



REDWOODS MONASTERY NEWSLETTER Fall/Winter 2017

Dear Friends of Redwoods Monastery:

This newsletter is an effort on our part to stay connected with you and to share with you the spirit of Redwoods, even when you are not physically present here. I hope you enjoy these thoughts and pictures and I invite you to let us know what you think of the newsletter. With prayerful wishes for peace, Sister Kathy DeVico.



Dear Friends,

I am writing on the threshold of Thanksgiving and by the time you receive this newsletter we will have entered the season of Advent. These sacred moments offer us at Redwoods the opportunity

to extend our profound thanks for all the love and support you have given us over the past year. Also it is a time to assure you of our prayer for whatever needs or trials you may be dealing with. We especially want to remember our friends who lost their homes in the Sonoma County fires.

Some news from here: In September I attended our General Chapter of the Cistercian Order in Assisi. This meeting of Cistercian abbots and abbesses from around the world happens every three years. The work of our Chapter is mainly pastoral and one can witness the bond of charity that unites us across all the continents as we face difficult matters affecting our monasteries as well as sharing the grace of contemplative life.

At the General Chapter we experience monastic life embodied in cultures very different from our own. It is an enriching experience, one that expands the horizons of one's heart and mind reminding us that we are united as one larger body of Christ's love. We had the special grace of a private audience with Pope Francis. After his

talk to us he surprisingly proceeded to shake each one of our hands, 200 in all!

You will read about our newest member Sr. Gertrude Feick, as well as an update on recent projects. Also the monastery's Advisory Board is losing its leader and inspiration Jim Purcell. We are ever grateful for his guidance and all he has done over the years to help us raise needed funds for our Master Plan.

May God bless you for your generosity and prayerful support, and may the grace of Christmas renew us all in hope. Let us join our prayer together for peace in our world.

Gratefully,

Sister Kathy DeVico, OCSO



Sr. Kathy with the Holy Father

Chapter Talk – All Saints’ Day

by Sr. Kathy DeVico

Today on this Solemnity of All Saints we have many things to be grateful for and to ponder. We celebrate the anniversary of the foundation of this monastery and honor our two sisters, Godelieve and Veronique, who were part of the beginning of this monastery and continue to be faithful witnesses through their monastic calling, an inspiration for all of us. Then this is an important moment for Redwoods as you Sr. Gertrude begin your probationary period....not a small step but one clearly of faith and of following the Divine calling in your life.

All Saints: we honor today not the known saints but all the unknown ones, unknown yet they have paved a way before us....and what is this way? They were human, just like us....they were seekers and they aspired to serve God...to serve God in and through their humanity, their broken humanity...just like us.

In my view sainthood is no extraordinary thing, although perhaps we could say it is ‘exceptional’. Exceptional in this sense: it is living one’s call to the end, offering each day the gift of one’s self, ready to take up one’s cross, carrying it with joy and not being pulled down by it or resentful of the personal baggage one is asked to bear and carry into life! These unknown saints were faithful in carrying their cross, they were open to conversion... open to learning, learning especially how to love, like Christ, no matter their existential circumstances. I use the word ‘exceptional’ because it parallels the message of Jesus: “Enter by the narrow gate for it is a narrow way that leads to life and few follow it.” Let me stress this: the narrow way need not be exceptional, meaning only for a few, because with God all things are possible. And ALL the saints today are bringing this message to us.

Now dear Gertrude: I offer first this text from Thérèse of Lisieux:

“Leaning with nothing to lean on
Without light and in darkness
I go burning with love.
Of Love, I have had experience
Of the good, of the bad that it finds in me
It knows how to benefit (what power)
It changes my soul into itself”
(*A Life of Love*, p.208).

Both the good and the bad that Love finds in us...it knows how to benefit! We must never forget this. Love uses whatever it finds in us, even the stuff that we label ‘bad’, that needs

healing and transformation. All this, Love uses and changes our soul into itself. What hope this is for all of us! To lean on nothing takes me back to Abbot Gerard’s conference at the General Chapter...leaning on nothing but Christ’s love....leaning on nothing paradoxically reveals the glory of God....And it builds within us, over time, an inner strength capable to go forward, not afraid but assured that one is held by the power of God, which is God’s love....there is NO power greater than Love....this is evidenced in Jesus, through his death and resurrection...it is this Love that raised him from the dead, this Love that has brought his presence so close to us to sustain us on our pilgrimage.

Gertrude, you shared with me a text from Br. Christophe’s journal (*Born From the Gaze of God: The Tibhirine Journal of a Martyr Monk*) that was especially speaking to you during your retreat. Christophe writes: “I re-read Ruth’s promise to Naomi, and I would love to be able to live it in truth, in poverty: ‘Wherever you go, I will go. Wherever you live, I will live. Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God.’ To follow God: here.” (p.116) These words are powerful and very direct. They express a commitment, they could well be part of a profession formula! They are total in their offering: ‘Wherever you go I will go....wherever you live I will live...to follow God here...’ Gertrude, it is my sense that you are ready and willing to make this offering today as you respond to the flow of grace calling you!

Finally, to conclude: the extraordinary message of today’s Solemnity of All Saints is that holiness, which I define as revealing the glory of God in our lives, or, letting our light shine forth, is possible for each one of us. So let us not run away from this way, which needs be narrow, for only then can it expand into the sweetness of love and the freedom of spirit to which our God calls each one of us. Amen.



My Journey to Redwoods

by Sister Gertrude Feick

November is my favorite month of the liturgical year. This year was no exception. I was especially blessed on All Saints' Day when the Redwoods community formally received me into the Cistercian (OCSO) Order. Simultaneously, I began a three-year probationary period in preparation for Solemn Profession. Dear readers, this is nothing short of a miracle.

When asked to share my story, I didn't know where to begin. In brief, my life has not been uneventful. Born the youngest of eight in Muncie, Indiana, I developed a sense of adventure at an early age that remains. Words from an Edna St. Vincent Millay poem became my mantra: "My heart is warm with the friends I make, and better friends I'll not be knowing, Yet there isn't a train I wouldn't take, No matter where it's going." That said, I was comforted by a recent Pope Francis Tweet: "GOD is always faithful and never stops for a moment loving us, following our steps, and running after us when we have strayed from him." I used to be a really fast runner, literally and figuratively.

By the grace of God, I entered Queen of Angels Monastery, Mt. Angel, Oregon, in 2000, making my perpetual monastic profession with the Benedictine Sisters ten years ago. The years prior to my entrance into monastic life have been described as peripatetic. What follows may give reason for such a description.

The travel bug bit in 8th grade when my dad took me on a business trip to Tahiti. Through the experience I learned no distance was too great, no person a stranger. Since then, I've traveled to five continents and lived and worked in seven states. After graduate school in 1988, I spent nine years working in the field of health promotion in a variety of settings. Spare time was filled with training, and competing nationally and internationally in triathlons.

My last race was in Perth, Australia, the 1997 ITU World Championship. Burnt out, I wondered if there might be

something more fulfilling in life. After divesting myself of nearly all personal belongings, I served in the US Peace Corps in the Republic of South Africa, not without climbing Mt. Kilimanjaro before returning to the US. Not sure what to do next, I started driving across our country with tent and bicycle, no destination in mind. Then I landed in the monastery and fell in love with the Rule of Saint Benedict.

Over the last 17 years, I have been gifted with myriad opportunities to grow deeper in my relationship with God through a communal life of prayer, work, and study. Formal theological studies culminated in a Doctorate in Sacred Theology from the Pontifical University of Saint Thomas Aquinas, Rome, with a dissertation, "A

Pilgrim's Search for God: The Spirituality of Cardinal Basil Hume." In addition to leading retreats and giving presentations, I taught at Mt. Angel Seminary and the University of Portland. Most recently I served as Executive Director of the Benedictine Institute, Saint Martin's University, Lacey, Washington.

One might wonder what is next. In fact, a friend asked if I was content. I shared a recent insight that came when minding my own business: this is the first time in a long time that I am not

wondering what I might do next, and where I might do it. There are days when I am overwhelmed by the love and mercy bestowed upon me by God through my Redwoods Sisters. My sisters are teaching me to love and be loved. If that is a sign of contentment, then the answer is yes.

I met my first Cistercians in 2006. Through two in particular, one Nigerian, the other Irish, I was attracted to what I sensed as the utter simplicity of their lives of prayer and manual labor. They were beautiful, no-nonsense women who spoke to me in different yet powerful ways. Ever since I prayed I might one day be a Cistercian, knowing full well God would never grant such an outrageous request. Be careful what you pray for. God is full of surprises, and miracles. May God be praised.



In Gratitude for the Work of Jim Purcell

by Gail Priestley

“Like most of you, I have fallen in love with the Monastery, its incredible setting, and most of all, its community of sisters and their extended family.”

Jim Purcell

After twelve exceptional years of devoted service, Jim Purcell is stepping away from his role as leader and guide of the monastery’s Advisory Committee which assists with planning and fund-raising. Offering expertise and continual encouragement, Jim always focused on strengthening relationships with you, Redwoods Monastery’s extended family.

The fruits of his leadership abound: the Senior Wing, the rehabilitation of the House on the Hill as a new home for the community’s collection of periodicals and books, the Welcome Center (presently under construction) and over thirty-five other projects. This newsletter owes its existence to Jim.

We honor Jim’s loving service to Redwoods Monastery, both in building community and for the major role he played in the implementation of the community’s master plan. With deep gratitude, we pray God’s blessing for him and his family.

Project Update

by Jim Schlight

As we approach the end of another year, it’s a good time to share about a number of capital improvement projects at the monastery. This year brought to conclusion several important projects and the start of some new ones.

We’ve done some work on the House on the Hill, making it able to accommodate the monastery’s library. That work is now nearly complete. Besides providing a climate-controlled environment for the monastery’s collection of approximately 15,000 books, the improvements include new offices and work rooms and a Founder’s Room to house the monastery’s earliest collections. This new home for the monastery’s intellectual heart will serve the community for generations to come.

Over several weeks in late summer, a roofing contractor completed a number of important roofing projects at the monastery. The roof of the honey building, which you see from the main parking lot, was replaced with a new metal roof, as



House on the hill

was the roof of the novitiate building. In addition, critical repairs were completed on the roofs of the main buildings. All these projects are crucial as the monastery routinely receives one hundred inches of rain a year, primarily in the winter.

In November, work started on the monastery’s new Welcome Center which expands upon the existing guest dining room. The primary purpose of this project is to provide comfortable gathering, reading, and dining spaces for guests. The new Welcome Center will include separate “talking” and “silent” dining rooms as well as an expanded gift shop. The sisters are excited to offer this new hospitality, an essential part of their calling to the monastic life.

As you can imagine for buildings that are fifty years old, mechanical systems can often be a challenge. The community is working with a mechanical engineer and a trusted commercial heating contractor to evaluate the existing boiler system for the main buildings. Work is scheduled to begin mid-December to replace the heating system with a set of boilers that are more energy efficient and will provide a built-in backup in case one of the boilers fails. Redundancy is crucial as the monastery is very remote and it can be difficult for contractors to respond immediately to system outages.

All of these projects were made possible by your generous contributions which help the sisters continue to be wise and careful stewards of their built environment. Thank you!

*If you would like to give a present of Redwoods honey and cards this Christmas season, you can order through our store website:
www.redwoodsabbey.org/Store*

Redwoods Abbey

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