

MONASTERO DI SAN BENEDETTO IN MONTE  
NORCIA





DEAR FRIENDS AND FAMILY,

The prophet Hosea gives us this warning: “The children of Israel shall sit many days without king, and without prince, and without sacrifice and without altar.”

To be able to sacrifice – to make offerings – to God is a great privilege. It is only possible because He first made the greatest sacrifice of all, that of His only begotten Son. Left to our own resources, we have nothing to offer Him. The holy season of Advent, then, calls us to make sacrifices and do penance in preparation for His coming, but even those sacrifices come from Him. Like the Magi, we give them back so as to receive the newborn Child worthily at Christmas.

Since the times of Cluny, the season’s penitential character was slightly softened by a practice revered also in Norcia. During the last seven days of Advent, when the famous O-antiphon chants are sung, a small amount of sweet wine awaits the monks to drink in the refectory in silence, as an anticipation of Christmas joy, adding to the one-meal-a-day fast which began September 14. Although there is much to do penance for, this little treat reminds us that even in the midst of the greatest darkness, the hope of Christ’s

coming – past and future – brings gladness. *Ut laetificet cor!*

We hope this newsletter can add to that joy, not only heeding our invitation to add Birra Nursia to your Christmas dinner table ([birranursia.com](http://birranursia.com)), but by reading of the good news happening in our community in Monte.

Re-construction work on our historic church continues at a good pace. In our next newsletter we’ll share opportunities for sponsoring specific furnishings for its interior, since, *mirabile dictu*, the day of the church’s reopening draws ever nearer. In this edition, we also share news of the first gift for the new church: a freshly cast bell, blessed at the pouring in Passau, Germany, and soon to be consecrated in the traditional form. You’ll also find news of some in-house projects, such as the making of incense and candles for the service of the altar. And, as the year comes to a close, a list of the texts we have read in the refectory in 2019.

Although ours is a vocation of hiddenness in the cloister of a small Umbrian monastery, the pressing needs of the Church and your own intentions are not unknown to us. We will offer them at the Crib, that He might accept our prayer and make it His will.

A BLESSED ADVENT TO YOU,

*Prior Benedict Nivakoff, O.S.B.*

Dom Benedict Nivakoff, OSB  
Prior



## A NEW BELL WILL TOLL

**BR. AUGUSTINE WILMETH, O.S.B.**

This September, Father Prior and I traveled to the beautiful town of Passau in Bavaria, Germany, to attend the casting of a bell that would later be given to the monastery. We were surprised to find that much of bell founding is still done manually and without the aid of computer technology. To be present was a dramatic encounter with traditional craftsmanship.

The master founder, Mr. Rudolf Perner, and his family have been casting bells in much the same way for more than three centuries. They spent weeks preparing the clay mold and faithfully inscribed the Latin inscription, written by one of our monks, that incircles the bell. The mold was buried in a large sand pit along with other molds for smaller bells that would be cast afterwards. The molten metal was carefully heated in a large cauldron to around 1100°C. When it was nearly ready, Fr. Prior blessed the molten metal with a special ritual from the *Rituale Romanum* and sprinkled it with holy water.

It was a thrilling moment when the time to pour finally arrived. Everyone watched in suspense. The cauldron was slowly tilted, and the molten metal gushed into the brick path laid out for it, filling the molds one by one. We then chanted Psalm 116 in thanksgiving to God for the successful pouring. The bell has since safely arrived at the monastery and we hope to install it soon. Our special thanks to those who generously sponsored the bell, Mr. Alois Erl (Erlbau GmbH & Co.) and Mr. Armin Kiendl (Max Streicher GmbH & Co.), and to Jürgen and Anette Linder for their hard work in planning and organizing the donation. May God grant that this bell will call the monks and townspeople of Norcia to prayer for centuries to come!

## A PENTITENTIAL PILGRIMAGE



The monks recently made a penitential foot pilgrimage to the tomb of St. Rita in nearby Cascia, asking God to deliver His Church from the many trials and temptations She presently faces.



## ON MAKING INCENSE

BR. ANTHONY ZEMENICK, O.S.B.

The use of incense has always played an important role in Christian worship. Even in the Old Testament when making the covenant with the people of Israel, God decreed the use of “fragrant incense” (Exodus 39:38). The Psalms speak of incense as a symbol of prayer rising up to God (Psalm 140:20). Pure frankincense was one of the gifts brought to the Child Jesus by the wise men. And in the Book of Revelation, describing the eternal Heavenly Liturgy, the twenty-four elders hold “golden bowls full of incense which are the prayers of the Saints” (Revelation 5:8).

In the Roman Rite, incense is mainly used during the offering of Holy Mass and at Vespers, though there are other occasions as well, such as during Eucharistic Adoration and certain solemn blessings and processions. The incense symbolizes the prayers of the Church rising up to God, the Sacred Humanity of Christ consumed and offered in His Passion, and the spiritual sacrifice (burnt offering in the odor of sweetness) of all the faithful united to Christ. For monks, the customary three scoops of incense can symbolize the three monastic vows and the offering of one’s entire life to God in the monastery, which may be thought of as a big thurible, and the incense rises up in a silent “suscipe me Domine.” The burning coals on which the incense is burned symbolizes Charity and the Holy Spirit, as is explicitly referred to in a prayer the priest says during Solemn Mass when handing the thurible to the Deacon.

Frankincense itself is the sap from the “Boswelia Sacra” tree, which grows only high up in the arid desert mountains of Somalia and Ethiopia. When the trees are mature, they are tapped and the pale yellowish sap flows out and is collected. When it hardens on contact with air, the sap naturally forms chunks or nuggets of frankincense.

In making incense for liturgical use, often various fragrances are added to give a sweet fragrant smell to the naturally spicy and woody smell of the frankincense sap. For this, there are various methods and traditions. The method that I learned is common for the type of incense produced by Greek monks. I learned from a hermit monk and also from contact with a monk on Mount Athos who makes incense.

First, the pure raw frankincense is frozen and ground into a very fine powder. Then a particular amount of frankincense powder is mixed with high quality pure fragrances. The mixture is kneaded by hand like dough, and then left to cure for several days until it is a firm sticky lump. Afterwards the incense mixture is rolled out, cut into thin strips, and then each piece is broken off and rolled by hand. The pieces of incense are put into a bowl of chalk to prevent them from sticking together. After a week or so, when the incense pieces have dried and hardened, the excess chalk is sifted away, and the incense is ready for use.

Since the incense itself symbolizes the prayers rising up to God, prayer accompanies the making of the incense: the Jesus Prayer, the Hail Mary, or other short repeated prayers, and the needs and intentions of those who ask prayers of the monks are also remembered. Thus, the making of incense is itself a work of prayer: of worship ordered to the Sacred Liturgy and of intercession for the needs of all who ask our prayers.

Here at the Monastero di San Benedetto in Monte, only the highest quality ingredients are used for the incense made for the Sacred Liturgy. We do not sell our incense, but only produce it for use in our monastic church.

## WANING DAYS AND WAXING CANDLES

BR. PAUL ULICKI, O.S.B.

Since the beginning of our time here *in Monte*, we have put into practice what St. Benedict tells the monks to do during the sleeping hours of the night – that “a candle shall be kept burning in the room until morning” (Rule, 22). For monasteries, the art of making wax candles goes back centuries. Benefactors would donate wax to the monks since, every day, candles are lit for Holy Mass and the Divine Office of Matins, Lauds, Vespers and Compline. Although in these days the tradition of candle making is more common in Byzantine monasteries, we are happy that we now make candles for our liturgical use.

We use two methods of candle making (molded and hand-dipped) and, leaving aside some specifics, each method is straightforward. For molded candles, one simply heats up the solid wax in a double-boiler until it liquifies and reaches the right

temperature, which varies depending on the type of wax used. Then, one pours the wax into a mold (glass, plastic or silicone) with the right sized wick. Let the wax cool and *voilà!*, the candle is ready. For hand-dipped candles, the wick is prepared for each candle using a wick holder. Once the wax is ready, the wick holder is repeatedly dipped into the wax until the desired diameter for the candle is obtained.

As the season of Advent approaches and the days become shorter, we become more aware of our desire to see the coming of our Lord – the True Light – on Christmas. Candles visibly remind us of His Presence with us, and although the days pass and the darkness seems greater, it is then that we are reminded in the liturgy to make the Psalmist’s words our own – *et in lumine tuo videbimus lumen* (and in Thy light we shall see light, Psalm 35:10).



# ✠ 2019 READINGS AT TABLE ✠

*In the monastic refectory, the monks eat in silence while one of the monks reads from a text aloud.  
Here's a list of what we read at table in 2019.*

## *A Christmas Carol*

BY CHARLES DICKENS

## *Homilies on Advent and Christmas*

BY ST. BERNARD OF CLAIRVAUX

## *Before Church and State*

BY ANDREW WILLARD JONES

## *Excerpts from The Liturgical Year*

BY DOM PROSPER GUERANGER

## *Life in the Cosmos*

BY DR. JEREMY HOLMES  
IN PEREGRINE MAGAZINE

## *The Rationale Divinorum Officiorum*

BY WILLIAM DURAND OF MENDE

## *The Letters of St. Peter Damian*

## *The Dialogues of St. Gregory the Great*

## *The Sadness of Christ*

BY ST. THOMAS MORE

## *Homilies on the Gospel of St. John for the Triduum*

BY ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM

## *A Counted People*

BY MARC BARNES IN FIRST THINGS

## *Heroic Catholic Chaplains*

BY THOMAS J. CRAUGHWELL

## *The Church and the Scandal of Sexual Abuse*

BY POPE BENEDICT XVI

## *Orations of St. Gregory Nazianzen for Easter and Pentecost*

## *The Homilies of St. Bede the Venerable for Ascensiontide and Pentecost*

## *Magnificat Magazine articles*

BY FR. SEBASTIAN WHITE, O.P.

## *Magnificat Magazine articles*

BY ANTHONY ESOLEN

## *Annibale Bugnini*

BY YVES CHIRON

## *The Sanctifier*

BY LUIS M. MARTINEZ

## *Man Against Himself*

BY MARCEL DE CORTE

## *Five Books on Consideration*

BY ST. BERNARD OF CLAIRVAUX

## *The White Fathers*

BY GLENN D. KITTLER

## *Baptism of Blood*

BY MARTIN MOSEBACH IN FIRST THINGS

## *Subversive Catholicism*

BY MARTIN MOSEBACH

## *Oration on the Nativity of the Theotokos*

BY ST. JOHN DAMASCENE

## *A Crusade of Prayer and Fasting*

BY RAYMOND LEO CARDINAL BURKE AND BISHOP ATHANASIUS SCHNEIDER

## *Camaldolese Extraordinary*

BY JEAN LECLERQ

## *For Love of My People I Will Not Keep Silent*

BY JOSEPH CARDINAL ZEN

## *The Soul of a Church*

BY VERY REV. BENEDICT NIVAKOFF, OSB (ESSAY)

## *Saint Benedict and His Times*

BY ILDEPHONSE CARDINAL SCHUSTER

## *Reading the Signs of the Times*

BY DOUGLAS FARROW IN FIRST THINGS

## *Eternity in the Midst of Time*

BY FR. WILFRID STINISSEN, O.C.D.

## *Christus Vincit*

BY BISHOP ATHANASIUS SCHNEIDER AND DIANE MONTAGNA

## WAYS THAT YOU CAN HELP...

*For Benefactors in the U.S.A.*



**PLEASE ADDRESS YOUR CHECK TO:**

The Monks of Norcia Foundation

*and mail it to:*

Monks of Norcia Foundation  
10685-B Hazelhurst Dr. #18857  
Houston, TX 77043 USA

*This foundation is a 501 (c) (3) tax-exempt organization.*

*For Benefactors in Great Britain and the European Union*



**PLEASE ADDRESS YOUR CHEQUE TO:**

Monastero di San Benedetto

*and mail it to:*

Fr. Martin Bernhard, O.S.B.  
Monastero di San Benedetto  
Località Case Sparse, 164  
06046 Norcia, (PG)  
Italy

**OR MAKE A BANK TRANSFER:**

Intesa Sanpaolo S.p.A.  
Agenzia di Norcia – It

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