

# Ab Austro

## Newsletter of Notre Dame Priory

May/June 2019 No. 27

### This issue:

- † Victorian Retreats
- † 12<sup>th</sup> Degree of Humility
- † Recent Visitors

## First Retreats in Victoria

The end of May and beginning of June this year saw our first ever Victorian retreats at Pallotti College, Millgrove. 16 took part in the men's retreat and 22 in the women's. These were also the first retreats to be held entirely under the auspices of Notre Dame Priory, Fr Prior being ably assisted by Brothers Bede and Joseph as well as by postulant Xavier.

The setting of Pallotti College is ideal for retreats. Tucked away in the Yarra Valley near Millgrove, the college was first built as a seminary for the Pallotine Fathers. For the past few decades, it has been run as a retreat centre. The weather was a bit of a challenge, as it was cold and rainy almost all the time we were there.



For those who had made the retreat before, these sessions were special, not only because of the setting, but also because of their more monastic format. There were fewer talks, but more time for personal



Br Bede telling the men about our history and retreat apostolate

prayer and some of the hours of the Divine Office. There was also a long period of adoration of the Blessed Sacrament during which retreatants were able to come at their leisure to spend some intimate time with the Lord.

On our side, it is encouraging for us to realise one of the aspirations of the foundation, which is to recreate in the centres where we hold our retreats something of the atmosphere of the monastery. We consider retreats as not so much us going out into the world but rather bringing the retreatants from the world into the cloister where they can experience the peace, calm and beauty of the truth for which we were made.

All in all, this new model seems to be the wave of the future, so please consider signing up for one of our future retreats. Registrations are open, and all the info can be found on our website at <https://www.notredamemonastery.org/retreats>.

Brother Chronicler

IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO OFFER YOUR  
SKILLS TO HELP THE MONKS, PLEASE  
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[WWW.NOTREDAMEMONASTERY.ORG/  
VOLUNTEERS](http://WWW.NOTREDAMEMONASTERY.ORG/VOLUNTEERS)

QUODCUMQUE DIXERIT VOBIS FACITE





## JESUS MARIA JOSEPH

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

Lk 12:49

My Dear Friends in Jesus and Mary,

“The twelfth degree of humility is that a monk should not only be humble of heart, but should also in his behaviour always manifest his humility to those who look upon him. That is to say that whether he is at the Work of God, in the oratory, in the monastery, in the garden, on the road, in the fields, or anywhere else, and whether sitting, walking or standing, he should always have his head bowed and his eyes downcast, pondering always the guilt of his sins, and considering that he is about to be brought before the dread judgment seat of God. Let him constantly say in his heart what was said with downcast eyes by the publican in the Gospel: ‘Lord, I a sinner am not worthy to raise mine eyes to heaven’. And again with the prophet: ‘I am bowed down and humbled on every side’. Then, when all these degrees of humility have been climbed, the monk will presently come to that perfect love of God which casts out all fear: whereby he will begin to observe without labour, as though naturally and by habit, all those precepts which formerly he did not observe without fear; no longer for fear of hell, but for love of Christ and through good habit and delight in virtue. And this will the Lord deign to show forth by the power of his Spirit in his workman now cleansed from vice and from sin.”

At last we have arrived at the summit of the virtue of humility, that ladder which one takes downward but which is then lifted up by God according to the measure of one’s progress. Having arrived at the most profound humility, it has become second nature; the monk, as by instinct, appears humble. He not only is humble, he looks humble. “He should always have his head bowed and his eyes downcast”. I’m not sure what modern psychologists would say about that. It sounds something like an inferiority complex, or worse. Perhaps we are here at one of those attitudes that are inspired solely by faith and become incomprehensible without it. One is reminded of those extremely counter-cultural attitudes that were inspired by Our Lords’s words, such as: “He who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me...” (Mt 10:37), or “Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple..” (Lk 14:26). Those words demand total adherence to Christ at the risk of losing everything else. No human affections stand when it is a matter of fidelity to God.

Here we have a similar attitude. The monk who has

achieved the summit of humility and perfection reflects in everything he says and does the attitude of one who is about to be judged by God for his sins. In chapter 4 of the Rule, St Benedict places among the instruments of good works “to weep everyday for the sins of one’s life”. St Benedict is writing this is for monks who have spent years, decades even, praying, working, serving the Lord. How is this possible?

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conscious of the  
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It is possible only when, through faith, one has come to realise the gravity of sin, the deleterious effect it has on self and on the whole world. What is really fascinating here is that such an attitude is followed immediately by the casting out of fear in favour of love and the delight of virtue. In the mind of St Benedict this twelfth degree is followed without delay (the Latin word is “mox”) by the delight of virtue. In other words, the deeper you go down into the valley of humility, the more you are conscious of the gravity of sin, of your sins, the more you expose yourself to the superabundant joy of the Holy Spirit that is made manifest in one who has been fully purified.

On retreat, I sometimes compare this to a trampoline. The lower you descend into the valley of your wretchedness, the higher you are projected into the joy of God. The longer and harder you accept to look your sinfulness straight in the face, the higher chance you have of actually discovering, even in this life, the sweet joy of the Divine embrace. We could also say that, if St Benedict’s analysis is trustworthy – and who would deny that? I, as a Benedictine, certainly would not –, unless you accept to go down that path, to sink into the mire of your ontological nothingness and your spiritual insignificance, you will never attain to that state in which you run with joy on the way of the commandments.



And here we see how the modern current that consists in denying sin or denying that it is really serious and can separate from God for eternity, is actually a road block to peace and serenity in this life as it is a falsehood that derails from the path that leads to Heaven.

So how does one go about obtaining that level of humility? The first step is to ask for the grace to throw off the mask of our self-justification, to step on our pride and acknowledge our failings. To achieve this, I know of no better aid than St Ignatius' first week, in which, by overlapping layers of contemplation, the focus of our mind and heart zooms into sin and its consequences, showing us its devastating effects on our lives. One of the high points of that journey is the triple colloquy of the Third Exercise. It goes like this:

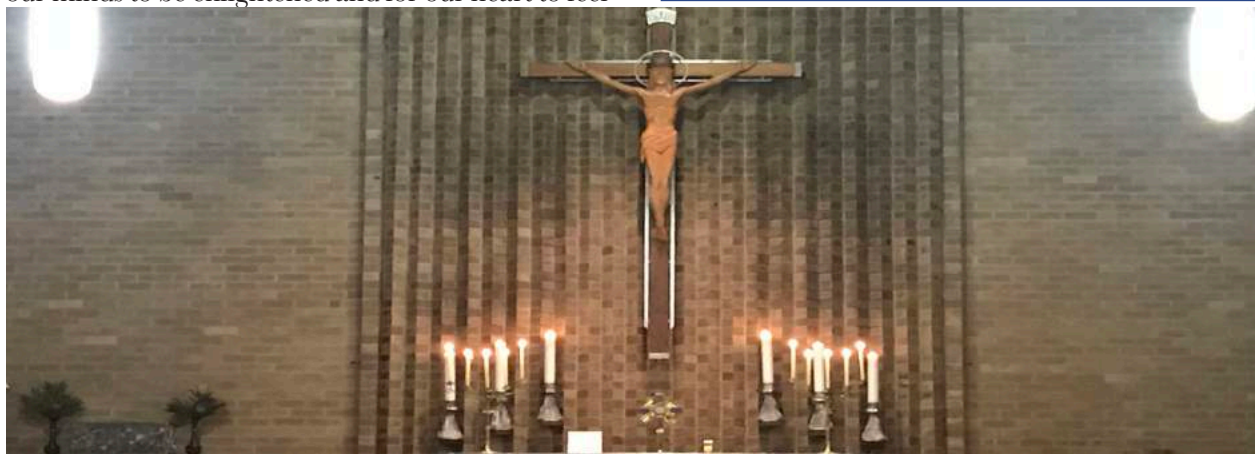
“The first colloquy will be with our Blessed Lady, that she may obtain grace for me from her Son and Lord for three favours: 1. A deep knowledge of my sins and a feeling of abhorrence for them; 2. An understanding of the disorder of my actions, that filled with horror of them, I may amend my life and put it in order; 3. A knowledge of the world, that filled with horror, I may put away from me all that is worldly and vain. Then I will say a Hail Mary. I will make the same petitions to her Son that He may obtain these graces from the Father for me. After that I will say Soul of Christ. I will make the same requests of the Father that He Himself, the eternal Lord, may grant them to me. Then I will close with the Our Father.”

This little prayer is a masterpiece, but it takes a bit of time to discover its depth. At each request, we ask for our minds to be enlightened and for our heart to feel

abhorrence and disgust. First, there are our sins, then there are the internal causes of our sins, that is to say our own passions and pride, finally the external causes of our sins, namely the influence of the world. The repetition of this prayer has a beneficial and pacifying effect; it leads firmly but gently to the truth; we see things as they are, and nowhere does a human being find peace as he does in the truth. Most psychological problems take their source in a lack of acceptance of reality. Never forget: the devil is allergic to reality and he seeks to infect us all with that rebellion.

So, coming back to St Benedict's twelfth degree of humility, we can see how the attitude of head bowed and eyes lowered is fully compatible with true joy in the Holy Spirit. The monastic ideal once again reveals itself as having a lot to say to our contemporary culture. The world says, “Affirm yourself, defend your rights, lift up your head and impose upon others”, and it ends up creating conflicts and wars. St Benedict and the other saints say, “Bow your head, humble yourself, acknowledge the rights of God and others, put yourself in the last place”, and they make men and women who are serene, joyful, full of the Holy Spirit, the exact kind of person we need to build a world of true justice and prosperity. The paradox is ever there. “Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled, and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted” (Lk 18:14).

*Fr Pius Mary Noonan, O.S.B.*



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# Update from the Priory

Beloved Friends,

I am happy to announce that the Priory has been graced with the presence of Fr Charbel from Abbaye Ste Madeleine in Le Barroux, France. I have been trying for some time to obtain help from traditional Benedictine communities around the world. The Abbot of Le Barroux, Dom Louis Marie, graciously lent Fr Charbel for a period of six weeks. Having Fr Charbel has been a real pleasure. We do hope the pleasure has been shared by him! Father showed us a number of photos from his monastery, revealing its extraordinary expansion over the years since its foundation in 1970, as well as the present plans to build new additions to the gorgeous Romanesque style monastery built in the 1980's. The presence of Fr Charbel was encouraging for another reason. Le Barroux came into existence in the same way as ourselves, with just one professed monk around whom a few young men formed a new community. And it worked! So, in spite of so many difficulties and challenges, we are encouraged to march on. Others have trodden this path before us and have succeeded.



“Quod isti et istae, cur non ego? – “What these men and women have done, why not I?” as St Augustine wrote. The life of the founder of Le Barroux, Dom Gerard Calvet († 2008), has been published in French, and we look forward to a translation, as it shows, along with a great love of God and persevering efforts to make his dream come true, the inevitable and, it would seem, never ending trials, from incomprehension to disbelief to outright persecution. But he persevered, and today Le Barroux is truly a city set on the mountain, enlightening many by its fidelity to the demands of traditional monastic life.

Fr Charbel was with us for our recent community outing to Freycinet, on the eastern coast of Tasmania. The date was 22 May, but several of the brethren,



along with Fr Charbel, went down on the preceding day to do some camping. They were joined the following morning by the the rest of us, who, to tell the truth, did a bit of “camping” of their own at the Priory. The entire group then proceeded to climb to the summit of Mount Amos. The weather was absolutely glorious and the view from the top of the mountain overlooking Wine Glass Bay was astounding.

On 10 May we were pleased to welcome for a brief visit author and journalist Greg Sheridan. You may recall that Greg penned an article on our community in *The Australian* a couple years ago when we were still in Lindisfarne. Last year, he published a book (*God Is Good For You*) in which we again appear as a modern phenomenon pointing not only to the existence of God but also to the relevance of basing your life on faith.



Finally, this issue of our newsletter covers both May and June, so our next one won't be till end of July. Until then, let us pray for each other.

Through Mary Immaculate,

Father Prior

