

The Norbertine Canonesses of the Bethlehem Priory of St. Joseph

# FIRST FRUITS

Month of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, August 2023 / Issue 59



“LET US NEVER FORGET THAT AN AGE PROSPERS OR DWINDLES IN PROPORTION TO ITS  
*Devotion to the Eucharist.*

*This is the measure of its spiritual life and its faith, of its charity and its virtue.”*

— St. Peter Julian Eymard





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

*Laudetur Jesus Christus!* When Christ ascended into heaven, He promised that He would remain with us always (Matthew 28:20). The early Christians lived this reality, as they “devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers, together with Mary, the Mother of Jesus” (Acts 1:14; 2:42). It was in gathering as one Church to worship God in the Sacred Liturgy, especially at Holy Mass, with and in the Heart of the Mother of God, that Christ was really and truly present among them ~ most profoundly, in the Sacrament of His Love.

It is no different two thousand years later, for Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever (Hebrews 13:8). Christ remains with us — Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity — in the Most Holy Eucharist, and this Eucharist comes to us through the consecration at the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, a celebration which is extended through all the hours of the liturgical office. “I came that they may have life and have it more abundantly,” (John 10:10) is literally fulfilled in this constant celebration of and contact with the Sacred Mystery of Christ’s Real Presence among us — always in the spirit of His Mother.

As the Catholic Church in America strives to deepen Eucharistic devotion through the National Eucharistic Revival, we, as Norbertine Canonesses, joyfully share in this time of renewal through our lives dedicated to the celebration of the Holy Mass and the Liturgy, in union with the Blessed Virgin Mary. We pray that this time will be one of great spiritual renewal for you, our dear family and friends, as we draw closer to the source of all grace: Jesus Christ.

Prayerfully united in Christ and His Blessed Mother,

*Mother Mary Augustine, O. Praem.*

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



## With Our Lady AND THE Eucharistic Jesus

St. John Bosco once had a dream of a great stormy battle at sea, which threatened to sink a massive ship, symbolizing the Holy Catholic Church. When the waves and winds rose highest, and the enemy boats seemed close to overthrowing the mighty vessel, the ship’s captain, the Pope, anchored his charge to two enormous pillars that had risen from the sea. At once the wind and waves died down, the enemy took to flight, and there was great calm.

The two pillars? The Most Holy Eucharist and the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Within the joyful Easter Season and closely following it, there is a series of memorials, feast days, and solemnities as Holy Mother Church unfurls before our eyes all the wondrous mysteries that have been made known to us and have come to glorious light through the resurrection of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Among these, there are two that may not, at first glance, appear to be closely linked. These are the devotional custom of crowning the Blessed Virgin Mary in the month of May, and the Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ, Corpus Christi, often in June.

In our community, these two events are both marked by solemn processions around our convent grounds: in May we process to the statue of the Holy Family across our pond, while praying the Rosary and chanting the Litany of the Blessed Virgin Mary. In June, we process from our choir, while singing hymns to the Blessed Sacrament, with the Monstrance being carried by the presiding priest who follows the procession of nuns.

While on earth, Our Lady was perpetually occupied with God. And when God became her little Son, she was spiritually and physically in constant adoration and service of Him. This is her same Son, God Incarnate, Who dwells among us, Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity, in the Most Holy Eucharist. It

is Him we adore and serve in the Monstrance on our altars. By crowning a statue of Our Lady we are doing externally what it behooves us to do interiorly. By honoring and turning to her, by becoming her children and servants, we are allowing her to mould our hearts to be like her own: hearts ever in adoration and service of God Incarnate, the God in the Holy Eucharist, the God of our Altars.

Often in modern times, external acts of devotion — such as processions, crownings, and the chanting of pious hymns — have grown less popular and less respected. But they have long been valued in that great bulwark of tradition, the Holy Catholic Church. For these things are not mere external acts, but ones that shape and inform the interior devotion of the faithful, the whole Mystical Body of Christ. And it is only through a deep anchoring of our souls in these mysteries, that of Christ among us in the Eucharist and the mediation of His Blessed Mother, that we can hope to stand firm against the storms, the attacks, and the enemies that will surely come. But with these two pillars, we know there is no storm, nor any enemy that can prevail against the barque of Peter, nor against those within, His faithful ones.



**On the Cover:** *The Eucharist in a Fruit Wreath*,  
by Jan Davidsz de Heem, c 1655

## The National Eucharistic Revival

NATIONAL PROGRAM  
for  
*Eucharistic Revival*

LAUNCHED  
June 19, 2022

DIOCESAN REVIVAL  
June 19, 2022 – June 11, 2023

PARISH REVIVAL  
June 11, 2023 – July 17, 2024

NATIONAL EUCHARISTIC  
CONVENTION:  
July 17 – 21, 2024

NATIONAL REVIVAL  
July 21, 2024 – Pentecost, 2025

[EucharisticRevival.org](http://EucharisticRevival.org)

The Eucharist is the “source and summit of Christian life,” which “all ecclesiastical ministries and works of the apostolate are bound up with and are oriented toward. For in the blessed Eucharist is contained the whole spiritual good of the Church, namely Christ Himself.” (Catechism of the Catholic Church n. 1324)

It is fitting that, to renew and revive the Church and her members in our Country, our Bishops have called for a renewal and revival of Eucharistic devotion.

In the 16th century, a “revival” was needed to counter new ideas which denied the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist. For this, the Church brought to the fore great defenders of the Real Presence from the treasures of her saints. Among them was St. Norbert, who was officially canonized at this time and became known as the “Apostle of the Eucharist.” The relocation of his mortal remains from Magdeburg to Catholic Prague caused many conversions to the faith, and belief in the Eucharist as the true Body and Blood of Jesus Christ.

Now, in our own day, we turn again to St. Norbert to aid us in reviving Eucharistic devotion in our country, so much in need of the spiritual renewal that God alone can bring.





Our cloistered choir,  
as seen through the grille

## In Imitation OF THE Eucharist

Every morning, day in and day out, our community gathers for Eucharistic adoration and Holy Mass. In our little choir, shoulder to shoulder, we adore Jesus Christ, the Son of God made Man, now Truly Present in a consecrated piece of bread, exposed in the Monstrance on the altar. One might say that, in this snapshot of forty or so nuns gathered together, with the eyes of their hearts all focused on the same radiant and astoundingly humble God, we see a snapshot of Norbertine life, and indeed the life of the whole Church.

St. Norbert, in his time, had a tremendous devotion to the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and to the Eucharist, and he bequeathed to his daughters the same devotion. Devotion to the Eucharist may take many different forms, and be manifested in each soul and each religious family in a unique way. For the Norbertines, as a holy Norbertine nun, Marie de la Croix, once said, “devotion toward the august Sacrament consists mainly in the *imitation* of the gentle and humble Savior, and in union with the Eucharistic acts of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Their entire life is marked with this special seal and must retrace, in its more humble details, the life of the Savior in the Eucharist. Thus they pray, they adore, they suffer, and they give themselves in union with Jesus for the glory of the Father and for the salvation of souls.”

Imitation of the offering that Jesus made of Himself to the Father. Jesus, now seated at the right hand of the Father, is in a mysterious way really present on our altars and in our tabernacles. And what does He do there? “He lives forever to make

*intercession for [us].”* (Hebrews 7:25) On the night before He died, He laid out very clearly, in the hearing of His apostles, what He was asking the Father to provide for us by the offering He was about to make:

“*I consecrate Myself for them...  
I pray also for those who will believe in me  
through their word,  
so that they may be one,  
as you, Father, are in Me and I in you,  
that they also may be in us, that the world may know  
that You have sent Me... that they may be brought to  
perfection as one, that the world may know that you  
have loved them, even as You loved Me.*”  
— John 17:20-21 & 23

“*That they may be one in us.*” Jesus, the Lamb of God, offered His life. For this? Yes. Because communion with God and with one another in God is the end for which we were created, and which, after the fall, we were unable to attain without God’s grace. In the Most Holy Eucharist, the reception of which is called Holy Communion, Christ works in us and intercedes for us that this union may be brought about.

“*The Eucharist is the efficacious sign and sublime cause of that communion of the divine life and that unity of the People of God by which the Church is kept in being. It is the culmination both of God’s action sanctifying the world in Christ and of the worship men offer to Christ and through Him to the Father in the Holy Spirit.*”

— Catechism of the Catholic Church, n. 1325

Every morning, at Chapter, our community listens to a section of the Rule of St. Augustine. In our Chapter Room, we hear the words of our Holy Father St. Augustine, as we strive to live by the wisdom he so clearly lays out.

“*The chief motivation for your sharing life together  
is to live harmoniously in the house,  
and to have one heart and one soul seeking God.*”

— Rule of St. Augustine, Ch. 1, n. 1

While it may be rather rare that a woman has this particular goal in mind when she steps through the cloister doors and receives the veil of a postulant, it soon becomes clear that this goal given us by St. Augustine is, in very fact, the kernel of all Christian striving, and especially pertinent for us as Norbertines. This unity, or *communio*, is, as stated by our Constitutions, the way in which the Norbertine charism must be actualized in our day (cf. *Constitutions of the Canonesses Regular of the Order of Premontre*, n. 11). And, by living it in the way Christ intended, we find in the practice of *communio* the self-sacrifice, charity, forgiveness, labor, generosity, common prayer, and many other things besides that Christ instructed His followers to practice, so as to enter eternal life: communion with the Most Holy Trinity.

Christ prayed for unity so “*that the world may know that You have sent me...*” Without Christ, most especially the Eucharistic Christ, at the center, any attempt at *communio* will soon fail; but *with* Him, all things are possible, and our life together can be a foretaste of heaven.

“*In all of our communities, in the midst of the people of God, the Eucharist is to be celebrated with the faithful participation of the sisters, since it 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. ‘Because the loaf of bread is one, we, though many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf.’ (1 Corinthians 10:17)”*  
(Constitutions of the Canonesses Regular of the Order of Premontre, n. 62)

“*In the midst of the people of God.*” Norbertines, as canons and canonesses, always offer the praise and adoration of the Sacred Liturgy in public, so that all may attend, so that all may be one, joining voices of religious and laity alike to Christ’s, as He offers Himself to the Father:  
“*that they may be one in us.*”

Every morning, day in and day out, all over the world, Christians gather, shoulder to shoulder, to adore, praise and receive in Holy Communion a radiant and astoundingly humble God in the Most Holy Eucharist. On a little hill in Tehachapi, prayers and lives are offered in imitation of, and in union with, the Lamb of God, as He intercedes for mankind to the Father. And, we pray, it may continue to be so, every morning, without fail, until we all reach the Eternal Morning of Heaven, where we shall all at last be perfect, where we will finally be one.



Pictured top to bottom: Reading a part of the Rule of St. Augustine at Chapter; Many hands prepare soil and plant seeds in our vegetable garden; Many hands harvest from and tend the fruitful plants; Guests participate in the Sacred Liturgy at our monastery; Our community kneels in adoration of the Blessed Sacrament during our morning Holy Hour.



# Events at the Bethlehem Priory of St. Joseph



## IN MARCH

- 1) The snowstorms of February continued into March! Here, the sisters shovel snow off the roof of our berry house.
- 2) We were blessed with a visit from our Norbertine confrere, the Right Rev. Hugh Allan, O.Praem., from Peckham, England, who gave us conferences on our Holy Father, St. Augustine.

## IN APRIL

- 3) April 7-9th brought the Sacred Triduum of Holy Thursday, Good Friday (pictured) and Easter, presided at by our confrere, Rev. Stephen Boyle, O.Praem.
- 4) On the 27th, it was a joy to receive a visit from our active Norbertine Sisters, Mother Adriana, S.Praem., and Sr. Hermana, S.Praem. (Pictured: Singing a polyphony piece for our guests.)

## IN MAY

- 5) On May 1st, the Solemnity of St. Joseph the Worker, Sr. Antonia entered our community as a donata postulant.

6) May 8-16th, Rev. Vincent Kepler, O.P. gave our annual community retreat, speaking on Our Lady and the Sacraments. (Pictured: Father gives the asperges blessing at Paschal Vespers.)

7) On May 24th, the feast of St. Herman Joseph, priest and Marian mystic of our Order, we had our annual May Crowning (see pg. 2).

## IN JUNE

- 8) With great gratitude, we received a visit from the Bishop of our Fresno Diocese, the Most Rev. Joseph Brennan, on June 1-2nd.
- 9) The Solemnity of Corpus Christi fell on June 8th, and we adored the Eucharistic Lord in our choir and in procession (see pg. 2).
- 10) Rev. Gabriel O'Donnell, O.P., a dear friend of our community since our inception, visited us from June 9-16th, giving us conferences on the history of monastic life.

## IN JULY

- 11) We welcomed our dear friend and guest priest, Rev. Charles Ryan, FSSP, who gave us several conferences on Christology.
- 12) On the 9th, one of our postulants received the white habit of St. Norbert, and the religious name Sr. Mary Isaac (Jogues).

## — 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
6:20 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, 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/](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 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 \$18 million required to take the step of commissioning a complete architectural design and blueprints. With over \$7 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](http://www.norbertinesisters.org)

God Bless You!



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

## Monies Needed

	FOR PHASE II: CHAPEL & WING
<b>\$23.0M</b>	<b>\$23,000,000</b>
<b>\$18.0M</b>	<b>Current Goal</b> <b>\$18,000,000</b>
<b>\$7.0M</b>	<b>Funds Raised to Date</b> <b>\$7,000,000</b>

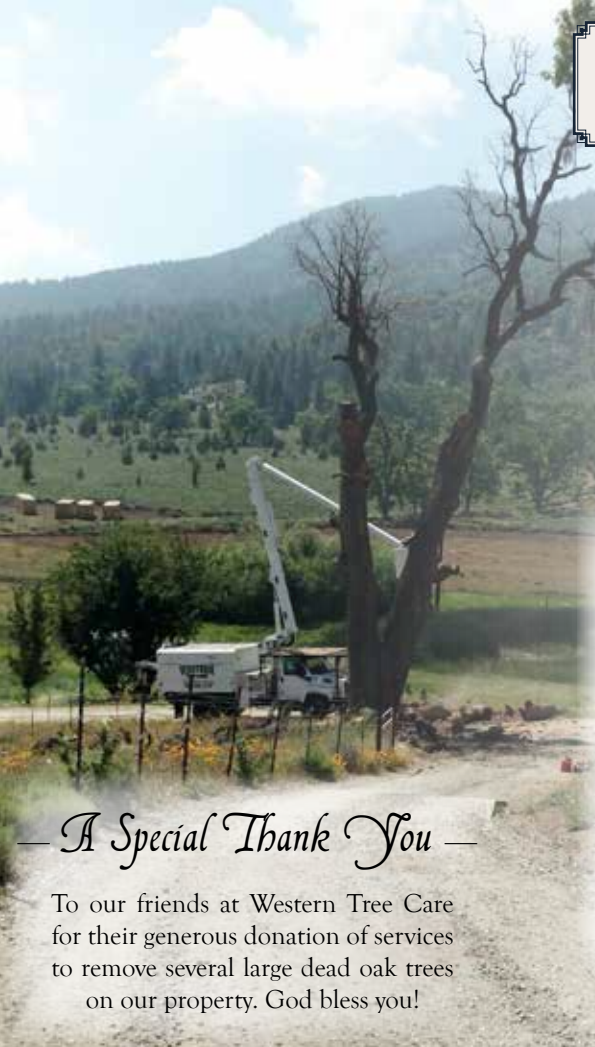
R. Belcher



THE NORBERTINE CANONESSES  
OF THE BETHLEHEM PRIORY OF ST. JOSEPH

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— *A Special Thank You* —

To our friends at Western Tree Care  
for their generous donation of services  
to remove several large dead oak trees  
on our property. God bless you!

*Norbertine Canonesses*

— WEBSITE —

♣ Online Monastery Gift Shop

♣ 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.shop.norbertinesisters.org](http://www.shop.norbertinesisters.org)

♣ FOR CHEESE PURCHASES:

Please visit: [www.cheese.norbertinecanonesses.org](http://www.cheese.norbertinecanonesses.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](mailto:pray_req@cybersurfers.net) or  
[norbertinecanonesses@gmail.com](mailto:norbertinecanonesses@gmail.com)

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



*“You must courageously and rightly apply  
all the truly salutary counsels given by St. Norbert for the religious life...  
— You must continue your praiseworthy traditional practices —*

THE DIVINE PRAISE,

*Eucharistic worship and Marian devotion,*

AND A PENITENTIAL SPIRIT.”

— Pope St. John Paul II to the Norbertine Order, July 6, 2000