



DEAR FRIENDS AND FAMILY,

A blessed and Happy Easter to all of you!

In the seventh lesson for the Easter vigil, the prophet Ezekiel opens a window on what the resurrection of the body will look like: "And I prophesied as he had commanded me: and as I prophesied there was a noise, and behold a commotion: and the bones came together, each one to its joint. Behold I will open your graves, and will bring you out of your sepulchres, O my people: and will bring you into the land of Israel."

Are we ready for this? Will we want to go?

In C.S. Lewis' *The Great Divorce*, many of the people on the bus to heaven would prefer to take the bus back "home." They are offered the chance of eternal life with God in Heaven, but fear holds them back. What do they fear? While some fear that they don't have strength for the journey, many fear that the prize won't be worth the struggle. Wouldn't it be better to be comfortable here than to risk what will likely be an intense purification, only for a prize that is hardly certain?

If we have asked ourselves the same question we have implicitly accepted a lie. Is this life really so comfortable? Technology, entertainment, modern medicine -- all of these can keep us feeling comfortable and safe. But what if comfort only masks sadness, depression, emptiness? Does being comfortable really substitute for the injustice, falsity and misery we each experience at one time or another? What if, in fact there is a joy and peace that far exceeds what passes for happiness in this world? What if all we really need to obtain it is to desire it more than mediocre imitations?

Easter, o joyful Easter, o blessed Resurrection of Christ! Easter has given us this hope. In these times of darkness and trial, may each of you experience a foretaste of that joy which will make you and us desire it for all eternity. May the stories of building and animals and prayers in this newsletter give you a little encouragement on the path. Christ is Risen and has left the door of life open for us. Shall we enter?

IN CHRIST,

Dom Benedict Nivakoff, O.S.B.

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Prior



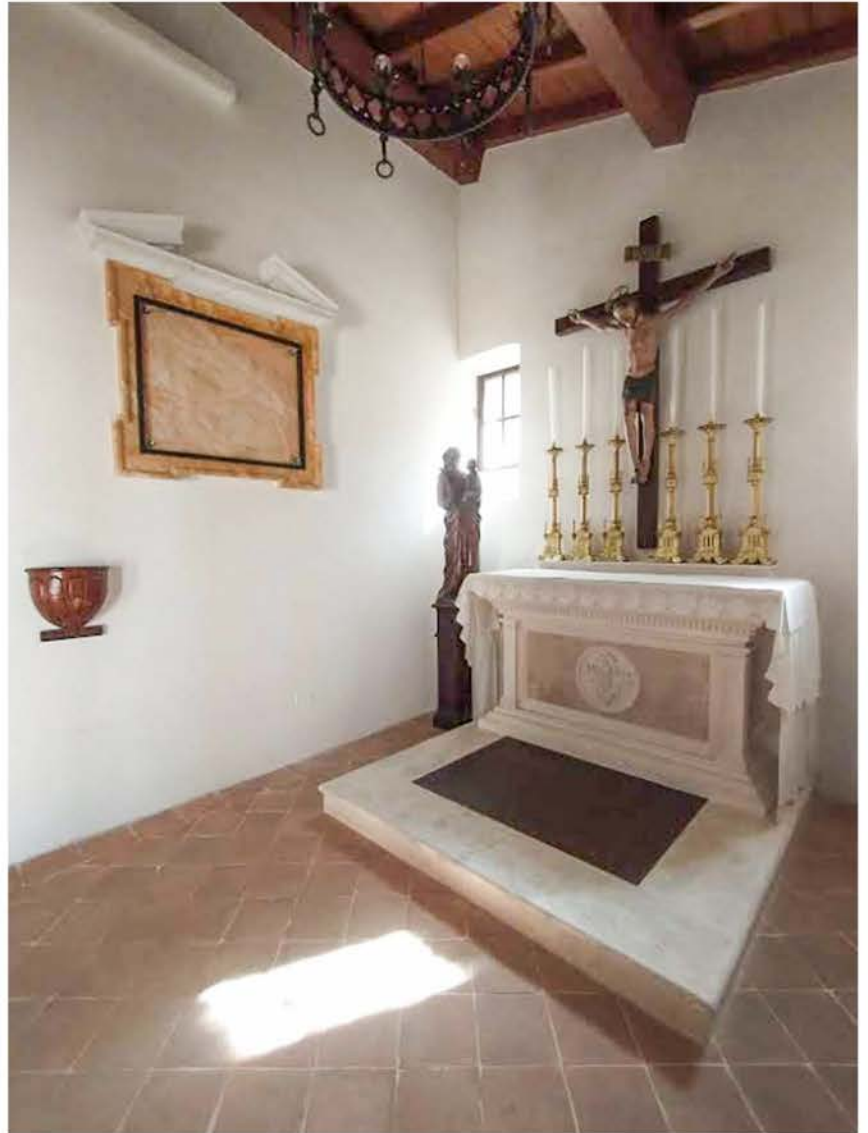
The newsletter is written by monks of the monastery.

I: AN ALTAR FOR ST. JOSEPH

Since 2007, every afternoon the monks have prayed for the material help to rebuild the monastery with a prayer that begins: "O God who by ineffable Providence did deign to choose Blessed Joseph... ."

For well over a decade, not one day has gone by without petitioning that most noble man whom Christ called "father." God gave His own two most perfect treasures to St. Joseph: His only Begotten Son and the Immaculate Virgin Mary. By the mysterious arrangement of Providence, he became the noble guardian of the Son of God and His Mother, participating in the redemption of God's own people by exercising true paternity over the Savior of the world.

St. Joseph is, in a particular way, an appropriate model for monks. Like him, we have a mysteriously hidden mission in the Church as we strive for a holy way of life that puts Christ and His Immaculate Mother first. By giving all to Him through Her, we participate in the ineffable Providence of God which reaches to the invisible ends of the Church, and through our turning to God in prayer, we make ourselves ready to receive the wonderful benefits which God has arranged for us.



At last, we are finally able to offer him a visible sign of the honor we give to him in our hearts. Through the generosity of a family from Michigan and the skill of Architect David Napolitano, we have dedicated one of the five side chapels to this holy example of fatherhood.

The beautiful stone altar arrived just in time for his March 19 feast, allowing us to thank him in a concrete way for his help in our efforts. In this chapel, a marble monument now hangs, soon to list the names of all those who helped restore the church and rebuild the monastery. Our hope is that those who provided a place for us to honor God through the work of their hands may be remembered in the chapel of St. Joseph, a noble worker of God, who helps provide for our church and for the entire Church according to the mysterious will of ineffable Providence.

Deus, qui ineffabile providentia beatum Joseph sanctissimae Genitricis tuae sponsum eligere dignatus es: praesta, quaesumus; ut, quem protectorem veneramus in terris, intercessorem mereamur habere in caelis.

II: MONASTIC LIFE WITH GOATS

Five small goats arrived at the monastery last June to help clear our forest of underbrush. The little herd had always lived on a small farm nearby, and despite the smiling faces on the monks (not to mention the beards that we wear in common), they felt unsafe in an unfamiliar place. When upset, a goat's bleat is eerily similar to a human scream, which made for an unforgettable experience for the monks who carried them to their little forest pen!

Handfuls of oatmeal or carrots gradually won them over, and by the time the first kid was born in August, they were letting us pet them. New to livestock, I was reluctant to let them out of their pen without a fence, but after the next litter brought their numbers up to nine, we decided to risk letting them graze at large. After six months on the monastic mountainside, the goats had adopted it as a new home.



Now the goats spend their days wandering our several acres of forest, cloistered by stone walls built by the Capuchin friars who first inhabited our land, hard at work trimming the underbrush. They enjoy leaves too from our European oaks, which make a majestic sight among the shrubs, some old enough to remember the friars, and evergreen "live oaks" planted by the friars themselves. This combination of oaks and goats is known locally to make fertile ground for Umbrian black truffles, which we hope they won't find! If there's a plant on our property they haven't yet tasted, I have no doubt that they'll get to it eventually, though the monks are quick to chase them away from the rosebushes, in which case, startled, they'll run straight back to the safety of their little pen.

Something similar happens to a monk as he grows into the life of the monastery. The death to self that St. Benedict calls us to can be as frightening to a man as the new pen was to the poor little goats. But the new kids born in the monastery feel at home exactly where the old goats were terrified.

So for a monk. Each little death to self is at the same time a new birth of Christ in the soul. He lives more and more a new life that only knows the monastery as its home, and if he ever has to go out on business, he runs back as fast as he can. The Fathers used to say that a monk out of his cloister is like a fish out of water. Taking care of our little herd, I've learned that he's also a lot like a goat out of his pen.



III: RESTORING THE PERIMETER WALLS



The old 17th-century stone walls encompassing the Capuchin's land were in much the same state as the rest of the mountainside property when we arrived here after the earthquakes of 2016 -- neglected and in ruin. The quakes damaged the walls further, throwing down whole sections at a time. We recently finished the restoration of the church and have begun rebuilding the cloister and buildings, but just like Nehemiah in the Old Testament, God has "put into our hearts" the desire to rebuild the perimeter walls. Although we are grateful that we don't have to rebuild while simultaneously fighting off the enemies of Judah, we are armed with prayer books and must contend with an army of trees and shrubs that have been gaining ground for decades.

Walls can serve many purposes, some of them merely practical like defense or keeping out wolves and wild boars. But like so many other things in the Church's liturgy and in the monastic life, there is symbolic and spiritual significance intertwined with the practical. Whether it is the historic city of Jerusalem or the heavenly New Jerusalem from the Apocalypse, walls don't just keep enemies at bay but they also protect and partition off the sacred. A monastery needs walls, cloisters and enclosures because we monks are consecrated to God to serve Him alone. By extension, even the buildings, gardens and forests that are part of our property share in this consecration and dedication to God, and the walls help mark off this sacred ground.

Large sections of the wall are still intact and we merely need to shore them up, replace the roof tiles and re-plaster them. It really is incredible how strong and well-built they are. We have a lot to learn from the Capuchin friars and local Nursini who first constructed these walls -- with no heavy machinery while on steep cliffs and rugged hills! We try to see our preservation and maintenance of these walls as part of our more general charism and call to receive the good things handed onto us by our forefathers (like the traditional liturgy, and the Rule of St. Benedict) and preserve them for future generations. It might take us a little bit more time and expense to rebuild these walls with stone the old-fashioned way, but when finished they will be a permanent and beautiful part of our property that we hope will last for at least several more centuries, God willing.



IV: TENEBRAE IN THE RESTORED CHURCH

The Offices of Matins and Lauds for the Sacred Triduum (i.e. Holy Thursday, Good Friday and Holy Saturday) are sung together as one seamless Office several hours before dawn in a service traditionally known as Tenebrae, which in Latin means “darkness.” This Office is composed of 15 psalms and canticles interspersed with readings, antiphons and responsories in highly ornate and very ancient melodies of Gregorian Chant, and is sung in a dark church with candlelight sufficient to read the liturgical texts. Additionally, a large triangular candelabra is placed near the altar with 15 candles representing the psalms and canticles sung, one of which is extinguished at the conclusion of each psalm. Thus, as the service draws to its conclusion, the lights gradually diminish until the church is left in complete darkness, offering a vivid representation of the words Christ spoke to the adversaries who arrested him in the Garden of Gethsemane: “haec est hora vestra et potestas tenebrarum” (“this is your hour and the power of darkness”) Lk. 22:53. The name Tenebrae may also be derived from the dramatic highpoint of these offices which comes midway through the Good Friday service in the Responsory, beginning with the word Tenebrae and unfolding before us the scene of Christ’s death, with his piercing cry from the Cross: “My God, why hast Thou abandoned me?” (cf. Mt. 27:45-46), as well as the comforting words indicative of His unshaken confidence in God’s power to save: “Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit” (Lk. 23:46).

Another responsory from Friday’s service vividly describes the supernatural phenomena that surrounded our Lord’s death, and is taken directly from Matthew 27:51-52: “Behold the veil of the temple was rent in two from the top even to the bottom: and the earth quaked and the rocks were rent. And the graves were opened and many bodies of the saints that had slept arose.”

These words which portray the destructive power of an earthquake, the tearing of the veil of the temple at the death of Christ, and the new life God brought about amidst that destruction, have special meaning for us this year as we sing our first Tenebrae in our newly restored church. We have experienced first-hand the devastating force of trembling ground and have seen not only buildings but also the very mountains crumble in the grip of its unleashed havoc. We have witnessed our sanctuaries and churches rent from top to bottom, even as our Lord’s body was broken and disfigured. But we have also seen the enduring power of God, often manifested through the kindness and generosity of others, restore what seemed beyond hope of repair, and bring new life from mere ruins. Therefore, this year’s celebration of the Sacred Triduum and Easter was marked with distinctive gratitude for what God has already done for us, and vibrant hope for what He will continue to do for us in the future. Darkness can never triumph over light, for Christ has conquered death.



EMAIL INFO@NURSIA.ORG IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO LEARN ABOUT SPONSORING A SPECIFIC FURNISHING IN THE RESTORED MONASTERY OR CHURCH.



ABOVE: A monk prepares the base that will serve to support a sundial.

BELOW: Birra Nursia continues to arrive at more homes in the U.S. and Europe.



BELOW: On the Feast of St. Benedict, the monks gathered at dawn in the empty Piazza di San Benedetto, imploring the saint's help for Norcia, the world and the Church.



WAYS YOU CAN HELP THE MONKS

For Benefactors in the U.S.A.



PLEASE ADDRESS YOUR CHECK TO:

The Monks of Norcia Foundation
and mail it to:

Monks of Norcia Foundation
10685-B Hazelhurst Dr. #18857
Houston, TX 77043 USA

This foundation is a 501 (c) (3) tax-exempt organization.

For Benefactors in Great Britain



PLEASE ADDRESS YOUR CHEQUE TO:

Friends of San Benedetto Norcia
and mail it to:

c/o Rev. Dom Michael Lang
The Oratory
Brompton Road
London SW7 2RP

OR MAKE A BANK TRANSFER:

Friends of San Benedetto Norcia
Sort Code: 40-52-40

For Benefactors in the European Union



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Account number 00032036

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