

Our Lady of Perpetual Help Retreat and Spirituality Center

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Newsletter

March 2023

From Pruning to Building

—Rev. Mark Yavarone, OMV

Every priest meets some people who think that the suffering in their lives is a punishment for what they have done or failed to do. It can be a challenge to help them see that it is not necessarily so. Suffering is a mystery to which the only real answer is the person of Jesus Christ.

Occasionally, however, Jesus lifts the veil on the mystery of suffering just a little, and gives us a partial reason for suffering that we *can* understand. His words in John 15 are an example: *"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine grower. He takes away every branch in me that does not bear fruit, and everyone that does, he prunes, so that it bears more fruit."*

God sometimes *prunes* us through suffering. What does this mean?

To prune means to cut away branches from a plant to encourage fuller growth. When I was stationed in the Philippines, there were some indescribably beautiful flowering bushes on our property. The gardener would periodically prune these tropical plants by cutting off a *lot* of branches and leaves. After he finished the job, the plants looked terrible!

If flowers could feel as human beings can, they probably would have screamed in pain while the gardener pruned them. If they could speak as human beings can, they would have asked, *"Why are you cutting away our branches? Why are you taking away our life and vitality? Why not cut the useless plants over there that are not bearing fruit?"*

And if the good gardener could respond to them, he would say, *"You cannot understand what I am doing now, but later you will see that the pruning has helped you to grow, to produce flowers that are even more beautiful, and fruit that is even more luscious and healthy."*

I cannot help but think that our retreat center has passed through a time of pruning. This is true even in a physical sense, as the destruction of the hurricane has already led to small but important improvements. For example, the removal of drywall exposed pipes in the villas that would soon have burst. Those pipes have now been replaced. Worn 25-year-old furniture, kitchen appliances, and sound systems are also being replaced. The recent approval of our permits is now leading to the repairs shown in the photos on p. 2. The end result, God willing, will be a facility fitted to bear fruit for decades.

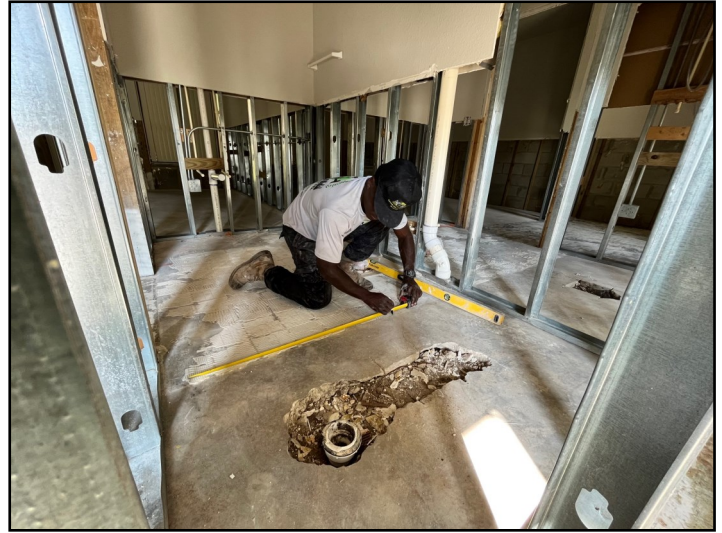
More important, however, is the interior pruning. So many former retreatants have told me how hard it was to see the pictures of the entire property submerged under water. It is as though they did not fully realize
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re-building of
OLPH

You may reach Fr. Mark and Fr. Shawn directly via email or by calling (941) 486-0233

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Photos of Construction on 3/3/23. Left: Removal of old tile adhesive in the villas to prepare for new floors. (All the floors were destroyed by post-hurricane flooding.) Right: Removal of concrete in shower stalls prior to drain replacement.

Pruning

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how much OLPH meant to them until it appeared that all might be lost. Ian taught me how little is really under my control, and how utterly dependent I am on God. I might even say that the bewildering details of construction have left me no choice but to trust Him!

In the updates that I wrote immediately after the hurricane, I spoke to you about the priority of prayer as we move forward, and I would like to repeat that message now. Some might say that the on-time completion of a construction project would be a greater miracle than the parting of the Red Sea, but I ask you to pray that construction will continue on schedule if it is for the greater glory of God. At this time, we await a partial reopening on June 1st for individual retreatants, and we are accepting group overnight bookings for September.

I have no doubt that a fruit-bearing age for OLPH is upon us. In this life, we will never have a complete explanation for Ian, but the day is coming when those who love the retreat center will be able to say, “Thank you, good Master, for pruning us.” ■



Restoration/Improvement of St. Michael Shrine. Left: St. Michael after the flood. Note the dead plants near the base of the statue. Right: Jatropa plants and dwarf bougainvillea have been replanted, this time with curved edging stone and lava rock. Our crew and volunteers also ran new pipe for a sprinkler system to water these plants.

Through Your Generosity: Before and After . . .



Left panels: The front of the Dining Center, central shrine of Our Lady of Perpetual Help, and Rosary Walk shrine after Jan.
Right panels: Grounds have been restored in front of dining center, central shrine has been repaired and power washed, and Rosary Walk shrine has been rebuilt. Thank God for Chuck and the rest of our crew!



Monthly Days of Prayer

The Monthly Day of Prayer is an opportunity to take time out of our busy and hectic lives to focus on God and devote time to prayer and reconciliation. This day retreat is led by an OLPH priest. The cost is \$40.00 and includes a continental breakfast and lunch. Please see below for the upcoming topics.

Due to the impact of Hurricane Ian on OLPH, sessions have been re-located to local parishes.

Note: The conference topics are the same for each session in a respective month, so please choose the day that is compatible with your schedule.

[Click Here to Register](#)

- **Mar. 8, 2023 (Wednesday):** Education Center of Our Lady of Lourdes Parish in Venice, FL
- **Mar. 12, 2023 (Sunday):** Epiphany Parish Center in Venice, FL
- **Apr. 12, 2023 (Wednesday):** Education Center of Our Lady of Lourdes Parish in Venice, FL

March Topic

“Part Four of Healing the Broken Hearted: CPR HAS Failed & Identity Theft”

presented by Fr. Shawn Monahan, OMV

Having addressed how the absence of love growing up has impacted our hearts and seen the connection with the 7 Identity wounds, this fourth presentation will highlight how to draw upon some foundational Ignatian principles for Meditation and Contemplation that are indispensable for healing and transformation. Real ‘Metanoia’ happens when what we believe in our hearts is enlightened by the revelation of God’s love and His truth through a ‘contemplative gaze’.

“Before his gaze all falsehood melts away. This encounter with him, as it burns us, transforms and frees us, allowing us to become truly ourselves. His gaze, the touch of his heart heals us ...enabling us to become totally ourselves and thus totally of God”.

Pope Benedict XVI, Spe Salvi

Please note: It is not required to have attended the previous Monthly Day of Prayer sessions to participate. A brief recap of previous presentations will be given.

April Topic

“The Four Last Things”

presented by Fr. Mark Yavarone, OMV

Benjamin Franklin once said that nothing is certain except death and taxes. But even taxes will not last forever. In this Lenten Monthly Day of Prayer, Fr. Mark Yavarone, OMV goes back to basics with the only four things we can be sure of: death, judgment, Heaven, and Hell. (Only those wishing to go to Heaven should register.)