# MARYMOUNT HERMITAGE NEWSLETTER

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Volume 38, No. 9 September, 2021


## FATHER BILL McCANN AT MARYMOUNT

*By Sister Mary Beverly, HSM*

Sister Rebecca Mary and I had only been living as Hermit Sisters at Marymount Hermitage for about nine years when I received a letter from a seminarian asking if he could make a retreat here. Actually, in those days, having a retreatant was very rare. This letter came in about February of 1993 from Mt. Angel Abbey in Oregon. The seminarian, Bill McCann, was already ordained a deacon and was preparing for his priestly ordination. At the time, I said to Sister, "The men are supposed to make a canonical retreat of a week, and here he is asking for a month. This tells you the caliber of the man!" I wrote to Bill to say he could come for the month of May, as requested.

About a month later, March 25, 1993, to be exact, I happened to be visiting the Sisters of our former community in Beaverton, OR. When Sister Charlene, who was part of the vocation team for the Archdiocese of Portland, asked me if I wanted to accompany her to Mt. Angel for the day, I welcomed it as a chance for us long-time friends just to be together. Little did I know it would be a historic day for more than one reason. That morning at about 4:30 AM, a major earthquake struck so hard and so close to the Abbey that it was later called "the Mt. Angel Earthquake". It was a weekday, and, as far as I could tell, the Benedictine monks, and all the teachers and seminarians continued their day as if nothing had happened.

Sister Charlene and I were walking across the grounds of Mt. Angel about midday, when a man approached me and said, "Are you from Marymount Hermitage in Idaho?"

I was surprised because I had never seen him before and said, "Yes. How did you know?"

He said, "I wrote to you and am coming on retreat in May."

"Then you must be Bill McCann," I said in reply. It was nice to meet him and he was kind enough to invite Sister Charlene and me to eat lunch with him in the seminarian's dining room.

While Deacon Bill was here on retreat, it was a real joy and a privilege to get to know him. It was easy for Sister Rebecca Mary and me to imagine what a good priest he would be.

*Deacon Bill McCann putting firewood into Sister Rebecca Mary's hermitage storage shed.*

Bill fit into our life so perfectly that we were amazed. He prayed and worked, read and studied, and seemed very much at peace, comfortable with the religious rhythm of our life. We taught him to make flower cards and took him with us up into the mountains to pick wildflowers. He loved it all!

We had good spiritual conversations over Sunday dinner, which we shared with our chaplain and Bill at the time. First just teasing, and then later in real earnest, Sister and I started asking Bill to think about being our chaplain. I could tell that he was genuinely interested.

Later he would tell me that he felt a real call to the contemplative life, so much so that his spiritual director at the seminary had asked him if he really wanted to be a diocesan priest. Bill was committed to returning to the Diocese of Las Cruces in New Mexico. He believed it was God's will for him to be a pastor at that period of his life. He finally told us at the end of the month-long retreat, "I have a bishop waiting for me." We felt we had made a new friend, but the idea

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that he would ever come back to Marymount permanently never entered my mind for the next 25 years.

I had the privilege of being present at the Ordination Mass for Bill McCann at the Las Cruces Cathedral, and the next day at his first Mass in his first parish, Our Lord of Mercy, Hatch, NM. (And yes, the famous "Hatch chili peppers" do come from there and are THE best!) I waited about five years before I asked him this, but, when I felt he had been a priest long enough, I asked Father Bill to be my spiritual director. This was only possible by monthly phone calls and my visits to him in his parish once a year. He also visited us here at Marymount when he was on vacation in Montana, visiting his family on a yearly basis. Father Bill would often arrive in time for the celebration of the 4th of July. We would sit outside somewhere, light sparklers, watch the spectacular fireworks over Council, and eat popcorn and drink root beer floats. To us as hermits, Sr. Rebecca Mary and I felt this was recreation at its most luxurious and fun!

*Father Bill McCann and Sister Rebecca Mary outside the church in Capernaum near the Sea of Galilee. We pondered this heart rock. What did it mean?*

One outstanding memory we both have of Father Bill is when we made a ten day pilgrimage to the Holy Land in the Jubilee Year 2000. We were blessed to have three priests accompanying our group of about 30 people, including Father Bill's mother, Anne Marie McCann. We had daily Mass and saw all the major sites in Jerusalem, Bethlehem, and Galilee.

*Our first daily Mass for the Holy Land pilgrimage was in a small dining room of the hotel in which we were lodged in Jerusalem.*

We had unforgettable adventures and graces in attending two outdoor papal Masses with Pope, now Saint, John Paul II, who was also on pilgrimage in Israel the days we were there. We still remind each other with enthusiasm and gratitude of the memorable events of those historic March days during the Jubilee Year 2000.

I cannot summarize adequately who Father Bill has been for us all these years, but I will now jump to recent years to conclude what I am sharing here. In the summer of 2019, when Father Bill was here in July for his usual yearly visit, he began for the first time to tell me what he was praying about and planning for his retirement, which then was two years away. I was sincerely surprised and overwhelmingly happy when he asked if he could live permanently at Marymount Hermitage. By then, we had not had a resident priest for nine years and Sister Rebecca Mary had moved to the Infirmary of St. Mary of the Valley convent in Beaverton, Oregon eight years previously. The thought of daily Mass here again was a cause for much gratitude to God!

That year, Father Bill and I spent the better part of two days hiking all over the 100 acres of Marymount looking for a building site for him. He proposed to have a hermitage of his own design custom-made. It would be a permanent and substantial gift to Marymount. Last year in July, when Father Bill was visiting as usual, he settled on a site neither of us had thought of previously. It is perfect! It faces the mountains to the west, has a panoramic view which includes the mountains to the north and south, and is close to the utilities, so that installing

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water and electricity will be easy. Wise, as always, Father Bill anticipates living here a year to get settled in and develop a solid rhythm of contemplative life before planning and building his new hermitage. We ask prayers for the next phase of this development for the future of Marymount.

Father Bill has been living here since July 11, the Feast of St. Benedict, a blessing in itself! He has made himself available to substitute for the priests of his home diocese and has already been gone to New Mexico for two weeks in September. He will be the presenter for the Day of Pilgrimage on Oct. 9. I am glad when others can be here for Mass. I love how very reverent and focused Father Bill is and how deep and memorable his homilies are. For me already, they have become manna in the desert, nourishing and spiritually sustaining.

*This portrait of Father Bill was taken when he was pastor of Our Lady of the Assumption parish in Roswell, NM. I celebrated by 40th Jubilee there by renewing my vows at Mass on August 15, 2007.*

In conclusion, I want to publicly thank Father Bill's bishop, Bishop Peter Baldachino of Las Cruces, NM for supporting Father's desire to live the contemplative life in Idaho. I also sincerely thank our own bishop, Bishop Peter Christensen, for welcoming Father Bill so warmly and enthusiastically to the Diocese of Boise to live and to pray for the Church.

When I first met Bill McCann on that earth-shattering day, little did I know that God would bring him as a priest to Mesa to live permanently and to minister to me and retreatants and guests. As Our Lady discovered in her own unique vocation as the Mother of God, "Nothing is impossible for God," (Lk. 2:37) so I have experienced the fruit of the grace, which began for me on March 25, 1993.

Please visit our diocesan website to read the feature article, which Gene Fadness, editor of the Idaho Catholic Register, wrote after an extensive interview with Father Bill on August 26. This is the issue of the ICR published September 10, 2021. Web address: **catholicidaho.org**. Father Bill McCann and I are pictured on the cover of the paper and the article is entitled: "Worth the Wait." Indeed!

# COMMUNITY NEWS

**DAY OF PILGRIMAGE:** The mini-retreat led by Father Dominique Faure, VS, on August 28 was a day of grace, according to the almost 40 people who attended. The demand for such offerings prompted the plan for the Day of Pilgrimage which Father Bill will be presenting on Oct. 9 on the theme: "Praying and Seeking Peace in Our Troubled World."

*Photos above by Helen Glidden*

The outline of each Day of Pilgrimage includes ample time for silence and prayer, but is spiced up with a catered lunch and time to socialize at midday after Mass.

**WATER WORKS:** On Friday evening September 10, the three retreatants and I found ourselves without water. Thanks be to God, it was not a problem with the well or the pump. On Sept. 13, Ray Groves & Co. safely dug up the broken pipe just coming out of the well casing and successfully repaired it. Being without water for three days in the desert is a meditation!

"All's well that ends well." (Is this a pun?)

**CONTACT INFO:** Father Bill McCann's U.S. mailing address is c/o Marymount Hermitage. His email address is **padrebill7@yahoo.com** Contact him directly for prayers or appointments for confession or spiritual direction.

**ROAD WORK:** The cost will be $32,000. With donations, $10,000 is needed yet. Please pray about this!

**MEMORIAL**
**Robert A. Greger**
by
Virginia Arnold, IN