

September 2023 Newsletter



For love is strong as death.

Prayer Happens Here



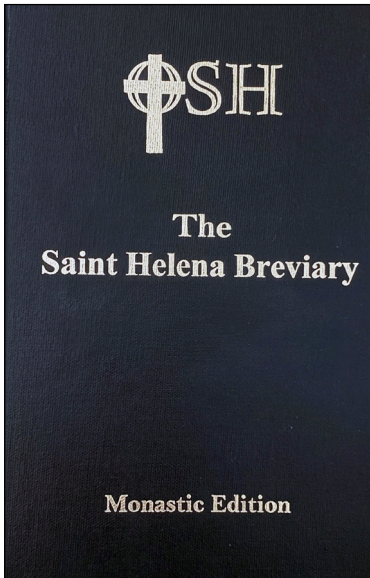
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THE SISTERS OF THE ORDER OF SAINT HELENA



MONASTIC PRAYER FOR THE WORLD



When we step into the chapel of The Convent of Saint Helena, we find ourselves in a peaceful place, awash with prayer. Sisters come alone for silent meditation, and we come together four times a day to pray the Daily Offices from *The Saint Helena Breviary*. We pray the canticles, hymns, psalms, and scripture for our community, our neighbors and friends, and for the whole world.

In this newsletter, you will find a favorite selection from the *Breviary* by individual sisters and the reasons why these selections are special to them.

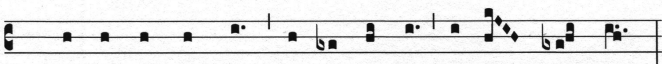
May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing through the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen! (Matins Closing)

Sr. Faith Anthony: We sing the Benedicamus at the end of Shrove Tuesday to welcome the season of Lent; then we sing it on Easter morning. During Eastertide, we sing the Benedicamus on special occasions as we celebrate Christ's victory over death. It reminds me that we are together no matter what is happening and makes me feel triumphant and secure.

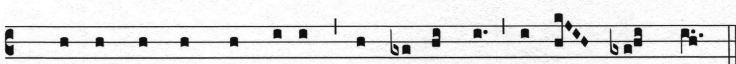
440 *Proper of Eastertide - Easter Day*

BENEDICAMUS

The festal Benedicamus, below, is used at Matins and Vespers throughout Easter Week and at Sunday Matins and Saturday and Sunday Vespers throughout Eastertide.



Cantor: Let us bless our God, al - le - lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia.



Response: To God be thanks for e-ver, al - le - lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia.

Sunday Matins, Week II, Psalm 42:1-2

*As the deer longs for the water-brooks,
so longs my soul for you, O God.*

*My soul is athirst for God, athirst for
the living God;
when shall I come to appear before
the presence of God?*

Sr. Mary Lois: This is the life-long quest, searching to see the face of God. So what if there is no God? I am still called to the search. I trust the call. It is my quest.



Photo: Kalhh (Pixabay)

Matins Collect for Guidance

O God, our Creator and Sustainer, in you we live and move and have our being: We humbly pray you so to guide and govern us by your Holy Spirit, that in all the cares and occupations of our life we may not forget you, but may remember that we are ever walking in your sight; through Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.

Sr. Linda: I take great comfort from this prayer that is often chosen to bring Matins to a close. It provides me calm assurance for the day ahead. I pray these words will stay with me through the day – remembering that I live as part of God’s very being – as do my sisters and everyone else. I am encouraged by the truth that we are always walking in God’s sight – watched over, guided, loved.



Photo: Sven Lachmann (Pixabay)

Wednesday Matins Week I, Psalm 108:2-3

*Wake up, my spirit;
awake, lute and harp;
I myself will waken the dawn.*

*I will confess you among the peoples,
O God;
I will sing praises to you among the
nations.*

Sr. Ellen Stephen: Psalm 108 is my favorite bit of scripture in the Breviary. It speaks of my vocation, of my joy. I am a “word” person. I praise Christ as the Word, the Logos. I am called to pray the Divine Office, to speak and chant the words. My writing: hymns, poetry, plays, and books, confess God’s praise.



Collage by Sr. Ellen Stephen, OSH

Sunday Diurnum Week I, Psalm 84:1,3

*How dear to me is your dwelling, O
God of hosts!
My soul has a desire and longing for
your courts;
my heart and my flesh rejoice in the
living God.*

*Happy are they who dwell in your
house;
they will always be praising you.*

Sr. Ann Prentice – In mid-life, I found myself inexorably drawn to “church” in a form previously unknown to me. Convents, monasteries, monks, nuns in the Episcopal Church? The call continued for 10 years. When I finally put my foot over the threshold, I felt I had stepped into an underground river of joy! To offer my life with others called by God to sing prayers and praises, participate in the Eucharist, share what we have in witness and service – this is the fulfillment of my soul’s desire.



Photo: Núria Millàs (Pixabay)

Tuesday Vespers Canticle, Week II

*Arise, shine, for your light has come, and
the glory of God has dawned upon you.
For behold, darkness covers the land;
deep gloom enshrouds the peoples.
But over you the Holy one will rise, and
the glory of God will appear upon you.
(Isaiah 60:1-2)*

Sr. Rosina: When we sing these words in chapel, I can feel the love and warmth of God, and it makes being with my sisters very special! The words invite and encourage me to rise and shine because Christ, my Light, is always here. God’s love and protection leave me deeply content.



Photo: Foundry (Pixabay)

Vespers Cantic for Monastics

Sr. Carol Andrew: I suspect the reason I gravitate to this cantic/poem written by St. John of The Cross is that it is suggestive rather than descriptive. Most of the other passages in our Breviary come from biblical texts, and so many of those are texts I have studied in some detail. Now, it's not as though I don't receive new encouragement from well-known texts, but that sometimes I need to be surprised by words I don't expect. No matter how many times I have sung this cantic, it always catches me off-guard – which is a very good thing! The beginning lines are:

How well I know that fountain's rushing flow, although by night, its deathless spring is hidden. Even so, full well I guess from whence its hidden sources flow, though it be night.



Photo: Congerdesign (Pixabay)

Compline's Closing

Sr. Ellen Francis: The Office of Compline beautifully concludes the day with settling-down prayers and blessings for the day past and night to come. I especially love the closing:

Officiant: May the divine help remain with us always.

Response: And with those who are absent from us.

This is a prayer for God's presence to be with those of us who are present in the chapel; and the response expands the prayer to include all our sisters, friends, and families – alive and deceased – the community who live around us – and expanding still more to include all our nation and all the world.



Photo: Hamsterfreund (Pixabay)

The Beautiful in the Terrible



<https://ESAL.us/ecologist-redefines-forest-fires/>
Philip Higuera, photographer. Used with permission.

Resurrection happens even as we are swamped by overwhelm, pain and grief. In the garden where Jesus had been laid in a tomb, Mary Magdalene discovered that beautiful and terrible things can happen at the same time.

Amid her deep grief at the death of her teacher and friend Jesus, she discovered the empty tomb and ran to get others. After they left the scene, she encountered two angels. It was enough for anyone to lose their bearings! She turned, then turned again when Jesus called her name. And in the turning her heart caught up with her eyes and ears, and she recognized the beautiful in the terrible. In that moment she knew resurrection; she knew the risen Christ. (John 20:1-18).

Grief is messy and confusing, and in the middle of it we don't always have clear bearings. What was once familiar and comforting; what we knew as love and life and heart, is gone, as it was with Mary Magdalene. Many of us have experienced this same disorientation in the last 3-4 years with the pandemic, the reckoning with racism and its ongoing effects, a near-insurrection here in the US, the rise in mass shootings, the increasing magnitude of natural disasters, and wars and rumors of war. It's enough for anyone to lose their bearings!

Frequently through these last years, I've been reminded of fireweed, a wildflower sometimes called resurrection flower. In the aftermath of mountain fires, resurrection flowers are often the first to sprout through the ashes. They are beautiful in the middle of the terrible. A single flash of that bright pink-purple hue amid the destruction speaks to resurrection in the aftermath of great loss, a sign that what was lost is finding its home in this renewing state. Life is renewed even as the signs of death and destruction remain visible, even as the wounds are still tender, even as our grief overwhelms us.

A fire often leaves a landscape of ashes and death. In our grief and pain, we can't always see this for what it is — the precursor to resurrection. But eventually, sometimes achingly slow, or in a turn or two, we see it. We know it. Resurrected life right there in front of us. The beautiful in the middle of the terrible. Christ risen from the grave. And like Mary Magdalene, all we can do is shout to the world, "I have seen the Lord!"

—Sr. Miriam Elizabeth, OSH

How have you experienced the beautiful in the midst of the terrible? When have you turned and seen resurrection?