

Ab Austro

Newsletter of Notre Dame Priory

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Priory update

Dear Friends,

Hardly had the festivities surrounding the blessing of Immaculate Conception Church on the feast of the Annunciation been completed, the community passed without transition into Holy Week. The ceremonies were memorable, it being the first time since the foundation that we did not have to drive to St Patrick's Colebrook twice each day. Immaculate Conception proved to be a charming and most fitting place for the ceremonies of the Great Week. What we did not expect however was the exceptionally warm weather, especially on Holy Saturday, so warm that there was pressure (from whom we won't say!) on Father Prior to turn on the AC. We are proud to announce that the pressure was resisted. Consequently we all sat through the long Easter vigil, aspiring towards the refreshing breeze of the Holy Spirit – but knowing full well that this will probably never happen again in our lifetime!

Earlier that week, Fr Prior attended the customary day retreat for priests in Hobart. Holy Tuesday (also known as Temple Tuesday) has long been a day on which all the priests of the archdiocese gather for the annual Chrism Mass, all the while recollecting themselves, listening to spiritual talks by one of the priests. This year, the speaker was Fr Prior. He gave two talks, one on the sufferings of Christ, the other on the role of Mary in the Redemption. Fr Prior returned to the cathedral the following week in company with Br Gregory, on Easter Friday, for the ordination of Tasmania's newest priest, Fr Jessie Banez, originally from the Philippines.

On Easter Tuesday we all got away to Cape Raoul on the Tasman peninsula. The splendid weather made it an unforgettable day. The rest of the Easter Octave was marked by preparations for the Victorian retreats. Last year's sessions having been cancelled, the event was all the more longed for. The new venue (our third new retreat venue for this year) is located at Don Bosco Retreat Centre in Lysterfield, an eastern



suburb of Melbourne, run by the Salesian Fathers. Fr Prior and Br Joseph left the Priory early on Low Sunday, and spent some time at the Parish of St John Henry Newman in Caulfield before making their way to the centre. As was to be expected, the Enemy came through with his usual antics. That very day, a long power outage at the retreat centre made it impossible for the staff to clean up after another group had left, so cleaning had to wait till the next day. The general appraisal of Don Bosco was excellent, the dominant quality being the cordiality and homeliness of the place, no doubt due to the Salesian influence. It is remarkable that, even though it so close to Melbourne, it is so deeply peaceful, tucked away in a gorgeous countryside. 17 men joined the retreat that first evening for the five-day exercises and 30 women were able to attend a three-day retreat starting the following Sunday. In between the two, Fr Prior and Br Joseph had a break with the Dominican Fathers in Camberwell where they were welcomed with fraternal warmth. Next retreats are in Galong, NSW between 28 June and 8 July. There are still places available, so now's the time to book in!

Brother Chronicer

QUODCUMQUE DIXERIT VOBIS FACITE





In the school of St Benedict

(Chapter One, On the Kinds of Monks, 1-5)

There are evidently four kinds of monks. The first are the Cenobites, that is, those who live in monasteries, serving under a Rule and an Abbot. The second are the Anchorites or Hermits, that is those who, not in the first fervour of their religious life, but after long probation in a monastery, having learnt in association with many brethren how to fight against the devil, go out well-armed from the ranks of the community to the solitary combat of the desert. They are able now to live without the help of others, and by their own strength and God's assistance to fight against the temptations of mind and body.

After having meditated upon the prologue of the Rule over the past several months, today we open the first chapter. St Benedict here describes the various kinds of monks, and even though the text is principally for the monks themselves, there are many gems that will bring light and instruction to people in all walks of life. The mention of the cenobites is brief because the rest of the Rule is concerned with them. In this chapter, he distinguishes three other kinds of monks, one of them good, the two others bad.

Anchorites or Hermits have never been lacking in the Church. Even today, one can encounter them. Sometimes they live on their own with a Rule of Life approved by their bishop. One finds a similar situation with women who live in the world as consecrated virgins. There are also hermits who live near the monastery they belong to, and these fit exactly St Benedict's description.

They are not young, nor in the initial enthusiastic period of their life in the Lord. On the contrary, they first lived for a long time in community. St Benedict's experience had shown him the dangers of becoming a hermit without the training of community life. He himself, very young, had passed through such an experience unscathed, and yet he had almost fallen. It was a close call, and where he succeeded, others can easily fail. What's more, he had no doubt met other hermits who simply did not correspond with the ideal of a holy life which they professed. On your own, it is so easy to slip into all sorts of imperfections and vices. This is why St Benedict demands a long trial in the monastery before being accepted as a candidate for the hermitical life.

The ultimate reason for which St Benedict will not allow a novice monk to be a hermit is that the desert

is the battleground of a virtuous life, and the Enemy of our souls wages war against anyone who seeks to progress in the ways of God. Within the ranks of a monastery, one has the help of brothers, and the guidance of elders. If one falls, there is someone to lift you up and help you get back on your feet. There is a story told by one of the desert fathers about a young hermit who had consented to a grievous sin in his cell. Pushed by despair he decided to return to the world and leave behind any attempt at becoming holy. A saintly elder, inspired by God, met him on the path and simply said to him: "Never despair of God's mercy". This word, which we will see is the culminating instrument of good works in chapter 4, saved the young man. He went back to his cell and persevered. But if the elder had not been there, he would have been lost. In truth, the lesson had already been taught by the Wise Man: *It is better that two should be together than one: for they have the advantage of their society. If one fall he shall be supported by the other: woe to him that is alone, for when he falleth, he hath none to lift him up* (Ecc 4:9-10).

It's also interesting to note St Benedict's use of military language: *bene extructi fraterna ex acie – well armed in the ranks of the community*, is an expression that could have been taken straight from the military commander's instruction manual. When the soldiers stand together in array, they are strong. If anyone breaks ranks, he by the very fact becomes feeble, and an easy target for the enemy.

The great lesson here for everyone, whatever our state of life, is that no man is an island, no man suffices to himself. We are all weak, we all need the help of others, we all need the light and guidance of elders. This is so true that as soon as someone says that he knows better than anyone else, we can be certain that he has gone off the track, or will shortly, for pride comes before a fall (cf Proverbs 16:18). On the other hand, there is security and force in numbers. The book of Proverbs says as much: *A brother that is helped by his brother is like a strong city* (Pr 18:19).

It, of course, demands humility to submit oneself to the judgment of others and to live in community where one's faults and weaknesses are known to everyone. But it is the only way not to be led astray. *Nemo iudex in causa sua – no man is a good judge in his own case.*

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Br Paphnutius discovers the liturgy

The night office of Matins and the dawn office of Lauds are not the only morning prayers of the monks. Br Paphnutius is more and more intrigued by the hour of Prime. This office, which is said at the end of the grand silence and which opens the day's work, is conceived as a pendant to Compline in the evening. Just as the major evening office of Vespers is completed by Compline which asks God's blessing over the night, so the morning office of Lauds is completed by Prime which asks His blessing over the day's activities. After Prime, the monastic beehive once again starts to hum.

The psalms of this office are not specifically chosen. Rather, they are taken in order from the psalter, starting from Psalm 1. It may seem curious that the very beginning of the psalter is found at the office of Prime on Monday. In the Roman Liturgy, the psalter begins at Sunday Matins, and in the monastic office we still have a remnant of this at Easter Sunday Matins. St Benedict starts Sunday Matins with Psalm 20. Why does he have the Psalter commence on Monday at Prime? One theory is that he is still very much in the tradition of the desert Fathers whom he seeks to emulate as much as possible. We are told that they prayed the entire psalter each night, ending with the Laudate psalms of Lauds (Psalms 148-150). The next office then would of course be Prime, and so back to the start of the Psalter. But perhaps we could venture another reason: beginning the psalter on Monday at Prime, that is to say at the beginning of the work week, also creates the atmosphere for that work: the monk should live out his daily labour in the spirit of the psalms, all the while praying them in his heart in the midst of his occupations. In this way, not only are his nights accompanied by the recitation of the Psalter, but also his days.

This point is stressed even more by the fact that Prime is followed by the daily community gather-

ing in Chapter. Departing from choir at the end of the office, the brothers process to the Chapter Room while singing the *De Profundis* for all deceased brethren, relatives and benefactors. The Martyrology for the next day is then read, the prayers for the day's work, and finally the daily passage from the Rule, on which Father Prior gives a short commentary before handing on any particular instructions for the day.

Like the other day hours, Prime always begins with the same hymn, *Iam lucis orto sidere*, in which we ask for all the graces needed for a fruitful day: to guard our tongues from falsehood, our hearts from anger, our eyes from vanity; to keep our conscience pure, our souls from folly, our senses from pride and sensuality. In this way, we will be kept unstained for our evening repose and will take our rest in the peace of God Himself.



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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

Ignatian retreats always conclude with a contemplation of the Resurrection of Our Lord. In so doing, one reflects upon the special grace which is attached to this saving event, that of joy. St Ignatius says that it is proper to ask for the grace “to be glad and rejoice intensely because of the great joy and glory of Christ Our Lord”. Joy has always been associated with the Resurrection. So what is joy?

It is both a passion and a fruit of the Holy Spirit. As a passion, it is caused by the possession of a good that one has desired, and from this perspective, anything that we obtain after having longed for it causes some joy. But this passion of joy is short-lived and can be very superficial. Indeed, people sometimes rejoice in things that are bad for them, because they seem good. Later, and sometimes very promptly, they regret them and feel sadness.

As a fruit of the Holy Spirit joy is caused by the possession of Truth and True Love, and the highest motive for such joy is the experience of the glory of our Risen Saviour. Indeed, when we contemplate the glory of Our Lord, when we know from faith that the One who is truth and whom we truly love is henceforth beyond all suffering, that He can no longer die, and that He is calling us to share in that bliss, our hearts should be filled with abundant joy which is oblivious of whatever trials we may be suffering at the moment. Contrary to the first scenario of the sinner who rejoices in his sin, only to feel bitterness of soul later, the joy of the Resurrection can coincide with personal suffering, for the very simple reason that it is at an entirely new and deeper level. St Paul gives us an example of such joy when he writes: “I exceedingly abound with joy in all our tribulation” (2 Cor 7:4).

This is all the more important when we consider, with St Francis of Assisi, that “The devil is delighted when he is able to take away spiritual joy from the servants

of God”. Why might that be? Simply because if they have no spiritual joy, he will have an easier time enticing them with vain and worldly ones which lead to death and hell.

Joy is also one of the most essential prerequisites for an effective apostolate. When we speak of the Lord and our hope for eternal life, if we are not animated by joy that is visibly sincere, we are not likely to arouse enthusiasm: *Gaudium Domini est fortitudo nostra – the joy of the Lord is our strength* (Nehemias 8:10).

