



Little House of Prayer

I began my travels heading west on I-40. Although the weather was still mild, seasonal changes were apparent by the foliage already transitioning into their brilliant fall colors. Prior to my departure, I had called for reservations from my list of Benedictine and Cistercian retreat houses and received the same answer that there were no vacancies for weeks to come. The fall season was indeed a popular time of year for large group retreats. Thankfully, just before leaving Nashville, I was surprised by a call from St Scholastica in Fort Smith, Arkansas. They informed me that, although their retreat house was full, they had available lodging at a smaller retreat facility in a nearby town. This would be the starting point and first destination of my stops.

I arrived by late afternoon at the retreat house located in the town of New Blaine in the northwestern part of Arkansas. The facility had been established in 1981 by several members of the St. Scholastica community at the site of the original monastery before the community had relocated to Ft. Smith. The returning Sisters completed the retreat residence and chapel, then built several cabins as part of their prayer ministry. A bucolic setting, the property was surrounded by cow pastures along Shoal Creek at the foot of the Ozark Mountains.

I was greeted by the director, Sister Louise Sharum, who invited me to dinner at their residence that evening and to attend Mass the next morning. After showing me around the main building, she took me to a cabin a short distance away. A chain link fence separated the cabin from a field of grazing cows and a small pond. It was then I noticed a handmade sign on the cabin side of the fence with the name, Hesychia House of Prayer.

I brought my backpack inside the tidy, simply furnished, cabin and began to settle into my little sanctuary. Among my belongings was a book I had brought to read on my travels. It was a gift I received a few weeks before from John Duckett of our Nashville group when my travel plans were announced during our annual LCG gathering at Gethsemani. The inside cover pages of the book contained written blessings, kind words of encouragement, contact suggestions, and

signatures of many of the LCG members in attendance that weekend. It had been an unexpected gift and an affirming send off.

That evening, sitting on the front porch of my tiny house watching the early evening sky and hearing the sounds and stirrings of my nearby pasture mates, I felt a deep peacefulness settle upon me. I have to admit that after leaving the Abbey of Gethsemani, I had not expected the first stop on my journey to be this simple, solitary lookout in a rural setting overlooking a pasture of grazing cattle. As I watched the sun setting in the dwindling light and the sounds of night descending across the fields, I was struck by the realization that the book in my hand, the gift from my LCG friends, was *The Way of a Pilgrim*. As I began my night prayers, I realized this was exactly where I was supposed to start.

