



REDWOODS MONASTERY NEWSLETTER Fall 2021

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,

With signs of Fall emerging in ever so quiet ways and the elk beginning their visitation once again, it is a good moment to give a glimpse of life at Redwoods.

Our guesthouse remains closed because of Covid and the new Delta variant. However, we decided to go ahead with implementing the 'monastic internship' program for young women. Sr. Suzanne gives a brief description of the 'internship' in this newsletter. So far, we had four women who stayed a month or longer, and we scheduled it so that there would be two women at a time. Their time with us was very rich and they all brought a spark of beauty, of spontaneity, of loving service, of heartfelt seeking and prayer.

Sr. Gertrude has written a piece on our community retreat with Fr. Simeon Leiva, a renewing experience for us.

Needless to say, in the background of our daily living we are holding in prayer the so many needs right now, especially the continued covid virus, the prevalent fires

in the west as well as the drought, the unsettling events in Afghanistan.

Please be assured of our prayer and gratitude for the so many ways we are supported by you.

(As this newsletter was at the printer, we received the news that Fr. Maurice Flood, our chaplain for many years, passed away on August 24th. Please remember Fr. Maurice in your prayer – a good and faithful servant. We will remember him more fully in our next newsletter.)

Gratefully,

Sr. Kathy

Encounter with the Risen Jesus

The community's annual retreat in August 2021 was led by Father Simeon Leiva-Merikakis, ocsa, a monk of Saint Joseph's Abbey, Spencer, MA. Father Simeon recently returned from Rome after serving for six years as the Secretary to the Abbot General of our Order. The retreat, "Encounter with the Risen Jesus," gave us an in-depth and fascinating look into the post-Resurrection accounts found in the Gospel of St. Matthew.

On the final day of the retreat, Father Simeon gave a fitting description of our time with him when he said, "We will conclude our meditation." Indeed, our community was gifted with a seven-day meditation on the encounters with the Risen Jesus found in Mt 28:1-10, 16-20. With his background in Comparative Literature and Theology, along with his expertise in and love for classical languages,



and not without a sense of humor, Father Simeon approached the text on levels spiritual, theological, doctrinal, and pastoral. We peered into the scenes, the people, the angel, and how the Risen Jesus encountered Mary Magdalene, the other Mary, and the disciples. We explored too the varied responses to the Risen Jesus of not only the women and the disciples, but also the guards. At the same time, we were able to see how all the encounters can shape us in ways personal, communal, and ecclesial.

Our retreat culminated on the Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the patronal feast of our Order. At the last conference, we were left with plenty of material for lectio divina, along with a few questions and wise advice for all those who “abide in glad submission to the unpredictable sway of a Heart that is always seeking to encounter us and delight us with his Presence, normally against our own better ‘wisdom.’”

Some of the questions for us to reflect on:

“Do you truly believe that Christ is always searching for you personally, longing for union with you with all the ardor of his divine Heart? Can you not feel how such a truth ought to revolutionize your life? Do you realize that this is Christ’s principal interest in you, rather than how he might use you as witnesses of his Gospel? For, do you not see how being a worthy and effective witness of the Gospel wholly depends on your first clinging to Christ with your whole person? Learn your lesson from an old monk: Stop right now wasting your precious time! Start clinging to Christ with all the might his love communicates to us!”

Father Simeon is the author of several books. His most recent work completed the last of four volumes of meditations on the Gospel of St. Matthew, *Fire of Mercy, Heart of the Word: Meditations on the Gospel According to St. Matthew*, all published by Ignatius Press.

~ Sr. Gertrude

Monastic Internship

Redwoods began the Monastic Internship Program in the Summer of 2021. It is designed for young women who desire to spend a focused time in a monastic setting to better discern their lives’ deeper meaning or direction. As Cistercian monastics, we are committed to sharing the richness of monastic teaching and tradition with a new generation of believers and questioners alike.

With the 6th Century Rule of St. Benedict as our guide, the Internship Program focused on essential monastic practices. This is a practical and experiential approach that unites body, soul, heart, and mind into a generative whole, fully present to oneself, the environment in which we live, our community and our spiritual source. The interns followed our monastic schedule with regular choral prayer, meditation, manual labor, conferences, and spiritual accompaniment.

Our encounter with these young women has been a twofold blessing. As we observe graces and growth in our interns, they have impacted the Redwoods Community with their creativity, honesty, energy, and generosity.

If you would like more information about this program, please visit www.contemplativeretreat.org.

~ Sr. Suzanne



I am discerning a religious vocation, and it was so valuable for me to learn what contemplative monastic life is like. Now I have a solid experience I can refer to as I continue my discernment. I connected well with the sisters’ life of simplicity, which I want to continue at home.

My time here was also a needed retreat. God and I were able to spend a lot of focused time together. The sisters are very supportive and gracious. It was a pleasure to join them in their daily routine of prayer, work, meals, and rest. One thing I was surprised to discover was that removing weeds from the garden is a satisfying task! Also, the homemade cookies and jams were splendid! I leave with much appreciation for this whole encounter.

~ Amy Faley

My experience at Redwoods will be with me forever. The community offered full engagement on a quest to seek the very essence that has been pursuing us for eternity. Through contemplation, prayer, and work, an environment is presented with simplicity to acquire the

strength to endure day-to-day, mundane things to seek the chaotic adventure that awaits our attention from within.

This journey was certainly an intense rollercoaster of peace, shedding, beauty, love, and humility. My greatest prayer is to integrate this expansion in God and myself through monastic immersion to last me forever.

~ Lindsey Donaldson

It would be insufficient to say that my time spent as a monastic intern at Redwoods Monastery was anything less than a lifechanging experience. I arrived after graduating from college with two expectations: first, the month I was to spend there was going to be relaxing and restful, and second, having just earned my bachelor's degree and not knowing what was next, I was going to relieve myself of any pressure of figuring out next life steps. Ironically, by the time I left, I found that I had met the reverse of my expectations: the month was far from being relaxing in the way that I imagined it would be, and I had made decisions that would set me down a path for the next phase of my life.

What do I mean when I say that my month at Redwoods was not relaxing? Unlike the life in “the world” to which I was accustomed, the activities and routine of each day were organized in such a way that I was kept in a meditative state of introspection and ceaseless prayer. I devoted myself as fully as possible to the monastic life and found that each day was intense, demanding full participation of the spirit, mind, and body. It was challenging: I fought internal battles and confronted what I imagine the Desert Fathers and Mothers referred to when they spoke about “demons.”

In fact though, it was the challenges that I faced that provided abundant opportunity for learning, growth, and expansion. I am still reflecting on all that was poured into me throughout the month—and I am certain I will continue to do so for years to come—but I will share just

a few of the most meaningful lessons I learned. One of the simplest yet most life-altering ones was to slow down and exist in the present. The daily practices and the internal hardships led me to wholly seek God in the present—which is, after all, the domain that He inhabits.

A major way that I did this was through meditation. I sought guidance from the sisters and through their wisdom, I am learning to greet every thought that enters

my mind, accept it, and surrender it to Christ, until eventually I settle deeper and deeper into the silent vastness. This practice has had a profound effect on me and as I continue to practice meditating in my day-to-day life, I am finding that I am more easily able to let go of anxious and hurried thoughts and habits.

The greatest gift I was given, however, was personal experience of the profound riches

of contemplative Catholicism. Staying at the monastery gave me a generous taste of the spirituality of Cistercian monasticism and of Catholicism more generally. Through my observation of and participation in the religious life, my friendship with the sisters, and the blessing of being a direct recipient of the living Love that courses through them, I found my spiritual home.

I sought God at the monastery and found, in the words of one of the sisters, that He had already been seeking me for all of eternity. I owe my deepest thanks to the sisters of Redwoods Monastery for giving me the opportunity to dwell with them and God on their parcel of holy ground. They welcomed me with open hearts, enormous generosity, and love that flowed directly from the Source. Each one of them taught me—individually and collectively, consciously and unconsciously—more than many learn in a lifetime. Thank you, my dear sisters.

~Chrissy Arlen



Chrissy Arlen, Sr. Suzanne, Sr. Anne Marie, Lindsey Donaldson

I travelled to participate in the internship program at Redwoods Monastery after about a year of residential practice at Green Gulch Farm, a Zen Buddhist community in the Bay Area. I felt a strong intuition that this would be an important part of my journey, and that feeling was confirmed throughout the month of life, work, and prayer with the sisters of Redwoods, who always accepted and supported me exactly as I was.

I often felt gripped by the potency and intimacy of daily services with sisters who have built a life of prayer over many decades. It was humbling to be included in their simple way of life, and to feel the presence of faith beyond words. I received so many gifts in the form of the theological understandings shared with me by those I encountered at Redwoods, which helped me return to an appreciation for the beauty and meaning embedded in the Catholic faith.



The sisters offered me spiritual guidance with open hearts, and helped me to recognize and name the powerful force moving me toward contemplation and life in community as my own unique “search for God.” Some of my favorite moments included learning about Lectio Divina, studying iconography with Sr. Suz, gardening with Sr. Ann Marie, reading and writing in the House on the Hill, and observing the turkeys, squirrels, and deer on daily walks.

My heart is filled with gratitude for my time with this community and the land and creatures that share a life together in Whitethorn. I hope to return and to express my thanks with courage and commitment to continue my search and practice.

~ Caroline Meister

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/>



Redwoods Abbey

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