

Pomegranate Blossoms

Let us go early to the vineyards,
and see if the vines are in bloom,
If the buds have opened,
if the pomegranates have blossomed;
There will I give you my love.

Song of Songs 7:13

Fruits of Our Monastic Garden

Christ the Bridegroom Monastery
Burton, Ohio

Winter 2017/2018

Volume 7 Issue 3

Encountering Our Dependence

A reflection by Mother Gabriella

This fall I was blessed to host a few of my friends on a weekend-long “moms’ retreat” to prepare for Advent and Christmas. Four of the five women were expecting, so we had our own visual of some very physical reminders of what Advent is about: dependence. The women physically witnessed to the dependence that Jesus had on Mary in the womb and to the dependence we are all called to have on Him, full of expectant joy and ready to carry Him wherever we go, just as a mother carries her unborn child. We prayed together and took time to discuss the beauty of prayer and motherhood, in light of our respective vocations. It was beautiful to be able to look at these women and tell them about the sacrifices of spiritual motherhood, which mirrors their own sacrifices as physical mothers. In turn, their life as wife and mother reminds me of the realness of my relationship with Jesus as my Bridegroom, and my life points to their ultimate fulfillment, which is not in their husbands but in Christ. The retreat was a necessary pause for all of us before we prepare to “nest”—both for Jesus and for the new babies who will be with us very soon!

We also discussed a book called “The Reed of God” by Caryl Houselander, which makes accessible Mary’s maternity as well as the great truth of needing to prepare for Jesus’ birth. In her chapter entitled “Advent,” she says, “The modern world’s feverish struggle for unbridled, often

Left: Mother Gabriella explains the icon she recently painted which is dedicated to her spiritual motherhood.





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unlicensed, freedom is answered by the bound, enclosed helplessness and dependence of Christ—Christ in the womb, Christ in the Host, Christ in the tomb. This dependence of Christ lays a great trust upon us. During this tender time of Advent we must carry Him in our hearts to wherever He wants to go, and there are many places to which He may never go unless we take Him to them.”

As we approach the Nativity, have you reached that point in the Advent season where you are just fed up? Have you become tired of what our world offers you as “happiness” this time of year—presents, parties, and planning every spare moment to make this Christmas “perfect?” Your distaste for the unnecessary “hustle and bustle” is good and right, but instead of despairing in the midst of yet another crazy Christmas season, let it lead you to Jesus, who is waiting for your “yes” to bring Him into your Advent plans. If you have reached that tipping point, you are on the edge of a real incarnational moment, a moment where you can encounter a deeper meaning of Advent: dependence on God. Let your intuition lead you to action; be bold in your dependence on Him. Make time during these final days of preparation, away from everything, for extra prayer, confession and attending services offered at your parish. Trust that even if that last present doesn’t come in, the Incarnation will come. Allow Jesus to free you to encounter Him this Christmas in the silence of your heart amid the noise of the holidays. He is waiting; will you come?

DISCERNMENT RETREAT

Five young women attended our discernment retreat, Oct. 12-15. These women, four from Ohio and one from Canada, enjoyed the opportunity to take time away to grow in their relationship with God through prayer and reflection. Our theme was “As a bridegroom rejoices in his bride, so shall your God rejoice in you” (Isaiah 62:5).

Mother Cecilia spoke about the history and development of monastic life, Sr. Natalia shared her vocation story, Mother Gabriella spoke about spiritual motherhood, Fr. Patrick Anderson (St. Mary, Hudson) spoke about discernment, and Mother Theodora spoke about our monastery and the process of discernment and monastic formation.



To enjoy more photos, visit our Facebook page. Please pray for those who are discerning a possible call to monastic life.



We also watched the movie “Mysteries of the Jesus Prayer,” soaking in the wisdom of the monks and nuns filmed at various monasteries in the Middle East, Eastern Europe and Russia. On Saturday evening, we all spent time in personal prayer by candlelight in the chapel, and the retreatants made use of the opportunity for the Mystery of Holy Repentance (confession). On Sunday morning, Bishop John celebrated the Divine Liturgy.

RECENT TALKS & VIDEOS

- We hosted a retreat day for wives of priests from the Ukrainian Catholic Eparchy of Parma, on Sept. 30. Mother Theodora spoke on “the one thing needful,” and Sr. Iliana spoke about her experiences as the child of a priest. See our Oct. 3 blog post.
- Mother Theodora, Mother Gabriella and Sr. Iliana each gave a talk on prayer during a retreat day for adults on Oct. 20 at St. Augustine parish in Barberton, Ohio.
- A few more episodes were filmed for the cooking show Eastern Hospitality, co-hosted by Mother Gabriella. The episodes will be available at www.easternhospitality.org.

The Bridegroom's Banquet



THANK YOU FOR HELPING
US SURPASS OUR GOAL!

Thanks to the generous support of many, we received over \$82,000 in donations and pledges at our Nov. 11 Bridegroom's Banquet and through pre-event donations. Generous benefactors pledged to match up to \$75,000! We are overwhelmed by the outpouring of support, which will help keep the monastery running in the coming year and will help us to renovate our remaining empty buildings into retreat space.



*Bishop Milan says a few words
and blesses the food*

Some attendees of the banquet attended the Vigil Divine Liturgy at St. Joseph Byzantine Catholic Church in Brecksville, Ohio, the parish which generously hosted our

event. Afterward, we cantored Great Vespers, at which Bishop Milan presided, and then dinner followed in the hall downstairs. About 250 guests enjoyed the evening with us.

We shared a 17-minute video titled, "Silence, Prayer, Poustinia," filmed at the monastery. An opportunity to give followed, and while the donations were being counted, Fr. Ryan Mann (St. Charles Borromeo, Parma) and Fr. Jacob Bearer (St. Francis de Sales, Akron) provided many laughs with three improv comedy skits.



ENJOY OUR VIDEO,



"The Christian life is a real struggle...it's actually a blood and guts battle, especially an interior battle with the reality of sin and temptation that we deal with in our lives every day" (Mother Theodora).

We hope you are inspired by this 17-minute video, produced for our recent Bridegroom's Banquet, in which we share some wisdom that we have learned about silence and prayer. We and a couple of poustinia guests also share some experiences of our time in the poustinia (literally "desert," but referring to our retreat house used for silent retreats). We hope that our video helps you to understand the importance of silence and daily prayer, and perhaps plants a seed for a future retreat!

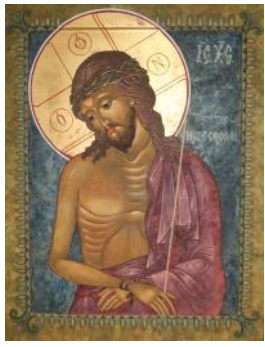
The video was filmed and edited by Bowling Green University film student David Bratnick, parishioner of our Cathedral of St. John the Baptist.

To watch, visit our Nov. 20 blog post, or search "Silence, Prayer, Poustinia" on YouTube.

RENOVATIONS BEGIN



Renovations on the "old farm house" and "former rectory" began on Nov. 27, thanks to Bishop Milan's permission and to our generous Bridegroom's Banquet donors. These buildings have been empty for years, and we are very excited about the retreat space that will be available soon!



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The cave of
the Nativity,
Bethlehem

"The King of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst; you shall fear evil no more." Zeph. 3:15

God becomes man in order to transform us and all creation. By His birth in our human flesh, He dwells among and within us, at this very moment, to share His divine life. No matter what disposition you are presently experiencing, open your heart to receive His profound gift of newness and allow Him to intimately dwell within you.

There seem to be no adequate words to express our gratitude for all the love and support we have graciously received from our Bridegroom and you, our family, friends and benefactors. May your selfless generosity be returned to you a hundredfold! We pray that the coming new year be filled with a newness of God's tender love and desire for you. Be assured of our love and prayers! God is with us!

+Peace, Mother Theodora



On a boat on the Sea of Galilee, July pilgrimage

SAVE THE DATE
2018

Great Canon of
St. Andrew of Crete
Thurs. March 15
(At the Cathedral)

Bridegroom Matins
Wed. March 28

Spring Work Day
Sat. May 26

For more information, please visit our website.