



# MARYMOUNT HERMITAGE NEWSLETTER

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## SOLITUDE IN DEEP WINTER

*By Sister Mary Beverly, HSM*

I am a hermit. I live alone. By definition, that is the essence of my vocation. When, as a young religious, I first felt God calling me to live in solitude and silence for the sake of prayer, I really could not imagine it. Now, after almost 40 years as a hermit, I love my vocation. It continues to be a source of deep joy and peace though it can be a challenge physically, emotionally and spiritually, especially in deep winter.

What is a hermit? "A hermit is a little brother of the martyr." This identification comes from the era of the first Christian hermits in the third and fourth centuries. When the time of persecution of the Christians had waned and becoming a martyr was no longer possible, men (and some few women) sought another way to live the radical Gospel of Jesus Christ. They moved out to the Egyptian and Palestinian deserts to live in caves, to fast, pray and keep vigils all night. They usually worked at weaving reed baskets and welcomed any who would venture out to these remote wilderness locations to consult them about the spiritual life.

Classics from this era are The Lives of the Desert Fathers, The Sayings of the Desert Fathers and The Life of St. Anthony by St. Athanasius, to name just three of the main books. What is startling is to see how relevant these classics are for us in the Church today. One of the famous stories about St. Anthony is that, when there was a persecution of Christians in Alexandria, he traveled to the city to encourage those arrested and prayed that he also would be martyred. He was not. So he lived the remainder of his long life in the inner desert of Egypt, becoming a spiritual father to the many who



*Looking out the chapel door towards Mt. Council; snow heaps on the top step; winter morning.*



*Snow heaps covering the view from the windows inside my house; accumulated snow shoveled from hallway & house roofs.*



*Side window inside chapel almost completely obstructed by snow heaps. Blue mountains seen in the distance to the east.*



*Snow shoveled from chapel roof by Mesa neighbors adds to piles.*



*Same view as above from inside chapel porch.*



*Snow heaps between chapel and my house with garage door open.*



*View from Hermitage Lane!*

# SOLITUDE IN DEEP WINTER

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sought his advice about how to pray and live as a hermit.

“The hermit is the little brother of the martyr.” This classic definition came back to me after reading the book, The Shepherd Who Didn’t Run: Father Stanley F. Rother, Martyr from Oklahoma, by Maria Ruiz Scaperlanda. The end of the book left me in a flood of tears. It is so moving. From the summary on the back cover of the book: “Father Stanley arrived in Guatemala in 1968, and he immediately identified with his parishioners’ simple, farming lifestyle. He learned their languages [Spanish and Indian], prepared them for the sacraments, and cared for their [spiritual and material] needs. ‘Father Stanley’—or ‘Padre Francisco’, as he was called by his beloved Tz’utujil Indians—had found his heart’s calling.” The Guatemalan civil war overtook his peaceful village of Santiago Atitlan. Father Stanley knew he was on the government’s death list, but he would not abandon his people by leaving the country, and made the ultimate sacrifice for his faith.

“Pray for us that we may be a sign of the love of Christ for our people,” wrote Father Stanley in a letter to his family in Oklahoma, “...that our presence among them will fortify them to endure these sufferings in preparation for the coming of the Kingdom.”

Father Stanley was true to his word. He did not run. He was martyred at the age of 46 on July 28, 1981. Where was I on that day and why did I not hear about his death? Yet because I was beginning my life as a hermit, I was united with this holy priest who carried on the mission of the Church in our day. Martyrs have a public role; hermits have a hidden presence. Martyrs have a bloody death; hermits have a “white martyrdom”, bloodless, but selfless and sacrificial. The story of Padre Francisco is a vivid reminder that I, and each of us in our own respective vocations, have a Gospel call to pray, to live a life of holiness, and to offer our sufferings and daily work for the salvation of souls and the good of the Church. As if



*Mt. Council to the northeast; foreground, see snow heaps by road.*



*Chapel roof needs shoveling!*



*Parking lot in front of chapel.*



*Holy Family House*



*Common House & old Library  
(Sr. M. Beverly's shadow as she takes photographs on a sunny day.)*

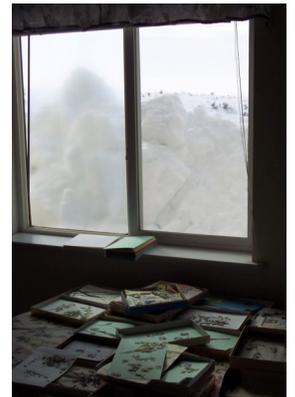


*Mesa neighbor, Shawn, works in snow shoes. He is digging out the porch to the front door of my house. Emergency exit only!*



*View from front porch of my house in early February, 2017.*

*Dining room window with snow heaps outside. I am working on real flower cards this season. Spring flowers in winter!*



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to emphasize that we need to look to the martyrs for inspiration for our faith and fidelity to Christ, on December 2, 2016, Pope Francis officially recognized the martyrdom of Father Stanley Francis Rother, the first martyr to have been born in the United States, clearing the way for his beatification.

You might well be wondering why I have been meditating on martyrs and the connection to hermits. It is the result of this severe winter. It has made for spectacular scenery, but also dark moments of intense isolation that were dangerous and frightening. Weather conditions, like we have had in our area, are life-threatening. I was vividly reminded of a Desert Father story: A young monk comes to the venerable abba and says, "Abba, my thoughts frighten me. The door of my cave is falling in and the lions will eat me."

We, as practical Americans, might quickly dismiss this with the obvious suggestion: "Well, fix the door and you won't feel unsafe." But no, the old abba knows that this is evidence of a spiritual disease. He advises the young monk: "Brother, pray that the spirit of the world be taken from you and be at peace." Is this mysterious? "The spirit of the world" might best be characterized by saying, "I want to be comfortable. I do not want to die." If this monk can pray peacefully in his cave with the thought that he might be eaten by lions, then he has indeed left the world and its worldly, fearful spirit. The Spirit of Jesus conquers all fear. Love is perfect when there is no fear.

As this story applies to me, my real aloneness did overwhelm me at times this winter when conditions were so severe. All fear is at root a fear of death. As St. Paul has written, "What can separate us from the love of God which comes to us in Christ Jesus?" The antidote to fear is prayer, trusting in God the Father. When our local area was without power at night when it was -22 degrees, I was really frightened. I remembered the times in the past when power outages could last for 2 or 3 days. Realistically, I and the buildings of Marymount Hermitage could not survive this degree of cold and rapid loss of heat for that length of time. Without electricity, being dependent on an electric pump for the well, I am also without water. My road was impassable at that time. I could neither drive or walk out to the highway if I needed to escape. This situation could really have been life-threatening.

So I told God, "I am going to pray until the electricity comes back on", trusting that would not be 2 or 3 days! I remembered Mother Teresa's words: "When

we pick up the rosary, we take Our Lady's hand." That is what I did. I prayed rosary after rosary and, after an hour and forty minutes, the power was back on to stay. Whew! Tears of relief and much thanksgiving to God!

I want to be like Father Stanley who did not run when his life was threatened. He remained faithful to his vocation as a priest. I want to have the grace of being secure in the faith that, whether I live or die, my life is at the service of the Church for the salvation of the world. There were other sufferings this winter, which God alone knows, but spring is slowly coming and the darkness and fears of deep winter are fading.

People always ask what I need. I need your prayers. I ask for a deeper faith and a more sacrificial spirit of prayer and poverty, dependence on God's grace. A little sister to the martyrs needs no less.

"It is true [Jesus] was crucified out of weakness, but he lives by the power of God. We too are weak in him, but we live with him by God's power in us." (2 Cor. 13:4)

## COMMUNITY NEWS

*By Sister M. Beverly*

The biggest news so far this year was announced in the January newsletter. The construction of Mercy House is fully funded. Please visit the **Library News** section of the website for progress on the new house of hospitality and library.

**Save the Date!** Bishop Peter F. Christensen, Bishop of Boise, will offer Mass to celebrate my 50th Jubilee of consecrated life on **August 23, 2017**. Mass is at 2 PM and all are welcome. The Bishop made this date change due to a scheduling problem. (Note that nothing is scheduled for October 25 as previously published in the December 2016 post card.) Please visit the new **Jubilee** section of the website for more details of this public event.

Archbishop Flores was one of the first U.S. bishops to donate to Marymount Hermitage when we began here 33 years ago. Please pray for him and all our generous friends and benefactors, both living and deceased. God bless you!

## MEMORIAL

In the charity of your prayers, please remember the soul of our friend and benefactor who died recently:

**ARCHBISHOP PATRICK FLORES**  
**Archbishop-emeritus of San Antonio, TX**