



CANTICLE OF ST. GERTRUDE

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OUR LIFE

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A Message from the Prioress Eustochium, Spiritual Daughter of Jerome, Example of Spiritual Mentorship

by Sister Mary Forman



Julia Eustochium, the second daughter born to Toxotius and Paula, ¹confidant to Jerome after the death of her husband, also went on pilgrimage with her mother Paula, when they left Rome for the East.

However, when they lived in

Rome, Eustochium regularly attended Jerome's scripture classes with her mother and took up the ascetical life of virginity while in her teens. Jerome attests in epistle 127.5 the following: "My revered friend, Paula was blessed with Marcella's friendship, and it was in Marcella's cell that Eustochium, that paragon of virgins, was gradually trained."²

Jerome's Letter 22, which was addressed to Eustochium (384), was a long exhortation on

1 While J.N.D. Kelly states on p. 99 of his work, *JEROME: His Life, Writings, and Controversies* (New York/Hagerstown/San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1975), that Julia Eustochium was Paula's third daughter, J.R. Martindale, *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire*, II: A.D. 395-527 (Cambridge University Press, 1980) 1143, shows her to be the second daughter in his stemmata for the family of Paula.

2 Jerome of Stridon, "Ep. 127," in *The Principal Works of St. Jerome*, translated by W. H. Fremantle, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers [NPNF] II.6 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark/Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989 reprint) 255.

the motives by which a young woman ought to devote herself to virginity. Because letters were public documents in ancient times, this treatise, according to J.N.D. Kelly, served as a platform for setting out [Jerome's] challenging program for asceticism and also "for exposing the rottenness...infecting great numbers of would-be Christians in Rome."³ In letter 22.2, Jerome referred to Eustochium as "lady," for she was "my Lord's bride"; furthermore, he called attention to Paula's privilege to be considered "God's mother-in-law" (ep. 22.20). Jerome insists that the object of his opening words in epistle 22.2 is "not to praise the virginity which you follow, and of which you have proved the value, or yet to recount the drawbacks of marriage, such as pregnancy, the crying of infants, the torture caused by a rival, the cares of household management, and all the fancied blessings which death at last cuts short...My purpose is to show you that you are fleeing from Sodom and should take warning by Lot's wife."⁴ Among the many temptations that might assail Eustochium, Jerome urges and warns her "as Christ's spouse to avoid wine as you would

3 J.N.D. Kelly, *JEROME*, 101.

4 Jerome of Stridon, "Ep. 22.2," 23.



St. Eustochium painted by Juan de Valdés Leal

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.

sister story

Sister Clarissa: A Dedicated Life

Sr. Clarissa Goeckner is a bright spirit filled with God's love and spreads it to everyone she meets. She has dedicated her life to God and to service as a teacher, assistant prioress and prioress. She contributes her time and talent for connection with others to the Monastery development office, keeping in touch with benefactors and friends.

Sr. Clarissa was born in Cottonwood, Idaho, just over the hill from the Monastery. As a girl, she attended St. Joseph's Elementary School and St. Gertrude's Academy High School, both administered and staffed by the sisters of St. Gertrude. Every year, Sr. Clarissa attended retreats at the Monastery and holds those experiences close to her heart.

During her time at the Academy, Sr. Clarissa particularly enjoyed her drama teacher, Sr. Imelda whose infectious joy filled the classroom with confidence and strength. Sr. Imelda gave all her energy to the students with unwavering dedication. She cared deeply for her students and the material she taught, making her a successful teacher and master motivator.

Sr. Clarissa was deeply influenced hearing the Angelus [prayer] bells. She credits the sisters themselves with the most significant impact on her life. Sr. Clarissa felt deeply cared for by the sisters and appreciated their steadfastness. "What a gift they were to us," remembers Sr. Clarissa.

These experiences lead Sr. Clarissa to enter the convent in 1957, at only 18 years old and make her final vows in 1961.

At that time, it was the custom for a woman to change her name when she made her vows to become a sister. She was invited to choose a few names to suggest to her superior who would make the final decision. One of the names Sr. Clarissa chose was "Clariss," the name of her best friend in high school. At her final profession at age 22, her superior gave her the name "Sister Mary Clarissa," honoring the president of their federation, Mother Clarissa.

Life changed for Sr. Clarissa in 1962, the beginning

of the Vatican II Council in the Roman Catholic Church. Prior to Vatican II, life at the Monastery was strictly regimented. The sisters rose at 4:20 a.m. to pray entirely in Latin. The changes Vatican II brought to the church made life more open to the broader needs of the world with more chances to engage in the wider society. Being able to pray in English brought Sr. Clarissa great happiness and she was delighted when the sisters were invited to have more interaction with laypeople.

Sr. Clarissa holds a bachelor's degree in English and three master's degrees in Leadership, Religious Education, and Counseling from the University of San Francisco. She taught at Presentation High School in San Francisco, St. Anthony's in Pocatello, Sacred Heart in Boise, Saints Peter and Paul in Grangeville and was principal at St. Mary's in Boise. Sr. Clarissa served as associate director of campus ministry at the University of San Francisco.

Sr. Clarissa loved her time teaching and looks back on it with joy. A favorite memory of her teaching career was staging the play *The Sound of Music* at Saints Peter and Paul.

In 1989, Sr. Clarissa was chosen to serve as Assistant Prioress at the Monastery. In addition to those duties, she served as an adjunct faculty member for Lewis-Clark State College in Lewiston and taught outreach classes. She was the coordinator for Children's and Family Catechesis for the Diocese of Boise and in 2004 Bishop Michael Driscoll appointed her to direct the Office of Catholic Education Ministries for the diocese. Even as she held these full-time positions, she continued to participate in local and national diocesan and monastery committees.

Sr. Clarissa was first elected to a six-year term as prioress in 2005 and elected in 2011 to an additional four-year term. Although she is happy to be "one of the sisters" again, she has warm memories of her two terms as Prioress. As much



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as there were challenges, Sr. Clarissa said, "... it offered opportunities to support the growth of an institution and individuals."

Sr. Clarissa loves being a sister and living according to the Rule of Benedict, at the core of which is hospitality, simplicity, and gratitude. She also loves to travel, try new foods, and listen to live music. In 2009, she celebrated her 50th Jubilee by taking a cruise from Amsterdam to Budapest. A big fan of the Gonzaga Bulldogs basketball team, she seldom misses watching a game.

Sr. Clarissa considers her life a beautiful dedication to God and spreads His love daily through her work as a member of the community. When asked to reflect on her life, Sr. Clarissa opines, "If you are open to what happens, there is beauty, sadness, and hilarity, all mixed together." We are grateful for this wisdom and for all the ways Sr. Clarissa has worked to bring God's Kingdom to Earth. ✕



Sr. Clarissa (above) speaking during her installation as Prioress.

Sr. Clarissa (right) wearing one of her famous scarves. On the day after she was elected Prioress (leader of the monastic community) all of the sisters came to the meeting wearing scarves, as a way to honor their new prioress and her great fashion sense!



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*"And to all guests let due honor be shown."
-St. Benedict*



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Spirit Center upcoming retreats

More information at
www.spirit-center.org

Jan-Feb
27-3

Come to the Quiet

Feb
13-17

The Sacred Art of Traditional Iconography

Feb
24-26

Lenten Yoga Journey

Mar
3-5

Healing Hospitality

Mar
7-9

A Watercolor Journey

Mar
13-19

Centering Prayer Intensive

museum musings

The Story of Building the Monastery



(As told by Jeff Wilkins, who played the role of Englebert Gier during the Raspberry Social):

My name is Engelbert Gier and I was the Monastery's architect. I immigrated from Germany and with my brothers worked as carpenters building churches and altars. I

fell off a ladder breaking both my wrists which affected my hands and switched solely to architect work. My brothers and I built St. Mary's Church in Mt. Angel in 1912. The Sisters contacted me to design their Monastery a few years later.

Since both I and many of the Sisters were from Europe, we chose a Romanesque design. The Monastery is built of blue porphyry (pronounced por-for-re) stone, which is not found anywhere else in the United States. Because of a shortage of workers during WWI, the Sisters helped to quarry and transport the stone from the hillside above. Because there wasn't very much stone, the fourth floor had to be sided.

We laid the cornerstone in 1920 and the walls are two feet thick. The towers rise 97 feet into the air and house four bells that are rung three times a day to call the Sisters to prayer. The convent face includes a grand stairway which was designed with a transverse underpass, but instead was enclosed and named "the music room" entrance.



In 1948, the Sisters needed more room so they hired Joe Stang to build the brick annex. My stone Monastery had only four floors with high ceilings. The brick annex needed to have 70 bedrooms so it had to have five floors. Mr. Stang lined up the bottom two floors and the top floor but as you can see

from the windows, the middle floors do not match.

The statues were added in the late 1930's by Karl Biber. He made nearly all the statues on the grounds. The first statue was the Sacred Heart of Jesus between the two towers. In the image of his heart are the names of the 12,000 donors. The Sisters promised to pray for those benefactors and their families for as long as the community exists.



In the niche above the back door is St. Gertrude the Great. Biber originally made a staff for her hand which had to be removed because she was never an abbess.

On the stairway are two angels holding working electric lamps. He placed the Compline Prayer for safety, especially during the night, in their bases. ✕



Lighten our darkness, we
beseech you, O Lord

-from the Compline Prayer

spirit center

A Compass

by Tim Oberholzer

In October I completed the Stewards of the Mystery spiritual direction formation program. The instructors asked us to pick an “image” of spiritual direction. A compass appeared in my mind. A compass helps determine where you are, the direction you want to go, and how you are progressing toward the destination.

Triangulation, using a compass to get bearings from three reference points, identifies your current location. Spiritually, you find your location in relation to God, others, and self. Spiritual direction invites you to ponder your thoughts, feelings, and emotions in experiences of prayer, hospitality, and solitude. The conversation allows you to reflect, notice, and wonder at the intersections of these relationships. Your spiritual director helps you recognize, clarify, and confirm the true, good, and beautiful of your life.

Navigation, using a compass to determine a direction of travel, enables you to move toward a new location from your present position. Spiritually, your heart longs to reach upward and outward as you deepen inward. Spiritual direction permits you to identify, name, and order your heart’s desires in these three directions. You freely choose where to go next. Your spiritual director acts as a sounding board for testing the harmony of your desires against the relationships you value.

Regularly stopping to consult a compass, triangulating and navigating, reduces the risk of getting lost or travelling in circles. Spiritual progress rarely happens linearly. Life inevitably presents challenges and requires adjustments.

Movement in one direction strains the others. Spiritual direction allows you to stop and check your progress regularly. Your spiritual director provides grounding as you assess, adjust, and set out again.

How is faith alive for you? What gives you hope? Who inspires your love? Is a virtue strengthening you? Is a vice tempting you? Who awakens your heart and compels you to act? Who pushes your buttons and tries your patience? When are you confident and at peace? What causes you to cringe and pretend to be someone you are not?

Spiritual direction helps you ponder these questions and determine where you stand in relation to God, others, and your true self. You choose your next steps. Your spiritual director accompanies you along the way.

If you would like to meet with a spiritual director on our team, call Sr. Lillian at 208-962-2071. ✕



Tim Oberholzer oversees Spirit Center and is a 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 recently completed the Stewards of the Mystery spiritual direction training program. Tim is a remarried widower, an ultramarathon runner, and an avid reader.

avoid poison. For wine is the first weapon used by demons against the young" (ep. 22.3).⁵ Jerome definitely preferred virginity and states, "I praise wedlock, I praise marriage, but it is because they give me virgins. I gather the rose from the thorns, the gold from the earth, the pearl from the shell" (ep. 22.20).⁶

That he saw himself in his role of mentor to Eustochium is clear from the following: "These things being so, my Eustochium, daughter, lady, fellow-servant, sister—these names refer the first to your age, the second to your rank, the third to your religious vocation, the last to the place which you hold in my affection..." (ep. 22.26).⁷ The scholar Kelly notes, "What chiefly thrilled Jerome, with his obsessive esteem for virginity, was the eagerness, humble but quite unswerving, with which [Eustochium] dedicated herself to [virginity] from girlhood. Indeed, he congratulated her on being the first young woman of rank in Rome to embrace this stern vocation" [ep. 22.15].⁸

Jerome considered Eustochium his spiritual daughter for many years, but upon the death of her mother Paula, she became the spiritual mother of the community Paula founded in Bethlehem, part of a double monastery for men and women. At the time of Paula's death, the convent contained about fifty nuns.⁹

Eustochium also replaced her mother as companion to and confidant of Jerome, many years her senior. After Paula's death, Jerome acknowledges his debt to Eustochium's prayers in his Prefaces to Chapters in the Commentary on Isaiah¹⁰:

"[1:] After the books of twenty explanations on the twelve prophets was completed with difficulty over a long time, and the commentaries on Daniel, you urge me, virgin of Christ, Eustochium, to pass over to Isaiah;

also I promised that to your holy mother, Paula, while she lived, to render it for you. Indeed, I remember that I promised that to the most learned man, your brother Pammachius, and since you are his comrade in affection you prevail in the present circumstance. And so, both to you and to him I render through you, what I owe, obeying the precepts of Christ, who said: 'You search the Scriptures' [John 5:39]; and 'Seek and you will find' [Mt. 7:7]. Lest you hear this with the Jews: 'You err, knowing not the Scriptures nor the power of God' [Mt. 22:29]. For, if according to the apostle Paul, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God [cf. 1 Cor. 1:24]; and the one, who does not know the Scriptures, does not know the power of God and the wisdom of God, [then] ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ. Whence supported by the help of your prayers, which for days and nights you meditate on the law of God and you are the temple of the Holy Spirit, I will imitate the master of the house, who brings forth things new and old from his storeroom [cf. Mt. 13:52]; and the spouse, who says in the Song of Songs: 'The new and the old, my cousin, I have kept for you' [Cant. 7:13]. And so, I will explain Isaiah, that I may teach not only that prophet, but also the evangelist and apostle. For he said about himself and the other evangelists: 'How beautiful are the feet of those proclaiming good news of those proclaiming peace' [Is. 52:7]. And to the same, as it were to the apostle, God speaks: 'Whom will I send and who will go to this people?' and he replies: 'Behold I, send me' [Is. 6:8]."

In the Second Book, Jerome writes: "Whence I beseech you, virgin of Christ Eustochium, that you raise your hands to the Lord with Moses for us laboring in the explanation of Scriptures." In the Third Book, Jerome begs for Eustochium's prayers: "Therefore, in single books, which signify so many numbers and order, I have placed brief prefaces. And I entreat you, virgin of Christ Eustochium, to help me by your prayers in the exposition of a most difficult vision, in which the All-powerful God is discerned in majesty; and two Seraphim are standing around him and are crying out: 'Holy, Holy, Holy Lord God of hosts; all the earth is full of his glory' [Is. 6:3]. He repeats the petition of her prayers for his endeavors in Books 4-7. In Book 10, he states: "So as you have wished, virgin of Christ Eustochium, and as it is decided in common, just as I have dictated the previous ones before, I will dictate this and the other books..., and I must obey more you and the holy and most learned man, your brother [in-law] Pammachius,

5 Ibid., "Ep. 22.3," 23.

6 Ibid., "Ep. 22.20," 30.

7 Ibid., "Ep. 22.26," 33.

8 J.N.D. Kelly, 100.

9 Ibid., 131.

10 These prefaces are taken from Jerome of Stridon, *S. Hieronymi Presbyteri Commentariorum in Esaiam Libri I-XI*, ed. Marci Adriaen, Corpus Christianorum Series Latina LXXIII, Pars I,2 (Turnhout, Belgium: Typography Brepols, 1963); and Corpus Christianorum Series Latina LXIII, pars I,2A. The page numbers for these prefaces will be indicated above in brackets. Note: There is no preface to Book IX and Book I begins with a Prologue.

who forces me with an insatiable zeal through letters, [397:] that after Isaiah is finished, to pass over to Ezechiel, when I, worn out by feebleness of age and of body, and scarcity of stenographers, who can assist me with their services, am still fixed in the same mud, and I scarcely believe that I will draw to a close the middle part of Isaiah in this volume. But if, by your prayer, I will have completed it the rest must be laid hold of, which they will have a beginning from the fourteenth year of King Hezechiah."

In Book 12, he acknowledges their mutual love for scripture and the role of female prophets: "The testimony of the few is sufficient for me and I am content with the praise of friends, who in requesting my little works will glide along with our love and zeal for Scriptures; and there will be some, I think, who will strive to lay open to detraction this very discourse, which I write to you, Eustochium, not considering that Hulda and Anna and Deborah prophesied to men, who were silent. And that in the service of Christ no difference of sexes avails, but of minds. Thus, the twelfth book of explanations on Isaiah will have this beginning." Then in Book 13, he calls on her prayers again: "Accordingly, Eustochium, unique example of nobility and virginity of the lands in the whole world, do not let the pupil of your eye be silent; and cry out in your heart: 'Abba, Father' [Rom. 8:15]. And say with the psalmist: 'Arise, why do you sleep, Lord?' [Ps. 43:23]. Let me complete the imposed work on Isaiah, with your prayer and with Christ's mercy." Finally, in Book 16, he ponders a question she raised: "You, daughter Eustochium, have made me to have mastery; for when you read the little preface of the former book, in which I asserted that the testimonies consider apostles and evangelists only from the Septuagint interpreters, either in their own words or in the words of those which agree with the Hebrew, that if moreover I entirely neglect those which are added by others, in that very place you have stated to me not a small little question, namely that the apostle adopted eight verses of the thirteenth psalm, which are read in churches, and are not rendered in Hebrew, when he writes to the Romans" [Rom 3:13-18].

It is clear from the last preface that Eustochium not only supported Jerome with her prayers, but that her careful reading of his work raised a question, which he had to research to answer. Thus, she reverses the role of her mentor by becoming his mentor. ❖



St. Paula and Eustochium, painted by Botticini



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A New Vision

Introducing the Center for Benedictine Life at the Monastery of St. Gertrude

It can be hard to stay positive in the midst of the problems that surround us. But, in a confusing world the Center for Benedictine Life at the Monastery of St. Gertrude is inviting people to embark on a path of profound hope. It is a path rooted in the presence of God, a path that can transform ourselves and our world. It is the path of the monastic way of St. Benedict re-envisioned for the needs of our world, the needs of our times, the needs of all people of faith, not just monks and nuns.

For over 1500 years women and men have used Benedict's guidebook to live a life centered on God, as a way to listen and respond to God's "delightful" voice. Today the invitation is to share Benedictine values and practices with the world and to invite people longing for a deeper relationship to God to live the Benedictine way.

Benedict's structured, monastic way of life focused on God has been lived in many different ways by all kinds of people through

the centuries. The Monastery of St. Gertrude is exploring and expanding new ways for our new millennium. We are seeing that new forms of Benedictine life are being born in our midst. We see our purpose as calling forth, nurturing, forming, and supporting new ways to live this time-tested way of life and we call on others to partner with us in this vision.

Our vision is two-fold. We are actively working to continue and strengthen the presence and ministries of the Monastery of St. Gertrude. St. Gertrude's was established in Cottonwood in 1907 and we intend for it to continue indefinitely into the future. We are also pioneering a new way of understanding and living Benedictine life.

*What is more
delightful than God's
voice calling to us?*

-St. Benedict

People acquainted with Benedictine monasteries usually think that the vowed

members, sisters or monks, **are** the monastery while the oblates, employees, friends, donors are simply the supporters. Here at St. Gertrude's, we see the monastery differently. We are saying that "all together, **we** are St. Gertrude's." All of us, sisters, oblates, Benedictine Cohousing Companions, employees, volunteers, artists in residence, friends and supporters of the Monastery of St. Gertrude are part of the "Center for Benedictine Life at the Monastery of St. Gertrude" (CBL). The Center for Benedictine Life is a new form of Benedictine community in which Benedict's call to live the Gospel is for all kinds of people who want to live a deeper spiritual life centered on God.

The Center for Benedictine Life is not simply a place or an idea. It is a movement to bring the transformative practices of the Benedictine way to many more people.

For more information, visit <https://stgertrudes.org/center-for-benedictine-life>



We Are The Monastery

