

Ab AUSTRo

Newsletter of
Notre Dame Priory

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Priory update

Dear Friends,

The soothing green colours have returned to the hills of the Coal River Valley. Jerusalem Estate is at its best. Unfortunately, we are still in what they call a “green drought”. Even though we have had intermittent rains, the overall quantity is low, the dams and rivers continue to dwindle, and so we are in need of some serious rainfall. During the triple Rogations processions before the Ascension, and now at daily Mass, we beseech the Lord to send us the sufficient rain for ourselves and all the surrounding farms, confident that our prayer will be heard in God’s good time.

For most of this past month, a welcome din of work tools accompanied our daily monastic routine. The noise was coming from our new chapel which, as you recall, was relocated from St Leonard’s Launceston in December. After a few months of waiting for the building surveyor to inspect and prescribe a certain number of amendments, the work has been going full steam since early May. The job consisted of stabilising the footings by bolting a number of steel rafters to the concrete piers, replacing the wooden cladding in a number of areas both inside and out, electrical rewiring, installing insulation and heating, and finally building an access ramp for wheelchairs. The final



sprint is now in sight and, of course, we are all excited about the prospect of having our very own church.

On 12 May, our Financial Advisory Committee met for the first time through Zoom. It was a new, but positive, experience for a number of us. Even though we feel it is better to actually meet in a physical place together, we had to admit that this method has a number of advantages, in particular that of allowing the monks to stay within the monastic enclosure, instead of being like fish out of water. At the end of the meeting, Fr Prior renewed his gratitude to this fine team of competent professionals who have been an invaluable help in keeping the community legally and financially secured. May God bless them all.

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In the school of St Benedict

“Let us, therefore, gird our loins with faith and the performance of good works, and following the guidance of the Gospel walk in His paths, so that we may merit to see Him who has called us unto His kingdom. And, if we wish to dwell in the tabernacle of His kingdom, except we run thither with good deeds, we shall not arrive.”

In the noviciates of many monasteries the novices are taught that “monks do not run”. It is indeed rather distracting in the context of a life dedicated to prayer and work in tranquillity to see a young monk running up and down stairs or through the cloister. Running – unless it is outdoors in the context of healthy exercise – would seem to be contrary to the *gravitas benedictina*, that seriousness, that is often associated with the monastic life.

And yet, several times in the Rule, St Benedict tells us that we must run. The first instance is today’s passage of the prologue. Unless we run to eternal life with good deeds, we will not get there, he tells us. We see a portrayal of this on the seal of our community, which depicts a monk in the act of running. This monk seeks to put into practice St Benedict’s admonition, and this he does by fidelity to the Rule, to the times of communal celebration of the Mass and Divine Office, to the hours of personal prayer, reading and work, to the tasks he receives through holy obedience, and through the fraternal help he gives to his brothers.

But there is another very important way that a monk of our community seeks to run. The seal evokes this by means of the tray. On it the monk carries two cups of wine in the direction of the west, which symbolises the world, the souls in need, especially those who come to us on retreat to hear the Word of God and learn how to assimilate it in their lives. The cups are two because this precious Cana wine is the twofold love of God and neighbour, which contains all the other commandments.

Note also that the monk is wearing his belt - his “loins are girt” according to the word of Our Lord which St Benedict refers to in this passage. Having one’s loins girt with a belt has a number of meanings. It signifies chastity (while putting on the cincture before Mass, the priest prays: “Gird me, O Lord, with the cincture of purity, and quench in my heart the fire of concupiscence, that the virtue of continence and chastity may abide in me”); it also stands for obedience (“another shall gird thee and

lead thee whither thou wouldst not,” Our Lord said to St Peter in Jn 21:18). More broadly, it means that one is prepared and ready to go. This is why St Benedict prescribes that the monk, even when sleeping, should be girt with a rope or belt and that a light remain lit in the dormitory throughout the night: the monk must always be prepared to go anywhere and do anything at the command of the Lord, for he knows that at any moment he may be required to give an account of his life to his Master.

**The monk must
always be prepared
to go anywhere and
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command of the Lord**

Let your loins be girt and lamps burning in your hands. And you yourselves like to men who wait for their lord, when he shall return from the wedding; that when he cometh and knocketh, they may open to him immediately. Blessed are those servants whom the Lord, when He cometh, shall find watching. Amen I say to you that He will gird himself and make them sit down to meat and passing will minister unto them. And if He shall come in the second watch or come in the third watch and find them so, blessed are those servants. But this know ye, that if the householder did know at what hour the thief would come, he would surely watch and would not suffer his house to be broken open. Be you then also ready: for at what hour you think not the Son of man will come (Lk 12:35-40).



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Br Paphnutius discovers the liturgy

We return this month to our young novice who is discovering the riches of the monastic liturgy. Our last instalment referred to the hymns of Matins. Today we come to the Psalms. One of the things that strikes Br Paphnutius the most about St Benedict's arrangement of the psalter is that, for the most part, the psalms are recited in their Biblical order, simply one after the other. For example, Sunday Matins prescribes Psalms 20 to 31. Monday has Psalms 32 to 44, Tuesday, 45 to 58, etc.



Whereas in most modern psalters, the Psalms are chosen and arranged in a thematic order, (Psalms of supplication, of praise, in times of distress, etc.), St Benedict – with the notable exceptions of Lauds and Compline – simply has his monks recite the psalter from start to finish. Each week the full psalter is recited and then the next week it is recommenced. We can see how close the Patriarch of monks is here to the desert fathers who, we are told, recited the entire psalter each day. St Benedict clearly wants his monks to maintain this attitude, even if he admits in his great discretion that once a week will suffice.

When monks adhere to this practice, in addition to showing filial respect for their founder, they find there are a number of advantages. Firstly, it shows great respect for the order of Holy Scripture itself. Is not

the Holy Spirit's order the best? Secondly, it helps the monk learn the psalter faster, as he much more easily remembers the content of a Psalm when he can situate it in its proper place in the Bible. Thirdly, and perhaps more importantly, it reflects better the human condition which can quickly change from joy to sorrow, from consolation to desolation, and back again. When the Psalms are chosen thematically (for example, the Psalms of the Passion on Fridays) this can seem manufactured. Fridays are not always days of sadness and suffering. This particular Friday may actually be a day of great rejoicing for me, and I may relate better to Psalms of praise. In the Benedictine psalter, I will find them along with others which do refer to the Passion. In the same way, Sundays are not always days of rejoicing. In the monastic psalter, the greatest psalm of the Passion (Psalm 21) is recited on Sunday morning, which is the time of the Resurrection. This may seem odd, but it might just be on Sunday morning in the cold of the night that I feel the weight of the cross and am more inclined to unite myself with the Passion of our Lord. In addition to this, reciting it at the very moment of the Resurrection reminds me that if I too want to attain to the glory of Easter, I must first carry my cross. The psalter thus becomes a veritable catechism and school of sanctity.



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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

Some highly constructive advice concerning the way we handle bad thoughts is given to us by St Ignatius in the general examination of conscience (cf. *Spiritual Exercises*, #32-42). He wants us to be aware of the good use we can make of even the bad thoughts that come to us. Indeed, he first tells us that when we have bad thoughts (be they impure, unkind, envious, vengeful, or of any other kind), they can be a source of great merit before God. This is of capital importance. Thoughts, in and of themselves, are not sinful. Sin requires an act of the will, therefore of acceptance of the evil intent in the thought. The thought of pushing someone under the bus might race through my mind as I'm standing and awaiting its arrival. Such a thought is not sinful as long as I reject it. What to do if it comes back? Quite simply, reject it again, and as often as it returns. If to reject it once is meritorious before God, even more so if I persevere in rejecting it each time it returns. So by being obstinate in tempting us, the Enemy is actually giving us the means to grow closer to God.

The worth of this counsel is incalculable. Indeed, it is very common for a penitent to confess to having bad thoughts, and a good confessor will want to know how the penitent deals with these thoughts. If the thought of committing some mortal sin comes to the mind and “for a short time one pays heed to it, or receives some sense pleasure, or is somewhat negligent in rejecting it” (*Spiritual Exercises*, #35), there is a venial sin. A bad thought becomes a mortal sin only if it is fully consented to, that is to say, either by acting out

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Our growing collection of fowl (geese, ducks, chickens, turkeys) have been intrigued by a new neighbour. On 19 May a 15x4m poly-tunnel cocoon (also known as a greenhouse) was installed in the garden area behind the house. It is destined to provide fresh vegetables throughout the year for the community and its guests – and *not* for the rabbits, even though they have been eyeing it with growing interest... We can't expect too many results in winter, of course, but we are getting started, and in the springtime we intend to set up a second cocoon. Hopefully next time you come to visit us, you will be able to relish some home-grown veggies (assuming the monks have not eaten them all)...

Last but not least, on 20 May, Vigil of the Ascension,

the thought in one's mind or by forming the intention of carrying it out when this is possible.

What many penitents do not realise is the golden opportunity that bad thoughts can be for the soul who seeks to grow in love for God. If we consider them as a chance to renew our love for God and fidelity to Him, far from being sins, they become stepping stones to Him. They can be compared to playing ping-pong or tennis. As often as the Enemy fires his loathsome darts at me, I can ward them off and actually send them back by means of a brief prayer, such as: “Jesus, save me”, “Mary, protect me”, “St Joseph, shield me”, or “St Michael, guard me,” etc... It's an extraordinarily powerful way of telling God how much we love Him and amassing merits for Heaven.

So the next time you are bombarded with evil thoughts, be mindful that it is just a matter of developing your tennis skills, with one big difference: not everybody can be a Wimbledon champion, but everyone can become proficient at rejecting bad thoughts. Get yourself a good racket and give it a go. It works.



we were honoured to have the visit of Archbishop Julian. The recent loosening of travel restrictions in Tasmania was providential, and allowed us to have a good catchup with His Grace. He informed us, among other things, of the appointment of a new Vicar General in Hobart in the person of Fr Shammi Perera, following the retirement of Mgr Michael Tate, A.M. We wish Mgr Tate all the best in this new stage of his priestly life, and will remain ever grateful for his encouragements and support going back to before we opened our doors in 2017. He will always count among our most distinguished benefactors. Ad multos annos!

Brother Chronicler

