



REDWOODS MONASTERY NEWSLETTER Summer 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,

Blessings of this summer season, a time that normally is spent with family and friends, vacationing, enjoying God's gifts, doing things that we finally have enough time for. With the pandemic, however, much of this is now on hold.

Our movements have all become more limited and in this sense all of us have become more 'cloistered'! Perhaps it goes without saying that anxieties and fears have increased not only for health concerns but financial as well. Added to this is the light that has shown upon racism once again. This light is calling us to look within our hearts to see how we, together, can change attitudes and societal structures where every human person is seen as God's beloved son and daughter. We are with you in holding these concerns in prayer as well as holding close our 'mustard seed of faith,' which tells us we will find our way through this, for with God 'all things are possible.'

Because of the pandemic and no vaccine, we made the difficult decision to close our guesthouse for this year. With the time not devoted to our guest ministry, we have spent more time in the garden. The garden has a new fence and a new shaded frame where we can grow vegetables that will not be eaten by our wild turkeys and other birds! We have already enjoyed many fruits from the garden: blueberries and rhubarb, from which Sr. Veronique has made her delicious jams. We've had string beans, eggplants, zucchinis, tomatoes, and lettuces so far. Also, beautiful flowers and roses adorn the space. Enjoy the photos!



Fr. Casey, Sr. Ann Marie, Sr. Annette, Sr. Gertrude

Our Cistercian Order put together a study program for all our monasteries titled: "Experientia." Its goal is an experiential reflection on monastic themes. In this newsletter, we share with you some of the personal insights and graces that came out of our work together. This content from the sisters of Redwoods is often personal, but this is reflective of monastic life or the spiritual journey in general: the more transparent we are in heart and soul, the closer we are to God. Christ's heart was totally opened by love and as his followers, our hearts, over our lifetime, are to become like his.

Finally, it came to me that in these very divisive times, ONE word unites us all: prayer. Let us join our prayer together for healing, peace, justice, forgiveness, love that transforms what divides. Many voices becoming ONE with the same intention. We are grateful for you, for the many ways you have supported us. And we are more aware now than ever before that we all need one another. Please do stay safe and hope-filled...

Gratefully,

Sr. Kathy



Sr. Ann Marie

The Journey So Far

We are all on a journey. This unit is to help us reflect on our journey, past to present.

My desire for God is to live in relationship with Him as a beloved daughter. I notice that along the way, I stumble and fall over unwelcome friends, namely, fear, insecurity, anger, and curiosity. Instead of pushing them away, I strive to listen deeply to how they bring more self-knowledge and enhance my relationships.

These ‘unwelcome friends’ are being purified by Grace and His Word day by day as they are discerned and re-directed through charity and faithful living, which give a hope that does not disappoint. Silence and attentive presence bring me to communion with God that alone satisfies all my desires.

~ Sr. Ann Marie Buss

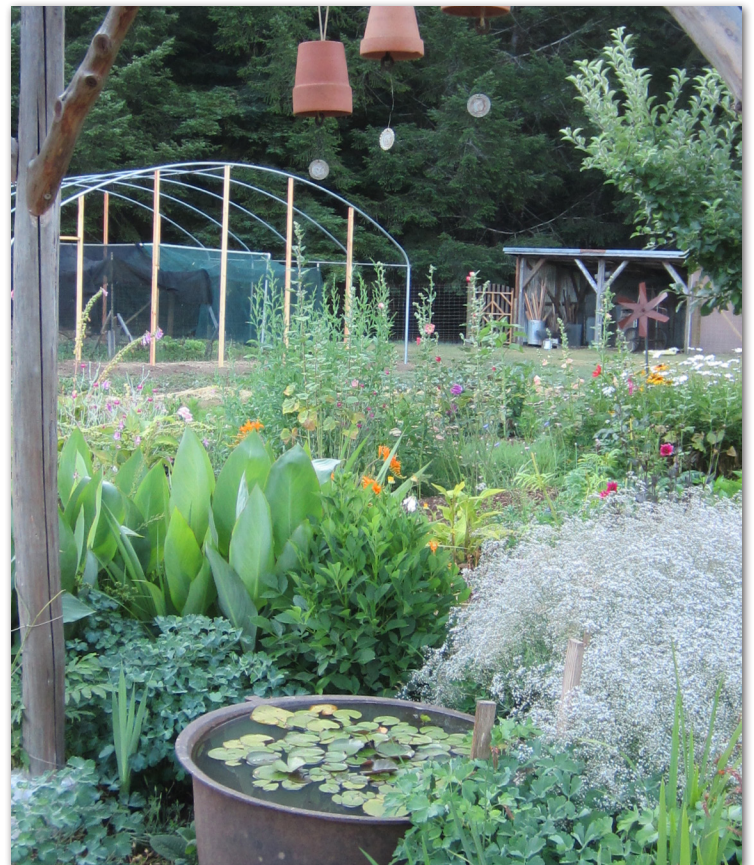
Prompted by reflection questions presented in this unit, I have renamed it “Welcome to the Human Race.” Put another way, this unit is about my journey from restlessness to seeking perfection of charity, that is, the universal call to holiness—true freedom as a child of God. This can be a rather storied, albeit adventurous, journey for one called, among other things surely, peripatetic, a kinetic contemplative, fiercely independent,

and a loner. Or if one prefers the words of the Holy Father, a journey where one comes to recognize: “It is not the way of my self- centredness, it is the way of Jesus, who is the center of my life” (Regina Caeli Address, May 10, 2020).

Using other Cistercian voices, here is something I may have said about 25 years ago: “Some achievements seem important, but inside me an empty cup remained to be filled” (Maria Angelica Torres Soto). More recently I could use words from Thomas Merton in *The Sign of Jonas*: “God had put me in this place because He wants me in this place, and if He ever wants to put me anywhere else, He will do so in a way that He will leave no doubt as to what He is doing” (p. 22). Or, “One of the thoughts is that I am glad to be at Gethsemani [Redwoods] and that the way to be a saint is to give yourself entirely to your rule and the circumstances in which God has placed you and work out the secret which is God’s will.” (p. 206).

Is this a way to holiness? To be continued. While praying for the gifts and the fruits of the Holy Spirit, I keep going, full pelt, for as Thomas Merton wrote: “Our vocation is to live life to the full.” (p. 80).

~ Sr. Gertrude Feick



A glimpse of the garden

Once upon a time when I was young, inexperienced in prayer and love, I felt that Life needed something more of me. After talking to my confessor about it, I became aware that my desire was to give something back to God for all I had received from being a member of the Catholic Workers Youth. So, I went to the Abbey of Nazareth in Belgium for a weekend retreat. I felt moved by the peace, stillness and beauty of the place. I did not know what monastic life was. I did know that the place I could enter had to be not in a city. I entered Nazareth in the Autumn of that year as a 'lay sister.'



The first thing I learned about myself was that I was lacking in virtues...so much for thinking I could give back to God! In my prayer I asked God for humility, purity of heart, to know myself better, patience, and to accept my poverty.

My first 'fervor' left shortly before I would go to Redwoods. After a few years I learned my woundedness: 'love' being the deepest. I fell in love and out of love, to despair. I suffered, I prayed, I was not myself. When I came out of this, I knew that God loved me, that I could love and was loveable. That experience was worth all the suffering.

It taught me that all wounds can be healed if we have the right medicine. Monastic life has gifted me with a great trust in God.

"When God loves, he desires nothing but to be loved, since he loves us for no other reason than to be loved, for he knows that those who love him are blessed in their very love."
(SC 83:4).

~ Sr. Veronique Geeroms

Desire Freed from Desires

One of the fundamental themes in monastic spirituality is Desire for God.

I have never desired to see Your face, Lord, but to be Your face? Yes. Then it struck me that of course William of St. Thierry is talking of that strong gaze of forgiving Love - that challenges, invites one to enter such a life, such a journey. He says, "Grant me burning love and dutiful humility...for love is very daring, and humility fosters confidence."

Growing up there was in me the desire to do noble things, encouraging people to stand up for their rights and to work for that justice, instilling in people a great love for God and caring for their needs. Or like St. Teresa of Avila - a great woman of prayer and action, to have a trust in God so great she could give all her life's strength to doing His will.

The task as I see it is to let go of my desire to be for God what I think God needs of me, and to have the faith and trust that my desire for God is the vehicle for God's use of me.

~ Sr. Victoria Serra



Sisters at common work

Schola Dilectionis (School of Love)

The Rule of St. Benedict envisioned monastic life as a 'school of the Lord's service.'

In contrast to the great intellectual schools of the Late Middle Ages in Paris, Chartres and Oxford, Cistercians called the monastic way of life a "Schola Dilectionis" or "School of Love." These schools, i.e. monasteries, focused on the education of the whole person in his or her pursuit of God.

"O Christian, learn from Christ how you are to love Christ. Learn to love sweetly, to love prudently and to love strongly. Sweetly, so that you are not seduced [by pleasures]; prudently, so that we are not deceived [by errors]; strongly, so that we are not turned away

from love of the Lord by oppression." (St Bernard of Clairvaux, Song of Songs 20, v 4.).

St Bernard teaches that love is not simply emotional attraction. It requires work and discernment, utilizing our reason and intellect. Love is for the long haul and requires commitment; it is not just a fleeting attraction.

Constant returning to the heart, in order to incarnate Christ's love, is the quintessential hallmark of the monastic journey. This encounter of Love, whose source is the Trinity, overflows into our relationships with Christ, the Community and ourselves. It takes a lifetime and, thankfully, we never really get it quite right. How can we, when touching this Love and being touched by It is possible only through grace, a gift of the Holy Spirit.

~ Sr. Suzanne Mattiuzzo

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>

Honey

Our honey, as well as cards reproduced from Sr. Victoria's artwork, can be ordered online from the store on our website:

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



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Imago Dei

While the theme of this unit is the 'image of God' in which every human person is created, the whole focus of Isaac of Stella's sermon is facing one's familiar demon.

"So, having come to the end of all these temptations, the devil departed, biding his time...until an opportune moment."

Jesus met his demons straight on and not only once but throughout his life. And so must I.

Acknowledging the presence of the demons is the first step. I must see the part of myself that I would rather not see and call upon the Divine Presence for help: "God, help me!" To enter into dialogue alone with the demon is more than I can handle. Naming it already separates me from its power. Very often all I can do is to pray: "God help me, I do not want to continue this tape. Help me!" Then I must choose in faith to turn, allowing the God within to empower and enlighten me.

"Return, I say, return to considering also your graciousness and beauty...do not ignore that you are dark, but at the same time, do not be unaware that you are beautiful." (John of Forde)

I [we] participate in God's beauty and Goodness...

I [we] are shining rays of God's Love, a sparkle of God's eye...

Radiating the Light of the Son, the Glory of God, the warmth and burning Love of the Spirit.

'Understand your dignity, O noble creature, created in God's likeness!'

~ Sr. Annette Madsen

Imago Dei: the human person created in the image and likeness of God. It is curious to note that in this unit the whole focus is on the 'personal demon' that lingers and dwells within all of our lives! When we are under the influence of our 'personal demon' we lose sight of our 'nobleness' and our 'dignity' before the merciful gaze of our God.

Isaac tells me this demon is so known: "For I reckon that I know and understand my demon quite well, beloved.....Nothing is more familiar (familiarius) to me, because nothing is more constant" (Sermon 38:7, p.62). Dear Isaac, thank you for helping me see the 'familiarity' of this voice....and so I pray: "What is my voice O beloved of my soul? What is Your voice? And what is 'that' voice, which tries to undermine my voice and smother Your voice?" Yes, this personal demon, so familiar, so constant, ignoring the deeper and truer movements of the heart ... I have seen that this personal demon does not like vulnerability. It tries to cover it up with its intellectual explanations and defenses and it is quick to criticize while refusing to reflect! It is like a lawyer in the courtroom, with many explanations, convincing defenses and rationalizations!

"Your voice, O my beloved, resides in the silence. It is named 'the small still voice of the Spirit.' O to find my true voice that sings Your praise and that seeks You with a sincere and humble heart. O help me day by day not to give power to this demon voice that would make me feel prideful in any way, or make me feel dislike for myself, or would push me into a defensive posture where I am explaining myself to the world! O the power of humble and truthful confession, which immediately renders the demon voice impotent! And then You speak, Your silent voice is heard, and once again I find my true voice, which proclaims Your love, Your mercy, Your forgiveness, Your truth."

~ Sr. Kathy DeVico

Generativity

'Work' is an essential element of what it means to be human. One profound witness of monastic life is its spiritual and human understanding of work.

This verse (#3) from Sermon 22 for St. Benedict by Gueric of Igny stays with me: "Remain patiently under the discipline of Wisdom in order to learn Wisdom... Into these ones, Christ pours himself." What more do I want? Christ pours himself.

For me the attitude of remaining is the key to generativity. The word "generativity" comes from the root: to give birth, to give rise, to engender. We do not create generativity, but we receive it. How? In remaining under Wisdom who teaches us, and this with patience. It is our daily monastic life: fidelity to our way of life: *Conversatio morum*. Like Jesus saying: "I am never alone because I do what is pleasing to the Father." (John 8:29).

This patient learning is further described by Charles Péguy in these words: "All the sentiments, all the movements we have for God, God had them first to us." To remain is linked to stability. Having moved twelve times before entering the monastery at 21 years old, I know that stability is more than staying in the same place. It is an anchor, deep in the soul. Perseverance is the motor. Not choosing what pleases but embracing patience in trust that God's love knows better than me what is good for me. This gives a real interior freedom nurtured by the dialogue with Christ, even in difficult situations.

~ Sr. Claire Bouttin

Gueric of Igny tells us that our lives are meant to continue to bear fruit. How do I continue to bear fruit? Dom Bernardo Olivera tells us there are two conditions to bear fruit: Stability and Perseverance. Stability in a place is an act of coming back interiorly. I choose to come back interiorly. Perseverance is a constant and firm attitude of remaining and saying like Peter, "Where can I go? Only you have words of Life."

When I was a postulant, we had the honor to receive Dom Bernardo in our midst. In my short monastic life, I had already enough time to experience *acedia*, which comes as a consequence of boredom from the routine and lack of distraction to escape from the boredom of routine and the confrontation of the self. It is a space where one does not know what to do with oneself.

So, I complained to Dom Bernardo that I was bored with monastic life. His advice to me was simple and concrete; and to this day it helps me to come back to the place where my life is called to bear fruit. He said, "Just get up and wash your socks." He did not say go and do your laundry! He just mentioned one small action to shake boredom, sadness, laziness, inertia, lassitude. One single action can cure all this. Monastic life confronts us with this side of ourselves but also offers us the opportunity to go out of ourselves to come back to wisdom, to the space where one dwells in love, to bear much fruit whether one is doing something or not.

In other words, generativity in monastic life is not about producing something. Generativity is about remaining in God who is the fountain of love and wisdom in whom our lives become life for all.

~ Sr. Karen Arce