

# Ab Austro

## Newsletter of Notre Dame Priory

October 2021

No. 50

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## Priory update

As you will have noticed, this month the newsletter of Notre Dame Priory, now called *Ab Austro*, marks its 50th issue. This coming 22 February will also be the 5th anniversary of our foundation. So much to be thankful for to God, Our Blessed Mother and all our good friends and benefactors. Thank you, dear Reader!

Between now and the anniversary a significant event will take place, namely the Solemn Profession of Br Bede Mary, on the feast of the Immaculate Conception, 8 December. This is the first solemn profession of one of our monks, and so is a very important occasion, for which Archbishop Porteous will be present. Given the fact that our own Church of the Immaculate Conception will not suffice, the ceremony will be held at St Patrick's Church, Colebrook. All are welcome, however, due to limitations of space it is necessary to reserve a place beforehand. If you wish to come, please contact us at [professions@notredamemonastery.org](mailto:professions@notredamemonastery.org). Hopefully we will be able to confirm your reservation for the 3 PM Mass to be followed by a reception at the Priory.

On Tuesday 22 February 2022, to mark the 5th anniversary of the foundation, we intend to hold a special Mass of thanksgiving at the Church of the Immaculate Conception, followed by a lunch with open house for anyone to visit the monastery.

After last month's Queensland retreats, Fr Prior was asked to give yet another retreat. The Carmelite nuns in Launceston, finding themselves without a retreat master due to travel restrictions, invited Fr Prior who accepted to fill in. Having to ensure daily Mass at the priory, he made several trips back and forth to Launceston during the week (What won't we do for our Carmelite Sisters?!). In spite of (maybe because of) this small discomfort, it was a time of grace for all. Wanting to avoid speaking to Carmelites of their own great doctors, Father took as a guide during this retreat the writings of a great Benedictine nun,

Mother Marie Cronier, foundress of the Abbey of St Scholastique in Dourgne, France. To speak of Marie Cronier, however, is also to speak of her spiritual father, Dom Romain Banquet, founder of the Abbey of Saint Benoit of En-Calcat. To these two masters of the spiritual life, major figures of the restoration of monastic life in France in the 19th and 20th centuries, a third was added, namely Dom Placide de Roton, abbot of Our Lady of La-Pierre-Qui-Vire, who died an untimely death in a car accident in 1952. He did however leave some very profound spiritual writings which the Carmelites were also introduced to during their retreat.

Coming back to earth, the brothers continue to develop the vegetable garden, having installed a number of raised garden beds. The frosts seem to be behind us, and we are getting much rain at the moment. Good omen for this year's produce!

Brother Chronicles





## In the school of St Benedict

(Chapter Two, What Kind of Man the Abbot Should Be, 11-12)

*Therefore, when anyone has received the name of abbot, he ought to rule his disciples with a twofold teaching, displaying all goodness and holiness by deeds and by words, but by deeds rather than by words. To intelligent disciples let him expound the Lord's commandments in words; but to those of harder hearts and ruder minds let him show forth the divine precepts by his example.*

“Practice what you preach” would be a popular way of expressing the directives St Benedict here gives to the abbot. If there are many souls who are able to understand the teachings received from their abbot, it is not the case for all. Some have a hard time grasping the theory and thrive more on good examples to imitate. So, preaching is not enough, nor is practicing. The one without the other will lead inevitably to a deficiency.

It is said that nowadays people are moved more by examples of a holy life than by eloquent teaching. This may be true, but it does not dispense the abbot from teaching authoritatively. St Benedict, and with him the whole of the tradition of the Church, tells us that the abbot, if he must be even more conspicuous by his good example, must nevertheless teach. In an age when it is common for superiors to be criticised when they teach with any amount of clarity, it is good to reflect a bit upon this point. When St Thomas Aquinas gave his inaugural address at his inception as a Master in Sacred Theology, he chose for a subject this verse of Psalm 103 (verse 13): *Rigans montes de superioribus tuis - From your lofty abode You water the mountains*. “It is plain to the senses”, writes Aquinas, “that from the highest clouds rain flows forth by which the mountains and rivers are refreshed and send themselves forth so that the satiated earth can bear fruit. Similarly, from the heights of divine wisdom the minds of the learned, represented by the mountains, are watered, by whose ministry the light of divine wisdom reached to the minds of those who listen”. This was actually part of God’s plan, explains Aquinas: “The King and Lord of the heavens set down this law from all eternity that the gifts of His Providence should come to the lower through intermediaries”.

The modern mindset would receive such a teaching with scepticism. And yet, is it not a fact of nature that the smaller and younger are brought to perfection

by their elders and the more experienced? It takes at least twenty years for human beings to be able to provide for themselves, and even then they are only getting off to a start. Even as they go through life,

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they will be well advised to listen to those who know more and have more experience than they. In the spiritual life, this is even more true, for the ways of the spirit are much more arduous and refined. One needs guidance in this realm until the day of one’s death, for before God we are always as little children. We can understand better now why St Benedict calls the monastery a “school of the Lord’s service”. As in any school, docility is a prerequisite for learning, but docility is made much easier and fruitful when the teacher is a model of practicing what he preaches.



We happily receive the details of anyone who might be interested in receiving our newsletter  
via [newsletter@notredamemonastery.org](mailto:newsletter@notredamemonastery.org)



## Br Paphnutius discovers the liturgy

St Benedict prescribes in the Rule that after lunch the monks go and lie down on their beds for a siesta. Even though this practice is not universally maintained, in the monastery the option is always there. As Br Paphnutius gets accustomed to rising early for Matins, he finds that a lot of days after lunch he could do with a few extra winks. Whether he does or doesn't take a nap, there is some quiet time after lunch during which he can do a bit of reading or cultivate a personal skill or hobby such as drawing or studying subjects that are not part of the monastic course of studies.

This quiet time is followed by a community recreation which usually consists in going for a walk out in the fields and socialising in a fraternal atmosphere. The novices learn that, in the monastic life, recreation is not so much about self as about others. Indeed, the main purpose of recreation is to promote fraternal charity. For monks who spend most of their time in prayer, study and work and who cultivate a spirit of silence at all times, having some time for recreation together allows them to get to know each other better, to share common interests, to explore certain ideas for the future of the monastery, etc... It is also a mutually very enriching time, especially when a community comprises members from very different backgrounds.

Brother Paphnutius learns the monastic recreation style: how to listen without interrupting when others are speaking, to ask questions that show he is interested in their stories (even if he is not!), and how to participate in a way that is always charitable and fruitful. On the odd, rainy day, the outdoor stroll is dispensed in favour of an indoor recreation which might include a word game to lighten the atmosphere.

So what is the connection of all this with the Liturgy? Quite simply: the apostle St John is said to have replied to someone who was surprised to see him caressing a bird, that the bow, under pain of becoming useless, cannot be in constant tension. Recreation and siesta both serve the purpose of making

the monks more fit to sing the Diving Praises. When recreation is over, Br Paphnutius is ready to return to choir for the office of None.



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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

When you have come to know that Jesus Christ is the Saviour of all mankind and you have been enkindled to go and convert the whole world to His most Sacred Heart, you may want to brook no delay and start preaching. You need, however, a tool to be effective at the apostolate. In our day, young people are trained extensively in how best to market their products, how to give the proper sales pitch to prospective clients, where to go to sell, etc. Christianity too has its “sales pitch”. It’s one that has been given to it by its Divine Founder and it is not interchangeable with any other. It is very simple. The pitch is Christ Himself. To the apostle Thomas who asked Jesus to show him the way to the Father, Jesus replied: “I am the Way” (Jn 14:6). If Jesus is the way, then we can do no better than to follow Him. The entirety of the Christian life is then going to be how best to conform our life with that of the Saviour. This is why the bulk of the Spiritual Exercises is spent watching, contemplating Christ, discovering how He lived, and asking for the grace to be like Him.

Gospels is not like reading any other book. In the Gospels we have the words and deeds of God in the flesh, and because this man named Jesus is actually God in person, then everything He said and did transcends the limited constraints of the historical period in which He said and did them.



That is why St Ignatius, along with many other spiritual authors, encourages us to spend time contemplating the scenes in which Our Lord is the principal actor. When we go there in spirit, it’s not like remembering one of Cicero’s orations against Catilina or historically reconstituting the Normandy landing. It’s much more than that. It is to connect really and truly with the salvific deeds of the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity. It is to take part through faith in what happened there. As Ludolph the Carthusian put it: “If you want to draw fruit from these scenes, you must offer yourself as present to what was said or done through Our Lord Jesus Christ with the whole affective power of your mind, with loving care, with lingering delight; thus laying aside all other worries and cares. Hear and see as though you were hearing with your own ears and seeing with your own eyes, for these things are most sweet to him who thinks on them with desire, and even more to him who tastes them. You must meditate on them all as though they were happening in the present moment; because in this way you will certainly taste a greater sweetness. Then you will feel how full of wisdom and delight they are”.

St Ignatius of Loyola proposes this incredibly simple but profound prayer: “that I might come to know the Lord intimately, love Him more ardently and follow Him more closely” – *intime te cognoscam, ardentius te amem, studiosus te sequar*. There is only one way to know the Lord better, and that is to spend time with Him. How can we spend time with Him when He lived 2,000 years ago? Again, it’s quite simple: we have His word, and His word tells us what He said and what He did while on earth. Reading the

