

FIRST FRUITS

The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, August 15, 2025 / Issue 65



"Assumpta est Maria, gaudent Angeli."

— Antiphon for the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary



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

Laudetur Jesus Christus!

"O God, Who, looking on the lowliness of the Blessed Virgin Mary, raised her to this grace, that your Only Begotten Son was born of her according to the flesh and that she was crowned this day with surpassing glory, grant through her prayers, that, saved by the mystery of your redemption, we may merit to be exalted by you on high" (From the Collect for August 15th).

In the month of August we celebrate one of Our Lady's most beautiful solemnities: her Assumption. Our Lady has been taken body and soul into heaven, and there reigns as Queen of heaven and earth at the side of Christ, her Son.

We are reminded through the liturgy, in daily events, and even by nature itself, that we are pilgrims making our

way to our true homeland, heaven. But in this pilgrimage we never travel alone: through this "valley of tears" we journey together, deeply united with our brothers and sisters in the faith, preceded and accompanied by that woman of faith, Our Blessed Mother, who aids her Son's children all along their way.

We are grateful to be fellow-pilgrims with you, our family and friends, and thank you for your continued support of our community. Please know that you and your loved ones remain ever in our prayers.

In Christ and His Blessed Mother,

Mother Mary Oda, O. Praem.

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

TU ES PETRUS

Since the time of Our Lord, the Catholic Church has possessed an unbroken succession of shepherds in the person of the Pope. Our new Holy Father, Pope Leo XIV, the 267th Pontiff since St. Peter, is living proof that Christ will ever guide His Church on her pilgrim way, through His Vicar on earth, the Pope.

"In the Upper Room, thanks to the maternal mission she received at the foot of the cross, Mary is at the service of the nascent community: she is the living memory of Jesus and, as such, she is the center of attention that harmonizes differences and ensures the unity of the disciples' prayer.

Mother Church supports the ministry of Peter's successors with the Marian charism. The Holy See experiences in a very special way the coexistence of the two poles: the Marian and the Petrine. It is precisely the Marian pole, with its motherhood, gift of Christ and of the Spirit, that ensures the fruitfulness and holiness of the Petrine pole."

— Pope Leo XIV, June 9th, 2025, Memorial of Mary, Mother of the Church



Profession of Solemn Vows

ONE IN THE ONE CHRIST

"When I speak of Christians, I understand one in the One Christ... We are many and we are one. How are we many and yet one? Because we cling to Him whose members we are; and since our Head is in heaven, that His members may follow."

— St. Augustine, *Sermon on Psalm 128*

On May 24th, the feast St. Herman Joseph, a saint of our Order, we joyfully celebrated the Solemn Profession of three of our Sisters: Sr. Mary John, Sr. Mary Philomena, and Sr. Mary Josephine.

The Solemn Profession was graciously hosted by Fr. Gregory Beaumont, the pastor of St. Malachy Catholic Church in Tehachapi. The church was filled with family and friends of our community, and around the altar were gathered our priest-friends and confreres of St. Michael's Abbey. We especially thank the Rt. Rev. Abbot Eugene Hayes, O.Praem, for sending Norbertine confreres to assist at Holy Mass: Rev. Vianney Ceja as main celebrant, Rev. Frederick Schmit as Master of Ceremonies, and Junior professed confreres as servers.

This blessed event beautifully illuminated the motto of our new Holy Father, Pope Leo XIV: *"In illo Uno illum unum,"* "One in the One." Taken from the sermon of St. Augustine quoted above, this phrase describes the Mystical Body of Christ: we are one with one another in the One Head of the Church, Jesus Christ. At the Solemn Profession, this mystery of our faith was made particularly visible with so many family and friends present, all gathered around the altar and united in a single purpose: to worship Almighty God, together with three young women who were giving themselves entirely for this purpose. Through their profession, the Sisters offer their lives to Christ, and so, in the same stroke, offer their lives to His Mystical Body, the Church — one in the One. This reality of unity, which was made visibly manifest on the day of their self-offering, will remain just as real as they offer themselves in the quiet, day-to-day life of a cloistered canoness. As our community processed from the church after Holy Mass, we were surrounded by the prayerful song of all of our guests — "Hail Heavenly Queen." The beauty of the Church shone forth in this moment: a people, gathered as one, making its pilgrim way toward God, led by Our Blessed Mother.



All Photos by Rudy Aguilar of Adoremus Photography
1) Prostration during the Litany of Saints; 2) Sr. Mary John professes her vows; 3) Sr. Mary Josephine signs her vows on the altar; 4) Sr. Mary Philomena receives the rochet; 5) Kiss of Peace; 6) The elevation during the consecration; 7) Mother Mary Oda, Sr. Mary John Paul and the new canonesses.

A Happy Shipwreck

Homily given at the Mass of Solemn Profession, May 24, 2025

We are celebrating today the death of our three dear Sisters. No, you didn't make a wrong turn this morning while driving here; and no, the preacher has not lost his mind. We are celebrating today the death of our three Sisters. Today, these three Sisters die to the world so that they might live completely, forever, for Christ.

In the Middle Ages entering Norbertine life was sometimes referred to as a *"felix naufragium,"* a "happy shipwreck," whereby we throw overboard all the cargo of fleeting and fluctuating things and escape from the stormy sea of this world to the tranquil port of the monastery. So, Sisters, just like Blessed Ricvera — a wealthy noblewoman who gave away all she had and became the first Norbertine nun — you are now shipwrecked, cast ashore, dead; but no worries, you landed in paradise. At least that's what our own St. Godfrey of Cappenburg called religious

life: paradise on earth. It is as if our Savior is saying to the three of you today the words He spoke to the dying St. Dismas: *"Today you will be with Me in paradise."* But remember Sisters, to get there, you have to die.

Because of this "happy death" of yours, you will live the rest of your life — like St. Dismas and all the saints — singing God's praises in choir night and day, seven times a day, and not just *like* the saints and angels, but actually *with* the saints and angels. They will be right there with you at every hour of the Divine Office. What a beautiful vocation God has given you, to have as your daily duty the work of the angels! Recall the words of the great Norbertine writer, Adam Scot: *"Do you not know that among all the practices of holy religion which you undertake it is this which is most especially the work of God? Here you stand before God, here you are in His presence, here you even speak to Him."*



Left: St. Norbert blessing Bl. Ricvera, first nun of the Norbertine Order.
(Original artwork by the Norbertine Canonesses)

*"You are now shipwrecked, cast ashore, dead;
but no worries, you landed in paradise."*

In addition to this, the three vows which you take of poverty, chastity and obedience will at times feel like nails fastening you to the cross; but never forget that, in so doing, they are keeping you united in an unbreakable bond to Him Who already offered His life for you on that same Cross. In other words, those vows will lock you in to this paradise on earth, lest you ever foolishly desire to leave it.

And because of your consecration, every good thought, word and action will now be an act of the virtue of religion, a holy and pleasing sacrifice, offered to the Most Blessed Trinity. Your life is now a holocaust, a complete and holy offering to God. It is for this reason that the rite of Solemn Profession is always carried out within the rite of Holy Mass, just before the Offertory. In an

ancient Offertory prayer, the priest, while raising the host to heaven says the words: *"Accept, O holy Father, almighty and eternal God, this unspotted host, which I Thy unworthy servant, offer unto Thee, my living and true God, for my innumerable sins, offenses, and negligences, and for all here present: and also for all faithful Christians, both living and dead, that it may avail both me and them for salvation unto life everlasting"* The life of a consecrated religious is similar to that host: it is offered up in penance for one's sins, for one's own salvation, for the salvation of all the world, even for the souls in purgatory, and for the glory of God.

Yes, what a beautiful vocation God has given you! There's nothing else like it in this world. And so, Sisters, may you remain forever dead to this world and all its vanities; and may you, in the arms of our Savior, forever, rest in peace.



Events at the Bethlehem Priory of St. Joseph



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1) Imposition of blessed ashes on Ash Wednesday; 2) The Good Friday Liturgy; 3) A spring rainbow; 4) Requiem Mass for the late Holy Father, Pope Francis; 5) Announcement of the new Holy Father, Pope Leo XIV; 6) Visiting with the juniors from St. Michael's Abbey; 7) A community day in the garden on the Solemnity of St. Joseph the Worker; 8) Praying for our newly Solemn Professed canonesses during the octave of their profession; 9) A Pentecost visit from our confrere Fr. Gregory Dick, O. Praem, and sisters from the Congregation of Norbertine Sisters in Costa Mesa, CA; 10) Holy Mass during the visit of His Excellency Kevin Vann, Bishop of the Diocese of Orange, CA.



Moving Forward

OUR MONASTERY BUILDING PROJECT

- Our construction committee continues to meet with our architect Paul Dhanens to finalize a building permit submittal package for Kern County (*pictured above*) with hopes of beginning construction Spring 2026.
- Starting in June, the Sisters began preparing our monastery grounds to make way for the new construction, which includes the relocation of sheds and our large chicken coop (*pictured below*).

We are deeply grateful to all of you who have helped us through your gifts, which have covered the preliminary expenses for this phase of our project, and we thank you for your continued support as we move forward.

It is crucial that we build the remainder of our monastery living quarters before demolishing the original ranch house, which sits on the site of our future church and currently houses both our temporary chapel and several indispensable living and working spaces. Your donations make it possible for this phase of our project to continue and for us to keep developing our design and plans for a future church.



May God reward you!



THE NORBERTINE CANONESSES
OF THE BETHLEHEM PRIORY OF ST. JOSEPH

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A Special Thank You

To the generous volunteers who fabricated and installed a steel archway which will serve as a rose-trellis entry to our new cemetery.

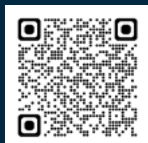
May God reward you all!



♣ DAILY MASS TIMES:
8:00 am

Some Fridays: 5:00 pm

♣ MONASTERY GIFT SHOP HOURS:
Daily: 10-11:30 am, 2:30-4:50 pm
Some Fridays: 2:30-4:10 pm



NORBERTINESISTERS.ORG

Praying the rosary during our annual May Crowning procession



On the Cover: *The Immaculate Conception*, by Esteban Bartolomé Murillo (c. 1670)