

From the Foot of the Cross



The Passionist Nuns of Saint Joseph Monastery in the Diocese of Owensboro KY

Spring 2019

Living the Paschal Mystery: From Death to New Life



The Lord is Risen, He is Risen indeed! The Easter Season is upon us once again, bringing the liturgical journey of the Church through the life of Christ, begun in Advent, to its climax. This year's liturgical cycle here at St. Joseph Monastery has been one that we will never forget! While our chapel was still decorated for Christmas, with the sweet Christ Child raising His tiny hands in blessing from the nativity scene, our **Sister Cecilia Maria** stood before the altar, crowned with thorns and with the cross on her shoulder, committing her life definitively to a participation in the Infant Redeemer's saving mission through her Perpetual Profession of our five Passionist vows.

Fast forward just ten days, and Mother John Mary and Sr. Mary Veronica were in the air headed to Italy, for the first General Chapter of the Monastic Congregation of the Passionist Nuns. In the last newsletter, we reflected on God's call of **Sister Catherine Marie** to serve as superior of the Passionist Monastery in Lucca Italy. If *that* seemed a radical call for a 75 year-old Kentuckian, how about a call, one year later, to the office of Mother President of an international Congregation? That call came by vote of the participants of the General Chapter. Back here in Whitesville, on the very day of Mother Catherine Marie's election, the Divine Bridegroom came "like a Thief in the night" for one of His beloved brides, our dear **Sister Therese Marie**, who passed away while the community was at morning Mass. In keeping with our Sister's lifelong devotion to the Holy Eucharist, she commended her life into the Hands of the Father in union with the Eucharistic Sacrifice.

Whew! What a year! And it's only just begun! It has been truly inspiring to witness and walk with these sisters of ours as each of them gives their "Yes!" to God. Really, it is a "Yes" to a share in the mystery of Christ's Death and Resurrection, the mystery which we are celebrating this Easter season. Our life as Passionists is an intimate participation in that mystery, from the day we make our vows, to the day our consecration is fulfilled when we are called home to the eternal wedding feast of Heaven. But the life of every Christian, too, is patterned on the life of Christ, and in each Christian, He renews the mystery of His Death and Resurrection. It's a journey that begins with our Baptismal death to sin and rebirth in Christ, and ends with our final passover into eternal life. Every stage of the journey in between, is marked by the death-resurrection mystery, as we die more and more to our own selfish ways and live by Christ's life in us. And what does that look like? How do we do that? It is as simple as giving our "Yes!" each day to what God asks of us, and to His Holy Will at work in our lives. With Christ our Lord, we say, "Yes, Father, such has been Your gracious will!...Father, not my will, but Yours be done!...Father, into Your hands I commend my spirit!" May God grant all of us this grace of surrender to His loving will during this Easter Season. For more on the most recent of these perennial paschal participations right here in our monastery, read on!

Veni Sponsa Christi!

Perpetual Passionist Profession of Sr. Cecilia Maria of the Body of Christ, CP January 5, 2019



With the joy of Christmas still glowing in our hearts, we had another celebration as our Sr. Cecilia Maria made her perpetual profession of our five Passionist Vows. Nine years to the day after her entrance into our monastery, our sister joyfully made her definitive, for ever-and-ever commitment to our Passionist life, and was consecrated in the name of Mother Church to the service of God and His Church.

Our faithful Lord, the Divine Bridegroom, came to the aid of our poverty and lovingly lent His hand to make this wedding-day beautiful for His little spouse. Our choir practiced the music for the Profession Mass for weeks, but as the big day loomed closer, somebody caught a bug, and a nasty cold began to make its way around the whole community! Even the day before the Profession, our choir sounded pretty croaky, and our prayer before the Divine Office, "Oh God, come to my assistance, Lord, make haste to HELP ME!!" was prayed with a bit more earnestness than usual! He heard our prayer, and the voices which joyously sang the Profession Mass were clearly a gift of His mercy.

It was a delight to have Sr. Cecilia Maria's parents, grandmother, sister, and other relatives here for the occasion. Her dear family has truly become our own over the past nine years. Also in attendance were a number of close friends of the bride, including a delegation from her days at St. Olaf College. Fr. Vincent Ferrer, OP, friend and classmate, played organ for the Mass and preached the homily. Another friend and classmate, Christine Beckman, played a moving violin prelude and assisted our choir. Fr. David Wilton, CPM, was the principal celebrant; Br. Manny Wenke, OFM Conv., was Master of Ceremonies, and Abe and Sam Wenke were altar servers. We extend heartfelt thanks to these and all those who gave of themselves to join the celebration, and of course, to our Oblates, who prepared the reception.

Top Row: **Christine Wilkinson Beckman** treated us to Baroque violin preludes; Sr. Cecilia Maria's parents, **Tim & Jane Wynn**, and sister, **Whitney**. Middle Row: **Sr. Cecilia Maria** professed her perpetual vows into **Mother John Mary's** hands; **Fr. Vincent Ferrer Bagan, OP**, preached the homily. Bottom row: **Sr. Cecilia Maria** was covered with a pall during the Litany of the Saints before she made her vows; **Fr. David Wilton, CPM** presided over the Mass and Rite of Profession.

The beauty of the Profession ceremony and the radiant joy of our dear sister, a joy overflowing and shared by all of us, truly cannot be expressed, but you can catch a glimpse in a few pictures we have of the glorious day. May God be praised!

Also, here are some reflections from Sr. Cecilia Maria herself about her Profession day and Liturgy:

Lord God...At long last, you have given me what I have longed for since first I began to know you: you have consecrated me definitively, such that every beat of my heart, every breath that I take, belongs to you. I am yours, O God, forever; you have set yourself as an indelible seal on my heart. I wear your sign upon my breast, and you have set your own diadem upon my head, your ring upon my finger. I am yoked to you, Jesus my Spouse, and I have pledged to follow you joyfully, shouldering your Cross, until finally I join you, caught up in the very bosom of your Father. Yes, O God, I shall dwell in your house all my days, offering up to you a continual sacrifice of praise, the happy holocaust of my whole self for your glory and for your work of salvation.

This liturgy...is replete with symbol and poetry, evoking the love of God poured out in such abundance for me, and my response to His invitation to be consecrated to Him alone. The lit candles and billowing incense symbolize my vocation to remain in God's presence, constantly lifting up the prayers of His people. The prayers and postures of the Profession Rite, which are continued and consummated in the Eucharistic liturgy, are powerful signs of the self-offering I make in union with Christ Crucified, dying with Him in order to rise to new life in Him....I think, if I had to choose just one phrase out of this whole liturgy to sum it up, it would be from the Psalm: 'In the shadow of your wings I rejoice!' I have found my home here, at the foot of the Cross, under the shadow of His outstretched wings...



Top Row: Sr. Cecilia Maria with her sister, **Whitney**; With twin cousins **Emily & Rachel**, mom **Jane**, **Grandma Nita**, **Aunt Alice**, and dad **Tim**.
Bottom Row: An Ole Reunion - **Dr. Jim May**, **Alan Stout**, **Christine Wilkinson Beckman**, Sr. Cecilia Maria, **Fr. Vincent Ferrer Bagan, OP**, **Mary Shaffer**, **Noreen Sedgeman**, and **Nick & Erika Nelson**; **Br. John Monzyk, CP**, with Mother John Mary and Sr. Cecilia Maria—other Passionists present for the celebration were Fr. John Shork, CP, and Fr. David Colhour, CP.

First General Chapter

OF THE MONASTIC CONGREGATION OF PASSIONIST NUNS

JANUARY 21– FEBRUARY 3, 2019



If you've been following our newsletter over the past few years, you have picked up by now that there has been some moving and shaking going on among the Passionist Nuns around the world, as the Holy See has been working closely with our monasteries on a journey of communion and renewal—really, a rescue mission of mercy in response to the many problems faced by our monasteries.

A climactic moment of the work of the past few years came with the gathering of superiors and delegates from all Passionist Monasteries in Rome. Basically, what the Holy See has been working on with us since 2015 has been to unite the thirty-some autonomous monasteries of Passionist Nuns into a structure of communion, called a Monastic Congregation, with juridical bonds between the autonomous monasteries, and a central government at the service of the Congregation. This historic General Chapter was the first official gathering of our newly formed Monastic Congregation, and the occasion of the election of our first Mother President and her Council.

So it is that, summoned by the Holy See, our Mother John Mary and Sr. Mary Veronica headed for Rome on January 15th, stopping first in Lucca where our sister, Mother Catherine Marie, has been serving as superior. Forty-four nuns were present at the meeting, from many different countries and language groups, yet the experience of sisterly communion in the midst of such diversity was amazing.



Of course, her nursing skills and experience were not wasted in the monastery! With the vigilance, thoroughness, and great love that characterized everything she did, she assisted with the care of the elderly and sick members of the community. For her, serving the sick was a way of serving Christ Himself.

She also found a place assisting with maintenance and watching over the general welfare of the monastery building and grounds. She was eagerly involved in the relocation project in the 1990s, when we moved from Benita Avenue in Owensboro to our current location in Whitesville. The image of Sr. Therese Marie, patrolling the building site of the new monastery with her hard hat, her green apron (with big pockets full of all sorts of tools and practical things), and her camcorder, is one that will go down in our community history. She took videos of the development of the building and property and stayed on top of the workmen, asking lots of questions and making sure they did not slack off. If Sr. Therese Marie was on patrol, they wouldn't get away with anything! One workman was overheard saying to his comrades, perhaps in warning, "Here comes that sister with the green apron!"

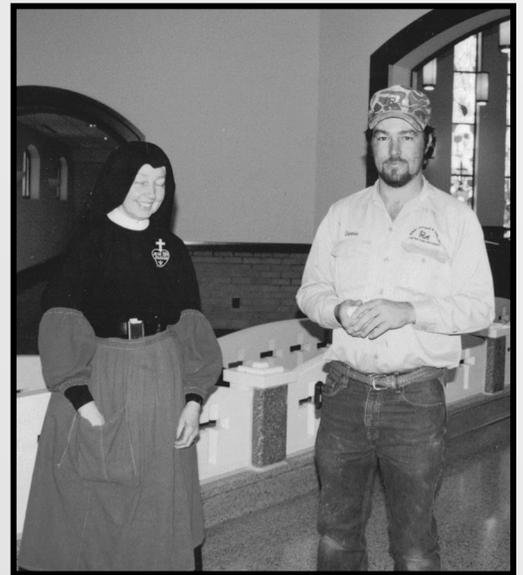
In community, she tended to be quiet and was never the most outspoken voice in the recreation room. However, she was a great conversationalist, showed a genuine and loving interest in her sisters, and liked to ask questions.

Sr. Therese Marie's devotional title, "of the Cross," expresses a mystery that she lived profoundly. The experience of the cross brought her into an experience of the "littleness" spoken of by her patron Saint. St. Therese taught that as we strive for holiness, our weaknesses and struggles should not lead us to discouragement, but to trust. These things show us how *little* we are before God; in our weakness, we can turn to God like a *little* child, and His merciful love will raise us up!

Sr. Therese Marie carried the cross of physical ailments, not least of which was the curvature of her spine, which for the last years of her life forced her head to be bent to her chest, not to be lifted without difficulty. In community, sharing our joys and crosses as we do, we knew that our sister could be a "worrier", and that this, too, was a great cross for her throughout her life. Finally, in the decline of her final months, our sister, who had a strong Irish will, had to let go of many things that she wanted to do, and accept more help and care from her sisters. This was not easy! She found herself unable to read, to concentrate on prayer, or to keep up with correspondence. Perhaps her deepest suffering of these final months was not being able to keep up with all the community prayer times.

Sister's Way of the Cross was a journey into "littleness", but for her, this same journey was a path to ever greater trust. At the end of her life, in days when she was stripped of so many things she held dear, she showed a remarkable peace, joy, and even playfulness which grew day by day. At her core, she wanted everything to be for Jesus: every breath and every heartbeat. To the end, she spoke of her desire to be a saint, a desire that had burned in her heart since early childhood.

(Continued on p. 8)



Top to bottom: Sr. Therese Marie with siblings Carolyn and Don; Sr. Mary Magdalen, Sr. Margaret Mary, and Sr. Therese Marie during community recreation at the Benita Avenue Monastery; Sister in her famous green apron with a workman during the community relocation to Whitesville.

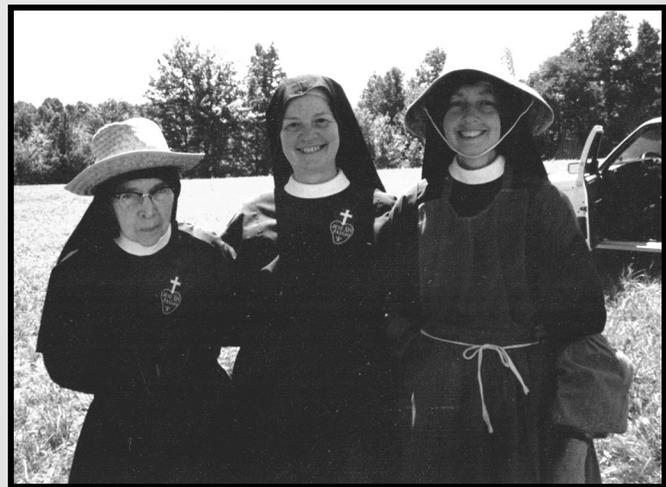
(Continued from page 7)

On the morning of January 29th, 2019, Sr. Therese Marie took us by surprise by her abrupt response to her Divine Bridegroom Who came to call her home. Though her health had been declining, even the day before her death, she had been up and about, coming to Mass, meals, recreation, and to some of the Divine Office, as usual. She passed away peacefully in her sleep while the community was at 7:00am Mass. Her passing was surely not as unexpected for her as it was for us. She had been looking forward to the day her Lord would come for her, and she was ready and waiting for Him!

A line from a favorite hymn of Sr. Therese Marie's, based on Mary's Magnificat, stood out as we sang it in her honor at Mass on the day after her death: "His little one, He has made great, I magnify the Lord!" Truly, in the midst of our sorrow, we could sing this hymn with gratitude to the Lord, Who has now raised His little one to Himself, and invited this little sister of ours to lift up her head and gaze upon the beauty of His face for all eternity.

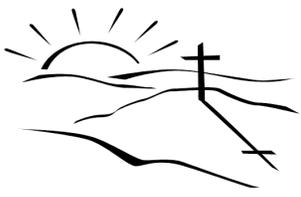
Preceding her in death are her parents, and two brothers, James Darvin Pritchard and Don D. Pritchard. Our condolences and prayers remain with her beloved sister, Carolyn Ann Kinley, of Des Moines, as well as her nieces, nephews, and very devoted friends from all of whom she was always so happy to hear, even though she couldn't write anymore in her last years. We also extend our gratitude to Sister's physicians, especially Dr. Mark Abshier and Dr. Rejmon Dadaj, for their devoted care. Lastly we thank our Passionist Nuns of the Erlanger KY monastery, especially Sr. M. Grace, for her faithful friendship for their faithful friendship over many years.

In closing, here is a story we could not leave out: Sr. Therese Marie enjoyed listening to tapes. Her caregiver, Sr. Frances Marie, knew she had been listening to the life of a saint just the afternoon before, and so the day after her death, rewind the tape to listen to what Sister would have listened to last. She was shocked to find that Sr. Therese Marie had in the meantime switched to a tape on scripture. She had listened to these verses from the last chapter of the book of Revelation, "Behold, I come very soon...The Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come!' Amen! Come Lord Jesus!" The Bridegroom came while Sister was still sleeping the next morning. She awoke in eternity having her prayer answered. Amen! Come Lord Jesus!



Clockwise from left: Sr. Mary Bernadette, Sr. Mary Agnes, and Sr. Therese Marie visit the site of the Whitesville Monastery during the relocation; Sr. Therese Marie documented the construction with copious videos and photographs; Sr. Therese Marie with her mother during the celebration of her 25th Profession Jubilee; Oblate Christie Swanson with Sr. Therese Marie during community recreation.





A Loving Remembrance of Our Deceased

Passionist Oblate **Mildred Harrington**, whose Oblate devotional name was Joseph Theresa of the Holy Face of Jesus, passed away on December 22, 2018, during her favorite season of the year. She chose this devotional name because she said St. Joseph had been her strength through all her married life, and St. Theresa was the first saint she remembered praying to in her teens. Her dear friend introduced her to devotion to the Holy Face many years ago, and this devotion always had a special place in her heart. Mildred began her Oblate formation here at the monastery with her daughter Susan in February of 2002.



Mildred (right) with daughter,
Susan Stallings.

She continued faithfully in the three-year Oblate spiritual formation program and treasured all she learned from Mother Catherine Marie, the Oblate spiritual director at the time. Through Mother's teaching, Mildred commented that she found growth in her prayer life and greater peace and trust in God's providence. In May of 2005, she and her daughter Susan, along with many others, made their Act of Oblation at a special Mass here at St. Joseph Monastery. During this Mass, she made a promise to promote devotion to the Passion of Jesus Christ and received her Passion Sign to become a full-fledged Oblate. She has been a peaceful and loving presence in our Oblate community. We will miss her beautiful, prayerful spirit as well as her famous pecan pies at our Christmas potluck dinner. Rest in peace, Mildred.

We remember also in prayer **Doris Campain**, grandmother of Sr. Frances Marie,
and **Mary Williamson-Wynn**, grandmother of Sr. Cecilia Maria, who passed away recently.
Grant them eternal rest, O Lord, and give peace to their families.

A Saint of the Passionist Congregation Mother Leonarda of Jesus Crucified



Mother Leonarda of Jesus Crucified was born in 1908 to a well-to-do family in Alessandria, Italy. She was a busy young woman, a leader in Catholic Action in her diocese, but she longed to give everything to Jesus and left the world to join the Passionist Nuns in Ovada in 1931. She was known for her joy and peace in the midst of suffering, enduring terrible headaches throughout her life with a ready smile and spirit of sacrifice. During World War II and the difficult years thereafter, she served as superior of the Ovada monastery. Under her leadership, many renovations of the monastery were carried out and the community itself flourished. Mother Leonarda was particularly renowned for her confidence in God's providence which obtained several miracles. For example, this little story is recounted from her life:

The supply of olive oil was running low. When the cook came to her with the problem, Mother Leonarda replied: "We need olive oil for our minestra [soup] and there is not a drop in the house and we have no money to buy it. Go to Jesus and tell him your need, but pray with great faith." That night, a large package arrived in the mail. On opening it the Sisters found bottles of the finest olive oil sent from someone in Tuscany no one could identify.

After many months of ill-health and heart problems, Mother Leonarda died in the odor of sanctity on October 22, 1953. In 2018, she was recognized by Pope Francis as a "Venerable Servant of God" and now awaits the confirmation of a miracle attributed to her intercession for her cause of beatification to proceed.

Mother Leonarda, Pray for us!

FROM THE FOOT OF THE CROSS



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Dear Friends - Greetings to all of you from the Foot of the Cross! If you haven't heard from us for a while, fear not, you are still on our mailing list! Though this newsletter has been a long time in coming, thanks be to God, we are finally able to share with you more photos and news from St. Joseph Monastery. Enjoy the photos, and please continue to pray for our newborn Passionist Monastic Congregation, our Mother President, Mother Catherine Marie, and for all of us.

As the Holy See calls Passionist Nuns world-wide to renewal and communion, we are reviewing our own life here in our monastery, asking the Lord for grace and guidance to help us be more fruitful, fervent, and faithful in our contemplative mission. In these times, our Church is in great need of the holiness and fidelity of her members! You can say a prayer also for more good vocations to our monastery, and for our two aspirants.

We truly cannot thank you enough for your prayers, your friendship, and your financial support. Please remember that your Passionist Sisters are here, at the Foot of the Cross, for you! You and yours hold a place in our hearts and prayers, and especially those particular people and needs that you faithfully entrust to our prayers.

With prayers for God's blessings on you this Easter Season,

Mother John Mary and the Community of St. Joseph Monastery



*Christmas 2018
the last photo
before
Sr. Therese Marie
was called
home to God.*

*Inset: Aspirants
Kathryn and
Jennifer*

Standing: Sr. Maria Faustina, Sr. Lucia Marie, Sr. Mary Elizabeth, Sr. Mary Therese, Sr. Marie Michael, Theresa (postulant), Sr. Frances Marie, Sr. Cecilia Maria, Christie (Oblate affiliate). *Seated:* Sr. Therese Marie, Sr. Mary Magdalen, Sr. Mary Agnes, Mother John Mary, Sr. Mary Veronica, Sr. Mary Andrea