

# Ab Austro

Newsletter of  
Notre Dame Priory

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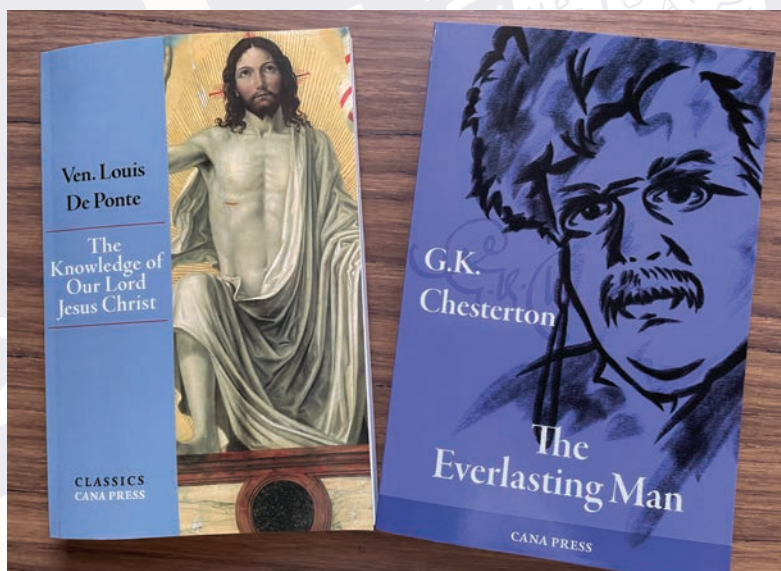
## Priory update

Thanks to the dedicated work of monastery friends, the wooden panelling of the future office area was completed just in time to provide a spacious area for the altar of repose on Maundy Thursday. The presence of several guests also allowed us to assure all night adoration of our Blessed Lord in the tabernacle and to console His Sacred Heart for so much indifference. In similar vein, the new stations of the cross in the church, which were presented last month, also allowed monks and numerous friends who were able to share the Holy Week services with us to meditate with greater attention the sufferings our Lord endured for our salvation.

Several archdiocesan events punctuated the month as well. On 5 April, Fr Prior took part in Fr Martin Mahn Aye's Silver Jubilee of ordination at Riverside. The jubilee Mass was followed by lunch with His Grace the Archbishop and the many priests present at the event. On Tuesday of Holy Week, the annual Chrism Mass was preceded, as usual, by a day of prayer and recollection at the cathedral for all the clergy of the archdiocese. On Wednesday of Easter Week, Fr Prior along with Brothers Gregory and Francisco attended the consecration of two diocesan hermits at St Mary's Cathedral. Drasko Dizdar and Fr Chris Brennan have



been close friends of the community since its beginning and it was a joy to be present at this ceremony.



Cana Press (<https://www.notredamemonastery.org/canapress>) is happy to present its two new titles: Venerable Louis de Ponte's classical *True Knowledge of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, and G. K. Chesterton's, *The Everlasting Man*. This last title is only the first in a series of works by the same author that are to come out shortly.

Brother Chronicler



QUODCUMQUE DIXERIT VOBIS FACITE





## In the school of St Benedict

(Chapter Two, What Kind of Man the Abbot Should Be, 30-34)

*The abbot should always remember what he is and what he is called, and should know that to whom more is committed, from him more is required. Let him realise also how difficult and arduous a task he has undertaken, of ruling souls and adapting himself to many dispositions. One he must humour, another rebuke, another persuade, according to each one's disposition and understanding, and thus adapt and accommodate himself to all in such a way, that he may not only suffer no loss in the sheep committed to him, but may even rejoice in the increase of a good flock. Above all let him not have greater solicitude for fleeting, earthly and perishable things, and so overlook or undervalue the salvation of the souls committed to him; but let him always remember that he has undertaken the government of souls and will have to give an account of them.*

St Benedict's overarching requirement for the abbot in guiding souls is to be firmly convinced that the ultimate goal of life in the monastery is to lead souls to eternal salvation. In the end, the question the Lord Himself will put to him on the day of judgment is: did you do everything in your power to save those souls who were entrusted to your care? Or rather did you give your monastery only earthly objectives? Did you demand that your monks keep the law of God and live up to their professed vows, or did you cowardly shrink away from your duties and pursue fleeting distractions? If the abbot meditates on these words consistently, he will know how to behave in his dealings with souls who are all different and require distinct care.

The best commentary on this paragraph, however, is given by the man who is probably the most famous of all of St Benedict's disciples, namely Pope St Gregory the Great. His Pastoral Rule written for bishops on the whole seeks to elucidate these principles. Let it suffice to quote its opening words:

“No one presumes to teach an art till he has first, with intent meditation, learned it. What rashness is it, then, for the unskilful to assume pastoral authority, since the government of souls is the art of arts! For who can be ignorant that the sores of the thoughts of men are more occult than the sores of the bowels? And yet how often do men who have no knowledge whatever of spiritual precepts fearlessly profess themselves physicians of the heart, though those who are ignorant of the effect of drugs blush to appear as

physicians of the flesh!

“But because, through the ordering of God, all the highest in rank of this present age are inclined to reverence religion, there are some who, through the

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outward show of rule within the holy Church, affect the glory of distinction. They desire to appear as teachers, they covet superiority to others, and, as the Truth attests, they seek the first salutations in the market-place, the first rooms at feasts, the first seats in assemblies (cf. Matthew 23:6-7), being all the less able to administer worthily the office they have undertaken of pastoral care, as they have reached the magisterial position of humility out of elation only.”

It is a sad reality that in every age such men can be found in the Church of God, who are ignorant of the art of leading souls to God, for the simple reason that they never learned at the long, hard school of a life of prayer and the studious experience of virtue.



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## Br Paphnutius discovers the liturgy

As the tranquil afternoon labour in one of the workshops or gardens of the monastery grounds reaches its end, a quarter of an hour before Vespers a first bell is heard, alerting all the monks to the upcoming solemn hour of evening prayer. It is the signal to leave what one has in hand and obey joyfully the call to sing the praise of Almighty God. A second bell will be heard ten minutes later. Brother is now all ready to go to the “statio”, the place in the cloister next to the church, where all the community remains standing to spend a few minutes in silent prayer before entering choir.

Along with the conventual Mass of the morning, Vespers is the most solemnised office of the day. On feast days, the celebrant dons the cope, and the altar is incensed at the Magnificat. Major feast days and Sundays have what we call First and Second Vespers. First Vespers precede the feast and Second Vespers is on the evening of the day itself.

As was the case for Lauds, the hymns for ferial days sing the beauties of creation, each day of the week portraying the Creator’s power by which He brought the world into existence. Sunday sings of the creation of light, Monday the firm land being set apart from the water, Tuesday the production of plants, Wednesday the creation of the sun, moon and stars, Thursday the fish and birds coming from the waters, Friday all animals, culminating in man and woman. From each of these events, a spiritual lesson is drawn. For

example, on Tuesday, we ask that our minds, burnt and darkened by sin, may flourish once again like a verdant prairie thanks to the workings of grace. On Thursdays, we pray that those who fall may not be crushed, and those who are lifted up may not be filled with pride.

During the special seasons of the year, a hymn adapted to that time is sung. For example during paschal tide, the hymn *Ad Coenam Agni* sings of the sacrifice of the paschal lamb, reminding us of the true sacrifice of the Lamb of God on the evening of Good Friday.



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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

As the retreatant prepares for the important decisions of his life, St Ignatius offers to his meditation three kinds of humility. The virtue of humility, that strictly Christian virtue, unknown outside of Christianity, incomprehensible to paganism and repugnant to modernists imbued with the grandeur of man who becomes God, is the only one which the devil cannot ape. St Benedict's twelve degrees of humility have already been presented in these pages. St Ignatius for his part takes a different, but no less insightful, approach. For today let's concentrate on the first step.

"The first kind of humility," writes Ignatius, "is necessary for salvation. It consists in this, that as far as possible I so subject and humble myself as to obey the law of God our Lord in all things, so that not even were I made lord of all creation, or to save my life here on earth, would I consent to violate a commandment, whether divine or human, that binds me under pain of mortal sin" (Sp. Ex. # 165).

Straight away we are informed that, if we want to save our soul, humility is not optional. Even though there are many levels of the virtue, there is a bare minimum under which one cannot be said to have any humility at all, and therefore not be a candidate for eternal life. Why is this? It is because the first thing humility does is to establish us squarely within the created universe we are part of, which we did not make, and which is governed by certain rules that we

must respect. We did not make the rules, and so we cannot change them. For the humble person, it does not matter what profit one might gain from sin; it does not even matter that a sin might help me save my life. My life is less important to me than the very source of my life, God, and if I were to seriously offend Him, it will serve me no purpose whatsoever to go on living. Better for me to die than to commit a mortal sin.

Numerous examples of this virtue are recorded in history. One most of us would be familiar with is St Maria Goretti, the young Italian girl who preferred to suffer a violent death rather than to commit a mortal sin. It would have been so easy for her to give in to her aggressor. No one would have ever known. But she would have lost her honour and her God. And her humility, even at that tender age of 12, was such that she knew there could be no compromise with God's law. "You will go to hell!" she cried to the young man under the influence of a shameful passion that led him to murder the innocent girl, stabbing her numerous times with a knife. The contrast between the two attitudes could hardly be more pronounced. The fiercely proud, lustful young man, for whom the only law is the satisfaction of his desires; the touchingly humble young woman who holds nothing dearer than her relationship with the God of love, whose wish is her command. Humility, even before purity, made Maria Goretti the great saint that we honour today.

This is a most powerful lesson for us in an age in which unbridled lust is no longer opposed or even tolerated, but rather promoted in the public square. As St Paul says: *They are enemies of the cross of Christ: their end is destruction: their God is their belly: and their glory is in their shame: they mind earthly things* (Ph 3:18-19). Their glory is in their shame. In other words, they pride themselves on what is shameful. They have so lost contact with reality that they no longer see the obvious. The root of this is pride, pride for which God's commandments do not count.

Here it becomes clear that the first kind of humility is not just the path to salvation; it is the unavoidable way to decent living in society. If life in society breaks down, it is because we are not humble enough to acknowledge two simple truths which, if only learned and embraced, would transform the world from the inside: 1) there is a God; 2) it's not us.

