



The Marian Journal

Keeping members and friends of the
Order of the Most Holy Mary Theotokos informed.

SPECIAL 2010 CHRISTMAS EDITION

December 2010

Volume 2, Number 4



**MARK YOUR
CALENDARS!!!**

**O.S.S.T.'s first
Synod / Retreat is
scheduled for
August 12-14
2011 in Conyers,
Georgia.**

**Conyers is where
the Blessed
Mother appeared
49 times on the
13th of the month
from 1990 to
1998. Well over a
million pilgrims
have visited the
site, with several
gatherings
estimated at over
100,000. Conyers
is a holy site
(Cont)**

Order of the Most Holy Mary Theotokos

(Ordo Sanctissimae Theotokos, O.S.S.T.)

Alleluia. To us a child is born: Come let us adore him. Alleluia.

Ave Maria School of Divinity Opens its Doors to its First Student

On Wednesday, September 8, 2010, the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and the one-year anniversary of the founding of "The Old Catholic Marianists", the Ave Maria School of Divinity was established; opening its doors to the first student on October 15, 2010.

The Most Reverend Doctor Robert F. Jangro, O.S.S.T. (President of the Seminary), along with the Reverend Monsignor Christopher E. Richard, O.S.S.T. (Academic Dean) welcomed Sister Sherie J. Mercier, O.S.S.T. as Ave Maria's very first student.

While the primary purpose of Ave Maria School of Divinity is to prepare candidates for ordination to Holy Orders, the doors are also open to those who merely wish to pursue theological studies for their own personal edification.

Our goal is to provide a "journey in formation" that is based in the baptismal ministry of all persons, focusing on the spiritual and personal development of those considering ordination, and is guided by the leadership needs of this jurisdiction and the Church at large. At the same time, it has been our desire to design and model interactions with interested persons and congregations that respect the diversity of our community and the wide range of skills, life experiences, and individual callings of those who approach us for consideration.

Some come to us with extensive seminary preparation, while others come with very little to no previous course work. And that is why our ministerial formation program was developed with the late vocation especially in mind, realizing that in most cases full time attendance at a conventional seminary is not possible due to work and family obligations. We prepare our candidates for ordination in a slightly unusual way, by what is known as the time honored custom of "reading for Holy Orders". All reading for Holy Orders is by distance using available technology.

We have also patterned clergy training in the Order of the Most Holy Mary Theotokos after the ancient practice of the "bishop's" or "abbot's" schools. In the early medieval period, before general education, universities, and

where untold numbers have experienced healing, conversion and a deeper relationship with Christ and Our Loving Mother, the Blessed Virgin Mary.



Bp. David



Msgr. Christopher



Fr. Anthony



Br. Jeffrey

seminaries; leaders of Christian communities trained others for ministry to the diaconate and presbyterate/priesthood in a local setting.

We have renewed that vision which allows people to train within their local churches and to receive a high quality, academically demanding and professional instruction in ministry.

Let us pray.

O Eternal God, bless Ave Maria School of Divinity, that it may be a lively center for sound learning, new discovery, and the pursuit of wisdom; and grant that those who teach and those who learn may find you to be the source of all truth; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

A Glorious History to Remember and to Recount... a Great History Still to be Accomplished!

As the Advent season draws to a close, and we prepare to celebrate Christmas, we reflect on the many ways in which God continues to bless our community. Among one of the greatest blessings is a continued growth in vocations.

Not only do our members come from diverse places, but they also bring with them a wide variety of backgrounds. However, they all share one thing in common: whether a doctor, a teacher, missionary, or seminarian prior to entering our community, each man and woman comes here having responded to God's call. Each of their stories is unique, and yet each witnesses to the desire to give everything to the Lord, with selfless joy.

Bishop David Demaciado Pascua, O.S.S.T. from Hayward, California was incardinated as a bishop on July 25, 2010 and made his First (Temporary) Profession on July 16, 2010, taking the three traditional evangelical monastic vows. Bp. David holds dual affiliation with Unity Catholic Church / Servants of the Good Shepherd (an independent Orthodox Church) where he was recently elected and elevated to the position of Vicar General.

Monsignor Christopher Eugene Richard, O.S.S.T. from Loudonville, New York was incardinated as a priest on July 25, 2010 and made his First (Temporary) Profession, taking the three traditional evangelical monastic vows on November 21, 2010. He was also elevated to Monsignor and appointed Claustal Prior. Formerly a member of the Independent Old Catholic Church, Msgr. Chris has been serving as the O.S.S.T. Vocations Director and the Academic Dean of Ave Maria School of Divinity since August 15, 2010.

Father Anthony Christopher Zacchino, O.S.S.T. from New Port Richey, Florida was incardinated as a priest on November 21, 2010. Formally a member of the Independent Old Catholic Church, Fr. Anthony made his First Temporary Profession and took the three traditional evangelical monastic vows on July 16, 2010.

Brother Jeffrey Alan Leach, O.S.S.T. from Wolverhampton, West Midlands, United Kingdom was appointed Spiritual Director on August 15, 2010. He made his Final (Perpetual) Solemn Profession and took the three traditional



Sr. Sherie



Fr. John



Fr. Bruce



Sr. Helene



The star of Bethlehem was a star of hope that led the wise men to the fulfillment of their expectations, the success of their expedition. Nothing in this...

evangelical monastic vows on October 10, 2010. Br. Jeff is a Church of England seminarian studying for Holy Orders.

Sister Sherie Jane Mercier, O.SS.T. from Mayer, Arizona was accepted as an aspirant for Holy Orders and was admitted as the first student of Ave Maria School of Divinity on October 15, 2010. Formerly a member of the Roman Catholic Church, Sr. Sherie made her Final (Perpetual) Solemn Profession and took the three traditional evangelical monastic vows on December 8, 2009.

Father John Edward Kinsley from Prescott, Arizona was incardinated as a priest and participated in the Rite of Blessing and Reception of a Postulant, making his Promise as a Postulant on November 21, 2010. Fr. John was formerly a member of the Independent Old Catholic Church.

Father Bruce George Douglas from Ellington, Connecticut was incardinated as a priest and participated in the Rite of Blessing and Reception of a Postulant, making his Promise as a Postulant on November 21, 2010. Fr. Bruce was formally a member of the Independent Old Catholic Church.

Helene Marie Smith a member of the Church of England from Oxley, West Midlands, United Kingdom, will by the grace of God make her First (Temporary) Profession, taking the three traditional evangelical monastic vows on January 6, 2010.

As our history continues to unfold, we in the Order of the Most Holy Mary Theotokos appreciate each member's willingness to play a part in our life and mission within the community, and within the Church at large. Thanks be to God!

Journey

I have shared before in a previous edition of "The Marian Journal" how I was raised as a Baptist, then different Protestant denominations. I, however, had a lot of Catholic influence as where I grew up (St. Joseph, MI), was a very Catholic town. Even though I went to public schools, our system was based on the Catholic Church's schedules, e.g., no meat on Fridays (pre-Vatican II), off on holy days of obligation, etc. My grandmother was also Catholic and had statues and rosaries as far back as I could remember. But in the same vein, I know that from an early age, God had a calling on my life to go into ministry. In 1986, I became a Catholic (Roman) and remained as such for the next eleven years. However, in 1997, some things transpired that made me leave the Roman Catholic Church (RCC), for quite some time. One priest had stated that unless we received last rites and had made a good confession before dying, we would go to hell. I could not reconcile with that statement at all and left the RCC over it. For the next 9 years, I went to several different churches, eventually joining a Pentecostal church and becoming an ordained minister of the Gospel. For the next 7 years, I pastored and/or co-pastored several churches. But a chain of events at the end of 2005 brought me back to the RCC. We lost 3 very close friends, one of whom was a priest, in a month's time. Then a priest friend of mine gave me a Rosary that had been blessed by Pope John Paul II and given to the priest. This brought me back to the RCC until recently when I left.

In the RCC, women are not allowed to be priests or deacons, even though the Scripture talks in Romans 16 about Phoebe, and St. Paul uses the Greek word

...world is more fundamental for success in life than hope, and this star pointed to our only source for true hope: Jesus Christ.



Christ was born in the first century, yet he belongs to all centuries. He was born a Jew, yet He belongs to all races. He was born in Bethlehem, yet He belongs to all countries.



Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, ...

for deacon in describing who Phoebe was and did. The biggest thing for me is I know God wants me to minister to others in the Sacraments (especially the Eucharist) and I would not be allowed to do that in the RCC. God has opened a few doors for me, one is that Dom Robert and Msgr. Christopher Richard have started the Ave Maria School of Divinity. I am currently a seminarian, studying to eventually become ordained a priest. Of course, I will be ordained a deacon first. Secondly, I have had excellent support by my loving husband, Mark, who knows that God has called me to ministry before and is continuing to do so. Thirdly, a local Anglican Church of North America (ACNA) pastor (a woman named Rev. Pamela) started a small congregation that meets on Sunday mornings. Although I have to drive 25 miles one way to go to church, it is so worth it. She has been supportive of my studies and we talk frequently about the ministry.

I have shared a lot of this with Msgr. Christopher as well as Dom Robert and hope and pray that you will hold me up in prayer daily as I pursue what I know is God's calling on my life. Interestingly enough, I answered God's call with the same response as Mary, Our Blessed Mother, be it done to me according to Your will. May we always, as O.S.S.T. brothers and sisters, answer God's call with our "fiat".

Blessings in Jesus and Mary,
Sister Scholastica (Sherie), O.S.S.T.

Totus Tuus

From the Claustal Prior

Season's Greetings

I would like to personally take this opportunity to wish you and your loved ones a very Merry Christmas, and a Happy, Healthy, and Holy New Year. May God continue to bless our Order and our members throughout this Holiday Season and in the New Year.

You, and your loved ones, will be remembered in the Holy Sacrifice of the Masses that I celebrate throughout this Holiday Season at St. Joseph's Chapel. God bless!

Vocations

The O.S.S.T. Clergy Vocations Program currently has one Candidate for Holy Orders enrolled, Sr. Sherie J. Mercier, O.S.S.T. Sr. Sherie has been diligently working on the academic program of the first section, Candidacy, and will be entering the second section, Seminarian, shortly after the New Year. Sr. Sherie is on course to be Ordained as a Transitional Deacon at the Synod in August, 2011. Please keep Sr. Sherie in your prayers.

If you, or anyone you may know, feels that you, or they, may have a Call to Holy Orders, please contact the Vocations Director, so that together we may discern your Call and work toward the ministry that God may be Calling you to. The Vocations Director may be reached at frcrichard@yahoo.com.

"Find-a-Friend"

This past October, the Order tried the "Find-a-Friend" program so as to

***... saying, where
is he that is born
King of the Jews?
For we have seen
his star in the
east, and are
come to worship
him.
Matthew 2:1-2***



***Late on a sleepy,
star-spangled
night, those
angels peeled
back the sky just
like you would
tear open a
sparkling
Christmas
present. Then,
with light and joy
pouring out of
Heaven like water
through a broken
dam, they began
to shout and sing
the message that
baby Jesus had
been born. The
world had a
Savior! The
angels called it
"Good News," and
it was.***



increase membership in our community. We had two new Inquirer/Visitors join our e-group.

All members are encouraged to continue this program throughout the New Year and try to bring at least one new friend to our e-group and/or one new friend to join as a member of the Order.

The more members we have, the greater our ability to minister to God's people in need. There is indeed strength-in-numbers. And, in today's secular world, we need as many members as possible to spread the Gospel and bring Christ to others. In this time of year when Christ is actually on the minds of others, this is an ideal time to bring them into the Order and keep Christ, and Mary, in their lives throughout the year.

Fasting Wednesdays

The Order has designated Wednesdays of each week to be our day of Fasting and Prayer. All members are encouraged to Fast, within the limits of their personal health issues, and/or to increase Prayer.

This devotion has been widely accepted by our members as a way to stay in solidarity with one another, and with other Monastics around the world. Please continue this devotion and let our members know what you have chosen to do on Wednesdays.

Contributions to the Order

Many of us may not realize this, but it does take funds for the operation of the Order. There are costs incurred in printing, postage, shipping, website, Pectoral Crosses, supplies, and numerous other expenses.

Since the founding of the Order over a year ago, the overwhelming majority of these expenses have been paid for from personal funds of the Presiding Bishop. A few small contributions have been made for the good of the Order, but a very small amount compared to the Presiding Bishop's personal contributions.

Our Order does not collect dues, nor do we require regular contributions of our members, as many other Old Catholic jurisdictions do. Therefore, voluntary contributions to the Presiding Bishop are the only source of funds, other than his own, that he has to work with.

All members of the Order are encouraged to make voluntary contributions to the Presiding Bishop to help offset the expenses incurred in the operation of the Order. The contributions may be whatever amount you personally feel comfortable making. You may consider making smaller contributions throughout the year, if you find this more affordable.

Let us continue to support our Presiding Bishop, personally, financially, and with prayer, as he works so very hard to serve us as our Shepherd. May God bless the cheerful giver!

Monsignor Christopher E. Richard, O.S.S.T.



***And she will bear
a Son, and you
shall call His
name Jesus, for it
is He who will
save His people
from their sins.
Matthew 1:21***



***There is no name
so sweet on
earth, no name so
sweet in Heaven,
The name, before
His wondrous
birth, to Christ
the Savior given.***



Nativity Light

Yesterday I saw you, standing there again
A knowing smile you gave me, as I passed you your fallen cane.
I asked you why you stood there, on the same corner every day
As if waiting for a friend that may show up for you one day.

You took my hand and asked me, if I had time to hear you pray
To tell me of your story, that you heard of yesterday.

I got us both a cup of hot soup, as it was snowing and cold outside
Then I sat down beside you silently, as this story from your mind would unfold.
Holding my hands in your hands, you looked straight into my soul
You filled my heart with a holy light, that warmed straight through my soul.

This is what you said to me, the day I cared to stay
To listen to your story, your gift from yesterday:

"Once I was a shepherd, before I lost my sight
Before they came and took me and robbed me of my life.
I was looking after my sheep, that night the Angel came
An angel of my Lord was he, his beauty shone around.

He told me of my birth
A tiny little infant has been born, in Bethlehem this night.
A Savior that had been promised you see
Since the scriptures of time were in sight.

I was so filled with light and hope, I had to go and find
This tiny little infant child, a Savior born that night
The Savior of all mankind, my only son you see.

I followed the Angel's request, a shining star I had blessed
It took me far to Bethlehem, where they had come to rest.
A beautiful girl called Mary, God's chosen one for me
Was given by the Holy Spirit, a tiny child of thee.
She looked so tired and helpless, and yet I could now see
All three would be protected, by the Spirit for all eternity.

I looked upon the infant, an image of myself
I knew from that day forward, mankind was saved no doubt.
He was shared that night for all, to show how much I cared
To come among his people, so that our sins could be repaired.

On the day of the Epiphany, three wise men from afar
Had travelled to worship and bless me, with gifts to heal and help us go far.
They too had followed the star, from miles away to see
A true king in baby Jesus, a true King of humanity".

***God grant you the
light in
Christmas, which
is faith;
the warmth of
Christmas, which
is love;
the radiance of
Christmas, which
is purity;
the righteousness
of Christmas,
which is justice;
the belief in
Christmas, which
is truth;
the all of
Christmas, which
is Christ.***



***The way to
Christmas lies
through an
ancient gate....It
is a little gate,
child-high, child-
wide, and there is
a password:
"Peace on earth
to men of good
will."
May you, this
Christmas,
become as a little
child again and
enter into His
kingdom.***

That night was the last time I saw him, my friend who'd lost his sight
But now I know who he was, and why he came to me that night.
Why as a shepherd he came, to fill me with his spirit
So I can carry on his light, so I could be his sight.
God you were a shepherd, bringing me into your fold
That I would never go hungry, for this story you once told
Of the infant Jesus our Savior, a story that never grows old.

The story of the Nativity, a story that must be told!

~ A poem written by Helene Marie Smith ~

Mary... Crucial to Christmas

As we approach the Advent and Christmas seasons, we begin to ask ourselves the question as to what role the mother of our Lord should play in our worship and festival observances. How important a place? The answer in a nutshell is: a very important place.

Protestant observances of the events surrounding the Incarnation all but deny the importance of Mary. A few references to her in sermons, a character in the Christmas play, and a statue in the Nativity scene are about as far as it goes in terms of recognizing the role of Our Lady in the divine transcendent event. However, Catholic observers are quick to point out that their own Church hasn't always properly emphasized her importance.

The life and ministry of Jesus on earth begins with the Annunciation and the Incarnation. The vehicle or means by which the Incarnation took place is the Blessed Virgin Mary. The Incarnation of the Son of God requires that we discover God's purposes in the Word made flesh. Through the Annunciation, Mary learned that her motherhood would extend to all who stand in need of God's mercy and forgiveness. As Father Romanus Cessario writes: "If we reflect on the truth that God chose to come among us as a little Child, we will begin to comprehend what Mary's spiritual motherhood means for the Church."

Not to emphasize the central role of Mary in history is to dilute the importance of the Incarnation. And when the Incarnation is no longer crucial, the basic tenets of the Christian faith begin to crumble.

In one of his talks on Our Lady, Pope John Paul II clarifies the basis for emphasizing the role of Mary in the Christmas message: "The fiat of the Annunciation inaugurates the New Covenant between God and the creature. While it incorporates Jesus into our race according to nature, it incorporates Mary with Him according to grace. The bond between God and humankind that was broken by sin is now happily restored." As Christians we realize that this change occurs only because of what God has accomplished in Jesus through Mary.

The Annunciation celebrates the beginnings of our Christian faith. At the inauguration of human salvation, the divine plan involves the Virgin Mary. The divine strategy always includes Mary. As the mother of the Messiah, Mary retains a specific responsibility in our spiritual development.

Again as Pope John Paul II exclaims, "In Mary every perfection of the creature



***A little child
a shining star
a stable rude,
the door ajar.
Yet in that place
so crude, forlorn,
The Hope of all
the world was
born.***



***The event of
Christ is the only
event in human
history that
promises
relocation and
centering,
meaning and
purpose. This
promise and its
fulfillment evoke
passionate and
heartfelt praise
and thanks,
especially for
those aware of
their own
brokenness and
the healing which
Christ brings into
their lives.***



preexists, and in a manner unspeakably more perfect than in everything else, short of God himself and Jesus the Word made flesh."

Of course, the Holy Father is not meaning to suggest that Mary supplants our Savior in the scheme of human salvation, as Protestants often accuse Catholics of teaching and believing. Rather we set the record straight. Since Mary's dignity remains founded on being the Mother of God, everything she accomplishes for us comes from Christ himself.

This means that the Blessed Mother can never be regarded as being merely incidental to the main event with no one daring to raise her to a level beyond that. The Mother of our Lord was never merely a passive sidelight to the Annunciation and the Incarnation, but rather she was God's chosen instrument by which the coming of the Savior became a possibility. Hence, by devotion to Mary, the importance of her Son is not minimized, but is ultimately underlined.

When the Church ceases to focus on Mary, it loses perspective on Christ. Recognition of Mary is a crucial ingredient in observing Christmas. Mary glorifies God, never herself. The Marian doctrines do not constitute Mariolatry. They are Christocentric. They are part of the Church's teachings and designed so that Christ -- not His mother -- is glorified. Mary leads us to her Son. That is why she is crucial to Christmas.

DR. DICKSON is a college chemistry instructor, Lutheran parish pastor, and author of the book A Protestant Pastor Looks at Mary.

A Special Christmas Message from the Presiding Bishop / Abbot



Mary, the Theotokos, pray for us and lead us to do the Father's will for our lives.

Dear O.S.S.T. Family and Friends,

~ *Totus Tuus* ~ "Totally Yours"

Christmas is nearly upon us again, and for many, the yearly remembrance of our Lord's birth brings with it a sense of renewal and hope for the future. In most parts of the northern hemisphere, the earth lies dormant; not barren and



Eternal God, this holy night is radiant with the brilliance of your one true light. May that light illuminate our hearts and shine in our words and deeds. May the hope, the peace, the joy, and the love represented by the birth in Bethlehem this night fill our lives and become part of all that we say and do. May we share the divine life of your son Jesus Christ, even as he humbled himself to share our humanity. Amen.



lifeless but rather in a purifying slumber that tells us it will once again burst forth in life. The liturgical year began anew and hopefully for all of us the season of Advent has afforded us the chance to reflect on the past year while looking forward to the new one.

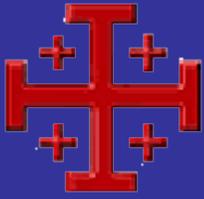
But something just doesn't feel right. Our leaders speak of a never-ending war as we say, "Peace on earth, goodwill towards men." We decry the commercialism of Christmas but then turn and lament when cashiers won't say, "Merry Christmas." While many may dream of chestnuts roasting on an open fire, still there are many who are faced with the reality of being unable to afford heating costs, or health care, or a decent meal. Something is not right. It has been said, many times many ways, that it is easy to get so caught up in the details of preparing for Christmas that we can lose sight of what Christmas is about. Christmas is about the Gospel. But quite apart from the normal distractions of the holiday season, if any of the above contradictions ring true—and I believe they do—then a fair question to ask is, "What *is* the Gospel?"

Certainly we know the story. There's a hay-filled manger with all kinds of animals nearby. There's the Virgin Mary and the baby Jesus and St. Joseph. There's the star and three wise men bringing gold, frankincense, and myrrh. There's an angel and some shepherds. It all makes for a pretty scene adorning a mantle piece—or for those who really splash out, a front yard—and it does remind us of the narrative. I do not wish to discount the value of knowing the Nativity story, but the question still remains: What is the good news? What is the meaning behind the Christmas story that makes having all those trinkets worthwhile?

If here you are hoping for a simple "Jesus saves" kind of answer, dear reader, I am afraid you will be disappointed. The fact is that in merely having to ask, "What is the Gospel?" an even more unsettling question arises: *Is there a Gospel? Is there any good news at all?* In a world that is dominated by rampant materialism, a notion that all things can be explained by quantitative formulae, and a relativism that denies even the possibility of abiding truth, there is precious little room for a newborn baby who, some claim, is the savior of the world.

It is no wonder so many people detest the Christmas season. All this talk of peace, love, hope, and joy does not mesh with the prevailing worldview that measures peace in terms of how much or how little violence is going on, that equates hope with a decent retirement package, and that discounts love and joy as nothing more than chemical reactions that can be manipulated. If all this leaves one thinking that life has no meaning, it is not hard to see why. The mentality of pointlessness, however, does not seem to lead always to despair. Instead, the coping mechanism of cynicism steps in, allowing many people to laugh at the perceived absurdity of the world: "There is no need for good news because nothing is wrong and nothing is right. It is what it is and there is nothing meaningful to say." So much for the Gospel, right?

The problem with this postmodern worldview, though, is that it can paralyze the human spirit. The cynical answer here is, "There is no such thing as the human spirit," but that just makes the paralysis easier to ignore. The point is clear enough: if there is nothing to the notion of a shared humanity, then the ideas of justice, responsibility, equality, and human rights have no claim on us. Indeed, if we flat out reject the concept of a human nature that is more than just biological similarity, then the result is a complete isolation of the individual



***Order of the Most
Holy Mary
Theotokos***

***Our Lady of
Peace Abbey,
Atlanta, GA.***

***Our Lady of
Divine Providence
Abbey,
Roanoke, VA***

***Our Lady of
Solitude Abbey,
Mayer, AZ***

***Abbey of Our
Lady and
Benedict,
Lancs. UK***

***Abbey of Our
Lady of Grace,
New Port Richey,
FL***

Hayward, CA

Somers, NY

***Our Lady of
Animals Abbey,
Tigard, OR***

***Our Mother of
Sorrows Abbey,
Alpine, TX***

in which actions only have “meaning” for the person who performs them, and any impact on other people’s lives cannot be viewed objectively as either good or bad. Some see this as true freedom. Others, including myself, see it as the epitome of slavery.

Another way of coping with a worldview devoid of meaning is to adopt a rigid fundamentalism. This involves a firm declaration of belief that there is real meaning in life, but it also requires the total rejection of any fact or idea, however valid, that does not fit with one’s picture of reality. At first, such a stance may be comforting to those seeking something concrete on which to pin their hopes, but it invariably leads to a mentality of exclusion that is just as poisonous to the human spirit as any postmodern way of thinking—and perhaps even more so. “If,” runs the fundamentalist mind-set, “you do not believe exactly what I believe and act exactly as I say you should, you do not deserve my respect.” Subconsciously or not, this attitude can lead to a gradation of humanity; those of the “in crowd” being human, and everyone else somewhat less so. Grading humanity in this way makes it easier to label others as enemies who either need to change completely or be eliminated. In a system like this, the only good news is belonging to the “in crowd.” It’s bad news for everyone else.

These two ways of dealing with life’s contradictions—shrugging one’s shoulders and saying, “It’s all meaningless anyway,” or claiming that everything will be ok when our enemies are converted or destroyed—are equally unsatisfying because both views degrade the relationship that human beings have to one another and their surroundings. To the fundamentalist, it’s a hard-line “us and them,” so life’s contradictions are not seen as contradictions because somebody has to be the bad guy. To the postmodernist, it’s neither us nor them but an unconnected collection of “me’s,” and there need not be any sense of contradiction at all because there is no objective standard according to which actions have meaning.

It’s hard to reconcile the meaning of Christmas with such worldviews. That is because the message behind the story is about relationship: God embraces humanity. The love that created and holds all things in being—not an impersonal force or abstract concept of philosophical speculation, but the living energy that gives life to the world—stepped fully into the human condition. There, in that manger, was placed the ultimate expression of humanity’s relationship to existence. In the manger is God’s message that humanity does not consist of “us and them” but rather is one; only “us.” For all the strife and separation, for all the alienation and conflict there is in the world, in the manger is God’s message that humanity does not stand abandoned and isolated. God is with us. The pervasive yet unmoving love that sustains existence makes its home in our humanity. Joy to the world? Emphatically yes!

But still something does not seem right. Life’s contradictions persist. God may be incarnate, but the world still seems as crazy as ever. Here it is good to remember that it was into such a world that our Lord was born and that he spent much of his public ministry exposing hypocrisy and contradictions and caring for those who, according to the prevailing worldview of the time, were seen as less than human. If anything should strike us about Jesus, it should be his uncompromising humanity.

And, my friends, we are called to follow his example. We are called to be radically honest about the world’s contradictions (our own as well as those of

***Our Lady by the
Cross Abbey,
West Midlands,
UK***

***Sanctus Maria
Nostrum Abbatia,
Milpitas, CA***

***Our Lady by the
Lake Abbey,
West Midlands,
UK***

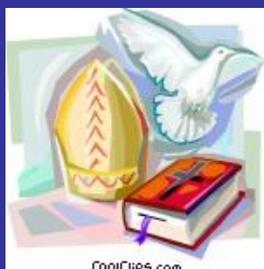
***Notre Dame de
Lourdes Abbaye,
Loudonville, NY***

Ellington, CT

Prescott, AZ

***E-mail:
DomRobert@osst-
abbey.org***

***We're on the Web!
www.osst-
abbey.org***



***"The Old Catholic
Marianists"***

others), to recognize where incongruities can lead to dehumanization, and to cry foul whenever and wherever we see the forces of dehumanization at work. Also, in the face of such contradictions, we are called to care for those who have been made outcasts and to persist in proclaiming a message of joy, peace, and hope; of a joy that is founded on God's intimate involvement in humanity, of a peace that is based on a true understanding of our shared humanity, and of a hope for the future of that humanity so glorious that it can truly be described as "not of this world." Undoubtedly, taking such a stand is not easy, and in many cases, doing so will meet with derision. Jesus warned us that this would be the case. But if it means restoring a sense of worth and belonging even to one person out of a hundred, the stand is worth taking.

The monks of the Order of the Most Holy Mary Theotokos (The Old Catholic Marianists) pray that you and the entire world may have a joyful Christmas and a peaceful and prosperous 2011.

Wishing You God's Peace and Abundant Blessings,

Dom+Robert - Presiding Bishop / Abbot, O.S.S.T.



Behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people; for to you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. Luke 2:10,11

