

THE JOYOUS RETURN OF 'ALLELUIA' • WELCOMING NEW CATHOLICS • PRECEPTS OF THE CHURCH

THE MAGAZINE OF THE ARCHDIOCESE OF HARTFORD

Catholic TRANSCRIPT

APRIL 2024

archdioceseofhartford.org



THE PASCHAL CANDLE

Shining the light of Jesus

SERVING THE COUNTIES OF HARTFORD, NEW HAVEN AND LITCHFIELD, CONNECTICUT

SACRAMENTALS OF

GETTY IMAGES/JOH

Candlemaker Mother Lioba Postel holds the Paschal candle on the grounds of the Abbey of Regina Laudis.



The Paschal candle, Chrism oil are an integral part of Easter.

Story by KAREN A. AVITABILE

PHOTO BY AARON JOSEPH

▶ Taper candles dry on a rack in the candle studio on the grounds of the Abbey of Regina Laudis.

“When we embrace our cross, no matter how big or small, we believe new life will follow. We are called to live this Paschal mystery daily.” For Mother Lioba Postel, the cross is ever present, especially on the Paschal candle she has been making more than 25 years for the Abbey of Regina Laudis, a community of contemplative Benedictine women in Bethlehem, Conn.

“The Resurrection cannot be separated from his passion and death,” she says. “We know this truth in our lives, in our personal sufferings, the sufferings within our families and communities, the Church and our world.”

The Paschal candle in the Catholic Church, the preeminent symbol of the Easter season, will be lit at the Easter Vigil, the holiest of nights, and placed in a prominent spot in the sanctuary. It will shine during Masses through Pentecost. Then,

▼ Wooden pegs on the Paschal candle represent the five wounds of Christ.



PHOTO BY AARON JOSEPH

it will be lit during baptisms and funerals throughout the year.

As a child, Mother Lioba was fascinated with candlemakers, seeing them firsthand while traveling with family to Germany.

“I lost myself immediately in the candlemaker’s shop with its process of harvesting the beeswax to dipping tapers depicted on the walls outside and its rich smell of beeswax candles inside,” she says.

Upon entering Our Lady of the Rock Priory on Shaw Island, Wash., Mother Lioba was trained as a liturgical candlemaker. At the Abbey of Regina Laudis, she founded its candle studio more than 25 years ago and since then has made the Paschal candle and tapers used at the Easter Vigil.



COPYRIGHT/ ABBEY OF REGINA LAUDIS

The Abbey’s Paschal candle is 60 percent beeswax obtained from hives on the property, fragrant with pollen from the fields, orchards and flower gardens. Generally a golden hue, beeswax

must undergo several filtrations to obtain its whitish color for the candle.

The art of candlemaking is a painstaking process. But Mother Lioba grows ever more passionate about it each year and says it gives her insight into the nature of her enclosed monastic life.

The process begins by melting the wax to 200 degrees, which lasts for about two hours. A vat with a 90-degree water bath is used for cooling. Mother Lioba worked with a local company to construct a specialized mold to obtain the candle’s distinct dimensions — 36 inches long by about 4 inches wide.

CHRIST HIMSELF

Over time, a well-formed solid 15-pound candle is able to stand on its own. The wax and wick have been bonded together into one by hand, also a tedious process.

Ground mica powder, indigenous to Connecticut, is used to infuse color into the symbols of the candle. Inscribed into the body of the candle are the year and the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, “Alpha and Omega,” for the beginning and the end. Colors chosen for the symbols are discerned annually by the Abbey’s Mother Abbess Lucia. The Paschal candle colors for 2024 are red and gold.

Mother Lioba also drills holes and inserts incense for the five wounds of Christ — in his hands, feet and side. The wounds are represented by wooden pegs customized by a fellow nun’s brother.

To begin the Easter Vigil for the Abbey and its guests, a fire is lit outside the Church and blessed by a priest. This fire is used to light the Paschal candle. The congregation follows behind the large candle and enters into the dark church. Once everyone is inside, the candle of each person is lighted from the Paschal candle and the ancient prayer *Exsultet: The Proclamation of Easter* is sung, unfolding the mystery of salvation history.

“This candle becomes the *Lumen Christi*, the light of Christ from which we take our own light and with which we renew our baptismal promises, declaring ourselves one with Christ,” Mother Lioba says. “This is a great opportunity, especially in these dark times, to refresh our minds so that we can all enter more fully into the Easter Vigil this year.”

◀ Elements of the Paschal candle used by Mother Lioba.



PHOTO BY AARON JOSEPH

THE ABBEY’S CHRISM FRAGRANCE

Another sacred symbol of Christ which dates back to the early Christian fathers is the Sacred Chrism, made up of a concentrated biblical balsam-like fragrance which is diluted with olive oil.

Mother John Mary Adshead of the Abbey of Regina Laudis makes the unique and authentic Chrism fragrance and shares five bottles with the Archdiocese of Hartford for use during its Chrism Mass and in the sacraments of baptism, confirmation and holy orders.

“As Christians, we believe that Jesus is the true Christos (Christ), the anointed one, the Messiah,” Mother John says. “Just as Christ is anointed, then, so Christians are anointed.”

More than 40 years ago, the Abbey’s “Cecelia Chrism Fragrance” was created after the art of world perfumer Steffen Arctander, who developed a friendship with the Abbey. The Chrism formula is based on biblical spices and resins found in balsam and mentioned in the anointing oil in Exodus — frankincense, myrrh, cinnamon and cassia.

The perfumer developed the fragrance, named for St. Cecelia, with deep masculine notes blended with uplifting, feminine fragrances of essential oils of lemon, clary sage and mint “to create an exotic and sweet aroma that is rich and evocative of its mystery,” Mother John says. “We hope that this sacred fragrance is a fitting expression of the Holy Spirit’s presence and anointing on each person who receives it.”

Dating back to the third century, the Chrism Mass is one of the most solemn and important liturgies of the Christian liturgical calendar. The Oil of Chrism is consecrated at the Chrism Mass during Holy Week while the Oil of Catechumens and the Oil of the Sick are also blessed.

Mother John, who relishes in the scent of flowers and the fragrance of roses, has been making the Chrism since 2008. She began planning for this year’s Chrism last fall when its 14 compounds began arriving at the Abbey.

“This Chrism is the one that feels the most privileged to us (for the Archdiocese of Hartford),” Mother John says. “It is a chance for us as an enclosed community to be present for the archdiocese because this fragrance is going to go forth into every parish.”

In the Bible, along with wheat and wine, oil is one of the essential gifts God gives to his people, Archbishop Leonard P. Blair says. “Oil consecrated as Chrism is reserved for the most sacred sacramental use. It is scented, and we are blessed in the archdiocese to use the aromatic fragrance produced locally by the nuns at Regina Laudis.”

The Chrism is made in a small perfume studio on the Abbey property, where Mother John also produces soaps and lotions sold in the Monastic Art Shop. Mother Lioba makes baptismal candles, hand-dipped tapers and beeswax figurines. Additional crafts, books and cheese are also available for purchase. For hours and more information about the Monastic Art Shop, visit abbeyofreginalaudis.org. ☪



PHOTO BY AARON JOSEPH

▲ Mother John Mary Adshead holds a bottle of Cecelia Chrism Fragrance inside the Monastic Art Shop, on the grounds of the Abbey of Regina Laudis.



PHOTO BY AARON JOSEPH

▲ A bottle of Cecelia Chrism Fragrance, made in the perfume studio.