

November 1, 2020

St Joseph Monastery

2200 S Lewis Ave

Tulsa, OK 74114

Dearest Sisters of St Joseph:

I was looking at your website and I found the following: "This, then, is the good zeal which monks must foster with fervent love: 4 They should each try to be the first to show respect to the other (Rom 12:10)." Rule of St. Benedict, Chapter 72 verse 3.

I was so encourage by the verse, I looked up the rest of it:

". . . 1 Just as there is a wicked zeal of bitterness which separates from God and leads to hell, 2 so there is a good zeal which separates from evil and leads to God and everlasting life. 3 This, then, is the good zeal which monks must foster with fervent love: 4 They should each try to be the first to show respect to the other (Rom 12:10), 5 supporting with the greatest patience one another's weaknesses of body or behavior, 6 and earnestly competing in obedience to one another. 7 No one is to pursue what he judges better for himself, but instead, what he judges better for someone else. 8 To their fellow monks they show the pure love of brothers; 9 to God, loving fear; 10 to their abbot, unfeigned and humble love. 11 Let them prefer nothing whatever to Christ, 12 and may he bring us all together to everlasting life. . . "

Because I was so moved, I asked Abbess Aemiliane for her blessing to write to you and tell you a little about St. James Monastery from my own experience. I am one of the lay women who have been with the monastery from the beginning. I was not one who started it or made it happen; I was just one of the women who discovered it and embraced it, as have so many others who have been greatly blessed by the monks in the short time they have been here in Oklahoma.

I think people are curious about the monks at St James, in part, because of their gentle natures and their complete love and dedication to one another and by extension, to us, as well. There have been 4 monks at St. James, and I know each of them well, for they all have been in my home to spend time with my husband and with me. They have a *fervent love* for our community and are frequent visitors in many of our homes. They have even met with us in a park, on occasion, to give my husband's father, who suffers with Parkinson's and at high risk for contracting COVID, an opportunity to be blessed by their company.

They are especially good with the children in our community. I think some of our younger ones make the mistake of thinking that the monks are "grown up children," as they roughhouse and play with them. They never scold; they gently *teach* our children, through their example, how to be kind to one another and to love each other.

The monks are sweet, helpful, and excellent communicators. They are well educated and most speak several languages. But what truly impresses me, is how hard they try to understand American culture. It is not their desire to change us, as I have experienced with others in the past. Our monks embrace the American people and want to better understand us so they can help us.

As a community, they show *tremendous patience* with one another. I have never heard them utter a cross word to each other. There is no tension in the air. They are *obedient* and accountable to one another, working seamlessly together, demonstrating in a tangible way how they are of like mind and of one spirit.

Our monks *love the things of God*. They honor Him with beautiful mosaics and icons and by translating the Holy Fathers. They show *great zeal* for the faith and take the time to forward writings to us addressing different topics we have raised in conversation.

The monastery is immaculately maintained, which I appreciate when I go to visit them. They always have refreshments on hand to welcome guests. They remember the little things, like who has a bad back so they can ensure they have a place to sit comfortably during services.

I heard kind of a funny story about them this week. My husband was there for a vespers service when they heard a knock on the door. When they opened the door, they were greeted by a little old man, probably in his 90s, with two glasses and a bottle of wine. He asked to see Father Athanasius and was worried because he had not seen him in a while. Father was not there, but another monk asked him to come in and join them in the service. The little neighbor was happy to oblige and my husband told me later that he liked attending these services because he was a Christian.

The monks open their doors to all who would like to attend.

The monks at St. James have become part of our family and we have become part of theirs. I believe they are here by God's grace to give us the sustenance we need to face the abrupt changes we are experiencing in the world, as well as within the Church. These extended lockdowns have been extremely hard on us.

I love each of the monks as if they were my sons and as their "mom" I am incredibly proud of them and what they have accomplished here in Tulsa. These young men are so deserving of an opportunity to further their mission in Oklahoma and to continue to be a blessing to those who have the privilege to know them. That they might be in the middle of this country would be a huge benefit to Christ's Church, as people from both coasts would be able to more easily access them and to be refreshed in their presence.

Thank you, Sisters, for allowing me the opportunity to tell you about these wonderful people. May God continue to bless you and may His will be done in this, as in all matters. It is our greatest wish to serve our Lord.

Glory to God for all things!

With Love in Christ,

Gail Sheppard