

Ab AUSTRo

Newsletter of
Notre Dame Priory

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Priory update

Dear Friends,

The first days of August brought with them the first anniversary of our move to Jerusalem Estate. The fifteenth, feast of the Assumption, brought the second anniversary of our purchase of the property. Much has been accomplished in that time, and even though our ultimate goal is to build a complete traditional-style monastery in the hills of our land, we are now very close to having a chapel of our own (after nearly four years of saying the divine office in the room of a house), individual cabins for the monks and plenty of space for guests to come and pray with us and make retreats. As of this writing, the painting of the chapel is almost completed, and all that remains is the light fittings as well as the floor to sand and polish, and it will be ready for use. Another bit of good news is that we now have accommodation for retreatants: a small dwelling which was built several decades ago for the seasonal shearers has been insulated and repainted and is now ready to receive guests.

The bad news is that we had to cancel the Hartzler Park retreats which had been scheduled for the second half of August. It was a difficult decision for Fr Prior, but in the end it had to be made. Getting to NSW would have been possible, but the getting back to Tasmania—due to quarantine requirements—would have been a huge hassle, totally disruptive of our monastic life, and also quite possibly very expensive. The silver-lining of this situation is that we have organised two retreats here in Tasmania. A retreat for women is planned at Emmanuel Centre, Launceston from 26 to 31 October, and a retreat for men here at Jerusalem Estate from 27 December to 1 January. This latter retreat, the first to be organised at the Priory, will be an exceptional opportunity to thank God for the graces of this past year and get the new year off to a good start by praying with the monks.

The weather has been interesting. On 4 August, we had our first (and sadly, last) snow. It was absolutely

gorgeous. Unfortunately that very day we had a power outage, which can be a bit stressing when you depend on electricity for just about everything, and it's snowing! Thank God, it lasted only a few hours. A lovely candlelight dinner will be remembered.



On the vigil of the Assumption, Fr Prior and Br Gregory attended the solemn profession of Sister John Mary Baptist of the Sisters of the Immaculata in Franklin, Tasmania.

On a lighter note, the community went for a few days break to Dolphin Sands, on the east coast, for what Fr Prior calls a “monastic retreat”, but which most people would call a “holiday”! In Fr Prior's defense, there was a lot of time to pray and contemplate the beauty of God's creation in the sea and the mountains; but we also had a very fraternal time in which fun was mixed with adventure. It was much appreciated by all, but perhaps mostly by those who have to resume their philosophy at the end of the month! Back to school already?

Brother Chronicler





In the school of St Benedict

(Prologue continued, 29-32)

Such men as these, fearing the Lord, are not puffed up on account of their good works, but judging that they can do no good of themselves and that all cometh from God, they magnify the Lord's work in them, using the word of the prophet: Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give the glory. So the Apostle Paul imputed nothing of his preaching to himself, but said: By the grace of God I am what I am. And again he saith: He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.

It can sometimes happen that people express their admiration for the kind of life we monks live. On such occasions, the novice monk can be tempted to think he is doing something extraordinary; if he is not careful, he can fall into pride, imagining he is indeed an exceptionally good person; but that would be the end of his monastic spirit which is based on humility. In today's passage of the prologue, St Benedict shows that there is no contradiction between doing something really hard and glorious for God and having a lowly opinion of oneself. The secret is grace. God's grace alone makes it possible to live a good life, and any truly good things that one might do are the fruit of His benevolent grace. It is usually not very hard for the monk to come to this conclusion. All he has to do is remind himself of his past sinfulness, and of where he might be now had God not called him to monastic life. The true monk knows that his vocation is a grace and that, were it not for that grace, he would be very far indeed. As the Imitation of Christ tells us: There is no sin a man can commit that another man is not capable of committing.

The wonderment of perceiving the truly beautiful things that one can do for God leads us to unite with Our Lady in her Magnificat. St Benedict's use of the word "magnify" in this passage is unequivocal—he is referring to Mother Mary and her song of praise. The Magnificat sprang forth from the heart and lips of Mary at a moment when, after having lovingly contemplated the unexpected and undeserved grace of her divine maternity as she made the journey to Elisabeth, she is taken by surprise and praised for the first time by human lips. Even though none of us will ever come anywhere near the sanctity of the Immaculata, the same attitude Mary had then should be ours whenever we perceive that we have done something

good, especially when it is pointed out by others and we happen to be the object of praise.

St Louis de Montfort tells us that every time we say "Mary", Mary says "God". Indeed, we can see that here. Elisabeth sings her praise; Mary sings the praise of God. The spotlight is on her; she turns it to the Lord, acknowledging, and rightly so, that all the good in her is a gift, a free gift, undeserved, but lovingly received, and she gives thanks where thanks is due.

**God's grace alone
makes it possible
to live a good life.**

To the Magnificat, St Benedict adds a reference to Psalm 113 and two references to St Paul. Both David and the Apostle had reason to give thanks to God for all that they achieved, and they were both shielded from pride thanks to the same realisation: all is a gift. St James tells us: "Do not err, therefore, my dearest brethren. Every best gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights" (James 1:16-17). Indeed, it would be a grave error to attribute anything of good to ourselves. "What hast thou that thou hast not received, and if thou hast received, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?" (1Co 4:7). We may have glory, indeed, but that glory is to be placed in the Lord, who lifts up the humble and extols the simple.



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Br Paphnutius discovers the liturgy

The second hour of the Divine Office is Lauds. The name, from the Latin *laudes*, which means praise, indicates that this hour is one that will favour the singing of psalms of praise. Indeed, this office, whose ordinance and celebration was fixed in detail by St Benedict in ch. 13 of the Rule, takes its name from the last three psalms of the psalter, namely 148, 149 and 150. When St Benedict refers to these psalms, he simply calls them *Laudes*. Lauds are celebrated at dawn, as the sun rises, which means it is the hour of light. St John tells us that the Word “was the true light, which enlighteneth every man that cometh into this world” (Jn 1:9). St Paul for his part tells us: “For you were heretofore darkness, but now light in the Lord. Walk then as children of the light” (Eph 5:8). The Lord Jesus Himself was clear: “I am the light of the world. He that followeth me walketh not in darkness, but shall have the light of life.”

The first psalm of monastic Lauds is each day the same: Psalm 66, *Deus misereatur. May God have mercy on us, and bless us: may He cause the light of His countenance to shine upon us, and may He have mercy on us. That we may know Thy way upon earth: Thy salvation in all nations. Let people confess to Thee, O God: let all people give praise to Thee. Let the nations be glad and rejoice: for Thou judgest the people with justice, and directest the nations upon earth. Let the people, O God, confess to Thee: let all the people give praise to Thee: The earth hath yielded her fruit. May God, our God bless us, May God bless us: and all the ends of the earth fear Him.*

The theme of the light is here woven together with those of praise, mercy, joy, fear, and bringing all the nations of the earth to God, thus giving us to understand that whenever we sing the praise of God, as the monks do throughout the day, we are effectively contributing to spreading the light of the faith and all the virtues. In this way, St Benedict makes it clear to his monks that the time they spend in church praying the psalms is not lost for the mission to souls. On the contrary. And so, each morning, as Br Paphnu-

tius chants *Deus misereatur*—learning it quickly by heart—he finds his mind and heart bringing the entire world to the feet of the Risen Saviour at the very hour in which He rose from the dead, begging Him to have mercy and to enlighten all souls, especially those that are still immersed in the darkness of error and sin.



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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 first part of an Ignatian retreat, the “First Week”, seeks to help the retreatant understand in what he/she has fallen short of the divine ideal that was outlined in the First Principle and Foundation: the praise, reverence and service of God for the salvation of the soul. In other words, it is a meditation on sin and its consequences. In the kickoff exercise, we are presented with the picture of sin in others: the fallen angels, Adam and Eve, and finally an unnamed man who sinned grievously and went to hell.

First of all, the angels. Those pure spirits were created by God in an act of love, for He wanted to share with other beings His eternal life and blessedness. We do not know how many angels were created, but the Book of Daniel does tell us of a vision of the angelic choirs: “thousands of thousands ministered to Him, and ten thousand times a hundred thousand stood before Him” (Dan 7:10). If we take these words literally, we have well over a billion angels! But as is often the case in Holy Scripture, numbers are symbolic, and so we can safely say that the number of angels is so great that there is no use in trying to imagine their exact number. God gives profusely of His life, as we see in our world too: the number of grains produced by the fruits and flowers would be able to fill many worlds much bigger than ours.



All these glorious creatures were made by God and established in His grace, that is to say, in His friendship. They did not however have the beatific vision. For that, they would have to undergo a test. Even God cannot create someone in glory, for communion with Him in love can only be chosen freely—love cannot be imposed, for this would be contrary to its very nature which is that of the free gift of self to another. The angels, therefore, were offered a share in the very

life of God, the face to face vision of His glory. Most of the angels lovingly accepted God’s offer, they let themselves be loved by Him, and they gave Him their love in return; they were thus beatified. They are the good angels who serve Him day and night while singing His praises; some of them are deputed to watch over us—these are the Guardian Angels.



Sadly, however, some of the angels refused God’s offer; they turned their back on Him. How many? We do not know. Speculation among the Fathers of the Church – based on the text of Apocalypse which refers to the dragon sweeping away a third of the stars of heaven (Cf. Ap 8:12) – indicates that as many as a third of their number fell into sin and rejected God. Given the number of angels, that’s a lot—and they all became devils, demons, the adversaries of God and his creation, which includes us. In what did the sin of the angels consist? How precisely did they become demons? We will have a close look next month.

