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Bishop establishes house of prayer for priests

By

Joyce Coronel

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Jun 12, 2013

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Fr. Eugene Florea stands by a resting quarters at Merciful Heart Hermitage, a house of prayer for priests in the Diocese of Phoenix. (J.D. Long-García/CATHOLIC SUN)

BLACK CANYON CITY — Priests in the Diocese of Phoenix now have a house of prayer where they can take time away for prayer and solitude.

Merciful Heart Hermitage was established May 21 by Bishop Thomas J. Olmsted. The oratory, as it is referred to in canon law, is on the premises of the former residence of the Poor Clares of Perpetual Adoration.

Fr. Eugene Florea, director of Merciful Heart, said it's crucial for priests to take time to be alone with the Lord.

“It’s really needed because priests these days have so many things on their plate,” Fr. Florea said. “It’s for them to have the silence and solitude they need to be renewed in Jesus’ love and mercy so they can then pour that on those they serve.”

A hermitage, Fr. Florea said, is a refuge where people can come and encounter God in deep prayer. Each hermitage is equipped with its own kitchenette during their stay.

Many priests set aside what’s known as a “desert day” each month. It’s a time for prayer and meditation. At Merciful Heart, priests and candidates for the priesthood can encounter Christ on a deep level, away from the hubbub of their daily life.

“It’s an opportunity to take away from the ministry and have time to pray before the Blessed Sacrament and to unplug before the world,” Fr. Florea said.

Fr. David Sanfilippo, vicar for priests, said the oratory is needed.

“It will be a wonderful place, on the top of the hill in Black Canyon City, for priests to gather in prayerful reflection and conversation with God,” Fr. Sanfilippo said. “I know that priests will be blessed and so will the people that they serve.”

What about all their priestly responsibilities? Their schedules, emails and parish council meetings?

“Even the Lord went into the desert for prayer and we certainly want to follow His example,” Fr. Sanfilippo said.

Fr. Fred Adamson, vicar general and moderator of the Curia, agreed.

“It’s a good opportunity for us as priests to have a place where we can go for solitude and prayer and have it designated especially for that,” Fr. Adamson said. “I think it’s going to encourage all of our priests to take that time which is important.”

“The whole concept of the name Merciful Heart is to be plugged into the heart of Jesus and to be drawn into intimacy with the Father,” Fr. Florea said. “To receive His love and mercy, to be one with Him — that’s our fuel for being able to serve others. If we’re not living in relationship with Jesus and our Father we are going to be burned out and we won’t have much to give.”

Merciful Heart was established as an oratory on May 21, the feast of the Mexican Martyrs. The feast honors the 25 Mexicans — among them, 22 priests — who were martyred during the Cristero rebellion during 1915-1937.

Merciful Heart Hermitage

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The Merciful Heart Hermitage: A House of Prayer for Priests provides an environment of silence and solitude in which priests may be drawn deeply into the Father's Merciful Heart through the Hearts of Jesus and Mary, thereby being renewed and strengthened in their foundational identity as beloved sons of the Father in Christ. As priests receive a deeper taste of the Father's merciful love for them, and are more deeply united to the Heart of Jesus, they are then able to share this divine love and mercy with all those entrusted to their care. In the words of St. John Vianney, "the priesthood is the love of the Heart of Jesus."

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Types of Retreats

Many priests like to come to the Merciful Heart Hermitage for their monthly desert day and stay one or two nights. Others prefer to come for a longer private retreat. A priest is available for the Sacrament of Penance or for spiritual direction at some point during the retreat or desert day.

Directed retreats in the Ignatian tradition are also offered on a limited number of occasions throughout the year. The directed retreat is an intense, structured experience that helps a person grow in conversion by receiving more of God's love and mercy in the depths of one's being. The retreatant meets daily with a spiritual director and spends about four hours a day in personal prayer with the Sacred Scriptures.

Availability of these retreats is subject to the discernment of the resident spiritual director at the House of Prayer for Priests and are scheduled significantly ahead of time.

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Other sites for retreat centers

<https://www.facebook.com/HolySpiritRetreatCenter/>

<https://www.materdolorosa.org>