

Notre Dame Priory Newsletter

DECEMBER 2017

QUODCUMQUE DIXERIT VOBIS FACITE

ISSUE TEN



Monks are on the move!

O LITTLE TOWN OF RHYNDASTON

A quick look at the map tells us that the little town of Bethlehem in Judaea is only 9 km from Jerusalem. An equally quick look tells us that Rhyndaston is about the same distance from Colebrook. What the map won't tell you however is that the initial name given to Colebrook in the 19th century was *Jerusalem*. Fewer still know that Rhyndaston is now known to a handful of monks as *Bethlehem*.

Nothing happens by accident in the plans of Divine Providence, and it is no coincidence that the Monks of Notre Dame are moving, in the days before Christmas, to this very small and unknown township at almost the same distance as Bethlehem from Jerusalem.

The day chosen for the move, 22nd December, Ember Friday in Advent, will have us read the Gospel of the Visitation, in which St Luke tells us that, after the Annunciation, *rising up in those days, Mary went into the hill country with haste* (Lk 1:39), where she would pay a visit to

her elderly kinswoman Elisabeth and where she would be filled with the Holy Spirit and intone that glorious song of praise: the *Magnificat*.

And so, as Mary makes her way to Ein Karem and as the Holy Family makes its way to the town of David, we make our way to our new home, up in the mountainous region overlooking the Coal River Valley.

Those who have visited us in Lindisfarne can get an idea of what the move entails. From the point of view of housing, it will be a real move towards the poverty of the Infant God. From that of scenery, we will exchange

the lovely bay for the mountains and forests of the Southern Midlands. Those who know our young community will not be surprised to hear that the monks are looking forward to this move. Cabin fever has been somewhat of an issue in this nice suburb of Hobart; it certainly will not be one in Rhyndaston.

We won't have a guest house quite yet, but we do look forward to your visit in our new setting at 515 Rhyndaston Road, Rhyndaston, Tasmania, 7120. From there, and from nearby St Patrick's Church in Colebrook, we pray that our voices may be united with those of the angels around the crib of the Infant God and with that of Mary Immaculate in the house of Elisabeth, and that God may be glorified in all things.

*Please take note of our
new mailing address:*

*Notre Dame Priory
P.O. Box 85
Colebrook, Tasmania 7027
Australia*

*2018 Notre Dame Priory Liturgical Wall
Calendar, now available at the reduced
price of \$AUD 18. Includes postage.
[https://www.notredamemonastery.org/
monk-shop-1/](https://www.notredamemonastery.org/monk-shop-1/)*



JESUS MARIA JOSEPH

**I am come to cast fire on the earth,
and what will I, but that it be kindled?**

Lk 12:49

Beloved Friend in Jesus and Mary,

In unison with the reflections on Bethlehem and the liturgical season, I wish to offer a few thoughts this month on the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. Far from being an interruption of the series on the degrees of humility, the example the Lord Jesus gives us in Bethlehem is one of the major sources of the teachings of the saints on this admirable virtue.

Every time I give a retreat, when I come to this mystery, I find myself trying to explain the inexplicable. That God would decide to become man to save men is an unfathomable mystery. But that this would happen the way it did, that just blows our minds. If anyone in human history should have been welcomed with all the pomp human dedication is able to muster, it is indeed the Son of God. Just imagine the long, painstaking preparations made, even in our day, to welcome certain heads of state. One spares no effort to make them feel welcome and to honour in their person the nation they represent.

But there is literally no comparison whatsoever between the head of the most powerful state in history and the Son of God Incarnate. When He came into the world, everyone should have been there, making their way to Bethlehem, bringing precious gifts and homage, and offering themselves in humble adoration and thanksgiving. The Divine Infant should have been born in a rich palace, the pavement of which should have been made of precious stones and the walls adorned with precious tapestries. There should have been legions of servants of every rank to execute the orders of the great monarch's parents.

And let's add that the Son of God was actually in a position to organise such a reception. He held sway over minds and hearts, and it would have been child's play worthy of the Divinity to make sure it all eventuated that way.

No. None of that. The one Person in human history who could have chosen the place and time of His birth, chooses the most extreme destitution, in the heart of the coldest time of the year, without a single door opening to Him, not a single heart reaching out to make Him feel welcome. *He came into His own, and His own received Him not*, muses St John with astonishment.

The historic reality is there. Jesus is born in a stable, amidst animals. It is cold, it is damp, it smells. There is no warm fire, no hot drinks, no sweets, no comfortable bed. Not even a delegation or an apology from the town mayor. Nothing. Nothing but silence, wind, rain. Heaven seems indifferent. But Heaven is in charge.

I always remind retreatants that Calvary was not an unavoidable catastrophe due to unmanageable political forces. Calvary was willed by God Himself. God did not spare His only Son, but handed Him over for all of us, says St Paul. So it is in Bethlehem. The one who is in charge is the One who appears to be purely passive: the Infant. He it is who has organised all things so that He could be born in this desperate situation. He so chose the last place that no one, no one ever in all of human history, can even begin to take it from Him. *The last shall be first*. Jesus chooses to be the last, and that is why He is forever the First.

This amazing example of poverty afforded to us by the Word Incarnate is what gave rise to the religious orders and to what is called the evangelical counsel of poverty. By it, men and women have embraced a state which, in the eyes of the world, is unnatural. And, in a way it is, just as the other two counsels of chastity and obedience. By obedience, one renounces what is most noble in a man, namely the will. By chastity, one renounces the innate drive to unite with

a spouse and procreate a posterity that will carry on, in some way, one's own existence. By poverty, one renounces the very natural desire, and even need, to own things and use them for one's subsistence. For sure, the evangelical counsels seem unnatural. But in reality, they are *supernatural*. And that is no surprise, as they were brought to the earth by the Son of God Incarnate. It's almost as if, when He entered the world, the Saviour wanted to leave His mark on His mission; He wanted to seal it with the unequivocal sign of His own presence: when God does it and when God invites souls to imitate it, it is good; it is actually better and more wholesome, and it is done with God's grace.

Here we encounter the common objections: what do you mean it's better? Isn't everyone's vocation better *for them*? In a way, yes, but there is an objective order, and objectively speaking, what Jesus the Lord did is *of necessity* the most perfect. There can be no higher state in life than that which assimilates a man more perfectly to the kind of life He led.

And that, as I was saying, is what gave rise to religious poverty, that blessed state in which one really does give up the ownership of all things, even the very clothes one is wearing and the bed in which one sleeps and the food one eats: all is renounced and hoped for from the eternal Father who is good, whose providence extends to the birds of the air and the lilies of the field.

So at this sacred time of year, as we contemplate the mystery once again, let us ask for the grace to understand, just a little bit more, the lessons given to us by Jesus, His scorn for worldliness and for human comforts; His choice of all that the world rejects. If we are given that grace, even just a tiny bit of it, this Christmas will truly be a time of grace, one that will have lasting effects on us.

And what about if you are not called to be a religious? The spirit of the evangelical counsels is necessary for all, for without it, one really can't be a true disciple of Jesus: *Every one of you that doth not renounce all that he possesseth cannot be my disciple* (Lk 14:33). Does that mean we must all sign over our belongings to somebody else? No, but it does mean that we must be interiorly detached from all things and prepared to give them up for the higher love of Jesus Christ. It does mean that we must never let anything created stand in the way of our fidelity to God and to His commandments. It does mean that we must be on the lookout for those who are in need and be ready to help them as best we can. *As long as you did it to one of these my least brethren, you did it to me* (Mt 25:40). Jesus loves the poor, because He Himself was poor, and He gives special graces and spiritual light to those who are truly poor of heart.

May Mother Mary and Saint Joseph, who too were poor, give us a great love and esteem for this most blessed state, and may they detach our minds and hearts from all created goods, so that we may cling to the only real, sovereign, lasting good forever, the Triune God.

A very blessed Christmas to you and yours!

Retreats: Both January sessions, for men and women, are booked full. If you were hoping to come, please consider signing up for the August sessions. Thank you!

Fr Pius Mary Noonan, O.S.B.

Update from the Priory

Beloved Friends,

I do intend to comment on the “little town of Rhyndaston”, but there is some other, and much more important news this month concerning our small community. His Grace, Archbishop Julian Porteous has proceeded with the erection of our community as what is known in Canon Law as a “Public Association of the Faithful”. This act constitutes us as a public entity within the holy Roman Catholic Church and is the required step towards eventually being acknowledged as an institute of monastic consecrated life. This may appear as insignificant canonical jargon, but in reality it is the most important thing that has happened to the community since its inception. The official acknowledgement by the hierarchical Church gives us great confidence that, amidst our feeble, often hesitating steps forward, our Beloved Lord is — through Our Lady’s maternal intercession — being served here in a way that pleases Him. I cordially invite you to give thanks with us first of all to the Most Blessed Trinity, from whom all good things flow, to our Blessed Lady, Mother and Queen of our community, to St Joseph, who is working together with his most holy spouse to get us on our feet, to our dear Archbishop who has shown us so much support, and to all those who in any way have helped us get this far. Thank you too for the role you have played in achieving this milestone.

Our move to Rhyndaston is necessary, not, mind you, for any lack of hospitality from the archdiocese; the house we have lived in since February in Lindisfarne is beautiful (perhaps a bit too nice, actually, for monks!). The question is one of location, in a suburb, without any garden, and with sometimes very noisy neighbours (ask the brothers about “Johnny Cash”...); hardly a context in which to form novices to monastic life. If you have been reading this chronicle over the past few months, you will recall our efforts at getting a house built on our Rhyndaston property. That project remains, but for the moment, providentially, a neighbour, just across the road, offered to rent out his place to us, and after an inspection and a community talk about it, we decided to move ahead.



“Bethlehem” from the outside



“Bethlehem” from the inside

The allusion to Bethlehem is not fortuitous: our move will mean, in many ways, embracing the poverty of Bethlehem. We will have to make do with less than we had in Lindisfarne in terms of the facilities that everyone needs, such as water and number of bathrooms (there is only one for the six of us, and more monks to come in the new year...). But that will be compensated by the setting in the mountains and, even more important, the family spirit that reigns among us. Needless to say, everyone is looking forward to the move.

Another big advantage is that, as Colebrook is only a few minutes down the road, we will be able to have daily Mass there until we get ourselves a proper chapel. It is such a blessing to have the use of that exquisite church, even though of course we look forward to the time when we will have our own monastery church. In the meantime, I hope we will have a nice big bell sometime soon to call the brothers to the Divine Office, seven times a day and once in the night (if anyone knows where we might get one, please let me know!).

And so, rest assured that henceforth — until God knows when — from the little town of Rhyndaston, we will be lifting up to the throne of the Divine Majesty all your intentions, those you have entrusted to us as well as all the others. With every blessing for a beautiful feast of Christmas and a new year replete with every grace from on High, through Mary Immaculate.

Father Prior

To keep up with Notre Dame Priory, visit our website at www.notredamemonastery.org
To contact us, please send an email to: info@notredamemonastery.org

To make a donation:

Via bank transfer: Commonwealth Bank of Australia - Account name:
Notre Dame Priory BSB: 062-654 Account number: 1024 4562

Via cheque: In Australian dollars, make payable to “Notre Dame Priory” and send to:
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