The Norbertine Canonesses of the Bethlehem Priory of St. Joseph

FIRST FRUITS

Solemnity of the Nativity of Our Lord, December 25, 2022 / Issue 57

"THAT THE world may know THAT YOU HAVE loved them."

ESUN

– John 17:23



"If any of God's children were to know and taste Divine Love, the uncreated God, the Incarnate God, the God who endured suffering, they would GIVE THEMSELVES COMPLETELY TO HIM, and with all their being would LOVE THIS GOD OF LOVE, to the point of being COMPLETELY TRANSFORMED INTO THE GOD-MAN, who is the Supreme Beloved." – Bl. Angela of Foligno

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

"And I have given them the glory You gave Me, so that they may be one as we are one, I in them and You in Me, that they may be brought to perfection as one, that the world may know that You have loved them, even as You have loved Me." - John 17:22-23

Laudetur Jesus Christus! As we celebrate Christmas, the beautiful solemnity that so eloquently proclaims God's unfailing love for us His people, we celebrate also the manifestation of His love in the life of our convent, especially in the recent professions and other graced events that have taken place in our community.

In this season of Christmas and always, we strive to become more and more united with one another in Christ, so that, as He promised, His love will become manifest to the world through the love that His followers have for one another. As cloistered nuns, this union with Christ's Mystical Body - with our Order, with our families and friends, with our Diocese and local community while remaining largely hidden and spiritual, is nonetheless very real, and one for which we have much gratitude.

We pray that you and your loved ones have a very blessed Christmas, and a grace-filled New Year, remaining in the love of God and in peace with all of His children.

Prayerfully united in Christ, Our Lady, St. Joseph, and St. Norbert, Mother harry frequesting, O Prenem

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

WE GIVE THANKS FOR THE RECENT SYMPOSIUM OF NORBERTINE SISTERS held at the Norbertine monastery of Oosterhout, Holland, and rejoice in the growth in communio between our various Norbertine houses around the world.



Represented AT THE MEETING vere the communities of * Congregation of

Norbertine Sisters, several countries 🖈 Doksany, Czech Republic * Krakow, Poland * Mariëngaard, Holland A Oosterhout, Holland * Toro, Spain * Tehachapi, USA * Zsámbék, Hungary

Presided at by the Most Rev. Abbot General Jos Wouters, O.Praem assisted by our confreres Rev. Christophe Monsieur, O.Praem Rev. Peter Muller, O.Praem . Thomás Vojtísek, O.Praem

On September 17th, our community, joined by many family members and friends, our Bishop, the Most Reverend Joseph Brennan, Fr. Mark Maxon and his parish community, gathered together at St. Malachy's parish church in Tehachapi for the Solemn Profession of Vows of Sr. Mary Agnes, Sr. Mary Genevieve, and Sr. Mary Gemma.

"Sisters, you and I – my brothers and sisters, all of us – in this day, in this age, in this place, must also be a sign of contradiction, because we find ourselves in the midst of a dominant culture that is pro-death, a dominant culture that is not filled with faith, a dominant culture that promotes everything that is the opposite of what you are about, and is certainly opposite, dear Sisters, of what you are about today – to assume these vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. You are signs of contradiction. You are being, in a sense, in a very real sense, consecrated for that life. And behind cloistered walls, you will change this world. You will.

I remind you, brides of Christ, that the most powerful symbol of God's love that we can find anywhere is the sign of the Cross, where He extends His arms and allows Himself to be nailed to the tree. And He does that in total gift and total sacrifice, because that's what love does – that's what real love does. It forgets the self, it doesn't indulge the self. It is always laying down the life for the other. It is that sacrificial love that we attempt to live, and that you look forward to now as Solemnly Professed Canonesses."

- From the homily given by the Most Rev. Joseph Brennan, Sept. 17, 2022

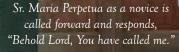
We are deeply grateful to all of our family and friends who helped with this event, especially Fr. Mark Maxon, Pastor of St. Malachy's for hosting us while we await the building of our own chapel, and to all those near and far who continue by their prayers and loving support to uphold our community, and especially these three new Canonesses. Deo gratias!

1) Our community chants the Introit; 2) Sr. Mary Genevieve processes into the church beneath the swords of the Knights of Columbus; 3) Our Bishop, the Most Rev. Joseph Brennan, delivers his homily; 4) The nuns to be professed prostrate before the altar for the Litany of the Saints; 5) Sr. Mary Agnes reads her profession formula at the altar; 6) Sr. Mary Gemma signs her professions formula on the altar; 7) The consecration at Holy Mass. (Photos by Dr. Jefferson Tilley)

first Profession of Vows

*O*n September 8th, the feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Sr. Maria Perpetua made her First Profession of Vows for three years, being reminded at Holy Mass by our confrere, Rev. Maximilian Okapal, O.Praem, that, as religious, we vow to a conversion of our ways – making vows, whether solemn or temporary, is not the end of the road, but the beginning. Every day of our life should see us advancing, in continuous motion, toward our heavenly goal.

The Solemn Profession of Vows









As a Bridegroom Rejoices in His Bride

THE ESPOUSAL OF THE INCARNATE GOD WITH HIS BRIDE, THE CHURCH

"Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ loved the Church and gave Himself up for her that He might present to Himself the Church in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing."

- Ephesians 5:25-27

In the fullness of time, God, having ordained His providential plan from all eternity, became man, took the flesh of a human Baby, born in a dark and forgotten cave in a little outpost in a corner of the world, called Bethlehem. In subsequent ages, artists would portray this event in almost every way imaginable, with every medium known to man, in every shade and hue and mood. The small family huddled in the cave on that first Christmas night recognized the miracle taking place, as did the shepherds who had recently seen the multitude of the heavenly host, and the wise men who, on seeing the Child,

fell down and did Him homage.

There was something tremendous and miraculous here. From the outside, in the externals, there was very little romance and splendor, very little that seemed grand or spectacular, but in reality, in that little cave, the greatest and most beautiful union that has ever been or ever will be, was being manifested for the first time. After thousands and thousands of years preparing the world, through the mediation of God's Chosen people, God was at last taking His people, all people, to Himself in the most intimate of unions: God was at last espousing His people to Himself.

That little Baby, Our Lord Jesus Christ, would grow in wisdom and age and grace (cf Luke 2:52), and in His thirty-third year, He would consummate His mission on earth and seal the espousal with His Bride at another event that was, similar to His birth, externally unromantic and unspectacular: His crucifixion. When He ascended into heaven and visibly left His little flock

on earth, His Bride, the Church, He did not wish to leave her without visible signs of His enduring and faithful love, and so He bequeathed to the Church His seven sacraments. One of these signs was to be a special manifestation of the grace of the Incarnation: He elevated the beautiful institution of marriage to the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony, in which a man and a woman, signifying Christ and his Church, become one flesh,

vowing to remain faithful to one another unto death – usque ad mortem - and through this faithful, self-sacrificing loving union, bring new life into the world, into the Church, and ultimately into heaven.

The life of the couple, and the love that they have for each other is something more beautiful, profound and farreaching than the private life of two individuals. It is a sign of a much larger and, in fact, eternal reality:

"The mutual love between man and woman is a reflection of the absolute and unfailing love with which God loves the human being."

– Pope Francis, June 2022

The human person, society itself, and the life of the Church, is upheld, encouraged and renewed by the witness of faithful married couples, for in seeing the love and self-sacrifice that two human beings have for one another, with the help and strength of God's grace to remain faithful to one another "for better or for worse," the human person, society and those within the Church are reassured, even if unconsciously, that the love of God is also real, and endures forever.

Cloistered nuns are not outside the sphere of influence of the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony. Young women do not enter, persevere, and vow themselves to religious life because they want to escape marriage. Rather, women who enter religious life are often drawn to the beauty of marriage, yet desire to enter that reality more deeply, by renouncing that good, for a greater good and for a higher calling.

For, as marriage is the beautiful and irreplaceable sacrament of Christ's Incarnation, His union with His Church and His union with every soul, the solemn profession of a nun and her life, totally dedicated and consecrated to God, is a concrete manifestation of the reality to which the sign points. But this in no way denigrates or diminishes the necessity of the sign: the two vocations are helps and encouragement to each other.

Christ loved the Church and gave Himself up for her. This love was total, profound, and perfectly consummated in the total holocaust of Christ on the Cross, but it was not spectacular to the eyes of those without Faith. In the same manner, the lives of married couples and the life of the nun will rarely be externally spectacular or blissfully romantic. It is in the seemingly ordinary and mundane events, viewed with the eyes of Faith, that the espousal takes shape in reality. It is in these events that the words of the marriage, pronounced hand in hand before a priest on a wedding day, or read and signed and placed on the altar of sacrifice on the day of solemn profession, are made concrete, and, in a certain sense, made incarnate. In the incarnation the second Person of the Trinity, the Word, has become Emmanuel, God with us, and to forever assure of us this sublime and consoling truth He left for all the world the example of the faithful and fruitful union of husband and wife, and the more hidden and mysterious consecration of the nun. With His grace and in His love, may He protect and guide those whom He has called to these Divine given vocations, so that always, through their lives and through their fidelity "the world may know

that You have loved them." (John 17:23)

To Christ. Our Lord and Savior, be all glory and praise, forever and ever. Amen.



Marie Rigney shows Mother her spinning wheel in 2003 Right: Almost 20 years later, Marie Rigney, now Sr. Mary Genevieve, promises obedience to Mother at her Solemn Profession









Fvents at the Bethlehem Príory of St. Joseph



* IN AUGUST

1) On the 15th, the Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, we renewed our Marian Consecration at a special ceremony, as we do each year, and were blessed also that day to witness the consecration by a group of visitors.

2) On the 24th, the feast of St. Bartholomew the Apostle, Sr. Katherine Dillard entered our community as a postulant.

IN SEPTEMBER

3) On the 8th, the Solemnity of the Nativity of Our Lady, Sr. Maria Perpetua made her first profession of vows.

4) On the 15th, the feast of Our Lady of Sorrows, our postulant Sr. Angela was vested with the white habit of our Order, becoming a novice and receiving her new name: Sr. Columba Marie, after Bl. Columba Marmion.

5) On the 17th, three of our nuns, Sr. Mary Agnes, Sr. Mary Genevieve, and Sr. Mary Gemma made their profession of Solemn vows at St. Malachy's Catholic church in Tehachapi.

6) We were invited to be represented at the Norbertine Prelate's Meeting in Rome, which two of our nuns attended. (Pictured: Pope Francis at his audience with the Norbertines.)

IN OCTOBER

7) Two of our nuns traveled to Holland for the Symposium of the Norbertine Sisters and the first meeting of the Federation of Norbertine Canonesses, held at the convent of Oosterhout.

8) On the 13th, the Memorial of Bl. Peter Adrian Toulorge, martyr of our Order, our postulant, Sr. Kathryn, was vested with the white habit and received her religious name: Sr. Mary Lucia, after Sr. Lucia, the eldest visionary of Fatima.

IN NOVEMBER

9) We were very grateful for the visit of Rev. Pius Collins, O.Praem, from the Norbertine house of Peckham in England, who gave our community classes on Canon Law.

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 Square (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 \$23 million, based on updated schematics and related plans, with about \$16 million required to take the step of commissioning a complete architectural design and blueprints. With over \$6.5 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 that He will raise up our chapel in His perfect timing, according to His holy will.

www.norbertinesisters.org

God Bless

Monastery Expansion & Our Current Needs

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



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

Monies Needed

FOR PHASE II: CHAPEL & WING \$24,000,000

Current Goal \$16.000.000

Funds Raised to Date

\$6.500.000

R. Belcher

\$23.0M

\$16.0M

\$6.5M

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— A Specíal Thank You –

To our friends and family who consecrate themselves to Our Lady at our convent, allowing us to celebrate this graced event with them and continue the Norbertine tradition of Marian maximalism.

(Pictured making their consecration is our beloved benefactress, Mrs. Angelina Husdon, RIP July 9, 2022, with her daughter.)

Norbertíne 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 <u>www.shop.norbertinesisters.org</u>

 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 norbertinecanonesses@gmail.com

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

Our community with our Bishop, the Most Rev. Joseph Brennan, at St. Malachy Catholic Church, following the solemn profession of three of our nuns, September 17, 2022

"IN THIS IS Love:

NOT THAT WE HAVE LOVED GOD, BUT THAT HE HAS LOVED US. and has sent His Son as explation for our sins.

Beloved, if God has so loved us, WE ALSO MUST LOVE ONE ANOTHER. If we love one another, God remains in us, and his love is brought to perfection in us."