

# Ab Austro

Newsletter of  
Notre Dame Priory

January 2022

No. 52

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## *Priory update*

After a much appreciated summer break, the editing team of *Ab Austro* is back in the saddle for another exciting year. The summer opened with Br Bede's solemn profession on 8 December. The rest of the summer, to tell the truth, has been somewhat uneventful, especially due to current travel restriction rules here in Tasmania.

In mid-December we had (at last!) our first attempt at using the altar bread making equipment inherited from the Bendigo Poor Clares a few years ago. Having accidentally (due to postal delays) run out of hosts, the equipment was taken out of storage and put to work making a series of large hosts with beautiful, traditional motifs. It is hoped that this year will allow us to get this machinery up and running on a habitual basis. So, when is that going to be, you may be wondering? All we need is a proper workshop space, which brings us to the next news item.

We were finally able to build the 7 x 7m shed we had purchased when we were still in Rhyndaston. It now stands next to the existing tool shed, and will probably house our printing shop. Another shed will be going up soon, and the renovation of the larger shed at the entrance to the property is also planned for this year.

There was some sad local news on, of all days, Christmas: monastery friends Chris and Sarah Scheurs and family lost their home to fire. Thank God no one was hurt. The whole community went up a few days

later to assist them in clearing out the site for reconstruction and sharing some articles of prime necessity. Chris and Sarah, who used to manage the Colebrook Shop, have been good friends since we arrived in the area. They continue to be our main supplier of firewood.

On the feast of the Holy Innocents (28 December) the community went on its annual Christmas week outing to Launceston, sharing parlour time with our Carmelite sisters before going for a lovely hike around the Cataract Gorge Reserve. That morning before heading off from Colebrook, Fr Prior granted an exceptional community breakfast replete with eggs and sausages (an event you remember in the monastery!).

On 11 January, Sister Mary Sarah and Sister Cecilia Joseph of the "Nashville Dominicans" in Australia arrived and spent a couple days at Bethany. They treated the community to a detailed explanation of the origins of their institute and its work in Australia. We were delighted to learn more about them and we wish them much success and many blessings as they strive to live out their charism around the country.

On the retreat front, our usual summer sessions in NSW sadly did not take place this year due to travel and accommodation restrictions. At the moment we are working to find solutions and as news becomes available about any planned retreats, it will be posted under the retreat tab of our website (<https://www.notredamemonastery.org/retreats>).

**Brother Chronicker**





## In the school of St Benedict

(Chapter Two, What Kind of Man the Abbot Should Be, 16-22)

*Let him not make any distinction of persons in the monastery. Let him not love one more than another, unless he find him better in good works or in obedience. Let not a free-born monk be put before one that was a slave, unless there be some other reasonable ground for it. But if the abbot, for just reason, think fit to do so, let him fix anyone's order as he will; otherwise let them keep their due places; because, whether slaves or freemen, we are all one in Christ, and have to serve alike in the army of the same Lord. For there is no respect of persons with God. In this regard only are we distinguished in His sight, if we be found better than others in good works and humility. Therefore let the abbot show an equal love to all, and let the same discipline be imposed on all in accordance with their deserts.*

This particular part of the chapter on the abbot was inspired by the social context of the time. Among the men who came to be monks, there were plenty of Roman nobles (like St Benedict himself), but also many from the lower classes and even from the “barbarian” nations in the north. To ward off any possible class rivalry, St Benedict stresses our unity in Christ. In a monastery the only kind of competition there should be is in loving service of God and neighbour. What distinguishes us, the saint says, is good works and humility.

This prescription of course has a practical goal, namely that of making common life possible for men of very different backgrounds. When we take a closer look, however, we perceive that it is somewhat revolutionary in its approach to life. Then, as now, humans established social ranks and distinctions. This is not bad in itself, for the order of society demands various levels and types of influence. Not everyone has the same talents. This reality, however, is always



open to disputes that can be superficial and give the impression that what matters is who your parents are, what schools you went to, where you work, how much money you make, etc... In reality, all that is passing. It

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will soon be gone. True values lie elsewhere. A great person is one who has a lowly opinion of himself. A great person is one who is able to perform good works, with the firm conviction that it is only by the grace of God that any good gets done.

This teaching of St Benedict, vital for life in a monastery, contains a precious lesson for everyone in every walk of life. We need to leave behind the fictitious façades and false appraisals. We need to see people as they are before God, deserving of our respect and help inasmuch as is possible. It serves no purpose to play a personage, to think that because you are from this family or that school, you are somehow privileged and better. At the same time it is also foreign to the Gospel to favour someone just because they are from a lower or poorer class. That is all perfectly irrelevant. Among the saints we find those who came from poverty and slavery, but we also find kings, doctors and magistrates. It's all about love, manifesting itself through good works and humility.



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## Br Paphnutius discovers the liturgy

After the brothers return from their recreational walk, the bell rings once again at 2 PM for the office of None, literally the ninth hour of the day. It was at this hour (roughly 3 PM) that Our Lord expired on the cross. This is why the hymn for the office of None (*Rerum Deus tenax vigor*) asks for the grace of a happy death:

*O God, creation's secret force,  
Thyself unmoved, all motion's source,  
Who from the morn till evening's ray  
Through all its changes guides the day:*

*Grant us, when this short life is past,  
The glorious evening that shall last;  
That, by a holy death attained,  
Eternal glory may be gained.*

*O Father, that we ask be done  
Through Jesus Christ, Thine only Son,  
Who, with the Holy Ghost and Thee,  
Shall live and reign eternally.*

On Sundays and Mondays, the Psalms recited at None, like for Terce and Sext, are divisions of Psalm 118. During the rest of the week, Psalms 125, 126 and 127 are repeated each day.

Psalm 125, *In convertendo Dominus captivitatem Sion*, sings of the joy of the captives returning from exile like harvesters bearing their sheaves. This psalm can be applied to the joy of the redeemed soul after its



earthly exile, being welcomed into the eternal kingdom. It is therefore a perfect psalm to accompany the hymn which asks for a holy death.

Psalm 126, *Nisi Dominus aedificaverit*, gives us the salutary reminder that if the Lord does not watch over the edifice of our sanctification, our efforts to achieve it on our own will be to no avail, for the building up of our soul for eternal life can only be the effect of God's grace and our cooperation with it. At the same time, as the monk goes about his afternoon tasks, it reminds him that he needs God's help for it to be successful.

Finally, Psalm 127 sings of the blessings reserved for the man who fears the Lord. His wife shall be fruitful and his children the crown of his endeavours. Br Paphnutius has no trouble understanding that as a monk, he can look forward to the spiritual offspring of those souls whom he will contribute to converting and saving by his prayers, sacrifices and, later, preaching, teaching, counselling. All this was prophesied by Isaiah many centuries ago:

*For thus says the LORD: To the eunuchs who observe my sabbaths and choose what pleases me and hold fast to my covenant, I will give, in my house and within my walls, a monument and a name better than sons and daughters; an eternal, imperishable name will I give them... Them I will bring to my holy mountain and make joyful in my house of prayer (Is 56:4-7).*



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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

At the heart of the *Spiritual Exercises* is to be found the famous meditation on “The Two Standards”, a key moment in any retreat. It is a practical exercise which introduces the retreatant into the delicate task of discerning the spirits: following Christ and fighting the devil and his illusions.

Ignatius portrays Christ and Lucifer as two military commanders leading opposed armies. Both Christ and Lucifer want our soul. None of us is excluded. The soul of each human being is the prize that Christ came to save by means of His Incarnation. It is also the prize that the enemy covets, for he seeks by all means to lead souls away from God and bring them with him to eternal torments in hell.

Knowing this is the case, the next question one would naturally like to have an answer for is: how do these two commanders operate? What are their tactics? Just as in any war, when you know what the enemy is trying to do, you can more effectively counter his moves, so in spiritual warfare, if we know what to look out for in the approach of the devil, we are in a good position to thwart his assaults, and are less likely to be fooled by his wiles.

So what are those tactics? For the enemy it’s all about snatching souls from Christ, and the way to do that is to get them involved with creatures, any creatures. Ignatius uses the term “riches” to designate anything or any position or any person who can take the place of God in our lives. As soon as a person gives more importance to any creature than to God they are already under the standard of Satan. It’s as simple as that.



But it doesn’t stop there. The fascination with creatures leads the person ultimately to fascination with themselves. The ego becomes the centre of the universe around which everything must revolve. In the end, if one is not careful, this leads to unbridled pride which in turn leads (back) to all other vices.

If the devil pushes souls to put their hope in creatures, then it’s not surprising that the Lord is going to do the opposite. Clearly, if creatures cannot satisfy us, but can constitute an obstacle to our salvation, then knowing how to leave them aside is going to be a major part in any true conversion and growth in sanctity. The tactic then of Christ is to detach souls from all things created and put all their confidence in God and His grace.

What gives so much spiritual tonic to the meditation on the Two Standards is that Ignatius does not advise us to simply be detached from things. He cuts to the chase and tells us to ask for the grace to be deprived of things. He even encourages us to plead for the grace to be received under the standard (or banner) of Christ Our Lord through poverty, mistreatment and humiliations. Such is the unavoidable path of the Gospel, for it is the path that Jesus chose for Himself, and which was already portrayed in the Beatitudes. It is the path of interior freedom and total gift of self, in which gift we truly find ourselves.

