

December, January, February-2012, 2013

The winter of 2012-2013 offered us many opportunities to experience God's presence among us. In our continuing study of Scripture, we watched Jeff Cavin's presentation of the Book of Revelations. We learned so much about the symbolism and meaning of God's messages there and were deeply enriched by the study. The experience became even more meaningful when we met the presenter in person! Jeff and his wife Emily were in town on December 10, 2012 to present a bible study at our parish church of St. Andrew's in Newtown, PA and came by to meet us! We were so glad to let him know how much we appreciated all his Bible courses, and to find out a little about him and his life.

Christmas brought us much joy this year, as always, as our chaplain Msgr. William O'Donnell offered Midnight Mass for us. Many of our friends joined us for this very special celebration and we were so grateful for the opportunity to share the joy of the Lord's Nativity with them. The week after Christmas gave us the gift of reconnecting with some of our priest friends, who came to offer Mass for us.

Shortly after Christmas, on January 2 we received a much-welcomed visit from Spencer's Landscaping to remove the trees that had been damaged by Hurricane Sandy. It was a day involving many workmen and noisy trucks and machinery, which frightened the deer that were living inside our enclosure. We love these beautiful creatures, but they do eat many of our flowers, fruits and vegetables which the sisters work so hard to cultivate. Well, the machinery scared them right through the gates! Although in a way we were sad to see them go, it was a relief to our gardening sisters. Now we can enjoy them so much more when seeing them in front of the monastery, where we have witnessed many little fawns being born. So God created a way for us to keep our animal friends and our gardens, too!

Epiphany gave us an opportunity for our joyful procession, with the sisters singing Christmas Carols and visiting all the nativity scenes throughout the monastery. Of course, we have to pick a "King" and this year it was Sr. Jean, who found the bean inside her cupcake! We will offer special prayers for her all year.

February brought with it our Forty Hours Devotion or Solemn Annual Exposition from February 10-12. During this time, the sisters offer prayers continuously before the Blessed Sacrament, in reparation for sin and for the needs of the Church and the world. Many of our friends also joined us in prayer during these days.

Right in the middle of this, on February 11, came the surprise announcement from Pope Benedict that he would be resigning! Although we, along with the whole Catholic world, were very surprised, we could see the Holy Spirit's wisdom behind his choice and were all praying for him during the remainder of his Pontificate, and for when he would begin his new life.

Amidst all this activity and sense of God's presence, this winter we experienced a bit of snow. Truly it was only "a bit" – 4 or 6 inches here and there. Farther north there was news of 36 inches and more at times. It made for a beautiful and tranquil winter scene for us, very conducive to prayer and reflection (and little shoveling). We pray that the Lord opened all hearts to enjoy his beauty and presence through nature, as well as through Mass and other religious ceremonies this winter.

March, April, May, 2013

In March we joined our prayers with all peoples of good will that the Holy Spirit would guide the Cardinals' conclave as they sought to elect a new Pope. We probably all remember where we were on March 13th when the happy announcement came that we had a new Pope with the chosen name Francis. His election was a FIRST in many ways: he was the first Pope elected from Latin America (Argentina), the first Jesuit, and the first Pope to take the name of Francis, after St Francis of Assisi. Like our own Holy Father Francis, our new Pope Francis desires to live simply among common folk, serving the poor of the world, and bringing God's peace, goodness, and mercy to all peoples. In a short period of time he has so touched the hearts of many faithful Catholics, as well as those who had drifted away from their faith, that our chapel and many churches noted an influx of people for Easter services – more than had been seen in recent years.

The Octave of Easter provided an opportunity for our beloved chaplain, Msgr William O'Donnell, to take a few days of respite after having completed the many services of Holy Week, Easter Vigil, and Easter day Masses, assisted by Br. Larry Hilferty, TOR. Two of our priest friends, Fr. Dennis Gill and Msgr. McLoone were able to celebrate Mass for us, as well as Fr. Brian Kean, a young priest serving at that time as Msgr. McLoone's parochial vicar. Fr. Kean is also the son of Bruce and Geraldine Kean who often come to our chapel for Mass and prayer.

As the spring season progressed, so did the Sisters' longing to prepare their gardens with flowers that would grace our chapel and monastery grounds. New topsoil and mulch, however, were badly needed. These were delivered, and then hauled via utility carts to the various gardens. We were grateful for the cool temperatures and ever-increasing daylight during this activity. Naturally, our two dogs, Trinny and Kioko, enjoyed the fresh scent and soil, and delighted in trying out their new, cool resting places (much to our dismay) atop the lilies and tulips.

Sr. Mary Alfred enjoyed a parlor visit with her sister Anne and cousin Sr. Agnes Bonner, who both worked many years for the Ministry of Caring in Wilmington, DE. Fr. Ronald Giannone and some of the Capuchin Sisters also came to share a delightful dinner and visit with the Sisters.

On our Lenten journey this year, we continued the video series produced by Jeff Cavin on the Book of Revelation. Through this study we definitely gained a richer, deeper appreciation and understanding of this book and its relationship to the Mass.

During this Year of Faith, we also enjoyed a couple of presentations given by Fr. Dennis Gill on Sacrosanctum concilium, the Liturgy Constitution of the Second Vatican Council, in observance of the 50th anniversary of its publication.

This spring 'Mother Nature' spread the beauty of her grace. We noted a robin family taking over the territory of the Sacred Garden for several weeks. The birds were so protective of their young that the parents would not permit any other birds or squirrels to feed in the area, chasing away any that ventured near.

Toward the end of May a newly-born fawn was seen resting in the shrubs near our fire hydrant. Friends who had come to Mass that morning were concerned as the mother deer was not in sight. The mother was lying next to the blue flag that marked our water line giving watchful care to her new born. Around noon the fawn tried prancing upon her wobbly legs, but the feat was too much for her, and she dropped to the pavement. Within moments she returned to her safe harbor among the ground cover. Later in the day she was seen further down our parking lot with her mother deer. (Picture of the newly-born fawn on the Christmas card.)

June, July August, 2013

In the beginning of June we had our annual Corpus Christi, the Body and Blood of Christ Procession. This devotion began in the 13th century in Belgium and then spread throughout the world. It is one of the beautiful old devotional practices that seems to be gaining prominence again. A Consecrated Host is carried in procession while we sing Eucharistic Hymns and process around the front of our monastery. Both the people present at the Mass and the Sisters join in this special act of homage. In some places they are able to stop at erected altars to have Benediction, but here we conclude our procession with the Benediction in our chapel.

On Memorial Day our chaplain Msgr. O'Donnell conferred the Anointing of the Sick on our infirm Sisters and those who attended the Mass with us who were in need of the sacrament. Everything went beautifully, and we pray that all those blessed with the sacrament were spiritually and physically rejuvenated. In July Kioko, our long-haired dog, got her fur cut or shaved with a discount coupon, to cool her down during the hot summer season. She came back looking refreshed and a bit like a little lamb that had been sheared. The place where she went put a pink bandana around her neck that said "excellent - well behaved!" (The only problem was that she got a cut that later became infected.) Her doggie partner "Trinny" cried her heart out every minute Kioko was away.

Toward the end of that month Pope Francis went to Brazil for World Youth Day. EWTN did a great job in coverage. What a wonderful time for all of us that we were able to pray with and for our young people. We continue to pray for an increase of religious and priestly vocation among them. We were able to tape most of the visit and then pick what we wanted to watch. We heard most of Pope Francis' homilies, and we did watch him at some of the Masses. The reception that the Pope received from the people of Brazil was inspiring. It showed their great faith, and the careful planning of the many beautiful and inspiring events.

This year we had Father Jack Rathschmidt, OFM Cap for the St. Clare Triduum. Father has given many great talks, as was this one on the Beatitudes. He described how Saint Clare lived the Beatitudes, and how we too can live them. Father Jack also touched us with his story of the rabbit. According to the story someone who lived in an ashram had a pet rabbit. This person would have to go out each day for his work. When he returned, the rabbit would run and jump into his owner's lap no matter what the rabbit might have done in a corner when his owner was away. That rabbit simply knew that he would always be loved, and he ran to be with the one who loved him. Isn't that the manner in which we need to run to be with our Beloved, trusting that in His great love He will not just accept us, but will be joyous always to have us return to Him, no matter what we might have done in error in our corner?

We were very happy to have Monsignor O'Donnell with us during this Triduum to assist Father Jack in praying for all the people who attended the evening healing service. Father Fidelis, TOR and Fr. Cletus, TOR, a surprise guest, also were able to join Fr. Jack and Msgr. O'Donnell for the Mass, and Br. Larry, TOR was our truly appreciated server.

Our lives were saddened in learning that Monsignor Charles J. Schaefflein was no longer with us in body. Monsignor went to his eternal reward on August 10. He was our first pastor at St. Andrew Church when we moved to Langhorne, and a great friend to us for many years.

At the end of August our Sr. Anne gave a presentation on St. Clare to our six new Capuchin brothers who traveled up to Langhorne from Philadelphia with Fr. Frank Jacobi, OFM Cap.

September, October, November, 2013

On September 7 we responded to the Holy Father's invitation and joined with the rest of the world to fast and pray for peace in Syria. Our main meal was soup and bread, and we prayed during our Mass and adoration times for a peaceful solution to the situation in Syria.

This year marks the 36th anniversary of the dedication of our chapel. We celebrate that occasion each year on September 8. Since the dedication is a solemnity for us, we used special readings for the Mass. We have been considering some maintenance for our chapel since the wood stalls need refinishing after their 36 years of service.

Saturday, September 14 dawned bright, beautiful and pleasantly cool for Sr. Isabel's Solemn Profession on the feast of the Exultation of the Cross. Her family and friends came from many parts of the country and the world to participate in the Mass and ceremony. Msgr. Joseph McLoone, as main celebrant, preached an inspiring homily with some touches of his Irish wit and humor. Fr. Oliverie was Master of Ceremonies; and he was joined by Msgr. O'Donnell, Fr. Graf and Msgr. Tomichek from our archdiocese. Fr. Ron Pecci OFM, Fr. Ronald Giannone OFM Cap, and Fr. John Pinto OCD also celebrated with them. Permanent Deacon, Romero Modelo, a friend of Sister, assisted at the Mass. Deacon Jim Hartman sang the Litany of the Saints with Anna Marie; and Br. Larry Hilferty TOR served. Sr. Isabel's brother, Antonino and his family traveled from Montreal, Canada to celebrate with her. Yolanda, with several friends, coordinated provision of food for the reception afterwards and for the Sisters who ate upstairs. We were happy to have Poor Clare sisters from Wappingers Falls, Chesterfield, and Wilmington join us for the profession. Sister Isabel's radiant smile expressed the joy and love that filled all our hearts as we rejoiced with her in witnessing her commitment to her spouse, Jesus Christ.

Our community retreat was held from September 22nd-28th with Fr. Michael Marigliano OFM Cap from the New York province. His presentations broke open some scripture stories, providing insights and background concerning the lives of the people during biblical times. He brought out the parallels and challenges that are common to our own times as we struggle with the same basic human issues, concerns and fears.

Fr. Fidelis Weber TOR presided at our celebration of the Transitus of St. Francis with Br. Larry Hilferty TOR assisting him. The next day Fr. Frank Berna celebrated our 8:15 AM Mass for the Solemnity of St. Francis. He is Sr. Mary Regina's nephew who teaches at LaSalle University. He had not been here for a while, so we spoke with him briefly in the hallway after Mass to catch up on his activities. Sr. Evelyn taped the Mass of Pope Francis in Assisi, and we watched the homily and some of the Pope's visit to Assisi.

This fall on September 10 our Sr. Joan reached the milestone of 60 years since her entrance into religious life. The following month Sr. Mary Constance celebrated her 66th anniversary of vows on October 18. Sister is 93 years young!

A recently ordained TOR friar, Fr. Patrick Whittle, came to celebrate Mass with us on November 6. He is a "local", having grown up in Levittown, PA in St. Michael the Archangel Parish. He was home visiting family and friends after his ordination. He will be ministering in parishes in the Steubenville, OH area and teaching a class at the Franciscan University beginning in January.

**May we wish each and every one of you a Blessed Christmas and
A Grace-Filled New Year!**