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From Sister Dawn Annette

Lent is a very important liturgical season during which we are called to repentance and conversion. Nevertheless, it is punctuated by several feasts when we can relax our Lenten austerities. This is where Saint Benedict comes in. There are two feasts commemorating Saint Benedict. The Feast of Saint Benedict celebrated on March 21 commemorates the presumed date of the death of Saint Benedict in 547. Although we observe this feast, most monastic communities, including ours, celebrate July 11 as the Solemnity of Saint Benedict since it falls outside of Lent.

We learn what little we know about the life and death of Saint Benedict from what Saint Gregory the Great tells us in his *Dialogues*. Saint Benedict prophesied about his death and ordered that his tomb be opened. Ill with a fever, Benedict had his disciples carry him into the chapel where he received the Body and Blood of our Lord.

Then, supporting his weakened body on the arms of his brethren, he stood with his hands raised to heaven and, as he prayed, breathed his last.

This account illustrates Benedict's strength and determination. More importantly, it conveys his love of the Eucharist. This love carried him from this world to the next. Gregory continues:

That day two monks, one of them at the monastery, the other some distance away, received the very same revelation. They both saw a magnificent road covered with rich carpeting and glittering with thousands of lights. From his monastery it stretched eastward in a straight line until it reached up into heaven. (www.osb.org/gen/greg/)

The revelation received by the monks confirmed Benedict's sanctity and his role as a monastic founder and spiritual master.

We can learn more about Saint Benedict's character and personality from his Rule. He was a man of peace and joy, concerned that no one "may be troubled or vexed in the house of God." He was orderly and practical; he required inventories and arranged for who does the dishes and the laundry. His flexibility and moderation are shown by his allowances for food, drink, and sleep; material goods were to be distributed according to need, considering individual infirmities. Benedict was offended by gossip and slander. He commended kindness, mutual respect, and attentiveness to both young and old. He was honest, direct, and compassionate. He was more concerned about the quality of his monks' observance than he was about his exercise of authority.

Whether we live in a monastic community or a family household, Saint Benedict has much to teach us about how to live a life dedicated to the service of Christ and his Church. The dark, wet days of late winter and early spring will eventually give way to sunshine and flowers. Let us be ready to welcome the new life that is coming.

Sr. Dawn Annette Mills, OSB
Prioress General

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The Benedictine Sisters of Perpetual Adoration are a contemporary monastic community with a distinctive dedication to the Eucharist. We serve the Church through our contemplative prayer, and witness to God's presence in our world through community life, hospitality, and a ministry of the word, in ways uniquely appropriate to our monastery.



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**FROM
THE EDITOR**

Every Sunday my mother took my brother and me somewhere special. Easter Sunday was no exception. I had often been given a new hat for Easter, complete with ribbons tied in a bow and adorned with flowers around its brim. I wore my patent leather shoes. I had white gloves and carried a little purse. I felt very stylish. My brother dressed neatly in a shirt and tie. He tucked a hankie in the pocket of his sports jacket. He looked handsome with his hair slicked back with Brylcreem. We were both ready to venture forth from our relatively quiet Queens neighborhood and travel to bustling Manhattan.

When my mother said we were going to the Easter Parade, I was very excited. Surely, the Easter Bunny, who had already brought us baskets filled with candy, would walk down Fifth Avenue, waving at the crowds. Maybe he would even toss candy to the children. There would be marching bands, floats, and balloons. The mounted police would be out in force riding their beautiful horses. The Easter Parade would be a spring version of the Thanksgiving Day Parade, only with the Easter Bunny instead of Santa Claus.

We took the subway to Fifth Avenue and walked down the avenue to Saint Patrick's Cathedral. Many people had gathered on its front steps. There were plenty of elaborate hats. Many women wore luxurious fur coats. Some families were taking snapshots. But nobody was lining up along the sidewalks to watch the parade. I didn't see a single float. It didn't look much like a parade to me.

I was very disappointed; then, my mother explained to me that this was the Easter Parade: people showing off their Easter finery. I didn't find that very interesting. I perked up when we walked the three blocks to Rockefeller Center. The Channel Gardens were beautiful with their Easter lilies and other floral displays. Bushes were artistically trimmed to look like bunnies. We walked up and down the gardens and through the buildings, peering into the



windows of small, exclusive shops. When we got home, we stopped first at George's Delicatessen to pick up a light supper. It turned out to be a pleasant outing, even without a parade or a glimpse of a real, live Easter Bunny.

I wondered why people like to wear new clothes for Easter. Why do women wear fancy hats? These could be signs that spring has finally come, with warm breezes and sunshine finally chasing away gray clouds. Fluffy yellow chicks and soft bunnies are signs of spring. But fancy new clothes are also signs of spiritual renewal and re-birth which is what Easter is all about.

The prophet Isaiah spoke of new life and renewal when he says:

I will rejoice heartily in the Lord,
my being exults in my God;
For he has clothed me with garments of salvation,
and wrapped me in a robe of justice,
Like a bridegroom adorned with a diadem,
as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. (Isaiah 61:10)

Saint Paul uses clothing as a metaphor when he tells us to "put on the armor of light" and urges us to "put on Christ" (Rm 13:12, 14). Clothing becomes more than fabric; it becomes symbol.

The parade I had anticipated turned out to be imaginary. I knew that the Easter Bunny, the rabbit that delivered baskets of candy, was really my mother. Now I know that if we wear new clothes and don hats decorated with flowers and bows, we do so because Christ is risen from the dead. This is truly cause to celebrate. 🌸

Sr. Sarah Schwartzberg, OSB

The Devil Gets the Hook: *Atonement, Passion, and Levity*

JACOB RIYEFF



Here we are two years in, and the pandemic continues to wear on us, not to mention so many other trying public and private trials and strife. During the first year of COVID, my parish's dads' group continued to meet on Zoom to keep some sense of community and fraternity. Before COVID, we met in person every other week for fellowship and study. We usually read the Scriptures in themed sessions, but we decided that we needed something a bit lighter and more specifically focused on joy and laughter. We turned to the book *Between Heaven and Mirth* by Fr. James Martin, SJ, to see what he could offer on levity in the spiritual life. We came to this decision as we entered into the deeps of a Wisconsin winter heavy with snow and light on sunshine.

The first night was refreshing. As we talked about the role of humor, laughter, and joy in Christian life, we considered different kinds of humor. The conversation turned to how riddles and tricks seemed to fit into the same category as jokes, defined as acts or words intended to provoke humor and levity. Our talk about tricks sparked in my memory a trick that featured in early Christian ideas about the atonement. I tried to explain briefly how Christ's passion was sometimes thought of as a kind of "cosmic trick" in early Christian thought and why that notion had made much spiritual sense to me years ago when I first encountered it.

Atonement refers to Christ's act that led to the renewed unity between God and humans described by Saint Paul in his Letter to the Colossians:

For in him all the fullness was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile all things for him, making peace by the blood of his cross, whether those on earth or those in heaven. (Colossians 1:19-20)

Since at least the second century, theologians have debated about how Christ's sacrifice redeemed humanity. Different answers have been offered for how this mystery of the faith came about and why. Was Christ's crucifixion necessary, or was his incarnation sufficient to reconcile God and humanity? Was it his death or the nature of that death that accomplished our salvation? Could God have simply forgiven humanity without any incarnation or death at all? One key question drives to the heart of the western understanding of the atonement: was the sacrifice on the cross satisfaction for sin paid to God on humanity's behalf, or was it something else?

Saint Anselm tried to answer the question in his eleventh-century work *Why Did God Become Man?* (*Cur Deus Homo?*). Anselm concluded that if humanity was to be restored to life with God, God had to become human, suffer, and die to make satisfaction for the debt that humans owed to God due to sin. This explanation is a particular view of Christ's sacrifice: that Christ had to offer his sacrifice to God

in order to satisfy God's justice by becoming human and dying in humanity's place.

I teach English literature and writing, and I convey to my students that the stories we tell and the ways we tell them matter. Anselm's way of telling the story of the incarnation and passion was a profound shift in looking at this central act of salvation history. It contributed much to the medieval and early modern spirituality of the suffering Christ: the Man of Sorrows who bleeds and bends under the weight of the cross. While I have a special devotion to the passion, this view of Christ's sacrifice can veer into unhealthy fixations focused excessively on violence and sorrow.

If Anselm's story was a major departure, what did it replace? The sacrificial nature of Christ's death on the cross was clear from the beginning because of the way Saint Paul and the author of the Letter to the Hebrews describe it. Nevertheless, the early fathers did not think of that sacrifice solely as satisfaction for humanity's debt. For example, in his commentary on the Book of Job, Saint Gregory the Great notes:

The devil himself . . . tripped us up in the very beginning in our first parents, so he justly holds humans captive, as it were, since they were created with free choice and consented to him who was coaxing them to do what was not right. Humans . . . became debtors to death by their own choice. (17.30.46)

As he meditates on Job 26:12, Gregory insists that sacrifice was the only solution and that only a sinless human could absolve human nature. If God wanted to redeem humanity and maintain justice, he would have to come as a human to offer his life in sacrifice for them.

So far Saint Gregory sounds like Anselm, but then he shifts back to the proud devil of the biblical verse. The devil attacks Christ through temptations but cannot "sneak into the inner self of that victim." He attacks Christ's body instead. In doing so, Gregory writes:

The ancient enemy through his excessive presumption also lost the creature he had acquired by means of the law of unfair persuasion. He boldly went after him in whom there was nothing to match him, and in so doing he lawfully lost the one he held, as it were, rightfully. (17.30.47)

In this story of the crucifixion, the devil has some claim on humans due to their willingness to follow his wiles. They are debtors to death. In coming as a human but having no part in their Fall, Christ nullifies the devil's claims.

In Gregory's *Homilies on the Gospels*, he relates a vivid illustration of this redemption-as-trick. Citing God's question about catching Leviathan with a hook in Job 40:25, Gregory says,

Leviathan...designates that fish-like destroyer of the human race which, when he promised to bestow divinity upon human beings, took away their immortality. He was the cause, in the first human being, of the sin of collusion... On a fishhook, the food is evident, the barb is concealed. The all-powerful Father caught this fish-like creature by means of a fishhook, because he sent his only-begotten Son, who had become a human being, to his death. The Son had both a visible body which could suffer, and an invisible nature which could not. When, through the actions of his persecutors the serpent bit the food of his body, the barb of his divine nature pierced him. . . . It is, then, as if the fishhook got caught in his throat as he was swallowing. . . . Therefore was the destroyer caught by a fishhook, because the cause of his destruction was where he bit. And he lost the mortal human beings whom he rightfully held because he dared to crave the death of one who was immortal, over whom he had no claim. (Homily 25, 195-96)

The retelling of the crucifixion with the monstrous Leviathan as Satan paints a cunning picture of Christ's deeds on the cross, deeds that are comic due to the happy end of the story's central battle. We who suffer have a little laugh at the devil's pride. The passion becomes a trick of cosmic proportions that also illustrates a profound aspect of this pivotal

moment in salvation history. We're in on the joke being played on Satan.

Some theologians, including Anselm, had problems with this way of telling the story of the atonement because of the implications of God deceiving anyone, even the devil. But God wasn't deceiving anyone. The devil brings the trick on himself. If the devil weren't so proud, he might have understood that Christ is "the Messiah, the Son of the Living God" (Mt 16:16). Satan can't take a joke because he takes himself too seriously.

During Lent we are called to focus on the events of Christ's passion and death as a prelude to resurrection. As we consider our need for repentance, we find no cause for gloom. Instructing his monks on Lent, Saint Benedict says in his Rule:

During these days, therefore, we will add to the usual measure of our service something by way of private prayer and abstinence from food or drink, so that each of us will have something above the assigned measure to offer God of his own will with the joy of the Holy Spirit.

Even here in the midst of one's own sacrifices, the follower of Christ should be rejoicing.

The trickiness of the early understanding of the atonement is a passion narrative that might help reconcile these two aspects of the Lenten season. The Christian story is a comic one. In the darkness of sin and death, the devil ultimately gets the hook, and we get beatitude poured into our hearts for eternity. 🌿

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Advice for Any Season



Pessimistic Qoheleth says,
"Better sadness than laughter.
A severe face confers some benefit.
All is vanity."

Jeremiah lamented:
"Curse the day I was born
to live in toil and sorrow
And to end my days in shame".

The psalmist advises,
"Let your heart take courage
and hope in the Lord".

Jesus invites:
"Follow me, for my yoke is easy
and my burden is light."

In hope, John's gospel says,
"God is love, and those who abide in love,
abide in God and God in them".

Paul chants:
"Rejoice in the Lord always,
Again I say, rejoice!"

The psalmist sings:
"Let everything that lives and breathes
give praise to the Lord."

Whose advice do you want to take?

Sr. Therese Marie Furois, OSB
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Saint Joseph

SR. SARAH SCHWARTZBERG, OSB

Many years ago, when I was a junior sister stationed at our Kansas City monastery, the community looked forward to receiving food, mostly baked goods, from the Saint Joseph Table on the day of his feast, March 19. This custom was new to me. In those days, we rarely left the monastery except for medical and dental appointments, and I had never seen a Saint Joseph Table. I only enjoyed the delicious bounty.

The Saint Joseph's Table, also referred to as an altar, is a custom that originated in Sicily and came to the United States with immigrants in the 1800s. A Saint Joseph's Table is usually a three-tiered display covered with white linen tablecloths. The three tiers represent the Holy Trinity and the ascent from earth to heaven. A statue of Saint Joseph is placed on top. The table is decorated with figurines, medals, candles, and flowers. Food, including limes, fava beans, cakes, breads, cookies, and *zeppole*, a fried pastry, is displayed on the table and is given to the poor on the solemnity. Because the feast occurs during Lent, no meat is allowed on the table. Since Joseph was a carpenter, foods containing bread-crumbs, representing sawdust, are served. There may be wine, symbolizing the wedding feast at Cana.

The story goes that Saint Joseph interceded to relieve a severe drought in Sicily. The people prayed to Saint Joseph, their patron saint, promising that, if he brought them rain, they would prepare a large feast in his honor. The rain came, and the people of



Sicily prepared a banquet. Fava beans, also known as broad beans, saved the population from starvation, and their use became a Saint Joseph's Day tradition.

Many saints have had special devotion to Saint Joseph. Among them is Saint Teresa of Avila. She

wrote in her autobiography:

I wish I could convince everyone to be devoted to this glorious saint. I have experienced the innumerable blessings that come through him from God. . . . Year after year, I have made some request of him on his feast day and he has always granted it. If my appeal was twisted in any way, he would always straighten it out for me. (36)

To this day, Saint Joseph is venerated by Carmelites as the principal protector of the Carmelite Order.

Devotion to Saint Joseph is beautiful and meaningful, but like any religious practice, it can sometimes verge on superstition. An example of this is the burial of a statue to hasten the sale of a house or other property. Some individuals bury the statue upside down to make the saint hurry. We can learn authentic devotion to Saint Joseph from an apostolic letter, *Patris Corde, With a Father's Heart*, issued by Pope Francis issued on December 8, 2020, to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the declaration by Pope Pius IX of Saint Joseph as the patron of the universal Church. In this letter, Pope Francis declared the year from December 8, 2020 to December 8, 2021 as a year of Saint Joseph. Although the year is now over, Pope Francis' letter is well worth

reading. Pope Francis aimed to increase our love for Saint Joseph, to encourage us to implore his intercession, and to urge us to imitate his virtues and his zeal. Pope Francis describes Saint Joseph as a beloved father, a tender and loving father, an obedient father, an accepting father, a creatively courageous father, a working father, and a father in the shadows. He concludes the letter with a prayer:

Hail, Guardian of the Redeemer,
Spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary.
To you God entrusted his only Son;
in you Mary placed her trust;
with you Christ became man.
Blessed Joseph, to us too,
show yourself a father
and guide us in the path of life.
Obtain for us grace, mercy, and courage,
and defend us from every evil. Amen.

Why do we pray to Saint Joseph? We do not know much about him; scripture has very little to say about him. During his years of ministry, Jesus was identified as the “son of Joseph” (Lk 3:23, Jn 6:41-42). Aside from this, Joseph is mentioned only in the genealogies and infancy narratives of Matthew and Luke. Mark does not mention Joseph at all. We learn that Joseph was a carpenter when the people of Nazareth, astonished by Jesus’ mighty deeds, ask, “Is he not the carpenter’s son?” (Mt 13:55). It is quite possible that Joseph was a highly skilled and literate artisan.

Joseph paid attention to his dreams and followed them as best he could. Matthew describes three dreams. In the first dream, Joseph is told by an angel:

Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home. For it is through the holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her. She will bear a son and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins. (Matthew 1:20-21)

After Jesus’ birth in Bethlehem, Joseph had a second dream in which an angel tells him:

Rise, take the child and his mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I tell you. Herod is going

to search for the child to destroy him. (Matthew 2:13)

Joseph remained in Egypt with his family until the death of Herod. Then, in a third dream, an angel instructs Joseph:

Rise, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child’s life are dead. (Matthew 2:20)

Joseph, obedient to what he understands is God’s will, protects and guides his young wife and infant son. Matthew mentions Joseph for the last time when he settles with the Holy Family in Nazareth (Mt 2:21-23).

From Luke, we learn that, prior to going to Bethlehem to enroll in the census, Joseph lived in Nazareth (Lk 2:4). Luke does not speak of the flight into Egypt, but he describes two scenes that are not present in Luke’s Gospel: the presentation (Lk 2:22-24) and the finding of the boy Jesus in the Temple (Lk 2:41-51).

Nowhere in the Gospels is Joseph’s death mentioned. Typically, Joseph is pictured as an old man, at least much older than Mary, but we do not know if this is true. He is never mentioned after Jesus’ childhood. Mary is always pictured by herself as a widow. According to tradition, he died peacefully in the arms of Jesus and Mary. But we will have to wait until heaven to find out how and where he died.

What we do know is that Saint Joseph was a just and kind man. He was a man of faith and was obedient to God’s will. He worked hard. He protected and guided his family. As a father, he taught Jesus a skilled trade and possibly how to read and write. He is surely a model of virtue for us. May he intercede for all of us. 🌿

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Easter and Passover Celebrate Victory of Light Over Darkness

RABBI ALLEN S. MALLER



The Passover Seder is a ritual meal that celebrates God's rescue of the oppressed Jewish people from Egypt more than thirty-two centuries ago. The rabbis added an aspect of intellectual freedom to the Seder when they invited the youngest person present to ask four questions because the right to question is the best way to become enlightened. As the Passover Haggadah, a text that has been revised, reprinted, and republished over six thousand times, states, the Passover is a journey "from sorrow to joy, from mourning to festivity, from darkness to light, and from bondage to redemption."

Easter also offers believers a victory of life over death and light over darkness. The light that comes out of darkness is not a natural light. It is the light of enlightenment which also is embodied in the following ancient narrative, transmitted orally in both Arabic and Hebrew throughout many centuries, and finally written down in several versions in the mid nineteenth century.

Two brothers who had inherited land from their father, divided the land in half so each one could farm his own section. One brother's land was mostly on an upper

hillside; the other brother's land was mostly in a valley on the other side of the hill.

Over time, the older brother married and had four children while the younger brother was still not married. One year there was very little rain, and the crop was very meager. This was at the beginning of a long draught that would turn the whole valley into an arid, treeless desert where grain did not grow and all the springs dried up.

The younger brother lay awake one night praying. He thought, "My brother has a wife and four children to feed, and I have no children. He needs more grain than I do, especially now when grain is scarce." That night the younger brother went to his silo, gathered a large bundle of wheat, and climbed the hill that separated the two farms and over to his brother's farm. He left his wheat in his brother's silo and returned home, feeling pleased with himself.

Earlier that very same night, the older brother was also lying awake praying for rain. He thought, "In my old age, my wife and I will have our grown children to take care of us as well as grandchildren to enjoy while my brother will probably have no children. He should at least sell more grain from the fields now, so he can provide for himself in his old age." That night, the older brother also gathered a large bundle of wheat, climbed the hill, left it in his brother's silo, and returned home.

The next morning, the younger brother was surprised to see the amount of grain in his barn seemed unchanged. "I must not have taken as much wheat as I thought," he said. "Tonight I'll be sure to take more."

That same morning, the older brother standing in his barn was thinking the same thoughts. After night fell, each brother gathered a greater amount of wheat from his barn and in the dark, secretly delivered it to his brother's barn.

The next morning, the brothers were again puzzled and perplexed. “How can I be mistaken?” each one thought. “There’s the same amount of grain here as there was before. This is impossible! Tonight I’ll make no mistake; I’ll take two large sacks.”

The third night, more determined than ever, each brother gathered two large sacks of wheat from his barn, loaded them onto a cart, and slowly pulled his cart through the fields and up the hill to his brother’s barn.

At the top of the hill, with only the light from the moon, each brother noticed a figure in the distance. When the two brothers recognized the form of the other brother and the load he was pulling behind, they both realized what had happened. Without a word, they dropped the ropes of their carts, ran to each other and embraced.

Christians and Jews believe the hill is Jerusalem. Muslims believe the valley is Mecca. I believe they are both right, and, God willing, someday everyone will see both cities and their sanctuaries as a pair of lungs that are central to humanity’s spiritual light and inspiration by and in connection to the One God of Abraham, Ishmael, and Isaac. As the Qur’an (*Surah* 5:8) states:

Believers, be steadfast in the cause of God and bear witness with justice. Do not let your enmity for others turn you away from justice. Deal justly; that is nearest to being God-fearing.

May the light and inspiration of this ancient tale, transmitted orally for so many centuries in both Arabic and Hebrew, help Christians, Jews, and Muslims overcome the many dark, hate filled actions occurring in today’s world. As the Qur’an states: “Good and evil deeds are not equal. Repel evil with what is better; then you will see that one who was once your enemy has become your dearest friend” (*Surah* 41:34). And as the Bible states:

On that day there shall be a highway from Egypt to Assyria; the Assyrians shall enter Egypt, and the Egyptians enter Assyria, and the Egyptians shall

worship with the Assyrians. On that day Israel shall be a third party with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth, when the Lord of hosts gives this blessing: “Blessed be my people Egypt, and the work of my hands Assyria, and my heritage, Israel.” (Isaiah 19:23-5).

The great Canadian Jewish folksinger Lenard Cohen wrote a song based on a thirteenth century book of Jewish mysticism entitled the *Zohar*. The *Zohar* describes a dialogue between two rabbis who are both idealists, but one sees an oil lamp half empty, and the other sees it half full. It does not make any difference to the lamp if it is half full or half empty, but it makes all the difference to us in this world.

Rabbi Isaac said:

The primordial light created by God was hidden away until the world will be fragrant, and in total harmony. Until that world arrives, God’s light is stored and hidden away.

Rabbi Judah responded:

If the light were completely hidden, the world could not exist for even a moment! Rather, it is hidden and sown like a seed that every year sprouts seeds and fruits whereby the world is sustained. Every single day, a ray of that light shines into the world, keeping everything alive. With that ray [of light and hope] God feeds the whole world. (*Zohar* 1: 31b–32a).

Cohen’s song goes this way:

The birds they sing, at the break of day
Start again, I heard them say.
Don’t dwell on what has passed away
Or what is yet to be.
Yes, the wars, they will be fought again
The holy dove she will be caught again
Bought, and sold, and bought again
The dove is never free.

Ring the bells that still can ring
Forget your perfect offering
There is a crack, a crack in everything
That’s how the light gets in. (www.azlyrics.com) 🌸

Sing



And so for me ...

save – that for me and thee,

O fellow traveler and pilgrim
there tolls the muted knell of now and life
the living in the here, the present,
anticipating the not yet.
while grounded in the sometimes
quiet desperation of today.²

The acknowledgment that as for him

so, too, for us

that resurrection in all its glory

does not stand alone

that empty tomb of Easter morn

is dénouement of Calvary, cross, and crucifixion!

It is the blood of Golgotha that sings in

the risen Christ of Glory Easter

And so, yes, the Risen Christ of Glory Easter sings

to me,

to me,

He sings to me

to join my Golgotha to his

to let my blood, my suffering mingle

and become one with his

as He sings my way to Easter.

He wants his Golgotha, the once and always,

to meet mine, the here, the now, the maybe:

infirmities and inequities of age.

O Lord, I would rejoice in your resurrection
I would claim it as mine own
I would gleefully wave palms of exultation
Spreading cloaks of gladness before the Lord
Laughing, singing, dancing to the calliope
of overflowing hearts of happiness and
gratitude, exuberance and cheer.

Amen, amen, I say to you "We are Easter people
and alleluia is our song!" sings the great Augustine¹
and we, full-throated, doth reply in equal measure
of rapture, innocence and longing:

"Yes, amen, and so be it!

"Yes! Amen!

"And so it is,

And so for me."

My Soul

The list is myriad and without end, without end
as is his compassion, love, and
endless offering of his Holy Sacrifice.

Oh, yes, and yes, we are Easter people, Saint Augustine,
for we, too, live and offer up our Golgotha
joining ours to his,
so that bound to him on the altar of our desolation
we may rise with him

to the joy and newness of Easter trumpet ...
that as Jesus the Crucified shines forth now
as the Christ and Lord of Glory
so, too, we may sanctify our sufferings
in the baptism of his blood
and know full measure the alleluia of his redemption.

"And the Word was made flesh
And dwells among us."

Amen!

Alleluia!

Rev. John P. Davis

ENDNOTES

¹ *St. Augustine (430), Father & Doctor of the Church, Bishop of Hippo Regius in North Africa. Today some scholars have difficulty in finding the exact source of this quote, which has been attributed to St. Augustine from time immemorial. The citation may have been lost over time or simply not discovered yet in the extant vast body of his work. In any event, he certainly "speaks the thought in other words", as is evident, for example, in The Letters of St. Augustine – Letter # 55.*

² *Henry David Thoreau (1849), Civil Disobedience and Other Essays. The full quote reads: "The mass of men lead lives of quite desperation."*



Childhood Experiences of Life and Death, Death and Life

REV. JOHN HAGEMANN, OSB

I did not realize the significance of many of my childhood experiences on our farm until later in life. Perhaps the birthing of calves, piglets, kittens, and certainly, the arrival of the day-old baby chicks were among the most memorable experiences; however, there was another striking experience that was both the exhilaration of new life and the sadness of death. I had quite an experience with both at the age of ten. Linearly, the experience was backwards, first the resurrection: new life, and then death and crucifixion, so to speak.

For some reason, I was enamored with ducks. My Aunt Gertrude, one of my dad's sisters, always raised ducks, and I thought it would be fun if I could do the same. She was most willing to give me some fertile eggs, but I would have to figure out how I was going to hatch those eggs.

Another aunt on my mother's side of the family, Bernadine (Bernie), who always seemed to have a setting hen in the chicken coop, told me she would give me one of her setting hens to hatch my duck eggs. The setting hen would be a type of surrogate mother for my ducklings. And that she was, a good mother to babies who were not her own but became her own. She knew their voices and they knew hers. It didn't matter that she was a chicken and they were ducks.

I was all set. I made a cozy home for my setting hen, also sometimes called a "cluck," in the hay loft of our barn. I made a little space out of straw bales; it was cozy and warm.

A setting hen does not move off her eggs very often, and so the small space was fine for her. Nor do setting hens eat or drink much while on hatching duty. She was totally on task. I was the one who was impatient, curious, and anxious. I was informed that the whole process would take nearly four weeks. It seemed like eternity. However, when it got near the fourth week, I could see little cracks and pecks in the shell of the eggs. I thought that it would be good for me to help the duckling in breaking the shell by picking away myself at the shell. I played the role of mid-wife. I did this with several eggs. A duckling came forth but was too immature and weak to survive. In the end, there were four ducklings that survived, and it was such a wonderful experience to have gone from just eggs to a live animal, fuzzy and ever so cute. It was so Easter-like!

Our family always had Easter eggs on Easter Sunday. We spent time coloring them several days before Easter. I always knew that eggs were associated with Easter. Even the chick breaking through the shell was a bit like Jesus bursting forth from the tomb. The

process of the chick breaking through was not sudden; one would not call it bursting.

My ducks were my friends and pets. There were times that my mother did not appreciate them because they love water. They would mess up the water feeders for the chickens. But she was willing to put up with that for me to have my ducks.

We never spoke about what would eventually happen with my ducks. While I helped butcher chickens by the hundreds, I never thought about the fact that one day we might butcher my ducks. But then, as things happen, I did not have to worry about that.

During corn planting season, my dad often parked the tractor with the planter near the house during lunch time. He had an attachment on the planter that put fertilizer into the ground at the same time he planted the corn. Some of it spilled out on the ground. The ducks had free range of the place. They ate the chemical and perhaps thought it was tasty. They ate. They died.

That day will always remain clear in my mind. The ducks sat peacefully under the ash tree that we climbed in and played in for many years. Their necks were folded back into their backs. It was the position that they often took when they rested under that ash tree. But they had died. They looked so beautiful, totally at peace. I reached down to pick up one of them as I did many times. It was cold and stiff; *rigor mortis* had set in.

I did not cry. I was puzzled about what had happened. My dad figured it out very quickly. He felt so bad, so very bad. He knew how the whole duck



experience was such a great thing for me. Both he and I knew that we would soon start over again. There would be more ducks and more new life. My dad and I buried the ducks and moved on. But the coming of life and the passing was obvious and real.

My dad had played a very important role in my life with the passing of my ducks. He was genuinely moved with pity and compassion. He felt bad about what had happened, and he took responsibility. In many ways, his attention and manner gave me the means to deal with the situation and to realize that death was not the final word. I did not realize this until much later in life. Whether my dad was aware of how he came across to me does not matter. What matters is that he gave me the capability to move on after death. It was wonderful, indeed!

Death and life. Life and death. This is what the passion of Jesus is all about. Many people have experiences of both all the time. We all need to remember that in the sorrows and disappointments of passing, eventually life wins out. It might not always look like that, but in the end it happens. The Paschal Mystery is played out in many ways in our lives. We have but to be aware of these experiences of everyday life. 🌿

Based on 1 Corinthians 1:23-26; 1 John 1:1, 2; 2 Timothy 2:11-13.

Fr. John Hagemann is a monk of Mount Michael Abbey in Elkhorn, Nebraska. Presently, he serves as the prior and as campus minister of the school. He loves gardening and quilting. A good part of the year, Fr. John hosts a Farmer's Market at the abbey's guest house area.

was telling a lie, and they decided to prove it. They selected three friends to go to Wanda's home one Sunday morning when her family was sure to be at church. The three were to sneak into the house, take pictures, and then come back and report.

When the three spotted the house, they got scared. The house was run down and in a scary neighborhood. Immediately, the three ran back to their homes. When the students returned to school on Monday, to their surprise, although the new student was missing, she had left a gift for each of her classmates. Around the room were one hundred elegant paper dolls wearing fashionable dresses. The paper dolls were pinned to a clothesline, and each dress was worn by a student in the class. Even more amazing than the dresses was the stunning artistic drawing of each student.

"Is she coming back?" one student asked tearfully. "No," the teacher said, "they left over the weekend. They did not say where they were going. Wanda asked that I put up the clothesline. I think she meant for each of you to have the dress she made for you."

The students were terribly embarrassed and sad. "She really liked us!" they said among themselves. They tried to find out where Wanda's family had moved but were unable to do so. Sometimes the students cried together. Sometimes they shared their paper dolls with one another. But they always agreed together that they would never be mean again and leave another student out of their group.

"I tell you this story, although I am not clear on the details," Moira's mother told her, "because when I was in high school, I wanted to be with the popular girls, even if it meant leaving other girls out. It was a while before I learned that my behavior was mean and cruel."

Another evening, Moira's mother told her about how Jesus chose to be with the lepers, the blind and lame, and the downtrodden. When he arose from the dead, he went first to Mary Magdalene whom he had converted from very sinful ways.

"I always find that Jesus' choice of Mary Magdalene when he arose from the dead was a powerful statement to me. I would have confronted the guards and gone to the Pharisees. I would tell them that they crucified the King of the Universe! There is so much to learn from Jesus," Moira's mother said. "Now, I reflect that Jesus is pure love, and I ask myself what it really means to be love and mercy."

Moira and her mother were planning Moira's birthday party. "I'm afraid," said Moira's mother, "that we can only afford to invite ten of your classmates. We can send the invitations through the mail so that it is not offensive to those we can't afford to invite. We can address the invitations tomorrow."

Moira looked pensive. "Mom, there is a group in my class who have never been invited to a birthday party. I hang with them on the playground. They are the ones I want to invite."

The party was a success. Cake and pop, treats, and playing at the nearby park were memorable. The presents were cans of food to be delivered to their church's canned food drive.

As the party ended, each guest sported a balloon tied to her wrist. Their laughter carried to the waiting cars, and the experience of bonding with one another became the beginning of a new relationships. Moira's mother remembered the words of the teacher about Moira's social awareness.

Later that evening, after a very tired Moira went to bed and thought about her mother's story which was told about her own middle school birthday party, her parents thought about her future and the gifts God had given to her for others. They prayed, "Thank you, God, for our children and their gifts. May they always bring you honor, glory, and praise through their thoughts, words, and deeds. Amen." ❁

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Sister Pascaline Coff, OSB

A Testimonial

ABBOT JAMES WISEMAN, OSB

Anyone who has read the account of Sister Mary Pascaline Coff's life that was published by her monastic community on the occasion of her death on December 16, 2021 is aware of the many different ways in which she was of service to others. In her own Benedictine community, she was at various times the postulant director, novice director, subprioress, prioress, and even prioress general of her Congregation, not to mention being foundress and first superior of Osage Monastery+Forest of Peace in Sand Springs, Oklahoma. In this testimonial, I will focus on Sister Pascaline's outstanding work in promoting interreligious dialogue.

How did Sister Pascaline become so heavily involved in such dialogue? It came as a result of her having served for six years as prioress general, for the late 1960s and early 1970s were tumultuous years of rapid change in the Catholic Church in the aftermath of the Second Vatican Council. As her sisters have written of Sister Pascaline, during this time of rapid change "she showed a deep love for the congregation struggling with difficult changes that she courageously initiated." That deep love was understandably taxing, so after serving that six-year term as head of her congregation, she felt the need for personal renewal and received permission for what she called "the life-changing experience" of living a year in Bede Griffiths' ashram in South India.

Why go halfway around the world from Clyde, Missouri? Sister Pascaline gave the reason: "I looked to the East ... not for God's power so much as for consciousness of his presence, for deeper levels of consciousness of divine love." During that year she experienced how the riches of spiritual life are to be found not only within Christianity, whose mystical tradition she already knew and revered, but also in other religions. Upon returning to the States, she took a leading role in helping found the North American Board for East-West Dialogue in 1978, for which she was the first executive secretary. When

I later joined that board, later called Monastic Inter-religious Dialogue, and was eventually chosen to be its chair, four of us Benedictines were invited to visit Tibetan Buddhist monasteries in both Tibet and India in 1995. Sister Mary Margaret Funk, then our executive secretary, and I readily agreed that one of the other two in our group should be Sister Pascaline. For us, this was a no-brainer, for she was already familiar with some of those monasteries from earlier trips to that part of the world. Beyond that expertise, she had the personal warmth and sensitivity that would foster not merely communication but communion.

Sister Pascaline's loving personality helped make this a very enriching experience not only for the other three of us Benedictines but also for every Buddhist nun and monk we met while abroad, including a memorable hour with the Dalai Lama at his residence in Dharamsala in northern India. The next year, 1996, we were all together again at the first Gethsemani Encounter, where Sister Pascaline gave an opening address entitled *How We Reached This Point*, a survey of the major events in East-West dialogue that paved the way for that encounter, which has become a reference point for all that has evolved in interreligious dialogue since then. Looking back on her life of dialogue, Sister Pascaline concluded an article in 2018 with the following words, which are a beautiful summary of what she modeled for all of us:

When irritation and inconvenience turn into sacrament from sacrifice, when all our stages of consciousness are completely transformed by the purifying fires of divine love, each blossoms into a gift of surpassing wisdom with which we in turn are sacraments of divine compassion in this our day, awakened and over-flowing.

May this wonderful woman now rest in the presence of the Lord whom she served all her life. 🌸

Abbot James Wiseman, OSB is the abbot of Saint Anselm's Abbey in Washington, D.C.



Sister Mary Pascaline Coff, OSB

January 20, 1927 — December 16, 2021

Sister Mary Pascaline Coff was born Margaret Mary on January 20, 1927, in Saint Louis, Missouri to Edward Joseph Coff and Agnes Newsham Coff. She had three older sisters and two adopted brothers. During the Depression, tragedy hit when Margaret Mary's aunt and uncle died within hours of each other during an influenza epidemic, leaving two orphaned boys. Her parents legally adopted the nephews into their family. As a child, she enjoyed basketball, riding horses, going downtown with her mother, and road trips with her father.

Margaret Mary felt called to religious life while in high school, but her parents urged her to delay entering. She attended Fontbonne College in Saint Louis. After graduation, she worked in public relations at Webster College. She appreciated being able to pray in their chapel each day. "The old struggle came back," she said. She decided that her heart belonged to Christ.

Margaret Mary visited the Benedictine Sisters' monasteries in Clyde and Kansas City, and knew it was where she belonged. "I was deeply devoted to the Sacred Heart and to Christ in the Eucharist," she said. "I wanted to be with others in community who also loved the Blessed Sacrament."

Margaret Mary entered on June 3,

1949, made her first profession on May 13, 1951, and her perpetual vows on May 17, 1956. At first, she was disappointed with the name given her, Sister Mary Pascaline; she had hoped to be given a name related to the Sacred Heart. Then she realized there was a connection; the name Pascaline represented the greatest of all Christ's mysteries, the paschal mystery.

As part of the changes before the 1962-1965 Second Vatican Council, Sisters Pascaline and Matthias Igoe studied theology at Saint Mary's University in Indiana. Both sisters earned doctoral degrees in 1959. Upon completing her studies, Sister Pascaline was appointed novice director, serving in this position until 1968, when she was elected prioress general. The six years of her administration were times of rapid change in the Church. She showed a deep love for the Congregation as it struggled with difficult changes that she initiated.

After Sister Pascaline completed her term as prioress general, she served as prioress of our Kansas City monastery until 1976, when she requested and was given permission to spend a year with Father Bede Griffiths, OSB Cam., at his ashram in South India. Upon her return, she received permission to establish a monastic ashram in Sand Springs, Oklahoma. For almost three decades, the small community welcomed religious seekers and hosted retreats for people of many faiths.

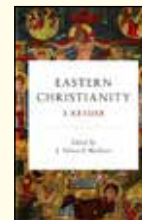
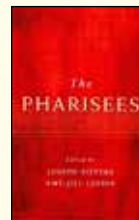
Sister Pascaline was co-founder and first executive secretary of the North American Board for East-West Dialogue (NABEWD), which later became Monastic Interreligious Dialogue (MID). She was editor of its newsletter for its first decade. She coordinated eight dialogue exchanges with Tibetan monks and nuns both in exile and in Tibet. She was a trustee and secretary for the Bede Griffiths Trust. Over the years, Sister Pascaline found herself in Japan, Korea, Tibet, France, Switzerland, Germany, Belgium, Canada, and Mexico.

Sister Pascaline was dedicated to monastic life and to Christ in the Eucharist. "Monastic life was a surprise gift that unfolded over the years. I have loved its focus on inner and outer transformation and the call to the breakthrough to ever deeper levels of consciousness, with a community of those with similar goals," she said.

After suffering a serious fall in 2015, Sister Pascaline moved from the Tucson monastery to Our Lady of Rickenbach Healthcare Center at Clyde. She kept in touch with many friends throughout the world until her health declined. Sister Pascaline died peacefully on December 16, 2021. She is survived by her monastic family, nieces and nephews and many friends. Her funeral liturgy and burial were held at the Our Lady of Rickenbach Chapel and Mount Calvary Cemetery in Clyde on December 18, 2021.



BOOK REVIEWS



COENOBIMUM: REFLECTIONS ON MONASTIC COMMUNITY, by Michael Casey, OCSO, Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2021, 224 pp, \$19.95 pb.

Michael Casey, OCSO, has been a monk of Tarrawarra Abbey, Australia, since 1960. A prolific writer and a frequent speaker, he has conducted retreats and workshops on every continent except Antarctica. He is known to many of our sisters. It came as no surprise that his latest book was chosen for table reading. More surprising is that the choice met with no protest, nor did the reading provoke complaint. Choosing books or articles for table reading is always a sensitive matter, since we have at least as many preferences as we have sisters.

The title *Coenobium* is a Latin word derived from a Greek term meaning “the common life.” More specifically, it refers to monastic communities that live under a rule and an abbot. Saint Benedict refers to cenobites as the strongest kind of monk, but being human, cenobites also have their foibles. With his many years of experience, Casey knows them all. Our sisters found his book down-to-earth and practical; it often evoked laughter or a knowing smile. The first chapter begins, “Those of us who live in a monastic community quickly learn to develop a tolerance for all sorts of odd behavior” (7). Casey affirms the value and beauty of ordinary and imperfect communities.

Casey includes chapters on community as church, common prayer, *lectio divina* or sacred reading, common work, self-restraint, self-truth, and fellowship. He acknowledges the challenges as monastic communities move into the future. He invites his readers to a deeper encounter with the Divine through our relationships with others. His observations apply to all who seek to follow a spiritual path.

Sr. Sarah Schwartzberg, OSB

THE PHARISEES, edited by Joseph Sievers and Amy-Jill Levine, Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2021, 506 pp., \$54.99 hc.

The Pharisees have been vilified and misunderstood since the birth of Christianity, yet, because of New Testament stereotypes and polemics, few know or understand their origins, beliefs, history, or place in society. Over the centuries, the Pharisees have been presented by Christians as legalistic, money-loving hypocrites. For Jews, the Pharisees are respected teachers who helped Judaism survive the destruction of the Second Temple and are responsible for the development of Rabbinic Judaism.

Here, at last, is a collection of multi-disciplinary essays that corrects the negative stereotypes that have led to antisemitic prejudices, which have often infiltrated the preaching and teaching of the Church. The essays, written by leading scholars, were initially presented at a 2019 conference, entitled *Jesus and the Pharisees: An Interdisciplinary Reappraisal*, sponsored by the Pontifical Biblical Institute. The essays cover such topics as the origins of the Pharisees, the meaning of the name Pharisee, the Pharisaic concern for the Jewish laity, purity practices, depictions of Pharisaic practices and beliefs in the New Testament, the relationship of Jesus and Paul to the Pharisees, and the representations of the Pharisees in art, film, passion plays, and Christian educational resources. An address given by Pope Francis to the conference participants is found as an appendix to the volume.

I found this collection to be a breath of fresh air. The extent and depth of the essays are outstanding. Most are well-written, and accessible to non-specialists. Pope Francis’ short address is remarkable and most welcome. I wish it would become required reading for seminarians, priests, and religious education instructors.

Sr. Sarah Schwartzberg, OSB

EASTERN CHRISTIANITY: A READER, edited by J. Edward Walters, Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2021, 439 pp, \$55.00 hc.

Many of us grew up thinking of Christians in two categories: Catholic and Protestant. We may have expanded our awareness to include Greek or Russian Orthodox believers. We rarely think of the various ancient traditions still existing in the Middle East and in the vast diaspora of their members. This new reader provides an excellent introduction to these little-known churches. It includes English translations of Syriac, Armenian, Georgian, Arabic, Coptic, and Ethiopic Christian texts from late antiquity to the early modern period. Many of these significant texts are appearing here in English for the first time.

Each section includes an informative historical introduction and bibliography, which invites further investigation. Similarly, each text is preceded by a brief introduction and bibliography of texts, editions, and studies. The texts include histories, doctrinal teachings, hagiography, homilies, hymns, and liturgical materials. A subject index and an index of scripture and other ancient texts are found at the end of the volume.

I found the introductions very helpful in understanding the linguistic, cultural, and literary traditions that the texts represent. I found it easier to understand and appreciate the introductions than the texts themselves, some of which are rather obscure. However, many of the texts are accessible, such as the *Syriac Life of Mary of Egypt* (104-122).

I have not read this volume straight through. Rather, I have been browsing and taking time with it. It is an excellent resource for students and for anyone interested in looking beyond borders, even just to see what is on the other side.

Sr. Sarah Schwartzberg, OSB

Community news

Fall Fest Celebrates Second Year



Monasterycreations.com hosted the Second Annual Fall Fest last autumn, offering a variety of holiday-related products and gift boxes along with customer favorites. As part of the event, the Benedictine Sisters donated a portion of the proceeds to two local food pantries: the Ministry Center in Maryville, Missouri, and the Stanberry, Missouri, Ministerial Alliance. “The COVID pandemic originally moved our annual fall sale online in 2020, and our customers responded so beautifully in their support of us,” Sister Cathleen Marie Timberlake said. “Making this an annual event seemed a perfect way to continue offering our holiday-themed products and also help those in need.”

Program Honors Lay Employees

The Benedictine Sisters are celebrating gratitude with a new employee recognition program. “We are honoring employees who go above and beyond during their day,” said Amber Otto, human resources generalist. “When a sister or an employee sees them doing something great, their name can be entered into a monthly drawing for a special reward.”



The program began last October and has already received multiple notifications of good deeds observed in and around the monastery. Winners will receive a gift card for local businesses or a variety of other appreciation gifts. “We hope to focus on positivity in times of doubt and trouble and know that together we can make a difference,” Otto said.

Reclaimed Materials Transformed

It’s no secret that Sister Sean Douglas is a whiz in the wood shop. Over the years, she has crafted a multitude of beautiful objects reclaimed from a previous life. This is her latest creation (see photo on right) and is based on a design found near the side altars in the monastery’s Adoration Chapel.

The piece includes recycled maple wood flooring, dating back to 1917, glass from around 1904, and black walnut lumber salvaged from our own trees. It is simply beautiful to see God’s bounty receive new life at the hands of our sister.





St. Benedict understood the importance of the role of community in religious life and provided his Rule to help imperfect people from different backgrounds live together peacefully.

In this new series, we will showcase the various works within the monastery that help the community live together as one as Saint Benedict instructed.

Sister Seamstress Stitches Together Prayer and Work for Community



Sister Marie-Jona Yoo views her role as seamstress as a great way to serve her community.

In a quiet room tucked away in a corner of the second floor of the monastery, the only sound is the soft, rhythmic whirring of a sewing machine. Even on a cloudy afternoon, the room is still bright, thanks to tall windows that let in the late afternoon light. A crucifix adorns one wall, a couple of large tables fill most of the space, and a seamstress mannequin stands at attention to one side. This is the sewing room where

Sister Marie-Jona Yoo spends several hours each day. It has been one of her assigned community tasks for three years and one that keeps her engaged. She leans over the sewing machine, light gray hair tucked neatly into her veil, and carefully guides the material past the needle.

“I make what our sisters ask for, like habits, veils, dresses, and pajamas,” Sister Marie-Jona said. She added, “and aprons, refectory table runners for special occasions, altar cloths, and the things that need mending, such as old habits, kitchen towels, and more.”

It’s a job that’s important to the daily flow of community life. Not much gets thrown away here. Sisters don’t spend much time or money shopping in stores, and they are dedicated to repairing and recycling materials to increase their longevity.

Growing up in South Korea, Sister Marie-Jona learned the basics of sewing from her mother. It wasn’t something she envisioned doing for a living until her early twenties. She took classes at a fashion academy to learn about designs and pattern-making for women’s dresses. Enjoying the work, she dreamed of running her own dress shop. Her mother owned a building in a city and let Sister Marie-Jona open a dress shop there. However, she was a little nervous about working in a large city so she moved to a small town to open her shop, to ease into the business, and to learn the ropes first.

Even though it was a small town, there were several opportunities for work, including making women’s dresses and hundreds of middle and high school girls’ uniforms, which weren’t sold commercially. “That’s how I gained experience and learned a lot about making dresses,” she said. “There were times, when making school uniforms close to a deadline, I and other employees stayed overnight for several days at a time.” She laughed and added, “But that was OK back then. I was young and didn’t get tired.”



Sister Marie-Jona enjoys sewing aprons, many of her own design, which she sells on the Congregation's e-commerce site, monasterycreations.com.

“By God’s providence, I met a young woman in that small town who was going to enter a Benedictine monastery. I heard of the word “Benedictine” for the first time in my life,” she said. “Years later, I didn’t open a new shop in the city. Instead, I joined a Benedictine monastery in South Korea.”

After she entered religious life, God provided her with a good opportunity to share her dress-making experiences. She was assigned to be the manager of the Self-Reliance Center for physically disabled women that was run by the monastery. There were about ten women at that time, living together and sewing school athletic uniforms for their living. Hiring a tailor and two skilled seamstresses, she worked for them for several years.

“I didn’t do much sewing myself in Korea, usually creating designs and making patterns instead,” she said. “I enjoyed the creative part of it, thinking about what I could make with the fabric when I saw it. Now I am sewing dresses myself and getting more skilled at it.”

Later, Sister Marie-Jona stayed over a year with the Benedictine Sisters at their monastery in Tucson, Arizona. She learned more about making albs by working with Sister Mary Jane Romero in the sisters’ liturgical vestment department. Sister Marie-Jona chuckles at the memory,

“Sewing is prayerful, manual work. I am happy to serve my sisters through this work.”
— Sister Marie-Jona Yoo

“But robes aren’t too difficult to sew.” She waves her arms and mimes wearing a big robe. “They are very roomy.”

When Sister Marie-Jona found herself managing the sewing room at the Clyde monastery in 2019, she knew she had more to learn. “The sisters may have thought I was more proficient than I really was before I came here,” she laughed. She turned to YouTube for help. She often watches videos to learn new techniques or to refresh a skill. “I don’t make the same thing every day, so sometimes I need a reminder on how to make a collar or a pocket,” she said. “I like to make things look nice.”

Sewing provides Sister Marie-Jona the opportunity to pair a skill with her religious calling of prayer and service for others. “Sewing is prayerful, manual work,” she said. “I am happy to serve my sisters through this work.”

As anyone who sews knows, sewing can be frustrating.

“When I sew something wrong, I have to rip it out and

do it all over again,” she

said. “However, it is a good

lesson as well. It reminds

me to be patient, not to

hurry, to concentrate.”

Another challenge is often

finding the right material

at a good price in the rural

area the monastery calls

home. “Here, in the middle

of a cornfield, it’s hard to find good material,” she said.

Continued on back cover



Sometimes it’s a challenge to find quality material at a good price, according to Sister Marie-Jona, who serves as the seamstress for the Benedictine Sisters.

Sister Seamstress Stitches Together Prayer and Work for Community (cont'd)

“You can’t feel material when shopping on the internet, and wholesale places in the city are so big without a catalog. It’s hard to find just what you need.”



At the suggestion of a friend, Sister Marie-Jona began making aprons to sell on the Sisters’ e-commerce website, monasterycreations.com. “I thought it would be a nice way to connect with and serve people outside the monastery, and my

friend was my first customer,” Sister Marie-Jona said with a smile. “Since then, I can barely keep them in stock.”

Because she only makes aprons when she doesn’t have other community projects to complete, they are added to the online store sporadically, two or three aprons at a time. “I’m amazed at how many people look at our website and order the aprons. They are from all over the United States,” she said. “Whenever a new apron is

added to the website, it sells out quickly. I appreciate our customers.”

Creating the aprons, utilizing good material, and quality design and stitching are important to Sister Marie-Jona. In many ways, she hasn’t changed from those early days in her dress shop, creating new designs and tweaking old ones. “I’m often thinking, ‘How can I make this better? How can I make it more comfortable for people to wear?’” she said. It’s that spirit of creativity, paired with a love for helping people inside and outside her community, that makes Sister Marie-Jona’s work so very special.

For more information about Sister Marie-Jona’s aprons, please visit www.monasterycreations.com.

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