



Benedictine Daughters of Divine Will



“Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the Kingdom of Heaven belongs.” *Luke 18:16-17*

The First Crèche



Setting up a crèche under our Christmas tree has become such a staple in Christian homes that one often forgets the tradition didn't always exist. So where did it begin? In the now famous town of Assisi with someone else born in a stable...St. Francis. In 1223, just three years before his death, the childlike saint wanted to “commemorate the nativity of the Infant Jesus with great devotion, determined to keep it with all possible solemnity,” as St. Bonaventure recounts. “He prepared a manger, and brought hay, and an ox and an ass to the place appointed” for Midnight Mass.

After Francis chanted the Holy Gospel and “preached to the people about the nativity of the poor King,” a beautiful Infant miraculously appeared in the manger “Whom the blessed Father Francis embraced with both his arms.” And as the story of the phenomenal event spread, so did the holy practice which sparked it.



A Living Nativity



Despite the “Happy Holidays” epidemic that every year renews its attempt to ignore Christ on His own birthday, the land of St. Francis continues to remain faithful to the now famous tradition its patron began one miraculous Christmas night almost 800 years ago – the Nativity scene (*see story on left*). Like many small Italian villages, our own Talamello takes pride in the various crèches that the parish church and its parishioners set up throughout the historic center, creating a type of scavenger hunt that both natives and tourists can enjoy from the Feast of the Immaculate Conception to the Epiphany. However, when asked to participate for the third year in a row, we, in all honesty, hesitated.

Though we very much value the devotional practice and appreciate its focus on Bethlehem rather than the North Pole, our experiences from the past two years raised some concerns. Visitors came to our door and admired the plastic figurines, store-bought Christmas lights, and homemade grotto that we set up near our chapel, yet very few took notice of Our Eucharistic Lord exposed just steps away. In spite of our best intentions, we still managed to miss the mark. So this year we had to ask ourselves: *How can we continue to promote the beauty and significance of the Nativity scene without detracting attention from the very real and true presence of Jesus – Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity – in the Blessed Sacrament?*



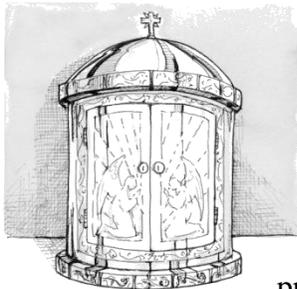
As the Holy Spirit's “creative” plan began to unfold (*see the finished product on the next page*), we couldn't help reflecting on



the loneliness that God must suffer in the tabernacle. How long and how often does He wait for His own children to make even a brief visit? Advent isn't a time of pretending that Our Savior has not yet been born, that we don't have Him always with us. It's a time to give Him the gift of our longing, to rekindle our burning desire for His presence in our lives... a desire that should always dwell in our hearts, yet becomes all too lukewarm shortly after the Christmas festivities fade away.

Jesus is born every day at every Holy Mass. He dwells perpetually in the manger of every tabernacle, waiting to be loved and adored. Can we be found with the shepherds or counted among the Magi? Or do we renew the sorrow of Our Lady who witnessed only a few, among many, come to know and worship Her Son in the little cave of Bethlehem? At the beginning of this new liturgical calendar, let us make no more excuses and resolve to *regularly* keep Our Lord company in the Most Blessed Sacrament...not limiting our devotion to the Advent and Christmas season, but carrying the joy of our dear Savior's birth in our hearts throughout the New Year as well.

"Escape from your everyday business for a short while, hide for a moment from your restless thoughts. Break off from your cares and troubles and be less concerned about your tasks and labors. Make a little time for God and rest a while in Him." ~ St. Anselm



Be not afraid...



St. Teresa of Ávila, one of the Church's most famous contemplatives, wrote in her autobiography, *"I do not understand the fears of those who are afraid to begin mental prayer. I do not know what frightens them."* She herself admitted to often preferring the harshest penances to the act of prayerful recollection and at times having to muster up great courage just to enter the chapel. So why is it, then, that we have such difficulty with (and even an aversion to) silent, contemplative prayer? The answers are many and usually particular to each individual, but a common thread does seem to be evident in our society today – because we've lost the art of just "being". Accustomed to constant sensory stimulation and ruled by the need to always be "doing" something, how many of us simply have no clue how to act or what to say or think after having placed ourselves before Our Lord?

Contrary to what the devil may whisper in our ears to discourage us from prayer, God doesn't put pressure on us as the world so often does. He's overjoyed with merely our presence and consoled by our wanting to be with Him. To *be* with the Beloved – that's prayer. Nothing else is required on our part except to rest in the arms of our Father and receive all that His love desires to give us.



Let us look to Mary for help as She kneels in adoration beside Her Son and God, not needing to say a word but delighted to just gaze at His beauty. Within those simple, silent, yet profound moments between Mother and Child, how much love was not exchanged? Or we can imitate dear St. Joseph, placing our heads on the Heart of baby Jesus and finding all of our contentment in every sacred beat. Still feel incapable? Don't worry...we all



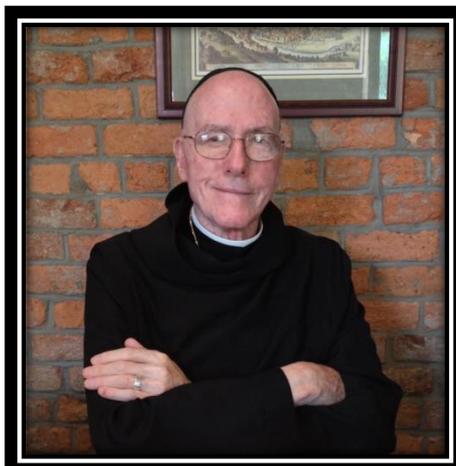
frequently find ourselves in the same boat of distractions (yes, even us sisters). Then let's make the ox and ass our models and offer Our Lord the warmth of our breath, asking Him to let the Divine Will be the life of our breathing. Everyone is capable of contemplation. We are all called to be contemplatives. In fact, as human "beings", it's what we were created for.

"As for the man who has not begun to pray, I beg him for the love of our Lord not to forego this great blessing...there will be much to tell of these joys which the Lord gives to those who persevere in prayer." (from The Life of Saint Teresa of Ávila by Herself)

In Memoriam

Fr. Jacques Daley, OSB, a dear friend and spiritual guide to our community, passed away on Sunday, October 25th after a more than six-year battle with cancer. One can easily learn about all that he accomplished in his seventy-nine years with just a click of the mouse. However, no internet search could ever adequately capture what those who knew Fr. Jacques would describe as his greatest achievement – his capacity to love without distinction.

Thank you, Fr. Jacques, for teaching us with your example how to love much, laugh much, and not take ourselves so seriously. Continue to guide us along the road of the Divine Will...the "little" yet secure way that we are sure led you straight into the arms of the Eternal Father. Enjoy all those Suns!



"Now I see a long, beautiful and spacious road, all illuminated by an infinite number of resplendent suns – Oh, yes, I recognize them! They are all my acts done in the Divine Will! This is the road that I must now take; it is the road that the Divine Will has prepared for me. It's the road of my victory..."

(The last words the Servant of God, Luisa Piccarreta spoke to her confessor, Fr. Benedetto Calvi, one hour before she died on March 4th, 1947)

(from left to right) Sister Mary Rose, Mother Gabrielle Marie, Fr. Elijah Joseph, Fr. Jacques, Sister Francesca, Sister Scholastica

A New Addition

Please pray for our newest Benedictine Daughter, Paragon Cuevas, who officially entered the community as a postulant last month. Born and raised in the Philippines yet spending most of her adult life in Texas as a physical therapist, God's Will eventually led "Pajie" to Italy...and thereby to the fulfillment of her vocational discernment. Though she had felt called to the religious life for the past several years, she knew a true vocation was not just about the "what" that the Divine Will ordained, but also about the "where". A woman called to be a wife and mother does not resign herself to marry just any man, but seeks the one God created specifically for her. In a similar way, despite having visited several different religious communities, Sister Pajie would not settle until she found the one prepared for her from all eternity. And when she finally did, her "yes" to the Will of God resounded all the more joyfully.



Supporting the Sisters

We've started the process of making our basement a more useful environment for our community with the hopes of eventually creating a livable space for guests, complete with a bedroom and bath. With our convent set up in a house rather than in a monastery structure, we have very little spare room to accommodate vocation guests, our visiting family members, and pilgrims who occasionally contact us to make private retreats. Would you prayerfully consider helping us fund this renovation project?



You can make a one-time donation by credit/debit card or sign up for automatic monthly payments on the "Donations" page of our website (www.benedictinesofdivinewill.org). Or simply send a check or money order to the address of our non-profit organization listed above.

Though we are always deeply grateful to our benefactors and pray for each and every one daily, Christmastime offers us an additional opportunity to reflect on your goodness to our community. Thank you so very much for all you have done for us in 2015, whether through your financial assistance, your friendship, or your prayers. We have truly treasured all three. May the Holy Family reward each of you on our behalf...for they know how to give the best gifts!



Please be assured that you and your families will be remembered in all of our prayers this Holy Advent and Christmas season. If you'd like to unite with us in praying a novena in preparation for Holy Christmas beginning on December 16th, you can download *The Nine Excesses of Love in the Incarnation of the Word* from the "Family Tree" page of our website. Just scroll down to Servant of God, Luisa Piccarreta.

Merry Christmas and a Blessed New Year!

