



## Resurrection: Every Moment, A New Beginning

Ove was deeply wounded. His cherished wife was dead. His job was eliminated. All love, purpose and hope now gone, the irascible 59-year-old decided to do the only logical thing: kill himself.

But despite his repeated, well-planned attempts, Ove remained foiled: Someone barged in on him. The rope broke. A half-frozen, starving cat needed help.

Life itself – and Ove’s willingness to say *Yes* to it – stood in the way of his plans. He began to heal.

This story comes from Fredrik Backman’s lovely novel, *A Man Called Ove*. Following the daily life of a gruff and cranky retiree, it explores questions of life, purpose and death. It also stalks the idea of resurrection, and of what it can mean to us on a daily, practical level.

Because we don’t just die physically, one time, at the end of our lives. We die daily. Sometimes many times a day. And resurrection is part of the plan.

### We fall down, we get up.

New life takes place every moment of our lives, literally. With each breath we ingest new atoms that are incorporated into our very cells. Researchers estimate that we replace 98 percent of the atoms in our body every year.

We are – by design and automatically – always being physically renewed. Spiritual renewal is just as important, but neither automatic nor easy. It requires work. And it requires our assent.

Ove gave his assent each time he helped a nosy neighbor, a hapless stranger or a fragile cat. With each interaction he grew a sense of purpose. He began to heal. To rise from his grave.

“Resurrection is not just a question of one day, after death, rising from the dead, but it is also about daily rising from the many mini-graves within which we so often find ourselves,” Rev. Ron Rolheiser writes. ▶



Sr. Sandra Brunenn, OSB

## Letter from the Prioress

My favorite poet, Mary Oliver, writes:

*Rumi said, There is no proof of the soul  
But isn't the return of spring and how it  
Springs up in our hearts a pretty good hint?\**

Similarly, we pray in Psalm 118, "The earth is filled with your love!"

Surely, the beauty of springtime reflects the truth expressed here. We know that just as the earth expresses God's love so are we called to be love- and life-givers.

We are challenged during Eastertide to consciously open our own being to receive and share God's life and love. Imagine all humankind opening in love as the budding flowers are opening to the sun!

This issue of Connecting Point focuses on the experience of Resurrection. As you read, I hope your experiences of Resurrection are remembered and renewed.

May Christ's love spring up in your heart and enable you to be a hint, a reflection, of God's limitless love for all of us.

\*From "Whistling Swans"

In other words, as the ancient desert monks are reputed to have said, *We fall down, we get up.*

Our fallen places, or mini-graves, can be shallow or deep, life-changing or trivial. Regardless, they affect us profoundly. Who hasn't had a sleepless night worrying about a conversation that took a wrong turn? Or feeling misunderstood by someone? Or grieving a major loss?



Sister Mary Jane Wallace, OSB

"We die a hundred ways," Sister Mary Jane Wallace, OSB says. "We feel like we didn't hit the target. We weren't able to do what we wanted to do. It can leave us with a spiritless, deadening feeling.

"But every morning the sun comes up. That's God saying, Try again. The light is always there, but we must rise to see it."

But, how?

### Accept your cross.

Sister Rosemary Becker, OSB says that we must first accept our crosses as invitations to growth and new life. Assistant principal for six years at Holy Trinity Catholic



Sister Rosemary Becker, OSB

School in Bloomington, Ill., she had ample opportunity to help many students do just that.

"When students were sent to my

office for being disruptive, I knew they were often acting out because of problems outside of school," she says. "I told them Jesus had crosses too. I didn't dwell on their bad behavior."

*"As long as we're alive, choosing resurrection is always worth the risk."*

— Parker Palmer

Sr. Rosemary guided her students to accept their situations, whether they stemmed from trouble at home, illness or another unchangeable circumstance. She helped them understand that – although they couldn't escape their cross – they could change their response to it.

"Accepting your cross doesn't mean that you must accept a life of misery," she says. "We are called to choose resurrection. New life every day."

In other words, we are called to grow and learn from our crosses. So, how can they make us better people? How can we move on?

### Get down off your cross.

Rev. Debra Jarvis, a hospital chaplain and writer, had been listening to a patient retell her story of diagnosis and treatment for cancer. Jarvis had heard it all before.

Despite getting a clean bill of health during her one-year follow-up exam, the patient was sharing how she had suffered and struggled all year, finally concluding, "I felt crucified."

Jarvis gave her a tissue, a hug and then said, "Get down off your cross." ▶



Sister Mary Core, OSB walks through the monastery rain garden, which fills with water during rainstorms, allowing the rain to soak slowly into the soil with minimal runoff.

Jarvis' advice, shared in the October 2016 issue of *Reader's Digest*, may seem almost callous. But Sister Sheila McGrath, OSB says it's absolutely right.

"Clinging to our old story feeds our wounds," she says. "We need to get off our cross to let the resurrection begin. If we don't, we stay stuck where we are, feeding the dying."

Jarvis shares that her patient did begin the work of resurrection, eventually creating a new story that wasn't consumed by her survivor identity.

"We have to avoid staying trapped in our wounds," Sr. Sheila says.

"We need to let go of our old story to rise. We need to let ourselves be healed and reborn, stronger, wiser, more patient. More compassionate."

Getting down off our cross means we open the door to resurrection. We say *Yes*. But then what?

### Roll your stone out of the way.

Alone in our mini-graves, we emulate Jesus' time in the tomb. There, we must open ourselves to healing, so that we can be reborn as the stronger and more compassionate people we will become. But we have to let God in.

"We must open ourselves to God's grace enough for God to do a new thing in us," Sister Mary Core, OSB says. "It requires that we get out of the way so God can act. When we are doing things our own way, we are the stone in front of the tomb."

In other words, we have to roll the heavy, lifeless stone of our old story out of the way to let the light in.

"When we allow God in, we gain the courage to do what we didn't know we could do. We gain insights and new perspective. It's about becoming. It's a new way of being. It's a restoration of life."

### Recognize the Risen One.

But letting God in is not always a straightforward affair. We don't always recognize divine guidance. We are, as scripture repeatedly warns us, often blind. Fortunately, God has ways of communicating with us in spite of our spiritual myopia, as Jesus' friends discover after the Resurrection.

"Still, like dust, I'll rise."  
— Maya Angelou

The scenes are memorable: Blinded by grief, faces wet with tears, they know nothing now but crushed hope, no future, no way forward. They are not prepared for any good news. Indeed, when Jesus appears, his friends don't recognize him. When he reveals his identity, some doubt. Jesus himself would be forgiven for losing patience.



Sister Catherine Cleary, OSB

But Jesus shows limitless kindness, trying in many different ways to get through to his friends.

"The Risen One shows us that God meets us where we are,"

Father James Martin, SJ writes in *Jesus: A Pilgrimage*. "See how the Risen Christ responds to doubt. He calls someone's name. He shows. He explains. He welcomes. He forgives. In such quiet ways are people invited to know the Risen One."

Our job, then, is to pay attention. To listen.

"Keep seeking," Sister Catherine Cleary, OSB advises. "Seek every hour of every day. God always has ▶



*From left: Sisters Sheila McGrath, Jackie Walsh and Claudia Scharf spy young fish swimming near the monastery dock.*

new ways of revealing to us. And this leads to something different. Something new.” *Resurrection.*

### Practice, practice, practice.

Every moment presents an opportunity to rise from the ashes of yesterday. To choose to begin again. And again. And again.

*“Resurrection will be now. Every moment, a new beauty.”*

– Rumi

“Practicing daily resurrection means rising up to challenges, suffering, unexpected events,” Sr. Catherine says. It may not be easy, she says, but it is an “important part of our faith.” And it requires intention.

“Without intention, we might miss the daily opportunities to practice,” she says, “when plans fall apart, schedules change, friends don’t

respond as we expect them to. How we respond emotionally, physically and psychologically to these minor grievances help us prepare for major issues.”

And for our own final resurrection.

“Resurrection is healing, renewal, newness,” Sr. Catherine says. “We have every hour of every day of our lives to practice for the final resurrection with Jesus.”

The joy toward which every life leads.

### Path to freedom.

A resurrected life is a life in which we are free of selfishness and self-focus. Free of anger and recrimination. We can reach out to others with whole-hearted love, generosity, hospitality and joy. We become who we are called to be.

“We never know what distractions

or temptations will come our way,” Sister Marilyn Ring, OSB says.

“But when we choose to turn away from self-centeredness, we choose life for the spirit. We free ourselves to rise in greater joy every moment.



*Sister Marilyn Ring, OSB*

Sr. Marilyn says we see it in Jesus’ own resurrection story.

“Jesus rose from the dead. He was resurrected so he could be free to fully serve all of creation. He could be God.

Like Jesus, resurrection frees us to fully be who we are called to be.”

### Heaven is closer than we think.

“How far from heaven are we?” asks Sister Mary Schmidt, OSB. “Not very. It’s here and now.” ▶

Heaven is all around us, sometimes apparent and sometimes not.

“Corinthians tells us we see with veiled eyes,” Sr. Mary says. “So we aren’t fully able to see heaven all around us.” We see clues, she says, in the earth’s rebirth this time of year.

“The beauty we see, especially in spring, awakens our sense of heaven. We see all that was dead come back to life. Even the weeds.”

The weeds – Jesus’ metaphor for evil – require constant vigilance in the gardens of our soul ... a daily practice that is never finished.

“Karl Rahner said he relied on miracles to get him through his day,” Sr. Mary says. “Me, too. The sun itself is a miracle. It’s God’s way of saying, I’m here. Heaven is so near to us that the people who have died are here, too. A veil covers them, maybe because we’re not ready to see them yet.”

Resurrected life “brings unity,” St. Paul tells us, “to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.” (Ephesians 1:10)

### Resurrected life is now.

Resurrection – the moment when we rise, all new – is the life to which we are called. Not once, as we give up our corporal bodies, but always. It requires that we give up our sometimes-cherished “old stories,” though; the old wounds that we have kept alive and well-fed. It’s a boulder-strewn path.

And it’s never over. As the Gospel resurrection stories show us, Jesus himself faces unrecognition and doubt. Like Jesus, then, we may well face doubt from our loved

ones who wonder, Who is this person who is no longer nursing her wounds? Who is this person who claims to have moved on?

“We can now live a new life.”

– Romans 6:4

As Jesus models patience, perseverance, forgiveness and compassion, he teaches us how to live our resurrection. Our renewal.

Practicing resurrection is about allowing ourselves to be changed, to grow, to become. It’s about getting back up, holding our experiences – those daily deaths – in hand, but not allowing them to be in charge. ■

Sister Stefanie MacDonald (left) helps Sister Mary Schmidt prepare the monastery garden for spring planting.



## Easter Bloom

*Alleluia*

*In and out*

*The deserts of our lives,  
Though support we know,*

*Dry and sandy*

*Hot and lonely,*

*In solitude we grow.*

*Like the desert cactus,*

*Reaching out*

*Branching up,*

*Roots deep, deeper yet,*

*In silent waiting, letting go,*

*We, like cactus,*

*A resurrection,*

*An Easter bloom!*

*- Sister Margaret Murphy, OSB*



The Oblates pray Vespers with the Benedictine Sisters during their annual retreat at the monastery.

## Shaping Our Souls with Psalms

By Sister Ruth Ksycki, OSB

During the past two years the Oblates of St. Mary Monastery (Christian lay women and men who seek to enrich their life with the ancient wisdom of St. Benedict) have studied the Psalms. Using *Psalms for All Seasons*, by John Craghan, they delved into the meaning and background of the Psalms, while reflecting on guided questions.

Oblate Madeleine Callahan, Bloomington, Ill., says, “We found they are a source of beauty. We performed them in dramatic, multi-voiced readings. We sang some laments and we also listened to a variety of musical settings of them. Many agreed this was a highlight of our study. Many shared how the Psalms ‘have shaped our souls.’”

“The Psalms have always been a source of wisdom. We tried illustrating single verses whose wisdom we wanted to share with a friend or family member. Some wanted to gather their verses in a journal. Others reminisced how the Psalms are the music they have known since childhood. We pondered how Benedictines and Oblates all over the world pray the Psalms for and with those experiencing various situations and emotions.”

Oblate Linda Clewell, Rock Island, Ill. writes, “Although I had often prayed the Psalms before this study, I had always skipped those with violent rhetoric. I favored those with poetic imagery for offering praise and thanksgiving.”

“Through this study, Sr. Ruth encouraged us to rewrite the Psalms in our own style. In my own versions, I could describe a God who could be called upon for mercy and forgiveness, to soften the hearts of our enemies, not destroy them. I could also pray to a non-gender-specific God, whose names became appropriate to the prayer. I asked Sacred Silence to answer me. I expressed gratitude to the Divine Presence dwelling within, and I gave praise to Holy Mystery for the wonders of creation. It has become a spiritual practice.”

Oblate Jean Wolf, Macomb, Ill., says, “studying the Psalms with my Oblate group brought out the communal nature of the Psalms; the importance of reading aloud and sharing responses as we focused on different Psalms each month. I was reminded of singing the Psalms with the Oblate community at St. Mary Monastery, and of reading Psalms during Mass, as a lector. I often connected with music from my own experiences as I focused on a specific section of a Psalm each week.”

For information about the Oblate program, contact Sister Ruth at 309-283-2106 or [oblates@smmsisters.org](mailto:oblates@smmsisters.org).



## Monastery Notes

### Kindness: Get in the Habit!

Be kind to one another was the Benedictine Sisters' message this spring, in a campaign designed to help counter the divisiveness seen throughout the country. Launched in collaboration with the 12 congregations of the Catholic Sisters of the Upper Mississippi River Valley, "Kindness: Get in the Habit" was shared on billboards, in movie theater ads, through social media posts and in Catholic school classrooms.

"The Kindness campaign was inspired by our Christian call to treat one another as we would hope to be treated," Prioress Sister Sandra Brunenn, OSB says. "It was both a response to the incivility that continues to permeate talk shows and social media, and a call to Gospel values such as caring for the poor."

The full campaign ran during the fourth annual National Catholic Sisters Week, March 8-14, 2017, and was made available to congregations across the globe. Adaptations of the campaign were seen from Rome to Pennsylvania, and Ohio to Kansas.

Elements of the campaign included a billboard featuring the image of a homeless person being handed a cup of coffee; social media posts featuring six images illustrating the kindness theme with Gospel text; movie theater video featuring all six images with accompanying music; school curriculum with Gospel-based kindness meditations and suggested activities for preschool-12th grade.

The Kindness project – with downloadable files of prayer cards, posters, curriculum and other supporting items – is available for use by educators, churches and religious communities. For more information, contact us at [beneditines@smmsisters.org](mailto:beneditines@smmsisters.org).



*Sister Charlotte Sonnevile, OSB, greets movie goers with a message of kindness during an event held on March 4 at Rave Movie Theater in Davenport, Iowa.*



## Benedictine News

\***Sisters Catherine Cleary and Marlene Miller** represented the community at the opening of a year of celebration of the 25th Anniversary of the Contemplative Community in Bloomington, IL. Sister Audrey Cleary established the first Centering Prayer Group at the Holy Trinity House of Prayer in Bloomington.

Oblate Florrie Dammers writes, “It was with gratitude and joy that Centering Prayer practitioners from across central Illinois gathered at St. Patrick Catholic Church of Merna in January to celebrate 25 years of Centering Prayer in central Illinois. The day began with Centering Prayer and a Prayer Liturgy and closed with a festive lunch. An important part of the morning was remembering our history, especially the work of Sr. Audrey Cleary, along with the support of the Benedictine Sisters. We listened to those gathered comment on the impact that Centering Prayer has had on their lives. Father Thomas Keating says that Centering Prayer groups tend to become communities of faith and love, and this was very apparent throughout the morning.”  
*Photo above, right.*



\***Sister Roberta Bussan** gave a presentation on the history of St. Mary’s Academy at the Joseph Smith Historic Site Visitor Center in Nauvoo, IL.

\***Sisters Helen Carey, Ruth Ksycki, Susan Hutchens, Catherine Cleary and Mary Core** participated in a peaceful protest in support of the Muslim community in front of the Rock Island post office. Several Sisters also participated in the Quad Cities Interfaith “Keep Families Together!” vigil for Immigration Reform in front of the Rock Island County Jail.

\***Sister Catherine Cleary** and her collaborators - Lisa Killinger (Muslim) and Linda Golden (Jew) - received a Human Rights Award sponsored by Church Women United for their work with the annual Muslim-Christian-Jewish Women’s Dialogue. “Our faith calls us to welcome the stranger in our midst,”



Sr. Catherine says. “The seriousness of this command to ‘love the stranger’ appears no fewer than 36 times in the Old Testament.

Jesus teaches that what we do to the stranger we do to Jesus himself. We are all on this journey together. Our enemies are not Jews or Muslims or Christians, but arrogant self-righteousness, fear, ignorance and xenophobic paranoia.” *Pictured above from left: Linda Golden, Lisa Killinger, Sr. Catherine Cleary.*



## Sister Mary Jean Feeney, OSB 1918-2017

Sister Mary Jean, 98, died Saturday, March 25, at Trinity Hospital, Rock Island. Born May 19, 1918 in Ivesdale, Ill., Sr. Mary Jean entered the Benedictine community on Sept. 16, 1937 and made her final profession on July 27, 1942.

She attended St. Ambrose College, Davenport, Iowa, the University of Illinois, Urbana, and Notre Dame University, South Bend, Ind. Sr. Mary Jean’s ministry included serving as a teacher throughout the Peoria Diocese; as teacher, principal and bookkeeper at St. Thomas More School in Munster, Ind., and as treasurer at St. Mary’s Academy.



## SMA News

**Sister Mary Core helps Anne Nelligan, '83 and George Glauner** celebrate their wedding in Florida (right).

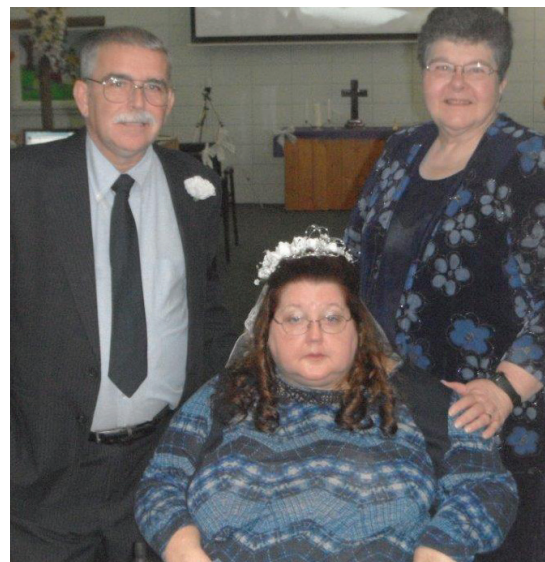
**Carolyn Schenk Lutz, '60** and husband Ron write from Mt. Pleasant, Mich., "We so appreciate you and your messages in *Connecting Point*. You inspire us and give us hope. Thanks to each of you for what you have done and continue to do, including teaching the values that are so important in our life journey."

**Marlene McCloskey Zinia, '70** writes from Minonk, Ill., "I keep all happy memories of my years at SMA. I will never forget the wisdom and kindness of all the Sisters!"

**Lisa Westfield, '76** writes from St. Louis, Missouri, "My visit to Rock Island and St. Mary Monastery in September for my 40th reunion is beyond words. I had not seen some of my classmates since we graduated. I cannot tell you how touching it was to see the Sisters, who were our teachers, and now friends. So many have departed for heaven already and that loss was keenly felt."

**Mary Schuman Kaboski, '60** and husband Lee, living in Racine, Wisc., recently celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary. "The Benedictine Sisters had a lot to do with the 'foundation' of this family. I am confident that you are the unseen teachers of the faith our family lives."

**Susan Fitzpatrick, '61** writes from Albuquerque, New Mexico, "Thank you for putting the words to the SMA song in your SMA news. Please always keep it there! I loved every minute of my time at SMA. The Sisters were so good to us, and so fun! I also loved the little town of Nauvoo. I returned a couple of years ago, and was disappointed to see that there was no sign of our beloved school. OH, the "Villa" where I lived as a senior was still there. I went to the Mormon information center. There were several workers there and they had never heard of SMA and were fascinated to hear my story. My Grandmother graduated from SMA in 1912. Her name was Kathryn Monroe. My Grandfather's family came from Nauvoo. His father had a harness shop at the other end of the block where the temple is, facing the main street. I have enjoyed going down memory lane with you!"



## The Bells of St. Mary's SMA School Song

*The bells of St. Mary's at dear old Nauvoo  
Have called her dear children, the loyal and true.  
And where e'er I wander on land or on sea,  
I know our St. Mary's is thinking of me.  
The bells of St. Mary's, ah, hear they are calling  
The old girls, the new girls who pledge loyalty.  
And so my dear comrades, when school days are over  
These dear old bells will still ring out  
For you and me.*

## In Memoriam ...

**Kathleen Murphy O'Donnell, '43**, sister of **Sr. Rosemary Murphy, '42**, **Sr. Margaret Murphy, '54**, **Patty Gaughan, '49** and **Mary Ann McHugh, '47**, died March 6, 2017.

George Kirwin, husband of **Michelle DePatie '68**, died April 8, 2017.

James Laroe, brother of **Margaret Lucy Laroe, '53**, died in Feb. 2017

**Julie McKinney, '72**, sister of **Mary Beth, '73**, died Feb. 2, 2017.

**Margaret Vega, '84**, died.

Rosemary, mother of **Diann Murphy-Kelley, '71**, died.

Don Schumacher, father of **Donna Sheehan, '67**, **Julie, '68**, **Sharon, '70**, **Beth Henderson, '71**, and **Ann Mason, '79**, died.

Mother of **Mary Bruhns Riesbeck, '87**, died Dec. 28, 2016.

**Krista Clark Landrebe, '70**, died Christmas night, 2016.

## Reunion Announcements

Class of 1967  
Aug. 4-6, 2017

Class of 1975  
Oct. 6-8, 2017



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