

# Ab Austro

## Newsletter of Notre Dame Priory

November & December  
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- † Solemn Profession of Br Bede Mary
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### *Priory update*

As we come to the end of another year, we have much to be thankful for. The only commodity lacking is the space in this newsletter to relate it all! Let's be content with the two most important events both of which took place over the past month. On the feast of Mary Immaculate, 8 December, Br Bede Mary made his solemn profession in the presence of His Grace Archbishop Porteous and a crowd of priests, religious and faithful as large as could be expected in the present circumstances. On 13 November, feast of All Saints of the Benedictine order, Celyn Scott took the holy habit of St Benedict, and received the religious name of Br Isaac Mary, being placed under the heavenly patronage of the patriarch Isaac, son of Abraham and Sarah.

We give thanks for these two events in the life of our community and are happy to share with you a few photos. Just a reminder that Ab Austro does not appear in January, so expect the next issue in February.

**Brother Chronicler**

### Homily for the Solemn Profession of Br Bede (excerpt)

Four years ago you were placed under the heavenly patronage of one of the most illustrious members of our order, St Bede the Venerable, whose erudition and austerity remain monumental achievements of our Benedictine tradition. But you also look up to Archbishop John Bede Polding, the first Archbishop of Sydney, another great monk whose dream was to evangelise Australia by means of Benedictine monks. We know that history did not allow that to play itself out, but at the same time his ideal inspires us, and we are allowed to nurture the hope that in time this small community may make a substantial contribution to the spreading of all that is truly good and holy throughout Tasmania, but also throughout all of Australia.



At the same time, we are fully conscious that the step you are about to take is one which the world has great difficulty understanding. The chant of the Divine Office, the building of a beautiful monastery, the helping of guests find God, the development of many other talents: people appreciate these, but all of them can be accomplished without the extreme form of consecration that is religious profession, and that is typified by the living out of the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience within the context of a specific community. Mind you, most of our faithful people have esteem for sharing with the poor, living a simple life without luxury. But when it comes to being dispossessed of all things, even to the point of not being able to possess anything personal, that is a radical choice, one that cannot fail to challenge. Our people have a certain esteem for chastity. However, the total renunciation of the love of a spouse and the founding of a family forces us to consider that when God tells us that He espouses us to Himself in fidelity, He is not just saying nice words, but revealing an actual state, a desire of His Sacred Heart. The vow of chastity in a world given over to hedonism is a statement that the love of God is greater and better and more fulfill-

QUODCUMQUE DIXERIT VOBIS FACITE





ing than even the most natural of human desires. It also points everyone to the eternal nuptials to which we are called and destined. Our people also understand that obedience is necessary for life in common. But when it is a question of signing over all personal autonomy and accepting, as St Benedict says in the Rule, to “walk according to the judgment and decision of another”, eyes and mouths open wide, one has difficulty in understanding. That Christ was obedient to death on a cross is incomprehensible to most. Nor should we try to explain away the radical nature of the religious life. It *is* radical. It was God’s choice, when He became incarnate, to inaugurate a way of life that takes us poor humans beyond the realm of our nature and already in some way makes present the life of the world to come. It is not by chance that the most atheistic regimes who seek to impose an earthly utopia have no room for the consecrated life. All signs of God must disappear from a godless world.

At one time, Australia had numerous religious vocations. There are several large, but empty convents around the country bearing witness to its vitality in inspiring young men and women to consecrate their lives to God. Today we find ourselves in a spiritual desert. And yet, flowers can grow in the desert. Oases



can be created there. The desert can flourish, as the Prophet Isaiah reminds us during this season of Advent: *The desert and the parched land will exult; the steppe will rejoice and bloom. They will bloom with abundant flowers, and rejoice with joyful song... Streams will burst forth in the desert, and rivers in the steppe. The burning sands will become pools, and the thirsty ground, springs of water* (Is 35). These inspired words give us hope. The hope that the definitive victory does not belong

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## May you be a light in the present darkness, a flower in the desert.

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to evil; it is not on the side of oppression, of those who delude themselves with imagining a world without God. We pray that you, dear Brother, may truly be a light in the present darkness, a flower in the desert, an oasis in which first God and then men may come to refresh themselves.

On this day, with the universal Church we turn our eyes to Mary Immaculate, God’s masterpiece, the true Ark of the Covenant in which God became incarnate, and who for that reason was preserved from the stain of original sin. We sang in the introit words which, also from Isaiah, no doubt spoke to your heart: *I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, and my soul shall be joyful in my God, for He hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, and with the robe of justice He hath covered me, as a bride adorned with her jewels* (Is 61). Today you will be clothed with the white monastic cuculla, this ample choir habit worn by solemnly professed monks. It is white because we place ourselves under the special protection of our spotless Mother. It is ample because, contrary to appearances, we know that monastic consecration is the path to true freedom. The day is fast coming, wrote a French author from the last century, when one will have to go behind



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cloistered walls to find men who are truly free. We know how true that is, when we see the enslavement worldly ideologies lead to. St Benedict told us so, but it was already there in Psalm 118: by running in the way of God's commandments, our heart becomes enlarged and freed from itself, from its vices, from its obsessions, from its follies. Men consecrated to God, because they take their stand on the eternal shore, are able to cast this world in its true light.

In a few moments, my Son, you will pronounce your vows before God and His people. You will sing the triple *Suscipe* prescribed by St Benedict himself and concluded with the *Gloria Patri*, witnessing to the fact that monastic consecration is first and foremost an act of *latría*, an act of adoration, a total gift of self to the God who made you. And that is why just afterwards you will lie prostrate on the sanctuary floor, placing yourself on the altar as it were, asking the Lord to consume you as a holocaust, while the priest chants over you the consecratory preface that will dedicate you for life to the Most Holy Trinity. That prostration is like a mystical death, by which you profess that the world, with all its beauty, is not big enough for your heart, for God alone can fill it.

## Homily for the Clothing of Br Isaac Mary (excerpt)

Throughout the day we have been immersed, as it were, in the great cloud of witnesses, our brothers and sisters in St Benedict who have gone before us, who have walked the straight path of the Holy Rule through this valley of tears. All of them, like you, one day encountered Benedict of Nursia and saw in him, a guide, a shepherd, a father, one they knew they could follow without fear of going astray, for the simple reason that he himself only followed the Lord Christ.

St Benedict is compared by St Gregory to “all the just”, that is the holy souls of the Old Covenant: Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, Elijah, Elisha, and others. In his life, there are episodes which are indeed reminiscent of Old Testament times; they lead us back to the very origins of our faith.



The monk is like Abraham, in that he hears the voice of God calling him to leave all things: family, home, lands, all that is dear. To go out, to leave behind. To leave oneself behind ultimately. But this going out is not a loss of identity or a search for any sort of nirvana. No, it is a going out of the creature to the Creator, out of the darkness into the light, out of turmoil into peace, out of fiction into reality, out of confusion into certitude.

Abraham has ever been a great model for monks, he who accepted to leave all things, and to go where he knew not, to spend all his life as a nomad, going from place to place, seeking a lasting home, one that would remain. But he would not see it himself. It would be centuries before the Chosen People would come up out of Egypt and settle in the Promised Land. The ways that lead to God are long, windy and narrow. They go down valleys and up mountains, through



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fire and water. They demand much of the soul that accepts to step out onto them, but they are most fulfilling, for they help the soul detach itself, liberate itself from all things created, in order to be free, in God's hand, for every kind of good work He may have in store. Such is, I believe, the mentality any man who enters a monastery should have: to be consumed with thirst for the living God, to go anywhere and to do anything that will lead to Him.

We see this clearly in the sacrifice of Isaac. God had promised Abraham an heir, whose posterity would be as numerous as the stars of the heavens. Even though the years passed, and both Abraham and Sarah were growing quite old, and even though Sarah had passed the age for childbearing, still Abraham continued to believe in God's word. Finally, the longed-for offspring comes, and the heart of the patriarch exults. But then something awful and unexpected happens. God commands Abraham to offer up Isaac in sacrifice. He commands him to slay his own son, this son of the promise, this heir of all his hopes and dreams. He must die, and there is to be no delay.

What went through the mind of Abraham as he climbed Mount Moriah, which tradition identifies with Calvary? What heavy weight must have he felt on his heart? His dearest treasure, his most loved son, his cherished Isaac. Abraham experienced his dark night of the soul on that occasion; he walked in the obscurity of faith, utterly confident that God is always true, that He never fails us, that what He asks is truly for our good, even if we do not see how.

All of us are called like Abraham to leave behind so many people, so many things. We are asked to step out into the unknown. We all have our Isaac, that most cherished person, place or memory, and God asks us to offer it up in sacrifice. But we are also called to be Isaac. Holy Scripture does not give us the exact age of the young man at the time, but he was strong enough to carry the wood up the mountain, which means he must have been a strong young man, perfectly capable



of resisting his hundred year old father. Nevertheless, when the altar is raised, and the wood is placed on it and the fire is ready for the holocaust, and the patriarch bids his son to lie down on the altar, and he grabs his knife to immolate him – through it all, Isaac is receptive; he lets it all happen; he allows his father to offer him in a bloody immolation. And so it would have been had not the angel of the Lord intervened.

And so it happens each day that when the Father of the monastery offers up the paten at the altar, mystically immolating the true Son of the Eternal Father, he places thereupon each of his own sons, and unites them with the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus. And there, at the altar, is where the monk's life is lived to the fullest of its potential. It is there that he becomes the body broken, the blood poured out, the sacrifice that reconciles souls to God.

And there it is that we reach the most intimate communion with all those holy monks and nuns we are privileged to call brothers and sisters. There at the altar, while the true Lamb of God is immolated by the Eternal Father, those brothers and sisters in glory surround us, allow us to enter into the great liturgy of Heaven, and obtain for us the grace to live out our own little ascent of Mount Calvary.

May all these patriarchs and saints guide and assist you at every moment and may you too one day be honoured as a Saint of the Order of St Benedict. Presumptuous? It would be if we relied on our own strength. But the reality is, that God Himself, in His Son, calls us to sanctity, to be one with the saints who have all grown and matured under the mantle of Mary Immaculate. Fiat.

