

Ab Austro

Newsletter of Notre Dame Priory

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Priory update

Good news: Hardwick House has ceased to be a freezer! The installation of a wood stove for the feast of St Benedict in the main room of the nearly two century old stone edifice has made all the difference in the world. Thanks to Br Joseph who keeps an eye on the supply of firewood, the entire building is now kept warm (even though Fr Prior contends that the heat has a hard time reaching his office on the first floor – but no worries, Father assures us that it never gets cold in Tasmania!).

More good news: all the monks, except for Fr Prior, have moved into their new cabins! Br Bede's cabin, donated by Maryann Howard, is dedicated to Our Lady of Perpetual Help; Br Francisco's, donated by Suzanne Seipel Smith, is dedicated to St Anne; Br Patrick's, donated by Charlie and Coney Lau, is dedicated to St Michael; Celyn Scott's, donated by Klarika Vargo, is dedicated to St Therese of Lisieux. The remaining cabins that have yet to receive monks have been donated by Charlie Mihialak in honour of St Lucy and in memory of his mother Kathryn; Joseph Mittel in honour of St Rose of Lima; Beth Larkin Wells Family in honour of St Thomas More; Sylvia Denetto in honour of St Pio of Pietrecina; Gil and Emily Wright in honour of St John Paul II; Christine Fry in honour of St Maximilian Kolbe; Craig Pastrone Family in honour of St Anthony of Padua; Alicja and Charles Abela in honour of St Faustina Kowalska; Charles and Colette Assaf in honour of St Charbel Makhlof; Duane and Sandy Denetto in honour of Venerable Eileen O'Connor; John Casey in honour of St Mary of the Cross. In addition, Maureen Luce has donated for Fr Prior's future office in honour of St Rita of Cascia and Rebecca Turbok Platz towards the printing workshop in honour of St Gregory the Great. We are most grateful to all these dear friends and ask St Joseph to bless them abundantly.

Another recent development: the new cabins have freed up the use of two demountables, one of which has been repurposed as the new confessional room



next to Immaculate Conception Church. The move was made possible thanks to our "new" Komatsu Pozidrive.

On the retreat front, lockdowns sadly forced the cancellation of those programmed in Galong NSW, but the vocational retreat was held as planned here at the Priory from 10 to 17 July. A few candidates were prevented from coming due to travel restrictions, but we still had six young men who followed conferences by Fr Prior and one by Br Bede on the liturgy, as well as a session on Gregorian chant with Br Antony. The retreatants also had a good share of manual work each day with the community. Please keep them in your prayers as they discern the Lord's will.

Finally, Jerusalem Estate was blessed by the week-long presence at the guest house of the Sisters of the Immaculata who were making their annual retreat. This retreat concluded on the feast of Saints Joachim and Anne with a fraternal gathering of the two communities, reminiscent of St Benedict's visit with his sister St Scholastica.

Brother Chronicer

QUODCUMQUE DIXERIT VOBIS FACITE





In the school of St Benedict

(Chapter Two, What Kind of Man the Abbot Should Be, 1-3)

An abbot who is worthy to rule a monastery should always remember what he is called and realise in his actions the name of a superior. For he is believed to be the representative of Christ in the monastery, and for that reason is called by a name of his, according to the words of the Apostle: Ye have received the spirit of the adoption of sons, whereby we cry Abba, Father.

Today we begin the second chapter of the Rule wherein St Benedict shares his idea of what kind of man he is looking for in an abbot, or superior of a monastic community (young or small monasteries do not usually have an abbot, but a prior who has the same functions and authority as an abbot). At the beginning of the chapter, two overarching principles are laid down: First of all, the abbot takes the place of Christ – the Latin text reads *Vices Christi*, literally meaning that he is “vicar of Christ” in the monastery. The second flows from the first: since the abbot takes the place of Christ, he must be like Christ for his flock. Interestingly, the title he gives to Christ is a rare one, that of Father. We often think of Christ as God and as our brother in humanity, but we rarely think of Him as Father. But of course, He truly is our Father, as He Himself makes it clear when He tells the apostles: “I will not leave you orphans” (Jn 14:18). We shall see in subsequent instalments the practical consequences of this paternity of the abbot, but for the moment, let’s pause to consider the virtues that any father must have, and this will prepare us to study the doctrine of the patriarch of monks.

To become a father a man must beget a child, but first he must commit himself to a stable communion of life with a spouse. To beget is to exercise responsibly the capacity a man has to become a father. That means not only being conscious of the incredible potential involved in it, but also not being afraid, when the time has come, to bring children into the world. Begetting is only the very first step to being a father. The father must be a strong support to the mother, and rear the child with firmness; he sets the limits and imposes barriers; he incarnates the law, giving structure and backbone to his children so that they learn what it means to become fully human and be a fruitful part of society.

Being a father means being there at every level of the education of the child, sometimes punishing for misdeeds, at other times rewarding for virtuous

actions and progress. It means taking part in the growing pains, giving reassurance in times of trial, showing in his own person the goal to be reached. It means ultimately teaching how to become an

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adult and take one’s responsibilities, and this entails finally stepping back so that the child can step into his or her own personality and blossom in a unique way, stamped by family traits, but distinguished by personal talents. A lot is demanded of a father, and it is all the more difficult when we consider that most children have not a clue as to how much a burden weighs on the shoulders of the man they call Papa. Only later, much later, will they realise this and, hopefully, show gratitude.

All this is true also, but in a different way, of spiritual paternity. Being the father of a monastery means being a father as Christ was father, and Christ’s paternity exercised itself in the most eminent way by offering His life for His bride, the Church. And so, the abbot must be prepared to sacrifice himself entirely for the sons whom he begets to the life of grace in the monastery and whom he leads in the ways of perfection. We will see in the coming months exactly how he is to do that.



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Br Paphnutius discovers the liturgy

With the arrival of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, the monastic day reaches its climax. The Mass is truly the sun around which gravitate the other hours of the Divine Office. The Mass is the heart of the monastic day for two very important but distinct reasons. First of all, thanks to the astounding miracle of transubstantiation, there is the real presence of Jesus, His Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity, under the Eucharistic species. Secondly, the Mass is the sacrifice of the New Covenant, in which the Son of God incarnate, Jesus Christ, renews on the altar the very same sacrifice he offered to the Eternal Father on the Cross. This stupendous miracle of grace, an “invention” of the Heart of Our Lord, allows every succeeding generation, and each individual soul, the opportunity to be present on Calvary as the Son of God pours out His Blood for us. When we go to Mass, we are going to Calvary. The mode of offering differs: on Calvary the Lord suffered and died; on the altar He cannot suffer and die, but He does offer His suffering and death once again to the Father by means of the mystical, sacramental immolation; it is the one sacrifice made present in every age and on every altar.

As he assists at the Sacred Mysteries, a peaceful, reverential fear grows in the mind and heart of Br Paphnutius. When the priest, after the multiple rites of preparation – Confiteor, orations, chants, readings, Gospel, offertory – enters “alone into the Canon” as an ancient liturgical book specifies, he sees an eloquent image of the Lord Jesus entering alone into the Holy of Holies and offering the only sacrifice that pleases God the Father, that of His own sacred Body and Blood, poured out for the sins of the world.

This awesome mystery accomplished on the altar in the deepest silence leads our young monk into the great mystery of self-sacrifice: if Jesus wants us to be present there on Calvary with Him, it is so that we may learn how to offer ourselves in sacrifice at each moment of the day. In this way, when the priest says at the end of Mass: *Ite Missa est*, Br Paphnutius knows he

is being sent out to sacrifice himself and offer his own life for the glory of God and the salvation of souls.



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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

There is an underlying thought that runs throughout the First Week of the Spiritual Exercises, and which is at the very heart of St Ignatius' considerations on the gravity of sin. It is a thought he also mentions later when he invites the retreatant to make before God the choice of a state of life or any other important decision: I will "consider what procedure and norm of action I would wish to have followed in making the present choice if I were at the moment of death. I will guide myself by this and make my decision entirely in conformity with it" (S. E. # 186). In this way, we see that the thought of death plays a double and vital role: it helps us avoid sin, and it strengthens us to bear our cross. As the *Imitation of Christ* tells us: "Keep thyself as a pilgrim and a stranger upon earth to whom the affairs of this world do not in the least belong. Keep thy heart free and raised upwards to God, because thou hast not here a lasting abode. Send thither thy daily prayers, with sighs and tears, that after death thy spirit may be worthy to pass happily to our Lord" (*Imitation of Christ*, B.2, ch. 23).

But this thought also helps us make good choices and to be strong in the face of difficulties. It moves us to relativise the pressure that can sometimes be brought to bear upon us when we seek to do God's will. The perspective of obtaining what will last forever and never fade is a mighty stimulus for building up the kingdom of God. Whereas most people try to avoid the thought of death and even live as if death did not exist – even though there are lots of people dying all around us every day – the truly Christian soul does not turn his gaze from this unavoidable reality. On

the contrary. The only way to live a good life at every moment is to be ready to die at every moment, and the only way to die a good death is to live a good life.

To close with another gem from the *Imitation*: "Son, be not dismayed with the labours which thou hast undertaken for Me, neither let tribulations ever cut thee down; but let My promise strengthen thee, and comfort thee in every event. I am sufficient to reward thee beyond all measure. Thou shalt not labour here long, nor shalt thou be always oppressed with sorrows. Wait a little while and thou shalt see a speedy end of all thy evils" (Book 3, ch. 47).

