



REDWOODS MONASTERY

NEWSLETTER

WINTER 2020

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,

As I write these words, we are ending another year but one that will be indelibly marked upon our hearts. The pandemic has presented suffering, struggles and uncertainties that collectively

we have never experienced in our lives. Still the Christian faith has hope at its foundation, a hope that emerges out of the darkness that overshadows our lives right now. There is a 'darkness' that is pregnant and ready to give birth to the eternal light of God...It is this grace that is at the center of Christmas and for which we are celebrating. The birth of Christ, God's gift of his very Self has become incarnate in our lives, and this birth happens over and over in the human soul. "We move from birth to birth" said Dom Christian de Cherché, superior of the Tibhrine community in Algeria. We are gifted with Divine love and life, which renews us from inside and opens the horizons of our heart to behold the life of God shining on one another and upon our precious creation. With God at the center of our lives, together we can meet this pandemic in a way that unites us in love and service to one another.

In this season of Advent like no other in our experience we are called to listen with the 'ear of the heart', to enter more the silence holding the longing within our hearts. Then, to patiently wait, to wait even in the midst of the doubts and fears,



anxieties and uncertainties that will be there, and that can pull us away from this pregnant silence, if we are not aware of them. In this midst we find ourselves reminded why contemplative, silent prayer is so important during this time of waiting. Contemplative prayer brings us into the silent space where the new of God will be born. Silent prayer helps us to be awake and vigilant to what is stirring in the heart.

In the past we have offered young women the opportunity to come to Redwoods and for a short time enter the stream of the Cistercian monastic life. This year we have not been able to offer these Monastic Experience Weekends but like so many we too have moved to online meetings! Later in this newsletter, sisters Suzanne and Claire give some reflections of these inspiring meetings with women seeking to discern the will of God in their lives.

At the monastery our doors have been closed since March. This is the first time in the history of Redwoods that we have not offered retreats. Hospitality for our monasteries is an essential part of our ministry and we have felt the absence of this outreach. With the closure of the guesthouse, we have had more time. We were able to make some improvements in the guesthouse: double pane windows, new curtains, and the two units were painted. Without the guests help in the garden, the sisters spent more time there. We received many fruits from the earth and shared them with our resident turkeys as well as several visits from a mother bear and her cub!!!

We are very grateful for the spiritual and practical support we receive from you. You will be remembered in our prayer during this holy time and, with hope, throughout the New Year.

Gratefully,

Sr. Kathy



When the Lord Closes a Door Somewhere He Opens a Window. (The Sound of Music)

~ Sister Claire

Come and show us your face, O Lord. Ps 79: 4

This antiphon sustains us during our Advent and Christmas Season. It is this reality we explored on our Monastic Experience Weekend. Usually we welcome some young women, once or twice a year, in our guesthouse for 3 days, giving them a little experience of our monastic life. But with the lockdown, this Fall, we organized a day of prayer via Zoom. Click, click, click, thanks to Sr. Suzanne's expertise, everything was in place and 6 faces appeared on the screen. We had prepared video conferences on prayer, lectio, the Divine Office and the Rule of St Benedict. More than the contents of the riches of our Cistercian Tradition, I was impressed by the authenticity of the search of these young women: grounded in their present reality and aware of the society they live in. Still studying or engaged in their work, they are open, full of life, deep in their searching and looking for spiritual counsel for their journey. Humble in their faith and aware of what dwells within them, they thirst for a deeper way of life, honoring God's love and presence in their personal call.

Who said that the new generation is indifferent?!

In this path of self-knowledge, they ask for more and respond with enthusiasm to our offering of a summer internship at the monastery. They strive to listen to God's will for them, to find their mission or as Pope Francis reminds us, to realize that each one of them is a mission and to live it in fidelity to their own being. In 2021, if God permits, 3 or 4 will spend 1 to 3 months with us, deepening their desire for God and bringing to us the beauty of who they are, and calling us to live more fully this advice from St Gregory of Nyssa:

"For those who are rising in perfection, the limit of the good that is attained becomes the beginning of the discovery of higher goods. Thus they never stop rising, moving from one new beginning to the next."

"When are we like God? I will tell you. In so far as we love compassion and practice it steadfastly, to that extent do we resemble the heavenly Creator who practices these things ceaselessly in us."

(Mechtild of Magdeburg)

Chapter Talk – Second Sunday of Advent

For the First Sunday of Advent, I mentioned that at Christmas we are celebrating the historical birth of Jesus and as well the 'second coming', the birth of Christ in the soul. The following words from Cardinal Jean Daniélou give a context for what this 'second coming' means for our lives. He writes: "We must allow Christ to pervade our souls to the extent that he becomes all in all; we must, according to St. Paul's beautiful expression, 'put on' Christ (Rm 13:14), trying to be what he was, such that we truly become his disciples. The whole of the Christian life is this progressive evangelization of our being, this shedding of the flesh, selfish and closed within ourselves, this opening up to Christ's teaching that we must follow" (Prayer, p.73). 'A progressive evangelization of our being': this is a profound image for us to hold in our consciousness. We normally take the word 'evangelizing' as an extroverted activity. Here, we, in our inner life, are being evangelized. Each birthing forth of God's life involves an inner transformation, an evangelizing experience where we become in mind and heart more Christ-like in our service, in our love, which opens us up to deal with conflicts, and helps us face our fears and anxieties.

For this Second Sunday of Advent there is a voice calling out in the wilderness: "Prepare the Way" (Mk 1:3). This proclamation of John the Baptist to 'prepare the way' includes John's call to a "Baptism of Repentance" (Mk 1:4-5). Why is repentance so important for preparing to receive this new birth? The words of Jean Daniélou shed light on this question: to have our beings 'evangelized,' is 'preparing the way.' To shed our selfish and hard-hearted selves, we need this inner evangelizing, an evangelizing that happens through God's Word. Going into the silent desert of the heart, descending

beneath the noise of the many voices that vie for our attention we can hear the Divine voice: "Comfort, take comfort my people" (Is 40:1); "Fear not your salvation is near"; "Do not be afraid, my love will never leave you" (Is 54:10). The Advent Word of God is always a hopeful word; our task is to simply receive these words and let them evangelize ourselves, beginning from the inside.

Our Advent preparation is not asking big things. Each of us can simply reflect on the past week where stuff came up in our hearts: murmuring about this and that, conflicts among

us, tensions in work exacerbated by fatigue, worries, fears and so on. None of this is surprising. It is part of what it is to be human. But John the Baptist's proclamation is asking us to be more, in order to have more of God's life, God's new life becoming part of who we are right now. Let us not lose sight of our longing: we each personally need this birth, this community needs this birth, along with our world and Church.

John's evangelizing message is "a message of conversion..." (p.39). In Daniélou's words: "John the Baptist is an instrument of grace. Now, people's hearts are hard. They are bound up in their lust and hatred. They are accustomed to their misery and cannot imagine that there could be something else. John the Baptist must therefore shake these hardened

hearts" (p.39). What about allowing John's evangelizing proclamation to 'shake' us up? To allow ourselves to be shaken up so that we are open to change prepares us to receive the gift of God's very Self: this "Wonder Counselor, Prince of Peace, Eternal Lord" (Is 9:5), hope of all the ages. Imagine, dear sisters and brother, the impact of just small changes in how we 'think, experience, act and value.' Clearly, we will be ready to receive the Coming One.



*Angel Gabriel written through
the hand of Sr. Suzanne*

Sister Suzanne

One of the ways the formation team at Redwoods has extended our vocation outreach during this time of pandemic is through Zoom meetings. We have held retreats online for candidates interested in contemplative life as well as regular check-ins and gospel sharing. Many of the women intend to participate in our Internship Program over the summer and will use that opportunity to further discern God's call in their lives. We are happy that Redwoods can be a place to inspire and nurture the vocations they will eventually pursue.

These young women continue to inspire us. They ask important questions about their relationship with God and what it means in their future life and career choices. As they delve deeper into their spiritual lives, the question of service and care of others often arises. They are awake, alive, involved with their friends, neighbors, pets - eager to learn and engage our monastic values of prayer, care for creation, community, simplicity and mindfulness.

Some of us older folks worry about the direction of our nation in these times. If these women are any indication of our future, we have nothing to fear. With depth and intelligence, they point the way to a future consciousness of compassion and resilience.

“Let the torrent that springs in heaven be channeled back to its starting point, and be poured on the earth again with fertilizing power. You ask how this will be done. It will be done in accord with Paul's advice: *“In all things give thanks to God”* (On the Song of Songs, Bernard of Clairvaux, sermon 13)

“God is encountered in the nakedness of pure trust, in the surrender of our own poverty and incompleteness.” (Thomas Merton).

If you know someone considering a vocation, you can direct them to the vocation page on our website for some helpful resources.

<https://www.redwoodsabbey.org/do-you-have-a-calling>

Shop Our Online Store

Our honey, cards produced from Sr. Victoria's artwork, and Sr. Veronique's handcrafted soap, can be ordered online from our store at:

<https://store.redwoodsabbey.org/>



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