



# The Minstrel

NEWSLETTER OF GREGORY THE GREAT ACADEMY

All Souls 2023

Dear Friend,

As I sit here writing this letter to you, I hear the animated voices of the seniors in a room next door to me discussing plans for the annual Haunted Barn — there is laughter, proposals, rejections, more laughter, a momentary silence, and then it all starts up again. They are serious about making this an unforgettable experience for their schoolmates; they are fully alive in this moment, engaged in something of their own making.

I realize that I am hearing the substance of their friendship: this free and serious and laughing conversation about something they care deeply about with friends who know them well. Every boy speaks his mind and is listened to by the whole group with absolute attention. They are known here, respected by peers whom they know and likewise respect. What a joy and a consolation it is to have one's place in a group where one is known. Neither left out nor forgotten. To be a member and be remembered.

As we approach All Souls Day, I think of our yearly procession down to the school cemetery, singing hymns for the Holy Souls, ending at the graveyard with "My Comrade," a ballad that a soldier sings to his lost companion in battle — a loss so dire that he "will never laugh again." The song ends with these hope-filled words:



Luke Culley  
Headmaster



I pray God Who loves the soldier  
To quickly place him, my comrade  
At the right of Christ the Lord.

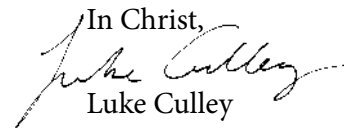
This song is so loved by our boys because it sings about the essence of their shared experience — true comradeship — the knowledge of having a friend that you want to share your life with, that you would even die for.

Death would seem to be the end of friendship. Indeed, the fact of death seems to annihilate all of those bonds that we cherish so deeply throughout our lives, threatening to call all of this into question. Is it all for naught? If all love and friendship ends with the grave, does the gnawing worm get the last word, the last bitter laugh?

The Byzantine memorial for the dead ends with the singing of the beautiful elegy, "May his memory be eternal." What a thought is contained there! To be remembered forever! But by whom?

A priest once told me that when we bury someone we are planting them in the ground like a seed awaiting the springtime of their resurrection. There is hope for our memory to be truly eternal, the hope that God will remember us, even in the grave! Only the eternal Word of God made flesh has the power to break us out of the isolation of death and "re-member" us back into the communal conversation of love and laughter among friends who will never forget us.

Thank you for remembering Gregory the Great Academy during this season of All Saints and All Souls. We count you as our friend and will remember you in our prayers during this hallowed season.

In Christ,  
  
Luke Culley



## Bringing New Life to an Old Cemetery

When an old stone wall fell over on his father's property in New York, a young man named Dan met the old mason hired on to mend it. Before long, Dan was lifting stones alongside him and learning how to set them in place. And that simple, solid art of placing stone on stone stuck.



Daniel Weichert graduated from the Academy in 2017, and has a lovely wife, Rosa, and a little son, Charbel. He is a talented musician (most notably on the uilleann pipes) and an enthusiastic mason. After picking up the method over that first mending-wall job, Dan has

built freestanding walls, retaining walls, patios, steps, and even a 10ft pizza oven modeled after the ancient monk huts of Ireland called Clocháns. Dan enjoys traditional masonry because of the purity of the labor that will weather the ages if done right. He also finds the occupation thoughtful and peaceful. As he puts it, "it's just you and the rocks."

This fall, through a generous gift from former faculty member Dan Davidson and his wife Margot, Dan has begun work to build a 147ft dry-stack sandstone wall enclosing the Orphanage Cemetery at Gregory the Great



Academy. Like the old mason who taught him the fundamentals of walling, Dan will be working with the boys and imparting to them those same stony secrets. We are honored and pleased to have one of our alumni leading this project and creating a noble structure for this holy ground. Please pray for Dan and his family as he travels to and fro from his home in New York to complete this mighty yet modest wall for our faithful departed.



## Three Remembered Orphans



The old Orphanage Cemetery lies in a quiet corner of our property, and for years we have prayed for those resting there while wondering over three sunken graves that bear no names. But recently, in corresponding with the order of nuns who ran the orphanage a century ago, the Sisters of St. Basil, Fr. Christopher inquired after these unmarked graves and was given records of the names of those three orphans. We began looking into securing markers so that we could, at last, remember the names of these souls, but alas, we found the cost too heavy.

Then, while writing one of our fathers this fall, Mr. Fitzpatrick recalled that the man owned a monument business. Then and there, Mr. Fitzpatrick asked if he would consider a donation of headstones for the three orphans, and he generously agreed. This gift will allow us to remember these departed ones particularly on All Souls

Day, and to truly sing the words from that old hymn, "We will trace out their names in the old churchyard."

We thank that kind gentleman for the names he has enshrined in our cemetery with the words, "May their memory be eternal." We hope that someday you can come and see them and remember Elizabeth Rospopa, Valentine Sasara, and John Pcsolyar in the hope of their eternal memory.



“And then all the host of Rohan burst into song, and they sang as they slew, for the joy of battle was on them, and the sound of their singing that was fair and terrible came even to the City.”

— *The Return of the King*, J.R.R. Tolkien

The “joy of battle” is a strange phenomenon often misunderstood as a reckless laughing in the face of death. Ivo Taillefer, however, was not crazy and reckless when he juggled his sword before the Saxon army at the Battle of Hastings; nor was Don John of Austria glorifying massacres when he danced on the prow of his ship at the Battle of Lepanto. These men were quite sane, but simply armed with a courage that can only come from



God. For they knew as they fought that day that they would be saved even in death. Indeed, the joy they experienced was not from an trivial outlook on death, but rather a firm trust in Christ.

This attitude—this blind, blissful trust in God—is necessary to win sainthood. For if a man is not willing to put his life in God’s hands, how can he become a saint? And if he mistrusts God in some way, how will he obtain the courage to endure the trials that saints so often undergo with a smile? This would be impossible without God’s aid, and the saint rejoices in that aid. Don John knew this, which is why he prepared himself with the weapon of the Rosary before Lepanto. He had complete and joyful faith in Christ.

Here at Gregory the Great Academy, we too experience “battle joy” in our own way. Before every rugby game, we sing and stomp our way through our battle song, “Sheriffmuir” with indescribable excitement, even though we know victory will not come easily. Much like Ivo Taillefer and Don John of Austria, we do not get caught up in the hardships to come, but rather stay focused on the good, true, and beautiful aspects to strive for in each and every moment: bravery, humility, victory—and especially the smile of your friend in the scrum.

— Szymon Figurski, ‘24







**Top left:** The Cochon Cotillion fundraiser in Virginia was a successful hootenanny yet again! Thank you to all who attended and enjoyed our pit-roasted pork, jugglery, and fellowship. **Top right:** Dr. John Rao, former associate professor at St. John's University, lectures to the boys on the Battle of Lepanto and the meaning of crusadership. **Bottom left:** Junior Rafael Lopez helps build an athletic supplies shed with his classmates in the carpentry guild. **Bottom right:** Our Students were blessed to attend the Three Hearts Pilgrimage to Clear Creek Abbey in Oklahoma. They sang the Pontifical Mass celebrated by His Eminence Raymond Cardinal Burke and also met with the Right Reverend Abbot Philip Anderson. Our thanks to the generous benefactors who made their pilgrimage possible.

**During This Time of Remembering the Faithful Departed, don't forget to prepare for your own passing with My Catholic Will... for free.**



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— Scott Hahn



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