



# Monastic Musings

*Living in and Practicing the Presence of God*

Fall/Winter 2020

## *Change has been happening by: Right Reverend Barb Martzall*

The Holy Theotokos of Mercy Community's mother-house moved in October. We moved down the road by 15 minutes. Moving out of a single family home into a condo. Given that both Mother Myrella and myself are getting older, we decided it was time to move into a place that we no longer needed to care for a yard for mowing or a large driveway for snow plowing. Yes, our little "door-keeper" Star Brite has moved with us and continues to guard all doors and windows!



The week before we did the closing on our new home, we were looking out the window while washing the supper dishes in our old home. Much to our surprise, we saw a teenage woodchuck enjoying the acorns that have fallen on the ground. This little woodchuck is rather more blonde than brown which is unusual around this area. Such a joy to watch the little one since we have not seen one for over two years. A true blessing to see new life in the middle of all the changes going on around us.

We will miss seeing this young woodchuck grow up, but move we really needed to do. At our new home we have already seen chipmunks, squirrels, opossums, and birds playing around the area. Now to see if any will be coming up onto our back deck for entertaining Star Brite.

We moved into our new home just in time! We had a snowstorm the first Friday. It was only 2 inches but very wet snow. I must say it was very nice not to have to do any shoveling. I only had to sweep off the deck of the snow and dead leaves. Already we can see the value of downsizing and moving.

This little creature loves to come to this particular spot every day to fill his belly for winter. He is a very cute little chipmunk that seems to live under our back deck. Watching him constantly reminds me just how fragile life can be. This little chipmunk is lucky to live where there are lots of acorns available to fill his belly. He has to share with the squirrels but given he stays close to the down drain, he can really have the area to himself. Life is rich in our "green belt" behind our condo. We are really blessed with all that we can see daily.



Covid is starting to ramp up again. That means our state has to take a step back and put more protections into place again. Sad actually as we were starting to head into a new normal life. But then

we have been living under restrictions since March and many people have grown tired of it and not really following the rules. Not surprising given that we have many colleges in our state and many had opened partially to students. What is the saddest part though of the colleges opening is that the students insisted on partying which then caused the spread of the disease!

Unfortunately I am seeing so many people who just think about themselves and not about the person they may come into contact with. I have seen so much of the “me first before anyone else” attitude. But really is this what our Creator has taught us? Did not Jesus teach that we should be always looking for ways to help others first to make their lives better before we worry about ourselves. The Golden Rule was given to us by our Creator and repeated by Jesus. Why is it that we have become a country that says it is religious/Christian but really does not act that way? This country was built on being a melting pot of many people from many different countries and many different faiths. But look at today and all you see is anger and hatred of anyone who does not match exactly what you think or believe. What has happened to caring for one another as we would like others to care for us?

Today I was hanging some of the artwork in our new home. I hung a poster that Mother Myrella and I love so much that it has hung in our home in CA and in the family home we just moved from. It really says how we should walk within our lives. Let me share the words of the poster with you:

***Walk Together***

*Don't walk in front of me, I may not follow...  
Don't walk behind me, I may not lead...  
Just walk beside me and be my friend.*

*Friends come in all shapes and sizes,  
but their hearts are always BIG.*

*Where friendships blossom,  
A garden of love will grow.*

*No matter the distance between them,  
friends stay close at heart.*

*If all the world had a friends,  
what a wonderful world it would be!*

*Walk together, hand in hand.  
--- Albert Camus*

What all of us need to remember is that life is very fragile and we need to do all that we can to protect all those around us, even if we do not agree with them. Everyone is a child of the Creator! Not just you but everyone in this world. We need to learn to set aside anger and come together in our Creator's love!



## ***By Their Fruit***

***by: Father Ron Lahti***

A wise man once taught “You can judge a tree by its fruit”. He was of course talking about the actions of people – one can present as something good, but their actions indicate something more sinister or negative. In recent months I’ve seen this played out time and again.

With the pandemic spreading and infection and death numbers soaring we have seen groups of people spurning the use of masks and gathering together without social distancing. The saddest thing is that these groups present as “Christians”. Here in New Mexico huge groups of “Christians” have gathered on public squares, in parking lots and parading in the streets boldly chanting “Faith Not Fear”. These folk quote scriptures about G-d's protection, and they state that one who wears a mask and practices all the other science-based recommendations for quelling the virus’ spread is showing a lack of faith in G-d. While many of these are protestant/evangelical/pentecostal type people, even the Roman Catholics have jumped aboard the “Faith Over Fear” bandwagon (and yes, they have a website by that name). The New Mexico Roman Archbishop recently ordered all liturgical celebrations to stop due to the recommendations of our Governor. Immediately afterward we were shown film of men and women, some quite elderly, kneeling on the cold pavement in front of the Cathedral in Santa Fe holding their rosaries aloft, literally screaming “Open our churches that we can see our God”. “We demand(sic) to not be kept from receiving our Jesus”. One common feature of these folk, Protestant and Catholic, is their calling down the judgement of G-d – often even to calling down death – upon our Governor and her team of Covid-19 advisors. This behavior is not limited to “Christians”. We’ve all seen the photos of thousands of Haredi/Orthodox Jews thronging celebrations, funerals, weddings, etc in this country and Israel. These people also are quick to voice their faith that they must “prove” their faith in G-d by violating practical common sense and medical advice.

What is going on? I wish I knew. With my therapist hat on I can cite fear reactions, trying to get a sense of control over an uncontrollable situation, people grasping onto anything that seems like it will return our lives to what we knew pre-Covid. It is apparent that the fascist, racist movements which have felt empowered by the current Administration make up many of the voices sounding lately. And the current Administration has jumped to politicize these “religious” movements. But I am disturbed and disheartened that many of the voices speaking against medical directives are from communities of faith. Even more disturbing to me is that I do not see voices from people of faith equally loudly countering the false claims of the “Faith Over Fear” movement. Once again I think we see the “People of G-d” co-opted and deceived into backing populist movements that can only be described as Un-Christian and even diabolical – think of the Holocaust, the Pogroms of Russia, the Inquisition, etc.. And even those people/communities of faith who are not actively involved in this madness are still participating by their silence.

So, do we just throw up our hands and step back? I cannot presume to tell others how to live their lives much less how to live their faith. For my part, I am actively promoting following health mandates – trying to educate the ignorant, and pushing corporate powers to enforce standards in their stores. I am also facing my own fears, and quelling them with action for

justice and sanity. And I am searching my own life and actions to see if I continue to live what I profess, and if I am an open channel for G-d's life and love.



*“Do Unto Others as You Would Have Them Do Unto You”  
by: Rev. Mother Myrella LeClair*

I was struggling to find inspiration on what to write about for this newsletter when I looked up at the Norman Rockwell lithograph hanging on the wall. It was titled “Do Unto Others” and showed people of all ages, faiths, genders, races, and ethnicities (<https://www.nrm.org/2018/11/goldenrule/>). This “Do Unto Others” bible verse (Luke 6:31) is also referred to as the Golden Rule! Wow! Is this not what we all need to do: to actually **practice** this rule and **apply** it to all with whom we come into contact? To see one another as Jesus sees each one of us.... not as adversaries but as God’s children. To understand that God loves all of us equally.....even those who do not believe in His existence.

Is it not time to put down our swords and turn them into plowshares of forgiveness and understanding? To do so, we must let go of our seemingly righteous anger toward and hatred of those people whom we view as our enemies. Otherwise, if we continue to hang on to our hatred and unforgiveness, they will continue to poison our hearts, minds, and spirits. If we truly want to end the cycle of hatred and the violence that accompanies it, we can only truly do so if we choose to see one another through God’s eyes. That is the antidote to the poison filling our hearts and minds.

Each one of us must search our minds and hearts and ask for God’s healing to occur – to let the past go as difficult as that may be to do. Rather than re-living the injustices we have suffered and inflicting injustices on others as payback, let us heal our minds and spirits by spending time in prayer and resting in the Healing Light and Unconditional Love of our Creator. See yourself and all of creation cradled within that healing light. Then bring into your mind those whom you view as your adversaries. See each one of them bathed in that holy, healing Light and that Unconditional Love. See them not as adversaries but as your loving brothers and sisters who dwell with you in our Creator in whom all are equally loved and equally forgiven. Rest with them in the peace of God. Know that Jesus is also right there with you reminding you to “do unto others as you would have them do unto you”.



*Chanukkah Reflections  
by: Father Ron Lahti*

As I've written before, I celebrate Chanukkah because Jesus celebrated Chanukkah (see John 10:22-23). This is a beautiful time of reflection on the victory of Light over Darkness. I would like to provide some reflections for each of the eight days of Chanukkah.

Day One

Upon re-dedicating the Temple in Jerusalem after driving out the invading Greeks, it was discovered that all of the temple lamp oil had been polluted by the Greeks. Only one small vial of pure oil was found hidden away and this was used to light the vigil light in the Temple. It was expected to burn only one day. The lamp became a symbol of the Light of faith overcoming forces that sought to oppress

and extinguish it. Have I ever experienced a moment of clarity and faith in the face of doubt or oppression?

#### Day Two

Oh,Oh. The lamp is still burning. Well maybe there was more oil than we thought in that one vial. Or...? What seemed mundane has now become a mystery. How many times have I been surprised by G-d's provision and then tried to explain it rationally away?

#### Day Three

Still burning. Something is definitely happening here! Chanukkah is a festival in which work is allowed to continue. Even in light of something mysterious, life must go on. How do I go about my daily routines while trying to keep a sense of the Mystery? Can I bring the Mystery into my daily work and experiences?

#### Day Four

Yup, the lamp is still going bright. We definitely have a miracle here! Now people are starting to feel a cautious joy. Cautious, because what seemed a deliverance in the past turned quickly to disappointment. What miracles have I experienced while going about my routine life? Can I accept the little miracles G-d sends me in gratitude and joy?

#### Day Five

OMG! The lamp is still going strong! People are feeling downright giddy now. During current Chanukkah celebrations children (and not a few adults) like to play Dreidel. This game involves spinning a top and, depending how it lands, players give or receive "gelt" money, or more commonly chocolates. The game represents the festive atmosphere of Chanukkah, but also carries a lesson. Giving as well as receiving are part of miracles. We receive in order to be empowered to give. Have I been a "good steward" of the things I've received from G-d and others? Do I keep the channel of receiving and giving open?

#### Day Six

Definitely miracle stuff here. How can this be? But faced with this miracle, all the people can do is sing! Chanukkah songs are all joyous and festive and everyone, even those with no voice (like me) join in the singing - and of course dancing. When was the last time I experienced, much less expressed, genuine joy and sang, and even danced, for G-d? Rebbe Nachman of Breslev said "There is nothing so bad that a little dance can't help".

#### Day Seven

This miracle is going down in history. The lamp continues to burn with no sign of dimming. We just have to tell everybody about this miracle. One of the guidelines for Chanukkah today is that we broadcast this miracle to the world. Jews are told to burn the Menorah (the nine-branched candlestick) in a place visible to those outside the home – usually just outside the front door or in a front facing window. This year, due to Covid-19 restrictions, Chabad (an Orthodox Jewish organization) is organizing Menorah parades with automobiles outfitted with electric menorahs on their roofs. Maybe a little silly, but, hey, we're still really happy (see Day Six). How do I let the world know what G-d has done for me? Can I take a chance on being "silly" to express my gratitude and joy to G-d?

Day Eight

We've gone past a week. Gee, G-d created the world in only seven days – here G-d gives us one more day! During these past seven days people had searched and worked to find or make pure oil to burn in the Temple lamp and now there was a steady supply to use. The miracle is no longer needed. G-d gave us what we needed until we can take over and continue the work. But the flame never went out – the Light never waned. As I depend on G-d for my life, can I see the talents and skills G-d has given me so I can pick-up where I need to? What does it mean to partner with G-d and continue G-d's work?

Well, we made it. I hope these few thoughts inspire you to try Chanukkah and find even more meaning in lighting the darkness for eight nights. I wish you all a Blessed and Bright Chanukkah and Christmas!

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*As I Close.....*

*by: Right Reverend Barb Martzall*

As I close this newsletter, I wanted to share just a little personal something. Last night as the mother-house was preparing to sleep, little Star Brite started to act strangely. She was growling very softly and staring very intently out the back window with her head and shoulders through the railing to the point I thought maybe she was going to jump from the “bridge” on the second floor to the first floor. Well I called her to distract her, but that did not work. I tapped her gently and that did cause her to run down the stairs and jump into her cat tree at the back window continuing to growl. I went downstairs to see if I could see anything. And what to my amazement did I see in the green belt but a moose cow! Now I have never seen one outside of a zoo so I was amazed. But then given the Covid and everyone is staying home, the wildlife has started to take over their lands again. So Star Brite and I had an adventure before we settled into bed for the night. Thank you Creator for all the wonderful creatures you have made!

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**Wishing all of you a Blessed Advent, Blessed Chanukkah, and a Merry Christmas (western rite and eastern rite) from the Holy Theotokos of Mercy Community. See all of you in 2021, which hopefully will be a much better year for everyone around the world!**

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