



Queen of Peace Monastery



Dear friends,

Our monastic community of Queen of Peace lived the 2021 Holy Week in profound communion with you. This long Holy Saturday of the Covid pandemic has been the occasion for all of us to experience isolation, immobility, and the darkness of the “tomb” with Jesus. Our Lord knows what suffering, anguish and darkness is all about. He has lived it with us; all of it, *“even unto death”* (Phil 2:8). Our God is not absent even if we do not feel or see Him. He is holding us close to His heart. He who has *“made the darkness His covering”* (Ps 18) has enveloped us in His cloak, and it *is* hard to see, it is dark! There we are asked to *“be still and know that He is God”* (Ps 46). With God, *“even darkness is not dark for you”* (Ps 139). As Isaiah reveals, there is a treasure to be found there. *“I will give you the treasures of darkness and riches hidden in secret places”* (Is 45:3).

What might this time of greater solitude and isolation be offering us? Could the emptiness, which we often attempt to fill and flee, be digging out and deepening a space in our hearts for God? Could it be increasing our capacity? The Eternal Father said to Catherine of Siena, “Be capacity and I will become a rushing stream to flow in you.” Our Dominican brother Timothy Radcliffe has written that “the void we feel is a space where God comes to live.”

By faith, we know that the tomb is not the end of the story. It was a place of transformation from which emerges new Life. As the caterpillar is entombed in the chrysalis and emerges changed into a butterfly so, we also, could come out of this pandemic “tomb” abiding in Jesus, and transformed into the light of the world with Him. As we sing in the Exsultet, “O truly blessed night, when things of heaven are united with those of the earth.” The hidden treasure of darkness is Jesus. Christ our Light! Alleluia!

God bless,
your sisters at Queen of Peace Monastery.





January: Our new year began with the arrival of two unexpected wayfarers on the feast of the Mother of God—Peter and John, our hydroelectric volunteers *par excellence!* They took advantage of the holiday to come check the project. At noon, we served them two plates in the guest dining room, stood well back, and held an impromptu session of carolling in thanksgiving for their hard work. Around this time, our hydro project entered the “hidden life” of electronics and drywall. From the outside, all seemed quiet—except for occasional rooster tails of water signalling the performance of pressure tests. Meanwhile, Sr. Claire finally had enough time to construct a split log fence along the west edge of the “nuns’ field” (*below*). The wood came from a blown-down cedar tree that she split into rails last summer.

In 2021, the Order of Preachers is celebrating the 800th anniversary of St. Dominic’s entrance into eternal life. The Jubilee opened on Epiphany with a special Mass. To celebrate throughout the year, we’ve begun singing the chant *O Spem Miram* after Compline on Tuesdays. We are also studying Dominican history through readings and Zoom lectures with Sr. Barbara Beaumont, O.P., the founder of the Sister Historians of the Order of Preachers. Based in Fanjeaux, France, S.H.O.P. aims to make accessible the history of women in the Dominican order

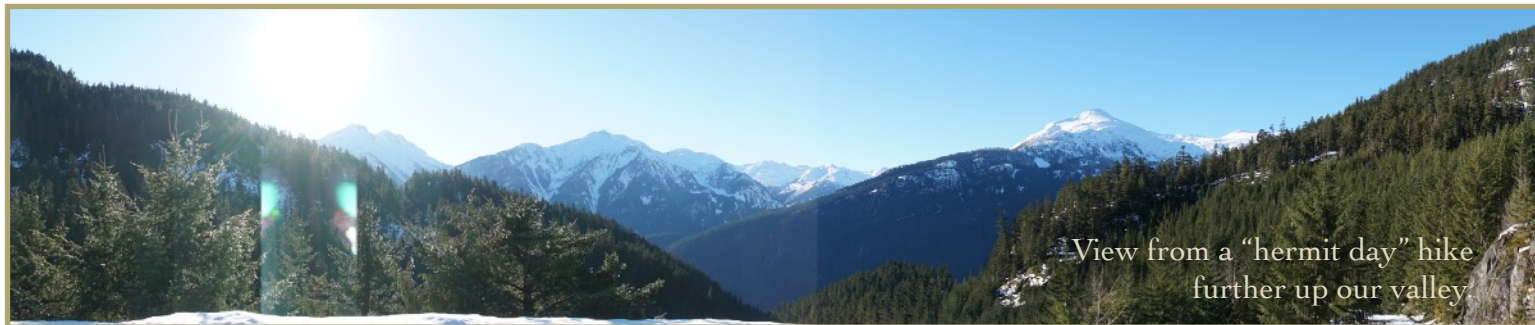


through serious research and study. The rest of the month appeared quiet, with Covid restrictions limiting our guests and prohibiting public attendance at our liturgies. However, tucked in little corners of the house, seeds were beginning—literally! We placed the seed order for our garden in mid-January, including kale, Swiss chard, lettuce, tomatoes, flowers, thyme and potatoes. Sr. Marie Thomas began work on our e-store, and would emerge from prayer full of greater serenity—and solutions to coding issues. Meanwhile, Sr. Isabelle and Sr. Mary Regina were sequestered in the sewing room preparing for a certain vestition...

February: On the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord (Feb 2), precisely one year after she entered, Sonia Gisenya received the Dominican habit and the religious name Sr. Laetitia Maria of the Holy Spirit (*above, left*). “Laetitia” means joy, and the name evokes the greeting of the Archangel Gabriel to Mary: “Rejoice, full of grace, the Lord is with you” (Lk 1:28). It was a beautiful day of celebration and joy for us all.

Work on the e-store continued. From the basement, the dull roar of the ventilation fan could often be heard as our soap making sisters mixed, blended and chopped to prepare our inventory for the launch. This month, we also welcomed the first of several aspirants scheduled throughout the spring. A new challenge of contemporary monastic life? The ten-day quarantine in outside quarters to reduce the risk of Covid entering the community!





Although the women experience more silence and solitude than usual, we've found ways to have physically distanced recreations and novitiate classes to ease their isolation.

On February 18, local farmer Thomas Schneider began an ongoing series of workshops for us about biodynamic gardening practices. This first session was about soil composition. It is exciting to learn natural ways to improve our garden that also respect and support the local ecosystem. Meanwhile, Sr. Marie Étienne and Sr. Mary Magdalen were busy in the pottery with a commission from him and fellow farmer Stefan, who had asked for earthenware jars to hold homemade plant remedies to improve their fields' soil and crops.

March: The month began with a bit of excitement as our main furnace decided to take a holiday. After an initial fix, we thought all was well; but at noon one day, the refectory reader put down the book about the 2019 fire in Notre-Dame-de-Paris, and asked, "Does anyone else smell that?" Our maintenance sisters ran to the basement, while the refectory gradually filled with the acrid odour of burning wire. The furnace had quit again, this time for good. We waited several weeks for a replacement part. In the meantime, to fight the cold, we started counting "sheep" (a wool vest is one sheep, a wool sweater on top of a vest is two sheep, etc.).

The novitiate held a community day, including an afternoon down in our pottery studio. Sr. Marie Étienne gave lessons in throwing pots, and each sister got a chance to try her hand at the art. By the end, there were cylinders, bowls, and some "creative" modern art pieces from when the wheel went awry. It was very interesting to try another sister's work area, and see both the beauty and some of the challenges of the craft.

From March 12 to 14, the Seminary of Christ the King bubble again approached the Queen of Peace Monastery bubble as the high school seminarians arrived for a weekend of outdoor work. Shepherded (and well fed!) by Fr. Peter, Fr. Leo and Br. Bartholomew OSB, the young men dug trenches, hauled deadwood out of the forest, hurled said wood down the mountainside, and then chopped the logs into firewood for our workman Ron to stack and store. Not only did they accomplish in a weekend what it would have taken us months to do on our own, they surprised us by offering homemade sushi for our supper on their first night here. On their second night, several sisters participated in a question and answer session (*below*), covering topics from vocation stories to distractions in prayer. It was a beautiful exchange for both groups, and we are grateful for this ongoing connection with the seminarians and the Benedictine monks of Westminster Abbey. It was from the monks that we heard for the first time of an online series about the life of Christ called *The Chosen*. It follows ~>



Ready for class!



Jesus and the first disciples as they encounter Him and are called to follow. Just after the feast of St. Joseph, we decided to try an episode for a special recreation. We were immediately struck by the series' incorporation of the Scriptures, by the authenticity of the main characters, and by the skill with which the lead actor portrays Jesus's humanity and divinity "unmixed and undivided" (as the Chalcedonian definition says). As contemplative nuns, we don't typically watch television; but this series has graced several feast day recreations throughout the spring with its insightful and thought-provoking episodes. The month closed with our first Zoom seminar about Dominican history facilitated by Sr. Barbara Beaumont O.P. We covered the beginnings of the Order with St. Dominic and the women who would become the first nuns of Prouilhe. With the pandemic, we've been missing the presence of our friars and other guests who ordinarily offer us lectures and the fruits of their own studies. We're very grateful to Sr. Barbara for offering us this ongoing formation.

April: The Easter Triduum unfolded in a beautiful silence until Holy Saturday, when we experienced a bit of unexpected humour! In the early afternoon, there came such a clatter, several heads poked outdoors to see what was the matter—and there found Sr. Isabelle and Sr. Marie Thomas setting up a large processional tent by the entrance to the chapel. Our cappas are warm, but not waterproof, and with rain threatening, something needed to be done to divert the deluge from our sisters, the Paschal candle and our valiant chaplain fr. Pierre Leblond O.P. The tent was a great success, kept the candle dry and, most importantly—lit!

After the Easter Octave, we launched our new online store to share the fruits of our monastic arts and workshops. You can find it on our main website at dominicannunsbc.ca/shop. Our first product? Handmade soap! In future, we hope to add rosaries and other goods made by our sisters.

May: By sheer coincidence, St. Joseph the Worker marked a major milestone for our hydro project. On May 1, a small herd of pickup trucks traced the road to St. Ann's power building as workers and volunteers arrived for the last testing needed prior to our upcoming BC Hydro inspection. Several hours, many sandwiches, and a fair bit of hand sanitizer later, we were told: success! After seven years of praying and working, it is a dream come true to be this close to generating our

own environmentally friendly electricity. Once the project is complete, our monastery buildings will be powered by our turbine, with the main grid as backup during low-water periods such as mid-summer. We are able to sell back to the government any excess energy we generate over and above our energy needs, creating another small source of income for our community. We hope to be able to share more details, and an official launch, in our next newsletter.

In mid-May we joined Mary and the apostles in the Upper Room for a silent retreat between Ascension and Pentecost. Each night concluded with a litany of the Holy Spirit sung as we walk in procession to Compline. "Come, Holy Spirit!" Towards the end of a beautiful week, we received a kind of retreat talk in the form of an international session hosted by the Monastery of Notre-Dame-de-Prouilhe in France. With over twenty other English-speaking monasteries, and our Dominican brothers Orlando Rueda and Fernando García, we journeyed with St. Dominic from Prouilhe to the convent in Bologna where he died in the midst of his brethren. After much joy, especially at seeing our sisters in distant monasteries, the talk sent us back into silence to ponder the Holy Spirit in our midst.



Sr. Jean Marie at prayer.



Monastery Soap

Prayerfully
Handmade

We all need reminders to slow down (even contemplative nuns—honest!). Something as simple as washing our hands can be a reminder to return to our true home, the presence of God. And, it helps when that reminder smells really, really good. That's why we're so happy to be able to share our soap with you through our new online store. Prayerfully handmade from simple ingredients, each bar is a piece of peace right at your fingertips. But, there's more to the making

than meets the eye. Here are answers to a few frequently asked questions.

What does it mean, “prayerfully handmade”? In monastic life, manual work is a form of asceticism that also fosters greater personal balance and awareness of holy poverty. The first monks in Egypt would often weave rush mats and baskets to support themselves, praying the psalms and singing hymns as they worked. Each sister has a different way of praying and encouraging attentiveness of heart as she works, but what we all have in common is that same desire and prayerfulness in even the “little things” of each workshop.

How do you make the soap? We've chosen to use very simple ingredients—water, olive oil, lye, essential oil and herbs—because they are gentle on skin and on the planet. If you can't pronounce it, it's not in our soap! Each variety is mixed in small batches. First, the olive oil is warmed and mixed with lye to begin a chemical reaction called saponification. Basically, the lye breaks down the molecular bonds within the olive oil and reformats them into soap molecules. This reaction also converts the liquid ingredients into a solid state. After 24 hours, we slice the soap and leave it to cure for at least four weeks. When the reaction is finished, the bars are well hardened, gentle, and a real treat to use—they leave your hands clean and soft.

Do you have different varieties? Our first soaps available online are from our “Classic Collection,” which includes some of the most popular blends from our physical gift shop. Each bar—Citrus, Lavender Evergreen, Lavender, and Mint & Eucalyptus—contains a unique blend of essential oils and herbs, both for scent and for natural colour. The Lavender Evergreen blend is particularly evocative of our monastery grounds, with the cedar trees surrounding our vegetable and flower garden in the summer. We pick the lavender and mint leaves ourselves, and dry them for use in the soap. For future collections, we're considering an unscented collection with no essential oils, and just the dried herbs. We'll have to wait and see where we go next!

How does buying soap help the monastery? We rely on benefactors and the work of our hands to support the day-to-day needs of our contemplative life. By purchasing soap, and sharing about it with your friends, you help support our growing community. We also hope that the soap will be a form of outreach to those who wouldn't usually frequent our chapel. Regardless of religion or creed, there's something we all have in common now more than ever—washing our hands!

You can find out more, and purchase a box of the Classic Collection soap, at dominicannunsbc.ca/soap. Each box contains four 115g bars, and costs \$25 plus shipping. Shipping is free on Canadian orders of \$100 or more.



Gardening & the Resurrection

“Who can separate us from the love of Christ in our garden? Can drought or flood or weeds or slugs or mildew or deer? No; in all these things we are more than conquerors through the power of Him who loves us.” (Romans 8:35 - 38, “Squamish” translation).

This year we have been blessed with the guidance of Thomas Schneider, an expert in biodynamic farming who works together with Stefan on his farm in our lower field. Thomas has been giving us monthly classes since December on topics such as different types of environments and their relationships to one another; the importance of fungi and perennials in the garden; and the important role of compost. Our goal is to develop a flourishing and sustainable garden. Christ is risen! And has *reconciled all things to Himself* (Col 1:20).

The principles of a biodynamic garden resonate very well with monastic life. Rather than clearing the ground of what’s there, planting what we want, and hoping the bugs

don’t destroy it, we instead observe the garden space, the way nature works and the order that God has created. In this approach, there are no failures, only learning opportunities. A biodynamic garden self-regulates bug populations, reduces weeds, and in some places eliminates them all together. It has a healthy population of microorganisms that also retains moisture in the soil, and dramatically increases the nutritional value of your vegetables. *If God is for us, who can be against us?* (Rom 8:31).

By working with God’s created order, nature becomes our ally, rather than our adversary, and will actually do most of the work for you! For example, our most prosperous “weed” is horsetail (*below, right*). The best cure for it is the horsetail itself. It grows best in soil that is poor in silica; yet, the horsetail itself is very rich in this mineral. By harvesting this plant we can make a fermented tea and pour it onto the soil, enriching it with silica, and the horsetail stops growing there. No uprooting necessary!

+ By Sr. Imelda Marie, O.P.



A New Icon for Easter

A year ago, I began the sketches for the icon of the Resurrection that you see on the cover of this newsletter. This Divine Mercy Sunday, it was finished and we placed it at the foot of our altar for the rest of Easter Season. Based on a model by British iconographer Aidan Hart, it depicts Christ’s descent into hell on Holy Saturday to “preach to the spirits in prison” (1 Pet 3:19).

In iconography, images are not primarily a form of self-expression, but visual theology “written” in the language of form, colour and symbol. Understanding the symbolism, as well as appreciating the beauty, can help us enter more deeply into the mystery of salvation the icon depicts.

In this model, there are only three figures: Adam, Eve and Jesus. Adam and Eve are being called from their tombs (Adam seems to need a bit of extra encouragement!) as Jesus holds the instrument of salvation, His Cross. Other icons of this type can include a whole crowd of figures, including King David, Elijah and John the Baptist.

Beneath Jesus’s feet are the doors of Hades, showing that He has “trampled” death by his death (the scattered hardware shows that the gates really are no more!). The looming mountains represent the gates of death (Ps 9:13), as well as the parted waters of the Red Sea and of our baptism. The *mandorla* around Christ represents His glory in the form of light.

Why does the mandorla’s light get darkest in the centre, closest to Christ? St. Thomas Aquinas says that we come to know God more deeply, not necessarily by an increase of vision, but by a “*certain connaturality*” with His charity (*Summa Theologiae* II-II, q.45, a. 2). By His Resurrection, Christ promises each of us our own resurrection in this life, and in the life to come; and so we are set free to love as He loves, and give as He gives. His “*love is strong as death, passion fierce as the grave*” (Song 8:6), for each one of us, and for our neighbours. Alleluia!

+ By Sr. Marie Thomas, O.P.

Sunday Complaine* in Canada's Far North

Brisk jaunt
Down a dusty path,
A mile long,
One thought,
Two and more,
That seemed to surface
From earth's floor

No house to house
Or door to door,
Just a path
And my quick tread,
As at tree to tree
I'd somewhat nod

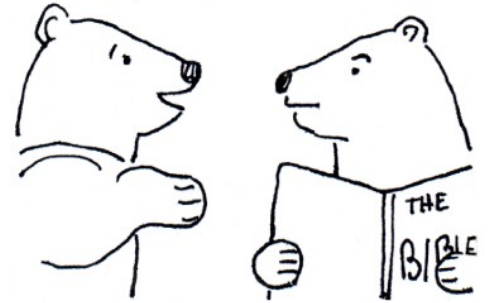
When at the end
I turned around,
No sound,
I only knew
That as I'd walked
To you my God I talked.

+ By Sister Mary
Regina, O.P.

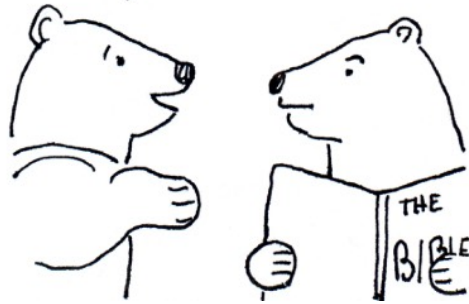
"The night shall be no more"
(Rev 22:5). Tonight's reading,
about the last Day, it's no
scoop for us! The northern sun
never sets all summer!



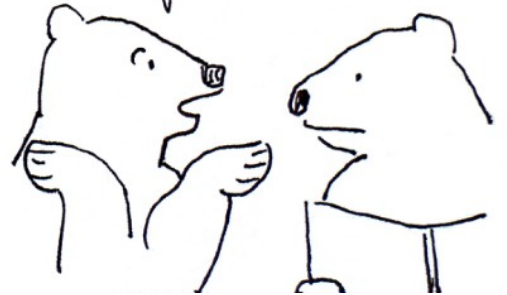
Yes! Since we know
what it's like, we could
launch a coaching business.



We could offer
courses on Zoom:



"Prepare for the Last Day
with bears of experience..."



* Night

Donation Information



Canadian friends

If you wish to receive an income tax receipt,
please send your cheques to:

Queen of Peace Monastery
Box 1745
Garibaldi Highlands, B.C.
V0N 1T0 CANADA

Cheque Memo: Queen of Peace Monastery

American friends

If you wish to give over \$200.00,
you can receive an income tax receipt
by sending your cheques to:

Blessed Sacrament Monastery
29575 Middlebelt Road
Farmington Hills, MI 48331-2311 USA
Cheque Memo: Queen of Peace Monastery

Please remember my intentions in your prayer: _____

Name: _____ Street: _____

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We assure you of our daily prayers for your family, friends and special intentions.



"Love is strong as death." + Song 8:6