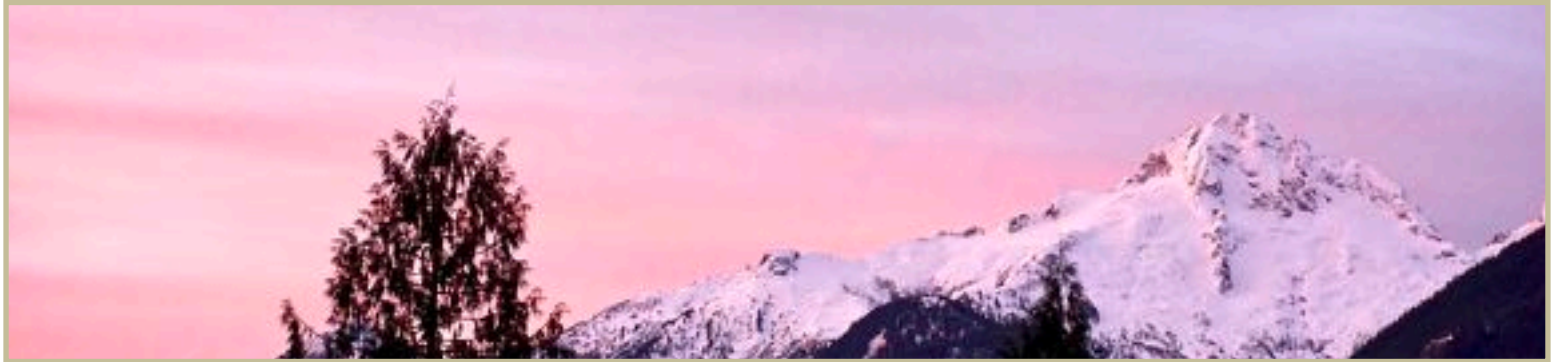




Queen of Peace Monastery



Dear friends,

In Advent we prepare our hearts to receive the gift of God. St. Thomas Aquinas says that it is God's nature to give; this is why existence exists. The fulfillment of all creation is the Incarnation of the Divine Word, when God gives His very self. He is the gift of all Gifts. This wondrous gift is offered for us to receive. As Saint John says, *"to all who receive him, who believe in his name, he gives power to become children of God"* (Jn 1:12). When we receive with gratitude, we are in relationship with the giver.

Last year, our Dominican brother fr. Thierry Marie Courau helped us to perceive this anew as he shared with us his exegesis of Genesis. The great temptation for humanity is to take and appropriate rather than to receive. From personal relationships to our natural environment, this attitude of grasping often results in alienation, suffering and sadness. In contrast, receiving with humble gratitude is accompanied by joy. When we receive from God with open hands, we often find that there is more to the gift than we could first perceive.

When the Magi followed the star of Christmas, carrying their gifts along the long road to Bethlehem, did they know what they would find? As they returned home *"by another road"* (Mt 2:12), their saddlebags were lighter but their hearts were full. The Gospels do not say what happened afterwards, or to what extent their lives were changed by the Gift they discovered amidst the straw. What is certain is that God offers this gift of encounter with Himself to each of us, again and again, throughout our lives. The Giver of all gifts knocks at the doors of our hearts, ever so gently, wondering if He could be let in.

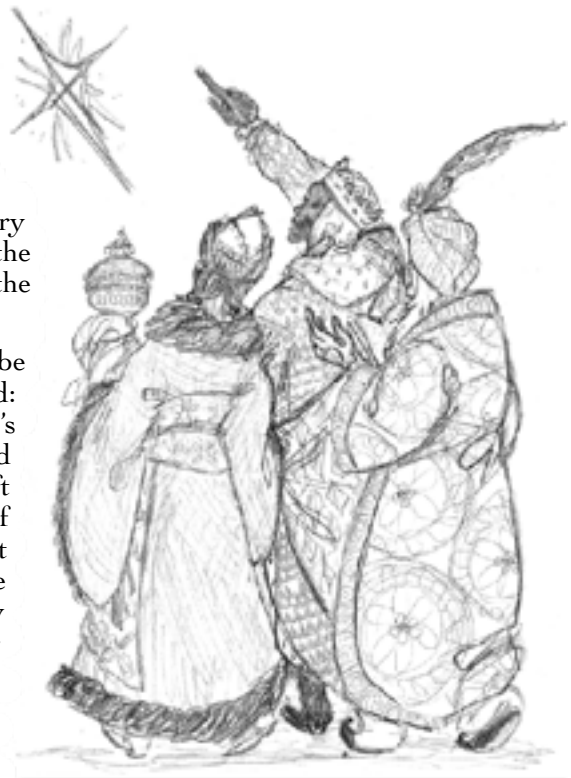
This gift of love is certainly enough to change a life, and so it is with great joy that we celebrated this year the solemn profession of Sr. Marie Thomas of the Divine Word. Even a widespread bout of Covid in the community the week prior to the ceremony could not dampen our joy! In this newsletter, we offer a reflection from Sr. Marie Thomas on the experience.

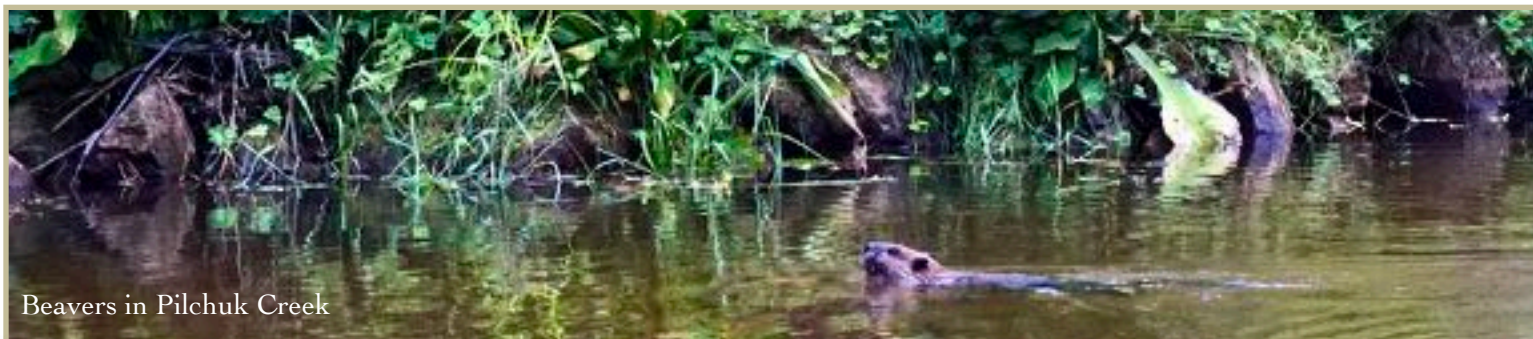
Another gift of this year was the return of Sr. Marie Etienne from the lands of St. Dominic in France, where she spent time at the Monasteries of St. Mary Magdalen and Prouilhe. There, she experienced the gift of encounter with the history and culture of our Order in southern France, and especially with the living presence of our Dominican brothers and sisters throughout the centuries.

To receive a gratuitous gift does not mean that we cannot ask for what is to be given. The Scriptures are full of prayers that ask for particular gifts from God: forgiveness (Lk 18:13), mercy (Ps 51:1), healing (Jr 17:14), the coming of God's kingdom (Mt 6:10), justice (Ps 43) and peace (Ps 122). This asking from God does not diminish the gift, but enriches it. As the Catechism explains, "God's gift and our acceptance of it are united in dialogue with each other. The prayer of blessing is our response to God's gifts: because God blesses, the human heart can in return bless the One who is the source of every blessing" (§ 2626). As we prepare to welcome and receive the Prince of Peace this Christmas let us pray together for peace in our war torn world and in our hearts. *"Lord, grant us peace; for all we have and are has come from you"* (Isa 26:12).

God bless,

Your sisters at Queen of Peace Monastery





Beavers in Pilchuk Creek

May: "The winter is past, the rains are over and gone, flowers appear on the earth," and the seminarians and monks from Westminster Abbey arrived for a weekend of work and prayer (Sg 2:11)! Next, we received a visit from Sr. Mary Margaret O.P., prioress of the Monastery of the Infant Jesus in Lufkin, Texas. She came to collect Sr. Mary Magdalen's carving of St. Dominic, and to experience our monastery for the first time. On the 15th, she and Sr. Claire departed for Corpus Christi Monastery in Menlo Park, California, where they attended the annual prioress' meeting for monasteries belonging to the North American Association of Dominican Monasteries. Mid-month, Br. Joseph Selinger O.P. returned for a time of retreat. The *Mysteria Lucis* chapter of our Dominican Laity from Vancouver joined us for a day of study and fellowship, and it was a joy to spend the time together.

Then, it was our turn to retreat between Ascension and Pentecost. This time was very special to us this year as we were joined by two student brothers of the Canadian Dominican Province, fr. Lamphone Phonevilay and fr. Mathieu Vezina. They were on retreat in preparation for their solemn profession of vows on the 25th of June. At the end of the month, Sr. Claire and Sr. Marie Bénédicte travelled to the General Assembly of the Canadian Religious Conference in Montréal. Sr. Claire gave a short talk to the Assembly on the theme of hope, sharing how God has walked with our community through its growth from a small foundation to our current monastery. Afterwards, our sisters spent time with the Dominican nuns of the Monastery Notre-Dame-du-Rosaire in Shawinigan, Quebec. Their community is now affiliated to ours, and this time of mutual encounter and sharing was a precious gift. We are deeply humbled and grateful to become the heirs of the first community of Dominican nuns in Canada, who came to Quebec in 1925 from Prouilhe, France. As a material sign of our communion, we received from them a monstrance, chalice and other sacred objects, which we now use on Sundays and Solemnities. It is a beautiful reminder of our communion and of the Dominican Order's deep roots in Eastern Canada.

June: Reading the Word of God in choir is beautiful, but challenging. Although each of us is trying her best, there is room for progress in our elocution! So, the month began with a lector workshop from Lauren McGibbon. After various exercises, our tongues are nimble and the Word of God is proclaimed more clearly and beautifully by all. Just remember: "Breathe!" These new elocution skills were put to the test in a very different context on June 12, when the novitiate performed two shadow puppet skits for Sr. Claire's birthday. With full set and hand-made characters, the skits were fantastic and thoroughly enjoyed by all. Given our monastery's location in the wilderness, it seemed fitting that even the animal characters were speaking! Our provincial fr. Yves Beriault O.P. visited from the 14th to 15th, accompanied by fr. José Kahombo O.P. They made a short video about monastic life by interviewing some young sisters. This was later shared at a meeting of the young Dominican friars in Canada.



Sr. Marie Etienne and Sr. Marie Angelica on cable duty

July: On the 5th, sisters donned their very oldest work clothes and assumed the task of pulling a very large electrical cable from the hydro-electricity building, over Pilchuk creek, under our chaplain's house, and down the hill to the new workshop building. "*L'union fait la force comme l'oignon fait la soupe*," as they say (translation, "unity makes strength like onions make soup"). With the electricity installed, workers could now connect their power tools *inside* the building, and Ron passes from room to room creating shelves, and work counters and drying racks as he goes. From July 10 - 17, fr. Emmanuel Durand O.P. of Fribourg, Switzerland preached our annual retreat on the theme of hope. In addition to a very good retreat, it was a delight to see our brother again. As we enjoyed his preaching and the extra silence, he enjoyed hiking and mountain biking in the hills around the monastery. On the 21st, we received a visit from our Archbishop Michael Miller, CSB. After Mass and a festive meal, the highlight of the visit was the first encounter between our good Archbishop and

Dominic, our monastery's rabbit. It was a great success! Again we saw that a bishop knows how to become *"all things to all"* (1 Cor 9:22). The month concluded with a visit from our former chaplain Archbishop-emeritus Ramón Arguelles (Lipa City, Philippines), who was in Canada visiting his family.

August: *"They see your solemn procession, O God,"* we sing in Psalm 68 at Matins. As the month unfolded, a rather different procession began as sisters started moving their respective workspaces from the main monastery down the hill to the new workshops. Around this time, we harvested the Russian Red garlic planted the previous autumn, and spent an outdoor recreation cleaning and tying it for drying. The feast of St. Dominic was celebrated quietly this year on the 8th, with beautiful hymns in both French and English. On August 17, our founder and brother came even closer as Sr. Marie Etienne flew to France for two months at the Monastery of Prouilhe. She spent time experiencing the lands of St. Dominic and soaking in the rich history of the region. We enjoyed receiving her regular updates and the news of our dear sisters of the community of Prouilhe.

September: On Labour Day, our Dominican brothers of St. Mary's in Vancouver arrived for a much-needed day of rest and retreat. Brs. Joseph D'Souza, Gabriel De Chadarevian, Gilles Simard and David Bellusci joined us and our chaplain fr. Pierre Leblond for a recreation. It was so good to see again our closest labourers in the Lord's vineyard. The garden harvest continued throughout the month, with Sr. Imelda Marie, Sr. Laetitia Maria, Sr. Marie Angelica and Khuyen regularly making the long trek from the garden to the kitchen with kale, corn, cabbage and green beans. At the end of the month, Sr. Isabelle flew to Corpus Christ Monastery in the Bronx, NY for the annual novice mistress's meeting of the North American Association.

October: The great event of this month was the solemn profession of our Sr. Marie Thomas on the memorial of St. John Henry Newman, October 9. The excitement began weeks before, duly balanced by the seriousness of extensive preparations: choir practices, counting of guests, procurement of food, etc. However, perhaps the Lord wanted to remind us that *"apart from Him we can do nothing"* (Jn 15:5)... One week before the great day, Sr. Isabelle unknowingly returned from New York with Covid-19 hidden in her luggage. After a few days, almost half of the community was infected and put into quarantined isolation. Our well laid plans changed almost daily to allow for the defection of various chantresses, cooks and sister organizers! But, by the grace of God, enough sisters were in good condition on profession day to make it beautiful, joyful and dignified. The chapel filled with guests, including Sr. Marie Thomas's family, friends, local neighbours, our dear farmers Stephan and Thomas with Astrid, and various members of the Dominican family, including representatives of the lay Dominican Chapter in Vancouver. Our Dominican Provincial of Canada fr. Yves Bériault celebrated the Eucharist, sister's friend and former university chaplain Fr. Dean Henderson proclaimed the Gospel, and fr. Don Goergen O.P. preached the homily. It was also our great joy to welcome for the first time Father Abbot Alban Riley OSB, abbot of Westminster Abbey in Mission, BC. Those who know our chapel can imagine that with ten priests (including seven Dominican friars), a deacon and a server in the sanctuary, things were joyfully a bit tight!

The celebration began with beautiful harp music thanks to Sr. Marie Thomas' friend and former teacher Alison Hunter. As a surprise for the newly-professed, it was concluded in solemn manner by *"Amazing Grace"* played on the bagpipe by her younger sister Christa-Mae (we think she's pretty *"amazing"* as well!). That was the signal for all to go downstairs to share a huge *"Oktoberfest"* meal of home-made sauerkraut, bratwurst, and Black Forest Cake (a small nod to Sr. Marie Thomas' German heritage). As sisters emerged one by one from quarantine in the days that followed, and the choir stalls filled once again, we returned to *"normal"* life with a deep feeling of gratitude for the God who calls us and *"makes us happy in his house of prayer"* (Is 56:7).



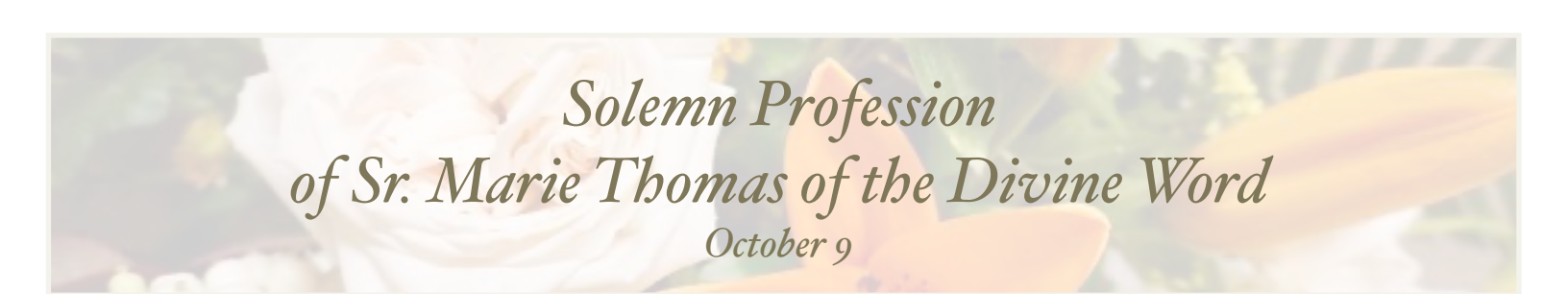
Sr. Marie Bénédicte
in the new candle workshop



Sr. Mary Magdalen
and Khuyen



Elk on the field at dawn



Solemn Profession *of Sr. Marie Thomas of the Divine Word* *October 9*

In Dominican monastic tradition, a sister makes an eight-day retreat prior to her reception of the habit, first profession and solemn vows. In our community, the retreat is often in a small hermitage located at some distance from the monastery. It is a time to enter the desert with God, to seek and be found by Him in the wilderness. I have always loved this time of preparation; despite its challenges, it contains an unexpected grace and encounter with God in the ways that I need at the time. With the ordinary routine of life somewhat at a distance, it is possible to live more simply, to spend time outside and in manual labour, and to become available to the Presence of God. There's just something about boiling tea on a camp stove and chopping firewood that makes the whole thing seem rustic, rugged and even a bit romantic. *"I will allure her, and lead her into the desert, and speak tenderly to her heart,"* as Hosea wrote (2:14). However, as a friar warned me during my noviciate, "God will lead you into the desert...but not the desert you choose."

On the third day of retreat, as I snuck back to my cell to collect forgotten items, I noticed a TV table outside the cell of the sister who is our novice mistress and liturgist. Since 2020, this sign has meant only one thing in our community: a sister in quarantine with Covid-19. Two days later, another table appeared outside our assistant liturgist's cell. By the sixth day of retreat, six sisters were listed as quarantined, our chaplain joked in his homily at Mass about a solemn profession with no singing, and invited guests were notified about the extent of the infection. The next day, our chaplain was quarantined with Covid!

The early monks and nuns considered keeping nighttime vigil to be a privileged form of prayer and asceticism, along with manual work, fasting and psalmody. It is, one might say, not my favourite form of prayer. That night, however, I found myself keeping an "involuntary vigil" during the wee hours. Eventually I gave up on sleep, donned a jacket, and went to sit on the front step of the hermitage. Realistically, I knew there was a lot to be grateful for. No one was gravely ill or hospitalized. If the prioress and subprioress both fell ill, a proxy could receive my vows in the presence of two witnesses. A solemn profession is still valid even if no one sings. But would the infection continue to spread until I was the only sister left in the chapel? This was 2023, not 2020!

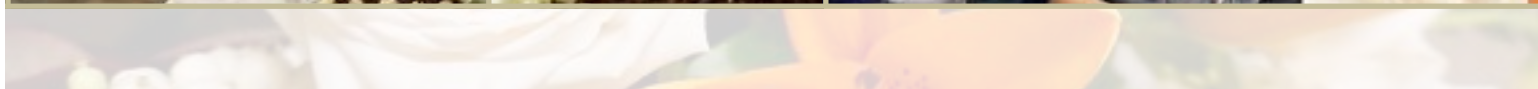
As I sat there for a time, struggling towards some kind of abandonment, I looked up and noticed that I was sitting under a canopy of stars stretched across the mountains that gird our valley. I realized at that moment that the desert is also a place where one can see the stars more clearly. During the day or in places with high light pollution, stars are invisible, their radiance obscured. It is only in darkness that their light can shine out clearly and be seen. The uncertainty of the situation was really a kind of night, obscuring all the details of ceremony, and sisters, and guests. I could not see beyond the present sleepless moment.

As Jean Pierre de Caussade wrote, however, *"the present moment is like a desert in which the soul sees only God whom it enjoys; and it is only occupied about those things which He requires of it, leaving and forgetting all else, and abandoning itself to Providence."* As I gazed at the stars with God, I began to be able to see clearly the *"one thing necessary"* to the situation: on the day of the profession, God would be there. The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit would be present and receive my vows for all eternity. And, in the spiritual economy of grace, this consecration was not actually about me. Perhaps, somewhere in the world, someone needed help; and perhaps this small thing would be able to help them. That was all that was required of me; there was nothing else to do or worry about. *"In peace, I will lie down and fall asleep, because you alone, Lord, make me dwell in safety"* (Ps 4:8). I did not realize then that this sleepless night was also October 7, the eve of the latest Israeli-Gaza war.

In the end, the day of the profession was beautiful. The sisters who were symptom free and tested negative were able to be in the chapel, including our novice mistress; the sisters in quarantine participated from behind the windows on the chapel's flat roof. Different sisters learned the music, including a sister who had never sung the responsorial psalm publicly before. Family and friends came, were comfortable enough to hug me afterwards, and enjoyed meeting our community and local neighbours. Despite the fatigue of cooking and nursing the sick, my sisters truly welcomed each guest as Christ. And, yes, God was there, in His own love and peace.

Daily life in a cenobitic monastery is different than the hermitage. Here, as in the world, that wilderness of encounter can sometimes seem a bit hard to find amidst the chores and surprises of ordinary life. But the desert of the present moment and God's will is always available, perhaps when it is least desired or convenient. Even in the midst of broadest daylight, it is possible to look up then and remember: a desert is a place where one can see the stars more clearly.

+ by Sr. Marie Thomas



In the footsteps of St. Dominic

My time in France was an immersion into Dominican history, and not only of the long-ago past of St. Dominic himself. Rather, I got a glimpse of the whole 800 years which led up to what the Order of Preachers is today, and what remains (or doesn't) of Dominic's presence in our midst. Even in recent times, conflicts and accidents have left their ravages on historical monuments and documents, as did the changing tastes and needs of every era. Things get lost, discarded, damaged, even destroyed, sometimes inadvertently. For example,

all that remains of the first foundation of nuns by St. Dominic at Prouilhe in 1206 is the keystone of the old church and the presence of the nuns themselves, which, nonetheless, had been interrupted for about 100 years after the French Revolution.

As sister-historian Sr. Barbara Beaumont O.P. explained to me when I visited her in Fanjeaux, historical research finds that so few documents remain of Dominic's time in France that the more we look into the facts, the less we are sure of his story. "The latest surprise," she told me, "is that there is no historical evidence that Dominic and Bishop Diego of Osma ever went to Denmark! There is, rather, a region in the south of France still called 'the Marches' and it is more likely they went *there* on their diplomatic mission where they encountered the Albigensian heresy." A real surprise for those familiar with the old story!

On the other hand, as lay Dominican Nathalie pointed out to me when she gave me a tour of



Basilica of
St. Nazaire
in Carcassonne

St. Dominic's house in Fanjeaux, this same historical research allows us to discover the richness of medieval culture.

A conversation between the nuns of Prouilhe and a visiting Dominican friar about ideas to revive Dominican life in the area highlighted how it could be an ideal place for historical research on early Dominican history. For example, there are nearby sites of archeological interest, such as the medieval mound in front of the monastery. The archives of Toulouse and of Carcassonne are also nearby, and the quiet country atmosphere could favour the writing of doctorates and books. Though much may seem lost and uncertain, I also think there may be much to recover—or *uncover*—of our Dominican heritage in Languedoc! As for me, wherever I

went, I looked for traces of Romanesque or early Gothic art. "Things that Dominic would have seen," I told myself. Even more ancient was the Gallo-Roman wall of Peter Seilhan house, the first convent of the Dominican brethren in Toulouse (founded in 1215!). This house was one of my favourite discoveries. As it is filled with portraits of Dominicans, both holy and simply famous, it felt like walking into a family home with portraits of all my relatives! Actually, more than physical traces of St. Dominic, I found a



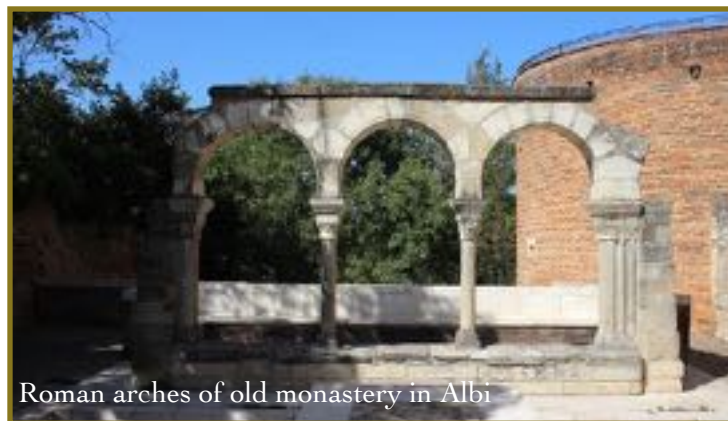
Keystone of Prouilhe



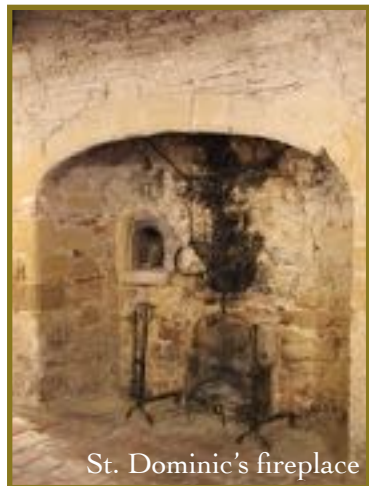
Romanesque art in Toulouse



Gallo-Roman wall
at Peter Seilhan house



Roman arches of old monastery in Albi



St. Dominic's fireplace

bit of his spirit in each Dominican I met in France— friar, sister, layperson or nun— including those who have followed St. Dominic before us into eternal life! To name a few of these latter, there is H.D. Lacordaire, who re-founded the Order in France after the Revolution; Bl. M. Hyacinth Cormier who, as provincial of the Dominican province of Toulouse (at age 30!), called the nuns of Nay to re-found Prouilhe; those same sisters who

I visited in the monastery graveyard; and their spiritual daughters who lived through the First World War and whose annals were being read in the refectory during my stay. Our Dominican sisters in Shawinigan were founded by Prouilhe, and their generous legacy continues to live on in our community today. We may be a young monastery here at Queen of Peace, but being part of the Order of Preachers means we are part of a great adventure, much bigger than ourselves!

+ by Sr. Marie Etienne



Cross of Sicaire
near Fanjeaux

The Dominic Chronicles: On Formation

"After one year in the monastery, I'm very happy. I like common life, have plenty of silence and solitude, and the sisters are so kind. I only find one monastic practice challenging: the veterinarian said "no unlimited carrots!" 'Tis a hard asceticism indeed, but I try to offer it up..."



Handmade Soap: Winter Collection

In the midst of the workshop move, our soap sisters have been hard at work to create a new collection of favourite blends! Our new winter-themed collection contains the bars: Log Cabin, Mint Swirl, Pumpkin Spice, and Mint & Eucalyptus. We think they're perfect for a warm start on a cold day, or a bit of refreshment after being outside in the snow. This collection and our classic soaps are available for purchase in our online store and our physical gift shop. You can find out more at dominicannunsbc.ca/soap

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