



## FACE TO FACE

Some years back I was with one of the sisters who had just been given some hard news. I couldn't change that, but I could treat her to some ice cream! So we stopped at a nice little place. It was in the middle of the afternoon and there were maybe five other tables occupied. We chatted and enjoyed the treat despite what couldn't be changed. (Just so you know—it turned out well.) As we walked out of the restaurant I noticed that every group was fragmented by the phones in their hands to which most heads were bent, not facing one another. The heartbreaker was a mother sitting across from her two-year-old, who was slumped watching his mom who was absorbed with her phone. No judgment on her! She may have had a very engaging time with him up until we walked by. But it did make me think – what are we doing?

A quick search on the internet that asks the search, "the effects of the screen and conversation" yields a long list of articles with studies from psychiatrists, educators and business people who all say it has a deleterious effect. Now this is not a simple use of the phone and internet; it's the result of over-the-top use: the kids who aren't playing with others, the teens who sit together but aren't really

yakking about all the nonsense that they could. We, as adults, often don't plunge into a conversation with someone who is sitting next to us at a pause in a meeting. We may miss the opportunity of making a new friend, brilliant ideas may be lost. And there is that wonderful unexpected gift that comes from sharing something deep and unexpected. In face-to-face conversations we see the other's face: eyes that fill with tears as we tell them about something we are dealing with, a warm hand reaches out and touches ours to console. Maybe an eruption of laughter over something breaks a mood we haven't been able to shake until that moment, or a deep insight is gained as we listen to the other's struggles or thoughts.

The Book of Genesis gives us a picture of God creating: from nothing to light, water, wind, planets, sun, green things, animals, and birds. At the end of each "day" Genesis records, "And God saw that it was good." Then on that sixth day "So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.... God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good" (Gen 1:27-31).

God saw. Two little words that state God regards, attends, notices with benign concern. Later in Genesis, Jacob, father of the twelve tribes of Is-

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rael, says that he had “seen God face to face” (Gen 32:30). And another great Old Testament book, Exodus, records that “the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend” (Ex 33:11). Moses told the Israelites that God was speaking to them “face to face” at the mountain, out of the fire where he, Moses, stood in between to be able to declare to them the words (Dt 5:4).

All of salvation history courses through the centuries to come to the fullness of time. God watches, guides, reveals through humankind. God is God. There are no limits or templates that confine his dealings with us, except his choice, his wisdom and his love. “He saw and it was good.” God’s delight caused our being. He created us knowing we’d fall. St Paul writes, “For now we see in a mirror, dimly, [so much is a mystery - why God didn’t ‘fix’ us from the start?] but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known”(1 Cor 13:12).

At Vespers on the 17th of December and at Midnight Mass on Christmas Eve we sing the Genealogy of Christ from St Matthew’s Gospel. After going through his ancestral forebears, the Gospel ends, “Thus the total number of generations from Abraham to David is fourteen generations; from David to the Babylonian exile, fourteen generations; from the Babylonian exile to the Christ, fourteen generations” (Mt 1:17). Each one of his ancestors mentioned is a person created by God and seen by him as necessary, who knew them fully just as we are “fully known” by him.

All those faces God created, knew and loved, lead to that cold, clear night in the quiet hills of Bethlehem. The Omniscient, All-seeing God, saw his Son already traversing the earth as Mary and Joseph made their way to the town of David the King on that night. That night when “the Angel stood before the shepherds guarding their flocks and the

glory of the Lord shown around them and they were terrified! But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people!” (Lk 2:9-10). The Father had waited patiently to see the faces of these shepherds, the men he had chosen to receive the message that would change the world! What was this message? “To you born this day ... the Messiah, the Lord! This will be the sign for you, you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger” (Lk 2:11-12). The Messiah, the Lord, a child, a manger: from the beginning of the world our Creator delighted in mixing the highest with the lowest. “So



God created humankind in his image in the image of God he created them” (Gen 1:27). God’s joy spilled out over the skies and “suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!” (Lk 2:13-14). The shepherds’ terror was gone. The glory of the heavens returned the night sky and they knew that God had indeed told them the truth, and they could not wait but went “with haste!”

With a nimbleness of feet that only shepherds could have in those rock-strewn hilly heights at night they ran. They carried a message for themselves, for the whole world, and even for Mary and Joseph. They found, “the child lying in the manger.” Then they told Mary and Joseph what they had been told about this child, “and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them.” All. The good news of great joy was for Mary and

Joseph too, whose hearts must have surged with love and wonder that all they had seen in visions and dreams was confirmed! God beheld these heralds as they looked with wonder at Jesus and Mary and Joseph with aching love and adoration. These first who beheld the very face of God, their newborn babe – Christ the Lord! Face-to-face with God.

Thirty-three years later Philip, one of his apostles, said to Jesus, “Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied” (Jn 14:8). In wonderment Jesus responds to him, “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father” (Jn 14:9). Jesus is the face of God.

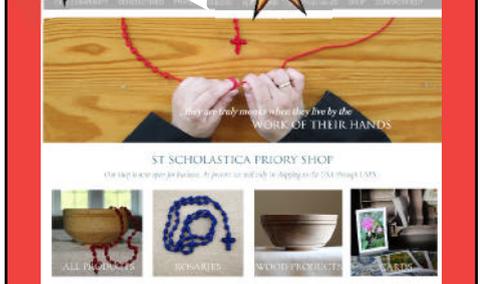
God delights for each of us to be with him face-to-face. Many times when you pray there aren’t words, thoughts or even feelings. But time spent face-to-face with the Lord is always good. God gazes on you, on each of us, as if there were no other. A poor farmer put it well: St John Marie Vianney, the Curé of Ars, asked him what he was doing in the church every day in the afternoon. The peasant said, “I looks at him and he looks at me.”

Technology can be a great blessing for us. But we can’t let it crowd out the many-layered ways we have been created to relate to others near us. Mary, Joseph, and the shepherds leaned over the manger to see this Baby. Huddled together as they exchanged awed glances as they looked on the beautiful face of Jesus, the face of God.

God has hovered over his creation from our beginnings: “He who watches over you will not slumber” (Ps 120:3). He is watching for you, for me, for each of us – let’s go meet him at the manger! Merry Christmas!



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It has been two years since having our last Oblate Retreat Day, because of the pandemic. One of our oblates had [presented the idea of] suggested a meeting on Zoom. At first I was a bit hesitant because it was an unknown environment, but after several oblates had asked for some kind of oblate meeting I decided to give it a try, especially because one of our oblates has a paid subscription for Zoom and would orchestrate the meeting. We would be able to spend up to three hours together.

Even though there were a few glitches we had seventeen oblates online, in addition to Br. Jerome and me. The whole experience was a revelation for me, and a very moving experience. There were several oblates that we hadn't seen in quite a few years! There were participants from Maryland, Oregon, and closer to home in surrounding states, as well as some "locals" and, as always, any gathering of the Oblates means all are remembered in the prayers we offer.

Having been asked to give a conference, I decided to talk about experiences of the past two years and give some teachings on the Rule of St Benedict. Because there was a variety of topics, I gave the conference in

five sessions. At the end of each session we left time for questions, comments, etc. There was almost 100% participation! It was very enlightening for me, and I think for all of the participants. One section became a long discussion on the Eucharist; how they coped without being able to attend Mass, and the tremendous sacrifice of not being able to receive Holy Communion. A lot of good came of this experience: a greater understanding of the Blessed Sacrament, the need and desire to receive Holy Communion, and a strengthened realization of the importance of Jesus in our lives.

Initially I thought that this Zoom would be more of a "meet and greet." I was wrong, because the majority of the two and a half hours we were together was to fulfil the hunger that all of them had, for time spent together, learning more about our shared faith prayer and the renewal of oblate promises. It is quite difficult for me to express what this experience did for me and the other participants. They even expressed the desire to meet on Zoom quarterly!

I was truly sorry that more oblates could not take part, not for lack of desire, but because of a miscommunication in the invitations. Now we know more, and I apologize to any oblates who missed this day.

The ideal is to have an Oblate Retreat Day here in Petersham at the monasteries and we all look forward to the day we will be able to do this. At any rate, we know that if it becomes impossible to meet here together we can always schedule a Zoom. I thank God for providing this technology for individuals and for groups to keep connected. SMPW

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# HAPPENINGS

August 22 -The Queenship of Mary is commemorated here with a procession as we sing the beautiful litany of Mary. The final destination is the statue of Our Lady Queen that moved along with some of us from Tickfaw, Louisiana. It was pouring that day so we honored her from our house chapel.



September 3—The feast day of the superiors of St Scholastica's and St Mary's are special days the communities celebrate with a shared meal and a bit of fun. Fr Gregory is a great fan of J.R. Tolkien. A skit put on by his students and "Elvish" menu delighted all.



September 4-7 Mother Mary Elizabeth attended a conference of the Communio Internationalis Benedictinarum in Rome. Well, actually, (she tuned in) from our basement at 2:45 AM and 5:00 AM for the two daily periods on ZOOM. The planning and care by Sr Lynn McKenzie, the Moderator, and her team made it a delight and so informative. Mother Mary Elizabeth's chat group contained two from the USA, one from South Africa and another from the Philippines all together at one time in their own time zones!

September 8—Solemnity of the Birth of Mary—This is our Foundation Day when Mother Mary Clare

Vincent was elected as our first prioress. On that same day Mother Mary Elizabeth, Sister Mary Angela and Sister Mary Frances were among the first of our community to make their Benedictine Solemn Professions in 1984.



September 14—Stephen Watson was clothed as a novice at St Mary's Monastery and took the name Br Pius—Saint Pius X is his patron and his feast day is on August 21.



September 21—Our handicap walkway to the main door was improved with a hydronic pipe system to keep the pavement clear of ice. Men came with a concrete pump truck with a huge boom so that they could reach the walk without breaking the surrounding gardens and yard.



October 8-10, Monastic Weekend—We had four women in attendance. They experienced praying the Divine Office, quiet prayer, and meals with us. This was our first since the pandemic started in 2020.

Oct 21- Rock Engraving, See the article on page 5

October 22-29—Our annual retreat was led by a Benedictine monk from St. Meinrad's Archabbey, Father Godfrey Mullen, OSB on Liturgy and Life. This was in union with the rest of the world by video, not in person.



October 29—30 Vocation Outreach, a work of Franciscan University of Steubenville that promotes religious vocations, sent a team of photographer interviewers to the religious communities in Peter-sham. We had the joy of having Rose with us to create a video called A Day in the Life. Sr Maria Isabel and Sr Emmanuel were interviewed and the entire day of our activities were photographed. We don't know when the finished project will be completed. To find out more about this beautiful mission which was done for us at no cost, look up: Vocations Outreach. We are so grateful!



November 2—All Souls Day—We had three Masses celebrated, prayed the Office of the Dead and had a procession to the cemetery to commemorate the souls of our deceased community members.



*Happenings continued*

November 6—Sister Mary Paula and Br Jerome had a Zoom Oblate meeting. See page 3

November 17-- Our friend Steve, Sr. Monica and helpers worked for two days clearing big piles of branches and other debris using a chipper. It looks so nice!



## THINGS JUST HAPPEN

Every spring I sit with Sr Gemma, our Cellarer and Sr Monica, our Maintenance Sister, and plan what project or two we might tackle in during the warm months. We had a plan: repair the heated sidewalk to our main door. That is done – just done and in such a way that there won't be wires to rust and break under the concrete! We are thrilled to have it. The other was to get the broadband and Wi-Fi completed with the town of Petersham. That is done too.

But then things just happen. Exploding cans alerted us that the heat in the pantry room was way too hot with the compressor from the freezer. We have worked with our refrigeration company since at least the 70s! They took the compressor off the unit and piped and wired it so it could be outside. That cooled the pantry down! But then the freezer box, which was twenty years old, started leaking condensation through the floor into the basement! So, the box needed to be replaced too. It has been and no more leaks in there!



For years there has been a huge rock, maybe five feet high by the same width sitting in front of the monastery near the walk. We have dreamed of having the priory's name engraved on that rock. It happened!

There are so many scriptural references to rocks: "who is a rock, except our God" (2 Sam 22:32), "building a house, who dug deeply and laid the foundation on rock" (Lk 6:48) and many more. For us it gives an image to Benedictine stability and perseverance in praising God here for many generations to come! St Mary's has one too!



*A skilled craftsman sandblasted the rock*

Sisters were noticing the big oven in the kitchen making excessive knocking noises. This oven was precious to us having been with us during the days of having our bakery. It is over forty years old! Over time it needed a few repairs but was always able to be repaired - until now. They are not making the parts anymore. We realized it was time to replace this faithful piece of equipment. It wasn't as easy as placing a call though. One company told us they could have it delivered in six months; another made it sound like they could somehow manage to have it to us the following week but at double the normal price! Finally we connected with a company that will have it here in February. We hope! We prayed a lot to Mary to help our old oven to hold on a little longer! We were to bake two hundred trays of brownies for a project and some Thanksgiving pies and hoping just a little bit longer! It has served us well. God is good.



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Our Gift to you is a  
Novena of Masses  
Merry Christmas!

## Christmas

Dear Friends,

This is how our house chapel looks during Christmastide. It is the place where we do our earliest prayer of the day called vigils for the world. For over half the year that means we pray in the dark waiting for the light when most people are still snuggled in their beds. We are happy to do this - well, most days anyway!

These bright Christmas lights celebrate Jesus. We always delight to see homes in them and shining from windows! St John's Gospel proclaims this right in the start, "The Light shines in the darkness ...the True Light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world." (Jn 1:5-9)

Thank God that we have this season every year to let his Light penetrate our hearts more and more. It is no secret that the whole world needs his help now. We always have and always will! And so we can ask him to be born more fully in our lives now



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than he ever has been. Being more his won't make us less human. Jesus himself explains why he has come into the world, "so that my joy may be in you, and your joy may be full!" (Jn 15:11). Yes! That is the "reason for the season!" It is God's joy to

bring us his love in Jesus!

Thank you for your love, prayers and all you do for us here. We hold you in our prayers every day but especially at this time! Without you we would not be able to live this life of prayer here at St Scholastica's. Thank you. Please pray for us too!

A very holy, happy and Merry Christmas!

Mother Mary Elizabeth, Sr Mary Angela,  
Sr Monica, Sr Mary Frances, Sr Gemma,  
Sr Christine, Sr Maria, Sr Mary Paula,  
Sr Emmanuel, Sr Maria Isabel, Sr Mary Gertrude  
Sr Mechtilde and Sr Martha