



CANTICLE OF ST. GERTRUDE

A JOURNAL OF
OUR LIFE

Fall 2022



A Message from the Prioress Paula of Rome and Bethlehem, Friend of Jerome

by Sister Mary Forman

Paula, the daughter of Blesilla and Rogatus, a wealthy patrician family, was born June 5/6, 363. In her marriage to Toxotius, a pagan, she bore him five children: Blesilla, Julia Eustochium, Paulina married to Pammachius, Rufina and Toxotius Junior, whose marriage to Laeta gave birth to Paula. After the death of Toxotius senior in 379, Paula and Eustochium moved in with Marcella for a time and continued as part of Marcella's Bible-study circle until they left Rome in 385 to go on pilgrimage to the Holy Land and Egypt. In 382, Paula, at her own property in Rome, entertained Bishop Epiphanius of Cyprus and met Bishop Paulinus of Antioch. In that same year, Jerome met Marcella, Paula and Eustochium. In spring of 384 Jerome wrote his letter 22 to Eustochium, a treatise on virginity or ascetical manual on how to live life as a virgin in her mother's household; Eustochium had been living as a virgin since the age of twelve. In fall of



Vintage engraving of Paula of Rome.

384 Paula's oldest daughter Blesilla, age 22, died from complications of too rigorous fasting at the behest of Jerome, for which Paula's fellow aristocrats blamed Jerome. Blesilla's death prompted Jerome's letter 39 to Paula, purported to be a letter of sympathy, but rather he urged her not to grieve too much,

especially since Blesilla now lives with Christ.

In the years 385-386, Paula and Eustochium joined up with Jerome in Antioch to visit holy sites in Antioch, Egypt and Palestine, with a brief stay with Rufinus of Aquileia and Melania the Elder, heads of monasteries on the Mount of Olives, Jerusalem. In the summer of 386, Jerome, Paula and Eustochium arrived at Bethlehem; Jerome wrote commentaries on Paul's epistles to Philemon, Galatians and Titus, all of which were dedicated to Paula and her daughter. Between 386 and 389, Paula and Eustochium stayed at a hostelry until their three monasteries and a hospice for pilgrims were built at Bethlehem. Each of the three monasteries for women housed women of different classes: aristocrats, the middle class and servants, while Jerome was in charge of the monastery of monks. The three different classes worked and had their meals separately but met together for psalm-singing and prayer. Everyone was required to learn a certain section of scripture each day. There was strict separation of men from the women. All were clothed alike, and Paula oversaw the life of each one and attended to each one's need to grow in virtue. It is Paula's resources that financed the building projects of the monasteries and hostelry, as Jerome attests in ep. 108.14.



Continued on page 6

OUR MISSION

Eager to welcome God's transforming power in ourselves and our world, we, the Benedictine Sisters of the Monastery of St. Gertrude, seek God together through monastic profession and respond in Healing Hospitality, Grateful Simplicity and Creative Peacemaking.

words from a sister

Sister Meg at the 35th Anniversary for Our Place

Sr. Meg was recently recognized for her ministry to Our Place. The organization she helped found is located in Spokane, Washington. She received an award honoring her contribution at the 35th Anniversary Party. Here are some excerpts from the speech she gave:

“Once upon a time, in the last century, there were six modest churches in the West Central Neighborhood. Each beautiful unique church had a small, somewhat elderly congregation, many of whom lived out of the area, a part time secretary, and a dedicated, zealous pastor. The Catholic and Presbyterian pastors were women, the Lutheran, Episcopalian, Baptist and Methodists were men. One church had a large 100 cup coffee pot which the others borrowed for funerals and dinners. Another had a computer and printer; they ran off bulletins for special events for the other churches. Three of the churches shared parking lots and staggered their times of Sunday worship. One church was the site for annual flu shots, while another offered office space for ESL training as they were on a major bus line.

“While the churches did not have a lot of financial resources or a lot of members, they did have dedicated, prayerful, energetic pastors who shared a Bible study each week and then brought the message of Christ’s concern for the poor and disadvantaged to their congregations. The area was also blessed with the West Central Neighborhood Center whose Director belonged to one of the churches. The Center had access to city, county, state and federal programs to help low income persons. The downtown SNAP staff provided support, training and information on how to ‘get things done.’

“We learned we needed to keep band-aids on hand

and the phone numbers of our parish nurses. If you don’t own a knife or the stove doesn’t work in your apartment, a turkey or small roast isn’t helpful; giving a cake mix to someone without a cake pan doesn’t work. We learned we needed to give cooking lessons using the foods we had to distribute, especially how to make chili and cook rice. Long women’s coats with fur collars just took up space; pairs of men’s work boots were worth gold. Thank goodness teachers weren’t yet requiring assignments involving computers! What do you say to the person who wants to take 10 purses or the one you see trading precious sugar for cigarettes on the street corner? Could we find a reliable, affordable mechanic? Where’s the closest free clinic?

“We had to learn to respect people’s choices, even when they didn’t want healthy foods or tried to sell the furniture we had found for their children, we had to recognize and deal with our anger and resentment. We had to learn that parents deserve to pick out the toys their children receive for Christmas and to give them those presents themselves. We learned that if we promised to pay the last \$30 of an overdue bill it was amazing how people could find the rest. We learned that often information was the best gift. We had to accept that many times we couldn’t help but we could always listen, be kind and pray.” ✕



museum musings

Interesting Facts About the Sisters of St. Gertrude

- Of today's 31 Sisters, four entered the Monastery before age 16. In the late 60's, the minimum age for joining was set at 16 and later raised to 21.
- In the 1960's, women who were widowed or divorced and had their marriage annulled with no dependent children were allowed to join. The first to join was Sister M. Veronica (Brost) Hassler in 1967. She was the widowed mother of Sister Benita Hassler. In total, eight widowed/divorced Sisters joined. Sr. Kim Jordan remains as the only "Sister Mom".
- There is no official count of how many women asked to be released from their vows and left. For their 1982 centennial celebration of 100 years in America, a "Former Sisters Reunion" was held where together they celebrated their communal journey. Since then, other reunions have taken place.
- The largest number of Sisters who were members of St. Gertrude's at one time is believed to be around 185.
- The last Swiss Sister to pass was Sr. Radegunda Bischofberger (age 101) in 2003. In total, 74 Sisters came from Switzerland, 13 from Germany, 5 from Austria, 1 from England and 1 from Canada. The Sisters who professed and stayed since the community moved to America number 231.
- The Sisters are silent each day from 9pm to 9am. This is a change from early days when silence reigned. Outside of prayer times, the Sisters went about the entire day in silence except on Sundays, feast days, and Tuesday evenings.
- Since 1970, the tables in the refectory seat six and Sisters can sit where they like. The tables used to be arranged in long rows and Sisters sat both in the chapel and at mealtimes in order of rank, based on their date of entry.
- Today, the Sisters all may speak to each other whenever they like. Rank previously enforced social division. Those women still in formation

and the junior Sisters were not to speak (except at special times) to those senior to them. ✕



October Museum Lectures

October 13th at 4:00 p.m.
Mary Ladelle Minton presents,
"Murder Most Foul in the New
Idaho Territory"

October 20th at 4:00 p.m.
Detective Jerry Johnson presents,
"Finding the Lost in Idaho
County"



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spirit center

Friendship

by Tim Oberholzer

Palm Sunday 2010. I lie on a rollaway cot in a Boston hotel room. David occupies the bed. We talk about Psalm 21[22]. The 114th Boston Marathon is 12 hours away.

David sees God in everything. He met Jeanine. He knows my grief. We've run long miles, held serious conversations, and preserved respectful silences in the 358 days since she died. The next day, David completes the first of 13 consecutive Boston Marathons. I limp to my only Boston finish.

Thanksgiving 2018. I call David. We lost touch during my time at New Melleray Abbey. I'm in town visiting Jeanine's family. "Do you want to meet for a run?"

We match strides for 12 miles. Hopes, politics, finances, and God's will fill our conversation. Bagels and coffee follow. The dialogue continues until I must go.

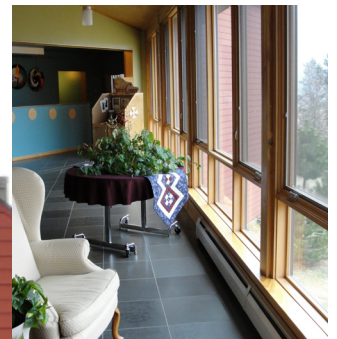
June 2022. David calls me. Three and a half years of infrequent phone conversations preserved our friendship. His Boston Marathon consecutive streak is in jeopardy. Physical setbacks and life circumstances slowed him. He must run a marathon quicker than 3 hours and 50 minutes before September to qualify. "Do you want to run a marathon with me?"

We choose the Tunnel Vision Marathon. A fast, downhill course. David knows his situation isn't ideal. Faith motivates him, giving God the chance to bless the effort. Appropriately, I miss the Compassion Acts retreat to help David pursue his goal.

Race Day. Concern for the clock becomes concern for my friend. His body and his goal part ways. We match strides for 26.2 miles. Running. Walking. Talking. We cross the finish line together. The clock

reads 5 hours and 10 minutes. The Boston Marathon streak ends. Our friendship grows.

Do you have a friend like David? Aelred of Rievaulx (1110-1167) writes that spiritual friendship grows out of "likeness of life, habits, and interests ... in things human and divine, with good will and charity." (Spiritual Friendship, 2:46b) Spirit Center retreats touch a variety of human and divine interests. Thirteen Spirit Center rooms contain two twin beds. We offer "shared occupancy" options for most group retreats and for private retreats. Consider sharing a retreat with a friend. Visit www.spirit-center.org for our current retreat options. ✕



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.

Spirit Center
upcoming retreats

More information at
www.spirit-center.org

Nov
1-3

An Attitude of Gratitude Yoga
Retreat

Nov
11-13

Thy Kingdom Come

Jan-Feb
27-3

Come to the Quiet

Feb
24-26

Lenten Yoga Journey

Apr
18-20

Discovering Your Soul
Potential: A Retreat on the
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special occasions
in warmth and
tranquility.



inn at St. Gertrude

After Paula's death in 404, her daughter Eustochium, whom Jerome considered his goddaughter, took up leadership of the women's monasteries in Bethlehem, and after her death (416/19), little Paula, daughter of Pammachius and Paulina, became the superior.

At the close of letter 108.30, Jerome expressed his utter grief over the death of his closest friend to Paula's daughter Eustochium:

"I have spent the labour of two nights in dictating for you this treatise; and in doing so I have felt a grief as deep as your own. I say in 'dictating' for I have not been able to write it myself. As often as I have taken up my pen and have tried to fulfil my promise; my fingers have stiffened, my hand has fallen, and my power over it has vanished. The rudeness of the diction, devoid as it is of all elegance or charm, bears witness to the feeling of the writer."¹

She who was "God's mother-in-law" (ep. 22.20) was gone to her eternal rest, but her soul-friend was left in deep grief.

Earlier in their relationship, in his letter to Ascella, who lived with Marcella, Jerome "confided his great affection for Paula," in the following words:

"It often happened that I found myself surrounded by virgins. To some of them I interpreted the sacred books as well as I was able. Our studies effected continuous communication which soon ripened into intimacy and then produced mutual confidence. If they [critics] have ever seen anything in my conduct unbecoming a Christian, let them say it!...No, my sex was my only crime, and even on this score I am not attacked except when there is talk of Paula coming to Jerusalem...Of all the ladies in Rome, only one had the power to subdue me, and that one was Paula. She mourned, fasted, was squalid with dirt, had eyes dim from weeping...the only woman who stole my fancy was one whom I had not even seen at table. But as I began to revere, respect, and venerate her as her outstanding chastity deserved, all my former virtues forsook me on the spot."²

Scholar Rosemary Rader has commented, "Here Jerome sketched Paula as the ideal spiritual woman,

¹ Jerome, "Letter 108.33," pp. 211-212, in *The Principal Works of Jerome*, translated by W. H. Fremantle, in NPNF, second series, vol. 6 (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1892).

² "Letter 45.2," as cited by Rosemary Rader, *Breaking Boundaries: Male/Female Friendship in Early Christian Communities* (New York: Paulist Press, 1983) p. 100. See NPNF 2.6, p. 59.

i.e., the celibate ascetic and the 'mother of virgins,' the mother who both trained her own daughters in the ascetic ideal of life, and served as mother of a community of other celibate women."³

There are only three letters to Paula from Jerome to her while they both lived in Rome, but Jerome attests to many exchanges between them and with Eustochium while in Bethlehem, of which none survive. Scholars speculate that since they lived so closely near each other, these notes and letters were likely written on wax tablets and not saved, as those written on parchment would have been.⁴ That said many of the translations of both the books of the Bible and Commentaries on these books attest to their being done at the behest of Paula.

Around 386, Jerome began his commentary on Ephesians; in the prologue to that work, he begs Paula and Eustochium and Marcella, who is absent, not to give her commentaries to the wrong people.

"Therefore, I beseech you who are present, as well as holy Marcella, unique exemplar of widowhood, that you not hand over my little works to the foul-mouthed and envious, nor that you give what is holy to dogs and put pearls before swine" [Mt. 7:6].⁵

Next in the preface to Book II, Jerome writes:

"According to your prayers, O Paula and Eustochium, we have taken on the book to the Ephesians, and we will send the new little work to Rome. Not that the learned senate would deign to read it or inscribe it among the libraries of the ancients, but that holy Marcella urges it to be done in her letters. I am always mindful of her studies, her abilities, her labor, while I condemn myself to inertia, who am established in the solitude of a monastery, in view of that manger in which the shepherds hastened to adore the crying baby, I cannot do the things a noble woman in the midst of family noise and household cares completes one after another. That is why I ask her and you and any other readers there might be, as you recognize that I present a speech I have not given long thought to, nor polished, but use words barely from the trivium

³ "Letter 108," in Rader, p. 100.

⁴ Andrew Cain, *The Letters of Jerome: Asceticism, Biblical Exegesis, and the Construction of Christian Authority in Late Antiquity*, Oxford Early Christian Studies (Oxford University Press, 2009) 222.

⁵ Translation of Jerome of Stridon, "Prologue to Book I," *Commentarius in Epistolam ad Ephesios Libri Tres*, Patrologia Latina 26.349-440. f

to reveal the mysteries of scripture...⁶”

Marcella is not far from Jerome’s memory and her letters are the spur for him to supply his commentary on Ephesians; he certainly admires her studies, abilities and labor, while he enjoys living not far from the church of the Nativity, where he worshipped. Here and in the preface to Book III Jerome depends on the prayers of these three friends, for he writes in the last preface:

“I have discussed sufficiently and abundantly, O Paula and Eustochium, on the argument of the epistle of Paul to Ephesians in the preface to the first book; and here and there, wherever the occasion arose, I showed though briefly that the blessed apostle wrote and revealed the hidden mysteries to the world to no church so mystically. Now, therefore, supported by the help of your prayers and those of holy Marcella, that I dictate the third, that is the last book on that epistle, it seems to me that I should teach how the etymology of the name corresponds to the meaning which I expounded above.⁷”

Jerome did indeed depend on their prayers, their support emotionally and financially and quite likely on their language abilities, which he acknowledged in the Preface to the Book of Esther.

“Moreover, you, O Paula and Eustochium, since you have been eager to penetrate the Hebrew collection of books, and have confirmed the struggles of interpreters, maintaining that Esther is a Hebrew book, examine our translation with its individual words, so that you can recognize that I have also increased nothing by adding, but in a faithful witness as in the Hebrew, it is considered simply that the Hebrew history has been handed on in the Latin language.⁸”

Clearly Jerome expects Paula and Eustochium to check his Vulgate Latin against the Hebrew text for the Book of Esther and report back that he has not added anything; earlier in this short preface he said that he tried for a word for word translation because other translators have commented that the manuscripts were corrupt. He, however, had uncovered in an archives among Jews a Hebrew manuscript.

⁶ Ibid., “Preface to Book II,” *Commentarius in Epistolam ad Ephesios*, PL 26.475-477.

⁷ Ibid., “Preface to Book III,” *Commentarius in Epistolam ad Ephesios*, PL 26.513-514.

⁸ Translation of Jerome of Stridon, “Preface to the Book of Esther,” in *Praefatio Hieronymi in Librum Esther*, *Patrologia Latina* 28.1433.

Paula represents a woman, steeped in scripture, having read and prayed with it in three languages—Hebrew, Greek and Latin. She was so adept that she was invited to comment on Jerome’s translation, here of the Book of Esther. Moreover, he dedicated some seventeen biblical commentaries to her and her daughter in the prefaces and prologues. The friendship between Paula and Jerome reveals not only shared studies, but also deep reverence for one another’s gifts and support for living the Christian life in an intentional way. ✠



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Back Page

Reflections A Poem by Sr. Meg

This is the day the Lord has made,
God holding the whole of it
God molding the shape of it
lump of grey clay, sparkling specks,
grains of dust, veins of gold
streaks of knowing, clouds of unknowing
sureness and refuge, terror and peril
each of us, all of us
into His Son.

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13 Kin-dom and the
Reign of God
with Sr. Mary Forman,
OSB

This presentation will address the four strands of understanding the reign of God in the First Testament, that is, the Hebrew scriptures; next the various ways the reign of God is portrayed in the New Testament in Jesus' exorcism, healings, and teaching; interpretation of the reign of God via-a-vis the church; and characteristics of parables, the key ways that Jesus taught about the reign of God.

