



REDWOODS MONASTERY

NEWSLETTER

Winter 2023

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,

By the time you receive this newsletter we will be entering the season of Advent, the season of longing where the heart and soul open to receive God's new gesture of Love incarnate in his Son. How do we experience God? "Only by the movement of my heart...did I perceive his presence" (Song of Songs, 73:6). These words of St. Bernard invite us to the silent depths where in this fertile ground of silence God's new manifestation of love and life will embrace our lives. 'Only by the movement of the heart': how subtle, how amazing, how beautifully simple that we come to experience the Divine Presence through this silent, attentive listening inward. No wonder the Rule of St. Benedict begins with the words: "Listen with the ear of your heart."

This year at Redwoods has been particularly rich. We had the visit of the new Abbot General of our Order, Dom Bernardus Peeters. It was a helpful visit as D. Bernardus encouraged us to 'dream' about our future five or ten years from now. D. Bernardus was particularly impressed with our monastic internship program as he met and spoke with our interns. Once again, in this newsletter, you will read the experience of these young women about their time with us. Their seeking and exploration of how they are to serve God and humanity has been a grace for us. In whatever way their journeys will unfold in the future, one senses that Redwoods will always be a part of their lives and they a part of our community fabric.

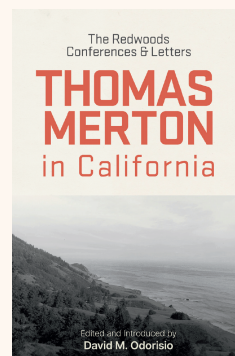
Finally, you will read a chapter talk I gave to the community to help our listening. Listening is the substance of the synodal process. Pope Francis and the

synod that he introduced and participated in concluded at the end of October. With all the people of God it is especially important that we renew and deepen our listening.

I cannot end my words without expressing concern for the wars in the Holy Land, the Ukraine and other parts of the world. One tool we have is prayer and joining our prayer together enhances its power to transform the darkness of war into peace, the peace that Christ embodies. Please know of our gratitude for your presence in our lives. A monastic community is not an island unto itself, and we are strengthened by your presence and loving support.

Gratefully,

Sr. Kathy



In January "Thomas Merton in California: The Redwoods Conferences and Letters" will be published. The book gathers together the previously unpublished conference talks given by Thomas Merton at Redwoods in 1968. The conferences cover a variety of topics including ecology and consciousness, yoga and Hinduism, Native American ritual and rites of passage, Sufi spirituality, and inter-religious dialogue, along with extended discussions on prayer and the contemplative life. The material presented in these talks reveals Merton's wide-ranging intellectual and spiritual pursuits in the final year of his life and fills a long-standing lacuna around Merton's visits to Redwoods Monastery, forming a necessary bridge to the Asian journey that was to come. The foreword is by Sr. Kathy DeVico, OCSO. (<https://litpress.org/Products/00313/Thomas-Merton-in-California>)

Chapter Talk – Twenty-second Sunday of the Year – September 3, 2023

“My thoughts are not your thoughts, my ways your ways” (Is 55:8). Let us take these Divine words of God inside, let them rest in the inner depths, let them open the mind and heart to the silent spaces of the soul. Then, notice if my thoughts recede and quiet down, if my many words fall away. In this receptive place, we pray, ‘O God, reveal your thoughts, reveal your ways.’ This receptivity is a posture of humility as we stretch to hear the thoughts and ways of God. We always need to pray for the quiet, the grace to descend to that deeper contemplative space where the Divine word emerges. “My thoughts are not your thoughts, my ways your ways.” These Divine words, if received, shake up, break down our very limited horizon and transform it into the larger horizon of Jesus’ way, his gospel way, his living Word.

I spoke in my last chapter talk about the ‘art of listening,’ a phrase used by D. Bernardus in his letter to us. Massimo Borghesi writes in his book *The Mind of Pope Francis*: “A ‘mystical’ thinker’ is an open thinker, who does not close the spirals.” (p. xxviii). Do not these words give us another key into the ‘art of listening?’ An ‘open thinker’ is an essential ingredient for this deeper listening. Borghesi draws this insightful understanding from Pope Francis who said: “The mystical dimension of discernment never defines its edges and does not complete the thought.” So, with the posture of humility, we stand rooted in the truth of God as we do not close the spirals, as we surrender to God, for God to do God’s work in and among us....The Spirit works through the open spaces of our heart, through the open spirals of a humble prayer posture.

“As the heavens are high above the earth, so are my thoughts above your thoughts, my ways above your ways,” (Is 55:9) says the Lord. So, how then do we access the ways and thoughts of God if they are so high above our human lives? With Jesus the thoughts and ways of God are brought close, they are incarnate in Christ. In the encounter, in the posture of humility where the spirals of our thoughts remain open, the Spirit...Christ’s very presence speaks the word of life...the word that we are to follow. In this open space of our thoughts and perceptions,

where the edges are not defined, where our ideas and views are left open, we prayerfully wait for the Divine word and inspiration to complete them. Here we are not insisting on my way and are ready to listen to the ‘other,’ to God and to our neighbor. For the listening process to have a Christ-centered, Spirit-led outcome this is the interior stance we each are to bring to discernment. It is profound that Pope Francis qualifies ‘discernment’ as mystical. This emphasizes that we are stretching to hear God’s way in whatever discernment is before us, no matter how small or

how large the matter is, how personal or communal the discernment.

To pray for an open heart and mind is the daily cross we are to take up so that the Spirit can guide, inspire, and lead our way forward. At our Morning Prayer we heard this text from Romans (12:1): “Offer your very selves to God: a living sacrifice, dedicated to God, the worship offered by mind and heart.” Making this offering of our selves daily surely will cultivate a wide-open heart and mind where there is sufficient space for the Spirit to define the edges and complete the thoughts so that God’s ways and thoughts become manifest in our discernment and

indeed in our community life.

Intern Reflections

- Annie Rovzar -

I came to Redwoods at a point in my life where I felt like I’d run into dead ends. For all the discernment I’d done over the past few years, I couldn’t seem to locate a path forward in my work, relationship, or vocation. The only thing I could sense was the pull to return to Redwoods Monastery after a brief retreat I’d done back in April. It was such a faint but certain stirring of the heart that brought me to the internship program, and as I sit here writing this on the last day of my time at the monastery, I’m awed by the depth and breadth of what God has done across these days.

Before coming here, I’d come to understand vocation as how we respond to God’s love in our lives—as something distinctly active in nature, something concrete, practical, and useful. It should be legible to the world somehow,



I thought, and the kind of thing that makes sense to talk about at a cocktail party. It took less than a day at Redwoods to register how sharply my notions of vocation clashed with the reality of how the sisters lived, and the internal dissonance I felt begged for a reimagination.

“God doesn’t ask us to be useful,” Sr. Claire gently and lovingly counseled me, “only to receive Him.” Receive. This word rang my whole body like a bell. That God loves us was one thing, but to receive that love, and to recognize that everything good in our lives comes from God and not us, was quite another. It turned my definition of vocation on its head—suddenly, I began to see that God is in the call, yes, but God is also in the response. To live out a vocation, then, becomes about offering back what has already been gifted to us, and to accept an invitation to an endless dance of grace. It asks us to become entirely dependent on God and not on the security of our own will and talents. It means entering the unknown, and trusting that, like Peter walking on water, Jesus always reaches out to save us from drowning.

Seeing this way, I began to experience the profound mystery of the Cistercian way, how simplicity and silence create space to hear even the subtlest ways God speaks to us. Like the prodigal son, I found myself called back to a way of being I’d been estranged from, one that felt native and that I saw reflected everywhere around me. Countless times while walking about the grounds, I’d happen upon one of the sisters paused in a field to admire the elk, or the grass swaying in the breeze, or a sliver of blue in an otherwise ashy gray sky. I felt a sense of kinship in such moments and was reminded again and again of how God calls us to live in astonishment at the gifts we’ve been given.

There is no end to what I’ve received from my time here at Redwoods. The sisters’ generosity—from the carefully prepared meals, to their regularly checking in on me, to their forgiveness and patience when I inevitably misplaced something or forgot to turn off the hose—was a constant reminder of God’s love and companionship.

I leave Our Lady of the Redwoods in peace, and with a deep desire to become what I have received.



Abbot General, Dom Bernardus, Community and Interns

- Gabriella Okigbo -

I came to the Redwoods in a rather restless period in my life, right on the brink of transition—the summer before graduating college—a time when my mind couldn’t stop frantically preparing “what’s next?” as a means to avert the Now. It is for this reason that I applied to be an intern at Redwoods, because I wanted to be “forced” to reconcile what I believed to have lost—a regular practice—a daily awareness in which the beginning and end of each day is consummated through the love of God. I came to the monastery because I couldn’t bear living as distractedly as before, more precisely, I wanted to finally investigate through my own participation what it may mean to abandon oneself to the remembrance of God—in which all encounters and daily tasks ripple outwards from this point of sacrality.

Living into Cistercian monasticism at Redwoods allowed me to physically understand the value of what it means to put the questions down and choose to live into them. It has been a remarkable blessing to witness the devotion of the sisters and to be so palpably welcomed by them—accepted just as I was—not needing to be anything other than myself. To live at Redwoods was to see the potentiality of the Kingdom of God within each of our hearts and the Kingdom of God we have the responsibility to cultivate beyond ourselves and into the communities we belong to, those close to us, and most importantly, the stranger: all those who we deem as other. I’ve been able to see clearly how the work we do to unify our hearts in solitude, and the work we do alongside others to serve them, manage to dynamically reinforce each other in the



process of encountering God—who is here right now, punctuating the subtleties of the ordinary moments which compose our lives and become extraordinary corresponding to the extent that we have the courage to abide within them with our whole Being.

For this, I say thank you to the sisters of Redwoods for granting me the opportunity to seek all whilst being held by their care. I have been shown the lifelong process of what it means to listen, and in the center of attentive listening, what it means to answer the call. I have been able to see and remain in wonder about the mystery of faith; about how the invitation to step into one's full humanity is the same as an invitation to divinity. I see that to live into my gratitude to this community is to cultivate the silence I've tasted, even in the midst of the world. To keep coming back to this anchor, this Love, above all else.

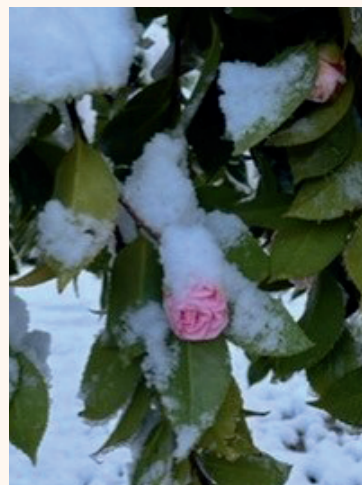
- Hanna Cox -

I am so grateful for my time at Redwoods.

Coming from a secular and atheist background, the notions that predominated my understanding of Catholicism were caricatures—far from the whole picture. My time as a monastic intern at Redwoods Monastery exposed me to the beauty, inclusivity, and capaciousness of Catholic faith. Through conferences, and many rich discussions with the sisters, the priest, and the other interns, I learned so much about Cistercian life, Catholicism, and Christianity broadly—and I now know that it was just the tip of the iceberg. The monastery's beautiful and exhaustive library was another treasure—I had access to a vast world of spiritual literature. While reading, I chewed on theology with my intellect, but meditation and prayer provided the critical environs in

which to digest. I would add to the hippy refrain “All you need is love”—and spiritual digestion!

While I expected that my immersion in monastic life would quiet my mind a bit and hoped that I may cultivate a state of heart-full-ness, I did not anticipate the extent to which these realities would become true for me, and even less did I anticipate how much I would be touched by the loving spirit and generosity of the community. The sisters offered sincere wisdom in conversations about nature, faith, and life—conversations that have remained with me since. My friendships with the other monastic interns were constituted of deep personal bonding and much good humor. I will so miss being within a community of people who so graciously care to nurture the spiritual growth of another, in all dimensions of one's being: to have a deeply illuminating conversation, and then, to also laugh about my unbeknownst T-shirt stains with Gabriella.



At the beginning of Lent the monastery was blanketed in snow. We received around ten inches which is the most in the history of our 60 years. Many branches and trees came down with the weight of the heavy wet snow.

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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