

Ab AUSTRo

Newsletter of Notre Dame Priory

Christmas Edition 2019

No. 31

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Priory update

Dear Friends,

Merry Christmas!

In this Christmas joy, we have some wonderful news to share. First of all, our community retreat was held from 14 to 21 November under the direction of Fr Michael Bozell from the Abbey St Pierre of Solesmes, France. Fr Bozell spoke to us eloquently of the religious life as keeping our eyes focused on Christ, with beautiful meditations on the Our Father and the Beatitudes. Father's presence from the motherhouse of the Solesmes congregation, with its 1,000 year history, was a great incentive to our community, as he was able to witness to the authenticity of the Benedictine life lived here in Tasmania. Thank you, Father, for coming to the peripheries of the world—we hope you can return some day!



On 7 December, we welcomed a new postulant in the person of Tim Garvey. Originally from WA, Tim worked as a lawyer in Melbourne. We also had the pleasure of meeting his parents, who came to spend a couple of days in late November.

At the end of November we launched “Project Jerusalem”, which includes the second and third stages of our settling into Jerusalem Estate. Its principal goal is to raise enough money to pay off our mortgage on

the Estate and thereafter to build a full monastery on a scenic location of the property. We are off to a good start, as of this writing, 29 hectares have been provided for. Of course, many more are needed. God bless you for thinking of the monks. For more information, see www.notredamemonastery.org/jerusalem.



As regards our provisional installation at Jerusalem Estate, the progress is good. Our building surveyor has finished all the plans for the local council and, at the moment, building permits are pending. We already have planning approval, which means that as soon as we receive permits, we will be able to commence construction of the monks' cells. As for the move and installation of the chapel from up north, the parts arrived on the vigil of Our Lady's Immaculate Conception and are awaiting final approvals before they take up their definitive position. We are very much looking forward to this, as it will allow us to have a more dignified space for the celebration of the Divine Office. Our gratitude goes to His Grace Archbishop Porteous for making this edifice available to us. We would also like to say a big “Thank you” to the two benefactors who financed the move: C.F. from VIC, Australia and J.M. from AZ, USA. God bless you for your kindness and to all the others who have made this possible.

Brother Chronicler





In the school of St Benedict

Christmas is the celebration of the Incarnation of the Son of God, Jesus Christ. It is a good time to reflect upon the role this saving event played in the creation of monastic life. Indeed, without the Incarnation monasteries would not exist. It is the Incarnation that was the pivotal moment in history when men and women began to be attracted to the consecrated life, to live vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, giving up all the world has to offer. The desire to live as Christ lived, in poverty, chastity and obedience, is where it all started.

The Incarnate Saviour gave up worldly possessions to such an extent that He could say: *The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head* (Mt 8:20). Since then, countless men and women, making themselves “strangers to the ways of the world” (Rule, ch. 4), have given up their possessions to free their minds and hearts for the Kingdom of God.

Jesus, who was a true man, did not take a wife. He could have. He did not. That is the reality. Since then, innumerable religious, “preferring nothing to the love of Christ” and “loving chastity” (Rule, ch. 4), have renounced the strongest of human desires, that of procreating children and founding a family, for the Kingdom of Heaven.

Christ did not do His own will. He was even able to say: *My food is to do the will of Him that sent me* (Jn 4:34). He accepted obedience unto death. Since then, untold souls, who “hold nothing dearer to them than Christ,” (Rule, ch. 72) have accepted to “walk by another’s judgement and orders, and desire to have an abbot over them” (Rule, ch. 5).

So we can certainly affirm that had it not been for the Incarnation, there never would have been monasteries. In this sense, Christmas is the foundational feast of every monastery. When we approach the poor crib of the Infant God, and see Him embracing the Father’s will without reserve, surrounded by the most pure Virgin and her most chaste spouse, let us thank Him for the example which He has given us, and for the precious gift of consecrated life which has been a saving force for the world. St Teresa of Avila is quoted to have said, “Woe to the world if there were no monasteries.” How true that is. From so many hearts He is excluded. All nations have more or less denied Him publicly; to monasteries Jesus can go to find solace and refuge. Filth and crime invade our homes and our cities; in monasteries He finds flowers of purity and virtue. Insolence, arrogance and pride reign in the public

sphere; in monasteries one can still find meek and humble souls who give joy to His Heart.

The Incarnation was the pivotal moment in history when men and women began to be attracted to the consecrated life

This Christmas, let us give thanks for the gift of the religious life; let us promote vocations and pray for families to be blessed with them; and let us be mindful that it all began there, on that Holy Night of our dear Saviour’s birth.



Br Paphnutius discovers the liturgy

Our novice is still discovering the exciting office of Matins. Having recited Psalm 3, the community now turns again towards the altar for the Invitatorium, a short verse, varying according to the day and the liturgical season, which accompanies Psalm 94, the psalm of invitation to praise par excellence. Most of the Invitatoria are structured in like manner: a revealed truth is announced, or the name of God or His grandeur is proclaimed, and then, in response to it, the invitation to adore resounds. One of the best known is that of Christmas.

Christus natus est nobis, venite adoremus. So sings the Church on that holy night of Christ's birth. Christ is born to us, come let us adore. With all its conciseness, this verse expresses the entire mystery. Christ is born! The Son of God in the flesh has come down to Earth. *Verbum caro factum est.* He who is God before all ages in the bosom of the Father, is now born on earth of the Virgin Mother. But that little word "nobis" is so important here. Christ has come for us! He did not become incarnate to save the angels. He came for us men and our salvation (*propter nos homines et propter nostram salutem*), as we say in the Nicene Creed. If it is becoming to recite it every day, Psalm 94 takes on special significance on this feast as we make our way to Bethlehem:

Come let us praise the Lord with joy: let us joyfully sing to God our Saviour. Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving; and make a joyful noise to Him with psalms. For the Lord is a great God, and a great King above all gods. For in His hand are all the ends of the earth: and the heights of the mountains are His. For the sea is His, and He made it: and His hands formed the dry land. Come let us adore and fall down: and weep before the Lord that made us. For He is the Lord our God: and we are the people of His pasture and the sheep of His hand.

At the words "Come, let us adore," the whole choir of monks kneels and bows low before the sovereign Majesty of God, adoring Him in the name of all humanity, offering Him praise and thanksgiving, even

for those who are far from Him or who never think of doing so themselves. While most are still asleep, the monks, the guardians of the city, wish to offer to Our Lord the adoration He seeks. During Christmastide, it is truly sweet to unite this public act of adoration with that of the shepherds and the Magi who were the first to be admitted before the crib. *Christus natus est nobis, venite adoremus.*



The psalm then goes on with stern reminders that Almighty God is not only to be worshipped. He is also to be obeyed and served. His voice indeed rings out to us and calls us to repentance. *Today if you shall hear His voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, according to the day of temptation in the wilderness, where your fathers tempted me, they proved me, and saw my works. Forty years long was I offended with that generation, and I said: These always err in heart. And these men have not known my ways: so I swore in my wrath that they shall not enter into my rest.*

Let us then come before the Lord each morning, adore Him, thank Him for bringing us to another day, and consoling Him for all those who fail to acknowledge Him. At the same time, our hearts go out to them and seek to find ways of bringing them into the fold, so that they too may become the people of His pasture and the sheep of His hand.

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JESUS MARIA JOSEPH

I am come to cast fire on the earth,
and what will I, but that it be kindled?

Lk 12:49

The Spiritual Exercises give us some profound insights into the mystery of Christmas with two well-known contemplations on the Incarnation and the Nativity. In the first, St Ignatius has us take a look at the sad plight of humanity before God sent a Saviour. It is a dismal sight still evident today wherever the Gospel of Our Lord has not yet penetrated or wherever apostasy has led from the light of the truth: violence, injustice, slander, cruelty, anarchy, impurity, unnatural vice, murder, hell... Without God's loving and merciful intervention, we would have ALL been lost, without exception. It is what St Augustine referred to as the "massa damnata", the whole mass of the human race left to its sins and lost forever in hell.

But God did not leave things that way. He looked down with compassion on our first parents, and through them, on each of us. He saw each of us, and decided that He would offer salvation. And so the Archangel Gabriel is sent to a young virgin of the town of Nazareth in Galilee. The event takes place in a hidden room of an obscure house in this town of little significance. God's ways are not our ways. His plan of salvation often goes against our better judgment. We think we know what needs to be done and how and when and where. But the wisdom of man is foolishness for God.



Mary on the other hand knows that God has not abandoned His people, and she knows that His plan is always the best. And so, when the Archangel relays God's proposal to her – will she accept to be the Mother of God? – her reply has already been given: "I am but the handmaid of the Lord, I am here only to do His will, He may do with me as He pleases." Her *fiat* is and ever will be the model of every truly Christian soul faced with the revelation of God's plans. All He need do is show me, and I am ready to go wherever and do whatever He may decide.

Nine months later, God's entrance into the world matched His entrance into the virginal womb. It was tucked away in an obscure little town of Judea, in the middle of the night, with no witnesses other than the Virgin Mother herself and St Joseph. He was not even born in a house. No one had room for the Son of God! "He came unto His own, and His own received Him not" (Jn 1:11).

This story we are familiar with for having heard it many times. Was it an accident, a fortuitous event that somehow escaped the scope of Divine Providence? St Ignatius invites us to consider the Holy Family "making the journey and labouring that Our Lord might be born in extreme poverty, and that after many labours, after hunger, thirst, heat, and cold, after insults and outrages, He might die on the cross, and all this for me" (SE 116). In other words, far from being an accident, all this was the will of the Saviour. He wanted to be born in wretched destitution. He wanted to take the last place, and to hold it so tightly that no one can ever wrest it from Him. The mention of the cross reminds us, to borrow the words of the Imitation of Christ, that "the entire life of Christ was a cross and a martyrdom" from beginning to end.

The question that is put to us, then, a question we cannot elude, is this: Who is right? Jesus, the Son of God? Or might it be I, with my short-sightedness? If I come to the conclusion – as I should – that it must be Jesus, then what am I going to do about it? How can I be more like Jesus? Indeed, if I am not like Jesus in some significant way now, how is He going to recognise me for one of His on the last day? May the coming year help us to progress in finding the right answers to these all-important questions.

A truly Blessed Christmas to all!

