



DEAR FRIENDS AND FAMILY,

*Puer Natus Est.* A child, a son, a boy is born. These are words a monk hears sung to ancient and beautiful melodies at the midnight Mass of Christmas every year. They are also words that mark that momentous occasion when a child is born into a family. A new baby brings the joy of new life and offers to new mothers and fathers a fresh perspective on the world. How many first-time parents recount that it has “changed everything”?

This Christmas at the monastery, the monks experienced a comparable moment of joy arising from new life. After years of work and the generous support of benefactors all over the world, the 16th century church on the mountainside was finally reopened. The timing was fitting for celebrating the birth of Christ in what was once used as a hay barn. It was a step toward the stability that a church in stone uniquely signifies.

While a monk will never celebrate the birth of his own children, he celebrates the dies natalis of the saints – their supernatural “birthdays” – when, through death, they enter heaven. Every morning after Prime, the Roman martyrology sings of history’s Christian heroes and heroines. There are martyrs who have been torn to pieces by hooks, tossed off boats in bags stuffed with vipers, burned or buried alive. Roman emperors were particularly creative when killing Christians, giving each one a birthday story that both shocks and inspires.

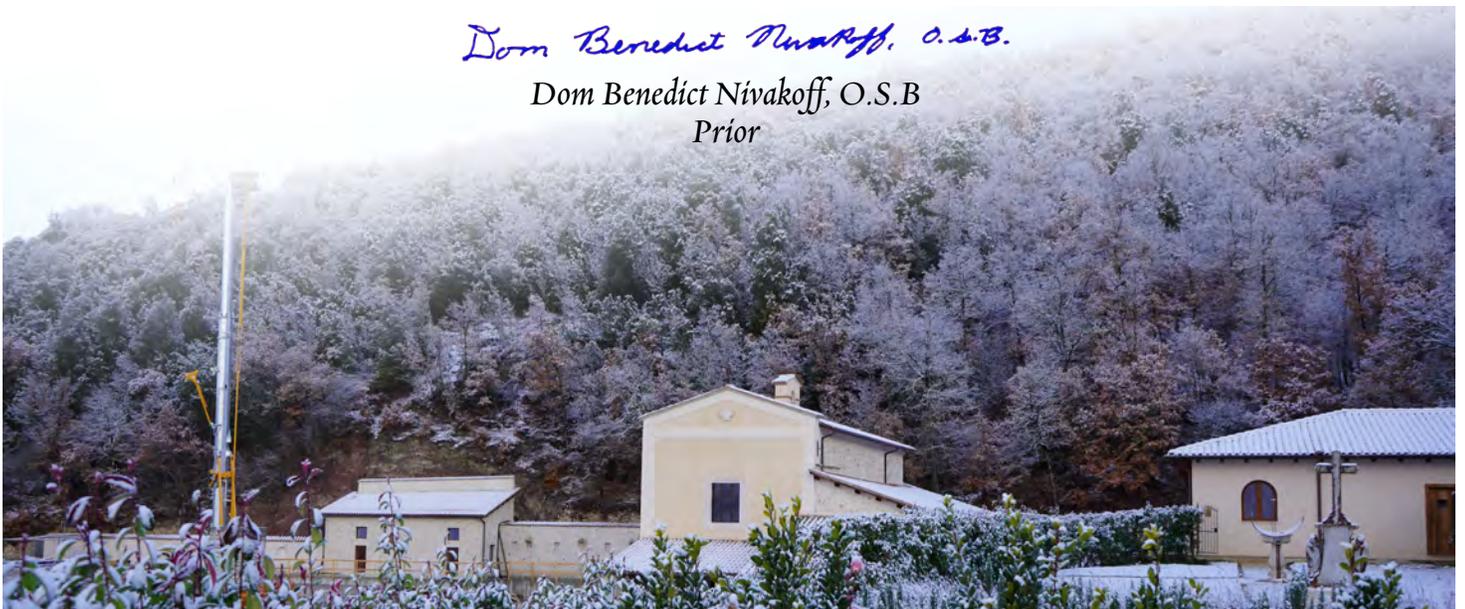
For Catholics, the beginning of a new (or restored!) church’s life has a special connection to these martyrs. The bones of the martyrs whose blood and prayers have brought them to heaven are sealed in a consecrated altar in an ancient ceremony that takes more than five hours to complete. As the body of a saint became a dwelling place for Christ, likewise the consecrated church becomes a dwelling place for Christ himself and all those who wish to adore Him.

It is with that rich symbolism in mind that we made the move to the stone church, Our Lady of Mercy, in December 2020. It was an historic moment for our community. We are grateful to God to be able to share with you some photos of the “new” church (1592), as well as news of other events in Monte. We hope the reopening of this little church, which was in disrepair and structurally weak not so long ago, can act as a reminder to all of us of a general truth: the more the Church is like Christ her spouse in weakness, the more she can follow Him to glory.

IN CHRIST,

*Dom Benedict Nivakoff, O.S.B.*

*Dom Benedict Nivakoff, O.S.B.  
Prior*



## The mystical burial

**In 2020, three monks of Norcia made Solemn Vows in Monte. DOM CASSIAN FOLSOM, O.S.B. shares insights into one part of the ritual.**

In the rite of monastic profession, as soon as the monk has pronounced his vows and sung the *Suscipe*, a special chant to Our Lady, there comes the mystical burial. In its latest form (which crystalized in the 17<sup>th</sup> century) this symbolic burial includes the full prostration of the monk, covering him with funeral a pall, placing funeral candles on either side of him, and ringing the death bell. The monk lies there, buried as it were, while the abbot and community make lengthy intercession for him. At the end of this long period (in which the Master of Ceremonies checks on the monk every now and then to make sure he has enough air!), the deacon proclaims: *Surge qui dormis!* "Rise up, you who sleep", and the monk rises to new life in Christ.

There are two groups of actors in this liturgical drama. The first consists of the newly professed monk, who manifests in a highly-charged symbolic action that he desires to die to the old man and to the world, and awaits the resurrection of the new man. These baptismal themes are based on St. Paul's letter to the Romans, chapter 6. While the monks lies prostrate, the second group of actors comes into play: the superior and community intercede for him, praying for the monk's transformation. This prayer is long and varied, including versicles and responses, orations, the prayer of consecration, the chanting of the *Miserere* and the blessing of the cuculla and other elements of the monastic habit. The symbolic meaning is clear, namely that the intercession of the community is necessary for the monk's interior conversion. "Awake, you who sleep and rise from the dead, and Christ will illuminate you."



*Dom Bernard Baca and Dom Paul Ulicki made solemn vows in late 2020.*



B I R R A  
**NURSIA**  
EUROPEAN ONLINE STORE



## Birra Nursia shared with Europe

**BY DOM AUGUSTINE WILMETH, O.S.B.**

As the monastery's brewer, I am happy to share with you the good news that this Advent we successfully launched our own European online store for our Birra Nursia beer. We have already shipped a large number of orders in the past few weeks and many Christmas gifts included our beer, chalices and openers.

St. Benedict is a patron of Europe and his monks helped build up the patrimony of Western culture. We are proud to offer to Europeans the opportunity to reconnect with their own roots and heritage whenever they open a Birra Nursia. We monks are also keenly aware that it is very difficult to travel to Norcia and visit the monastery in person right now, and this certainly helped encourage us to make the European online store a reality this year. This project did take some time to realize because of its multiple intricate moving parts and the added complexity of shipping to many different countries, but the gratitude of our European friends made it well worth it.

It is our hope that by sharing with you this fruit of our labor you can enjoy a taste of the monastic experience as it is lived here at the birthplace of St. Benedict. Every bottle of Birra Nursia you purchase helps in the rebuilding of our mountainside monastery and brings joy to your home, family and friends. **Ut Laetificet Cor!**

# Our Lady of Mercy Opens!



ABOVE: The restored facade of Our Lady of Mercy, with an added Marian shrine by Cody Swanson, an American sculptor living in Italy.



After years of work, the monks celebrated their first Christmas in the restored stone church.



A side altar dedicated to St. Scholastica, featuring a painting of St. Benedict's twin sister by artist Gwyneth Thompson-Briggs.

## Table Readings 2020

*During the meals in a monastery, one monk always reads aloud. Below follows a selection of texts read in the refectory during the past year.*

### Love is a Radiant Light

St. Charbel

### Life of St. Stephen Harding

J. B. Dalgairns

### In No Strange Land: The Embodied Mysticism of Saint Philip Neri

Jonathan Robinson

### Before the Dawn: Autobiographical Reflections

Eugenio Zolli

### How the Church has Changed the World

Anthony Esolen

### The Medieval Fathers and Writers: Saint Bernard of Clairvaux

Pope Benedict XVI

### Monastic Wisdom, The Letters of Elder Joseph the Hesychast

Elder Joseph the Hesychast

### Cyril & Methodius of Thessalonica: The Acculturation of the Slavs

Anthony-Emil N. Tachiaos

### Everyday Saints

Archimandrite Tikhon Shevkunov

### Beyond East and West

John C. H. Wu

### Dialogues

St Gregory the Great

### The Queer Feet (A Father Brown Mystery)

G. K. Chesterton

### The Great Heresies

Hilaire Belloc

### The Creed in Slow Motion

Ronald Knox

### Life of Christ

Fulton Sheen

### The True Story of the Vatican Council

Henry Edward Manning

### Homilies in Praise of the Blessed Virgin Mary

St. Bernard of Clairvaux

### History of the Franks: Book I

St. Gregory of Tours

### With God in Russia

Walter Ciszek

### De Bono Mortis

St. Ambrose

### The Servile State

Hilaire Belloc

### The Mind of the Maker

Dorothy Sayers

### Athos: The Holy Mountain

Sydney Loch

### The Flying Stars (A Father Brown Mystery)

G. K. Chesterton

## WAYS THAT YOU CAN HELP...

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