



St. Scholastica Priory, 271 North Main Street, PO Box 606, Petersham, MA 01366

## DID GOD NOT KNOW?

Catholic News Agency published an article on January 15, 2021 about Callista Gingrich, United States Ambassador to the Holy See. She was leaving the post and meeting for the last time with the Pope Francis; her husband Newt Gingrich also came on the visit. Ambassador Gingrich spent her time in Rome drawing attention to issues of human trafficking, persecution of Christians and religious freedom in various ways. The now-retired ambassador is a lifelong Catholic, and a long-time member of the choir at the Basilica of the Immaculate Conception.

That is not the reason I bring this couple up. Rather I bring them up because of the last section of the article. It says she “was instrumental” in her husband’s conversion to the Catholic faith. They met 1993 and began an affair in 1994. He divorced his wife in 1999 and married Callista in 2000 in a private ceremony. In 2002, Newt’s earlier marriage was annulled and in 2009 he became a Catholic. The story is messy. So yes, “She was instrumental.” What a Church we have! But—a Church that is following in the ways of God.

In Genesis we read that Adam and Eve “heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze”; God was looking for them but they were hiding from him. (cf. Gen. 2:8f). They are hardly dry from being formed by God and having life breathed into them and they are hiding. rather than the Voice who provided them with one another and paradise. Did God not know?

The wickedness of humankind was great in the “earth, and [...] every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually. And the Lord was sorry that he had made humankind on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart.” So God called Noah to build the ark, saving this one righteous family and the animals. Finally, the rain stopped, the dove found somewhere to perch signaling it was time for a new beginning! (Gen. 6-9). Yet only two chapters later the peo-



ple were building “a tower with its top in the heavens to make a name for ourselves” (Gen. 11:1f). Despite the flood the evil intent was not gone forever but was rearing its ugly head. Did God not know that would happen?

Some 1,000 years later or so the Israelites were now slaves in Egypt as the pharaohs forgot Joseph and their famine. Moses returned having fled from there to Midian to carry out God’s mission to bring Israel out of that land of oppression. The Israelites had seen the plagues in Egypt, the Red Sea open before them and flow over their pursuing enemies, had eaten their fill of manna every day and seen the flaming thundering Mount Sinai where

Moses would go alone to speak face-to-face with God, returning with messages for them. One message: “Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob and tell the children of Israel: You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to above all the people” (Ex 19:3-6). After this God told Moses to bring along some others up

Mount Horeb while the rest remained at the base of the mountain. “Then Moses and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel went up, and they saw the God of Israel. Under his feet, there was something like a pavement of sapphire stone, like the very heaven for clearness. God did not lay his hand on the chief men of the people of Israel; also they beheld God, and they ate and drank” (Ex 24:9-11). Meaning they lived!

They returned to the camp and did not die after seeing God!

Then Moses went back with only Joshua, leaving the people in the care of Aaron and Hur. Aaron and Hur had seen God! Moses would be gone for forty days and forty nights.

Forty days and forty nights after what they had seen and heard, a golden calf was fashioned by the hands of Aaron himself. Well, as he said, “Do not let the anger of my lord burn hot; you know the people, that they are bent on evil. They said to me, ‘Make us gods.... So I said to them, ‘Whoever has gold, take it off’; so they gave it to me, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf!” (Gen. 32:22-

24). Did God not know that this would happen?

God again placed his hopes in one of us, King Saul, but he too strayed, not following the commands. Samuel delivered the message that “the Lord has sought out a man after his own heart; and the Lord has appointed him to be ruler over his people” (1 Sam 13:14). David did well slaying Goliath, enemies, conquering the divided people and becoming king of all Israel. He brought the Ark back to Jerusalem, not minding the scorn of his royal wife. Then David received the great covenant from God that his house and kingdom would be established forever! But there was one little thing more that David wanted—Bathsheba, the wife of another man. Her husband, Uriah, was a good man, a man of integrity who was sacrificing and fighting for David’s very kingdom. And David had him killed to cover up his own sin. Did God not know?

Jesus had been with his disciples for some time when John the Baptist was beheaded. Jesus had compassion on the crowds that followed him, to the amazement of his apostles and all, blessing seven loaves and two fish to feed thousands! The apostles had seen things they could never have imagined and they

committed to following him. Finally he asked them, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” After they told him Jesus asked them, “But who do you say that I am?” Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter and on this rock. I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven” (Mt 16:13-19).

It seems that the work of Jesus has borne fruit: his disciples recognize him. And now Jesus changes the name of Simon to Peter, his rock, the rock on which

he will build his church, with so much entrusted to him. After this great revelation, Jesus prepares them further telling them of his suffering and rejection by the elders, chief priests and scribes and that he would be killed. The Rock, Peter, immediately gets things so wrong that Jesus now calls him by another name, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things” (Mt 16:21-24). Did God not know?

Did God not know how human beings would be? Was he surprised by their lack of spiritual insight, wisdom, perseverance and faith? No. How often in the Gospel do we read that Jesus sees the hearts of those speaking to him “for he himself knew what was in man” (Jn 2:25). And again, “Jesus, aware of their thoughts, responded and said to them, “Why are you thinking this way in your hearts?” (Lk 5:22). There are many similar passages.



God knew and knows. God is not contingent on our time—he is the Eternal Now. He is not in the dark about our ways—he is in the light. So then, what does this tell us about God?

It shows us the great humility of God, whom Jesus describes in the parable of the owner of the vineyard. At harvest time the owner sends one contingent after another to the workers, and each one is a total failure at carrying out his mission. Some were stoned, some beaten and killed. He then decided to send his own son. Even I could tell that was not a good idea! (Mt 21:33-40, Mark 12:1-12; Luke 20:9-18). However, our God keeps calling us to be one with him in heart and purpose, despite his being made a fool of. He never stops hoping in us. He throws his grace and invitation like the sower who scattered his seed over thorny

patches, hardened paths and good ground. All this is further revelation of the “the steadfast love that endures forever” (Ps 135). God knew from the beginning until now and forever what he intended from the beginning and what he wants despite our failures, because he knows our depths and our heights. Jesus said to Paul, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.” So, says St Paul, “I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me” (2 Cor 12:9).

St Benedict affirms this confidence in the dignity of our broken humanity when he legislates for correction “a second and a third time.” After a monk is excommunicated for a serious fault and has made satisfaction the abbot says, “It is enough.” The monk goes back to his original place! The abbot is told to remember the title by which he is called (“Abba,” “father”) but also “the abbot must always remember what he is” (RB 2:30) and these are not the same thing! Remembering what he is: a struggling, fallen and restored human just like everyone else. God allows us to see his own efforts foiled and flop. Of course, he is excellent at writing with crooked lines! This is his “revelation” as much as the profound lines beginning St John’s Gospel, “In the beginning was the Word, and the

Word was with God, and the Word was God.”

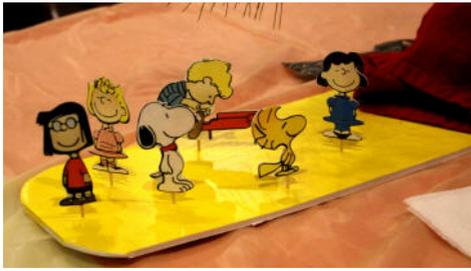
What all this says is very simple really – that God loves us with his fierce and determined love. He shows us the way to be humbled so that we can finally accept that he saves us. That we can stop trying to be perfect. We can stop trying to hide our weaknesses – so much wasted energy – but rather remain faithful, faithful and grateful and humbled. And then we will love, love more and more like him grateful and humbled by the power and love of our God!

*That you may tell the next generation that this is God, our God forever and ever. He will be our guide forever.*

(Ps 47:14)

MMEK

# HAPPENINGS



January 3-4—The monks hosted Mother's Patronal Feast Day meal for Mother and all of us. The Juniors put on a creative skit on the theme of "Peanuts" with balloons, illustrations and all. Sr. Monica made a beautiful redwood cabinet for Mother Mary Elizabeth's office to mark the occasion.



Sr Monica had been working on a surprise bookcase that is now part of Mother Mary Elizabeth office. She had it ready for the day of celebration too!



January 29— Mr. Steve was here and helped Sr. Monica with ongoing projects. We now have a weather station which is set up to provide temperature, humidity and wind speed! They also mounted the cup cabinet that she made to keep the counters clear of cups waiting for their user's return.



We are amazed at Sr Monica's skill and love the cubbies for our cups. Wood-working in the year of St Joseph!

February 20—The senior sisters got their first COVID vaccination. Mother Mary Elizabeth, Sr Mary Angela, Sr Mary Frances, Sr Mary Paula and Sr Monica and Sr. Christine were eligible to have it administered at the Petersham School. The second shot was given on March 13. Soon we hope the rest will be all set too!



Sr Maria and Br Benedict Joseph, of St Mary's Monastery, split a Christmas Cactus to share with the monks.

March 4—The sisters began their first soap-making endeavor. Mother took the lead while others looked on, using a lavender soap kit to help the sisters learn about the process. After a few weeks of curing, it will be ready to use-- just in time for Easter.



## HEART LIGHT

*"What came to be through him was life, and this life was the light of the human race; the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."*  
(John 1:4-5)

What is light? Most of us know light, in the physical sense, as that which makes something visible. Mentally, we speak of it as bringing clarity or understanding. Spiritually, it allows us to perceive and experience God. It is an indispensable and multifaceted component of our survival as human beings.

Visible light is but one part of an entire spectrum of energy (or electromagnetic radiation) that, while not visible to the human eye, is nevertheless capable of imparting change in our world. While there are several natural sources of radiation (the sun, bioluminescence, radioactive materials), the human heart has also been scientifically proven to produce its own electromagnetic field. With each heartbeat, a corresponding wave is generated. While the field is generally weak, studies have shown that when a person has a mind and heart integrated or ordered in love, the field increases. Furthermore, the greater one's integration and the stronger the field, the more likely that person is to increase order, or "mind-heart coherence", in others (Rollin McCraty, *Science of the Heart Vol. 2*, Boulder Creek: HeartMath Institute, 2015).

This discovery of the heart's physical electromagnetism parallels the spiritual understanding of the radiance of Christ as revealed in Scripture and the traditions of the Church. In the Image of Divine Mercy, Christ is shown as one whose heart is emitting beams of light, which symbolize the grace of God to give life and to purify. Similarly, the Sacred Heart of Jesus is commonly represented in art as a heart glowing with light. During the Transfiguration, Jesus revealed his divine

glory to his companions on Mount Tabor with dazzling luminosity (cf. Matthew 17:2, Mark 9:2-3, Luke 9:28-36).

In addition, the light of Christ is a central image used during the celebration of the Paschal Triduum liturgy. "I am the light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (John 8:12). In response to the Lord's words, the faithful repeat the phrase "Lumen Christi, Deo Gratias," as they follow the newly-lit Paschal candle into a darkened church at the Easter Vigil. Likewise, according to an ancient homily on Holy Saturday, Christ descends to retrieve Adam and Eve (and their descendents) from Hades. The author references Paul's letter to the Ephesians, saying, "Arise, O Sleeper, arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light."

Though the illumination of Christ is revealed physically, the light of God is clearly on a heavenly order. Yet, this is the shocking mystery of the Incarnation--a mystery of the physical and spiritual interwoven, a union of heaven and earth. In the Eucharist, we are given both realities through body, blood, soul and divinity; the flesh of the heart of Jesus comes in close contact with our own. It is true that the weakness of this heart-field in many humans is due to a lack of the love which orders our physiology. And yet, the perfectly ordered God-man, Jesus Christ, has a heart capable of sustaining the entire universe in being. Our willed reception of this sacrament, then, is like entering the radiant field of an infinitely powerful love. Spiritual communions in which we acknowledge the spirit of Christ within our soul are similarly powerful. For this is no static light: it effects change on the faith-filled recipient as definitively as the influence of the sun or a radioactive element. With the illumination that proceeds from God's presence, spiritually or sacramentally, we don't just perceive God with his light, we actually become like God himself-- gradually but very actively conformed to his likeness--through direct contact with his radiating Divine Heart.

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will do the same one day for others." And my sisters and I had the joy of learning pysanky writing and participating in the great Benedictine practice of handing down traditions, we look forward to that day when we can, indeed, do the same.

SMH



## ZOOM, ZOOM, ZOOM

Our experience of the zoom invasion began a little later than most as we waited for the final hookups for our fiber-optic Internet connection. BUT once that was in place it was – zoom, zoom, zoom! Like so many others, sisters had doctor appointments, family visits and meetings. And then on January 14<sup>th</sup> Sr. Mary Frances gave a Zoom talk to a group of church musicians on our community's liturgy: its history and development and how we celebrate it at present. A few days later Sr Mary Frances, Sr Mary Gertrude and Sr Mechtilde meet on a Zoom talk with some high school students near Devon, MA, who were studying monastic life in their Theology class. Sr. Mary Frances even worked with the choir of the monks of Christ in the Desert, New Mexico long distance on Zoom. Despite some initial glitches with the Internet connection, they were able to work hard.



## ORA ET LABORA:

# Between the Warp and the Weft or Why I have Taken Up Weaving

In the Sayings of the Desert Fathers it is written:

When the holy Abba Anthony was living in the desert, he fell into *acedia* [a lack of concern for his salvation/ indifference to spiritual things] and was darkened by many impassioned thoughts.

John Cassian also writes about this “noonday devil” in his *Institutes*:

“*Acedia*,” which we may term “weariness” or “distress of heart.” This is akin to dejection, and is especially trying to solitaries, and a dangerous and frequent foe to dwellers in the desert.... And when this has taken possession of some unhappy soul, it produces dislike of the place, disgust with the cell, and disdain and contempt of the brethren who dwell with him or at a little distance, as if they were careless or unspiritual. It also makes the man lazy and sluggish about all manner of work which has to be done within the enclosure of his dormitory. It does not suffer him to stay in his cell, or to take any pains about reading, and he often groans because he can do no good while he stays there, and complains and sighs because he can bear no spiritual fruit so long as he is joined to that society; and he complains that he is cut off from spiritual gain, and is of no use in the place, as if he were one who, though he could govern others and be useful to a great number of people, yet was edifying none, nor profiting any one by his teaching and doctrine.

What better way is there of describing the restless unease we can feel during the winter months, or for that matter, during this time of Covid. I have heard from friends that they just can’t stay home anymore, they would rather take the risk of getting sick than spend one more day in the confines of home with whomever that may involve living with. We can only take so much of the same thing over and over again. And in our rapidly evolving culture, where what was new yesterday is old news today, this sameness brought about by Covid, or in my case, by entering a Benedictine community with

monastic enclosure, and taking a vow of stability, is all the more challenging. So how in the face of so much sameness do we handle staying put, not taking our frustrations out on those who are nearest and dearest to us, but whom we just can’t stand at the moment? Or how do we make this time in our “cells” whether voluntary or involuntary, fruitful?

Abba Anthony asked the same question.

He said to God, “Lord, I want to be saved, but these thoughts will not leave me alone. What shall I do in my distress? How can I be saved?” A little later, when he got up to go out, Anthony saw someone like himself, sitting and working, then rising from work and praying, and again sitting and plaiting a rope, then again rising for prayer. It was an angel of the Lord, sent to correct him and assure him. And he heard the angel saying, “Do this and you will be saved.” And when he heard this, he was filled with great joy and courage. He did this, and he was saved.

My hope is that by picking up the shuttle, I too can be saved. And just as the Desert Fathers passed along their wisdom for how to overcome *acedia*, so too Sr. Mary Paula passes along to me the wisdom she has gained throughout her years of weaving in the monastery. The monastic life is a weaving together of *Ora et Labora*. And the struggles that I face in keeping the right balance are a struggle that countless generations of monks and nuns and Desert Fathers and Mothers have experienced before me and are experiencing now with me. Our simple life of prayer and work is like plain weave. At first it sounds mundane: it is all the same color, and just a repetitive monotonous over-under pattern, but as Sr. Mary Paula put it “Plain weave plays with the light so that from whatever angle you are looking at the cloth, you see a completely different aspect than what you would expect, it’s simple but beautiful and elegant.”

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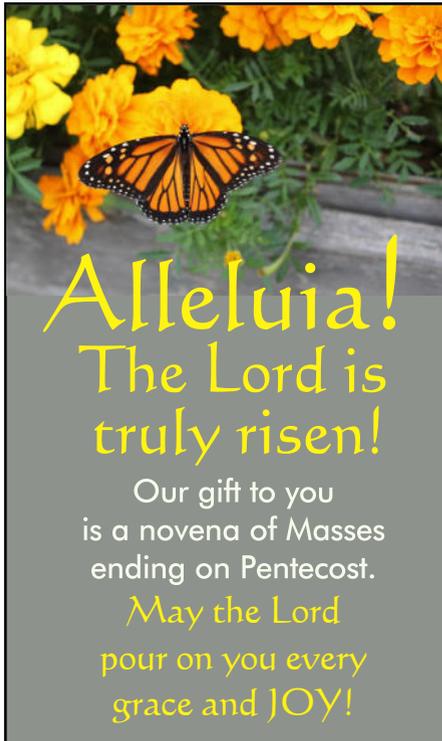
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## THE REVIEWS ARE IN: "IT WAS AN EGGSHELLENT CLASS!"

How wonderful it would be to learn a folk art tradition from someone who started practicing it he was in the fourth grade! We here at St Scholastica's had just such a privilege when our brother from St Mary's Monastery, Br Jerome Leo, offered to give a class on Pysanky.

Pysanky is the Ukrainian art of decorating Easter eggs. These works of art aren't painted; they are made using a batik method of wax resist and dying. Its history dates back to pre-Christian era, but was adopted and adapted to play an important role with the rise of Christianity in Eastern Europe. The egg, itself is symbolic of resurrection; the dye colors and motifs can also convey meaning – for instance, ladders symbolizing prayers going up to heaven or white dots symbolizing Mary's tears shed at the foot of the Cross.

Our first meeting was an introduction to the technique and the materials. We were shown how to use both traditional and electric styluses called "kistka"; how to choose the perfect egg on which to work; elementary geometric divisions & designs;

why is used rather than beeswax over paraffin, what color order is used in dying.... Then Br Jerome set us loose to try our hands at it. He was very encouraging, assuring us that "this craft is all about practice. You will get better each year."

As we made our first attempts at putting wax on the white eggs, it became clear exactly why it is referred to as "writing" an egg. Every one of these art works is a kind of icon. Writing an egg is an act of contemplation. Each drop of wax becomes an act of trust; each line in the design becomes a prayer. Initial artistic exuberance (or should I say 'eggs-uberance'?) became deep meditative breaths, with focus reminiscent of concentrating on the changing chant modes of the Divine Office.

Br Jerome is famous in our circle for the beauty of his pysanky and for the many eggs he has gifted to friends over the years. And now, as he said to my sisters and me: "I felt so privileged to be able to pass on the tradition, hopefully you

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