



CANTICLE OF ST. GERTRUDE

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OUR LIFE

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A Message from the Prioress

Saint Macrina, Devout Teacher and Foundress of an Ascetical Community

by Sister Mary Forman

Macrina of Annesi, Cappadocia, came from an illustrious family, who had a reputation for caring for the poor and giving hospitality from their wealth to charity. Three of her brothers would become bishops: Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa and Peter of Sebaste. Four members of the family would become involved in ascetical life: Basil, Naucratus, Peter and Macrina.¹ Her life, written between 380 and 383,² was a story told by an admiring brother of his beloved sister, born into a wealthy Cappadocian family (ca. 327) to parents Basil and Emmelia. When her father died, Macrina at age twelve took charge of the family.

As a young amma, she was “father, teacher, guide, mother, counsellor in every good”³ to her youngest brother Peter, the last of ten children. Refusing to marry after the death of her fiancé, Macrina never left her mother’s home, which Macrina eventually established as an ascetical household community.

She incorporated the family servants into the common life, where men lived in one set of buildings and women in another, with herself as head of the women. Gregory viewed her as “my teacher in everything,”⁴ going so far as to relate a touching incident of Macrina’s taking their brother Basil, later Bishop of Caesarea, to task for his pride in his rhetorical education; but she swiftly won him over to the ideal of philosophy, that is, the life of Christian asceticism. Gregory spoke of his sister as one surpassing her sex:



“It was a woman who prompted our narrative, if, that is, we may call her a woman, for I do not know if it is appropriate to apply a name drawn from nature to one who has risen above nature.”⁵

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¹ Kevin Corrigan, Introduction, in Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa, *The Life of Saint Macrina*, translated by Kevin Corrigan (Toronto, ONT: Peregrina Publishing Co., 1987) 12.

² Ibid..

³ Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa, *The Life of Saint Macrina*, 37.

⁴ Ibid., 43.

⁵ Ibid., 26.

sister story

Sister Corinne

Not all teachers use a chalkboard. Sister Corinne is a lifelong student and some of her greatest lessons have come from unexpected places.

Sister Corinne has had the privilege of working with many people with disabilities, and to that she attributes her patience and curiosity about others. Among those people is Sharalyn, her cousin with Down syndrome. Sharalyn has led a life that has truly blessed all those she has met. Here is what Corinne has to say about the influence of these special people on her life.

The first was a boy named Robert. Robert was so physically disabled that he had a wheelchair that laid flat instead of upright. He didn't speak, he didn't walk, and his thin limbs seemed to be sprawled all over the chair. Sister Corinne feared him at first, but eventually, she became more comfortable and brave with him. Robert showed her that he was capable of wheeling himself part of the way by using his toes in the spokes of the chair. He would lift his head and smile with his big blue eyes, and off they would go! Robert had a wonderful spirit and was a true gift to humanity. Through him, she learned how to look for love and joy in such dire situations.

The second special teacher for Sister Corinne was Ceci, a 30-year-old woman with cerebral palsy. Sister

Corinne remembers one day when they were cutting up rhubarb. Ceci was so excited about cutting up the rhubarb that whenever someone would come to the door she screamed excitedly and ran to show them what she was doing. It was a beautiful reminder of how important ordinary work can be in people's lives. It taught her the value of being present and finding God in everyday tasks.

Later, Sister Corinne met Inez, a woman in her early 60s who had advanced early-onset Alzheimer's. Inez had learned to be very passive with her disease and maintained little independence. She was always led around by one of the women working in the program. On one particular day, she and Sister Corinne spoke of the passion, death, and resurrection of Christ. At the end, something amazing happened - Inez lifted her head high, winked, smiled, and then walked by herself back to her place in the larger room! Wow! An important and comforting place in Inez' life had been touched. This type of moment truly moved Sister Corinne and showed the power of her faith. There is so much mystery in knowing people and so much beauty.



Sister Corinne with her signature smile between her parents at her First Profession in 1957.



Sister Corinne serving up raspberry shortcake and a smile of hospitality at the Raspberry Festival.

***“Christ is at work
reshaping both stars and
hearts of stone.”***

In closing, Sister Corinne shares the words of a hymn that speaks of God’s creation used at Morning Praise:

“God is recreating more than our inner world:

Look up beyond the planets where galaxies are swirled.

Look out and see how often surprising love is shown.

Christ is at work reshaping both stars and hearts of stone.

All life in Christ is compassed by that transforming grace

*Which spins new worlds and wonders to every time
and place.*

O Twirler of the stardust, O light no darkness rims,

*Your new creation pulses with worship, praise, and
hymns.”*

“The First Day of Creation,” by Thomas H. Troeger ✕

SISTER CORINNE’S LESSONS

***To look for love and
joy in dire situations***

***The value of being
present and finding
God in everyday tasks***

The power of faith



Jun 16 **Lectio Divina: Living Word of God**
with Sr. Mary Forman, OSB

Jun 30 **Evagrius and the Eight Principal Vices**
with Sr. Mary Forman, OSB

Jul - Sep 7 - 29 **Monastic Practices**
with Tim Oberholzer

St. Gertrude's L.I.V.E. Virtual Programs
Learn More at www.stgertrudes.org/retreats

Raspberry Social



**Sunday,
August 7th
from 11-3**



MONASTERY OF
ST. GERTRUDE

For More Information:
www.stgertrudes.org/raspberry-festival/

Treat Yourself To A Night At The Inn

**Experience
woodland
tranquility
amidst
Benedictine
hospitality.**





MONASTERY OF
ST. GERTRUDE

spirit center

What do you seek?

by Tim Oberholzer

Reading from the rites of the Cistercian Order, my abbot asked me this question at each stage of my progression as a monk. A scripted question with a scripted response. I did not remain in monastic life but the question remains with me. It is a question of devotion. Benedictine life helps us understand devotion in purpose, practice, and perseverance.

St. Benedict, quoting 1 John 4:1, understands that authentic devotion begins with God. Test the spirits to see if they are from God (RB 58:2). We try to recognize God's Spirit working in and around us. We respond with devotion. Benedict describes devotion's purpose as truly seeking God (RB 58:7).

Benedictine life establishes prayer, sacred reading, and work as essential practices of devotion. Benedict expects eagerness for the Work of God (RB 58:7). Yet, he prescribes caution and prohibits practices undertaken without the prayer and approval of a spiritual companion (RB 49:8-9). Practices undertaken without discerning the Spirit of God or contrary to truly seeking God are reckoned as presumption and vainglory (RB 49:9). Practices of devotion express purposeful responses seeking God's glory not personal praise.

Seeking God requires perseverance through trials. Devotion matures in complete dedication through the ups-and-downs of life. Devotion is never half-hearted or one-and-done. Perseverance requires showing up with determination in stability through hardships and difficulties which lead to God (RB 58:8-9a).

Spirit Center offers the support you need to live a devoted life. We maintain space and peace for you to hear the promptings of God. Spiritual directors help

you discern the Spirit and the authentic responses of a heart truly seeking God. The Benedictine life modeled by the Monastery of St. Gertrude's community and examined through various retreats sustain devotion in practice. The stability of the Monastery, the hospitality of Spirit Center, and the commitment of the whole community ensures we will accompany you in your devotion.

What do you seek? How can we help? ✕

Spirit Center
upcoming retreats

More information at
www.spirit-center.org

Jun 3-5	Justice Impels
Jun 20-24	Spirit Writing
Jul 8-10	Discovering Your Soul Potential
Jul 15-22	Come to the Quiet
Aug 12-14	Compassion Acts
Aug 22-26	Living as a Monk in Everyday Life
Sep 13-15	A Watercolor Journey II



Tim Oberholzer oversees Spirit Center and is a novice spiritual director. Tim spent five and a half years as a monk at New Melleray Abbey in Peosta, Iowa, before discerning out of monastic life and moving to Idaho to be closer to his parents. He earned a business degree from the University of Notre Dame, studied philosophy and theology at the University of St. Thomas, and currently participates in the Stewards of the Mystery spiritual direction training program. Tim is a remarried widower, an ultramarathon runner, and an avid reader.

museum

Museum Enjoys New Furnace and Flooring

The Historical Museum at St. Gertrude's recently completed a six-year-long renovation project, including seven galleries and interpretive history of the local area, but the one thing they didn't have was updated heating. Until now! Thanks to a grant from the Laura Moore Cunningham Foundation (LMCF), the old furnace from 1980 has been replaced with two modern heating and cooling systems that will keep staff comfortable, as well as keeping artifacts at consistent temperatures.

Proper heating and cooling is essential, not just for visitor comfort, but for preservation of the displays and artifacts in the museum. The museum houses a remarkable diversity of galleries, from the history of Chinese Immigration in Northern Idaho to artifacts discovered at a recent archeological dig pointing to human occupation of the area 16,000 years ago. The new renovation has also added QR codes for those who would like to listen to interpretive stories throughout the museum.

The \$35,000 grant has already made possible the replacement of the museum's original 1980 heating and cooling system. Remaining funds were used to upgrade exhibit lighting and replace flooring in the Welcome Center. Carrie Barton, donor relations officer for the Monastery of St. Gertrude and writer of the grant proposal, observed, "The Laura Moore Cunningham Foundation has been a generous supporter of the Historical Museum at St. Gertrude over many years. Our award-winning museum would not be what it is today without the Foundation's encouragement and financial backing."

"The Laura Moore Cunningham Foundation has funded



*Before & after:
New flooring in the Welcome Center and Gift Shop*

other museum projects for lighting, video monitoring, electrical upgrades and a hands-on children's exhibit," said Carla Wilkins, museum curator and manager. "We appreciated having a working furnace last winter and the new flooring is beautiful!"

The Historical Museum at St. Gertrude features a rich and in-depth collection focusing on the history of North Central Idaho, specifically, mining, ranching, farming, the Chinese in Idaho, the Nez Perce, local characters, antique weapons and more. The scope of the Museum's work is the heritage of the Monastery of St. Gertrude and the Camas Prairie region of North Central Idaho. ✕

Deep inside the heart and spirit of every human being is a desire to do good and to have significance. For some, because of the perils of the journey, that good is buried under darkness and pain, and it will never see the light of day. But it's there.

- Richard Perry/Jeff Schreifels

Saint Macrina, Devout Teacher and Foundress of an Ascetical Community

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Cappadocia, Turkey

Gregory's idiomatic expression of a woman "who has risen above nature" described one who attained to a masculine degree of virtue, in the language common to the culture. Being a man in spirit or virtue is reflective of the idiom of the day. In the languages of Greek and Latin of the ancient world, there was a close association between virtue (Latin *virtus*; Greek *andreia*) and being male (Latin *vir*; Greek *andros*), such that "the property of virtue pertain[ed] to being like a man."⁶ When early Christian women are complimented on their virtue by male writers, they were often termed "manly" or described as surpassing their gender or nature.⁷ As Gillian Cloke has noted,

*"Feminine spirituality as a concept had no currency in the eyes of the patristic writers of the period.... This being so, anyone holy enough to be an exemplar of the faith could not be a woman: every one of the many who achieved fame through piety was held to 'surpass her sex'--never, be it noted, to elevate the expectations that might be held of her sex."*⁸

This way of viewing women of virtue can be quite disconcerting, if not repugnant, to modern readers with different expectations of what comprises sanctity in our own age irrespective of gender.

Somewhere between 356 and 357, Macrina persuaded her mother to renounce her way of life of a great lady and to partake in the life of the virgins around her, making of the slaves and servants, sisters and equals. In chapter 11 of the *Life*, Emmelia abolishes the difference of status between herself and her slaves and dividing up her possessions among her children. Of the forms of manumission possible, Emmelia likely took the *inter amicos* form, releasing the slaves from slavery but not allowing them to become citizens, nor changing their social status.⁹

The act of freeing their slaves to become sisters and equals represents, for the scholar Susanna Elm, "the first step towards the transformation of an ascetic household into an ascetic institution."¹⁰ This change precipitates changes in the organization of the household, for the property becomes divided. Emmelia divides her property among her children. Macrina gives her portion to the priest of the local church to administer, with a condition attached: the money must be spent for charity. Cloke sees in this action that Emmelia upholds the societal expectation that property pass into the hands of progeny, but since Macrina would have no descendants, this consideration was not necessary to her.¹¹

In chapter 37, after Macrina's death, a soldier speaks of having met at the "philosophic table" when he and his wife had gone separately into the men's and women's quarters respectively when visiting Peter and Macrina.¹² Corrigan suggests that it is not far-fetched to see Macrina participating in intellectual and religious discussions in the home, irrespective of formal philosophical training at a rhetorical school.¹³

6 Gillian Cloke, *This Female Man of God: Women and Spiritual Power in the Patristic Age, AD 350-450* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995) 213.

7 Ibid., 214.

8 Ibid., 220.

9 Susanna Elm, "Virgins of God": *The Making of Asceticism in Late Antiquity*, Oxford Classical Monographs (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994/1996) 84-85.

10 Ibid., 89.

11 Cloke, 144.

12 Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa, *The Life of Saint Macrina*, 59.

13 Corrigan, "Introduction," *The Life of Saint Macrina*, 22.

Moreover, philosophy was not understood in the fourth century as a narrow field of academic study, as much as it was a way of living:

“In the spirit of living wisdom which embraces the whole of human life: prayer, manual labor, hospitality, care of the sick, of the poor and the dying. It is a life entirely given to God, a life not without risk, a life lived ‘on the boundaries’ of human nature. It includes a vibrant intellectuality, life-long study and a spirit of true inquiry, and it culminates in the divine love of a person, Christ.”¹⁴

Later on, Gregory would write “On the Soul and Resurrection,” a dialogue between himself and Macrina, wherein Macrina takes the side of the Christian arguing from scriptures and Gregory, the side of the Greek philosophers arguing about several key issues of concern to Gregory, which arise after the death of Basil. The issues discussed between them comprise ten chapters, focused on the following topics: 1) the survival of the soul; 2) the nature of the soul; 3) role of the emotions; 4) the condition of the soul after death; 5) How does the soul recognize the elements of the body? 6) the purification of the soul; 7) Why is purification painful? 8) the transmigration of the soul; 8) the origin of the soul; and 10) the doctrine of the resurrection.

Macrina embodies a keen sense of devotion to Christ and the teachings of scripture, whereby the societal custom of slavery is set aside in the community she and her mother embrace. She became a key figure in the conversations and might we say conversion of her brother Basil to Christian philosophy. While she did not have formal rhetorical school training in philosophy, her pursuit of living the scriptures she pondered qualified her to be a teacher to her brothers Gregory and Peter. We commemorate her feast day on January 14 as patroness to widows and people caught in poverty. ✠



Orthodox icon of Saint Macrina

14 Ibid., 23.

Behold,

I AM DOING SOMETHING NEW:

St. Gertrude's Center for Benedictine Life

What is the purpose of Benedictine life today? What does Benedictine life have to offer our hurting world?

In the 6th century Benedict didn't start a new religious order in order to do heroic things. He simply gathered some fellow seekers who wanted to know God more deeply and he wrote a guidebook to help them do so. But in this simple beginning he showed how ordinary people can live extraordinary lives that can change society.

Today, as Benedictines, we continue that tradition, seeking God, being community, serving one another, living with the Gospel for our guide. But today there is also something new happening. While St. Gertrude's is a monastery, with those of us who make vows and a lifetime commitment, it is also the Center for Benedictine Life because all of us, together, can learn from and live Benedict's wisdom. And in doing so we become part of healing our broken world.

In 1882 three sisters came from a cloistered, Benedictine convent in Switzerland with a mission to teach German immigrant children and to live the Benedictine way of life. Today the sisters are still here. While our ministry is no longer teaching German immigrant children, we continue to live Benedictine life and respond to the needs of the times. The needs we are called to respond to today are broader than they were when we were founded.

Today the fundamental Benedictine values of prayer, seeking God in community, humility, service, hospitality and others are desperately needed in our world. The values and practices of Benedict aren't ones that can only be practiced by a spiritual elite or vowed religious but are fundamental to all people of faith. They are values and practices that will transform us individually and collectively.

As St. Gertrude's moves forward, we are being called to new forms of ministry, building on our heritage of teaching and service. We are saying we're a "Center for Benedictine Life." That means we have a ministry to help people live Benedictine life wherever they are, not just as vowed religious but in all ways of life. The Monastery of St. Gertrude Center for Benedictine Life invites people to learn about and live Benedictine values and practices:

Come to the Spirit Center and experience the practices of hospitality, silence and service.

Become an oblate (lay member) of St. Gertrude's and experience a community living according to the Rule of St. Benedict in new ways.

Experience living for a time in a Benedictine community as a volunteer or artist in residence.

Become part of our new Benedictine Cohousing Companions community.

Participate in Benedictine generosity and service by becoming a benefactor.

Learn about Benedictine values and life through our newsletter, e-news, Facebook, St. Gertrude's L.I.V.E. programs and our other programs and public events.

Join us as together we bring Benedictine values to help heal our suffering world.

Today all of us are called to live the values and practices of Benedict. Together, we can be a new Benedictine community, one that seeks God in community, lives simply and humbly, and by doing so helps to heal our world. Join us in becoming the Monastery of St. Gertrude Center for Benedictine Life. ✕

