

Chapter 2: THE FIRST PLACE

Ladoga, Montgomery County, Indiana

The Orthodox tradition for monasteries is to be withdrawn from the bustle of ordinary life to some degree. One extreme of this over the centuries was to live alone in the desert or a cave or elevated on a platform. The opposite extreme was many monks or nuns living in elaborate buildings with attached farms, workshops, and a place of worship. Sr. Pilar and Sr. Paula just wanted to get out of the city.



Their initial idea was to find a house to rent with a bit of land for growing a garden and a spare room for having guests. That is what was offered to them in Ladoga. The old house was two rooms up, two rooms down, a kitchen stuck on one side, and an open garage stuck on the other side. A porch crossed the entire front of the house, a divided pasture surrounded three sides of the house with a small barn at the edge of one field, a wide yard suitable for a garden at one side of the house, a small fenced yard with a large mulberry tree in back, and a nicely sized yard with large mature trees in the front.

A gravel county road led to the nearest neighbor (the local EOC parish priest and his family) a quarter-mile away. The property was two miles beyond the town of about 1000, which had a bank, a grocery, a library, and a hardware store. A small city with more retail services and a hospital was a 20-minute drive away. It was less than an hour away to join the Indianapolis parish for worship on special occasions, and a pleasant drive for the visiting Indianapolis EOC priest who had been appointed as spiritual director.

The Sisters did not fully realize how important the setting for the monastery would be. In Matthew 6:8 is a reminder that the Heavenly Father “*knows what you need before you ask.*” This was a place where the Sisters could discover what they had time and energy for doing, a place with a bit of space for solitude, and a place large enough to experiment with animal husbandry for income and growing their own food. It was blissfully quiet compared to Indianapolis and owned by other believers with whom they could share life in the Body of Christ.

Oh! And nature! Did I mention nature? In Ladoga you could see stars in the sky at night, find wild asparagus in the ditches, see fox and deer roaming freely, pick berries in the woods, and breathe air that smelled more like animals and corn than diesel fuel. It had been many years since either of the Sisters had lived in the country, and they found all of these things and the slower pace refreshing to body and soul. So did those who began coming for visits and retreats.

There will be more later about some of the specific things that happened while in Ladoga, but here it is important to explain how where the monastery was planted impacted how it developed. The Sisters could have certainly stayed within the inner-city neighborhood where they had been, but making a dramatic change of location helped them grasp this time as a new beginning. It helped others to see that too. They were finding their way a step at a time into this new lifestyle, and this place gave them the opportunity to set their own schedule and seek the Lord often, alone and together.

Here is an excerpt from one of the early newsletters sent to those who were interested in Holy Redeemer: Many of our retreatants comment on the quiet atmosphere of the monastery. This makes us think of a quote from author Kathleen Norris in her book *DAKOTA: A SPIRITUAL GEOGRAPHY*. “The monastery...claims by its very existence that *place* is important, that *place* has meaning in and of itself. You’re still in America in the monastery...you’re still in the modern world. But (this) place demands that you give up any notion of dominance or control. In this place you wait, and the place molds you.” We couldn’t agree more. We have found the monastic setting encourages us to flow with the natural rhythms (as well as the demands) of the hours of the day and the seasons of the year without trying to curb them to our will. Also, the natural sounds of the countryside quiet our hearts and nurture reflection more than the man-made sounds of the city. By the choice of a simpler life here, many distractions are eliminated, and there is more opportunity to pay attention to things of the soul and spirit.

Holy Redeemer was in Ladoga for eight years. The Sisters established a schedule of morning and evening prayers, as well as times of silence. The 1860 house was renovated into a comfortable home with one of the five rooms in the house turned into a chapel. As the Sisters net-worked with EOC parishes and other bodies of believers, retreatants began to visit. The Sisters began raising a small flock of sheep, baking breads and noodles, and making note cards to provide income. They gardened and canned to provide food.

Having been welcomed into the worship of the local EOC parish, which was then worshipping in the priest’s home, Holy Redeemer was set on course, and the Sisters were settled into a new life and routine that was becoming comfortable. Then, about 1990, the Holy Spirit began to ask, “Would you be willing to leave all that you have accomplished and start over somewhere else?” If He opened a door, would they choose to head into the unknown again? Their comfort was about to be disrupted.