

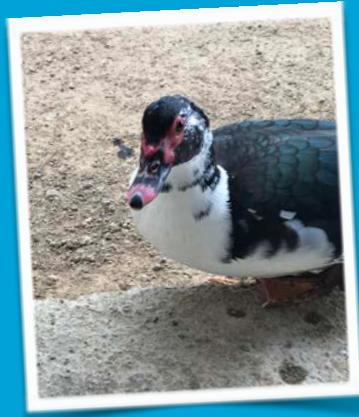
Notre Dame Priory

Newsletter

SEPTEMBER 2017

QUODCUMQUE DIXERIT VOBIS FACITE

ISSUE SEVEN



Quarterly outing on Lake Dulverton

OF ROSARIES ... AND DUCKS...

We knew it would rain, but it was the day.... The outing had been scheduled for 25 September, and all was ready. We had hoped to discover Port Arthur, but when we realised you have to pay to get into just about all the parks and footpaths there, we decided on something closer to home, which also had the unanticipated advantage of being rather close to our house in Rhyndaston (you'll see why....)

The sun rose bright, and we began the walk in the lovely little town of Parratah, happily heading along an easy footpath leading to the equally charming town of Oatlands. A frigid wind accompanied us all morning long, and when we reached lunch time we were chilled (not to mention hungry)...

Praise God, the public barbecue was working and we were able to fry our hamburgers — an *extra muros* exception to the Rule (but *shht*, don't tell anybody!). We even began to boil some water to make some tea — and all would have been well *if* we had succeeded. BUT, impossible to get the water to boil! It was just too cold and the flame was not strong enough, due to a relentless wind...

In the meantime our lunch was continually being interrupted by the local beggars, as can be seen in the photos. "If at first you don't succeed, try, try and try again." These ducks must have learned that one at pre-school, for they kept trying, and finally succeeded in softening Fr Prior's (now cold) heart. Remembering we had amidst our frugal lunch a package of biscuits from his last overseas flight — oh, the perfect opportunity to be rid of them! —, he mercifully treated the ducks to these.

Unfortunately for the ducks, due to the extreme cold — the brothers' fingers were changing colours: some to red, some to blue, some to white — Fr Prior decided a retreat was vital. We got back in the cars and drove to nearby Rhyndaston, to our very own little house where we made a fire and had a hot cup of tea. *All's well that ends well*. But the unresolved question remains: Does Fr Prior still think it never gets cold in Tasmania?!

On a more "pious" (not Pius) note, our readers are well aware

that the monks of Notre Dame Priory have not forgotten that they are here to pray and do penance for the world. And so, as we enter the month of the Holy Rosary, which coincides with the month of prayer and fasting for the family requested by the Australian bishops, we are pleased to announce an initiative which we hope will increase the number of Holy Rosaries offered to Our Lady during this month.

It's called *The Kitchen Rosary* (some call it a *Rosary Abacus*), and consists of a framed holy image with beads, which allows one to say the Rosary while going about kitchen or office or any other duties. The image is there, and it reminds you of your prayer, and the beads help you to take up where you left off whenever you get pulled away or distracted.

This *Kitchen Rosary* is, of course, not destined to replace the family Rosary, but rather to add to it. The mothers who cook for their families, the secretaries who spend long hours in an office, and many others, will hopefully, thanks to this new invention, be able to offer the Queen of Heaven an extra bouquet or two a day.

Don't miss out!



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 in JESUS and MARY,

In the Book of Genesis, when the patriarch Jacob flees from the wrath of his brother Esau, he lies down to rest in a place called Haran, and there he has a vision: *And he saw in his sleep a ladder standing upon the earth, and the top thereof touching heaven: the angels also of God ascending and descending by it* (Gen 28:12). What is the meaning of this mysterious event?

First of all, the ladder can refer to Divine Providence. God is continually looking after us at every moment, sending angels to watch over us, guide us, protect us. He is constantly giving us the goods of nature and grace, and ordaining all things in such a way that we can attain our eternal destiny. At the same time, we can at all times communicate with God, and we do so by our deeds: good actions earn us a divine recompense, bad ones, chastisement. Such is the ladder of God's Providence.

The ladder is also a very eloquent image of the Incarnation, by which God comes down to us. Christ is the *pontifex*, the bridge-builder between the Godhead and humanity, for He is both God and man. Jesus is the only way to the Father; and the Church He founded has the words of eternal life; her sacraments bring us divine life, and allow us to return to God. Such is the ladder of the Incarnation.

In chapter 7 of the Holy Rule, St Benedict refers to this vision as symbolising the virtue of humility and its various degrees or perfections: when we lower ourselves through humility, we are actually rising, and when we lift ourselves up through pride, we are actually going down. He then proceeds to describe the 12 degrees or steps of humility which the monk is called to ascend by descending.

For St Benedict, the angels going up and coming down the two sides of the ladder mean that when we humble ourselves we are lifted up, and when we exalt ourselves we are brought down and humbled. We may consider that some souls are continually lifting themselves up in pride, and consequently are persistently being brought low in virtue, and if they do not experience a conversion before death, they will be buried forever in the ultimate humiliation of hell. Others seek consistently to humble themselves, imitating the Saviour who said: *Learn of me, for I am meek and humble of heart, and you shall find rest for your souls*. Their entire life is, as it were, a continual contemplation of their own nothingness and the grandeur of God; they consider their many sins and beg God's mercy, putting themselves under the feet of all, rightly convinced that it is only by the grace of God that they live. These souls lower themselves in their own opinion, and are lifted up to God and to eternal life.

There are other souls however who both progress and regress, and most of us would be in this category. We have our good days when we seek to be more Christlike, when we are content with little, when we are happy to spend more time in prayer and in the service of our brethren. And then there are times when our fallen nature tempts us to pride, and we find ourselves tossed around on the waves of false and misguided self-esteem. It is at such times, that we should remind ourselves that *the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent bear it away* (Mat 11:12), which means that one must exercise fortitude, one must overcome manfully the temptations that assail us, one must thwart the attacks of the enemy of our human nature by renewed efforts to pray and make sacrifice. Only the "violent", that is, only those who impose discipline on themselves, will inherit the Kingdom of Heaven.

The image of the ladder tells us another very profound truth about our lives. Just as a ladder is not a place of rest, but serves only to reach something higher, so we must not settle for the mediocrity of our life in this world as if that were all there is. A man who is on a ladder presses forward, always seeking to reach the heights; if he stops halfway up, he will not reach his goal. So, in our spiritual life, if we sit back and relax, and try to convince ourselves that we have done enough, then that will be the end of our progress, and we will backslide. Just as a plant that does not grow has already begun to die, so the soul that does not make efforts to approach God more and more, is already on the road to damnation.

St Benedict's use of the ladder as a model for the 12 degrees of humility gives us to understand that, in this search for God, the source of all happiness, humility is the key virtue; it is the foundation of all virtue. A soul that is humble will have more enlightened faith, it will have a more solid hope, it will have a more ardent love; its fraternal charity will be more sincere and constant; its chastity will be protected in a stronghold of divine grace; its patience will sustain all trials; its fortitude will overcome all obstacles; its prudence will dictate the best choices, by means of a prayerful instinct that will inspire it when others are in the dark.

It is enriching to know that the teachings of St Benedict on humility are introduced by two key scriptural quotes. The first is that of the Lord Himself: *Whoever humbles himself will be exalted, and whoever exalts himself will be humbled* (Lk 14:10). The second is less well known, but it contains a luminous lesson for us. The quote is from Psalm 130 (or 131), in which the psalmist prays: *Lord, my heart is not exalted: nor are my eyes lofty. Neither have I walked in great matters, nor in wonderful things above me. If I was not humbly minded, but exalted my soul: As a child that is weaned is towards his mother, so reward in my soul.*

What does this image of the weaned baby signify in this context? A healthy baby loves the sweetness of its mother's milk. So the soul that is humble enjoys the sweetness of divine consolation: the more we grow in the spiritual life, the more we should know how utterly dependent we are upon God's merciful condescension to us. But when the baby is weaned, it cries, desiring to be satisfied with what was before so sweet to its palate. So, the soul which imagines it can get by without God, and which loses from sight the virtue of humility, is deprived of the sweetness of divine consolation, and must experience the bitterness of being weaned from the Divine Breast. This verse helps us to understand that if we want to enjoy the consolations of God, we must make ourselves little, humble; we must walk in the way of spiritual childhood and trust in the Goodness of God. It also warns us never to think we are spiritual grownups, for then we will begin to taste the bitterness of desolation. The question we need to ask ourselves then is: do we ever experience the sweetness of Divine Consolation? If not, it may be our fault. If we think we are "grownup" enough to get by on our own, God has no choice but to treat us as the babe that is weaned: "Oh, so now you're big enough to get by; alright, off you go, then!" And the bitter sadness of the world takes over once again...

May Mary Immaculate, the most humble of God's handmaids, teach us the wisdom of this truth, and help us to grow each day in humility by being lifted up towards the timeless truth: we are what we are before God, nothing more, nothing less. Next month, we will go into the different degrees or steps of this holy virtue as described by St Benedict.

Fr Pius Mary Noonan, O.S.B.

Retreats 2018

Both January retreats are filling up fast, so don't lose anytime in booking!
<https://www.notredamemonastery.org/retreats/>

Update from the Priory

Beloved Friends,

Notwithstanding the quarterly outing adventure recounted by our chronicler (my views on Tasmanian weather remain unchanged!), the month of September has brought us a bit of warmth, longer days, and — priceless gift in Tasmania — some water! Good thing we were able to get in a new water tank at our “Margarita” (Latin for “pearl”) property.



Digging foundation for water tank

The existing house has two small ones, but after verifying that the annual rainfall in Rhyndaston and the size of the house could take a lot more, we had a 22000 litre one installed. It is slowly filling up, thank God.

Several years ago when I started getting acquainted with Australia, one of the things that struck me the most was its dryness. Rain and water are precious in this part of the world. But I suppose it resounded more deeply in me because of its symbolism: Australia, like most of our modern world, is also a spiritual desert. In the midst of those reflections, I was deeply consoled by some words from the prophet Isaiah, writing in another Land in which water is vital. He used the imagery to encourage the chosen people with the perspective of the refreshing Messianic times to come, saying: *“Strengthen ye the feeble hands, and confirm the weak knees. Say to the fainthearted: Take courage, and fear not: ... God himself will come and will save you. Then shall the eyes of the blind be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as a hart, and the tongue of the dumb shall be free: for waters are broken out in the desert, and streams in the wilderness. And that which was dry land, shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water”* (Is 35:3-7). So I suppose that’s why I’m not daunted by the dryness of the land, seeing in it a much deeper reality, one which should spur on our zeal to cultivate monasticism in Tasmania, so that some day, the prophecy may come true in the Great Southern Land of the Holy Spirit: that an abundance of Divine Grace may be poured out here, and souls may be quenched with the living waters of grace.



Feeling rather small!

As you know, after the formation of the men who have entered the Priory, my main concern remains that of providing, not just for our daily subsistence, but for the building of a proper monastery. My efforts here go in two directions: 1) spreading the news about the Priory and approaching possible benefactors; 2) launching profitable projects that will eventually provide for our daily basic needs. It is in this context, that thanks to the initiative of friends, we are proposing the “Kitchen Rosary”. Time will tell if it catches on, but in any case, we do hope it will help more people pray to the Queen of Heaven for all the needs of our world. We have also just added a new “Monk Shop” button to our website which will allow us to make our products known. As for the fundraising campaign, we will be posting regular bulletins under the “Building Appeal” button of the website. Keep tuned in!

What progress have we made this month with getting the community to Rhyndaston? Very little, I must admit. It is all a very slow process, but one which we must accept: examining various proposals, and ruling them out, one by one, until the path ahead is clear. One significant step forward we owe to a friend from Brisbane who also happens to be a professional builder, and has given some very good advice on how to proceed. More than that, he is considering coming down himself to help us build the monastery. Please God this will work out, as it will have a threefold advantage: it’s the most cost effective way to proceed; it will allow the young monks themselves to take part in building their own monastery and learn some skills in the process; it will provide an interesting project for other young men who would like to come and help for a time, while living with the monks. What a wonderful experience that would be!



Finally, we continue to get to know our future neighbours, most of whom have been very gracious and helpful. None however have been quite as endearing as these two! May Mary Immaculate bless you and yours abundantly,

Father Prior

To keep up with Notre Dame Priory, visit our website at www.notredamemonastery.org
To contact us, please send an email to: info@notredamemonastery.org

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Notre Dame Priory BSB: 062-654 Account number: 1024 4562

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