

From This Holy Mountain

A Publication of the Dominican Nuns of St. Dominic's Monastery - Linden, Virginia - Winter 2022 Issue



"Let Your steadfast love,
O Lord, be upon us,
as we place our hope in You."

Psalm 33:22



*D*ear Friends,

The darkest hour, it is said, is just before the dawn. The shepherds watching their flocks by night must have known this hour well. The contemplative nun knows it, too, as she keeps vigil for the Bridegroom. And the young mother caring for her newborn child, and the nurse with her patients, and the watchman at his post! Each of us in our own way has seen the darkest hour of night, and each also has some experience of the dark hours that come to every human life.

What sustains us through these moments is the unshakeable hope of our Christian faith: the confidence that dawn will come, indeed, that it has already come with the birth of Christ.

*In the tender compassion of our God
the dawn from on high shall break upon us,
to shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death,
and to guide our feet into the way of peace.*

As the sun rises each morning, the Church sings these words of Zechariah and in the evening we chant the canticle of Our Lady: “He has come to the help of His servant Israel, for He has remembered His promise of mercy.” By taking on human flesh within the womb of the Virgin Mary, the Sun of Justice

has entered our world and, indeed, our very lives. He has entered into our darkness, come to be our Light.

“You shall call His name Jesus,” said the angel, “for He shall save His people from their sins.” This Christmas we call upon Jesus with renewed hope, not despite our hearts’ and world’s darkness, but because of it: because we need His mercy. It is for this that Christ was born, and for this that we hope and pray. Truly, as Saint Peter said, “there is cause for rejoicing here!”

Know that you and your families remain in our prayers day and night. It is your faithful support that makes our contemplative life possible. In gratitude, we will be remembering you and your loved ones in a novena of Masses celebrated in our monastery Chapel this Christmas season. May the light of Christ ever shine in your hearts, and may you be for our broken world a beacon of true hope!

With our grateful prayer,

Sr. Mary Fidelis, OP

Prioress



IN DULCI JUBILO

Dancing with the Angels

IT IS THE YEAR 1328 and the Rhineland priory is wrapped in the silence of falling snow. Alone in his unheated cell, Friar Henry Suso is wrapped in silence too. A familiar scene for the ardent young Dominican, yet tonight's vigil will be unlike any other. Or rather, it will be wondrously like that Holy Night of long ago.

The psalms bid us sing in the presence of the angels, but Blessed Henry goes literally a step—or several—further. For this night he receives a vision of angels, singing and dancing for joy at Jesus' birth. Later, he will record how one angel merrily approached him and declared that "God had sent him down to [Henry] to bring him heavenly joys amid his sufferings." The angel told him that "he must cast off all sorrows from his mind and bear [the angels] company, and that he must also dance with them in heavenly fashion." Immediately, the mystic friar and poet was caught up in the angels' jubilation, and reechoing their praise he composed the Christmas carol "*In Dulci Jubilo*."

"Good Christian Men, Rejoice" is how we commonly know this song. But the original text, alternating between medieval German and Latin—a playful reflection of heaven's dance with earth—is perhaps better captured in the following version, set to the same melody:

In dulci jubilo [In sweet joy]
Now sing with hearts aglow!
Our delight and pleasure
Lies *in praesepio*, [in a manger]
Like sunshine is our treasure
Matris in gremio. [In the Mother's arms]
Alpha est et O! [He is our Alpha and Omega]



O Jesu parvule, [O little Jesus]
For Thee I long alway;
Comfort my heart's blindness,
O puer optime, [O best Child]
With all Thy loving kindness,
O princeps gloriae. [O Prince of glory]
Trahe me post te! [Draw me after Thee]

O Patris caritas! [O Love of the Father]
O nati lenitas! [O painless birth]
Deeply were we stained
Per nostra crimina, [Through our crime]
But Thou for us hast gained
Coelorum gaudia. [The joys of heaven]
O that we were there!

Blessed Henry's song reveals the true source of hope and hence of joy: the Prince of glory has entered our darkness, our blindness, our sin-stained world: He has come to draw us, even now, into the reign of His Father's love. Indeed, our God is with us, and with the angels we rejoice!

Hope— in a strange land



Adoration of the Magi with Christ Crucified by Pesellino, 15th century

CHRISTMAS IS AT ONCE a joyful and a poignant time. For isn't there always incongruity, to some extent, between the peace and cheer that befit the season and the unguilt reality of daily life? Frosty windows festooned with pine boughs may warm the heart on a wintry night, but the chill still creeps into our living rooms and our lives. The packages we exchange usually feel far lighter than the worries we bear for those we love, as we wistfully reminisce about silent nights of years gone by. And so, while we readily raise our voices in carols of comfort and joy, how much harder it is to lift up our hearts in enduring hope!

If homecoming is a favorite theme of Christmas tales and songs, an air of homelessness often lingers with us as well. It is the paradox of Yuletide nostalgia and the myrrh mingling with our feasts: when we long most acutely for a home, a nation, a soul filled with love and peace, we seem ever to be reminded that, in some sense, man has no place to rest his head.

*For men are homeless in their homes,
And strangers under the sun,
And they lay their heads in a foreign land
Whenever the day is done.*

(G. K. Chesterton, "The House of Christmas")

This awareness—or bewilderment—described by Chesterton more than a century ago has doubtless redoubled with the cultural disintegration of our own era and the anxiety flourishing in its wake. Yet the roots of our nostalgia and yearning, I would suggest, reach through the ages into the depths of the human heart. For we, like the wandering Magi, are still seeking to gaze on the face of our King, and with Joseph and Mary and their little donkey, we must journey in the night of faith. The way is dark for them, as for each of us, and even in our fathers' cities we are far from home.

Our monastic cloister, too, grace-filled haven that it is, bears the poignancy of this sense of displacement. *Out of the depths I cry to You, O LORD: Lord, hear my voice!* Midday, evening, and at night, even on Christmas Day, our community takes up the words of penitent David and exiled Israel, making their cry our own:

*I long for you, O LORD,
my soul longs for His word.
My soul awaits the Lord
more than watchmen for daybreak.*

(Psalm 130:5–6)

This is a prayer of pain and desolation, but also of resounding hope—at once discordant with our Christmas carols and opening our souls to their deepest truth. For although, in the words of our father Dominic keeping vigil in the darkened church, we cannot “look upon the height of Heaven because of the greatness of our sin,” our God stoops even to a manger so that we can gaze on Him. Hence, by the mystery of Christmas, writes Saint Thomas, hope is “lifted to the heights, for as Augustine said, ‘nothing is so needful to build up our hope than for us to be shown how much God loves us.’” How much God loves us—and how profoundly we need His love. For it is into the depths of a broken world and broken hearts that the heavenly Father sends His Son. It is our frail flesh that the Word assumes and in our feeding troughs that He lies, partaking of our very homelessness to lead us to His perfect rest. “He was born not in His Father’s house,” explains Saint Bede, “but in an inn and by the wayside, because through the mystery of the Incarnation He was made the way, by which to bring us to our country where we shall enjoy the truth and the life.” *See what love the Father has for us! — For God sent His Son into the world . . . that the world might be saved through Him* (1 Jn 3:1; Jn 3:17).

Certainly, we long during these holy days to behold the beauty of our Lord, to contemplate His truth, to reflect His kindly light. And, please God, we do receive glimpses of His sublimity and splendor from time to time. But oftener, I believe, the grace of Christmas is a humbler epiphany, like the manger and the Child Himself: a manifestation of our lowliness and littleness, of our weakness and our wounds. And with this, too, a manifestation of our need for mercy—for God’s mercy and each other’s. Thus, as we raise our voices in Christmas song, we let our hearts be upraised and pierced as well: we gaze on the Word Incarnate, made little in the Host, we listen to His teaching, and we partake of His Sacred Feast.



It is not Eden in the world nor Heaven in the monastery, even on Christmas Day, but before the manger, upon the altar, our love is nourished and our hope sustained. “In the morning,” Moses promised the Israelites, “you shall see the glory of the LORD. . . . You shall be given

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bread to the full” (Ex 16:7, 12). During the liturgy of the Nativity, and at every Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, this promise is renewed with a foretaste of eternal life: “Today you will know that the LORD will come, and He will save us, and in the morning you will see His glory” (Introit, Vigil Mass).

With the Magi we seek, with Mary we ponder, and with the children of the promise we hope and plead, longing for the fullness of God’s kingdom even as we rejoice in our newborn King.

*To an open house in the evening
Home shall all men come,
To an older place than Eden
And a taller tower than Rome.
To the end of the way of the wandering star,
To the things that cannot be and that are,
To the place where God was homeless
And all men are at home.*

(Chesterton, “The House of Christmas”)

Friends Spotlight:



Please consider joining our
*St. Catherine
de Ricci Guild*
to help support the nuns
on a monthly basis.



Benefits of membership:

- A perpetual membership in the Monastery's Eucharistic Adoration Association, which includes a weekly Mass for your intentions and a daily remembrance in the prayers and good works of the nuns.
- An invitation to join the nuns for Vespers on a Sunday evening in the fall, an opportunity to meet and greet the nuns, followed by a wine and cheese reception at a nearby winery.

Visit our website for more details on how to register to make a monthly donation through Faith Direct:

www.lindenopnuns.org.

A Luminous Gift

ARRIVING AT ST. DOMINIC'S MONASTERY, one enters hallowed ground. Here, the presence of God and his Word are given free rein to speak into the depths of our souls. Here the Bridegroom, who continually awaits us, beckons us to meet his gaze. It is a place permeated by his Eucharistic presence and by the Word of God, prayed and proclaimed throughout the hours of the day and night. Here, God draws us to seek rest in that which is eternal, which will never pass away. For two years, I had the privilege to call this monastery home while discerning my vocation.

Now as a wife and mother, I am acutely aware of the tremendous value of the contemplative vocation for the Church, the world, and my family. It is a luminous gift reorienting us to eternal Truth. It is a beacon in the storms of life when our foundations are tested. In the world, it is easy to forget that our battles are with principalities and powers rather than flesh and blood. We can become disoriented by the political climate or the politics of church affairs and scandal. We can even be overly consumed by fashioning the perfect programs to share the faith. In all this, we can lose touch with the magnetic heart of Christianity, the faithful love of the Bridegroom for his bride. This heart of love beats strongly within the monastery. In the gift of intimacy and conformity with our crucified and risen Lord, we learn to walk the path of self-giving love that guides every vocation.

The nuns have supported me with their prayers for many years, through vocation discernment and through the joys and sorrows of major life events. We as a Church are also greatly indebted to their vocation, and as such, my family prioritizes supporting the monastery. Because the nuns strive to live authentically and with evangelical poverty, every gift makes a real difference. I am grateful my children can witness this powerful vocation, and I pray this monastery will continue to be a beacon in the Church for generations to come.

Victoria Sanborn, a member of the Third Order of St. Dominic, lives in Florida with her husband, David, and their three sons.

PHOTO: Victoria Sanborn - courtesy

Contemplata Aliis Tradere

By Fr. Cajetan Cuddy, O.P.

MANY PEOPLE IN TODAY'S WORLD suffer from a sense of hopelessness.

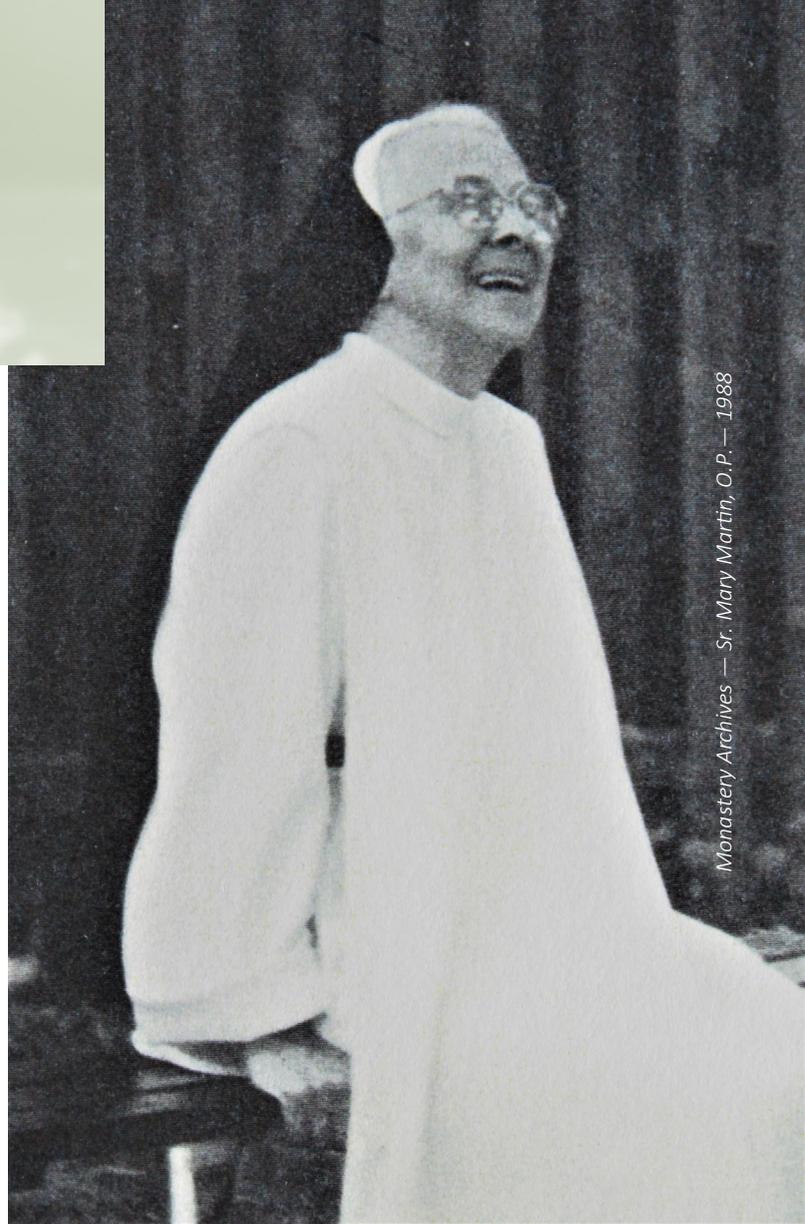
Everybody eventually reckons with the bleak reality of human inadequacy and wretchedness—both within ourselves and in others. And many of us consecrate our entire lives to the task of fixing ourselves. In other words, we try to compensate for our inadequacies by means of our own resources. Sadly, however, this self-help project only accentuates our deficiencies. The inadequacy of our self-help project only pulls us deeper into the very darkness within ourselves that we so desperately wish to expel.

In a word, we suffer problems that we cannot resolve by ourselves. And, because of this, we fall into a sense of hopelessness.

Christmas changes everything, however. In Christmas, we encounter Emmanuel: “God with us.” And God is with us as He is in Himself. There is no darkness in God. He is all powerful and all merciful. And because God is truly with us, all reasons for hopelessness are dispelled from us. Christmas enables us to hope in God.

Saint Thomas Aquinas explains that hope “leans upon” God’s power and mercy rather than upon human resources and abilities. Nothing limits God’s power and mercy—not even our profoundest inadequacies or our gravest sins. Through the grace of Christmas, God comes to us as we are and invites us to lean upon Him.

Hope-filled persons do not look within themselves for the ultimate solution to their problems. The hope-filled person does not despair in the face of his own inadequacies and wretchedness. Rather, Christian hope looks to and relies upon God—upon His goodness and upon His power. Such saving hope is possible because “God is with us.” The grace of Christmas is a grace of profound hope.



Monastery Archives — Sr. Mary Martin, O.P. — 1988

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Christmas hope also accounts for the life of the cloistered contemplative. The contemplative nun is wholly consecrated to God. Thus, she does not search for light within herself. Nor does she despair in the presence of her own inadequacies and weaknesses. Why? Because she does not rely upon her own resources. She relies, in hope, upon God—the God who is truly with her because of Christmas.



St. Dominic's Monastery
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YOUR CHRISTMAS GIFT WILL BE DOUBLED!

*Several generous benefactors have come forward and offered the nuns a \$500,000 Challenge Grant, promising to match every dollar donated in support of "For the Praise of His Glory" building campaign from Sept. 1, 2022–Dec. 31, 2023. This means your generous, tax-deductible gift will be matched — **dollar for dollar** — all the way up to \$500,000.*



A SPECIAL NOTE OF THANKS TO

,all who have contributed to the \$500,000 Challenge Grant. Thus far we have received \$167,242! Your generous assistance is helping us to reach \$1 million closer to our goal: to build a holy Dwelling where God will be worshipped day and night for many generations to come.

Mass Times:

Friday & Sunday: 11:00 a.m.
Remaining weekdays:
Usually at 7:00 a.m.

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