



Monastery of the Ascension

# THE DESERT CHRONICLE

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## SALLY LANGLEY ICON PAINTER

*By Laura Hudson, OblSB*

Sally Langley's art is a testament to the power of tradition, spirituality, and personal healing. For over 25 years, Sally, an Oblate, has devoted herself to the ancient craft of icon painting, a practice steeped in meaning, which has become an integral part of her journey through grief, faith, and self-discovery.

Initially a tole painter, she sought a deeper connection with art at Ghost Ranch in Abiquiu, New Mexico, where she took her first icon painting classes. This marked the beginning of a passion for the form, which she describes as both an "escape from life" and a source of profound spiritual growth.

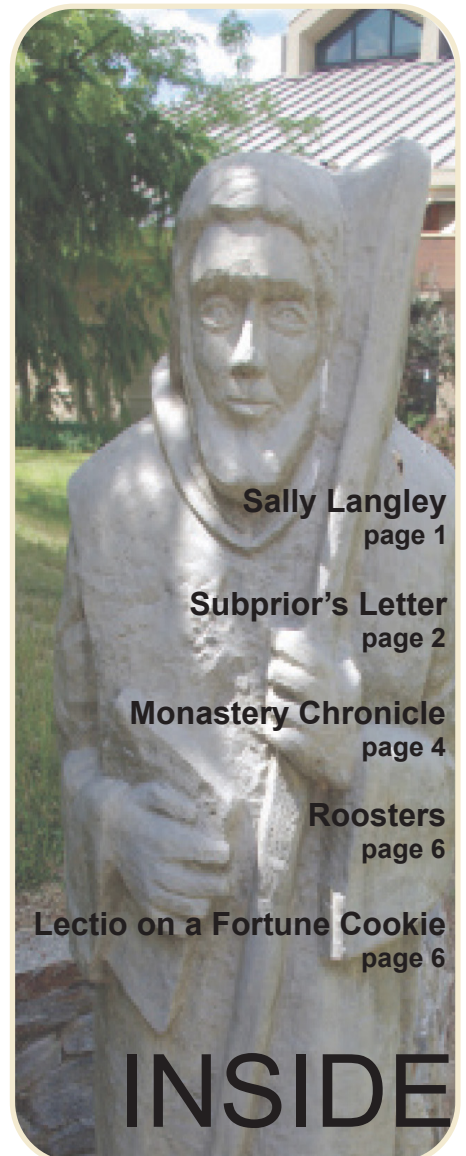
Traditional methods of icon painting influence her work, particularly the use of egg tempera, a mixture of ground pigments, egg yolk, and vinegar, favored for its historical authenticity and rich, luminous quality. While Sally paints with acrylics at home, she recognizes the unique spiritual and aesthetic value of egg tempera, a technique

that she learned from Father Damian Higgins, a priest of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church. The egg, a symbol of life and resurrection, aligns with the spiritual themes of icons. The icons are spiritual objects rather than mere artwork.

Sally explains that the meticulous process begins on a wooden panel, often lovingly prepared by her late husband, Rex, who would apply 15 coats of gesso, sanding between each layer to achieve a smooth surface. Sally describes the process of transferring an image she has selected from a book onto the board using carbon paper to create an outline that will guide her painting. The board is washed with acrylic paint to hold the image; this is called a "cartoon." The painting itself unfolds in layers, from dark to light, culminating in delicate highlights that bring the sacred figures to life.

Sally uses gold leaf, another hallmark of traditional iconography,

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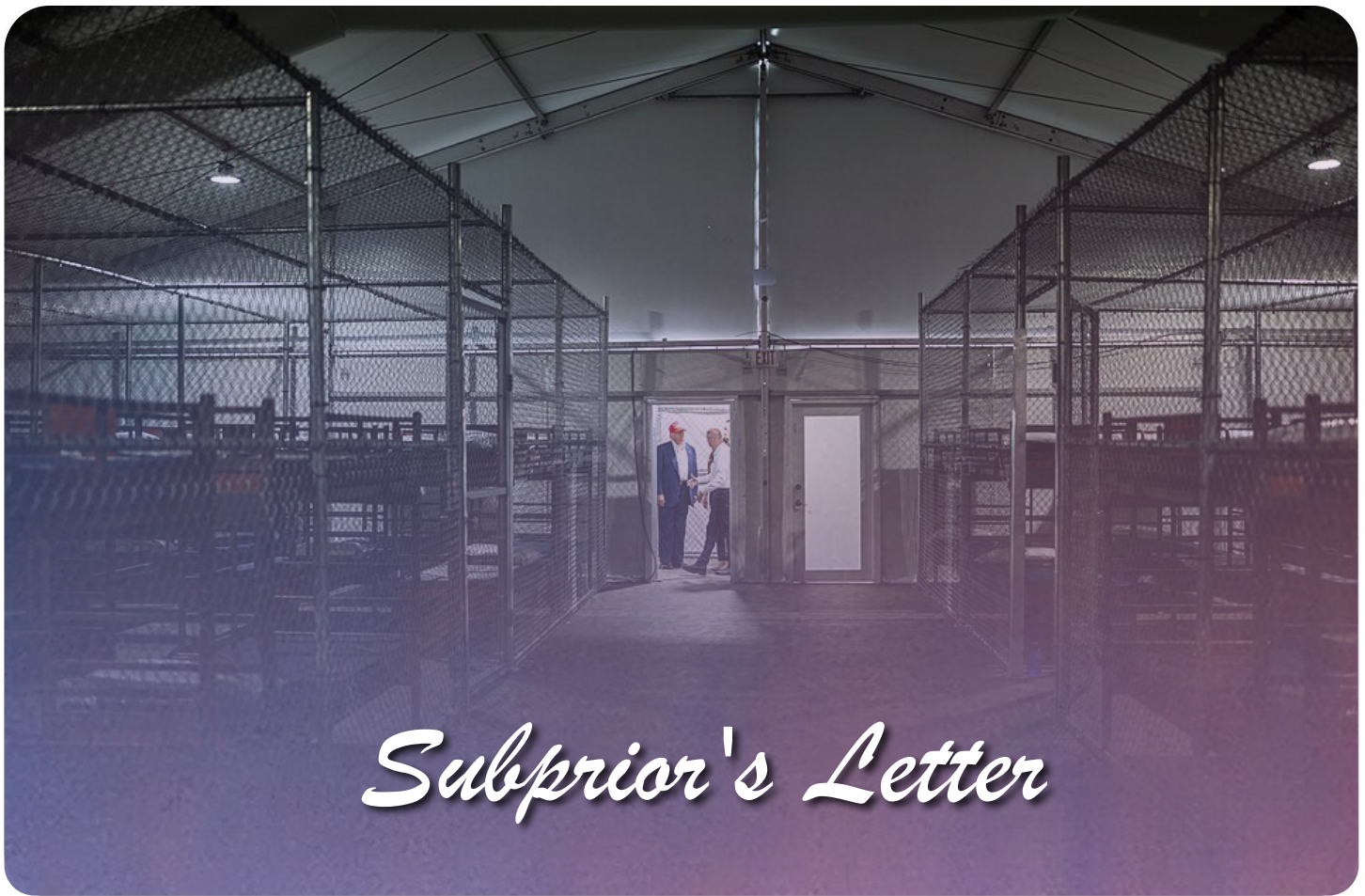
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## Subprior's Letter

Dear Friends of the Monastery,

*"Walk in the truth."* (3 John 3)

"The devil is the father of lies" (John 8:44); he is Beelzebul, "the Lord of the flies" (Matt 12:24). We are surrounded by his flies, whose buzzing is amplified by media, offering alternate facts, suggesting that the law of non-contradiction no longer applies, that truth is what someone wants it to be.

In search of reality, I now spend ten minutes in the morning sitting on the front porch, trying to let what is there impinge on my senses. I see the sunrise, the haze, the butterfly bush starting to bloom, the weeds poking through the sidewalk. I smell the morning air, the chemicals, the manure, and the fresh cut grass. I hear the rustling leaves, the traffic on the road, the collared doves. I feel the wind, the warming sun, the hard chair. These things are undeniably real. This is step one: practice for perceiving what is, for letting things be for me as they are.

Step two is to evaluate the implications of reality as it presents itself to me. For example, I know some of the scientific consensus about air pollution, aquifers, and climate change. Scientific consensus can change through the discovery of new information. My perceptions and assessments can change also, and for the better, if what I seek is the truth, not the comfortable or profitable.

With the best information available, I am responsible for deciding how to live in this world of

dazzling sunrises and climate change, rising seas and diminishing aquifers. "All is fine;" "We are doomed"; "Don't think about it." These are buzzing flies that allow me to do nothing.

As an example, there are the arrests of people of obvious ethnicity who, without due process, are summarily hauled off to a new holding camp in the Everglades. There, they are kept in cages, like hapless chickens, awaiting deportation. People celebrate or denounce these happenings, but I have not heard anyone deny their reality.

I am a Christian; I believe that no man is an island. We are brothers and sisters sharing God's good earth, intertwined with each other and with that earth, called to be one in Jesus. I am an American, committed to justice and due process for all.

May I ignore, deny or despair these unlawful arrests and detentions of my kin? No. I do not think that I may walk on the other side of the road, where my brother or sister lies half-dead. At the very least, I need to walk in the truth, support those who are swatting flies, and swat a few myself.

Be assured of our prayers.

Peace and good things!

Fr. Hugh Feiss, O.S.B., Subprior



*Continued from page 1*

to embellish halos and backgrounds, though she admits its application can be challenging. Sally, pictured, is standing next to a copy of an icon of the Trinity, with extensive gold leaf in the background.

For Sally, icon painting is more than an artistic pursuit; it is a spiritual discipline and a form of healing. She describes lighting a candle, saying a prayer, and playing music as she works, transforming the act of painting into a meditative practice. One instructor, Peter Pearson, now an Episcopal Priest in Pennsylvania, once told Sally, "Often in icon painting, if there are unresolved things in your life, it'll come to the surface." The process of bringing unresolved issues to the surface offers a path toward healing and self-understanding. The loss of her husband, Rex, her greatest supporter, has made it difficult for her to return to painting. Her son-in-law wisely shared his perspective that "how you choose to live is a reflection of who you are," which has motivated Sally to get back to her "casita" or studio to continue painting her icons. The boards Rex prepared for her remain a tangible reminder of his support and love, encouraging her to continue creating in the face of grief.



Sally's icons are deeply personal, often created as gifts for friends, family, and religious communities. She has donated works to churches and monasteries, where they are blessed and hung in worship spaces. One icon displayed at St. Michael's Episcopal Cathedral behind the pulpit is of Jesus, the Teacher. Despite her talent, Sally is humble about her abilities, describing herself as someone who "copies" rather than invents, striving to remain true to the ancient craft.

Her favorite subjects to paint include the Trinity, the Virgin Mary, and saints such as St. Cecilia and St. Herman of Alaska, each chosen for their personal and spiritual significance. Sally's favorite icon, because Fr Damian Higgins brought the icon to St. Gertrude's, and the message, is of St. Claire of Assisi, who famously said, "We



become what we love, and who we love shapes what we become." Sally's icons are not only works of art but also vessels of meaning, intended to inspire contemplation and devotion in those who encounter them.

Sally's journey as an icon painter is a story of resilience, devotion, and the enduring power of art to transform both the creator, through prayer and meditation, and the viewer, creating a sense of connection to the divine. Through her dedication to tradition and her openness about the struggles and joys of her path, Sally offers a moving example of how creativity can serve as a bridge between the human and the divine.



*Sally's Icon of Tobit's Angel.*





# Monastery Chronicle

*By Fr. Boniface Lautz, OSB, and Fr. Hugh Feiss, OSB*

## *May 2025*

May 1: New dishwashing machine installed but needs help from Hobart technician.

May 2: Deacon candidate retreat begins.

May 6: Fr. Boniface to pain clinic for procedure.

May 7: Visions Health here. Fr. Hugh to Kalamazoo for annual Medieval conference. Papal conclave begins.

May 8: Pope Leo XIV elected. Fr. Hugh's birthday.

May 9: AA retreat. MSP work on trailer in back.

May 12: Hobart tech here. Will return.

May 13: Visions foot care here. 100 South road being paved.

May 16: Fr. Hugh returns. Hobart dishwasher works! John and Br. Roger repair washing machine.

May 17: MSP marriage retreat. Fr. Hugh meets with oblates in Boise.

May 19: Plumbing repairs in basement. Visitors from Oregon.

May 21: Br. Sylvester has back pain treatment. Visions Health here.

May 24: MSP Lay Theology and Bible Study.

May 25: Fr. Boniface 65th ordination anniversary. Celebration after community Mass.

May 30: Fr. Boniface signs conservation easement on farm; Marshalls present.

May 31: MSP prepare for anniversary celebration.

## *June 2025*

June 1: Feast of the Ascension, date of our Founding and many subsequent events; MSPs host glorious celebration after Mass and into evening.

June 2: MSP say Mass; Fr. Boniface has hearing aid test, procedure to relieve back pain scheduled.

June 3: MSP priests go to Boise. Meeting of Corporation board with Diane.

June 4: Visions Health here.

June 5: Procedure at pain clinic for Fr. Boniface. Prayers and good wishes from Frs. Meinrad, Jerome and Ezekiel.

June 6: Tim Perrigot ordained deacon in Boise; Fr. Hugh sick; Fr. Boniface falls and is taken to St. Luke's in Twin Falls.

June 7: Fr. Boniface undergoes surgery for broken hip.

June 8: Fr. Hugh celebrates Sunday Mass (and for all June and July); Br. Tobiah and John Wasko visit Fr. Boniface

June 9: Fr. Boniface moved to St. Luke's Jerome for rehabilitation; no weight allowed on broken hip.

June 10: John take Brs. Sylvester and Selby to visit with Fr. Boniface

June 11: Routine sets in: Br. Tobiah usually with Fr. Boniface during the day; John sometimes; MSP at night.

June 12: Fr. Emanuel (American Falls) celebrates community Mass; here immersing in Spanish.

June 13: After community Mass, Fr. Hugh takes Fr. Boniface communion (and henceforward every other day).

June 16: Fr. Jesus MSP is main celebrant.



June 17: John takes Br. Sylvester to see doctor; they visit Fr. Boniface.

June 18: Visions Health here for weekly check on four of us.

June 19: Fr. Emanuel, John, Br. Sylvester visit Fr. Boniface. Fr. Hugh emergency visit to dentist.

June 20: Fr. Emanuel is celebrant; he leaves for San Antonio tomorrow. Fr. Hugh celebrates internment for Mary Zimmerman.

June 21: The Boise theology book club meets here.

June 22: Solemnity of Corpus Christi.

June 23: Fr. Hugh takes communion to Fr. Boniface.

June 25: Holy Communion for Fr. Boniface. Home Health here

June 26: The community holds a meeting with Diane Sparks sitting in. All vote to approve the agreement with the Missionaries. Br. Selby has some reservations which will be conveyed to the Congregation once the Missionaries have agreed to the document.

June 29: Missionaries will have spiritual exercises next week. Br. Carlos, Br. Giovaney and Br. Sergio are back.

June 30: Fr. Hugh takes communion to Fr. Boniface and anoints him.

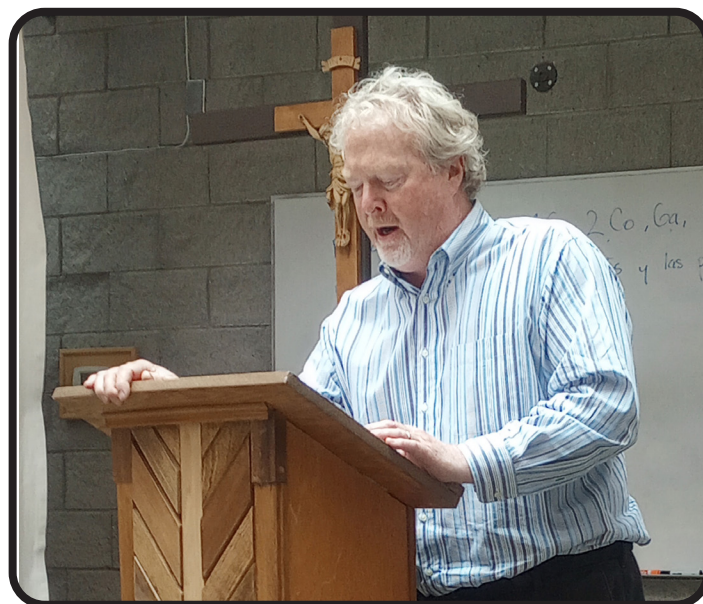
July 11: St. Benedict's Feast. Recliner (assembled by a crew of monks and Missionaries), friends from Oregon, Tamie and PT for Visions Home Health and Fr. Boniface (in wheelchair via Creekside van) all arrive. Room is equipped with fancy doorbell so Fr. Boniface can phone for help.

July 12: Fr. Boniface attends liturgy and meals in wheelchair, receiving therapy to strengthen and use legs.

July 14: Fr. Hugh, John, and Diane accompany Fr. Boniface to see his primary care provider.

July 18: Tom Hogan and Jane Rickenbaugh arrive for what is now an annual visit. They will stay till Sunday. Missionaries have a program.

July 19: Oblate picnic well attended. Astons celebrate 50th anniversary of their wedding at the Priory in TF witnessed by Fr. Cosmas White. Deacon Tim Perrigot gives talk about deacons. Bingo.



***Deacon Tim Perrigot***

July 20: Friends from Shoshone here for Mass. Linda catalogued books.

July 21: Fr. Boniface has visit from Visions Home Health. MSPs getting everything clean.

July 22: Eileen helps in library with project sorting collection of Mass and prayer books.

July 23-30: A routine and warm week. Fr. Boniface is visited often by caregivers; the rest of us dive deeper into what Fr. Kenneth calls the "age after old age," the "pill age." In fact, he sometimes seems like the weldest of us all.

## ***July 2025***

July 1: Tamie S. here to start setting up home care for Fr. Boniface. Meeting with MSPs regarding helping with Fr. Boniface. They are being extremely kind and helpful.

July 3: Training at St. Luke's regarding caring for Fr. Boniface. Cathy arrives; will stay for five days.

July 4: LuAnn prepared a very fine traditional 4th celebration: burgers, baked beans, corn on the cob, two kinds of pie. MSPs away for the day.

July 6: Large congregation for Sunday mass and coffee and snacks.

July 8: Diane H, Fr. Hugh, and John W. go with Fr. Boniface in Creekside van to meet with this orthopedic surgeon. He is happy with progress. Father can now start putting weight on his left foot. A big step forward.

July 9: Friends from Oregon coming to see Fr. Boniface; sending a new recliner ahead.

July 10: Fr. Abraham has kindly offered to move out of his suite in the guest house, and it is prepared for Fr. Boniface. Br. Abraham will move temporarily to a room and office on the lower floor of the monastery.



# ROOSTERS

*By Ronald Pepin*

For many summers in a row, I used to look forward to spending one or two weeks at Ascension Monastery. I would come from Connecticut to Idaho to assist Father Hugh Feiss with Elderhostels (later, “Road Scholars”). For the first few of those visits, I stayed “out back” in the Annex, right next to the chicken coop that housed not mere fowls, but Brother Tobiah’s prized specimens. His show birds had garnered many blue ribbons at fairs, and they reminded me of Grandpa Pepin’s similar flock. To a small boy in awe, my grandfather introduced an impressive gathering of Houdans, Silver-Spangled Hamburgs, and Buff Cochins, those puffy, golden-brown beauties.

Brother Tobiah’s roosters roused me from slumber EARLY each morning. I was never late for chapel or class. They were recently brought to mind when, for some arcane purpose, I was reading a Latin poem composed centuries ago, perhaps by a Benedictine monk. The verses pay tribute to the weathervane, the loyal cock who perches above the Lord’s house and serves to remind monks, and all priests, of their duties. At seventeen stanzas of four lines each, this medieval poem is lengthy, but I offer a few verses in English translation as a testimonial to Brother Tobiah and his feathered friends, to Father Hugh and the monks of Ascension Monastery, and to faithful priests everywhere. May they stir us and summon us all to our Christian duties each day.

The cock is a wonderful creature of God,  
And thus he signifies the good priest  
Who presides over a church in the care of souls,  
And stands before his flock against what is harmful.

Positioned above the cross, the cock diligently  
Stretches forth his head against the wind.  
So the priest when he knows the robber  
(the devil) is coming  
Places himself as a barrier to him for his flock.



The cock rules over a large flock of hens,  
And he has great solicitude for them.  
So may the priest, taking up the care of souls,  
Teach and do what is pleasing to God.

The cock never neglects the time of Vespers;  
Then he flies with his flock to roost,  
So that at the time of Matins in the middle of the night,  
He might call the servants of God to the divine office.

So also the good priest, rejecting earthly goods,  
May lead his flock away from the pain of Hell,  
Offering them a celestial way to the pleasant  
paths of heaven,  
So that, when Christ comes, they will be  
a joyous throng.

Wise Priest, may you be an imitator of the cock  
By living conscientiously, by rising up in the morning;  
Read, study, preach, sing your hours,  
And thus abide in heavenly things with your  
heart and soul.



# LECTIO ON A FORTUNE COOKIE

*By Julie A. Ferraro, OblSB*

In a world where so many people focus on eating healthy, I admit: I don't, and really haven't since I was a kid. I grew up in a family where we "cleaned our plates" before we left the table, and that included problematic meals like my father's ham and bean soup.

Four hours of trying to finish even a small bowl of that put me off soups for life.

While I don't frequent fast food restaurants very often, if I discover a good source for Asian food, I tend to take advantage of it.

Teriyaki chicken or beef is a favorite.

Sweet and Sour Chicken is another.

But, please, don't put peas and carrots in the fried rice!

This past April, while enjoying a generous portion of Sweet and Sour Chicken, I ended the meal with the obligatory fortune cookie. I like the taste of the cookie itself even moreso than the message inside, to be honest. But I find the pithy bits of "wisdom" intriguing sometimes.

Including the one I opened that evening, which read, "Your mind, being creative and original, will make you famous."

In all humility - as the Rule of St. Benedict advises - I agree that my mind is creative (sometimes too much so) and definitely original. The fiction I've written across more than five decades attests to that - including why publishers reject my manuscripts: they are too "original" to be "commercial."

I sat with that fortune cookie message for quite some time, and still do. It's never been my intention to be "famous" - my goal was to earn enough money to raise my sons (not an inexpensive prospect, when they cleaned out the refrigerator every other day) and, after they left home, give back for all my blessings by going where my skills are needed.

What is "fame", after all? I don't really need to be noticed on that scale; too many actors, public

figures or athletes who are labeled "stars" or "celebrities" have mourned the loss of their privacy and the extra demands made on their personal time.

My hope for the creative and original mind I have been gifted is to keep using it to tell the stories that inspire, engage and inform - whether in the secular or religious realm. As I've traveled these past 12 years, I've encountered many incredible individuals about whom I've written, while I also continue to write fiction for my own amusement, primarily.

There are times, certainly, when I envy the visual artists who can create masterpieces with brush and paint, or clay (I flunked ceramics in high school, because I couldn't turn a pot on the wheel). Still, I understand that, if each unique individual didn't have his or her own distinct gifts, the world would be a dull, dull place.

So, that little fortune cookie as been a source of comfort, in some ways, as it opened me to broaden my way of thinking about humanity and the gifts we all have to offer.





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When we recite the Our Father, in addition to celebrating the grace of being children of God, we also express our commitment to responding to this gift by loving one another as brothers and sisters in Christ. Reflecting on this, one of the Fathers of the Church wrote: “We must remember... and know that when we call God ‘our Father’ we ought to behave as children of God” (Saint Cyprian of Carthage, *De Dom. orat.*, 11), and another adds: “You cannot call the God of all kindness your Father if you preserve a cruel and inhuman heart; for in this case you no longer have in you the mark of the heavenly Father’s kindness” (Saint John Chrysostom, *De orat. Dom.*, 3). We cannot pray to God as “Father” and then be harsh and insensitive towards others. Instead, it is important to let ourselves be transformed by his goodness, his patience, his mercy, so that his face may be reflected in ours as in a mirror.

—Pope Leo XIV  
*Angelus, July 27, 2025*



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