

## November Update

Greeting from snowy Denver!

As I am writing this it is close to 0° F outside with a low of -15° during the night. It has been snowing all day with a potential of 6-14" this week alone. We did our normal rosary walk this evening around the campus shuffling through piles of freshly laid powdery snow. It is the coldest temperature I have ever personally experienced. I was in a thick coat that I had purchased over a month ago but had not yet used. My thick gloves prevented me from handling my rosary so I used my fingers instead (10 fingers and 10 beads in a decade, coincidence? I think not). It is definitely an interesting experience and is something I am going to have to get used to. It does not help to remember that a week ago I was in sunny and beautiful Arizona with highs in the 70s. All of this, however, has happened in the current month of December but I thought it would provide a good visual and perhaps some context. Now onto November!

I may have mentioned our All Saints celebration in the previous letter, but I will mention it again here as it did in fact happen in November. All Saints as we all know is a solemnity in the church and the seminary did not disappoint. In the morning of the 1<sup>st</sup> all the seminarians gathered in the main chapel for Mass. We had been practicing the music for this Mass for several weeks, so with the organ and 95 seminarian voices it was incredible. The Mass itself was done very well and was one of the best liturgies of the year (from a human standpoint of course, because it is always God who conducts the liturgy in his perfection, and we humans, even the celebrant, who participate). After the Mass was concluded we had a Eucharistic procession around the campus. We borrowed a large canopy from the Oblates of the Virgin Mary to cover the Eucharist and the priest holding the monstrance. Following the priest were the deacons then the seminarians in cassock and surplice walking three by three. There were periodic altars set up around campus where we would all stop and gather around the monstrance to adore and sing a short hymn. The procession itself went all the way around the campus and lasted about 45 minutes. It was heaven on earth! Eucharistic processions fell out of common use after the council, but they are no less glorious. As the faithful it is up to us to request our priests to bring back this beautiful tradition (and Eucharistic adoration!! Most vocations come from parishes with devotions to the Eucharist).

Why a Eucharistic procession? St. Maximilian Kolbe once said: "If the angels could be jealous of humans they would be so for one thing: Holy Communion". How many people approach the Eucharist at Mass without giving it one thought? God wants to so completely unite us to himself that he is willing to come in the appearance of bread and wine that we may receive him in intimate communion! Each Sunday we receive GOD, the same God that made the heavens and the earth and whom the universe cannot contain! Far be it from us to take this lightly or without even a consideration. This also means that we must properly prepare ourselves to receive the Eucharist by going to the sacrament of Penance and by fasting. It is that important! This Advent we are called to be AWAKE. Do not let this most precious gift go unnoticed. Processions therefore are a public witness of our faith as Catholics in this beautiful gift.

November is a month that the Church puts aside to pray specifically for the souls of those who have died. That is why at church you may have seen pictures of people's loved ones displayed in the vestibule or baptismal font. Why do we pray for the dead? As Catholics we believe in Purgatory. It may sound like a bad word but it is actually a beautiful gift given by God that we may be purified before entering into the pure presence of God. Our sins are forgiven us by the blood of the cross, but as humans we tend to carry with us certain vices even after our sins are forgiven. Purgatory helps us to grow in faith, hope, and love. The souls in purgatory suffer but it is very unlike Hell in that there is

hope, hope of seeing the face of God. It is our job as the church militant to pray for these souls (the church suffering) that they might grow in virtue and ultimately be released from purgatory so that they may enter the heavenly kingdom (the church triumphant).

During the month of November it is recommended that Catholics visit a cemetery to pray for those souls. I got the opportunity to visit one on two different occasions. On All Souls Day (Saturday, November 2<sup>nd</sup>) one of my good friends here, Andrew Kinstetter, and I took a trip up to Longmont. Our main goal was to go to a local brewery called Left Hand (they make an excellent nitro milk stout). It is a very popular brand in Colorado and I believe I have seen it in AZ as well. After our stop there we headed over to the Longmont cemetery. We found a grave and prayed particularly for that person but also for all the souls in the cemetery. We prayed a decade of the rosary and then had some beautiful spontaneous prayer. It was a very moving occasion! Another time was at the local Catholic cemetery in Denver called Mt. Olivet. As the Friday hike planner I decided that the whole SY class should go to a cemetery and do our stations of the cross there. They had set up at the cemetery large stone crosses for that very purpose, but they also doubled as headstones and family name markers. All the guys really seemed to enjoy it. We also got to go over to the priest/ religious section and see where the past bishops of Denver were buried. After the cemetery visit we went to a trail down the road that went through a bird sanctuary surrounded by water. It was great for skipping stones and the trail was not too difficult.

On Sunday, November 3<sup>rd</sup>, we celebrated the end of 40 Days for Life. For 40 days there was much emphasis put on praying and fasting for the sake of ending abortion. In particular we prayed for the closing of the Planned Parenthood abortion clinic here in Denver, the second largest clinic in the country. Each Friday we would come up with a particular fast and offer it up for the children being aborted each day. Every Tuesday groups of us would go down to the clinic and pray a rosary. It was about the time the employees would be getting off from work so they would see us out there praying. We had many people give us the finger, while other looked at us in confusion. See, there are particular non-denominational groups that come out to protest the clinic as well. However their tactic involves standing on tall ladders and yelling with megaphones about how they are all going to hell for murdering their children. This is obviously a very negative tactic and simply makes them ignore pro-lifers. However, when they see us simply kneeling and praying we hope that they can come to see that we are not all bad and that we do in fact care for them. On the last day of 40 Days for Life we first year seminarians gathered at the Planned Parenthood and led a candlelight vigil. Other Catholics and pro-life groups gathered with us as we prayed evening prayer. It was a short but beautiful night. Please pray for the children, the mothers, fathers, and for the conversion of the employees, as well as all those who are hurt and continue to suffer from the effects of abortion.

Before it got too cold Andrew Kinstetter and I managed to get out for a short 6.5 mile hike up Carpenter's Peak in Roxborough State Park. It was an opportunity to scout out some future hiking places for the Friday hikes. Andrew and I had a great time. It was a medium to difficult trail, steep at times but the view is always worth it. Once at the top we could see all of Denver. Even the Rockies we could see for miles. We managed to locate a geo-cache at the top and then made our way back down. The rest of that day was kind of rushed, but it was really nice to be able to get out for a little bit and do a little bit more strenuous hike to get those muscles working! Most of the hikes that we go

on as an SY group are only about 2-3 miles and generally flat, because I have to keep in mind the physical abilities of the guys in the group.

While the rest of the seminary was preparing for finals and studying very hard for their classes, we got to sit back and enjoy our non-graded courses on the spiritual life, the catechism, and on scripture, and even a short course on evangelization. Perhaps my favorite class has been the one on the spiritual life. In the month of November we finished off St. Augustine's *Confessions* and started in on the *Rule of St. Benedict*. I always enjoy reading St. Augustine but I had never read through the Rule before. It is a short book written by St. Benedict fifteen hundred years ago after escaping to a cave because he was disgusted by the paganism in Rome. Each religious order has a particular rule which is essentially a list of laws and regulations that the particular brother or sister chooses to abide by if he or she wishes to be part of that order. "The man or woman looks around and sees a way of life that is chaotic, irreverent, or unethical and decides to design a life according to different standards" (Preface, Thomas Moore). Is that a world that sounds familiar? From my point of view after living in a house of prayer for just three months, I can say that leaving for Thanksgiving break the world seemed to me to be very chaotic indeed. The Rule provides the model for an alternative to chaos to men and women even today: A model where "...certain values are given higher status than they would have in modern society" (Thomas Moore). I found the book to be very informative, especially regarding the ability (and even a desire!) to lay down one's life for the sake of the Kingdom. The Rule also covers what are known as the "12 steps of humility". These steps include such things as: Loving not your own will, embracing suffering and unjust conditions, confession of sin, admitting one's inferiority, and speaking gently without ready laughter and with modesty and brevity. We are then told at the end of the Rule that if we master these things it is only the beginning of perfection! At the end of the month we started in on St. Teresa of Avila's "*La Vida*" or "Life". Teresa was a Castilian Carmelite mystic who lived during the golden age of Spanish conquest and exploration. This so far has been a very good read and would not be a bad start for anyone wishing to dive into the spiritual masters of the Church.

In Scripture we just got through Deuteronomy, Joshua, and Ruth, and started in on 1 and 2 Samuel and the beginning of Kings. 1 and 2 Samuel are perhaps among my favorite stories in the Bible. It is also quite refreshing to read especially after getting through books like Leviticus and Numbers. While starting Kings we discussed a very interesting point that I would like to share with you here:

In 1 Kings we see early on that "Bathsheba bowed and did obeisance to the king..." (1 Kings 1:16). Bathsheba is of course the wife of King David, so as her king and husband it makes sense that she would bow profoundly to him. Later on after King David dies, Solomon his son is made king. "And Bathsheba went to King Solomon...And the king rose to meet her, and bowed down to her... and had a seat brought for the king's mother, and she sat on his right" (1 Kings 2:19). In the middle ages it was the king's wife who was queen. However in ancient Mesopotamia and Israel, it was not his wife but the king's *mother* who became queen. This had to do with the fact that most kings had many wives but only one mother. One ancient Assyrian proverb says that (now don't be offended, this is ancient Assyria) if your wife and mother were drowning in a river and you could only save one that you should save your mother, (now here's the kicker) because we only have one mother but can always get another wife. Even today in the Middle East mothers are held in very high esteem. In the

bible, throughout the generations of different kings in Israel you can look and see that when a new king is named it mentions his name, the years he ruled, and his mother's name (Example: 2 Kings 18:1-2). Why? Because she was the queen! It is also the role of the queen mother to intercede for the needy and the poor, as Bathsheba does for Adonijah in 1 Kings, by presenting their needs to the king. In Luke we hear the story of Mary visiting Elizabeth: "And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the child leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and she exclaimed with a loud cry 'Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And why is this granted me, that the **mother** of my **Lord** should come to me?'" (Luke 1:41-43). What Christian would not call the Lord King? Calling Mary queen doesn't seem too far off then, right? This gets better: "And a great sign appeared in heaven, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and **on her head a crown of twelve stars**....and the dragon stood before the woman who was about to bear a child, that he might devour her child when she brought him forth; and she brought forth a male child, one who is to rule the nations with an iron rod....Then the dragon was angry with the woman and went off to make war with the rest of her offspring, on those who keep the commandments of God and bear testimony to Jesus" (Revelation 12 1:1, 4-5, 17). What Christian would not say that he keeps the commandments of God and bears testimony to Jesus? Revelation is saying that we are the offspring of this heavenly queen who gives birth to a son who will rule the nation. We are Mary's children, and Mary is our queen, and just as she interceded at the wedding feast of Cana on behalf of the wedding party to her son, she intercedes for us as well. And they say Catholics make this stuff up! However, this is knowledge that the earliest Christians knew and it didn't even cross their minds to make a fuss about it. Cool huh? That is a small taste of what scripture class is like.

Now it's not all work and reading and praying. There is also plenty of time for fun and games. These are a few things that have occurred this month that have been used to pass the time or done for the sake of building community. Never before have I been around so many people that love the game of chess! I remember my parents bought me a chess board when I was in 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> grade. However, I had no one to play it with. Playing chess by yourself is really not that exciting...at all. In the last three months I have finally had the opportunity to play the game with another living human being. I organized a chess tournament in which ten people from the SY house signed up. Game play lasted close to three weeks. The last game was played right before we left for Thanksgiving break. Someone wrote on the board that the winner gets a St. Arbucks holy card (Catholic humor for Starbucks gift card). Ultimately out of ten people I came in 3<sup>rd</sup> place. Not too bad! Some of the community night games have also been a lot of fun. For one community night we played a game called "sardines". In this game two people go and hide. They have the entire campus open to them. They hide together and then after two or three minutes the rest of the group goes in search for them. Once you find them you hide with them. This continues until all the players find the group. One highlight was when two guys hid in the darkness of an open field by simply laying down. It was the hardest one and the fewest people found them before the time was up. I happened to be the first one to find them, almost tripping over them before I saw them. The other two rounds did not go as well for me....

I was fortunate enough to be able to come home for the week of Thanksgiving. I flew in on the Monday before Thanksgiving and stayed until the following Monday. It was great to be back in

the homeland! Especially since the homeland was in the high 60s and not in the single digits! I was able to go to daily Mass and did by best to make a holy hour each day. St. Helen's has an adoration chapel; it is the only one close to my house and is still a 15-20 minute drive. I also got to go to St. James parish for their Thanksgiving day Mass. I was able to speak with Fr. Robert and Deacon Roy and I will likely be serving Christmas Masses there this year. It was wonderful to be able to spend time with my family on Thanksgiving. I got to spend a lot of time with my 10 year old niece. That generally involved Nerf gun wars and long bike rides...not at the same time. On Saturday I organized a hike with a group of my friends from a Catholic young-adult group called Our God Spot. We met for morning Mass at Most Holy Trinity and then hiked North Mountain. Later on that night I watched Arizona State destroy U of A after watching Superman: Man of Steel with a group of friends. On Sunday I went to the 7:30am Mass at St. Thomas More. I also attended an 11:00 High Mass at Mater Misericordiae. Monday morning I was able to spend time with my niece and my sister before heading off to the airport.

I will be back in Phoenix on December 18<sup>th</sup> through the 5<sup>th</sup> of January. When I return to the seminary in January we will have three days before going on our 30 day immersion in another state to do ministry with the poor. We are sent two by two. We do not know where we will be going, in fact we do not find out until the day before we go. I do not know if I will be writing a December update because of the break. Look for the January update mid-February, depending on how much I am allowed to share. As of now none of the other guys can tell us anything about our immersion or what to expect.

Know that I often offer up Masses and holy hours for you my sponsors. Please continue to pray for me! In fact I would love to hear how you are praying for me! Feel free to write. Have a very Merry Christmas!

God Bless,  
Andy Miller

Hopefully these links work when you type them in. They are slide shows of our camping trip at the beginning of the year through to All Saints. Enjoy!

<http://youtu.be/1PETKs9CgA8>

<http://youtu.be/93yda7SOkok>