



FROM THE HEART OF

The Pelican

NUMBER 19, 2018



OUR NEW NOVICE:

Sr. Maria Regina

Editorial

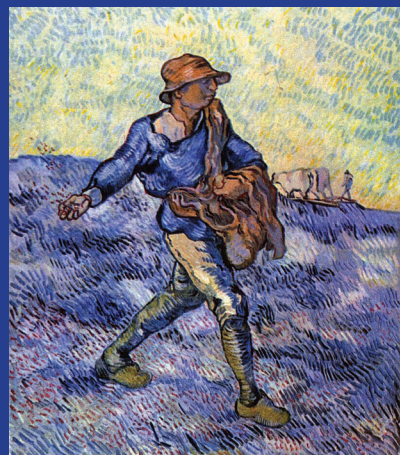
SR. GERTRUDE GILLETTE

DEAR FAITHFUL FRIENDS,

OUR DIOCESE RECENTLY celebrated its annual Eucharistic Congress with thousands of devoted Catholics processing with the Blessed Sacrament through the streets of downtown Charlotte. It is always a beautiful experience to come together as one family with our beloved Bishop (Peter Jugis) and spend the day honoring our Eucharistic Lord. We were all particularly moved this year as the bishop offered the day in reparation for the sins of sexual abuse and neglect among the clergy. The sadness evident in the bishop's voice as he led the rosary and delivered his homily seemed to me to reflect that of the Lord himself, whose Sacred Heart surely feels the anguish of the victims and the sins of his chosen sons. It is indeed sad times...but we must recall St Paul's words that "where sin abounds, grace abounds the more." In my heart I prayed that the perpetrators would have true repentance and not despair of God's mercy (as a few have sadly committed suicide). As we all await more transparency in the Church, we hope that the bishops who—in differing degrees—are guilty of negligence in dealing with the abusing clergy, will acknowledge their complicity and accept the measures laid on them by the competent authorities. In this crisis, Pope Francis and the bishops have a serious responsibility to step forward and act with swift measures if the Church is to keep her course and prevent her weaker members from jumping ship or creating a mutiny in the storm.



And for the rest of us: What does the Lord want of us? Although anger and mistrust are the human responses one sees everywhere, in the end, they do not produce salutary fruit. We believe that Jesus founded a Church and that he will be with it till the end of the ages. This crisis too will pass. We know by faith that the Lord will raise up competent leaders and holy souls who will restore purity and wisdom



Dear Sowers,

Thank you, faithful Sowers who support us with your annual donations! God bless you much!

Please send your donations to:
Benedictines of Mary, Queen of Peace,
687 Moss Rd., Rutherfordton, NC 28139.

to those who are consecrated to his service. In the meantime, I believe that the role of the rest of us is twofold: first to *pray* for our shepherds in earnest—they have no easy task; second to remain *faithful* in both senses of the word, that is: to *trust* that God is in charge, and to *persevere* in staying the course.

I say this because I see the need for *balance*—a middle course between the two extremes of flight and arrogance. On the one hand, we don't want to run away because of the evils done by some of our leaders. On the other hand, we don't want to become petty self-righteous judges, with scornful and contemptuous attitudes, who spread distrust of all spiritual authority from the pope down to the local pastor. I am not saying that anger toward spiritual authorities who have used their power to hurt the innocent victims directly or indirectly is out of place. Anger is a natural human response to abuse and a positive one when courageous action is needed. Furthermore, one who is not deeply moved by the life-long pain of the victims lacks Christian compassion. But feeling anger is different from assuming a contemptuous, condemning attitude, fostered by pharisaical arrogance and a moral superiority towards others all in the name of self-righteous indignation. Satan cleverly whispers in the ear of such folks that they have a right to reject all authority now that the corruption of authority by a few has come to light. "No one can be trusted" the Father of Lies sneers, insinuating rebellion into weak minds as he moves closer to his intention to create disunity, schism, chaos, disobedience and a host of other problems—all for the purpose of destroying Christ's Church. Of course he will never succeed, but for

every soul who succumbs to his wiles, he achieves a minor victory and feels complacently closer to achieving his goal. My dear friends, let us take care to discern what we hear and read; we must recognize the Enemy's voice and resist the temptation to consider ourselves more than we are.

For most of all, who will never be called to sit on a lay tribunal advising the bishops, our place is to *pray* for our leaders, to *fast* and make reparation for our Church and thus to console the hearts of Jesus and Mary. I firmly believe that if we are *faithful* and *humble*, God will use our prayers and stability to bring about the triumph of Mary's Immaculate Heart. We were created to live in these times. May this crisis be an incentive for all of us to live holy and pure lives. +



FROM THE HEART OF The Pelican

ISSUE 19: 2018

The Benedictines of Mary,

Queen of Peace

687 Moss Road

Rutherfordton, NC 28139

Phone: 704-827-2490

email: qopbenedictines@gmail.com

web: www.qopbenedictines.com

Editor: Sr. Gertrude Gillette

Layout: Michael Schrauzer

Photography:

Giuliana Polinari Riley, et al.



News & Updates

WE REJOICE TO ANNOUNCE **TWO BIG BLESSINGS** FOR OUR community (and a **third one** to come), which are also the reasons behind the delay in sending out our newsletter this summer.

The first is the clothing of our postulant, **Jennifer Walker** (*right*), who became a novice on September 29, the feast of the Archangels Michael, Gabriel and Raphael. She is now **Sr. M. Regina**, for Our Lady, Queen of Peace. As a novice, she wears the habit of the community with a white veil signifying that she is now undergoing the two-year period of formation required before taking first vows. Please keep her in your prayers.

The second blessing is our **new chapel** (*above*). After months of patiently watching it take shape, we have finally finished the 1st phase of our building project, namely, the lower level of our “chapel wing” with the chapel as the prominent room on this floor (the other two smallish rooms are a classroom/reception room, and a library). We heartily thank all those involved with bringing the chapel to completion: first, our general contractor, Deacon Sigfrido Della Valle; then, the many subcontractors—many of whom gave us a break in the cost; and most importantly, our beloved benefactors who generously provided the finances necessary to pay for all the labor and materials (as you know, your names are permanently under the tabernacle in thanksgiving). We thank all who gave of their time and prayers so that the project could come to completion. We will be grateful to you all forever for this lovely chapel where the praises of God ascend to heaven day and night.

We had intended to leave the 2nd phase of the project—the **upstairs** of the new wing—unfinished for the time being, until the need for more bedrooms for new vocations should arise.



Lo and behold, we are due to receive another postulant, **Rachel Hoffman**, on November 1, and so we are scurrying to complete the upstairs in time for her arrival. If anyone would like to help towards completing this area, we would be *supremely grateful* for your support. Thank you for considering it!

With chapel construction taking so much time, we were unable to start **our farm** this summer (though Sr Scholastica did quite well on creating a vegetable garden). We are still hoping to get chickens in the near future, but the farm animals will now have to wait until next Spring.

Our **annual retreat** this year took us on a road trip to New England and Canada. Sr Gertrude spent a lovely week with the Carmelite nuns in Concord, New Hampshire in mid-June giving them a retreat on the topic of humility. During that week, Sr Scholastica and Jennifer made their way by car to New England, stopping at various monasteries along the way. After meeting up at St. Anselm Abbey in Manchester, New Hampshire, and a short (goodbye) visit with the Carmelites in Concord, the three spent a day in the White Mountains with an old friend, and then went on to **Immaculate Heart Monastery** in Westfield, Vermont, where we made our own retreat. The nuns belong to the Solesmes Congregation and thus sing their



Top left: Our unfinished upstairs corridor.

Top right: Exterior view of our chapel addition.

Above: Three of our Oblates helped build our sacristy cabinets: Talon and Patrick Campbell and Jeffrey Delgarn.

Below: The Carmelite nuns of Concord, New Hampshire.





Immaculate Heart Monastery, Westfield, Vermont

entire liturgy in Latin with Gregorian chant. They were most gracious to us, though with papal enclosure and our being on retreat, we didn't interact with them as much as we would have liked. The weather was cool for late June—mainly in the 60s, which made it perfect for taking walks on their lovely piece of land in rural Vermont.

On our return, we took the long way home so we could visit other monasteries including Saint-Benoit-du-Lac and Sainte Marie de Deux Montagnes in Canada, Mount Saviour (which raises sheep) and Genesee Abbey in New York, the Byzantine Benedictine Sisters in Pennsylvania (who raise miniature horses), and Our Lady of the Angels in Virginia. All in all, it was a very fulfilling trip.

Another double blessing came to Sr Gertrude in April when her nephew Brian (and wife Sara) became proud parents of **twins**, a boy and girl . . . their first children: Wyatt and Jordan! Blessings upon you! +



The Nativity

BIRTH OF THE LORD

THIS EPISODE IN our Marian series takes us to Bethlehem. Lying 90 miles south of Nazareth, Bethlehem would have taken Mary and Joseph 4–5 days to reach, no easy task for a pregnant woman. In sharing some insights about this narrative with you, let me confess straightaway that a number of them come from the excellent video presentation by Dr. Edward Sri (*A Biblical Walk with the Mother of God*, Ascension Press).

Roman census: Dr. Sri relates that Jesus' birth in the context of the Roman census is supposed to highlight the fact that Christ came into this world in the midst of political oppression, when his people needed a savior. He would indeed be their savior, but one far beyond their dreams and hopes. The enrollment was the way that God brought Mary and Joseph down to the royal city of Bethlehem (the city where King David was born) so that Micah's prophecy might be fulfilled: “. . . from you [Bethlehem] shall come forth for me one who is to rule in Israel” (Micah 5:2).

No room in the Inn. When Mary and Joseph arrive in Bethlehem, they find no lodging, and eventually resort to finding shelter in a nearby cave. (The cave as a place of the Nativity is pretty well authenticated in the Early Church's testimony; the stable proposition arose later and became more popular over the centuries). The fact that there was no room at any of the commercial places to stay is symbolic of the fact that there is no room for the Son of God in the hearts of worldly people. They are too full



of themselves and their business associates to notice that the Son of God is knocking at their doors! It seems then that being too busy with the world is the first warning that Jesus wants to teach us. We will miss his coming, indeed we will push him away, if we are too entangled in worldly affairs. Are we all not a bit too busy?

John Paul II had a lovely meditation on this: “The Gospel notes that ‘there was no place for them in the inn’ (Lk 2:7). This statement, recalling the text in John's Prologue: ‘His own people received him not’ (Jn 1:11), foretells as it were the many refusals Jesus will meet with during this earthly life. The phrase ‘for them’ joins the Son and the Mother in this rejection, and shows how Mary is already associated with her Son's destiny of suffering and shares in his redeeming mission” (General Audience, Nov 20, 1996).

Swaddling clothes: These are mentioned twice in Luke 2: 1) when Mary wraps him in these clothes after his birth (v.7); 2) when the shepherds are told: “this will be a sign for you: you will find a babe wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger” (v.12).

This verb *σπαργανώ* (“to wrap in swaddling clothes”) has an antecedent in the book

of Wisdom, where the author puts into the mouth of Solomon the following: “And when I was born . . . I was nursed in swaddling clothes and that with cares” (Wis 7:3-4).

If Luke wants his readers to recall this verse, then he is pointing out that the heir of King Solomon is now born in Bethlehem as the long-awaited Messiah and, like his royal predecessor, wrapped in the simplicity of swaddling clothes. Furthermore, Dr. Sri makes the insightful connection between the birth and death of Jesus. “Just as the baby Jesus is *wrapped* in swaddling clothes and *laid* in a manger, so will his body be *wrapped* in the linen shroud and *laid* in the tomb (cf. Lk 23:53). . . . Luke shows us that the humble way Jesus is born into this world foreshadows how he will leave this world” that is: poor, rejected and unrecognized by many.

The Shepherds: “In that region there were **shepherds** out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear” (Lk 2:8–9). This is totally in line with the humble beginnings of Jesus' birth. We have just been told that Mary placed Jesus in a manger because there was no place for them in the inn. They were rejected . . . no one wanted them. Another group rejected by the leaders of Israel were the shepherds. Their nomadic style of life did not allow them to keep all the prescriptions of the law and therefore they were despised by the Pharisees. Their poverty and rejection made them the most like Christ at his entry into the world. They are the ones therefore who are honored with the first revelation of the Messiah's appearance on earth. We know in the Gospels that Jesus identifies with those who are marginalized by society: the poor, the sick, the outcasts, women, and foreigners. The lack of self-righteousness makes them very receptive to the good news of the Gospel.

Pondering these words: After the shepherds testimony that they had seen angels announcing the birth of a king, it is said that “Mary kept all these things, pondering them in her heart” (v.19).

Dr. Sri again points out that this word “pondering” has Old Testament links in

1) Gen 37:5–11: When Joseph tells his dream about the sun, moon, and stars bowing down to him—signifying his father, mother and brothers—his brothers sneer at the suggestion, but his father Jacob pondered his words. Jacob seems to realize that there is more to this than is evident at the moment.

2) Prov. 3:1–2: “My son, do not forget my teaching; but let your heart keep (ponder) my commands: for length of days, and years of life, and peace, will they give you.” In other words, a wise person meditates on the advice of his parents and obeys them.

3) Ps 119:11: “I have hidden your oracles in my heart (pondered them), so as not to sin against you.” Pondering the word of God leads to living a purer life, a life further and further from sin.

How does this help us understand what Mary was doing? She certainly realized, as Jacob had, that certain words or events would only be understood at some point in the future. God reveals his mysteries slowly so that we can ponder them and be prepared for their full meaning when it comes to light. I see Mary continually going deeper into the words and events surrounding her son, always *content to see revelation happen as God willed, bit by bit* . . . not worrying, not anxious, just accepting and being joyful; indeed making light of any trying situation she found herself in. It was the Divine Will that Jesus be born in a cave, where animals were kept. This humility, this poverty was what Mary dwelt on . . . realizing that *if God chose to be born in this way then there is a message in it*. We too can ponder God’s way of

revealing himself (e.g. his extreme humility) through human events.

What virtue do I see Mary exercising? I see her **flexibility in the face of God’s own plans**. Whatever plans that she and Joseph had arranged or hoped for, fell through, but God’s plans did not. She can teach us that when our own plans go awry, his emerge—and of course, his are better, even if at the time they don’t seem to make a lot of sense. We can learn to step back and watch God’s providential care unfold for us without worry or anxiety.

Good news: “The angel said to [the shepherds] . . . Behold, I bring you **good news** of a great joy which will come to all the people; for to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord . . . And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom he is pleased” (Lk 2:9–10, 13–14). We are all very familiar with these lines, but how many of you realized that the words are supposed to conjure up a contrast between Christ and Caesar Augustus? “In the first century, Caesar has been known as the ‘savior of the world’ and as a ‘son of God,’ one who has brought ‘good news’ of ‘peace’ throughout the world. His birthday has been celebrated throughout the empire as a start of a new era.” “The angels announce that baby Jesus, not Caesar, is the true Lord, Son of God, and Savior of the world. It is Jesus’ birth, not Caesar’s, which brings true Good News and peace to the world. It is Jesus’ birth that will be remembered and celebrated throughout the world as the beginning of a new era. No one today celebrates the birth of Caesar Augustus. But millions around the world remember the birth of Jesus every Christmas.”

May that birth always bring each of us joy. +