

Ab Austro

Newsletter of
Notre Dame Priory

February 2022 No. 53

This issue:

- † Visit and Retreats of Grace
- † Of Rods and Correction
- † Manual Labour
- † The Three Classes

Priory update

Among the books we have read recently in the refectory there is the famous life of St Bernadette Soubirous by Mgr Trochu. Providentially, we were still reading it for the feast of Our Lady of Lourdes, on which day we were honoured to receive another visit from His Grace Archbishop Porteous. The main reason for his coming was the conferral of the remaining minor orders on Brothers Bede and Gregory. He then shared supper with us and joined us in Bellarmine Library for a very pleasant time of recreation. Speaking of the library, Fr Prior's prophecy that Hardwick House would end up being just a library and nothing else may not be that far down the track. Shelving space is starting to be a problem, even though that should be resolved in the next few weeks, temporarily that is. The ground floor monks may be looking at a possible eviction.... But to where?

Well, things *are* happening, slowly but surely. Our second green house is well on the way to being installed, as well as another storage/workshop space between the two shipping containers on the hill overlooking the monastery. Also a first coat of paint was put in the six cabins still being constructed. Finally, on Ash Wednesday, one final job on Immaculate Conception Church was completed with the installation of new stained glass windows in the sacristy and vestibule.



On the retreat front, as announced last month, two retreats took place at our Bethany guest house. The first was a group of six men, the second a group of seven women. The majority of retreatants were students who wanted to get their retreat in before



going back to class. Both groups were able to follow the *Exercises* and take part in the Divine Office. Two other retreats are planned for May (see retreat button on our website) and we are hopeful that mainland retreats will soon be organised.

Brother Chronicer





In the school of St Benedict

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

For the abbot in his teaching ought always to observe the rule of the apostle, wherein he says: Reprove, entreat, rebuke (2 Tim 4:2). He must adapt himself to circumstances, now using severity and now persuasion, displaying the rigour of a master or the loving kindness of a father. That is to say he must sternly rebuke the undisciplined and restless; but the obedient, meek and patient, these he should exhort to advance in virtue. As for the negligent and rebellious, we warn him to reprimand and punish them. And let him not shut his eyes to the faults of offenders; but as soon as they begin to appear, let him, as he can, cut them out by the roots, mindful of the fate of Heli, the priest of Silo (1 Sam 2:11-4:18). Those of gentle disposition and good understanding should be punished, for the first and second time, by verbal admonition; but bold, hard, proud and disobedient characters should be checked at the very beginning of their ill-doing by the rod and corporal punishment, according to the text: the fool is not corrected with words (Pr 29:19); and again: Beat thy son with the rod and thou shalt deliver his soul from death (Pr 23:14).

Rest assured: most abbots these days don't want any trouble with Professional Standards; much less do they want to be taken to court. And so, the rod is no longer in use in monasteries... Let's leave it to educators to discuss the effectiveness of traditional methods, and go straight to the underlying motivations of the teaching of the Rule.

St Benedict's attention is drawn by the reality of different temperaments and degrees of understanding, but also zeal in the service of the Lord. Some people are more sensitive than others, more adaptable to discipline, more easily formed to a new way of life. Others, in spite of their good will, need to be helped along the way. Even among those who are generous at the start, there can come times when their initial fervour wanes, and a bit of coercion is required. We don't live on a cloud, nor on a distant planet. We live on planet earth, where we need to help each other reach the goal. That is one of the most valuable aspects of the monastic life. The superiors are there to help us reach our full potential and grow into our sometimes hidden gifts. This is not always an easy task. It can be compared to Socrates' method of helping his students "give birth" to the truth that is in them. As mothers well know, giving birth is no piece of cake, nor is education at any level. Parents know that correcting their children is among

the hardest aspects of their role. In a similar way, the abbot is there to help his monks progress, to be faithful to their calling, and become saints. He would be remiss, and culpably so, if he let his monks get

Parents know that correcting their children is among the hardest aspects of their role.

away with anything that is contrary to good morals or to the monastic observance of the Rule. In difficult moments when he might be tempted to take the easy way out, the wisdom of the Rule is there to help him not neglect his duty. Later he will reap the fruits of the seed sown in labour and fatigue.



We happily receive the details of anyone who might be interested in receiving our newsletter
via newsletter@notredamemonastery.org

Br Paphnutius discovers the liturgy

After the office of None, the monks move to their assigned manual work until Vespers. St Benedict is clear that the monk's time, outside of the Divine Office, is spent either in *lectio divina* or in manual work, for "idleness is the enemy of the soul". At Notre Dame Priory, numerous kinds of manual labour are in honour. As the community is still settling in, much of the work goes into building and furnishing the monastery and its grounds. This can be anything from digging holes to painting boards, installing insulation or water pipes to sowing seeds and planting trees. In addition, there are of course the tasks required for the upkeep of any house: cooking, laundry, house-cleaning, and, in winter, providing firewood and keeping the fire going.

The monks do look forward to the day when, the monastery being fully operational, they will be able to spend more time in activities to support themselves. Already, the seeds of such activities are being sown: workshops are going up, green houses being installed, fruit trees and vineyards being planted, animals are being bred.

Our novice who, like so many of his generation, had it pretty easy growing up, learns to discover that the value of manual work lies not so much in the work itself as in the virtues it helps foster: the spirit of poverty and mortification, fraternal charity, patience and humility. Indeed, as all the saintly monks

of history tell us, manual work has not only a physical but also a spiritual therapeutic aspect to it.

He learns the story of how the desert fathers used to make baskets for their livelihood, as this kind of work allowed their minds to ruminate the spiritual thoughts they derived from reading Holy Scripture. In this way, manual work does not constitute an interruption in the monk's life of prayer, but rather a testing ground for its authenticity. The monk who approaches manual work from that perspective comes, in short order, to love the tasks that are imposed upon him by holy obedience. That too is an important point: each monk receives his jobs in obedience; he doesn't choose them for himself. This guarantees that it is not through self-seeking, but rather because of his desire to seek God alone that he accepts and embraces the daily labour. Before you know it, the work becomes a pleasure, a need even, and hardly has Brother put his hand to it – or so it seems – when the bell is ringing for Vespers.



NOTRE DAME PRIORY IS A PUBLIC ASSOCIATION OF THE FAITHFUL FOUNDED IN 2017 IN THE ARCHDIOCESE OF HOBART. YOUR DONATIONS GO TOWARDS HELPING THE COMMUNITY GET ESTABLISHED AS AN AUTONOMOUS BENEDICTINE MONASTERY

VISIT OUR WEBSITE

www.notredamemonastery.org

CONTACT US - info@notredamemonastery.org

POSTAL ADDRESS

Notre Dame Priory
PO Box 85
Colebrook TAS 7027
Australia

MAKE A DONATION

Account name: Notre Dame Priory
BSB: 067-004 - Account number: 1004 1427
Cheques payable to "Notre Dame Priory"

USD - via cheque, made payable to
"Notre Dame Priory, Inc." and sent to:
Notre Dame Priory c/o 1202 Park Hills Court
Louisville, KY 40207 USA
Credit card - notredamemonastery.org/helpus



JESUS MARIA JOSEPH

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

Lk 12:49

On the fourth day of the Second Week of the Spiritual Exercises, after the meditation on the Two Standards, St Ignatius provides another meditation destined to bring home the same point. The meditation on the Three Classes of Men helps the retreatant be honest with himself and overcome the obstacles that his self-love creates in the pursuit of holiness. By having the retreatant measure himself against the three kinds of attitude one can adopt with regard to the demands of an authentic conversion to the spiritual life, this meditation should assist him in avoiding the illusion of thinking he is becoming holy when he is still leagues away.

Set against the background of what to do with something we cherish when we perceive that it is preventing us from giving ourselves wholly to God's plan over our life, Ignatius portrays three kinds of men. The first are what we might call "do-nothings". They see that they should be doing something about their perfection and would like to, but they never really get down to doing it. They procrastinate from day to day and, before you know it, their life is over.

The second group we could call the "compromisers". They are more convinced than the first that they need to do something, but they never do the right thing, the one they know will really be effective. As a consequence, they try to give themselves a good conscience by performing certain tasks, but not the ones they should be doing. They try to bring God to see things their way, but as God does not change, and they won't move either, these, too, arrive at the hour of death without having done anything useful for their sanctification.

The third group are the real "achievers". For them, there is no question about procrastinating or pretending. They really want God's will to be accomplished

in their lives. They truly have understood that what hangs in the balance is of such importance that it is worth laying down their life for it. Consequently, all they desire is to know the will of God and execute it. If His will is not clear to them, they pray unceasingly for it to manifest itself, and in the meantime they strive to be fully detached from all created things. In this way, they are ready for when they do receive a sign from Divine Providence.



One of their most powerful means of being truly at the divine disposal is to ask the Lord to take away from them any obstacle, any attachment to creatures that would have the potential to slow them down in the pursuit of sanctity. This prayer they make courageously each day, and little by little, their affection for it diminishes, and lo and behold, one day they find themselves free to embrace the ways of God. Then, the path to authentic sanctity is wide open, and God alone knows where it will lead.

