

Ab Austro

Newsletter of
Notre Dame Priory

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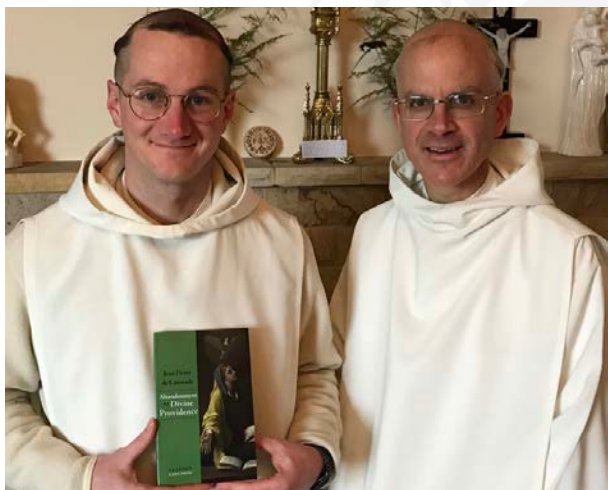
This issue:

- † Cana Press Premier
- † Mountain Climbing
- † Of Swearing, Idle Words and Correction

Priory update

Dear Friends,

Following up on last month's request to join us in prayer for rain, we have some wonderful news to share. The Nativity of St John the Baptist brought joy to the world; this year it brought us the joy of bucket loads of water. For three days it rained, and Jerusalem Creek became Jerusalem River, which of course also means that the Craighourne Dam across the road is back to comforting levels – a great solace to all of us here in the Coal River Valley. After multiple prayers *ad petendam pluviam*, we are now giving thanks to Almighty God, the Giver of all that is good.



Other momentous news of the month is the creation of Cana Press, the new publishing company of Notre Dame Priory, and the production of its first books. The project has been on our minds since the foundation began, and has finally come to fruition. From the early days of the retreat apostolate (2007), it has always been a must to have good books available for retreatants. The retreat is something like a spiritual surgical ward; but after things have been fixed in surgery, there are a number of necessities for the preservation of good health. Having a proper spiritual diet is a key element, and for that, not just

good, but *very* good books are essential. Beyond the group of retreatants, however, Cana Press will also allow us to reach many other souls, and thus play our small part in bringing the world back to Christ. So we pray.



Our first titles are now available. They include reprints of great classics of spirituality which everyone should have and read: *Prayer* by St Alphonsus Liguori, and *Abandonment to Divine Providence* by Fr Jean-Pierre de Caussade. Fr Prior has also put out a little book on the Twelve Degrees of Humility called *The Grace to Desire It*, which comes with endorsements from Benedictine Abbots, other monks and well known authors. Father Prior has other titles in the works, and Br Gregory is working on formatting a number of other out-of-print and out-of-copyright classics, not just in spirituality, but also in philosophy, theology and good Catholic fiction.

Over at the Chapel, we are happy to announce that the carpenters have finished their fine work, leaving all ready to be painted and re-roofed. The latter will be done in a couple of weeks' time. As for the painting, this is a job for the monks and should commence shortly. We'll keep you posted!

Brother Chronicler

QUODCUMQUE DIXERIT VOBIS FACITE





In the school of St Benedict

(Prologue continued, 23-27)

Let us ask the Lord with the prophet (Psalm 14): Lord, who shall dwell in thy tabernacle, or who shall rest upon thy holy hill? Then, brethren, let us hear the Lord answering and showing us the way to that tabernacle and saying: He that walketh without blemish and doeth that which is right; he that speaketh truth in his heart, who hath used no deceit in his tongue, nor done evil to his neighbour, nor believed ill of his neighbour.

Last month St Benedict told us we must be prepared to run to Heaven. Today we discover that our course goes uphill, to the “holy hill” or the “tabernacle”. Many scenes of Holy Scripture come to mind: Mount Sinai, on which Moses fasted for forty days and forty nights before receiving the Commandments; Mount Horeb, to which the prophet Elijah journeyed by foot, fasting from earthly sustenance and sustained by the Bread of God; the Mount of Beatitudes from which Our Lord, the New Moses, promulgated the Law of the Gospel; the Mount of the Transfiguration, where Jesus becomes our model in prayer and transformative contemplation; finally, the Mount of Olives, which is both the scene of the Saviour’s agony and that of His Ascension, illustrating for us that if we suffer with Christ we will be glorified with Him.

St Benedict’s recourse to Psalm 14 gives us to understand that it is by becoming apprentices of the life of prayer and distancing ourselves from the world, symbolised by the mountain, that we make ourselves worthy of dwelling in the eternal kingdom. The mountain of this life is where we learn to enter into communion with God, leaving down in the valley all the cares of this passing world, discovering how to practice all the virtues which lead to God. These virtues are summarised in the Psalm with the words “walking without blemish, doing what is right, speaking the truth in one’s heart, not lying with one’s tongue, doing no evil and believing no slander against one’s neighbour.”

Clearly, a complete programme of Christian life is given here. If we were to condense these words further, we could say quite simply that in order to dwell in the eternal tabernacle, we must make sure that all we say and all we do is in conformity with God’s law and the charity we owe to our neighbour. In order to avoid sins of the tongue, however, we must avoid sins of the mind, which reminds us of last month’s “tennis” – learning how to reject continually and perseveringly those insidious bad thoughts the devil throws our way. Just as a variety of physical skills go into making a good athlete, so a variety of spiritual

skills go into making a truly spiritual person – walking, running, warding off the fiery traits of the enemy.

What is consoling is that there is nothing overly complicated about these skills. It’s all about wanting to acquire them and giving them time and effort. This is no doubt the most essential of all the aspects of true spiritual life, namely, giving it the time. You do not pray when you have time; you make time to pray and perform spiritual exercises. Mountain climbing, from

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this point of view, is a most fruitful analogy. When you climb a high mountain, the most indispensable requirement is to be regular, consistent, persevering. No one can sprint to the top of Mount Blanc. You can only get there if you put one foot in front of the other and repeat unflinchingly until you reach the top. This takes time; it takes energy; it takes stamina; it takes patience; it also takes a guide. Great mountain climbers have to be patient people; they also have to get to know themselves, and be aware when they need to pause and for how long; they need to know what foods and how much they need; they need to listen to the guide, etc.

In the spiritual climb to God’s mountain, devoting time to Him, persevering in waiting patiently for Him, never turning back, never allowing oneself to become frustrated: such are the techniques that will take us to the summit. If you have climbed a tall mountain, you know the feeling: when you start deep down in the valley, you wonder how you will get there, and there are moments during the ascent when you feel inclined to give up. But if you persevere, if you doggedly take each of those strenuous steps, you reach the summit, and your whole body is then filled with invigorating delight. The quasi-infinite panorama is worth the effort. How much more when the summit is Christ Himself.

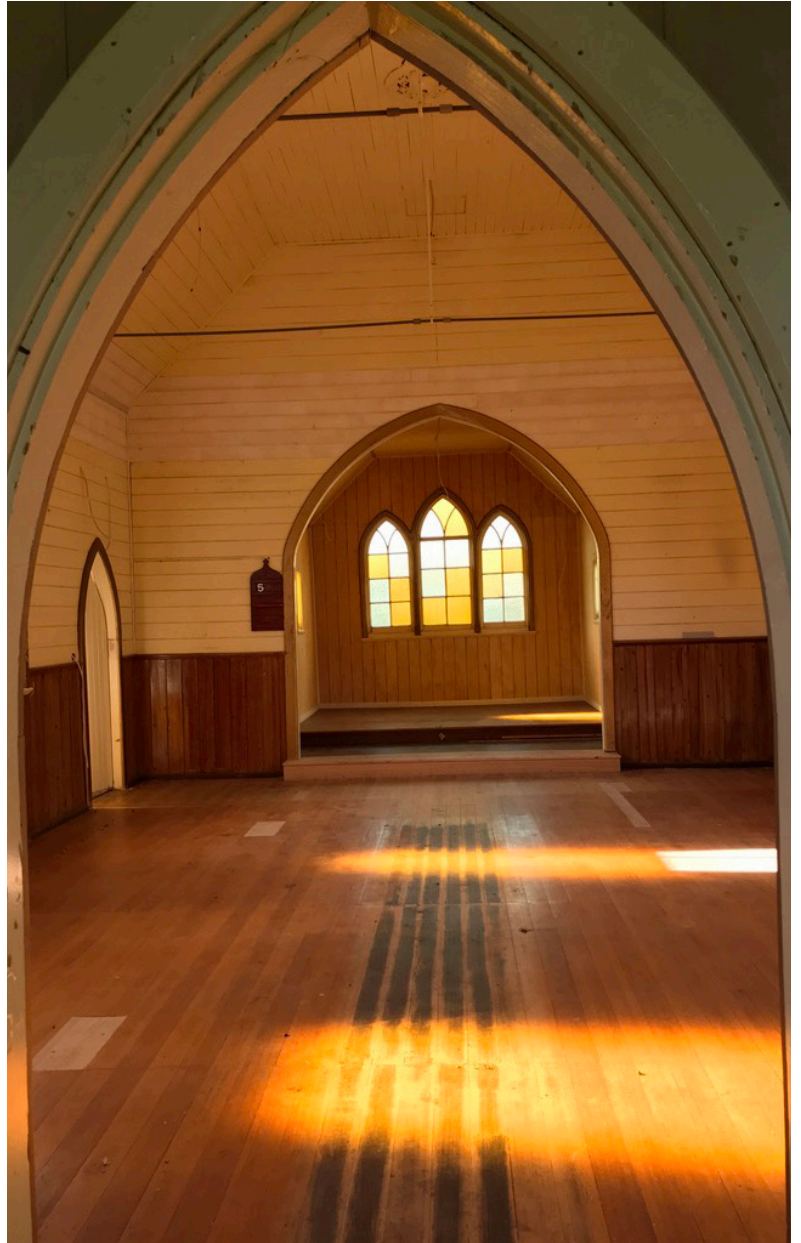
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Br Paphnutius discovers the liturgy

Br Paphnutius continues to be wonderstruck by the Office of Matins. He had realised from the first day that it is the longest office of the monastic horarium – of course it would be, as it has the most Psalms: in addition to Psalms 3 and 94, there are always 12 other Psalms, and on Sundays and major festivals, an additional three canticles. But it's not just the Psalms that make for the length of Matins; there are also the readings (usually called lessons). On Sundays and major festivals there are no less than twelve lessons – four for each nocturn – each followed by a long responsory. The first nocturn always presents lessons from Holy Scripture, usually the Old Testament. The second nocturn is most often taken from the Fathers of the Church and is, in some way, connected with the Scripture readings of the first nocturn or with the liturgical season. The third almost always gives a homily which develops one or other of the teachings of the Gospel reading for the day. The office ends with the solemn chant of the Gospel by the Superior: in this way is shown that all the other lessons lead up to and prepare the Holy Gospel, foundation of our faith.

On weekdays, there are only three lessons, but St Benedict prescribed that during the summer months (from Easter to the beginning of November), given the shortness of the nights, only a brief lesson is to be recited by heart. At Notre Dame Priory, because of the reversal of seasons in the southern hemisphere, Br Paphnutius learns that there are never any short lessons at Matins – they are always long! So where do these lessons come from? This is where Brother learns to use the Monastic Supplement, an addition to the breviary containing the extra lessons (culled from the Roman Breviary), as well as those for several other offices of saints on our local calendar, such as St Patrick, St Brigid, St Columba, St Mary of the Cross, St Regina, etc... The young novice is amazed further when he realises all the work that went into making this supplement and he wonders if one day there will be a complete *Breviarium Colbruccense*? When he sleeps

– as a good monk does – and is not too excited about going to Matins the next day, he now has a fascinating project to dream about...



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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

In his general examen at the beginning of the *Spiritual Exercises* (#38-41), St Ignatius concentrates on three ways of sinning in word: swearing, idle words, and offensive words.

As regards swearing, he is concerned mostly with swearing in the strict sense, that is to say, making a solemn statement by calling someone to witness, as when we “swear on the Bible”. Swearing or taking oaths is necessary in certain contexts in order to have a guarantee of truth. When the witness in a trial makes a declaration under oath, we more readily believe what he says. Thanks to professional oaths, when we consult our lawyer, it gives us peace of mind to know that he will not divulge our affairs to the public; when we put powerful weapons into the hands of political leaders or our soldiers, we rest secure that they will not misuse them; when we go to see the doctor, we are reassured to know that he has taken the Hippocratic Oath. Oaths are necessary. But outside of those contexts, one should not swear. Our Lord was clear about this in the Sermon on the Mount: *I say to you not to swear at all, neither by heaven for it is the throne of God: nor by the earth, for it is His footstool: nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great king: neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black. But let your speech be yea, yea: no, no: and that which is over and above these, is of evil* (Mt 5:34-37).

Concerning idle words, Our Lord said: *Every idle word that men shall speak, they shall render an account for it in the day of judgment* (Mt 12:36). So, what are idle words? “I understand a word to be idle,” writes St Ignatius, “when it serves no good purpose, either for myself or for another, and was not intended to do so.” So, if a word serves no need of soul or body, and has no purpose for the furthering of God’s plan over our lives, we are wasting a God-given talent and precious time that could be used in some profitable way. Does this mean we can never sit down and relax and have a chat



about things of interest? Certainly, there is a place for recreation, as it gives us needed relaxation and makes it possible to return to work invigorated. But there is a measure to be kept in all things. Talking for the sake of talking is never a good thing, for “in much talk you will not avoid sin” (see Prov 10:19).

Finally, concerning offensive words, we do not usually need to be told that it is wrong to lie, to bear false witness, to speak ill of others, etc. But it does raise a question: Does this mean we can never speak of another’s faults? There are times when this is permissible, as when the fault is already public, but even then we must take care not to give scandal. There are also times when it is required, as when someone needs help or must be protected. For example, informing parents of their children’s bad behaviour is a duty. So is warning a vulnerable person and their guardian of the danger of immoral persons. In both these cases, the revelation of the fault is certainly not sinful, but rather an obligation. Indeed, the failure to speak can also be sinful, when one has the duty of care or of instruction, e.g. a pastor who neglects to warn a sinner, a parent who fails to admonish a child, a teacher who is remiss about correcting an error, etc. With the Psalmist we should pray: *Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth: and a door round about my lips. Incline not my heart to evil words; to make excuses in sins* (Ps 140:3-4). But also: *I have declared thy truth and thy salvation. I have not concealed thy mercy and thy truth* (Ps 39:11).

