Spirit & Life

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Benedictine Sisters of Perpetual Adoration
Clyde, Missouri

From Sister Dawn Annette

By this time, I'm sure almost everyone is aware that Pope Francis has declared this year as the Holy Year of Hope. So far it has been hard to see 2025 as a year of hope. We have had fires in the west and ice in the east, north, and south. What we can be certain about is that we are in a time of change. Change often implies that we will face some unknowns. The unknown can be scary. Yet the unknown is also where hope takes root.

I just attended a workshop where the presenter talked about the difference between optimism and hope. Optimism is the belief that good will happen because we have some experience, some evidence, that gives us reason to expect success. Hope holds the same belief without experience or evidence, but based on faith alone. The author of the Letter to the Hebrews tells us:

> Faith is the realization of what is hoped for and evidence of things not seen. Because of it the ancients were well attested. (Heb 11:1-2)

Amid change, conflict, even disaster, where do we find hope? I would suggest we turn to the central mystery of our faith, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Death is recognized as the end of life or at least of the life we have known. It is the loss of everything. Yet, in the mystery of the resurrection, it becomes a new beginning. Death is changed from a brick wall to an open door.

In the Acts of the Apostles, Saint Paul says, "I have the same hope in God as they themselves have that there will be a resurrection of the righteous and the unrighteous" (Acts 24:15). Paul believed that Jesus Christ opened the door for all of us. This is our hope: Jesus has made a way for us through every trial and tribulation. We all have some experience of the cross. We know the taste of suffering, of loss, of helplessness. Yet, faith reminds us that the story doesn't end with the cross. It ends with the fulfillment of hope.

In the words of Saint Peter:

> Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who in his great mercy gave us a new birth to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you who by the power of God are safeguarded through faith, to a salvation that is ready to be revealed in the final time. In this you rejoice, although now for a little while you may have to suffer through various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold that is perishable even though tested by fire, may prove to be for praise, glory, and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Although you have not seen him you love him; even though you do not see him now you believe in him, you rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy, as you attain the goal of [your] faith, the salvation of your souls. (1 Peter 1:3-9)

Sr. Dawn Annette Mills, OSB
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The Benedictine Sisters of Perpetual Adoration are a contemporary monastic community with a distinctive dedication to the Eucharist. We serve the Church through our contemplative prayer, and witness to God's presence in our world through community life, hospitality, and a ministry of the word, in ways uniquely appropriate to our monastery.

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FROM THE EDITOR

Growing up, Easter was almost as much fun as Christmas. On Holy Saturday, during the night or early morning, the Easter Bunny brought my brother and me baskets. The baskets were lined with crinkled shredded paper and filled with jellybeans, lollipops, chocolate Easter eggs, chocolate bunnies, as well as the colored Easter eggs we had dyed the day before. We knew that the Easter Bunny did not lay the eggs; he used ours instead. We also knew that the Easter Bunny was really our mother and that the candy came from the grocery store around the corner.

I don't think we had Peeps. Google has informed me that Peeps were invented in 1953. My lack of a childhood Peeps memory probably reflects my age. Jellybeans, on the other hand, have been around since the mid-1800s.

The Easter Bunny was a significant figure in German folklore, but he was not a rabbit. He was a hare. Hares and rabbits are distinct species. Hares are larger and have longer ears and longer hind legs. Neither hares nor rabbits lay eggs. The reason that the Easter Bunny was a hare is that hares were thought to give birth without losing their virginity, like our Blessed Mother. Thus, hares became a popular motif in medieval church art (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Easter_Bunny). In folklore, the Easter Hare was like Santa Claus in that he judged children's behavior and, like Santa, kept a "naughty list." In our home, the Easter Bunny, our mother, did not act like a judge in fulfilling her Easter basket duty. We received candy whether we were naughty or nice. She did not place conditions on her gifts of love.

Jesus did not come to judge us either. In John's Gospel, Jesus said, "For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him (Jn 3:17). He repeated this teaching later in the same Gospel: "If anyone hears my words and does not observe them, I do not condemn him, for I did not come to condemn the world but to save the world" (Jn 12:47). When the Pharisees asked Jesus why he ate with tax collectors and sinners, he replied:

> Those who are healthy do not need a physician, but the sick do. I have not come to call the righteous to repentance but sinners. (Luke 5:31-32)

Jesus did not turn anyone aside. He includes all of us, naughty or nice, in his offer of redemption. We may reject him, but he will never reject us.

I find Easter eggs to be a more meaningful tradition than an Easter Bunny who is used to keep children in line by threat of punishment. In contrast, eggs are an ancient cultural symbol of rebirth and renewal. Rebirth means that we have an opportunity to begin anew, to start over, to reverse course, to erase the mistakes we've made, to make amends to the those we have hurt. Renewal means to replace, to restore, to refresh. God gives us the grace to restore broken relationships. In the Christian tradition, Easter eggs symbolize the empty tomb of Jesus. In addition, one ancient tradition was the staining of Easter eggs with the color red in memory of Christ's blood, "shed on behalf of many for the forgiveness of sins" (Mt. 26:28) (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Easter_egg).

Efforts toward rebirth and renewal begin with Lent and continue through Easter. But they do not end with Easter, they last throughout our lives. As we hurtle toward Pentecost, let's ask for the grace to repair what is broken and to replace what is worn out.

Sr. Sarah Schwartzberg, OSB

Forgive Us as We Forgive

Rev. John Hagemann, OSB

A few months ago, one of our alumni of Saint John Seminary gave us a presentation on his and his family's experience of deep forgiveness. His name is Sylvester Schieber. He graduated from Saint John's Seminary in 1964. (Saint John's Seminary was the precursor of Mount Michael Benedictine High School in Elkhorn, Nebraska.)

This lived example of deep forgiveness was extended to the man who raped and killed the daughter of Sylvester and Vicki Schieber. The story, entitled "When the Death Penalty Got Personal," was featured in Spring 2021 issue of the *Notre Dame Magazine*, a quarterly magazine published by the University of Notre Dame. I was a young student at Saint John's when Schieber was here. I was finishing my freshman year in the spring of 1964, the year Sylvester graduated. I remember him, and when he related his story, I felt it in a personal way.

I don't need to retell the story, but I want to talk about the point that really touched my heart. The Schiebers attended Mass on the Saturday night after the murder. In his article, Schieber talked about how he had attended Mass daily most of his life. He wrote:

> I was raised in a Catholic family that prayed a daily rosary together. I went to a Catholic boarding high school where we attended daily Mass. Later I enrolled in a Catholic college as an undergraduate and pursued my doctorate at Notre Dame. I had said the Lord's Prayer thousands of times, but that night as we reached "forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us," I was struck dumb. Suddenly that prayer had meaning I had never fully grasped before. (Schieber)

The Schiebers were willing to forgive the killer of their daughter from the very beginning. I can't say that I, myself, was struck dumb. But I gasped, and I was deeply moved. The family was ready to forgive almost immediately. That's just unbelievable. They didn't even need time to process it all. Ready to forgive! Immediately!

I had a flashback during Schieber's presentation to another time during my high school days. It had to do with some prisoners from the State Penitentiary in Lincoln, Nebraska. Father Mario Gramlich, OSB, taught a class on social justice at the Seminary. Father Mario was doing some prison ministry at the time. He was able to obtain permission from the authorities of the Penitentiary to allow some prisoners to give us a presentation on why they were imprisoned and their experience of rehabilitation.

I remember being extremely moved by this experience as well, but it had more to do with the senses of sound and sight. These prisoners' feet were manacled, and when they walked, there was a clanging noise of the chains. I will never forget that noise.

During the academic year of 1996-1997, I was teaching a similar class on social justice. I came across an organization called Someone Who Cares. This organization provides names of prisoners who have asked to receive mail; it's a pen pal sort of thing. I chose a name from the list they provided and began to write to this man. He was imprisoned in California.

I have communicated with this man ever since that time. It has been nearly thirty years now. I still have most of his letters. He has been up for parole numerous times. I wrote letters on his behalf every time. He was released from prison this past year.

I had the privilege of visiting him in prison three times when I happened to be in California. I must admit that it has been an interesting journey to say the least, and it is still going on. I would say the most rewarding aspect of the journey was to help this man understand that he could be forgiven. More importantly, he needed to believe and feel forgiveness deeply within himself. Despair is devastating. The belief that he could be forgiven changed him. He became very positive. I tried to teach this man that, as he has been forgiven, so now must he teach others that they can be forgiven as well. It gives the will to go on in life. He is now doing that. It continues to help others in prison and daily life.

2025 is a Jubilee year in our church. It is a time to forgive debts and wrongdoings. It is a time to let go of all those hurts and wrongs that many of us have hung on to for many years. In his February 2022 letter announcing the jubilee year, Pope Francis wrote:

> We must fan the flame of hope that has been given us and help everyone to gain new strength and certainty by looking to the future with an open spirit, a trusting heart and far-sighted vision. The forthcoming Jubilee can contribute greatly to restoring a climate of hope and trust as a prelude to the renewal and rebirth that we so urgently desire.

In the same letter, Pope Francis stated that the celebration of the jubilee year is meant to be experienced as "a special gift of grace, characterized by the forgiveness of sins."

I am truly grateful to those people in my life who have taught me this. The effort that Father Mario took to get those prisoners here to our school will never be forgotten. The Schiebers' story will always be an example for me to forgive and to forgive immediately. My experience with the prisoner I helped will always be an example of the forgiveness Jesus Christ won for all humankind and offers absolutely to everyone.

Lent is the season for us to receive and give forgiveness. Perhaps we all need to be struck dumb by the words "forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us."

> Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. Stop judging and you will not be judged. Stop condemning and you will not be condemned. Forgive and you will be forgiven. (Luke 6:36-37)

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Helping and Being Helped in the Rule of Benedict

Mary S. Sheridan

As a teacher of future social workers, I always began my introductory methods class with an exercise that I called "Helping and Being Helped." Most basically, people want to become social workers to help others. There are a lot of dimensions of helping, and students need to understand not only the practicalities but also the emotions involved.

Here's how the exercise went. I first asked the students to think of a time when they helped someone else. It could have been something small like giving directions on the street. Some students had taken in a homeless stranger or done some other form of "big" helping. As each student spoke, I placed a word or two on the whiteboard. I also asked each student to tell me how they felt about the helping: "good," "satisfied," "happy," and so on. I wrote those words on the board too. There was a warm, proud feeling in the room as the number of "helpings" and positive words accumulated.

Then I turned the tables on them. I asked each student to tell about a time when they received help, something as small as directions on the street or something bigger—and wrote those incidents and feelings on the board.

In a moment, the emotional tone of the room changed. People were grateful for the help they had received, but they were also uncomfortable. It could be hard to admit that they needed help. American society teaches us, more and more, that it is not okay to be anything less than self-sufficient. People should be strong, self-reliant, givers of help and not receivers. They should "pull themselves up by their own bootstraps" even if they don't have boots. Chad Hymas, who became quadriplegic in a farming accident, describes his feelings: "I have always prided myself on my independence. I was the guy my family and friends could always call on when they needed something. I am now the one who needs help" (104).

I did this exercise because it is important that those who will give help recognize their feelings about their work and about those who receive help. Often the one who gives help is perceived as good and powerful. The one who receives help is "needy," "weak," even a "loser." To need help is, somehow, disgraceful. This is not how we want social workers to think about clients. The days of "Lady Bountiful" are over. My exercise was the beginning of teaching that we all, sometimes, are givers of help. We are all, sometimes, in need of help.

The negative feelings about needing help can be associated with the American frontier or the myth of the cowboy. Hymas points out that this is wrong: "We live in a ranching community. Ranchers and farmers depend on each other for their livelihood. . . . Freedom is not independence. It never was" (104).

I have been happy to find this philosophy in the Rule of Benedict. For example, in Chapter 53, Benedict speaks of those who run the kitchen that serves the guests:

> Let them be given such help as they need, that they

> may serve without murmuring. And on the other hand, when they have less to occupy them, let them go out to whatever work is assigned them. And not only in their case but in all the offices of the monastery let this arrangement be observed, that when help is needed it be supplied, and again when the workers are unoccupied, they do whatever they are bidden.

In Chapter 35, Benedict speaks similarly of the monks who work in the monastery kitchen:

> But let helpers be provided for the weak ones, that they may not be distressed by this work; and indeed, let everyone have help, as required by the size of the community or the circumstances of the locality.

Likewise, in Chapter 31, Benedict discusses the role of the cellarer, who manages the provisions and physical property of the monastery. He concludes once again, "Let everyone have help, as required by the size of the community or the circumstances of the locality."

Several useful things strike me about these passages. First, Benedict recognizes that some jobs may exceed the capacity of those assigned to do them. Work can be too much or too hard. This can be true especially in a large monastery or where there are many guests. How I wish that some of my bosses over the years had come to a similar conclusion! We may not like to admit it, but we all have our limits. Some limits are because we are human, and some because of the nature or the amount of work. Benedict hates "murmuring," and does not want to give anyone, weak or strong, a reason to grumble.

Second, Benedict states as a matter of course that those who need help have a right to it. What a concept, and he makes it sound so natural! Imagine the impact on morale if those who needed help were simply given it, not shamed or considered "undeserving" Imagine if the hardest worker, who is often such at the price of family, health, or sanity, were not praised but just given help and permission to go home.

Finally, Benedict says that when one can give help, one ought to do it. This, too, is natural. Benedict, always a fan of balance, sees us not as strictly divided into givers and receivers, but as sometimes one and sometimes another. I feel this as a natural flow. There will be times when someone else is struggling and times when I am. Sometimes I will reach out, and sometimes someone reaches out to me. Even the Lone Ranger had Tonto.

This mutuality is easier in a small community. My neighbor sees me struggling with a box and helps. She needs someone to care for her cat, Leo, and I am happy to do so. In the monastery, a call goes out for help with the apples, and it becomes a party.

Benedict wants both the giver and the receiver of help to be humble, perhaps because he sees them as interchangeable roles. In Chapter 34, he says that those who need more help should be thankful for receiving it, and those who need less should be happy that they need less. Again, what a concept in a world that hates to see a neighbor get more than we have. Gratitude, not preening or groveling, is the standard for which we should strive.

Many people have said that receivers of help offer the opportunity for others to be givers. This is true, but Hymas takes it one step farther: "How can we learn to be kind, generous, helpful, or supportive, if we aren't allowed to do that for others? And how can others learn those wonderful traits, if we don't allow them to do it for us—and show our appreciation when they do." This is especially true in raising children. He concludes with the rhyme, "It is right to give/ This we all believe;/ But it takes a truly generous heart/ To learn graciously to receive" (107-108).

Balance, Benedict teaches us. Humility always. If we could extend this giving and receiving way of life to our larger communities, corporations, and societies, wouldn't we be far better off?

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What Inspires Me? Who Inspires Me?

Susan Black

Everything inspires me.
Everyone inspires me.
Everything and everyone
come from God.
Therefore, God inspires me.

It's inspiring to know that there are many ways to think about inspiration.

In physical terms, inspiration is part of the process of respiration, the breathing that sustains life. Without inspiration, there would be no exhalation, the other half of that vital process. Inspiration nourishes me with oxygen, exhalation cleanses me of carbon dioxide. Inspiration and exhalation cannot exist without each other.

In imaginative terms, inspiration draws God's essence into my essence, into my very being. Exhalation sends our co-mingled essences out into the world where they can act in concert to bring about all manner of things that are full of truth, beauty, and goodness.

In spiritual terms, inspiration points me towards God who does not need to be drawn into or depend on anything. God is in and of everything. Even so, the respiration process I have just described reminds me that I am a co-creator with God, a role I try to cultivate in everything I do and in how I live and why I live.

In creative terms, inspiration gives me the impetus to fulfill the ideas that come to me through every experience in my life. Inspiration helps me turn my ideas into realities.

. . . . .

A few weeks after the March 2023 elementary school shooting in Nashville, I was at Sunday Mass. In the pew in front of me was a family with four children who were the age of the dead children in Tennessee, or even younger. I was stricken, not for the first time but somehow as if for the first time, by the horror of what has become an epidemic in our country. I could think about nothing but those innocent little children.

What could I do? Over many years, I had anguished with my friends; I had prayed, and I had educated myself. I had signed petitions, I had marched, I had written to my congresspeople, I had mailed postcards to voters when gun-control measures were on the ballot. I thought I had gone as far as I could. But my good works were intellectual, performed at a distance. "Think globally/act locally" goes the saying. Again, what could I do?

Clear as a ringing bell, it came to me: "Gradually and then suddenly," to borrow a phrase from Hemingway. What seemed to be a quick inspiration was also the culmination of much rumination and reflection. I had held the lock in my hands for a long time, but now I possessed the key that would allow me to "act locally": my lifelong love of reading.

I joined a program of adults trained to be "reading buddies" in my community's elementary schools. During the academic year, I spend ninety minutes a week at my assigned school; a half-hour in the library reading aloud with each of my three students: two first-grade girls and a second-grade boy. These children all like to read but just need a little extra one-on-one attention. With literacy at grade three being a marker for future success in almost all aspects of life, my kids are at a vulnerable stage. Maybe I can make a bit of a difference. Maybe I can inspire them.

. . . . .

Each year, three days after Christmas, the Catholic Church observes the Feast of the Holy Innocents, those children murdered by King Herod in his attempt to eliminate the Baby Jesus, the "newborn King of the Jews." Such ancient history is newly relevant to me because holy innocents were murdered in that Tennessee school. That ironically inspirational event is never far from my mind. When I make my weekly "reading buddies" trip to school, I need to be buzzed through two locked doors to gain entry. Then I sign in and am given the badge that says I've passed a background check and am a trusted visitor. Finally, I can head to the library to meet up with my three holy innocents. On the way, I offer a little prayer for our safety.

FORM OF BEQUEST FOR A WILL

I give, devise, and bequeath to the Benedictine Convent of Perpetual Adoration, 31970 State Highway P, Clyde, MO 64432-8100, a corporation organized and existing under the laws of the State of Missouri ... (state here the amount of money or description of the property willed). For wills, bequests and estate planning, our legal name is: Benedictine Convent of Perpetual Adoration.

Thank you for your Will to Give

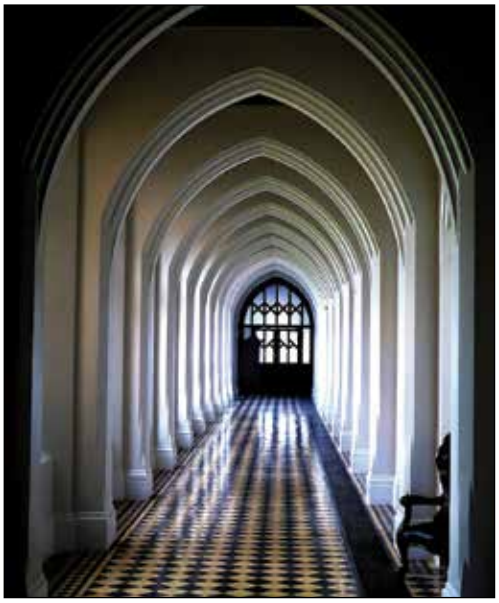
Your gift will support our life of prayer, and our prayer will be the gift we offer in return, to support you and your loved ones.

If you are reviewing your will or other estate plans because of tax law or other changes, now may be an ideal time to consider your charitable priorities. Be sure your advisor knows what these priorities are.

On Mortification: *Seeing from Death to Life*

Jacob Riyeff

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified their flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also follow the Spirit.
(Galatians 5:23-25)



As we venture through Lent once again and the Upper Midwest winter continues, my mind turns toward the penitential ways the Church has called its members to imitate their Head. Central on that list is mortification: the deliberate denial of one's natural desires in order to subordinate one's will to the divine will. The thinking goes that if we are fallen people with a tendency toward self-centeredness, we must actively refuse that tendency in our daily life if we are to follow where the Spirit leads (Gal 5:25). This means at least avoiding the occasions of mortal sin. But more importantly, as we seek a life more open to the Spirit we find that further restraint on our natural desires fosters just this kind of freedom in the Spirit (2 Cor 3:17).

The term "mortification" has been largely expunged from the contemporary spiritual vocabulary, though it has been a mainstay of the Christian spiritual tradition from the beginning. Historically, there's plenty of reason to downplay mortification as a spiritual approach. Some Christians through the centuries have been a little too hard on the natural desires of the body, and there has been a tendency for middle-class morality to colonize Christian morals. This has led to lots of contemporary comments about one's parents or grandparents who "always told us our bodies were bad" or "we shouldn't talk about sex," and about how fasting "doesn't make sense to me," or that "we should do good for our neighbors rather than deny ourselves." Yet the modern desire to rid ourselves of mortification is a case of throwing the baby out with the bathwater.

A spirituality that tells us that whatever we want is good without serious qualifications is a spirituality that doesn't take the cross seriously, especially in decadent, consumerist societies focused on individualist priorities and satisfactions. This doesn't mean that a spiritual life should be dour or morose. If as disciples of the Way we are called to face the reality we find outside ourselves without flinching, we must also face our own selves: our desires, our shortcomings, and our sins included. We ought to have compassion for ourselves and realize that we cannot transform a life in a day or a week. The spiritual life is a lifetime affair. The masters of the spiritual life have called us to mortification all the way down the line, and we should listen.

"If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.

For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it" (Lk 9:23-24). If we take the time to really look into our own hearts in regular protracted silence, in the contexts of the liturgy and the sacraments, in relation to the pain and suffering of others and with unflinching honesty, we will see the harmful ways our bodies and souls are oriented toward ourselves, our desires, our own plans. There's nothing intrinsically wrong with desires and plans. The question we must ask ourselves again and again is: how do our desires and plans depend on our subordination of other people and other creatures to those desires and plans?

When we put ourselves first at others' expense, we fail in charity. These are the places in our lives for mortification: to restrain our natural desires in light of an opening of the heart to grace, to caring for others, to emptying the self in imitation of Christ in his Incarnation and Passion: "Therefore, since Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same attitude (for whoever suffers in the flesh has broken with sin), so as not to spend what remains of one's life in the flesh on human desires, but on the will of God" (1 Pt 4:1-2). While we might protest that living lives of security, comfort, and sensual satisfaction doesn't hurt anybody, we must look hard at the ways that perhaps our comfortable lives, while not actively and directly harming someone, may habituate us to failing to see others' pain and suffering. In addition, the resources needed to maintain our automobile- and electricity-dependent lifestyles are much less innocent than many of us want to admit.

The sixteenth-century French Benedictine abbot Louis of Blois saw mortification as the foundation of the spiritual life. He was careful to ensure his readers did not take this to mean that we should seek out suffering and extreme austerity. Rather, "looking upon nothing as his own peculiar property, [the disciple] must utterly strip himself of all things," in everything seeking "God and his honor and will" (2.2). Abbot Louis teaches that in the spiritual life, as we practice regular denial of self-will; restraining the senses; moderating food, drink, and sleep; resigning the will in patience and charity to accept all that comes one's way as coming from the Lord for our sanctification, we find that "in genuine and entire mortification lies hid true and most joyful life" (5.1). Why? Because "he who is always dying to himself is always beginning a new life in God." I love his image here: "The resigned and mortified soul is like a bunch of grapes, ripe, soft, and sweet; but an unresigned soul is like a cluster, unripe, hard, and sour. No more pleasing offering can be made to God than the resignation of our own will, because nothing is more dear to man than his own will and his own freedom."

Dame Gertrude More learned from Abbot Louis and her own spiritual father, Dom Augustine Baker, that mortification was a primary part of the road to contemplative simplicity and peace. She notes in her spiritual diary, *Confessions of a Lover*, that we do not need to seek out any suffering; this only offers us chances to fail and/or to sow pride. On the other hand, if we say we do not need mortification, Dame Gertrude notes that, contenting ourselves with our devotion to God, we will "deceive [ourselves] and nourish pride and self-love within [ourselves] under pretense of spirit." (Confession 46). Rather than these options which put too much trust in ourselves, we need to practice resigning the will in patience to what comes our way. She says to God in Confession 27:

> For I find that where I seek myself, there I am caught, as it were, in a snare. And where I forsake myself, there I become more and more capable of that true liberty of spirit which carrieth the soul above itself and all created things, that it may more perfectly be united to thee. For this is thy will: that by true abnegation in all things both external and internal and by a total subjection to thee . . . we should enjoy a certain divine and heavenly peace amidst the crosses, passions, contradictions, and mutabilities which are incident to our life.

I find Dame Gertrude's image of the "snare" particularly insightful. What looks appealing, what looks

pleasing, is in fact exactly what binds and limits us. If we could only eat more, drink more, sleep more, say that nasty thing about our co-worker more, binge-watch that show more, post about how stupid that other person online is more, and be perfectly justified in doing all this, then we'd be content! Then we'd have peace! These are all bait in the snare of self-love, hatred, and sin, a missing-the-mark that bends us back upon ourselves in selfishness rather than outward toward others and the Trinity in charity. Once we're caught, how will we break free? In the regular practice of mortification, we find clear spiritual vision to resist the snares and instead find ourselves uncannily free in "true liberty of spirit."

This isn't to say it's painless. It's mortification after all. But to die to our self-centeredness is to live unto others, to live with others. To take up our cross and face our own self-serving longings along with everyone else. Facing the reality of the human heart and wanting to live most fully means dying to all the ways—small and large, insidious, and heinous—that we seek to dominate others. We must die to ourselves a little every day, every moment, to allow the Spirit to make our hearts overflow with faith, hope, and charity.

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Jacob Riyeff is a teacher, poet, and translator. His books make accessible to contemporary audiences Benedictine works from the early medieval to the modern eras. Jacob is an oblate affiliated with the Benedictine Sisters of Perpetual Adoration, Osage Forest of Peace, and lives in Milwaukee with his wife and three growing children. The present essay is extracted from the author's book, Contemplate: Toward an Expansive Heart, *forthcoming later this year from Monkfish Book Publishing Company.*

The Vine

Creeping up the trellis of time;
seeking strongholds for tendrils
as it is budding forth green leaves.
The sturdy stalk
nourished from the root
supports the whole vine.

But this central source of life
cannot bear fruit of itself.
so it sprouts, grows and greens
the branches.

Some branches thrive
and others divert energy from the rest.
They are pruned to help the whole vine.
In a growing vine
stalk and attached branches flourish
and with care they produce much fruit.

Christ is the stalk
nourishing the branches.
We live in Christ.

Sr. Therese Furois, OSB

Counting One Hundred Blessings Daily Enriches Your Life

Rabbi Allen S. Maller

Enter his gates with thanksgiving, his courts with praise.
Give thanks to him, bless his name.
(Psalm 100:4)

A daily counting of our blessings is age-old advice that improves our mood and mindset. One reason that it works is because it counters the human tendency to notice and remember the negative rather than the positive. There's a strong evolutionary reason we think this way: it's vital for our survival. We hardly notice if a cat is following us up the street, but we certainly would notice if it were a lion. Our brains are primed for danger to keep us safe. This is good, but in a world of constant news of war, suffering, hatred, and division, this bias can overwhelm us with worries and anxiety.

One way of influencing people to think positively is to teach them the importance of saying blessings for what they experience, both in their ordinary daily life and at extraordinary times. It is a Jewish religious duty to say blessings over food and drink. Every morning when we wake up, it is a duty to say several blessings because various parts of our mind and body still work. During daily prayer, there are eighteen blessings. There are blessings for the weekly celebration of the Sabbath. There are blessings for special occasions. Our sages urged us to say as many blessings as we can, since the more blessings we say, the more blessed we are.

Jewish tradition maintains that everyone who can say one hundred blessings a day is truly blessed. Among the special occasion blessings, there is a blessing for seeing a non-Jewish sage and another one for seeing a Jewish sage. There is a blessing for hearing good news and another one for hearing bad news. Rabbi Huna (c. 216—296 CE) taught that we need both joy and suffering to experience "very good." Here are a few examples of blessings for special occasions:

On beholding fragrant trees:
Praised be Adonai our God, Ruler of space and time, creator of fragrant trees.

On seeing trees in blossom:
Praised be Adonai our God, Ruler of space and time,

whose world lacks nothing we need, who has fashioned goodly creatures and lovely trees that enchant the heart.

On seeing many people:
Praised be Adonai our God, Ruler of space and time, for just as no person's opinion is like that of another, so their faces are different from one another.

On seeing evidence of charitable efforts:
Praised be Adonai our God, ruler of space and time, who clothes the naked.

On seeing people who overcome adversity:
Praised be Adonai our God, ruler of space and time, who gives strength to the weary.

Understanding that suffering, sorrow, and death do not nullify the basic goodness of the world God has created, and training oneself to see all the blessings that surround us, are two of the many ways the Torah tradition teaches Jews to have an optimistic view of the natural world and of human society. Although individuals can train themselves to make their lives joyful and holy, some would say that civilization has corrupted the world with sin, lust, greed, violence, and immorality. It is true that prior to the creation of self-conscious moral creatures the world was free of evil. However, the world also lacked good, for there were no creatures who could choose to do good over evil.

An important Jewish teaching concerns the outcome of human history. Most ancient philosophies saw human history as cyclical. Some saw the cycle as a declining one with each age followed by a more degenerate one. The present age was often seen as dire and getting worse. The prophets of Israel, especially Isaiah, introduced God's assurance of a future messianic age when all nations would achieve peace, prosperity, and justice.

How can we believe in a messianic age after all the world went through in the twentieth century? Human society changed more rapidly and violently in the last century than ever before. Doctors saved the lives of millions. Dictators sacrificed the lives of millions. Populations exploded and birthrates declined. Technology produced both worldwide prosperity and pollution. How can we look upon the future with optimistic hope?

Are the world and society heading towards a wonder-filled new age or toward doomsday? Or are both occurring concurrently because breakdown is always a prelude to breakthrough? Many who believe in the biblical vision of a messianic age use the insights of the prophets as a guide to understand the social, economic, scientific, and cultural upheavals sweeping society. Usually, it is the dramatic dangers of the pre-messianic tribulation that are emphasized. I will focus on some positive signs developing throughout the world that accord with the messianic vision of the Jewish prophets.

In most religious traditions, redemption is defined in terms of individual enlightenment or personal salvation. However, the prophets of Israel conceived redemption as a transformation of human society that would occur through the catalyst of the transformation of the Jewish community. This transformation, which will take place in this world at some future time, is called the messianic age. The transition to the messianic age is called the birth pangs of the Messiah. The birth of a redeemed messianic world may be the result of an easy or difficult labor.

If everyone lived according to the moral teachings of his or her religious tradition, we would bring about the messianic age. If we will not do it voluntarily, it will come through social and political upheavals. The Messiah refers to an agent of God who helps bring about this transformation. The Jewish tradition teaches that this agent of God will be a human being, a descendant of King David, with leadership qualities like those of the prophets Moses, Jesus, or Muhammad. The arrival of the messianic age is what's important, not the personality of the agents

who bring it about, since they are simply the instruments of God.

The messianic age is usually seen as the solution to all of humanity's problems. This may be true in the long run, but the vast changes the transition to the messianic age entails will provide challenges to society for many generations to come. For twenty-five centuries, Jews have prayed for the day when Isaiah's vision of a radically new world would come, when Jerusalem would be filled with joy for "no longer shall there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, nor anyone who does not live a full lifetime" (Is 65:20).

Where does a Messiah fit in with all of this? Most Orthodox Jews would not commit themselves to any individual as a Messiah unless he successfully rebuilds the ancient temple in Jerusalem, fulfilling the prophecy of Zechariah, "He will build the temple of the Lord, and taking up the royal insignia, he will sit as ruler upon his throne. The priest will be at his right hand, and between the two of them there will be peaceful understanding" (Zec 6:13).

Now that a large part of the Jewish people has returned to the Land of Israel and resurrected a Jewish state, one might think that rebuilding a temple of the site where Solomon originally built one almost 3,000 years ago would be simple. But a Muslim shrine, the Dome of the Rock, presently occupies the site. It was built in 691 by Abd-Al-Malik, and Muslims regard it as the third holiest site in the world. Any attempt to replace the Dome of the Rock would provoke a Muslim Holy War of cataclysmic proportions.

There is open land on the Temple Mount. A small Jewish house of worship could be built six hundred feet north of the Masjid al-Aqsa, near the Dome of the Rock, if Muslims would cooperate. Most observers agree that anyone who could arrange such Jewish-Muslim cooperation would really be the messianic ruler of peace (Isaiah 9:5). Christian support for such a cooperative venture would also be important. Anyone who can bring Jews, Christians, and Muslims together in mutual respect and cooperation would surely fulfill the greatest of all messianic predictions, "They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning knives; nation shall not take up sword against nation, they shall never again teach war" (Isaiah 2:4). Such interreligious cooperation would not be possible without great spiritual leadership in all three communities. Thus, each community could consider its leadership to be the Messiah. This would fulfill the culminating verses of Isaiah's messianic prophecy as enlarged upon by Micah 4:3-5:

> He shall judge between many peoples and set terms
> for strong and distant nations;
> They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and
> their spears into pruning hooks;
> One nation shall not raise the sword against another,
> nor shall they train for war again.

If each person truly followed the best of his or her own religious teachings, the Messiah will surely have arrived, and God's Kingdom will be established. This is the most positive vision we can have and that we can work for together. Isaiah 41:10 reads:

> Do not fear: I am with you;
> do not be anxious: I am your God.
> I will strengthen you, I will help you,
> I will uphold you with my victorious
> right hand.

"Seek peace and pursue it."

PS. 34:14
(quoted in the Prologue to the Rule of Benedict, vs. 17)

An Evolving Vortex of Compassion

Sr. Mary Clare Buthod, OSB

Easter was early that year. It was chilly, but weather rarely stopped us. Our city park was decorated with eggs. Some were real eggs and others were candy, which were our favorites. My five-year-old sister Mandy and I could see the colorful eggs gleaming in the sunlight as we neared the field. We found our first eggs nestled in clumps of spring grass. Mandy squealed with delight. I helped her put her prizes into the wicker basket that I safeguarded. Mandy was jumping, skipping, and running around the trees and bushes.

As we scampered to find more eggs, I felt a pull on my sleeve. "Katy, Katy," I heard Mandy whisper, "Who is she?" Mandy pointed to a teenager in a wheelchair who was watching the egg hunt with fascination and delight. Although the challenged youngster was clapping, she looked lonely to me.

I had seen the teenager, Kerry Hobert, at every hunt I attended. "That's Kerry Hobert," I said. "She loves to watch the Easter egg hunts."

"Let's give her an egg!" Mandy said. "She can't walk. She needs us to hand her an egg." Mandy and I walked over to Kerry. I felt the eyes of all the egg-gatherers watching us approach Kerry.

All long-time egg gatherers knew about Kerry and that she was always at our hunts, but no one really knew her. Mandy and I went up to Kerry, and Mandy held out her most beautiful egg. "Here," Mandy said, "This is the prettiest egg of all. I found it over there under the spruce tree. I want you to have it."

"It is beautiful! Thank you!"

Slowly all the children came up, and each child offered Kerry the most beautiful egg he or she had. I put the large basket that I had brought by Kerry's wheelchair. Soon the basket was filled with hard-boiled eggs and candy eggs.

The children lost interest in the Easter egg hunt when Kerry said, "I used to make up stories about Easter egg hunts and tell them to my parents."

"Why are you in that chair?" asked Mandy.

"Because I can't walk," said Kerry. "Do you know where your spine is?" Kerry asked as she pointed to her own back. All the children felt their spines. "Well, my spine is twisted so I can't walk.

"Do you know where your heart is?" Kerry asked as she felt for her heart. "Feel your heart make thumping noises," Kerry instructed. The children felt their hearts and nodded. "Sometimes my heart skips a beat. It goes 'beat, beat, skip, beat, skip, beat, beat,'" said Kerry.

"Oh," the children sighed sadly.

"Would you tell us a story like you tell your parents?" asked Jim.

"Of course I will," said Kerry. "What is your name, and what do you want to be when you grow up?"

"My name is Jim, and I want to be a farmer!" For some unexplained reason, we giggled at Jim's response.

Kerry began to tell the funniest story the children ever heard about a farmer.

"Me, me!" cried Sue. My name is Sue, and I want to be a ballerina!"

As the afternoon wore on, the sun began to warm this small group now seated on the ground in a circle around Kerry. The children took turns calling out their names. After the children had reported their intended occupations, it became apparent to Kerry's father that his daughter was tiring. This kindly man came toward Kerry; she glanced up at him and exclaimed, "Daddy, these are all my friends!"

"Good afternoon, Mr. Hobert. Kerry has told us stories about what we will be when we grow up. This has been the best Easter egg hunt ever! Thank you, Kerry!"

"Goodbye, my friends," Kerry called out as her father waved and began wheeling his daughter and her very precious basket out of the park.

Mr. Hobert began wheeling Kerry toward the sidewalk. We could hear Mr. Hobert talking with Kerry about her afternoon. They were both smiling.

That year Kerry became very ill. The "Easter egg children" who knew and loved Kerry were very sad that Kerry was sick. The youngsters talked about her often with their parents, who, pleased with their children's new-found compassion, decided to visit Kerry's family with casseroles, desserts, and salads. My mother called Kerry's mother, who was delighted. And so, shortly after school one afternoon, the children gathered, and the group carpooled to Kerry's home.

When the cars pulled up to the Hobert home, they saw a wheelchair in the front yard. In it sat a concrete Easter bunny and basket with a sign that read, "Welcome! Enter! There is a great surprise inside!"

The families took turns approaching the Hobert home. A smiling woman introduced herself as Kerry's mother. She hugged each child and welcomed the families into her home. Soon, baked goods, desserts, and fruits were piled up on the kitchen cabinets.

The children began looking around the living room where the table, shelves, and chairs had caramel Easter eggs sitting upon manuscripts. They peeked at the papers and realized that the stories were about each of them.

Quiet and respectful, they stifled surprised gasps. Mrs. Hobert asked them to select an egg and find their story. The room was filled with excitement, gratitude, and utmost delight. Mrs. Hobert said, "Kerry has been eager to see you. She had so much fun making your eggs and typing your stories. Come, Kerry's room is right here. Kerry wants you to visit her."

In awe of their precious gifts, the children tiptoed into Kerry's bedroom. Kerry looked very sick, but she was beaming with joy. My mother took several pictures of all of us gathered around Kerry. "I'll send pictures out to everyone," my mother assured Kerry, her mother, and the group. Soon the children's parents guided them out to their cars. My mother called back to Mrs. Hobert, "The children will want to write thank you notes to their wonderful friend."

"That will please Kerry so much. She'll be reading your notes over and over!"

It has been fifteen years since that visit to Kerry's home. I think that we all still have our personalized manuscripts and caramel Easter eggs. We have placed Kerry's picture someplace special in our bedrooms. I am married with three children. Although I am very busy, I find myself remembering that Easter egg day often.

Today we took a sad trip back to my parent's home. My father died of heart failure. We attended his funeral and escorted his body to the cemetery. Although my father's illness was not unexpected, we were sad when the day of the funeral arrived. We would miss his dry sense of humor, love, and spirit of hope.

After the funeral and as we were driving out of the cemetery, my children began bouncing up and down. "Look!" they pointed. "Can we get out and see the bunny?" A cement bunny was sitting on a large bench in front of a headstone. Tears came to my eyes because I had seen that bunny before.

My husband and I let the children examine the bunny; his basket; and hard, painted Easter eggs. "K, K, Kerr-y Hobert" my five-year-old sounded out the name on the plaque. I was amazed at the respectful silence of my children. They knew that this space was holy ground. I said, "Let's go home, and I will tell you the story of Kerry Hobert."

The car was quiet on the way home. We were all filled with awe and didn't quite know what to say. I began, "I want to tell you a story that took place fifteen years ago. I was twelve years old then, and I had a little sister, you know, Aunt Mandy?"

Then I launched into telling them about our visit to the Easter egg park. I told them about gathering eggs and Aunt Mandy's desire to give her favorite egg to a teenaged girl in a wheelchair whose name was Kerry. Our children quickly made the connection to the gravesite. They sat wide-eyed when they thought of each child hearing a story about his or her future job.

I ended my story by telling them about our visit to her home. They were amazed that each of us received a caramel egg, a story, and a picture. "Please, please," they begged. "Show us your egg and picture. Please read us your story."

I began reading: *To: Katy*
From: Kerry

Miss Katy, you will be a wonderful mother. I watched you take care of your little sister, Mandy. Katy, you were very attentive. You watched your five-year-old sister, Mandy, skip, run, and dance around the trees. Instead of trying to quiet her, you enjoyed your little sister's delight! When Mandy brought me the most beautiful egg in the park, you were encouraging her to share, and you brought your own wicker basket to carry all the beautiful Easter eggs. Thank you, Miss Katy. When I close my eyes, I can see you, Miss Katy, with your own children. You will encourage them to care for others and be happy to be themselves. Teach them to pray, Miss Katy, to love, share, and forgive. And always remember: Never be afraid of death because the best is yet to come!

I finished the letter, and we all sat in stunned silence. Then, I stood up and asked, "Anyone up for ice cream?"

MEMPHIS: In Memory of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Back and forth on Beale Street
Then to Lorraine Motel
I all misty-eyed
For he'd seen wrong
And tried to right it
A wreath still marking where
He'd exchanged his life
For that storied dream
Then once again to Beale Street
And you still there
In shabby clothes
Where I had come on pilgrimage
To venerate where blues were born
"This is a special place" I said
You could only shake your head
"Man if you only knew"
You knew the dream
Is still a dream
Back and forth on Beale Street.

Rev. Gerard Garrigan, O.S.B.

BOOK REVIEWS

PRAYERS FROM THE CLOUD: 100 PRAYERS THROUGH THE AGES by Pete James, Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2025, 220 pp, $17.99 pb.

Pete James is a Presbyterian minister who pastored a church in Virginia for many years and is now an adjunct professor of practical theology at Gordon-Conwell Seminary, an evangelical seminary in Massachusetts. After ten years in ministry, he felt "empty inside." Quiet time was too quiet for him; he wanted action, to do something for God. Recognizing that he was burned out, James decided to make changes. He began reading the Bible and to pray regularly. He let people into his life (ix-x). It wasn't easy, and he admits that it is still not easy for him to pray. An avid reader of history, he began looking for prayers from the past. He began sharing these prayers with a cousin. He added a brief narrative about each individual who composed these prayers. Eventually he had a collection of hundreds of prayers.

James' little book contains the prayers he collected during the first year of his project. He includes prayers by both Catholics and Protestants. The prayers range in date from the time of the Church Fathers to modern times. The first prayer in this collection is by Polycarp and the last is by Henri Nouwen. One short prayer is by the fourteenth century mystic, Julian of Norwich. Another is by Tikhon of Zadonsk, a Russian Orthodox bishop and monk on whom Dostoevsky modeled Father Zossima in *The Brothers Karamazov.*

This delightful book should be of help to all who are drawn to prayer and yet sometimes struggle with silence and discipline. There is something for everyone between the covers.

Sr. Sarah Schwartzberg, OSB

SWAMI ABHISHIKTANANDA: HIS LIFE TOLD THROUGH HIS LETTERS. Edited by James D.M. Stuart. Rhinebeck, NY: Monkfish Book Publishing Company, 2024. 506 pp, $49.99 pb.

Monkfish has done the global community of spiritual seekers a great turn in bringing out a revised and updated edition of James Stuart's masterful biography of Dom Henri Le Saux, OSB, known later in life as Swami Abhishiktananda. Dom Le Saux's spiritual journey speaks powerfully to the human longing for transcendence and fulfillment within the world's religious traditions along with the openness among traditions that has arisen in the modern world.

One of the Benedictine Sisters' former superiors, Sister Pascaline Coff, lived at the Christian ashram, Shantivanam, that Swami Abhishiktananda co-founded in India. She based the mission and spirit of the congregation's Osage+Monastery on the principles she observed there.

Le Saux was a French Benedictine monk and priest who spent the last twenty-five years of his life in India. While he went with the intention of founding enculturated contemplative religious life in the Indian church, he soon discovered that Hinduism had much to teach him. He was inspired by his encounters with Hindu sages and wrestled with how to bring the insights from his experience of Hinduism into conversation with Christian doctrine and mystical experience.

Stuart's biography of Swami Abhishiktananda chronicles this sometimes painful, sometimes blissful wrestling through extensive extracts from the Swami's own letters. The new edition includes a new foreword by Swami Atmananda Udasin, the Director of the Abhishiktananda Centre for Interreligious Dialogue, which contextualizes the biography with insights afforded from several decades of hindsight. Though it is a large volume, those who give the work a chance will find an engrossing tale of a wonderful, earnest, and inimitable spiritual seeker.

Jacob Riyeff

JOHN OF HISTORY, BAPTIST OF FAITH: THE QUEST FOR THE HISTORICAL BAPTIZER, by James F. McGrath, Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2024, 486 pp, $47.99 hb.

I eagerly picked up McGrath's new book on John the Baptist to read during Advent. McGrath's work is much too technical to make good spiritual reading. Nevertheless, although I argue with many of its premises, I found it fascinating.

Most Christians think of John the Baptist as the forerunner of Jesus. John the Baptist takes an important but secondary role in Christian thought. He said, "You yourselves can testify that I said [that] I am not the Messiah, but that I was sent before him. . . . He must increase; I must decrease" (Jn 3:28, 30). Some of Jesus' disciples were among John's followers. Andrew and John, sons of Zebedee, heard John. Andrew first found his brother Peter and then found Philip. Philip found Nathanael, and so the good news that Jesus came to bring began to spread.

McGrath uses historical-critical methods to explore the message and the world of John the Baptist, Besides the New Testament, McGrath uses a reconstructed Q source, a hypothetical document that consists of material common to the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. He also uses a later text, the Mandaean Book of John. Mandaeans, members of a Gnostic sect, believe that John was the last and most important prophet. I found McGrath's bold claims based on such sources to be questionable.

Despite my arguments, I enjoyed McGrath's book. It broadened my perspective on John's role in the development of early Christianity. I recommend this book for readers who can tackle a scholarly work with a critical eye.

Sr. Sarah Schwartzberg, OSB

History and Hope:

A Conference on the Benedictine Heritage

The Benedictine Sisters of Perpetual Adoration welcomed a renowned expert in Benedictine history to help them reflect on their Congregation's place within the broader tradition.

Abbot Joel Rippinger, OSB, of Marmion Abbey in Aurora, Illinois, spent two days with the Benedictine Sisters in November at their monastery in Clyde, Missouri, leading discussions on their origins and the lessons drawn from their pioneering predecessors. "This tied in nicely with the year-long celebration of our 150th jubilee," Sister Dawn Annette Mills said. "We held our meetings at Our Lady of Rickenbach so our older Sisters could take part too."

During the conference, participants explored the congregation's development, its relationships with other monasteries, and ways to carry forward the insights gained from their history into the future. Abbot Joel's thoughtful facilitation enriched the experience for all who attended. "We were grateful he took the time to be with us," Sister Dawn Annette said.

The gathering not only honored the congregation's past but also deepened the sisters' commitment to living out their monastic charism in a way that remains vibrant and relevant. Reflecting on their history has inspired them to embrace the future with renewed purpose and gratitude for their enduring Benedictine legacy.

Sister Dawn Annette Mills, OSB, Prioress General of the Benedictine Sisters of Perpetual Adoration, and Abbot Joel Rippinger, OSB of Marmion Abbey.

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A Ministry of Care

Sister Joan Ridley is the new sister-administrator for Our Lady of Rickenbach, the congregation's healthcare facility.

Sister Joan Ridley has been appointed administrator of Our Lady of Rickenbach, the congregation's healthcare facility. After serving in multiple leadership roles, she views her latest position as one that serves as a continuation of the Benedictine call to hospitality and community.

Sister Joan Ridley has embraced her new role as sister-administrator of Our Lady of Rickenbach (OLR), the congregation's healthcare facility. Although new to this position, Sister Joan brings leadership experience, having served on the general council and as a community superior. She assumed her responsibilities in September and has spent the past few months learning the intricacies of her role, which she views as a needed and challenging ministry. "Sisters who reside at OLR are receiving healthcare, yes," she explained, "but just as important is preparation for meeting our loving God in glory. Healthcare is never outside the desire to live the monastic tradition to the degree each one is able."

Before entering the Benedictine Sisters, Sister Joan earned degrees in social work and law, using her knowledge and skills in ministries that served the poor and disabled. She succeeds Sister Cathleen Marie Timberlake, who dedicated a decade of service as the administrator of OLR. When invited by leadership to step into the position, Sister Joan accepted as an act of obedience in line with Saint Benedict's teachings. "The grace of God to do what one is asked to do will be there when needed," she said. "I have found this to be profoundly true."

Sister Joan's duties at OLR are varied, encompassing everything from purchasing food and medical supplies to coordinating with the nursing, kitchen, and housekeeping staffs. One of the most pressing challenges is recruiting and retaining qualified staff in a rural area with a limited workforce.

Beyond administrative tasks, Sister Joan wants to spend time with each sister to foster deeper connections and support them on their spiritual journey. She strives to ensure that OLR remains a place of compassionate care where the broader monastic community actively engages with the healthcare sisters. Sisters from the main monastery frequently visit, share hobbies, participate in prayer services, and celebrate special occasions such as holidays and jubilees with the residents.

For inspiration in her work, Sister Joan looks to Chapter 36 of St. Benedict's Rule, which emphasizes the importance of caring for elderly or ill community members. "The Rule says that caring for the sick 'must rank above all else,'" she said. "All are to be served as Christ. Our lay nursing staff and I want to more deeply absorb this perspective and carry it out."

Sister Joan sees her work at OLR as a continuation of the Benedictine call to hospitality and community. "Our Lady of Rickenbach is about creating a space where each sister feels loved, supported and prepared for her final journey toward God," Sister Joan said. "That is the heart of our ministry and our monastic life."

Jim Wege, brother to Sister Joy Ann Wege, displays a quilt his wife made. Sister Cecilia Rose Sprekelmeyer looks on. (Below) Sister Patricia Vereb takes a moment to appreciate the craftsmanship of the quilt made by Mrs. Wege.

(Photo below) eeFriends are always welcome to visit sisters at Our Lady of Rickenbach. Enjoying a nice moment of fellowship are (from left) Sister Benita Luetkemeyer; Father Patrick Caveglia, OSB; Sister Colleen Harris, CSJ; Sister Cecilia Rose Sprekelmeyer; Sister Kathleen Harris, CSJ; and Sister Bede Luetkemeyer. Sisters Colleen and Kathleen hail from Tucson, Arizona, and are friends of the community.

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