

Ab AUSTRo

Newsletter of
Notre Dame Priory

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Clothing of Br Francisco & retreats in NSW



The year got off to a great start with the clothing of our first Western Australian. Br Francisco Maria De Brito was surrounded by his parents, two sisters as well as a niece and nephews who all made the long crossing to witness the event. Fr Michael Rowe, longtime friend of the new novice, also joined us for the clothing which took place after Vespers on the solemn feast of the Epiphany. Br Francisco is placed under the heavenly patronage of St Francisco Marto, the young seer of Fatima. Brother's Portuguese ancestry (both his parents were born there) and his devotion to Our Lady of Fatima made the choice of the eleven year old saint quite appropriate. We wish Br Francisco all the best as he becomes our first lay brother novice.

At the end of the same week, Saturday within the octave of the Epiphany, the Priory celebrated its patronal feast for the second time since foundation. We were again blessed to use the same provisionally approved office for Our Lady of Cana.



January has come to be known as the month of the summer retreats. On the 16th, four of us made our way to Hartzler Park Retreat Centre in Burradoo NSW. This time around, it was "Ladies first" with a three-day session from 16 to 19 January which was attended by 43 women. Two days later began a five-day session for a group of 33 men. Fr John de Britto, who came from France as usual to help Fr Prior conduct these retreats, has since joined us at the Priory to give classes during the first two weeks of February.



In between the two retreats, we paid a visit to the Benedictine Nuns at Jamberoo Abbey. We had announced our visit, and were expected by the entire community providing tea and delicious homemade biscuits. It was a delightful time which allowed us to get to know a bit more about each other's respective communities.



Brother Chronicler

QUODCUMQUE DIXERIT VOBIS FACITE





JESUS MARIA JOSEPH

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

Lk 12:49

*Homily of Father Prior at the Clothing of
Brother Francisco Mary (Israel De Brito)*

Dear Brother,

Some years ago now, like the Magi, you saw a star and you have come to worship and offer gifts to the Lord. You heard what you perceived to be a call from the Lord Christ, the Infant God, and, after searching in other parts, you set out on this arduous path that led you from Western Australia here to Tasmania. You arrived over nine months ago to test your vocation, and after a number of difficulties, you have asked to be clothed with the habit of St Benedict and begin your formal time as a novice lay brother.

This feast is certainly an auspicious one on which to be clothed with the habit. The star evokes the call to religious life. It is often seen at first from a great distance. A journey is required before one can reach the longed-for goal, and many perils and obstacles lie in the way. Let's enumerate some of them.

There is first and foremost the difficulty involved in seeing the star. This requires effort, for only those see the stars who are prepared to sacrifice of their sleep to go out into the night and look up. Each night God deploys before the eyes of humanity the marvels of His creation, but most people prefer the comfort of their worldly pleasures, and they never rise to the task of lifting up their minds and hearts to eternity. They do not even see the star.

Second, there is the reading of the sign, for the star is only a sign – its meaning is not self-evident. The Magi saw the star, they observed it, they studied the Scriptures to know what it meant, and they came to the conclusion that if God was sending His anointed one to us and showing us the path to get there, then we must go to meet Him right there where He is revealing Himself. They do not calculate the time and expense involved – it probably took a few months and cost them a fortune –, they leave behind families and friends and set out on a journey they know will bring much fatigue. So many refuse the time and effort involved in seeking God like the Magi, and so they never find Him.

Third, the journey itself is long and is sown with dangers: the path has to be discovered, wrong paths

avoided, obstacles overcome, precautions must be taken to assure success. Legions of souls, filled with good desires, never follow through with them because of the effort involved.

Fourth, the Magi know that this journey will lead them to a foreign country. Coming to Judea at a time when the local king was not a Jew was not without peril. It demanded courage. How many fail to heed God's call for fear of what men might say or do to them.

Fifth, when the Magi arrive in Jerusalem, they are subjected to a terrible trial of faith: the beloved star vanishes, leaving them without a guide, wide open to the temptation to think that it was all an illusion. But in that circumstance, they take the means at their disposal: they go and ask the legitimate authority what to do. And God, who blesses humble obedience, provides them with the exact answer they need. So many accept to follow God and obey as long as they can see and understand. If they find themselves in the dark and cannot read events for themselves, they abandon everything and run away.

Finally, as the Magi leave the trouble of Jerusalem, the star reappears and their hearts overflow with ineffable joy. But this is only the prelude to greater joys to come. For when they adore the Divine Babe, we can be sure that He, from His tiny Divine Heart, poured forth into theirs a bliss that only those can know who have experienced it. It is something like what the psalmist referred to when he said: "Thou hast made known to me the ways of life, Thou shalt fill me with joy with Thy countenance: at Thy right hand are delights even to the end" (Ps 15:11).

As we contemplate this mystery, a few saints come to mind. There is first of all the Poverello of Assisi, the great St Francis, to whom we owe the tradition of the holy crib in our churches. St Francis' love for nature and his capacity to see God in nature should inspire you in your life as a lay brother. Or again, St Anthony of Padua, a native of Portugal, who was gratified with visions of the Infant Jesus, in reward for his angelic purity. Closer to us, we can consider that God, who became a child, prefers to manifest Himself to children. He did so in particular in Fatima (again Portugal), where Saints Francisco and Jacinta along with their cousin Sr Lucia were

privileged to behold the Mother of God in glory. Lucia would write: "Our Lady opened her hands for the first time, communicating to us a light so intense that, as it streamed from her hands, its rays penetrated our hearts and the innermost depths of our soul, making us see ourselves in God, who was that light, more clearly than we see ourselves in the best of mirrors." Francisco would later say, referring to the immense joy he experienced in this encounter: "I loved seeing the Angel, but I loved still more seeing Our Lady. What I loved most of all was to see Our Lord in that light from Our Lady which penetrated our hearts. I love God so much! But He is very sad because of so many sins! We must never commit any sins again." That little boy, at such a tender age, understood the superiority of the contemplative experience, and for the rest of his short life he would be entirely intent on what God wanted him to become.

Coming back to the Magi, after paying their respects to the newborn king, they disappear from Sacred Writ, no more mention is made of them. They take back with them the sweetness of the experience, but they retain it in their hearts to contemplate and adore. Francisco and Jacinta

Marto, after having been gratified with the vision of glory made manifest in Mary Immaculate, disappear from this world, going to contemplate the Light of God in its very source in Heaven. In the same way, a contemplative soul receives God's grace as a lover's secret; he bears it in his heart, where the Word of God hollows out in him an abyss of silence, leading evermore to intense communion, prelude to eternal life.

Such is my wish for you on this day, my son, that you may ever seek the countenance of the Living God and come to experience more and more the sweetness of the Divine visit. But remember that, like the Magi, you are on a journey, you have not arrived at the goal. This is just the beginning, and many trials lie before you, up hills, down valleys, over crag and torrent. May the kindly light guide your every step and lead you to the longed for vision of His glory.

Fr Pius Mary Noonan, O.S.B



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Update from the Priory

Beloved Friends,

Alongside the joys of this month's clothing (Br Francisco) and the two big retreats that were visibly supported by a great deal of prayer, there has been considerable progress at Jerusalem Estate. We have finally received results from the soil tests for the church site which have made it possible to finalise the application to the council. Also, the installation of the waste water plant is now imminent. In addition, the brothers have been able to put on the new cladding of Bethany, our future guest house, and continue the re-plastering and repainting of the Old House (this is the way we now refer to the 19th century sandstone edifice on the property). But the big job of the last couple weeks has been the concrete slabs for future workshops. On 25 and 29 January, we had a team of professional concreters come to complete a job that had been prepared by the brothers.



But manual work is not the only kind of work the brothers have been involved in of late. The week after Epiphany saw our first session of philosophy for the three junior monks. Dr. Andrew Wood spent a full week with us, giving 3 to 4 hours daily of intense classes, starting with an introduction to philosophy. Andrew's knowledge of and veneration for the late Dr Austin Woodbury was all too evident for the brothers, who thoroughly enjoyed the session, even if it did leave them a bit exhausted – whence the need for a bit of concrete hockey!



An event Brother Chronieler failed to inform you of took place when the brothers and I drove back to Tasmania after the retreats. One of the stops was in Albury where I was asked to offer a solemn High Mass at St Patrick's Church. We were all very much impressed by the Latin Mass community there and wish them all the best.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to all those who make the retreats possible. Each session leaves me astounded at the beautiful work of grace in souls, and it gives me more incentive to pursue this divine work. Certainly, there is something exciting about starting a monastery and building a new edifice to the glory of God. But there is something even more exciting about leading souls along the paths of conversion and the conquest of sanctity, opening up for them unforeseen and undreamed of vistas.



And so, I ask you to pray for the continued success and spread of the retreat apostolate. We have six more organised this year: 2 in Victoria, 2 more in NSW and 2 in Ohio, USA. All details can be found on our website "Retreats" button. Finally, I invite you to consider if you yourself might not be in need of a retreat. It could be considered a luxury in a world in which it is sometimes hard to make ends meet. But it is a luxury one cannot do without.

May Mary Immaculate bless you in abundance,

Father Prior

To get an idea of the costs involved in our move, please visit: <https://www.notredamemonastery.org/jc-wishlist/>

