



# REDWOODS MONASTERY NEWSLETTER Fall 2011

*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, Sr. Kathy DeVico.*



Dear Friends,

We are well into autumn now, with the days becoming shorter and the nights colder here at Redwoods. Thanksgiving is approaching and soon

after, Advent, the quiet, reflective season of preparation for Christmas.

This time of the year speaks of two essential dimensions of our lives: remembering and gratitude. We remember the many gifts God has bestowed upon us and all those who have graced our lives whether they are alive or have gone before us. We are especially grateful for the many ways you have blessed us.

In the past year, we received a new processional cross created and given to us by the sculptor and friend of the community, Joseph Aspell.



The cross now sits on the altar platform seemingly floating in the chapel window against the backdrop of the changing seasons. In this newsletter I wanted to share with you his thoughts on the “invitations” and “responses” behind the shaping of this deeply moving image of Christ.

In our daily lives we hear many invitations and are called to respond in different ways and situations. Some of these invitations take the form of inspiration, some come as gifts of nourishment. In this newsletter, a few of the sisters describe where they find these invitations in their daily lives.

Finally, a Happy and Blessed Thanksgiving to you all. Please know that you and your loved ones will be remembered with deep joy and gratitude as we celebrate our Eucharist on Thanksgiving Day.

Gratefully,

*Sr. Kathy*

Sister Kathy

# Processional Cross

## The Healing Christ

In beginning something new, I try to find a “container,” a context, by which I can hold it. In the making of this Processional Cross, that container was a weaving of several essential strands. I describe those strands as “invitations,” and the work expressed in the processional cross as “responses.”

### *Context of Christian Tradition*

**An Invitation:** Of the images of *Christ Crucified* down through the centuries, three were particular sources for the processional cross:

- A *Christus* at the Cleveland Art Museum (*Polychromed Wood / 12<sup>th</sup> century / French, Burgundy, Autun?*)
- A *Christus* at Grace Cathedral, San Francisco (*Wood / Spain / 13<sup>th</sup> Century Romanesque*)
- Cimabue’s *Christus* and painted Cross (*Santa Croce, Florence / 13<sup>th</sup> century / painted wood, ruined by the Arno flood of 1966*)

**A Response:** The *Christus* of the monastery processional cross reflects the Peace of these previous images. It can be looked upon as a *Healing Christus*.

### *Context of Cistercian Tradition*

**An Invitation:** The prayerful beauty of Cistercian spaces I attribute to their simplicity, proportion, natural light, acoustics, texture – not to ornamentation or rich materials.

To place a sculptured human figure, such as a processional cross, into such a space is a delicate

matter – how to be a *part* of that beauty, rather than dominating it – i.e. becoming the sole focal point and making everything else a “backdrop.”

**A Response:** The processional cross has the same materials or coloring of other elements present. (For example, the wood is the same mahogany as the candle stands and the same color as the wood of the tabernacle as well as the redwood trees). Although finely crafted the *Christus* is modest in size. Its gray patina matches the gray of the cinderblock walls, as



well as the lichen on the bark of the redwoods viewed behind the Altar. It blends in with the rest.

### *Context of the Architecture of the Chapel, A Sense of Place*

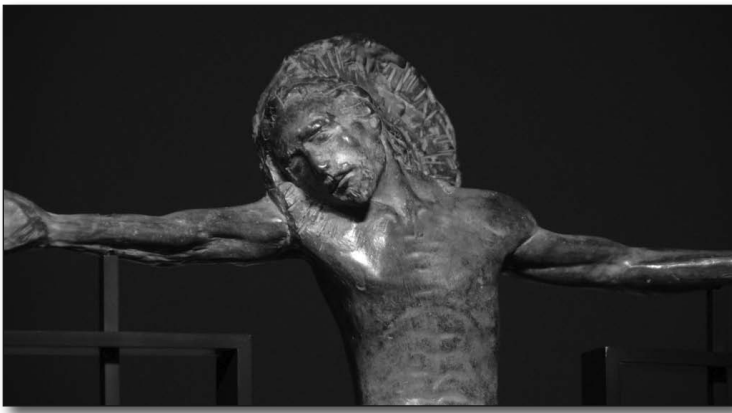
**An Invitation:** This Chapel reflects the quintessence of Cistercian beauty. Its miracle is that it expands and reveals that beauty even more. This is achieved with modern sensibility by creating majestic openings in the cinderblock walls to views of meadow and redwood, reuniting our daily prayer to Nature’s ongoing prayer.

**A Response:** The processional cross also expands and reveals. Placed in front of the window behind the Altar, like the chapel itself, the rendering of the Cross as a metal outline enables it to include the landscape beyond.

### *Context of Craftsmanship*

**An Invitation:** The monastery is exemplary of materials well used. It is also exemplary of a living that cooperates with Nature rather than trying to solely dominate it.

This is also the essence of good craftsmanship: knowing your materials and using your tools to bring out their inherent beauty.



**A Response:** Although a modest piece, the processional cross, by thoughtful and skilled craftsmanship, allows its “work of human hands” to become part of the prayer.

- The *Christus* is cast aluminum, making it much lighter than bronze – an important consideration for a piece that is to be carried. It is coated in copper which allows it to take patinas which enable it to look like bronze. (Alan Osborne - Fine Arts Foundry, Sacramento, CA)
- The metalwork is brass with a bronze patina. (Tony Brenta – Phoenix Day Co., San Francisco, CA)
- The shaft is mahogany unusual and rare for the intricate figure in its grain work. This piece was in the craftsman’s storage for 30 years “awaiting” a worthy project. (John Burt, Furniture Maker, San Jose, CA)

### **Context of Believing in our Times**

**An Invitation:** There is a tradition that our Faith grows when it is open. It is open to God. It is open to the signs of the times.

There are various sources in various fields that describe the fruitfulness of openness:

- In the field of spiritual authors Thomas Merton, a friend and guest at the monastery, reflected: *Time is given to us not to keep a faith we once had, but to acquire a faith we need now.*
- In the field of Theology, the body of work of the scholarly Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury and friend of Benedict XVI, was qualified as “yet this diverse body of work is apparently not unified by any overarching system or agenda. Indeed, one of the hallmarks of Williams’ thought is **vigorous refusal of completeness** and systematic closure. [*Christ the Stranger: The Theology of Rowan Williams* By Benjamin Myers (Charles Sturt University,

Sydney, Australia)]

- In the field of the visual arts: The American sculptor Richard Serra describing “*Picasso’s Guitar is a different kind of break altogether, and allows you to understand how space can enter into a form and open up volume.*” [Richard Serra: *Sculpture: 40 Years* Museum of Modern Art, NY ]

**A Response:** The openness of the Chapel architecture and the openness of the processional cross design are examples of our openness in Faith.

This processional cross is part of that tradition. It not only reflects the meaning of our Faith and our past at its best, it is openness to the Healing Presence of Christ in our times.

### **Context of a Personal Tribute**

**An Invitation:** This processional cross had a predecessor, a remarkable processional cross for another chapel. It had been made in memory of a person who had died too young and in tribute to his widow and children.

**A Response:** Thirty years later, upon learning that that processional cross for that other chapel had been discarded, I also received the invitation from the Community of the Redwoods Monastery to create their processional cross. It was a grace. For me, this cross is not only *in memoriam* but also some form of *transitus*: it is a Healing Christ.

Joseph Aspell, *Joseph Aspell Studio*

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*If you would like to give a present of honey this Christmas season, you can order through our honey store web site:*

**<http://www.redwoodsabbey.org/Store/Honey>**



*In these challenging economic times if you can remember us in your year-end giving we would be deeply appreciative.*

## What inspires me in my daily monastic life?

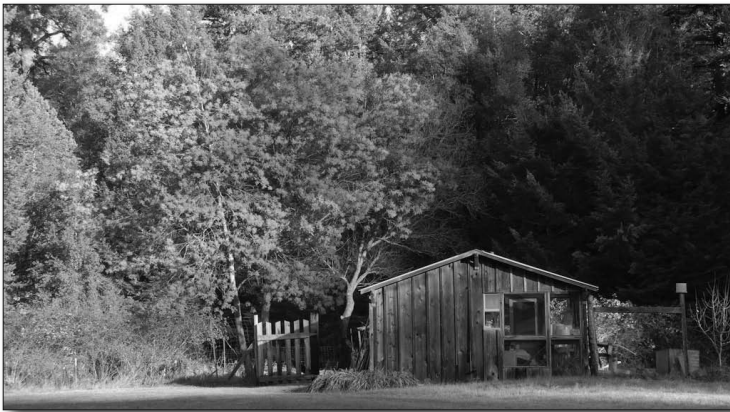
*Gardening is an integral part of my life here at Redwoods Monastery for it puts me in a right relationship with all of creation to foster my awareness of the communion of the beauty and gifts provided by God, the Creator of all. The labor of tender pruning, weeding and digging deep in the recesses of mother earth emphasize the value and dignity of the work of my hands in daily life, while cultivation demands careful attention to new life...an abundant harvest is awaited with hope. – Sr. Ann Marie Buss*



*What inspires me is the reality that God needs, uses us as we are (not as our ideal would have it) if only our desire, our intention is to be more and more available to God's loving action in and through us. It is faith nurtured by daily liturgy/prayer and the interactions with the people, events, surroundings that fill our day. – Sr. Victoria Serra*

*What nurtures my daily monastic life?*

*I am still touched by the call I have heard some 40 years ago to live for Christ in the Cistercian life. It was an invitation to a relationship of friendship and love with an experience of freedom and greatness. So, what nurtures my daily life is to answer this call each morning and day through what may/could express this life of relationship: through the common life, so real and a place to live and witness that we are on the way of loving (Jn 13: 35), through prayer that is dialogue, through simplicity of life that is truth and solidarity, through the work of our hands that roots us in reality. In awe of God's love and of his trust to us to be "guardians of his wonders". – Sr. Claire Bouttin*



*My Soul's Nurturing*

*The gift of Faith in God's Unconditional love for me—for each of us—as witnessed in each day's offerings:*

*Eucharist / Liturgy*

*Each day, everyday Jesus proclaims his total gift of Himself To me (to each of us) just as I am, in whatever season of life I find myself*

*Giving Himself that I may become more,  
That Love may beget Love in and through me.*

*My Sisters and Brother*

*Their willingness and love to forgive and see beyond my lack of kindness*

*To the deeper reality that I at times fail to see.*

*Creation*

*All God's creature--fauna and flora  
The delight and beauty that fills my being  
When I behold it in all its wonder.*

*Each day*

*I wake up to a new day, a new beginning  
That goes beyond my knowing awareness  
Indeed, that at times contradicts what my experience is.*

*– Sr. Annette Madsen*

*What nourishes my soul?*

*Our monastic way of life is set in such a way that the sacredness of Life reveals itself in the way we relate with one another, with the things of the monastery and Nature. It is mindfulness to each of these that opens the soul to God within — Love.*

*The way I relate changes everything. Mindfulness helps us to come back to that sacred space to know how to relate.*

*– Sr. Karen Arce*



**Redwoods Abbey**

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