

Notre Dame Priory

Newsletter

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QUODCUMQUE DIXERIT VOBIS FACITE

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TASMANIA'S FIRST BENEDICTINE CLOTHING

They say this is one of the hottest Novembers in (recorded) Tasmanian history. One thing is sure: hearts surely were ablaze in Colebrook on the feast of Our Lady's Presentation, 21st November.

The event was the first ever Benedictine monastic clothing in Tasmania. Our four young candidates having completed their time of postulancy, their "clothing day", that is, the day they receive the holy habit, was set for Our Lady's Presentation in the Temple.

At 5 PM, in St Patrick's Church, Colebrook, Archbishop Julian Porteus presided at Pontifical Vespers, after which all the ministers processed out, then returned to choir, this time without the postulants. One of the priests, filling the role of Novice Master, then came forward to address the Prior, informing him there were several men desirous of receiving the Benedictine habit. At Fr Prior's behest, the men were brought in and proceeded to prostrate themselves, lying flat on the church floor in the presence of all. Absolute silence. Awesome. Fr Prior asked them what they had come for, to which they replied: "The mercy of God and fraternity in the community".

Fr Prior then, having commanded them to rise, addressed them according to custom on such occasions, reminding them of the difficulties involved in monastic life (you will find the text of this address on the following pages). The Prior then presented each of them with the Rule of St Benedict, inviting them to

enter, should they still persist in the desire to become a monk.

The next part of the ceremony, somewhat surprisingly, was the washing and kissing of the feet. Fr Prior knelt before each postulant, as our Blessed Lord did before His apostles, washed his feet, then kissed them.

Having accomplished this humble task and recited a magnificent prayer asking that "we might attain that peace of heart which Mary received while she kissed the feet of her Redeemer", Fr Prior then intoned psalm 23 with the beautiful antiphon "*Hi accipient*": *These shall receive a blessing from the Lord, and mercy from God their Saviour: for this is the generation of those who seek the Lord.* This was followed by another antiphon "*Beati eritis*": *Blessed shall you be when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of Man's sake. Be glad in that day and rejoice; for behold, your reward is great in heaven.* As the assistants chanted the canticle of Zachariah, Fr Prior then imposed the habits on each of the postulants, accompanying each part of the habit

(tunic, belt and scapular) with a prayer adapted to the symbolism of each.

After a final prayer in which he asked the Lord to surround these men "with the helmet of faith, so that, favorably thus protected, they may taste of the sweetness of having fled the world", came the final part of the ceremony, in many ways the most awaited: the imposition of the new names.

Tomas Cannavo received the name of Br Bede Mary. St Bede, monk and doctor of the Church, is one of the glories of the Benedictine order. But the name was also chosen because it was the religious name of the first Australian Benedictine, Archbishop John Bede Polding, whom we look up to as the model of the Benedictine pioneer. Alec Hobbs received the name of Br Gregory Mary. St Gregory the Great, biographer of St Benedict, Father and Doctor of the Church, was probably the most widely read author of medieval monks, and he remains a great inspiration to us today. David McMahon received the most coveted of names, that of the foster-father of Our Lord; he is now Br Joseph Mary. Finally, Graham Leach was placed under the patronage of the great abbot of Clairvaux, St Bernard, the "bard of Our Lady".

So, as you can see, the new novices have a lot to live up to. At the same time, they are under the special patronage of these glorious saints as well as under that of Mary Immaculate.

Please keep them in your prayers!

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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

**Exhortation given by Father Prior at the clothing ceremony for
Brothers Bede Mary, Gregory Mary, Joseph Mary and Bernard Mary
St Patrick's Church, Colebrook, 21 November 2017,
Feast of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary**

Beloved Sons, Tomas, Alec, David and Graham,

Today we honour the Presentation of the Immaculate Virgin Mary in the Temple of Jerusalem. On such an auspicious day, you come to present yourselves to serve in the house of the Lord which is a Benedictine Monastery. To such men as yourselves our holy Father St Benedict prescribes to teach the *dura et aspera*, the hard and rugged paths that lead to God. We may not hide from you the difficulty of the task one undertakes when one enters into the religious life. Over the past nine months you have already had the opportunity to verify the exactness of that reality: going to God entails giving up many things, leaving behind creatures in order to prefer the Creator. The coming year will be a time during which you will further test your vocation; you will be continually spurred on to turn your eyes to the example afforded us by Our Lord Jesus Christ Himself when He walked this earth and was the model of the perfect life. You will strive to know Him more intimately, to love Him more intensely and to follow Him more closely. From Bethlehem to Calvary, the entire life of Christ was a cross and a martyrdom, and the man who aspires to the perfection of religious virtue must constantly turn his gaze to the Crucified One in order to obtain the grace and the deeper love to overcome all obstacles which lie in the way of perfection. A crucified Lord shares His cross with those He loves. But at the same time, hand in hand with the cross come the interior consolations, the inexpressible joy of being loved and of loving in return. *Expertus potest credere*, says St Bernard of Clairvaux — only the one who has experienced it can really understand: there is no joy on earth but in the cross of Jesus Christ.

Today's ceremony presents us with a number of gestures upon which I would like to reflect with you.

The first one we all witnessed this evening was your *prostration* before the altar of God. It is a striking gesture even for those of us who have witnessed it before. Lying prostrate before God is an solemn act of adoration; it signifies the placing of oneself, of one's entire being, of one's whole life, into the all-loving hands of God. It is the acknowledgement of a reality, namely, that we depend entirely upon God for our very existence, and we find peace in that truth which grounds us upon the solidity of a life given over to God. But this prostration was also accomplished in the Church, before those who represent the Church, before our Archbishop whose presence, along with the great joy it affords us, gives us the assurance of being in continuity with the historical church of Jesus Christ founded on the successors of the apostles. The prostration was made before your Prior, the one whose task it will be to guide your steps in the monastic life and who is responsible for your progress. In that sense, it is a reminder that, in the Church one is never alone, for one always has the mediation of those men who come to us in the name of the Lord and through whom He makes His presence felt. It is a reminder that ever since God became man, His word and will reach us through men. Let that frame of mind remain always in you, and may you know how to prostrate yourself often before the grandeur of the Divine Plan which encompasses you and draws you on to its ineffable fulfillment. As St Gregory the Great writes concerning St Mary Magdalene's persevering search for Christ: "For those who love, it is not enough to look once: the power of love increases the vehemence of the search. The first time that she sought Him she could in no wise find him: she persevered in seeking, and so it came about that she found Him. And this happened, because longing increases when unsatisfied, and thus increased, can retain what it finds".

The second part of this ceremony will be the *mandatum*, the washing of feet. We are familiar with this ritual in the context of Maundy Thursday, but most of us will probably be surprised to see it performed in the setting of a monastic clothing. What does it mean? The antiphons we will chant during the *mandatum* all refer to the Lord's new commandment, that we love one another as He has loved us. If the father of the community washes the feet of his sons it is to imitate the Lord Jesus and show that the hierarchical nature of religious life,

far from taking away from its familial character, reinforces it, for the shepherd is the one set apart to serve the others. By allowing your father to wash your feet, you learn that you in turn must wash the feet of your brethren, that in a monastic community, the one who is really great is the one who knows how to stoop down and serve the needs of others at his own cost. But this ceremony also has another meaning. In the Rule, St Benedict prescribes it as a form of hospitality shown to guests. By placing it here in the ritual of clothing, the tradition gives us to understand that the postulant who knocks at the monastery door has come from a long journey, he is tired, his feet are dirty, he is looking for a home, and he finds solace in seeing the door open to him. You have each travelled a long way; you have considered other options in life, and for the moment at least — even though you are free to pursue another course in life should you decide to leave —, you are asking to be welcomed here in order to try your vocation as a Benedictine Monk. If you persevere, you will later learn to practice that same love and warm welcome for all those who knock at the monastery door, be it to become a monk, or simply to find some peace in the midst of a confused world.

We come then to the heart of this evening's ceremony: the *clothing*. Having laid aside your secular garb, the symbols of your attachment to the world, you will don the habit of the order of St Benedict, the same habit which has been worn for a millenium and a half by men and women inspired to walk in the footsteps of the patriarch of western monks. The ancients tell us that the habit has a double symbolism, that of humility and that of innocence. Of humility, because it is not attractive in the eyes of the world. It is in fact the public profession of a penitential state, and as such, may draw some condescending looks or provoke the scorn or even the ire of worldly-minded persons. Of innocence, because it is the outward expression of conversion of life. Innocence we may have lost, but one of the purposes of religious life is to conquer it anew, to become the "new man who is created in sanctity and truth". In our community, the habit reflects another innocence, that of the One who is truly innocent, the Immaculate Virgin Mary. Like St Joseph, the just man who was chosen to be the guardian of Mary, may you ever be enthralled by the attraction of her spotless purity. In an age which seems to pride itself on its worship of vice, this is no small matter. In a world of growing darkness, wearing the white habit of Mary our Mother will make you witnesses to the eternal light which shines bright in the hearts and even on the countenance of the chaste. With Mary Immaculate, there is also the legion of holy virgin saints whose companionship is sweet to the consecrated soul. This evening we honoured the memory of St Cecilia, by chanting an antiphon recalling the angelic presence at her side, protecting her virtue and establishing peace in the midst of bloody persecution. Another great virgin saint we honour as patroness is St Mary of the Cross, who suffered much for Christ in founding a religious order. May she too spur us on amidst the challenges of our own fledgling community.

Finally at the end of this ceremony, you will receive a *new name*. Just as when you were born you were given a name by your parents, so at the threshold of monastic life you receive a new name from the father of the community. Not that you will abandon the patron saint of your baptism, on the contrary, that bond is eternal. Rather the new name symbolises a deepening of your commitment to the Lord as well as your intention to pursue greater perfection as you continue to discern your vocation. The new saint who is given to you, along with Our Blessed Mother whose name also you will be privileged to bear, will be an intimate friend to whom you must have recourse often during your religious life. To quote a famous passage of St Augustine: *What they have done, why not I?*

Yes, why not I? I know only too well that each of you has asked yourself this question often over the past few months: why am *I* here? *You* are here because you have heard the call to make this beginning, to set out on a path that is folly in the eyes of the world. But, like a man who sells everything to purchase the field wherein the treasure is hid, you know that this is a sure step, one that faith tells you you will not regret.

To conclude, may these words of St Bede the Venerable become reality for you; if they do, you will have found beatitude on earth: "I was no longer the centre of my life and therefore I could see God in everything".

And so, my dear Sons, "Unfurl the sails, and let God steer us where He will".

Fr Pius Mary Noonan, O.S.B.

Update from the Priory

Beloved Friends,

The big news of this month's clothing must not make us forget another big event: the entrance into postulancy of Dominic Swan, who completed his period of aspirancy and was welcomed on 13th November, feast of All the Saints of the Benedictine Order. Dominic, who is now our only postulant, was acolyte and book-bearer at the clothing ceremony. He has been kept busy in the kitchen and in the laundry but has also shown us his practical talents in making the platform for the bishop's throne which we used for the clothing ceremony. At present, in addition to enjoying his first month of postulancy, he is working on a couple other manual projects for household items. I doubt not that we have tapped into some hidden talent here.

Talking about talents to be developed, Brothers Gregory and Joseph attended a course on the craft of sandal and leather-belt making with a local saddler; they are now in the process of mastering this noble art. The belts given to the new novices in the ceremony of clothing were all made by the brethren. It is our hope that this will be a source of income for the Priory. I suspect you will be hearing more about it as we go along and as these brothers become proficient in their art.

Before their clothing, the four novices finished their reading of the catechism, and so that leaves them free to spend more time on what makes up the essence of the novitiate formation. This includes a more indepth reading of the Rule, the study of magisterial documents on the religious life, and presentation of the monastic vows. This will prepare them for their first vows which, please God, we hope will take place towards the end of next year.

Other bits of news this month include Martine Watkinson's escapade to Queensland. The purpose of this trip was twofold: first, celebrating her son Peter's 20th birthday, and second, organising a shipping container with various items she had collected over the years, and which will be useful for the Priory. Thanks to a generous benefactor, we only had to purchase the shipping container which is due to arrive any day now: transport costs were covered. I would like to extend a warm word of thanks to this benefactor as well as to those who helped Martine load the container and make it ready for departure. As regards the Pearl, we are having a large shed put up adjacent to the house, and it should be in by Christmas. This will, we hope, change lots of things for the community, but, as there is much astir on that front, we will tell you more about it next month, please God.



Finally, the Priory also saw (another!) American tradition take root: on Thursday 23rd November, we celebrated Thanksgiving. This was, I believe, a challenge for all but me. First of all, no one here (including me) had ever cooked Thanksgiving Dinner. But our dear friend Judith Andrews, thanks to my childhood memories, recipes from my sisters, and a bit of help from Mr Google, was able to prepare a superb Thanksgiving Dinner which was enjoyed by all. I say "all", because we were honoured that day with the presence of Mgr Michael Tate, Vicar General of Hobart, Fr Terence Naughtin, Br Bede's parents — Sam and Deb Cannavo —, longtime friend Trudy Scremin and two young men who are discerning their vocations at the moment. For sure, there is so much to be thankful for, especially as we look at those five young men in formation and at all we have accomplished since our foundation day in February. Thank you, dear Friend, for your support and prayers, without which we would not be here. May Jesus, Mary and Joseph bless you abundantly during the coming Advent Season.

Father Prior

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