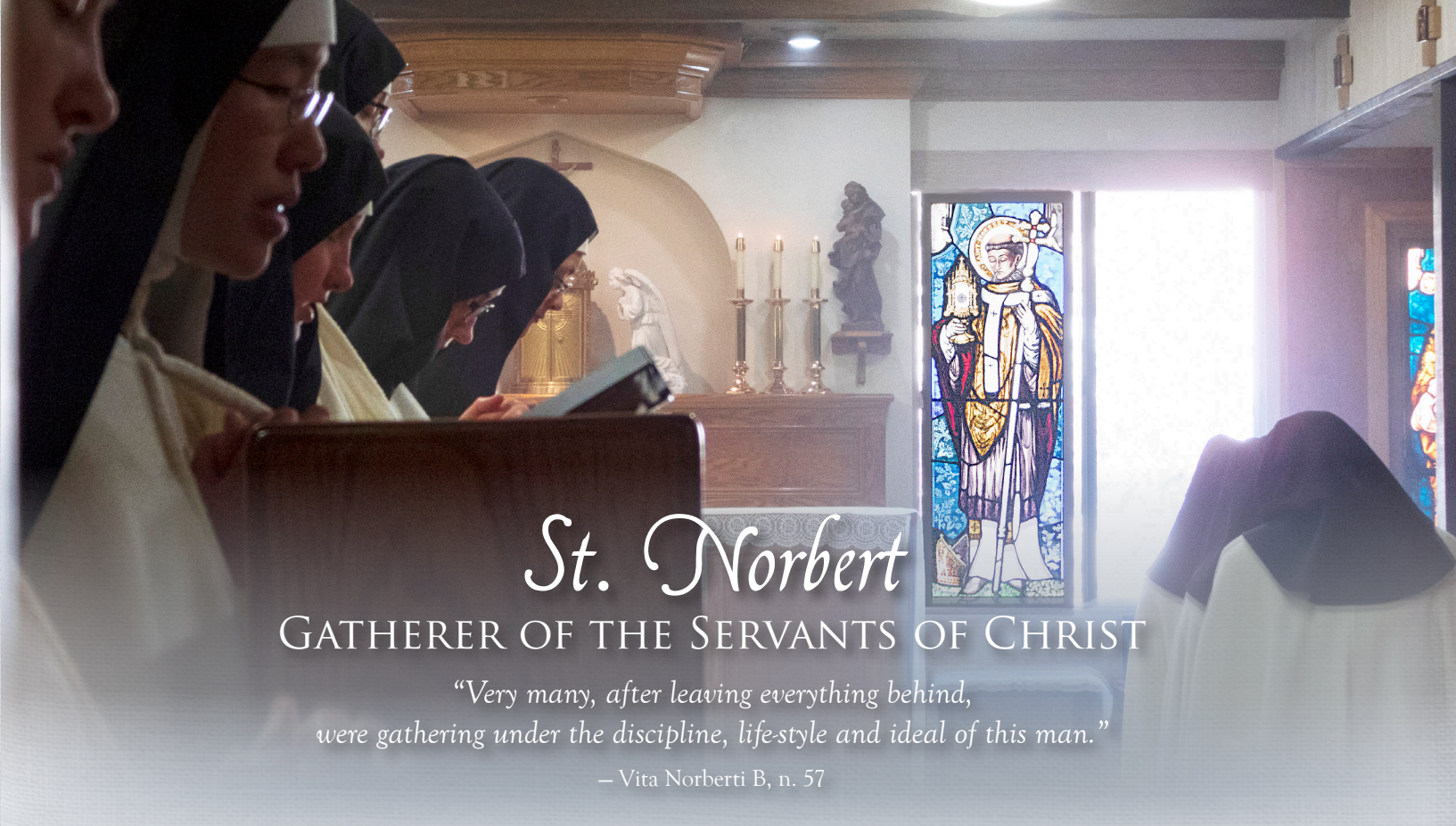
— From the Council of Trent, 1551



“In present day society, which so easily
rejects God and denies His existence,
THE LIFE OF WOMEN
completely dedicated
TO THE CONTEMPLATION OF
Eternal Truth
constitutes an open profession
of the reality of both
HIS EXISTENCE
and
HIS PRESENCE,
since such a life seeks
loving intimacy with
God.”

Whoever leads such a life can reassure
those who suffer temptations against faith
and those who through error are skeptical of
the possibility man has of conversing with
the transcendent God.”

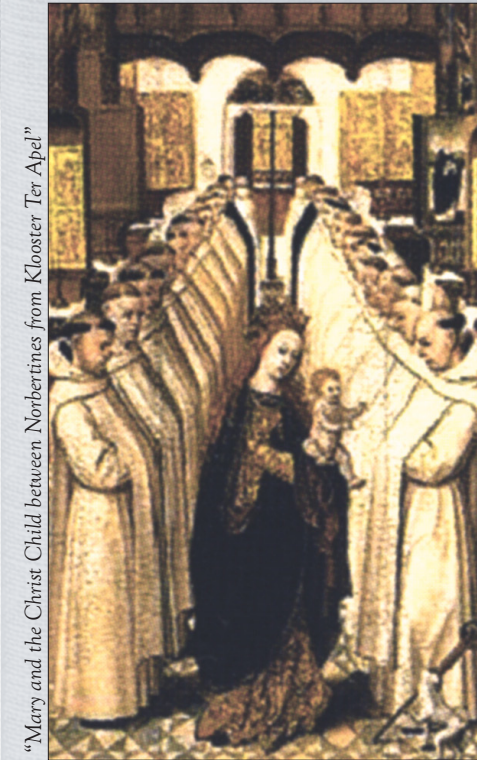
— Venite seorsum, August 15, 1969



St. Norbert GATHERER OF THE SERVANTS OF CHRIST

“Very many, after leaving everything behind,
were gathering under the discipline, life-style and ideal of this man.”

— Vita Norberti B, n. 57



“Mary and the Christ Child between Norbertines from Klooster Ter Apel”

When St. Norbert gathered companions and brought them together at Prémontré, he chose to establish it as a community of canons; thus, the center of their day was the celebration of the Mass and the Divine Office. These men, soon joined by lay brothers and devout women, gathered under Norbert’s ideal, which was that of the Apostles and the early Church: men and women gathered around Mary, the Mother of Jesus, devoting themselves to the Breaking of the Bread, and to prayer. (Acts 1:14, 2:42)

From the very beginning, the unifying center of the Premonstratensians has been the Eucharistic presence of the Lord, in union with Mary, His Mother.

“The celebration of the Eucharist and the Liturgy of the Hours, to which all canonical communities especially dedicate themselves ... is the culmination of our communion. Indeed, ‘no Christian community is built up unless it has its basis and center in the celebration of the Most Holy Eucharist.’”
— Constitutions of the Canonesses Regular of the Order of Premontré

St. Augustine called God “beauty ever ancient, ever new,” and the same term can be applied to God’s Holy Church, in whom His Spirit rests. The Church, ever ancient and ever new, is ever returning to the ancient, yet timeless, beginnings of the Apostolic era — she is ever returning to the simple life of the early Christians, gathered around Mary, the Mother of Jesus, devoted to the Breaking of the Bread and to prayer.

Today, Our Lord in the Eucharist, the same Lord who St. Norbert and the early Norbertines gathered around and adored, is still present among us to gather us all into one Mystical Body, around Mary, the Mother of Jesus, as we devote ourselves in union with her to prayer — in a word, as we live the life of the Church.

This was the ideal of St. Norbert, the ideal of the Apostolic way of life:
“The chief motivation for your sharing life together is to have one heart and one soul seeking God.”
— Rule of St. Augustine I.1, Acts 4:32

And so today, in the spirit of the Apostles and in the footsteps of St. Norbert, the Premonstratensians still strive to show forth this ever ancient and ever new mystery of the Church: that we, though many, may be gathered into one around Mary, the Mother of Jesus, devoted to the Eucharistic Lord in the Breaking of the Bread, and to prayer.

“The sacrament of the Eucharist is called
THE BREAKING OF THE BREAD.
Jesus used this rite when He blessed and
broke bread. It is this expression that the
first Christians used to designate their
Eucharistic assemblies, signifying that all
who eat the one broken bread, Christ, enter
into communion with Him and form but
one body in Him.”
— Catechism of the Catholic Church n. 1328



Offered With Him Whole and Entire

THE SACRIFICE OF CHRIST ❀ THE SACRIFICE OF HIS CHURCH

"In the catacombs, the Church is often represented as a woman with arms outstretched in prayer.

Like Christ who stretched out His arms on the Cross, through Him, with Him and in Him, she offers herself and intercedes for all men."

– Catechism of the Catholic Church n. 1368

When God became Man, He joined Himself irrevocably to the human race as our Brother, and on the Cross, He joined Himself to the human race in a deeper and more intimate way: through the sacrifice of Himself to the Father, the Church was born from His pierced side and He took her as His Bride, becoming her Head and Bridegroom.

"It is in the Church that Christ fulfills and reveals His own mystery as the purpose of God's plan: 'to unite all things in Him.'

(Ephesians 1:10)

St. Paul calls this nuptial union of Christ and the Church 'a great mystery.' In the Church, this communion of men with God, in the 'love that never ends,' is the purpose which governs everything. 'The Church's structure is totally ordered to the holiness of Christ's

members. And holiness is measured according to the 'great mystery' in which the Bride responds with the gift of love to the gift of the Bridegroom.' (Pope St. John Paul II)

– Catechism of the Catholic Church n. 772-774

If the Church, and all her members, are united to the Head in such an intimate bond, they must participate in a very real way in Christ's sacrifice and offering of Himself to the Father. In the faithful reception of the Eucharist, the unbloody memorial of His offering upon the Cross, His life becomes our life and His sacrifice our sacrifice.

"The lives of the faithful, their praise, sufferings, prayer and work are united with those of Christ and with His total offering, and so acquire a new value."

– Catechism of the Catholic Church n. 1368

As the Church is built up and structured for the purpose of the holiness of her members, so our own lives are meant to be built upon and centered around the sanctification not only of our own souls, but the souls of all our brothers and sisters, whom God wants to draw into His embrace.



But how is it done? How does one, practically speaking, center one's whole life around the sanctification of souls and the gathering of the children of God into His embrace?

The answer is to be found in the sacrifice of Christ, a sacrifice which can enrich and elevate our every action.

During His life on earth, and now in heaven, Christ lives always to make intercession for us to the Father, and to offer Himself in love for the glory of the Father and the salvation of souls. If this is the life of the Head, this must be the life of the members, and the basic work that occupies our day to day lives.

"You are obliged to renounce yourselves, to detach yourselves and divest yourselves freely and completely of all that is yours for the sake of God, so as to bear the cross of Jesus Christ on your shoulders each day, to lead a penitential life, patiently suffering the repeated trials that will come to you. This is the narrow way that leads to heaven, our true homeland. Jesus Christ, by his death and by his life, has gone before us courageously on this way, pointing it out to us by his words and works."

– From the sermon of our Holy Father St. Norbert

Our Holy Father St. Norbert, the Apostle of the Eucharist, understood well that nothing in this life matters more than bringing souls to God, and so he knew that nothing mattered more in our daily lives, whether in a cloister or a cubicle or a kitchen, than continuing the sacrifice of Christ and his offering to the Father, which alone can effect that salvation of souls.

"The only perfect sacrifice is the one that Christ offered on the cross as a total offering to the Father's love for our salvation. By uniting ourselves with His sacrifice we can make our lives a sacrifice to God."

– Catechism of the Catholic Church n. 2099-2100

The sacrifice that we participate in at Holy Mass is meant to redound to our whole lives. But again, how is this done?

"Every action done so as to cling to God in communion of holiness, and thus achieve blessedness, is a true sacrifice."

– St. Augustine, *The City of God*

Our day to day lives must be lived: the cows must be milked, the grass must be cut, the food made, the laundry washed, the dogs walked, the house cleaned, the chores done. Yet there are innumerable ways in which we can offer ourselves to God and sacrifice ourselves with Him for souls: by struggling, despite the difficulty, dryness, and renunciation it will necessarily entail, to remain united with Him in our thoughts and actions, patiently bearing all He sends us and seeking His will in all we do.

Joined to our Heavenly Bridegroom in the Eucharist and united as one in His Mystical Body the Church, our whole lives can become an offering to the Father, so that, through the Church and through us, Christ can continue to accomplish God's plan to unite all things in Him, gathering all souls into His embrace, in the communion of love that never ends.

To God be all glory and praise, forever and ever. Amen.

"The sacrament of the Eucharist is called THE HOLY SACRIFICE. It makes present the one sacrifice of Christ the Savior and includes the Church's offering. It completes and surpasses all the sacrifices of the Old Covenant."
– Catechism of the Catholic Church n. 1328

Events at the Bethlehem Priory of St. Joseph

The original 1970's ranch house currently used as our cloister chapel, lay chapel, gift shop, computer workroom, library, sewing room, liturgy office, Prioress' office and storage.



IN MARCH

- 1) Early this month, Fr. Joseph Homick, COSJ, our long-time friend, visited our community and gave us rich spiritual conferences on inner healing and conversion/transformation based on the writings and teaching of the Church Fathers.
- 2) Beginning in March, we are being blessed with ongoing classes from our dear friend, Leo Severino, ranging from proofs of God's existence, to realism philosophy, to the virtues, to the application of these truths in our lives as contemplative nuns.
- 3) On March 25th, the Solemnity of the Annunciation, we joined our Holy Father Pope Francis and the Bishops in consecrating Ukraine and Russia to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. May God grant our world peace and light through His Blessed Mother.

IN APRIL

- We rejoiced in the yearly celebration of the Solemn Triduum:
- 4) On the 14th, Holy Thursday, at the office of Tenebrae, sung at three in the morning;
 - 5) On the 15th, Good Friday, at the veneration of the Cross during the Good Friday service.
 - 6) On the 17th, Easter Sunday, as we process from the Baptismal Font, after renewing our Baptismal vows. *Alleluia!*

IN MAY

- 7) In preparation for our annual May crowning, our novitiate sisters spent almost a month cleaning, repairing and beautifying our outdoor statue of the Holy Family and the surrounding area.

IN JUNE

- 8) We gratefully welcomed back Fr. Charles Ryan, FSSP, who gave us conferences throughout the months of June and July on the Angels and the Most Holy Eucharist. *(Here Father Ryan is pictured leading our Corpus Christi Eucharistic Procession, accompanied by Fr. Tony Ritter, brother of one of our nuns.)*
- 9) With profound gratitude and abundant joy, we received a visit for a few days from our Bishop, The Most Reverend Joseph Brennan, giving thanks for his celebrations of Holy Mass and inspiring homilies, presiding at the Liturgical Hours, and the sharing of many lively stories and beautiful songs with our community at recreation.

IN JULY

- 10) This year, when we celebrated Independence Day, we had special cause to rejoice and give thanks to God for the Supreme Court's ruling in overturning *Roe v. Wade*, as we continue to pray that America may truly be one nation under God, striving courageously for liberty and justice for all: born and unborn.
- 11) On the 9th, the feast of Norbertine Martyrs Ss. Adrian and James, Sr. Marie-Claire, the blood sister of one of our nuns, became a postulant in our community. *Deo gratias!*
- 12) On the feast of St. Mary Magdalene, July 22nd, Sr. Mary Godfrey (left) and Sr. Maria Chiara (right) were vested in the white habit and became novices, receiving their new religious names. *Double Deo gratias!*

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, office, maintenance, utilities, clothing, medical/health, 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).

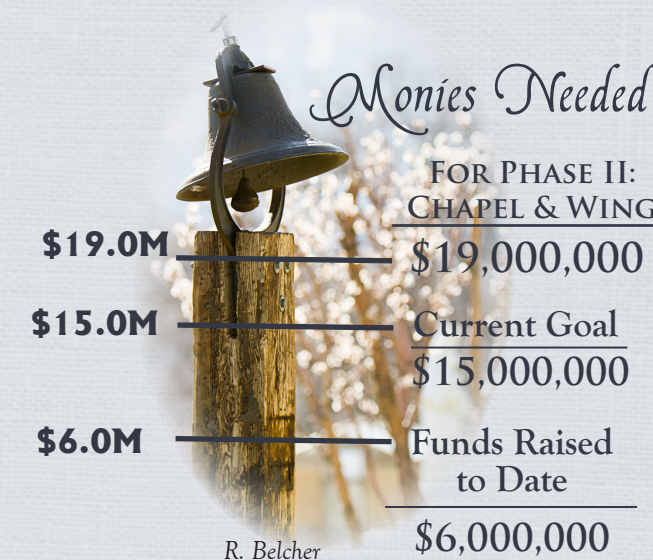
PHASE II OF OUR MONASTERY EXPANSION PROJECT:

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 current estimated construction cost of Phase II's chapel and wing, interior and exterior, is approximately \$19 million, based on schematics and related plans, with about \$15 million required to take the step of commissioning a complete architectural design and blueprints. With over \$6 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



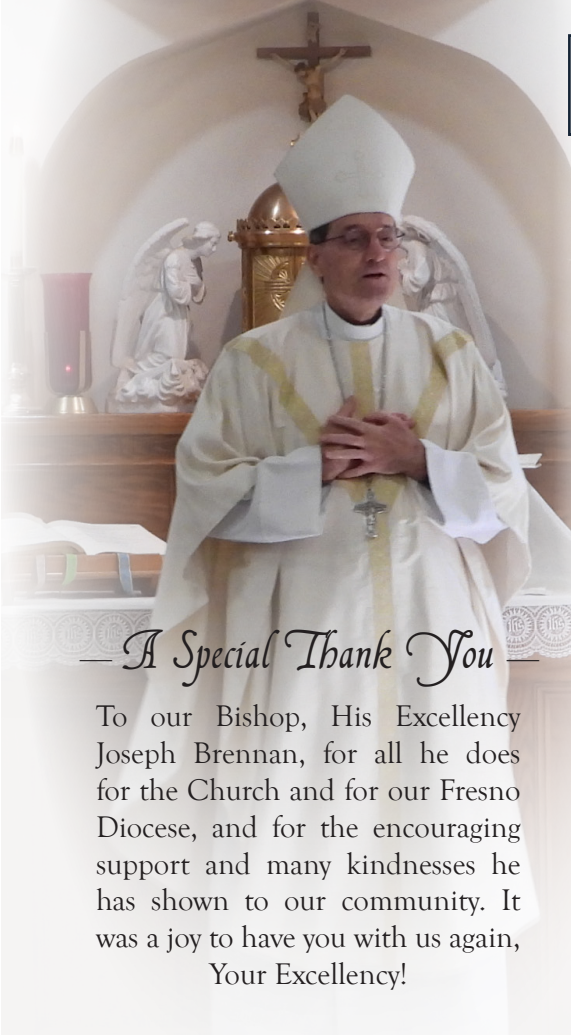
Conceptual Drawing of our Future Chapel By Mark Russell, A.I.A., Radian Design Group, Inc.



God Bless You!

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 Bishop, His Excellency Joseph Brennan, for all he does for the Church and for our Fresno Diocese, and for the encouraging support and many kindnesses he has shown to our community. It was a joy to have you with us again,
Your Excellency!

Norbertine Canonesses

— WEBSITE —

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

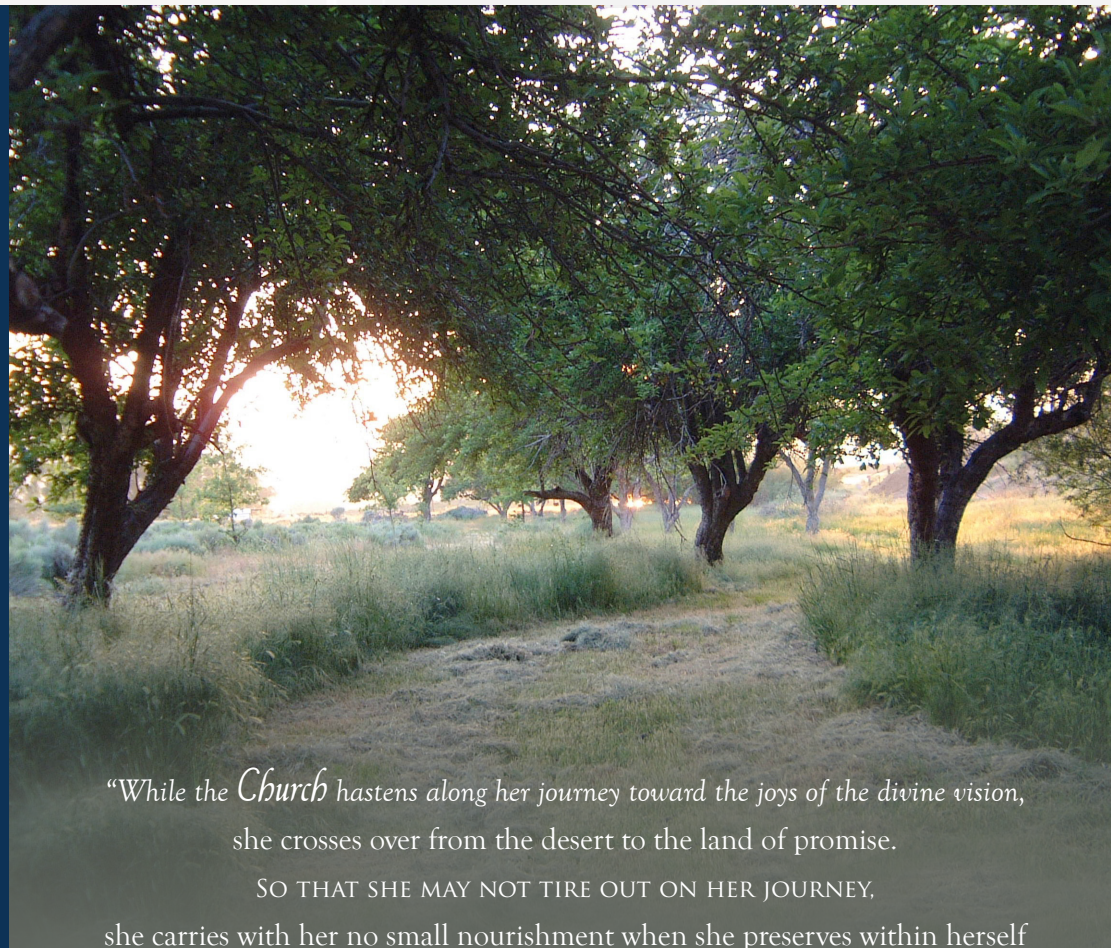
www.norbertinesisters.org

♣ **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.



“While the Church hastens along her journey toward the joys of the divine vision, she crosses over from the desert to the land of promise.

*SO THAT SHE MAY NOT TIRE OUT ON HER JOURNEY, she carries with her no small nourishment when she preserves within herself the sacrament of the **Body of Christ.**”*

— Adam Scot, Praemonstratensian canon, 12th c.