



THE ABBEY OF OUR LADY OF
NEW CLAIRVAUX
VINA, CALIFORNIA

GESTA MONASTICA

News from the Abbey of Our Lady of New Clairvaux



Father Paul Mark Schwan, OCSO
ABBOT

Welcome!

MISSION STATEMENT

Seeking God at this place of New Clairvaux, we are a community of Cistercian monks living the Rule of Saint Benedict. We witness God's love for the world according to the Gospel of Jesus Christ by a life of prayer, labor and sustainable stewardship of our resources in simplicity and openness to the signs of the times. Our monastery welcomes all people in a spirit of hospitality, and engages others in collaborative relationships.

FROM THE ABBOT'S DESK

Dear Friends,

Saint Paul, writing to the young church at Ephesus, in what is today Turkey, encouraged the people in their newly professed Christian faith to have a new spiritual way of thinking (Eph 4:23). He reminded them that they had put away their old former way of life. And now, he said, "is the time to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, putting on the new self, created in God's way in righteousness and holiness of truth".

This is an appropriate text for the Paschal season we

celebrate these beautiful days of spring. And how apropos as we learn to live with the COVID-19 pandemic. The tragic consequences of the



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pandemic rampaging through the world impact all of us. What was taken for granted three months ago; work, shopping, school, career, and lifestyle has all changed in the blink of an eye.

But God is with us. This Paschal season of hope gives us courage to look forward to a better day, a day of renewal where you and I will live more authentically in the mystery of God's righteous, holy truth. The moment is now and it is a wonderful opportunity.



In this issue we hope to provide a resource for your benefit to assist you to take a new spiritual way of thinking for your life, to put on a new self, created in God's way of caring, love so to live in the greater truth of holiness that God desires for you.

Thanks for reading friends,

Fr. Paul Mark



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HOLY WEEK & SACRED TRIDUUM 2020

Our Holy Week and Triduum liturgies were marked by the absence of the faithful this year. Each year the days of Triduum bring into focus the sacred mysteries of Christ's life and redemptive work from his entry into Jerusalem with palm branches, his Last Supper with his Apostles to his Passion, Death and Resurrection. During this time of global pandemic when many are unable to attend church services, the monks carried the intentions of all the faithful people of God in their liturgical celebration.





PERSPECTIVES FROM THE CLOISTER

The monks of New Clairvaux were invited to offer their reflections on this global pandemic. In this volume of Gesta Monastica, the brothers share their thoughts on what this time of global crisis has meant to them and what they believe God might be saying to us all.

“RETURN TO GOD”

By Brother Gerard Arsenault

My experience of what we are going through these couple of months is that I feel very strongly that the world has to return back to God. Even in the cloister, we hear the news about deaths and divisions. Before the pandemic, we heard about all the shootings and mass killings in America usually by young men. And even in our government there are so much problems with one another. But I also believe great good will come. We must never

lose hope. I have felt this very strongly before the coronavirus pandemic. Now I feel it more strongly than ever that “we must return to God.”

“GOD IS OUR REFUGE”

By Father Placid Morris

During this time of pandemic, prayer and being watchful over thoughts, reactions, emotions are the best possible antidote to the restlessness that is experienced during lockdown. This gives perspective, detachment and knowing we

are not alone. God is with us. Knowing that there is no vaccine has been frustrating to accept as one with respiratory problems already. Hopefully, I will have the patience to accept symptoms and surrender (as best I can) to God’s Will in it.

If there is a scripture passage, “God is our refuge and strength” (Psalm 46:2) and “The God of Jacob is our stronghold” (Psalm 46:8) have come to me at times and remind me that God “has my back” in all this. As for what is God saying to us: “Take this time to step back



PRAYER DURING A TIME OF GLOBAL CRISIS

May Our Lady of New Clairvaux, queen and guardian of this Cistercian Abbey, stand together with us in the shadow of her Son’s cross so that we might come to know the joy of His glorious resurrection. May her tender intercession bring healing to all who are afflicted, eternal rest to those who have died and comfort to all those who mourn. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

from the bustle, tactile comfort and looking to each other is crucial for relationships than devices and getting through this together is the most important point as love than anything else.

"GOD SPEAKS IN THE LANGUAGE OF SILENCE"

By John Peyton, Observer

It's quite striking for me to reflect on how this global pandemic has given many people the special opportunity to experience something of monastic life. As most of us are highly encouraged to stay at home right now and not mingle too much in public,

we've suddenly found ourselves compelled by circumstance to live a bit like monks in a cloister! And I think this is good. Our culture forces us to be too busy in our daily lives - so busy, in fact, that we are rarely able to quiet ourselves and listen for God's voice in our lives. God speaks in the language of silence, however, so we need to find that quiet time to form a solid, personal relationship with Him.

In this respect, I think we should all be grateful that we have this shining opportunity to step back from the busy world we know and reacquaint ourselves with God's world. Who knows when

we'll get such a chance again? Let's make good use of it, for our salvation and His glory!

"I AM THE WAY ..." (Jn 14:6)

By Brother Peter Damien

During the current global pandemic, we seem to be even more concentrated on our way of life by living in solitude with Lectio Divina, prayer and labor. These aspects are the backbone of monastic life which allow us to experience God's goodness and His mercy for the world.

"No man is an island." In fact, we live in solitude, yet we do not separate from the world. During the global pandemic our hearts and prayers go to our friends, to those who are working endlessly in the frontline fighting against the coronavirus. Daily at mass, together we pray to the Virgin Mary, Our Lady of New Clairvaux Abbey "to bring healing for all who are afflicted, eternal rest to those who have died, and comfort to all those who mourn."

But overall, in his rule St. Benedict reminds us that whatever we

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RHONE RIVER CRUISE 2023

The April 12 - 25, 2021 Rhone River Cruise with Abbot Paul Mark and New Clairvaux Winemaker Aimee Sunseri has been cancelled. Our hope is to reschedule it for 2023.



do, "The love of Christ must come before all else" (Ch.4:21), because Christ is the center for our life and activities. Every little road leading to perfection must be merged into the Highway of Jesus, for "Christ is the way, the truth and the life" (Jn 14:6). Jesus, the way of truth and the way of life, is the living way, the only true way that leads us to life. Other ways may seem right, but the end of them is the way of death. Whoever follows the way

traversed the globe, striking millions and drastically changing the way of life in our world on so many levels. It is clearly a time of transition.

As Christians, we view things with the eyes of faith. We know that we can view anything that happens in our world or to us in one of two ways: only as a threat or as an opportunity for God. I take great courage and comfort from the Gospel. I can't help but think that when the apostles witnessed Our Lord being seized, arrested and cruelly executed, that they must have seen it as a not very promising turn of events, to say the least. And yet from this seemingly impassable disaster, God worked the salvation of the whole world through the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. The lesson seems to be that God is at work in the most unlikely and unpromising situations.

When there is a change, a transition, a new situation, it requires us to move forward, to adapt to the new way, to evolve. We become creative in responding to the challenge as is awakens something new in us. Is this how God moves the world forward? Time and again, God has permitted great, great challenges, but always He is with us. We can rely on Him and call out to Him in our need. Perhaps our world, with its great technical skill, needs to be reminded that all our skill and blessings are a gift, not to take God and His generosity for granted.

How is God hoping we will respond to this change in the status quo, to this crisis? Does he hope that we will use it as an opportunity to live out the Great Commandment: to have faith in God's power, love and presence with us, and to find new and creative ways to serve



of the Lord will find consolation and happiness and reach eternal life. Alleluia!

"NEW TIME, NEW OPPORTUNITY"

By Brother Christopher Cheney

It's amazing to think that the first case of the novel coronavirus was reported in mid-December of 2019 in China, and now, in that quite short period of time, it has





our neighbors in their need and anxiety?

“YOU ARE OUR POTTER AND WE ARE THEY CLAY”

By Father Thomas Davis

The present pandemic is not the first time a serious disaster has appeared in the world. World War I, World War II, the Holocaust, revolutions in various countries with serious upheavals as a consequence,

and so on, seem to suggest that serious disasters are periodic. As distressing and painful this pandemic is, with the numerous deaths and sorrow these bring to families and spouses, I sense we are slowly entering into a new era of some sort. It may take decades for this “newness” to unfold. From the viewpoint of our Catholic Faith, Vatican II with Pope St. John XXIII prepared us by opening the door to the Holy Spirit of God. Our present

Pope Francis is leading ever so gently further into this “newness” that God in Divine Providence has arranged for us, as incomprehensible as it now seems.

William of St. Thierry, one of early Cistercian theologians and a good friend of St. Bernard of Clairvaux, gives us some healthy advice and solid encouragement when he writes in his first Meditation:

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ABBAY OF NEW CLAIRVAUX GUESTHOUSE REOPENS JUNE 1, 2020

Guesthouse area generally remains closed to Day Visitors. But retreat facilities are limited to 4 people. Retreatants are required to sign a “Hold Harmless” form. Email reservation@newclairvaux.org OR call 530-839-2434.

Wearing of masks in public and social distancing are encouraged.



“Have mercy, Lord, have mercy! You are our potter and we are the clay. Somehow or other, we have held together until now! Until now, your powerful hand carries us. And until now, we hang on to your three fingers - Faith, Hope and Charity - on which you weigh the massive bulk of the earth, the strength of your holy Church. Have mercy, Lord! Hold us lest we fall from your hand. Fire our inner depths and our heart by the fire of your Holy Spirit, and strengthen the work you have accomplished in us, lest we fall apart and be reduced into our clay or into nothingness.”

“DEATH BEFORE MY EYES”
By Brother Luis Cortez

The recent pandemic has had a sobering effect on me—even for one who takes to heart St. Benedict’s exhortation to “keep death before one’s eyes daily.” The threat of a potentially lethal virus lurking invisibly and nearby brings me to reflect more ardently on the “last things.”

Instead of being afraid, however, I’m inclined to lean into the future with more zeal and hope. We cannot overlook the suffering and

death occurring now, but we mustn’t lose sight of the ultimate reality toward which we all aspire, for death has been conquered and suffering redeemed by Jesus Christ.

“GLIMMER OF THE CROSS”
By Father Gueric Llanes

There may be a prevalent feeling of helplessness and even hopelessness in our world. Sheltering-in-place may not come natural for people who are always on the move, always mobile. What is it in the monastic tradition that can speak to this sense of restlessness?

In our mid-afternoon prayer during the Easter season, we sing the ancient hymn *“Haec hora, quae resplenduit.”* The translation in our psalm books reads as follows: “The ninth hour saw the cross gleam out, dispelling darkness from the world, and Christ’s victorious cry in death brought light and beauty back again.” I have often thought about this verse in relation to what we are facing on a global scale during this pandemic. The glimmer of that old, rugged cross overtakes our present darkness and we behold the splendor of God’s creation restored - that is who we are in God’s eyes - children of light reflecting God’s beauty.

As we come to the end of the Easter season, I think it’s fitting that we should find ourselves back at the Cross. For there is a silent hill inside

each of us. And on that hill stands a cross. Here from the vantage point of the cross within I find God's love outpoured. I love the line from Scripture that says, "God will wipe every tear from our eyes." God did not say that pain, sorrow, suffering or for that matter, the coronavirus, will magically disappear. The tears we shed are real. And so are the lives we've lost to this virus - they were someone's mother, father, brother, sister, child, grandparent, lover or best friend.

While feeling helpless and hopeless is undeniable, the Cross shines out even in this present darkness. We need to return to that silent cross within, that still point of our souls, to search for meaning, to make sense of the present chaos and uncertainty and to find our hidden source of strength, an inner stability and peace.

"GOD HAS INTERVENED"

By Brother William Chng

My niece Priscilla sent me a question from her non-

Christian friend who asks not as a challenge but as a sincere question, "Why has God not intervened in this pandemic?"

God has intervened. We hear of many heart-rending stories of people, volunteers, medical workers who risk their lives to provide essential services for the benefit of all. Some have succumbed to the virus. This pandemic is not God's doing. But God has intervened. God has shown us the way to love one another.



Have You Remembered the Abbey in your Estate Planning?

If you have, we would like you to share this with us so we can add your name to our growing membership in the St. Bernard's Society.

Bequests are the cornerstone of most estate plans and are

among the easiest to arrange. The Abbey wants you to contact your own legal advisor or life insurance agent. They have the technical expertise to draw up planned giving documents or bequests.

You can contact me at mikeprym@newclairvaux.org or at (530) 839-9936 and I will be happy to add your name as a new member of the society.

Please accept our heartfelt gratitude in advance.

REFLECTIONS FROM AN OBSERVER

By John Peyton

John comes from the Bay Area and is undergoing a 3-month Observership period at the Abbey. He is a young organic farmer by trade and profession. The Observership is a time of prayer and discernment for men who are interested in becoming a monk. This time gives interested candidates the opportunity to live in the monastic enclosure with the community and to participate in the daily work and prayer of the monks.

I'm beginning to write this reflection about a month into my observership at the Abbey of New Clairvaux. That means I'm one-third of the way through this three-month monastic journey! Part of me wonders if I can convey an accurate idea of the observership program based on only one month of experience. It ultimately occurs to me, however, that not a lot changes in this lifestyle from day to day. In a way, it seems like

time just stops here. The New Clairvaux community has a well-ordered schedule where times

It's a beautiful thing, really, to be in a place where the world just seems to sit still; where a person feels like he's walking hand-in-hand with Time. Indeed, there's such order and harmony in the regular monastic schedule at New Clairvaux that I feel like I'm moving with Time, at his same pace, instead of being outrun by him for miles. And that provides an immense sense of peace.

I think those folks who have spent the majority of their lives "in the world" can relate to the aforementioned feeling of



for prayer, work, meals, meetings and rest are all accounted for in a balanced measure. And the monks observe this schedule day after day, month after month, year after year, until, finally, they cross over into the ultimate changeless reality of Eternity.



For more information on becoming a monk

Please contact:

VOCATION DIRECTOR - Fr. Guerric Llanes

Email: godseeking@newclairvaux.org OR Direct Message on any of our social media sites

 [monksofvina](https://www.instagram.com/monksofvina) |  [newclairvaux.abbey](https://www.facebook.com/newclairvaux.abbey) |  [@godseeking2](https://twitter.com/godseeking2)

being outrun by time. This is understandable, of course, as our culture forces us to be way too busy with all the wrong things today. When we aren't being pressed to work in an "employed" way, we're encouraged to engage in recreational activities that only promote a noisy, hyperactive state of mind. This all contributes to an impression that Time's moving too quickly and leaving us in the dust. In actuality, however, we're moving too quickly for Time by adopting such a fast-paced lifestyle that has no room for silence, personal reflection or prayer.

Of course, this isn't our calling. We fulfill our natures as children of God by giving up our desire for instant gratification and letting Time carry us slowly along the humble road of the Cross. This road is often monotonous, arduous and humiliating, but it is the source of endless peace. Honestly, by distancing myself during my observership from the noisy world of electronic media and my busy job obligations, I feel like I've been able to discern God's will with a clearer head. That said, I can't deny that I've had my fair share of "impatient moments" during my stay here at New Clairvaux. For example, it's been a considerable challenge for me to "quiet myself" so I can listen for God's voice in Lectio Divina and personal prayer. I'm really not used to sitting still and, well... "doing nothing" for so long! Fortunately, the monks have been a support the whole way. They've given me some great books that have really

helped me to focus better in prayer. They've also been great about just patiently hearing me out when I need to vent about my Lectio problems.

That brings me to the next thing I want to highlight about New Clairvaux: the community. No joke, the monks are super kind and helpful. I feel like there's always someone here who's got my back in a scrape. Even only in the past week, I can recall at least five different times when a monk came to my rescue as I was scrambling to finish my assigned work before the bell tolled, or when I forgot to do something! They're simply that cool. Their kindness really empowers one, too. I've been amazed at just how confident I've felt in my work abilities since I started working with the monks. It seems like I can remember job details far better and learn new skills more quickly than I could before, when I was working for more ill-tempered employers! It's really easy for me to simply be honest with them as well, since I don't detect they want to judge me. I'm almost never hesitant to ask questions out of the fear of appearing stupid, I can joke with them without feeling like I'm being disrespectful (not that I'm a dirty joker or anything; I just have a sharp wit!), and I can tell them my concerns without worrying about offending them. In a word, I can just be myself around them, which is naturally a huge relief.

Honestly, I think the best compliment I can give the

monks is that they strike me as ordinary, down-to-earth people. They're simple, relateable folks, just like you and me; and this is appropriate, for Simplicity is the cornerstone of the Cistercian order.

It's still too early for me to say whether I feel God is calling me to share the vocation of this community, but one thing I can say for sure is that I've found a lot to love at New Clairvaux so far! There's a wonderful harmony in this life, and the community is just great all-around. Sure, there are difficulties too, but to echo the wise words of New Clairvaux's 91-year-old baker monk, Br. Gerard, "You can't expect all peaches and cream!" We're in an imperfect world, after all.

That doesn't mean we have to deal with these difficulties alone, though. To all those reading this who are thinking about taking a vocational retreat at New Clairvaux but are put off by the difficulties it might entail, I urge you to remember that there's a whole community here that's eager to help you out of whatever struggle you find yourself in. Just be honest with the monks and with yourself! Honesty in general opens the door for Christ to act in our lives and free us from all our inner-afflictions. Make no mistake about it!

Anyway, I look forward to seeing where God takes me from here! Praised be Jesus Christ, now and forever! Amen.

Abbey of New Clairvaux

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Gesta Monastica

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