

Ab AUSTRo

Newsletter of
Notre Dame Priory

October 2019

No. 30

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Priory update

Dear Friends,

Three years ago this month, Archbishop Porteous invited Father Prior to start a monastic community in Tasmania. We now find ourselves installed on a beautiful property with amazing potential for the future. God has been good to us, and so have you. Thank you for helping us get to where we are.

Father Prior and Br Joseph spent the first half of the month giving our first ever retreats in the USA. 10 men and 13 women took part in the Spiritual Exercises at Maria Stein Spiritual Center in Maria Stein, Ohio, within walking distance of the famous relic chapel established in the 19th century by the Sisters of the Precious Blood. After the retreats, both monks went to Clear Creek Abbey, Fr Prior just for a few days, Br Joseph for three weeks in order to experience life in a large, well-established monastic community.



In the meantime, at home the brethren continued to make Jerusalem Estate a worthy monastic home. We were blessed recently to receive from the Presentation Sisters a great number of items they had used at the retreat centre in Blackmans Bay but which is at present being donated for affordable housing. Many thanks to the Sisters for this generous donation.

In November the community will be entering the second phase of our staged installation in Colebrook.

The first stage consisted of obtaining and settling into Jerusalem Estate. This is now done. The next step is to “claim Jerusalem” by paying off our mortgage and to “build Jerusalem” with complete monastic buildings in a traditional style. We have been talking with planners and architects, so hopefully all this will soon be on the way. You will be receiving more information about this important initiative and ways in which you can help us achieve it.



Setting up a full monastery is no small task. As our Holy Father St Benedict says, they are truly monks who work with the labour of their own hands (Rule, ch. 48), so to support ourselves, we are working on small enterprises for our subsistence. In the coming months we hope to record our first CD of Gregorian Chant; Catholic greeting cards are once again available on our website as is our annual liturgical wall-calendar and the Kitchen Rosary. We are also considering a number of other means of support which demand more investment: printing press, winery, brewery, distillery, livestock, leatherwork... At the moment, our formation as monks is a priority and this takes time. For some of us, this also means studying for the priesthood. For the first several years of each monk's monastic life, he has very little time for productive activities, and so whatever we do as a community will be limited until such a time as some of the young monks are ordained priests or complete their formation as brothers. God bless you for helping us through these early years.

Brother Chronicler

QUODCUMQUE DIXERIT VOBIS FACITE





In the school of St Benedict

Prologue continued, v. 8-13

“Up with us then at last, for the Scripture arouseth us, saying: ‘Now is the hour for us to rise from sleep.’ Let us open our eyes to the divine light, and let us hear with attentive ears the warning that the divine voice crieth daily to us: ‘Today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts.’ And again: ‘He that hath ears to hear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches.’ And what doth he say? ‘Come, ye children, hearken unto me: I will teach you the fear of the Lord.’ ‘Run while ye have the light of life,’ lest the darkness of death overtake you.”

Like a man who is asleep, we often go through life oblivious of the eternal realities. We slumber in worldliness and vice and need a wakeup call. “Now is the hour for us to rise from sleep”. This text is the one that finally got St Augustine to leave behind his life of sin. Before, he had prayed: “Lord, make me chaste, but not quite yet”. After battling against God’s grace he finally realised that he could not put off turning to the Lord. Now is the acceptable time, now is the day of salvation. We must not put off our conversion to tomorrow, because we know not if we will have a tomorrow. Many of the saints had some very harsh words for those who go on sinning, putting off their conversion till an uncertain tomorrow. Do not arouse the wrath of God, whom you mock by putting off your turning away from sin. Do not put off till tomorrow what you can do right now. Conversion and sanctity are always about the present moment, in which it is always given to us to make the right choices and follow through with them by the grace of God.

Once we have accepted God’s grace and seek to rise from the sleep of sin, then we open our eyes to the divine light, that eternal light which has shone through the darkness of the world. In the Latin text of the Rule, it is not just a divine light, but a deifying light – *deificum lumen* – literally, a light that divinises, that makes us like God. When God gives us light, it is not only to show us His will or give a direction to our life. When God’s light shines upon us, it is to make us like Himself. We become light in the Lord, as St Paul writes: “For you were heretofore darkness, but now light in the Lord. Walk then as children of the light. For the fruit of the light is in all goodness and justice and truth” (Eph 5:8-9). St Peter, for his part, tells us that we have the light of Christ which shines upon us as in a dark place: “We have the more firm prophetic word: whereunto you do well to attend, as to a light that shineth in

a dark place, until the day dawn and the day star arise in your hearts” (2 Pet 1:19). St John too tells us in the prologue to his Gospel that the Word was Light, “the true light which enlightens every man who comes into the world”. Only, we must open our eyes to it, lest it be blocked by our persistence in sin.

The Lord cries out to us today, in many ways. What does He say? He teaches us the fear of the Lord, the fear which is the beginning of wisdom, the path to true happiness and fulfilment. Even in the midst of the darkness of today’s world, when the horizon is loaded with clouds of doom, even in the midst of the eclipse of God which is the great tragedy of our day, into the very depths of our darkness, the

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divine light shines. For those who want to see, there is always enough light. In the so-called Dark Ages, the light shone in monastic communities where culture and faith were kept alive, while civilisation faltered before the invasion of the barbarians. As in a stronghold, true values were kept for better



Painting of St Benedict in Subiaco

days. So in our age of wilful darkness, the Lord establishes beacons of light, small communities who go about living their lives of true evangelical holiness. The light is there. Its brightness is no less for its being enshrouded in thick fog. But the fog will rise, and many will enter the way of life. Let those who encounter the light run now, let those who are blessed to have a guide in the way of holiness hold fast to it, and not let it go out, let those who are able, give their all to protect the hearth of the light they have discovered. In a dark night, even the smallest flickering light must be shielded, protected, fostered, that it may wax again into a burning furnace.



The statue of St Michael at Maria Stein Retreat Centre

Br Paphnutius discovers the liturgy

After the act of adoration and mutual greeting which starts each office, the brethren turn towards the altar and Matins begin. This office opens with a verse of Psalm 50, the great penitential psalm of King David. “Domine, labia mea aperies – Lord, open my lips.” Three times, in honour of the Most Holy Trinity, the verse rings out in the night. By this verse, we acknowledge that, of ourselves, we are powerless to praise God as He deserves, we are unable to pronounce worthily the divine oracles we have been taught. If God Himself, by means of His grace, does not open our lips, we will be but parroting words that we will not understand.

But if the Lord does deign to give life to what our lips pronounce, then something marvelous begins to take place. There, in that humble chapel, at an hour when most are still asleep, all of creation begins to sing, through the lips of the monks, the glory of the Creator. It is with profound gratitude and emotion that the monk should enter upon this task, conscious that it is given him to pronounce day by day and night by night the very words of God, those words which give life to all creation.

After this threefold verse turned towards the altar, the brethren then turn in choir, and the cantor begins

psalm three, “Domine quid multiplicati sunt”. In the monastic office, this psalm opens every day’s chant. It precedes even the invitatory. St Benedict seems to have conceived it as a sort of warm-up, which also allows any tardy monks to get to their stalls without really being considered late. This psalm hurls up before the Lord a cry of distress. Conscious of the great privilege to sing God’s praises, but conscious also of the deadly enemy of our human nature who does all in his power to oppose this most divine of works, the monk asks God to thwart all the attacks of the evil one especially during the Divine Office:

“O Lord, how many are my foes! Many are rising against me. Many say to my soul: There is no salvation for him in his God. But thou, O Lord, art my protector, my glory, and the lifter up of my head. I have cried to the Lord with my voice: and He hath heard me from His holy hill. I have slept and have taken my rest: and I have risen up, because the Lord hath protected me. I will not fear thousands of the people surrounding me: arise, O Lord; save me, O my God. For Thou hast struck all them who are my adversaries without cause: Thou hast broken the teeth of sinners. Salvation is of the Lord: and Thy blessing is upon thy people. Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit”. (Psalm 3)

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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

Brother Chronicler mentioned that our first American retreats happened this month in Ohio. It is always a great joy to see the fervour with which retreatants receive the pure and solid teaching of our Holy Catholic Faith, and set themselves to learn the practice of prayer and meditation. In the context of rural Ohio, surrounded by seemingly unending fields, the oasis of Maria Stein was the perfect context to meditate on the Principle and Foundation.

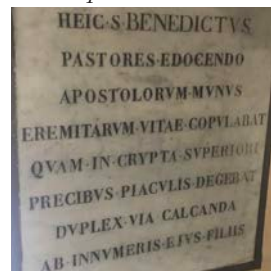
Last month, it was the first line of the Principle that caught our attention. “Man is created to praise, reverence, and serve God our Lord, and by this means to save his soul.” This month, we continue with the next assertion: “The other things on the face of the earth are created for man to help him in attaining the end for which he is created.”

Within the logic of God’s harmonious plan, the climax of which is the eternal communion of the rational creature with God in Heaven, it follows that everything else that exists can only be there to provide man with the means of going to God. If there are a sun, moon and stars, if there are birds, fish, flowers and fruit, if there are cattle and wild beasts, if there are summer and winter, it is all there for man, to help man to attain the end for which he is created.

Man is the only creature on the face of the earth which God created with an eternal destiny. Everything else comes and goes, its role being to cooperate with man, to serve his needs, and help him attain to his Creator. When this reality has been allowed to sink into our minds and hearts, perspectives change drastically. Objects are no longer there for personal satisfaction; they have a deeper, lasting meaning that appears through contemplation.

The monastic life is a privileged space for realising the Principle and Foundation in one’s life. All efforts in a monastery are ordered to the praise of God, and everything in the monastery is seen as a means of going to God, of giving Him greater glory, and of making sure the monk not only saves his soul, but also helps others do the same.

There is a plaque at St Benedict’s grotto in Subiaco that reads: “*Heic Sanctus Benedictus pastores edocendo apostolorum munus eremitarum vitae copulabat quam in crypta superiori precibus piaculis debebat duplex via calcanda ab innumeris eius filiis.* – Here, in teaching shepherds, St Benedict joined the duty of the apostolate with eremitical life spent in prayer and sacrifice in the grotto, thus giving to his innumerable sons an example of both ways of life”.



In other words, St Benedict saw no contradiction between a life of prayer in the solitude of the cloister and the preaching of the truths of the faith in a measure consistent with the demands of the monastic life. A monastery in which everything is ordered to the Glory of God and in which the faithful who come to the monks can find, not only a good example, but also the solid teaching of the faith, constitutes an eminent realisation of the reason for which we are created.

Please pray that God may call more monks to prayer and work, to both sing His glory in choir and fulfill the manifold intellectual and manual tasks by which His praise is proclaimed and souls are led to conversion and true holiness. This is what the world needs above all.

