

# NOTRE DAME PRIORY Newsletter

JUNE 2018

QUODCUMQUE DIXERIT VOBIS FACITE

NO. 16



Visit with  
Archbishop Porteous



ENTRY OF  
Israel De Brito



## A GRACE-FILLED VISIT, A NEW POSTULANT AND A FEW NEW ARRIVALS...

The month of June, dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, got off to a great start with a visit from Archbishop Porteous on 2 June. His Grace joined us for the office of Sext and lunch, and then shared our recreational walk to the Coal River Valley Gorge. The Archbishop's ongoing support is such a comfort for us. May God bless his paternal heart.

On 23<sup>rd</sup> June, we had another joyous occasion with the entry, as postulant of Israel De Brito who hails from Western Australia. Israel arrived at the Priory on the eve of Palm Sunday. Since then he has been very proficient at getting the garden in order: the garden beds we had previously acquired, but which had



been left incomplete, have now been sown with seeds. Israel is a professional wine-maker (and so we have extra reason to pray for his perseverance!). Until we can get to the point of actually planting a vineyard however, Israel has been put in charge of our most recent arrivals. Indeed, the population of Rhyndaston, already exploding due to the monastic foundation, soared again with the arrival of twenty laying hens and five geese. Israel had been working to prepare a new home for these winged creatures who, we hope, will provide us with all the eggs and, eventually, the needed fowl meat for our growing community.

On 4 June, we had another arrival: an empty shipping container. It

**The monks have recently started the production of holy cards. Enclosed you will find the first fruits of our work in honour of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.**

would not remain so for long. The next day, the brothers took all available vehicles to Bridgewater, where a number of items that had been previously purchased at an auction were awaiting their new home.



I'm sure you're wondering what the monks got at the auction? Well, as it turned out, the Australian Antarctic Division seems to be upgrading some of its equipment at the South Pole, and so we got several elements of an industrial kitchen: ovens, fryers, counters... but also shelving, cabinets, fridge, and..... a large antarctic tent (no, it never gets cold in Tasmania, Father Prior has again recently reminded us...). So what will the tent be used for? Time will tell, so stay tuned.

*Brother Chronicler*



## JESUS MARIA JOSEPH

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

*Lk 12:49*

Dearly Beloved Friends,

After the interruptions of the last two months due to the recent clothing ceremonies, we may now resume our reading of the degrees of humility as described by St Benedict in the 7<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Holy Rule. We come to the fifth degree: “The fifth degree of humility is that he humbly confess and conceal not from his abbot any evil thoughts that enter his heart, and any secret sins he has committed. To this does Scripture exhort us, saying: *Make known thy way unto the Lord and hope in Him.* And again: *Confess to the Lord, for He is good, and His mercy endureth for ever.* Furthermore: *I have acknowledged my sin to Thee, and my injustice I have not concealed. I said: I will confess against myself my injustice to the Lord, and Thou hast forgiven the wickedness of my sin*”.

St Benedict here refers to a commonplace teaching among all Catholic spiritual masters, and we could summarise it this way: you can't do it alone. We might begin by drawing a comparison with the human realms of any knowledge or skill. No one can master an art on his own. He needs the guidance of others who have been there before him and can teach him aspects of the question he does not suspect. Life is so complex and so short, that the person who wants to do it all on his own will get virtually nothing done. Life is not to be reinvented every time someone comes into the world. This is easy to understand, and we have all experienced it. Why is it then that one could imagine being able to progress in the *spiritual* life without a guide? The realm of the mind and heart is infinitely more complex than any natural science or realm of study, for it deals with the subtlest movements of the heart and, more importantly, is destined to lead to the contemplation of the eternal God, infinitely removed from our capacity to comprehend.

God has put us in this life to seek Him, find Him, and ultimately climb the steep path to His heavenly abode where we hope to see Him face to face. Impossible, indeed, if we had to try it on our own. But we don't! And that is precisely why God stepped into our world, to guide us to Himself. He gave us a Church to whom He has entrusted the task of speaking in His Name the saving doctrine and showing us the path to Heaven. And that is why those who wish to be among the Lord's intimates and for whom the interior life of the soul is truly the most valuable part of life, they, more than anyone else, need a guide. For the way is narrow, it is steep, it is lined with traps and dangers. St John of the Cross says that when the soul has reached a certain level of union with God, the path disappears, you no longer know where you are, you are in the dark night of faith. Precisely then, you need a guide.

Such is the background of St Benedict's teaching on the humility which moves the monk to admit to his abbot all his failings. Without such a confession, it would be impossible to progress in the interior life. Mind you, the confession to the abbot here described has nothing to do with sacramental confession. That is another realm, a sacramental one, directly related to the power of the keys held by the Church in the person of her priests. Any priest can forgive, in the sacrament of penance, the sins we have committed. Here, St Benedict is referring to the openness that takes place in the context of spiritual direction. The soul opens itself up like a book to an experienced spiritual mentor who knows the ways of the Spirit and can be a trusted and sure guide.

St Ignatius concurs when, in the 17<sup>th</sup> annotation, he admonishes the director of the Spiritual Exercises not to pry into the secret thoughts of the retreatant, but adds that “it will be very helpful if he is kept faithfully informed about the various disturbances and thoughts caused by the action of different spirits. This will enable him to propose some spiritual exercises in accordance with the degree of progress made and suited and adapted to the needs of a soul disturbed in this way” (SE 17). The spiritual director is unable to give sound advice of discernment unless he knows what is going on in the heart of the retreatant; the great importance of spiritual openness is evident.

St Ignatius returns to this in more depth in the 13<sup>th</sup> rule for discernment of spirits: “Our enemy may also be compared in his manner of acting to a false lover. He seeks to remain hidden and does not want to be discovered. If such a lover speaks with evil intention to the daughter of a good father, or to the wife of a good husband, and seeks to seduce them, he wants his words and solicitations kept secret. He is greatly displeased if his evil suggestions and depraved intentions are revealed by the daughter to her father, or by the wife to her husband. Then he readily sees he will not succeed in what he has begun. In the same way, when the enemy of our human nature tempts a just soul with his wiles and seductions, he earnestly desires that they be received secretly and kept secret. But if one manifests them to a confessor, or to some other spiritual person who understands his deceits and malicious designs, the evil one is very much vexed. For he knows that he cannot succeed in his evil undertaking, once his evident deceits have been revealed” (SE 326).

How often has experience shown that by manifesting one’s temptations to a trustworthy person, they disappear right away. Spiritual solitude is dangerous, for the devil is cunning, and he is evil. If we manifest our failings and bad thoughts to someone else, the enemy loses power over us. Moreover, there is a psychological reason for this: by manifesting our deepest thoughts, we are no longer alone with them, there is someone else there to help us. However, there is a much deeper reason, and that is humility. If St Benedict places these reflections here, it is because he knows that it takes humility to open the wounds of one’s heart to someone else. But he also knows that when the soul finds the courage to open itself up, such openness is going to increase its humility.

There is a famous episode in the life of St Thérèse of Lisieux, which she recounts herself in the *Story of a Soul*. She tells how, the day before her profession, during the hour of silent prayer in choir, she was tormented with the thought that she did not have a vocation, and that she was fooling everyone into thinking she did. The temptation was so obsessive that it seemed clear as day to her that she should not make profession, but should leave the convent. With that she rose, made her way to the Novice Mistress, asked her to come with her outside, and once there proceeded to tell her that she was now sure she had no vocation, and that she had been deluding everyone including herself. The Novice Mistress was content to laugh! And that was the end of the temptation: the diabolical illusion disappeared with the act of humbly uncovering the terrible thought of the heart.

Many, many other instances can be related, as found in the lives of the saints, but let this suffice for now. Remember: if you feel inclined to hide your thoughts because you are ashamed, that is a sure sign that you need to tell a trustworthy person about it. “A fault confessed is half redressed”, goes the saying. And a temptation avowed, is more than half conquered.

Fr Pius Mary Noonan, O.S.B.

## Update from the Priory

Beloved Friends,

As I pen this update to you, we have just celebrated the Nativity of St John the Baptist which coincides with the summer or winter solstice, depending on which hemisphere you happen to find yourself in. Even though this is my second winter in Tasmania, this is my first winter solstice here, as last year I was in Europe giving a retreat. This year, as we prepared to celebrate the Birth of the Precursor of the Lord, I was



reminded of a custom, in some places of Europe, which consists in lighting big bonfires on the feast. This custom undoubtedly, like that of ancient December celebrations, goes back to pagan rituals in honour of the sun, but it has now been christianised: the fire, source of light and heat, symbolises the Lord Incarnate who has come into our world to enlighten us with His truth and warm us with His love.

This being so, I thought it appropriate to inaugurate here at the southernmost tip of Australia, the custom of the St John Bonfire, and so, after first Vespers of the feast, our community gathered around a big fire and shared a fraternal meal, breaking our fast on the Vigil of the saint. The fire, along with its symbolism, assuredly played the vital role of keeping us warm: even though it never gets cold here, the monks — including the Prior — can sometimes get the impression it does... The photos will give you a good idea of the ambiance of this inaugural celebration. One thing is sure, it is now full steam ahead towards the summer solstice, and I think all of us are happy about that...



Of course you are all awaiting for news about the purchase of Hardwick House! In my last letter, I mentioned that the deadline was 19 June. Well, we asked for an extension, and got it! This extra time gives us the possibility of raising more money and thus reducing the amount that we are borrowing to get this purchase over the wire. Things are looking good, and I do hope that in our next newsletter, I will be able to announce the purchase, the settlement, and the beginnings of a long-awaited move. In the meantime, in order to complete the purchase we are going wide with an information package concerning the property which you will find here: <https://www.notredamemonastery.org/jerusalem-estate/>

This last photo portrays the monks processing after Prime from our small demountable chapel to our equally small chapter room. While the shot will tell you of our need for proper monastic buildings — and the funds to build them — it will also reassure you of our ongoing prayers for you and yours. Thank you for your ongoing support which makes all the difference. May Mary Immaculate bless you and yours always.



*Father Prior*

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To contact us, please send an email to: [info@notredamemonastery.org](mailto:info@notredamemonastery.org)

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