

Winter



November 28, 2020 saw our Evening Prayer for the First Sunday of Advent. The Sisters had the Blessing of the Advent Wreath in the refectory or dining room and each received a tiny angel figure with the name for whom that Sister would pray in a special manner during the Advent Season. The Sisters take this very seriously while including all our friends, benefactors and the special

intentions given to us, in their prayers.

After Sister Isabel's beautiful birthday celebration on the 9th of December (Sister is still 21+), we celebrated a new memorial, or liturgical remembrance, the Feast of Our Lady of Loreto (also spelled Loretto) and the Holy House. Eighteen miles south of Ancona, and about three miles from the Adriatic coast of Italy, stands the city of Loreto on the summit of a state property, enshrining, as it does, one of the most sacred and important of all Our Lady's Shrines — the Home of the Holy Family. Written on the door of the basilica are these words: "The whole world has no place more sacred. Here was the Word made Flesh and here was born the Virgin Mother..."

The next day saw the Sisters gathered to help begin our Christmas mailing. As usual there were some blimps in the process of our major mailing to you. All worked out well in the end with a little help from our loving God who has given us Saint Gabriel as the patron of Postal Workers.

Gaudete Sunday or the Third Sunday in Advent! What color for the Mass vestment? It ended up with our white vestment that had some pink/rose and lavender bars of color on it. It looked great and it did look masculine! Thank you, Monsignor Picard, for wearing it.

On Christmas, our Midnight Mass was very much appreciated by the Sisters, but was closed to the public because of the times. Then our Christmas Day Mass as well as Holy Family Sunday Mass, the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God Mass and Epiphany Mass were able to be open to the public. We truly appreciated Bishop Fitzgerald and the priests who were able to serve us during this Covid 19 period that was just beginning. *We still had a few more days before we had to close our chapel.*

Then one Sister became ill, a few days later another Sister was ill, and then the third Sister was ill. One had to be hospitalized, and the monastery was "**Quarantined**". No one in or out unless she or he was a health official. All the Sisters were masked and required to stay away from each other. We thank God that the three recovered and no one else was infected. After what seemed like eons, the quarantine was lifted and God gave us the ability to continue our life of prayer and love. On February 8, we were again allowed to have Mass in our chapel but only for the Sisters. Later, we were given permission to have our public Mass in chapel on Sundays with masks and disinfecting after the Mass.

All the Sisters were happy when it was Sister Joan Marie who found the "Infant" in her piece of cake on Epiphany. February followed with our "Mardi Gras" cake that Sister Anne's sister sends to her before Lent. (The custom of that celebration includes the baking of a King's Cake to honor the three Kings. The cakes are made circular to portray the circular route used by the kings to get to the Christ Child, which was taken to confuse King Herod who was trying to follow the wise men so he could kill the Christ Child.)

With the beginning of Lent, we continued quietly into this holy season presuming that the Covid 19 virus would disappear during this time



SPRING

Sometime in Spring we learned that the retired priests at Regina Coeli Residence were now permitted to resume their priestly functions and activities helping out parishes, and our community, for daily Mass. The priests at St. Andrew in Newtown, which is our parish, offered to continue serving us for Sunday Masses. We are so grateful! At about

this same time, most of the Sisters received their first Covid 19 vaccine shots, and subsequently their second shot a few months later.

On the Feast of Saint Katharine Drexel, our Sister Joan Marie was scheduled to serve as Lector for Mass, as well as be in the Offertory Procession. This was a very special joy to Sister, as her own Aunt was a religious with the Blessed Sacrament Sisters who were founded by Saint Katherine Drexel.

You know how it can be 'unnerving' when we misplace an item. This happened to Sister Patricia one afternoon, when she 'lost' the community cell phone somewhere in the monastery. Prayers were immediately raised to St. Anthony! Although she would call the cell phone, she could never hear it ring in order to locate it. The following day, when another Sister was answering the door, she beheld the cell phone. Sister Patricia had left it on the stand with the statue of Saint Francis in the room where we answer the door. Thus, it had been safely guarded by our St. Francis!

March 18 marked our Poor Clare Vow Renewal day. The Sisters renewed their vows during our Mass which was celebrated by Archbishop Edward Adams. Father is a native of Philadelphia and has served many years as Apostolic Nuncio in various countries. He now resides at Regina Coeli Residence.

Our Holy Father, Pope Francis, dedicated this year to Saint Joseph, marking the 150th anniversary year in which Saint Joseph was named Patron of the Universal Church. As we incorporated special prayers to Saint Joseph on March 19, we also recalled a tradition begun at our monastery on Girard Avenue in Philadelphia many years earlier. Father Wheeler, a Jesuit priest, encouraged the Sisters to ask Saint Joseph to take care of our finances by keeping a light burning continuously before his statue. Saint Joseph has always come through in helping us!

Sister Mary Francis celebrated her 94th Birthday this year and thoroughly enjoyed her spaghetti dinner. After all, she is of 'Sicilian' descent. Sister's night aides are Muslim women, and they enjoyed sharing a traditional Uzbekistan sweet dessert (salumak) as they celebrated their New Year (Navruz) which is a 13-day major celebration. Sister is blessed with good 'angels' caring for her! She always said that she had two angels, Pauline and Rachel, but actually she has many more human angels surrounding her!

During April we had to be on the 'look-out' for delivery packages, and check all our doors to see where packages were being delivered. One day, a huge box was 'sitting' on a bench outside and near our entrance. It actually belonged to Saint Mary's Hospital for the Saint Clare Medical building. Another day, a very small, but very important item for our Altar Bread Department was stuffed between the crack of two doors in our retreat area. We are grateful that some deliverers now take pictures and post them on our email, so that we can know where the item was left.

Sister Isabel's name was drawn on May 1st to crown Our Lady's Statue in chapel during our May Crowning. The community gathered for special prayers and hymns in our Blessed Mother's honor as Sister stepped up the ladder to crown our loving Blessed Mother.



Summer

Summer was a time of celebrations with many reasons to be grateful to God. On June 6, we celebrated the Feast of Corpus Christi, without a procession as in the previous years due to dangers from Covid. However, this day was the first day, since the Covid restrictions began, that all churches in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia were allowed to be fully opened. It was truly a cause to celebrate for all of us in the Archdiocese! August 8 to 11 we celebrated our Saint Clare Triduum with Father Michael Cusato, O.F.M. who was able to give us new insights into the life of Saint Clare. We were able to live-stream the services as we had during the previous year. Many of you have expressed gratitude that you were able to join us in this way.

Following shortly afterwards was Sister Joan's Jubilee on August 14. It was a very special day and we thanked God with Sister Joan for 65 years of vowed religious life. Father Marc Cappizi presided at Mass and we rejoiced together. August is also a "birthday month." It gives us three Sisters' birthdays: Sister Maria Ramonita, Sister Joan Marie and Sister Anne. We are always so grateful for God's gift of life and the many ways we can share it together. Included in our August birthdays is our former chaplain, Monsignor William O'Donnell. We were happy to contact him and let him know we were thinking of him on his special day.

Sister Maria Eden made good use of the brighter evenings by taking great care of her beautiful garden. Sister has a knack in this area as well as in sewing. No wonder she is now helping with the Third Order Franciscan shrouds.

In addition to a time of celebration, the Summer was a time to appreciate nature. We enjoyed our many friends who made frequent visits to our sacred chapel garden: "Sammy" the squirrel and "Benny" the bunny were the most notable. One of our Sisters also made acquaintance with a newborn fawn one Sunday, when she heard it crying underneath her window. She went to investigate and started speaking to the fawn, it followed her until it arrived at a safe place where its mother could find it. The spirit of Saint Francis certainly seemed to be there! Our dog, Lady, also joined in the fun when she had her first professional haircut during the heat of July. She looked very different when she came home from the groomers, and she appeared to feel much cooler and lighter.

Our appreciation of nature was not all light-hearted however. There were some days of severe weather with heavy rains and tornadoes in the area. Sadly, some people in the area even lost their homes. We hold them and all those adversely affected in our prayers as they struggle to rebuild.

This summer, we were also able to complete a major project: replacement of our kitchen flooring, which has seen much wear and tear during 44 years. During the 3-4 days while the old was being removed, and then when the new was installed a few weeks later, we had our meals in the altar bread room among the stoves and other equipment. We even celebrated one of the Sisters' birthday there. It was definitely a memorable series of meals and we gained new appreciation for our work space, seeing it in a new perspective!

In addition to these specific events, summer gave us some time just to relax and play board games together, also to visit with some priest friends who came to celebrate Masses for us: Father Dennis Gill came on July 7 and gifted us with a beautiful altar cross for which we are very grateful, and Father Patrick Whittle, T.O.R. celebrated the Franciscan Feast of Our Lady of the Portiuncula with us on August 2. We are so grateful for their presence in our lives and for the presence of all our friends.



Fall

Early in September on the 8th we celebrated the 44th anniversary of the Dedication of Chapel. One of our weekday chaplains, Monsignor James McCoy offered Mass for us. In our prayers we remembered all those whose support made the building of our monastery and chapel a reality and those who continue to support us in so many ways.

September 29, the Feast of the Archangels, saw Sister Maria Ramonita renew her temporary vows. We all rejoiced with her as she renewed her commitment to Our Lord and the Church as a Poor Clare nun.

Our confessor, Father John McCloskey, O.F.M. Cap celebrated the Transitus of Saint Francis with us the evening of October 3. We were joined by some Secular Franciscans from New Jersey and our Sisters of Saint Francis of Philadelphia. Father's reflections were so helpful for our day and times. On the Feast of Saint Francis, our Monday chaplain, Monsignor Michael Flood celebrated our beautiful Mass.

Our foundress, Mother Mary Maddalena Bentivoglio arrived in New York on Columbus day, October 12 in 1876. Each year we commemorate her arrival with her blood sister, Mother Mary Constance Bentivoglio, on this day with a Votive Mass for Exiles and Refugees. Mother Maddalena brought the Primitive Rule of the Poor Clares to the United States from Italy.

Sister Jean Therese celebrated the 25th anniversary of her vows on October 19. Father Marc Capizzi from our parish celebrated Mass during which Sister renewed her vows. It was a day of great joy for Sister Jean and for all of us. Due to Covid 19, her family was not able to attend. However, we were able to have the liturgy and ceremony video taped to send to her family.

Dan Tarrant who taped Sister Jean Therese's silver jubilee returned in late October to film interviews with individual Sisters for some videos to enlighten people about our life and to encourage vocations to our community. We value his expertise and his enthusiasm for this project. We will be putting the links for the completed videos on our website. Dan has live-streamed our Triduum in honor of Saint Clare for the past two years for which we are very grateful.

We have benefitted greatly from some excellent DVD's on spiritual topics. We looked forward each evening to Frances Hogan, an Irish scripture scholar, who presented *Diamonds of Daniel* through EWTN. Bishop Robert Barron's recent reflections on the *Nicene Creed* from Word on Fire were of great interest. Also, Dr. Michael Barber's series on *Salvation* answered the question of what salvation really means. This last was from the Augustine Institute which has many other great programs. On a lighter note, we explored the *Secret Life of Bees* and learned a great deal about the behavior of the *Hippos of Africa* from PBS.

Our Federation Meeting for the Holy Name Federation had been delayed for 18 months due to the situation with Covid 19 and with travel. Sr. Anne, our Federation President, was able to schedule a Zoom meeting with Rome's permission. Zoom worked well for our business meetings and for our keynote speaker Brother William Short, O.F.M. who spoke to us from Rome.

Looking forward to Advent, Sister Evelyn found the beautiful Advent Mass by Richard Proulx, *Missa Emmanuel* from GIA. We will be using it during our Advent Masses.

Just before Thanksgiving, a generous benefactor gave us 50 pounds of purple potatoes. Yes, **PURPLE** through and through! Most of us had never seen one before. We searched on the internet to find recipes for them. Sister Joan Marie sliced them and made some lovely rosettes in muffin tins.

**A Blessed and Holy Advent and Christmas to each of you!
Prayers from All of Us**