



MARYMOUNT HERMITAGE NEWSLETTER

2150 Hermitage Lane Mesa, Idaho 83643-5005

Website: www.marymount-hermitage.org

Tel. (208) 256-4354

E-mail: marymount@ctcweb.net

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The new library in Mercy House is still shaping up. A lovely large image of Divine Mercy, donated by Father Tom Loucks just before Christmas, now graces the space over the fireplace. The large crucifix, the icon of Theotokos and the image of Saint John Paul II will have their own places to the sides of the back doors. There is now a “procession” of saints over the book cases around the room. More icons will eventually line the foyer as you walk in the front door. The extraordinary turquoise blue you see through the windows shows what the camera “saw” of the fading sunlight on the new-fallen snow outside. (Panoramic photo by Mike Nourse on 1/11/2018)

A CLOUD OF WITNESSES

By Sister M. Beverly, HSM

If I were to walk into your home, I would probably notice that in the living room, dining room, kitchen and hallways, there would be photos of your loved ones...parents, spouse, children, grandchildren, and friends. You could say that your home makes visible the invisible love you have for these special people. The photographs are a testament to the important place that they have in your heart and life. These are people you could never forget, but they are physically memorialized for all to see. This “cloud of witnesses” are a tribute to the uniqueness of your family past, present and future.

In the letter to the Hebrews, St. Paul spends the whole of Chapter 11 giving a verbal picture of the great saints of the Old Testament, who are examples of faith in God and doing his will in their lives. The

chapter is appropriately entitled “Faith of the Ancients”. It recounts the stories of Abraham, Sarah, Jacob, and Moses, and concludes with “I have no time to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets...” In your mind’s eye, you can see a whole long procession of great men and women marching down through the ages with their holy lives oriented toward the One True God.

The ringing words of Heb. 12:1-2 are a culmination of this historical procession: “Therefore, since we for our part are surrounded by this cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every encumbrance of sin which clings to us and persevere in running the race which lies ahead; let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, who inspires and perfects our faith.” With “our eyes fixed on Jesus”, we are able to live a holy life, a life characterized by faith, virtue and good works. In other letters, St. Paul

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A CLOUD OF WITNESSES

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addresses the early Christians as “saints.” It is clear that to follow Christ, to take up our cross like him, is to become a saint. Since heaven is our goal, becoming saints is the ultimate effort of our earthly life.

“A cloud of witnesses” gives us the image of the angels and saints surrounding us with their presence and protection. However, we, as Catholics, have another traditional phrase which refers to the same reality, but which gives the image another nuance. “The communion of saints” is the phrase we use every Sunday when we pray the Creed together at Mass.

“Communion” adds the notion that we are united to all who are already in heaven, including our beloved dead family members and friends. Besides presence and protection, there is in the word “communion” the reference to our personal bond with the angels and saints, a bond of love and prayer. The Holy Trinity is a communion of Divine Love of the three eternal Persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. God desired to create angels and human beings to share in divine love for eternity. In the communion of saints, we and the holy angels are united together in Divine Love. A great and comforting mystery indeed!

When I was small, my faithful Catholic parents gave me a great gift. I was probably in the 4th or 5th grade when they enrolled me in a book club. Once a month, I received a Vision book from the series of saints’ biographies which were then being published in the 1950’s. I remember when the first book came it was slightly above my reading level, but I quickly learned to read better and faster and eagerly awaited my next monthly treasure. I loved my new books and the new friends I had in heaven about whom I was learning for the first time. This went on while I was in grade school. Even as a small child, I learned valuable, irreplaceable, unforgettable lessons. Saints were real people; they were each unique with regard to country, culture, language, vocation and personality. They each had challenges and difficulties to overcome. It became clear to me that no matter who I am, no matter what my circumstance or personality, I am called to be a saint. This awareness anticipated the

great teaching of the Vatican II Council a decade later on the universal call to holiness which opened a new awareness of sanctity in the Church.

A friend of mine, who wishes to remain anonymous, but who has been enthused about the icons proposed for Mercy House wrote this about her reflections on the saints: “I love reading about the saints because they weren’t wimps and didn’t expect life to be easy either. They continue to inspire me with their fortitude, trust and love of the Lord through very difficult times. I think of the saints as friends who walked the walk and now enlighten my path as well. I think Mercy House will be so beautiful with the icons of our friends!” She and I are going to make the theme of this year “Windows into Heaven”.

Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, who was the main celebrant and homilist for the funeral of Pope John Paul II, introduced in a stunning way the image of a window in heaven. Ratzinger’s poignant image was that “Pope John Paul II is now blessing us from the window of the Father’s house”. I still cry when I recall that touching vision.

This is the same reality which underlies the theology of icons. We are not looking at a picture of the saint depicted. No, that saint is looking at us from the window of heaven. It is a transcendent sense of “looking”. Who is doing the “seeing”? Certainly, in the glory of heaven, the saints are more alive than we are, so it is they who are more powerfully looking at us. Amazing.

We are never alone. The saints are always there with us...seeing, loving, offering their prayers and abiding presence to assist us on our journey to our true home. I say this often to people who are worried that, as a hermit, I am all alone. “God, Our Lady, all the angels and saints are here with me. It is down right crowded at Marymount Hermitage!” It is not a joke. It is true: the community of saints, a great cloud of witnesses. In faith, we believe this. May this New Year be a “Year of the Saints” for all of us.

P.S. Just so you know...some, perhaps most, of the Vision books currently in the children’s section of the new library are my own books from so long ago!

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The MARYMOUNT HERMITAGE NEWSLETTER is published by Marymount Hermitage, Inc., a non-profit, tax-exempt corporation in the State of Idaho. The Hermit Sisters of Mary are a canonically approved, Catholic community of women hermits, following the Rule of St. Benedict. The newsletter is published each month by the 15th on our website only. The purpose of the newsletter is to share the spirituality and material progress of Marymount Hermitage. Please pray that we may be faithful to our way of life in prayer and penance, solitude and silence for the sake of the Church and the world. Any donations are sincerely appreciated and are tax-deductible. Thank you in advance to those who have remembered Marymount Hermitage in their wills. God bless you!

COMMUNITY NEWS

By Sister Mary Beverly, HSM

WORK: January saw the last of the books being moved from the old library and being installed on shelves in the new library. I am happy to report that, thanks to the help of many people, we have a functional library now. Along with this milestone, Ceara and Mike Nourse have offered to be my librarians. I put the call number on new books (deciding where in the library this book will be), Ceara does the data entry into the computer of all the information, and Mike is printing all four items that each book needs: title and author cards, check-out card and spine label. Ceara will install the book pocket and spine label and then add the new book to the library shelves. As you can see by this partial explanation, the work of a library is huge and never ending. God bless the Nourses and all those who have donated and processed books in the past. It is a work of mercy.

OPEN HOUSE: I will be hosting the first Open House of the year at Marymount Hermitage on Saturday, January 27 from 10 AM until 12 noon. Everyone is welcome and this will be widely advertised locally. People who have never visited here might like to see the chapel and many are now interested in touring the new building: Mercy House. A second Open House is scheduled for Saturday, February 10, 2018 and others are planned and will be announced.

PARISH SALE: I am still in the process of scheduling the parish sales for the year. However, the first one planned for 2018 will be at Holy Apostles parish in Meridian, Idaho on Feb. 24 & 25.

NAZARETH SILENT RETREAT: Father Brad Neely, pastor of All Saints parish in Lewiston, ID, and I will be offering a silent weekend retreat at Nazareth Retreat Center in Boise, ID on May 18-20, 2018. The theme of the retreat is "Praying with the Psalms". See the Nazareth website for information and registration: www.nazarethretreatcenter.org

SAINTS: Through generous donations, I was able to purchase the icons of Jesus, Mary and the saints for Mercy House. Come and see the "procession" yourself when you can! Private tours or retreats are always possible. Just email me with the dates you prefer. In keeping with the theme of the communion of saints, I have chosen the topic for the fall classes I will give at Nazareth Retreat Center. From September to December, the four classes will be "Praying with the Saints". Each class will be focused on the spirituality and prayer methods of some of the great spiritual masters in the history of the Church.

NATURE'S DRAMA: Living out in the country always has its surprises. In November, there was a dead coyote to the side of Hermitage Lane where it connects with Highway 95. I assumed it was road kill because it was a beautiful, healthy animal. Then I observed ravens feasting on it. One day when I came back from town, all the ravens were perched on the fences, waiting. I wondered why. Then I saw a magnificent bald eagle also perched on a nearby fence post. He obviously had priority over the carcass due to his size!



In mid-October, I noticed the large jade plant in chapel had tiny buds on it. I did not even know jade plants could bloom and I have been raising them for sale for 25 years! Then the many tiny white buds took weeks to grow larger on their stems. Finally in December, the first flowers opened up...tiny stars as delicate and exquisite as could be. Now in mid-January, the blossoms are still there, getting more pink and dry. Yet, so far, not a single flower has fallen off. Now THAT is a slow growing process!

My last fun nature story is seeing from my kitchen window an ermine on the wood pile outside. In case that word does not trigger an image...an ermine in the summer time is a brown weasel with a black tip on its tail. In the winter time, the weasel changes its coat to a beautiful white. Then the black-tipped tail is unmistakable. Gorgeous! I thanked the Lord for this wonderful surprise, and also that weasels eat mice. Nice!

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MEMORIAL

MARTHA M. MATLOCK

of Corpus Christi parish, Fruitland, Idaho

by JoAnne Hall

GRATITUDE: Besides generous gifts at Christmas time, I was blessed with many cards, notes and promise of prayers. This is one note that touched my heart, as it will yours: "Dear Sister M. Beverly, Most warm & appreciated wishes to you & your friends in contemplative life—so needed in today's world! May your needs be well met and may all be blessed who help you so generously with projects! My love & prayers, Susan D." [in CA] Amen to that!

Gifts represent the gift of ourselves. God is THE gift given in Jesus. Thank you for the gift of YOU! May God bless you, our generous friends and benefactors, and let us pray daily for each other and for all.