



THE VISITATION

THE PUBLICATION OF THE NATIVITY HOUSE

AUGUST 2023

VOLUME 13 ISSUE 3

April Showers Bring May Flowers?

by Megan Zaleski

As I go about my days admiring all the new growth that comes with the season upon us, I can't help but shout in my heart, "I love this part!" In the ongoing drama of creation, as its rhythm and rhyme respond to the echo of salvation, it always enlightens me as if it were the first time I have ever seen it.

We might often hear the phrase, "April showers bring May flowers," and we might know this to be true, but it may sometimes feel like the showers are lasting a bit longer than we were expecting or prepared for.

Of all the ways nature can teach us lessons of growth, change,

renewal, beauty, and more, the underlying themes that will always continue to captivate my heart are those of love and healing.

I was recently reminded of a season I spent day after day tending to seedlings in a greenhouse. As I arrived at work each day, one thing that was always on the agenda was: water. From the time the seeds were initially planted, they continued to need different amounts of water, and different types of watering. When they were small, they would soak up water from beneath them, and as they matured, we would begin to sprinkle water on them from above. I knew this was

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Food Costs: Trying to Stay Positive

by Nia White

Grapes and eggs are the foods I eat frequently. Not together as a dish. Over easy eggs on rice. Grapes as a snack. Every farming community I have lived in had access to both. So, for many years, I spent close to nothing on both.

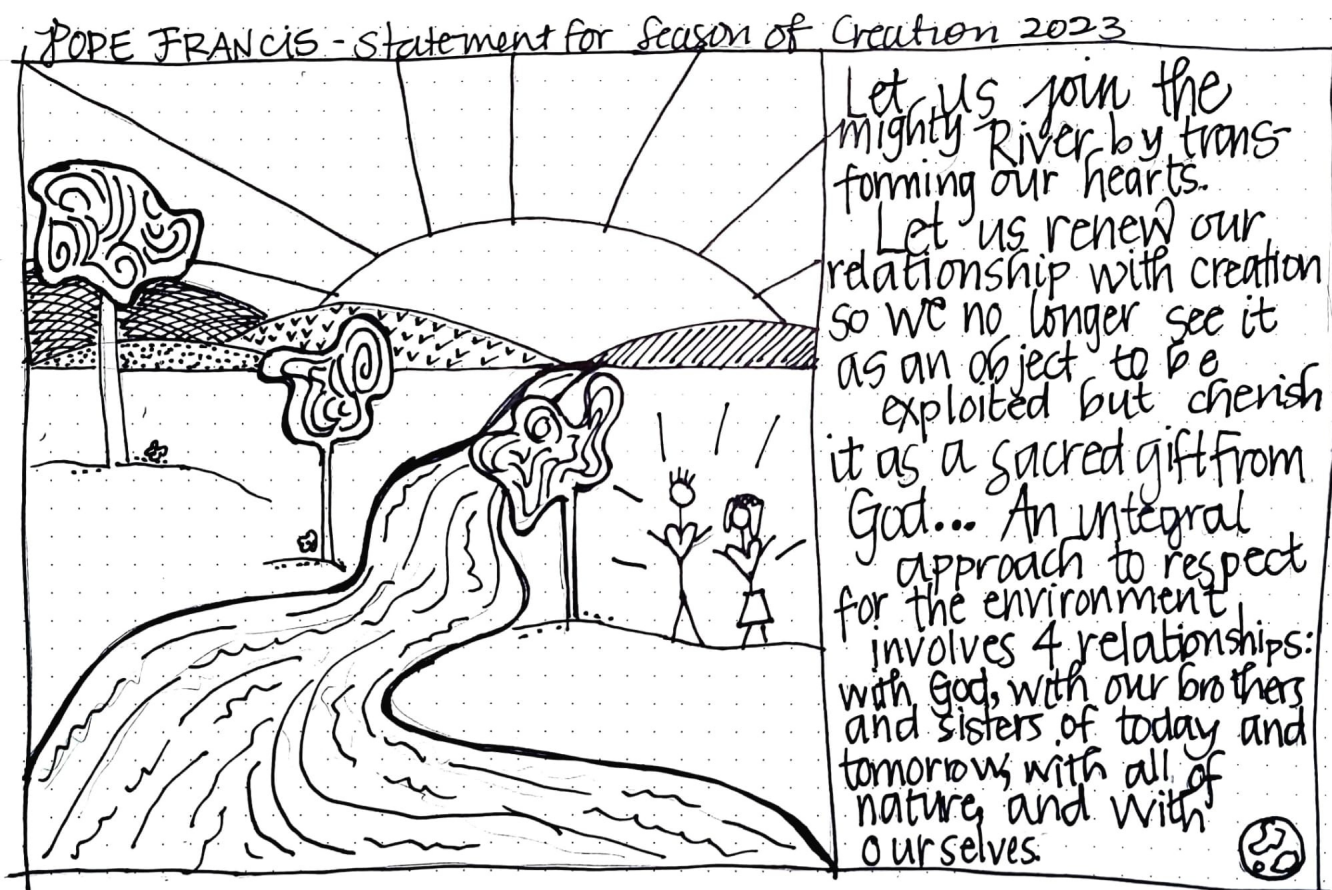
I moved to Chicago last year at the end of the growing season. I still had a gallon of the grapes I had frozen and over a dozen eggs. Once those ran out, I made a trip to the store to find that eggs were no less than four dollars a dozen and grapes were six to seven dollars a pound.

It made me think about the many people who live in a single income household with multiple

children. According to the US Census Bureau, the average household is about 5 people. According to the Illinois Department of Human Services, a household of five people is given about \$1000 a month for SNAP benefits. While some financial sites say a family could possibly be fed with \$1000, I fail to believe that, and many sites give a higher figure. I am sure many of us have noticed the rising cost of food. Certain fast-food places used to be quick and cheap. I used to disregard coupons and reward programs. Now, I sit every Sunday and clip coupons to lower the grocery bill.

The current financial times have caused me to reconsider living in

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Letter from the Directors

Dear Friends of Nativity House,

The Spring and Summer months have graced our community with much activity!

The garden season got off to a great start. Our friend and beekeeper of many years, Erik Olson, has been taking a leadership role in the garden. He recently acquired a masters degree in agriculture and education and is putting all of his new knowledge in sustainability and productivity into practice in the garden. It has been a great new journey in the garden.

We had a surprise birth of 2 goat kids on Easter Sunday. Then over Memorial Day weekend the three remaining does gave birth. There was quite a tizzy of activity as the community members quickly became adept at goat doula-ing. We have many goats for sale. If any of you are interested in starting a backyard flock or know someone who is keep us in mind.

In early June, close to Serita's three month birthday, we had a baby shower to honor guest mom Pina and her sweet little girl. The tradition of the Nativity House Baby Shower is truly one of the most amazing gifts of community. It was a blessed day with much celebrating and love!

The work of Nativity House is about flourishing in our God-given identity, we are made in the image and likeness of God. God is Trinity; God is relationship; God is community. It has always been our mission and vision to gather community around the poor. The vignettes mentioned above are testament to the work of community. All of it is encounter with the divine. We blessed and gifted with the work.

May brought financial difficulties for Nativity House. We were in danger of having to close our doors. The pandemic was not kind to many non-profits and our granting agency was not spared. Funding has been a challenge for us since the fall of 2021. We kicked off the Restoring Dignity Campaign in May with the goal of raising \$6000. Thanks to you, that goal has been met. We have also applied for a local grant that will help us continue the mission long-term. We await their decision.

We are excited for our annual Farm to Table Celebration (September 3 @ 4pm) It's not only a fundraiser but an amazing testament to the community that God has gifted us with. We hope to see you there. In the meantime please hold us in your prayers. Know that each night at evening prayer, we hold you in ours.

Peace and all good,

Venus and Justin Wozniak

About The Visitation

This newspaper, The Visitation, is a publication on topics of social justice, spirituality, and theology. It is published four times a year by Nativity House. Submissions are accepted from readers everywhere.

To contact us, email us at:

newspaper@nativity-house.org

Past issues are online at:

<http://www.nativity-house.org>

About Nativity House

Nativity House serves as a house of hospitality for first-time mothers in need of residence in the southwest Chicago suburbs. Nativity House operates an on-site community supported farm (CSA) that provides nourishment for the Nativity House and the greater community. Overall, we envision a healing environment focused on the dignity of each person, the dignity of work, and stewardship of the earth.

Nativity House is administered by a board of directors and an advisory committee of individuals with a broad range of experience. Nativity House has formed positive relationships with relevant local organizations that are extremely helpful in carrying out the mission of the house. Nativity House was recognized as a public charity in August, 2011.

To connect with us, please email Venus Wozniak at:

venusad@nativity-house.org

Postal mail should be addressed to:

Nativity House
17141 W. 143rd St.
Lockport, IL 60441

Donations may be made at [paypal.me/nativityhouse](https://www.paypal.com/donate/?url=https://www.nativity-house.org)

We extend the sincerest thanks to all.

April Showers Bring May Flowers?

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essential to their survival, so obediently, I would continue to water. Time would go by without a single sign of growth, and sometimes I would think to myself, “is this really working? Something this simple is really going to transform a hard, little seed?” But I’ll never forget how excited I would be the days I would arrive in the morning to a little bump in the soil, or to a little cotyledon (the first green leaf of a seedling) making its appearance. After being buried softly in the soil tucked away for a few weeks, although we couldn’t see it, these seeds were responding, and they were changing.

We kept the seedlings in their trays for a few weeks for them to mature until it was time to transplant. We would pop the tiny plants out of their first home and into a bigger home, one with fresh soil and more room to spread their roots.

One day, I was transplanting rainbow chard. As I popped the first little seedling out of its tray, I was amazed. Rainbow chard can be many different colors, and while we typically see what is above the surface, I was amazed that not only were the stems of this specific rainbow chard bright purple, but even its roots! I now felt like I was in on a little secret. As I looked around at the hundreds of seedlings of yellow, purple, and green rainbow chard, I knew what they had all gone through to become what they now were - and I knew the color of each of their roots.

This watering I was doing day in and day out, this monotonous task that was essential to the life and growth of these tiny seeds, was

not only providing nourishment to these plants, it was revealing their identity. “As in water face reflects face, so the heart of man reflects the man” (Proverbs 27:19).

Sometimes it may be tempting to feel helpless while wading in the waters of life’s storms, or it seems too obvious and monotonous to continue certain habits and believe they are actually deeply transforming us. But as I observe the process of nature in every season, and year after year see its return and promise, I rest assured knowing that the daily watering is not for naught. Each drop of rain, and sometimes the time spent tucked away, is nourishment to my soul and slowly reveals my identity - completely unique to me. And most importantly, when we trust that this process was all created for the sake of love, we can rest in hope that “many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it” (Song of Songs 8:7). Rather, “He covers the heavens with clouds; He prepares rain for the earth” (Psalm 147:8). Or rather, He prepares the rain for our hearts.

Some questions I ask myself while pondering this process are: What are the sources of water I’m allowing into my life and heart on a daily basis? Am I leaning on self-reliance in order to stay afloat when the light seems out of sight? Am I hiding under an umbrella in resistance to the water that is actually meant to give me life? And when it is time to break through the surface, to reveal and live in my God-given identity, am I bashful and do I doubt, or am I resting in the inheritance of love that God promises me?

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NATIVITY HOUSE
PRESENTS
THE 9TH ANNUAL

Farm to Table Celebration

SUNDAY
SEPTEMBER 3, 2023

4:00 PM *Mass with Abbot Austin*

5:00 PM *Mingle on the Farm*

live music, charcuterie,
cocktails & beer, silent
auction, yard games

6:00 PM *Feast on the Farm*

A 5-course meal
featuring Nativity House
fare and other local
delectables.

6:30 PM *Live Music*

Cost: *Free will offering.*

All proceeds go to the direct support
of our guest moms and their infants

Register: *Use this QR Code*

or <http://bit.ly/FarmToTableRSVP>



Divine Medicine by Erik Olson

It is no secret the last five years have seen a dramatic increase in the perennial “back to the land” movements that seem to cycle around from time to time. The 1970’s saw an explosion of intentional communities trying to escape the burdens of busy living by trying to have a go at small scale agriculture and communal living. Henry David Thoreau wrote in the 1800’s that he “went off into the woods to live deliberately” and recorded his foray into bean growing and simple living. So while the first answer to “why are there suddenly five families with chicken coops in my neighborhood?” might seem to be “because grocery stores didn’t have eggs during Covid lockdowns” I don’t think that’s the whole story.

The other answers typically given for the sudden surge in growing one’s own food are concerns about chemicals, plastics, toxins and the unmentionable bacteria that’s been discovered in our food supply. These are all valid potential explanations and the assurances that it is all “safe and approved” seem to be falling on deaf and deaf ears. Other people point to the climate and concerns with “sustainability” or even concerns of national security to explain the growing revival. Yet, I am not sure it is any of those.

Follow me on a slight diversion. In Genesis, Eve is deceived by being promised with what she already has. She has already been created with God’s “likeness” but that is exactly what she’s tempted with; to become “like the gods.” From my reading, she gets caught up in her mind and forgets her

embodiment. “It is pleasing to the eye” she rationalizes, and that wins her over. She forgets the reality: “I am made to be in communion with the divine as one of God’s creatures.” Afterwards, for Adam, it is by the “sweat of his brow” that he must scrape his food from the Earth and “till the land.”

What’s the connection? It seems rationality becomes divorced from creatureliness instead of being its guiding light. In modern times, we often get caught up “living in our heads” and seem to be existentially “away” from ourselves. Caught between materialism and Gnosticism, St. Augustine reminds us that “our hearts are restless until they rest in you, Lord.”

By now you are probably wondering how we got here from a general observation about chicken coops. According to the tradition of the Church, church fathers, bishops and even contemporary priests, God’s “punishment” is ultimately medicinal, just, and restorative. Since Eden, our punishment has been to till the Earth. But remember, this is medicinal. And remember, it is our nature to be in communion with him. Indeed, our hearts are restless until they rest in him.

Gardening, it turns out, is literally divine medicine for the soul. Literally. And, I don’t think we should be too metaphorical about it and rationalize our way into thinking that our cubicles are the modern “garden” we must work in. No. Real dirt. Real food. Really eating it. Our world is, by design, increasingly “trans-human.” We will do anything and

use any technology, mode of living, alternative food stuffs, gizmos or gadgets that allow us to escape the reality that we are the type of being that must kill or pull our food out of the dirt. We don’t want to be creatures. We want to be minds independent of our bodies. Yet the rates of addiction, suicide, loneliness, depression, anxiety, prescription drug use for “mental health” seem to suggest our hearts are still restless.

My family lives on half an acre in the suburbs. Last year we pulled in 300 lbs of white potatoes, 75 pounds of sweet potatoes and well over 100 pounds of tomatoes. Not including green beans till-you-are-sick of them, broccoli, cabbage, corn and squash for days. We also raised 15 broiler chickens, kept 11 egg layers and maintained a few bee hives. Plus a small orchard. My boys have a life where it’s normal to graze on peas before dinner and forage for berries before breakfast. They love our chickens and they know that we eat them too. It is important to stimulate the mind. And, in fact, it is our rationality that is most near the divine in many ways. But it is an embodied rationality not a gnostic one. God’s edict that we shall till the earth grounds us in embodied being and is proper medicine.

I am not nearly as good at growing as I could/ should be. But, I’ve always felt that while having the “form” of perfection as an Ideal is essential, a C- job you’re actually doing is far better than A+ job that stays in the mind. Unembodied. We have become profoundly alienated from ourselves, our nature, and what it means to be human. And, that’s not to say that’s a new thing. It

started in Genesis.

My hunch, is that our hearts will remain restless until we begin to take our medicine. It’s June. So, go to the local big box store. Buy a package of beans for \$1.99, put some dirt on them and water. While you’re waiting for maybe not much to happen, and a possible disaster, read up on how to do it a bit better next year. Not for gods-sake, but for your own, act. Here’s a place I’d recommend you start:

<https://growingresilience.com>



Erik teaches horticulture at a local high school and is a no-till organic gardener, beekeeper and chicken farmer. He lives with his wife and three boys on a half acre suburban lot.

Food Costs: Trying to Stay Positive

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the city. I love Chicago. In love the convenience, my neighborhood, and access to different cuisines and cultures. However, the lack of access to affordable, fresh food is too much for a lot of us. In the past, I would be angrier and more vocal about the issues with lack of access to fresh food or food deserts/apartheids in this state.

I wonder if because everyone has been affected by the cost of barely surviving there will be a movement to grow their own food. I have wondered and complained more than come up with possible solutions. I plan to start looking more at the good. My grandmother says if you fill your life up with so complaints and negativity, there will be no room for God to pour in blessings. So, I have been blessed with neighbors who own a Middle Eastern market. A few times a week, they bring over excess produce. Sometimes, if I am lucky there are eggs or grapes. In summer, Chicago has markets and ways to support those who do not have the same access to food that I have in my life. There is a growing interest in and push for CSAs and home-grown produce.

I would like to challenge you and myself to stay positive and affect change in the world around you. This can be through CSAs, educating your family, buying produce from markets, or donating to organizations that are in the mission of change.



Nia is a campus minister in the Diocese of Joliet. She is grateful for the mission of Nativity House.

April Showers

Bring May Flowers

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Unless I root every movement in love, this process can become lifeless, overwhelming, and even dry. When I allow Christ to be in control of the watering, and remember that it is truth, beauty, and goodness that I am becoming and revealing as I continue to reach toward the light, I can respond unabashedly and break forth in the direction of love when I begin to hear the faint echo in my heart calling, when My beloved speaks to me and says to me:

“Arise, my love, my beautiful one, and come away, for behold, the winter is past; the rain is over and gone. The flowers appear on the earth, The time of singing has come, and the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land. The fig tree ripens its figs, and the vines are in blossom; They give forth fragrance.

Arise, my love, my beautiful one, and come away. O my dove, in the clefts of the rock in the crannies of the cliff, Let me see your face, Let me hear your voice, For your voice is sweet, and your face is lovely.” (Song of Songs 2:10-14)

As the flowers continue to bloom, and signs of life continue to burst forth around us, may we receive it as an invitation to tend to our own hearts and the ways we are being invited to imitate the gift of creation.



Megan Zaleski has served as both a live-in intern and part-time staff at Nativity House. She loves spending time in nature and enjoys learning new things.

Easy Essays:

Right or Wrong

by Peter Maurin
(1877-1949)



1. Some people say:
“My country is always right.”
2. Some people say:
“My country is always wrong.”
3. Some people say:
“My country is sometimes right and sometimes wrong, but my country right or wrong.”
4. To stick up for one’s country when one’s country is wrong does not make the country right.
5. To stick up for the right even when the world is wrong is the only way we know to make everything right.



Thank you

Thank you to all who helped make our Restoring Dignity Campaign successful! We raised over \$6000. All funds go directly to the support of our guest moms and their infants. You are truly beacons of hope and fellow workers in the vineyard. It is a privilege to share in the work of restoring dignity with you!

St. Moses the Black

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fellow community members to discuss the “correct” penance for a fellow monk who had committed a “fault” of some sort. At first, Moses simply didn’t respond to the summons at all. When summoned again, he apparently “took a leaking jug filled with water and carried it on his shoulder...When he arrived at the meeting place, the others asked why he was carrying the jug. He replied, ‘My sins run out behind me and I do not see them, but today I am coming to judge the errors of another.’ On hearing this, the assembled brothers forgave the erring monk.” (ewtn.com)

This humility and recognition of one’s need for forgiveness echoes a favorite bible passage of mine: “Let he without sin be the first to cast the stone.” (John 8:7) And more recently in chronological history, a favorite papal quote of mine, “Who am I to judge?” (Pope Francis). I think we can all agree it would be hard to deny the continual witness of strong polarization and the inability to dialogue, forgive, reconcile, and embrace the mercy of God across many areas in our society today: Political systems, continued racial injustices, continued mass shootings, lack of action to address climate change, etc.

But, instead of wallowing in doubt, fear, self guilt, and/or lash out at others who differ from us in opinion, let’s take a page or two from the book of St. Moses the Black. Let’s remember that we are called to listen first as Jesus reminds us time and time again in the Gospels and Pope Francis reiterates daily in his own

encounters with others. Let’s remember that although forgiveness, reconciliation, mercy may seem too far away to grasp, we need only start with an open encounter with the neighbor, the friend, the co-worker right in front of us to begin the journey toward reconciliation. Let’s remember that the rising sun takes a little while to light up the whole world, one little, shining ray of light at a time until the darkness is imbued with radiance.

St. Moses the Black, Patron of forgiveness:

Pray for us!



Jake DeMarais is part time staff at Nativity House and full time dad. He loves being outdoors with friends and family always trying to live in the moment.

from Dorothy Day's Journal
May 1 1949

WE ARE ALL MEMBERS OF THE MYSTICAL BODY OF CHRIST AND SO WE ARE CLOSER TO EACH OTHER, BY THE TIE OF GRACE ... WE PARTAKE OF THE SAME FOOD, CHRIST. WE PUT OFF THE OLD MAN AND PUT ON CHRIST. THE SAME BLOOD FLOWS THROUGH OUR VEINS, CHRIST'S BUT ALL MEN ARE MEMBERS OR POTENTIAL MEMBERS, AS ST AUGUSTINE SAYS, AND THERE IS NO TIME WITH GOD, SO WHO ARE WE TO KNOW THE DEGREE OF SEPARATION BETWEEN US AND THE COMMUNIST, THE UNBAPTIZED THE GOD-HATER, WHO MAY TOMORROW LIKE ST PAUL, LOVE CHRIST.

Staff Spotlight

Beginning in this issue, we are going to highlight a different Nativity House staff member. This issue, we have asked Megan Zaleski to share a little bit about herself and her experiences with Nativity House.

Fun Facts about me:

I am a scuba diver! I've loved the water ever since I was little. Swimming, kayaking, water skiing, and in recent years, scuba diving! I wasn't prepared for the way Christ would knock on the door of my heart through the experience of being underwater. I opened the floodgates, and His ocean of Mercy has swept me away ever since. Swimming with sea turtles along the way is a huge bonus!

I have two nieces and three nephews. Being an aunt is my favorite role in this life, aside from being a child of God.

I have walked a portion of El Camino de Santiago - a pilgrimage across Spain leading to Santiago de Compostela, following the way of St. James. Somehow, I feel like my journey since then hasn't stopped! Being surrounded by the natural, Spanish countryside, different languages, and old churches, all while discovering the quiet hum of Heaven was a cornerstone in my journey with Christ. On any given day, you can still find me walking.

One of my favorite experiences at Nativity House:

The sun was just rising, making its way into our hospital room, mother and baby finally both sleeping after two long nights. I

had just witnessed my first labor and delivery of a mother and child whose bravery and strength was unmatched compared to anything I'd ever experienced before.

As I was just about to close my eyes, I was overcome with the reality of how sacred those moments were, and what had been pouring into my heart in those few days. In that moment, I felt an overwhelming source of strength, community, gratitude, femininity, grace, and gift all at once. I immediately thought of all the women around the world that were currently giving their own fiat's in those very moments, in whatever unique way the Lord has called them - making them very real in the wake of witnessing this mother's brave "yes." The unwavering prayers of the faithful penetrated the walls of our quiet little room, flooding it with goodness, comfort, peace, love, motherhood, and - heaven.

In those moments before I finally shut my eyes, I was able to rest even deeper in the reality that everything around me and in me - from mother and baby, to the love and exhaustion, and everything in between - was pure gift. To offer those moments of joy and sacrifice on behalf of all people (men and women) following, or maybe wavering in, the call to love is a gift I will never know how to describe. To think that just three weeks prior, the three of us had never met, and that within a short 72 hours had become family, is a memory that will continue to fuel the flame of love in my heart for a lifetime.



One more Funny Story:

One of our past interns that I lived with got engaged and married during her time at Nativity House. She asked if I would do one of the readings at their wedding Mass - in Spanish! I said, "Si!" I don't read or speak Spanish fluently, but was honored, and brushed up for the occasion! Being able to celebrate with them and the Nativity House community on their wedding day will always be another favorite memory during my time at Nativity House.



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Nativity House
17141 W. 143rd St.
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St. Moses the Black

Feast Day: August 28th

Patron of Africa and Nonviolence/Forgiveness

by Jake DeMarais

When taking a few minutes to refresh my understanding of this 4th century Ethiopian saint, I was struck once again by the uniqueness of this man's story and his ability to ask for forgiveness; to forgive others himself; and to simply, humbly embrace the mercy and love of God. Leaving his home in central Africa as a young man, Moses ended up a slave to a prominent Egyptian official. This ended when he was released/banished because of suspected theft/murder thus sending him into the "wilding" days of his life. Over the course of the next several years, Moses is said to have roamed the Nile River valley with a gang of bandits "spreading terror and violence" wherever they went. (ewtn.com)

One of my favorite stories of his robber days goes as follows: "On one occasion, a barking dog prevented Moses from carrying out a robbery, so he swore vengeance on the owner. In a second attempt, with a sword in his mouth, Moses swam across

the Nile towards the owner's hut. The owner, again alerted, was able to hide, and the frustrated Moses stole four of his sheep and took them to slaughter, selling their fleece in exchange for wine." (Catholic Online) Nothing like some pure vengeance right? Yikes! I don't know about you, but this "young" Moses doesn't sound like a person I'd want to be on the bad side of.

However, this is where his story also takes a dramatic turn as he finds shelter in an Eastern Orthodox Desert Monastery. It is said that while taking shelter here, he was struck by their "peaceful contentment" in their monastic way of life, and he eventually begged for forgiveness for his past ways. After a good amount of time, he was invited to join the brothers community. But, history has it that he struggled greatly with the disciplines of monastic life often being tempted to engage in his old violent ways. Moses often became extremely discouraged in himself and his "imperfections" as he continued



Artwork by JT Daniels, used with permission

on in the community. This brings me to a second favorite story - an encounter with another beloved saint: St. Isidore (Abbot of the community). This story goes as follows:

"Early one morning, St. Isidore ... took Brother Moses to the roof and together they watched the first rays of dawn come over the horizon. Isidore told Moses, 'Only slowly do the rays of the sun drive away the night and usher in a new day, and thus, only slowly does one become a perfect contemplative.'" (ewtn.com)

I love this story because it exemplifies the encounter with the Mercy of God: The power of

reconciliation with God and how it demands reconciliation with oneself just as much as with one another. A good reminder when it comes to the daily grind of living a life of faith today: We must be who we are meant to be, in all our messiness: the good and the not so good. God's mercy and love is beyond what we can imagine and embraces/warms/lights us up slowly as rays of the sun rising in the morning.

To conclude, I come to my last, favorite story of St. Moses the Black. Legend has it that he was once summoned to a meeting with

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