

Ab AUSTRo

Newsletter of Notre Dame Priory

December 2018 No. 22

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Our first professed monks

It's been a busy month at the Priory. The first few days saw the three novices to be professed in silent preparation for the big day, which meant all the material preparations fell upon the other monks, who gladly rose to the task. The weather was beautiful in the leadup but the forecast for that Saturday 8th December was cloudy with rain. Our Lady compassionately held off the rain till the next day and gave us some lovely sunshine, so appropriate for a day filled with such radiant joy.

Brothers Bede (SA), Gregory (QLD) and Joseph (NSW) were surrounded by their parents and a few siblings, and a number of friends, both personal and of the Priory, who came from around Tasmania and the mainland to take part in this first ever ceremony of profession in Colebrook. The presence of Archbishop Julian was a great blessing to us all. His unfailing support is such a consolation, and we are most grateful.

After the ceremony, David and Elisabeth Daintree once again hosted refreshments at their lovely cottage just a minute from St Patrick's. Thank you again, David and Elisabeth, as well as to all those who prepared the food (special mention goes to Judith Andrews), for making this luncheon such a memorable time for us all!



Witnesses to the ceremony relayed their emotion, especially at what has come to be the most striking part of the rite of monastic profession: the triple chant of the "Suscipe", which is a verse of Psalm 118 prescribed by St Benedict to be sung by the newly professed monk immediately after reciting his vows. By this chant, the first part of which is sung with arms outstretched to the altar, the new

monk hands over his life to God, making of it a joyful holocaust to His glory. Other distinctive traits of the day's ceremony were the clothing with the long scapular (novices have a shortened one), the choir cape, and — more impressive to see — the monastic "corona", or crown-shaped tonsure which marks the professed monk, not just in his habit, but also in his very person.



One more piece of news for this month: after all the excitement, the brothers were given no time to relax, as four days later, feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, took place the clothing of Fr Henry Whisenant, who received the name of Br John Baptist Mary. Fr Prior pointed out in his exhortation for the occasion that the Baptist has always been a great inspiration for monks thanks to his austere life in the desert, but also to priests thanks to his intrepid preaching of the moral law which cost him his life. He encouraged the new novice to walk in the footsteps of John the Baptist, being to all a model of monastic observance and intrepid fidelity to speaking and preaching the truth of the Gospel.

We wish the newly professed monks as well as our new novice every blessing as they pursue their respective paths in the service of Christ Our Lord, in honour of Mary Immaculate, Queen and Patroness of our Priory, and we offer her our grateful thanks for her maternal guidance and protection.

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

*Homily at Mass of Simple Professions,
8 December 2018*

“Today, the rod has sprung up out of the root of Jesse; today, Mary is conceived without sin; today, by her, the head of the ancient serpent is crushed”.

Such are the words which the Church sings on this day. In the very act of her conception, from the first moment of her existence, Mary crushes the head of the ancient serpent, that is to say, the devil. In the conception of the Virgin, Almighty God exerts His omnipotent power to ward off, by anticipation of the merits of the Redeemer, all stain of sin in that little babe in the womb of St Anne. Unlike her Son’s, her conception came about in a natural way, but God intervened in such a marvelous manner to preserve her from the stain of sin which had tainted all the sons and daughters of Adam and Eve from the first ages of humanity and had plunged our race into the mire of sin, violence and death. It is because the Most Holy Trinity took pity on our race that He decided to step in, to put an end to evil, to introduce into the world grace, light and love. And it all begins here. The Conception of the Virgin is the beginning of our salvation, for it is the first step towards the preparation of Mary for the ineffable grace of the Divine Maternity: this tiny baby girl is destined to become the Mother of God, the Mother of the Eternal Creator. She will one day offer to Him the hospitality of her own womb, and she will bring into a dark world the Eternal Light, Jesus Christ Our Lord.



What more appropriate day to celebrate the grace of monastic profession? Indeed, how else can we describe what is about to take place here today than by calling it a Divine intervention. Each one of you, my dear Brothers who are about to pronounce your first vows, has been the object, the direct beneficiary of a very special and unique Divine intervention. Had not God stepped into your life, you would not be here today. Had not the Lord of all things knocked at the door of your heart, you would never have had an inkling as to what monastic life is about.

God stepped into your lives. He came to you, amazingly, in the midst of a world in which one constantly sees and hears the deafening sound of dissipation and the sad spectacle of greediness, a world in which the attraction of the triple concupiscence, that is the concupiscence of the flesh, the concupiscence of the eyes, and the pride of life, becomes day by day more imperative. The world you were born into is a world that has lost touch with God, and having lost touch with God it has lost touch with itself; it is a world that is abandoned to its own devices, or rather, to its own vices, and therefore can only propose recipes for destruction. Only God, the True God, the Triune God, the God who manifested Himself in Jesus Christ, could have made His voice heard in the midst of such a cacophony. And he has left his mark upon you.

With a promising career at his finger tips, the young Benedict of Norcia too was about to set foot into the world; he pulled back and went to hide himself in the solitude of Subiaco, there to pray, to weep for the sins of the world and do penance, awaiting the hour of God. Like him, you have decided to set out on a path that seems foolishness to the world. You could have everything in the world; pleasure and freedom, personal satisfaction and gratification of every kind was within your grasp. And yet, you chose to give it all up, to turn your back on the world and walk resolutely in the footsteps of Jesus.

Our world bears much resemblance to the one Benedict was born into: general corruption of morals, troubled political scene, the menace of the collapse of the existing social order. We find ourselves at a turning point in history. In many ways perhaps, our world is even worse off than Benedict’s. The ills of modern man are such that the most fundamental truths of our nature are denied with impunity, and sins against our God-given nature are protected by law. There is no longer any doubt now that the world has turned its back on God.

But the answer that Benedict found is the same one that you have come to understand through prayer: to save the world, we must renounce the world. We must first descend deep down into the purifying fires of solitude and self-denial; only then can we rise as new men transformed by divine grace and become part of the reconstruction of the future.

In a few moments, you will pronounce what are called the vows of religion. A vow is a sacred promise made to God; it is a privileged way of binding oneself to God. Just as a man and a woman

who wish to found a family, vow to each other their lifelong fidelity, so you have chosen to vow yourselves to Jesus Christ. You do so using the very words of St Benedict, by vowing “stability, conversion of ways, and obedience”.

Stability reminds us that our promise to God is not something abstract, it is concrete, it is here and now in this particular community with these particular brothers and this particular superior. Such a vow is diametrically opposed to the virtual culture in which one is continually passing from one new fad to another, seeking endlessly and never finding, because always seeking the wrong things, or the right things in the wrong place or in the wrong way. Stability focuses the monk on God, here and now, in these circumstances, for humans are all too good at imagining another place, another person, another career where all will, so we delude ourselves, be well. By the vow of stability, you reverse the maxim and affirm that the grass is always greenest right there where you are. God, to whom you entrust your life, knows your needs, and He provides for them from day to day, through the father of the monastery who henceforth looks after you as his sons. Never forget that the stability of the monk places you irrevocably in the Sacred Heart of Jesus. There you will always find peace, courage, patience, and every other virtue.

Conversion of ways, in the mind of St Benedict, is a vow which obliges the monk to tend to perfection by living the conventual life which includes poverty and chastity. You are giving up a lot — a wife, children, a career. Is it possible, some might ask? Once again we go back to the Divine intervention. When God took our flesh and walked this earth in the Person of Jesus Christ, having been born of a Virgin, He lived a virginal life, He took no wife, He begot no children. He thus initiated a paradigm shift — the only one possible in Christianity and which therefore excludes all others: henceforth among the children of men God chooses some to manifest to the world the primacy of eternity in which there is no more marrying and begetting, for all the elect are united with God in the eternal nuptials they were created for. By your vow of chastity, you will proclaim to the world the salutary truth it does not want to hear: chastity is possible, it is fulfilling, it is the true sign of Christ and His Church, the seal of God’s presence among us. We are not abandoned to our whims, we can rise above the most powerful attractions of our fallen nature, we can become saints. That is a

tremendous act of faith. It affirms the power of the crucified and risen Saviour, Our Lord Jesus Christ, to transform us. God has stepped into your lives, He has intervened, He has called, and you have heeded the summons.

The third Benedictine vow is that terrible one which causes modern man to tremble even more: obedience. How can a man give up his freedom? How can he accept to hand over his life and trust the judgment of another man? How can he allow another to decide for him? By now you know the answer to that question: God has stepped into our history. Jesus lived a life of obedience to Mary and Joseph, to His teachers and guides. His food was to do the will of His Eternal Father. But does not everyone have to obey? We must all live by rules, for otherwise life in common would be impossible. But religious obedience is something more. It is the act by which a man hands over his entire future, his entire life, trusting that God, who has called and who has given authority to those who stand in his stead, will not allow a truly humble soul to be led astray. Religious obedience can be hard. It was hard for Jesus, who, as St Paul tells us, “became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross”. But the cross, as we know, leads to the glory of the resurrection. God blesses the humble and obedient soul.

And so, my dear sons, as you take these first vows under the vigilance of the Church who has in her wisdom imposed a certain number of years before one can make them definitive, turn your gaze to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. For over a year now, you have worn her livery, the white habit which honours her virginity. You have begun to experience the sweetness of holding her hand in times of temptation and trial, you know that she will not fail you. Remain always under her immaculate mantle, hold tight to her hand, and tell her often to make sure that, even if at certain times you want to let go, she will not let you go. Like the child who foolishly wants to run away to danger, but is held back by the firm grip of its mother, so may she always hold you tight and close to Jesus. There, you will find perseverance and will tread the path that leads, through the cross to the glory of the resurrection. Such is my prayer for you on this day.

Fr Pius Mary Noonan, O.S.B

VISIT OUR WEBSITE - notredamemonastery.org

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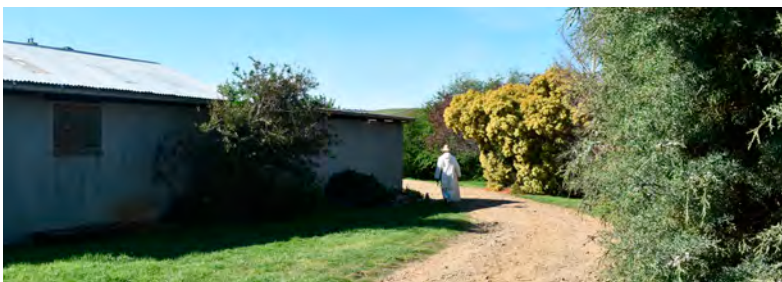
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Update from the Priory

Beloved Friends,

The three professions and one clothing of this month were a fitting conclusion to a year brimming with an abundance of divine grace. The professions in particular were a landmark event. These first Benedictine monastic professions in Tasmanian history, also give Notre Dame Priory a new status: we are no longer “one monk with a group of young men in formation”, there are now four professed monks and several others heading in that direction. In many ways, it’s hard to believe; we can only offer humble thanks for having been the beneficiaries of so many blessings.

These events give us solace, but they do not resolve the many material and financial issues around our establishment. We continue to work towards moving to Jerusalem Estate. Without being able to give a precise date, I can say with certitude that it is getting very close now. Council approval for the waste treatment plant was a key event which will make it possible, and this has been granted! The other key issue is the construction of a number of self-contained transportable cabins to be placed behind the old stone house. These cabins are essential for three main reasons: they will provide warm accommodations for the monks (after a winter in caravans and a shed, this will be a huge change making our living conditions much more bearable), they will allow the large rooms of the main house to be used for the common areas, such as classrooms, library, parlour, etc..., and last but not least, they will provide a bit of distance from the road, preserving the monks’ enclosure and silence.



To make all this possible, and provide for our future — let’s not forget, this is only a temporary setup, required by the imperative need to get our property rezoned before we can actually build a monastery, and this will take at least a year — we will be working on a fundraising campaign which will begin this coming Easter. In the meantime, I appeal to the generosity of friends to help us meet some of the more pressing needs surrounding our move. The practical aspects of it will be found on our website page under the button Jerusalem Estate, where we have posted a list of needs we will be facing in the

coming weeks. If you can help with any of these, be assured of our lasting gratitude and prayers.

A question you might be asking is: what will happen to the present structures when we actually build a monastery elsewhere on the property? Is this not a waste of funds? Certainly not, and this for two main reasons. The first is that we absolutely must move to



Jerusalem Estate in the first months of 2019 because we need to stop paying our present rent and we need room to live in a dignified manner and welcome the aspirants who keep knocking at the door. The second is that all the temporary buildings we put together to make the move possible (including the church we are getting from the archdiocese) will be relocated later and used around the monastery. The old house itself will be used by the community for welcoming guests and promoting the various products of our monastic labour. So anything that is given to us now will serve for a very long time to come to help establish a beautiful monastery here in this gorgeous island of Tasmania.

And so, as I entrust this to your consideration, I wish to assure each and everyone of you of the prayers of the monks for you and all those dear to you, living and deceased. May this Christmas find you gratified with a deeper knowledge of the Word Incarnate, growing in love for Him, and longing to follow in His footsteps, with Mary Immaculate and St Joseph. May the Holy Family give you and your family a grace-filled year 2019.

With every blessing through Mary Immaculate,

Father Prior

Please note:
Due to high demand, we are
obliged to suspend the acceptance
of all Mass Intentions
until further notice.

