

Ab AUSTRO

Newsletter of
Notre Dame Priory

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Priory update

Our last newsletter having covered only Fr Bede's recent ordination, we have saved till now news of the visit of Abbot Cuthbert Brogan from St Michael's Abbey, Farnborough, England. During the Abbot's visit in early April, we entered into a formal agreement with the English Province of the Subiaco-Cassinese Benedictine Congregation, paving the way towards an eventual full integration of Notre Dame Priory into the wider Benedictine Confederation of monasteries. A most significant event in our history!

Another bit of news that goes back to Lent. This year we were blessed to have our community retreat led by well-known Missionary of the Sacred Heart, Fr Ed Travers from 3-9 March. Fr Ed led us through the various stages of the spiritual life, taking inspiration from St Benedict, St Ignatius of Loyola, and the MSC charism as found in the writings and life of Fr Jules Chevalier. It was a blessed time for all of us, in which we learned, among many other wonderful things, to "go gently, but keep gently going..."

At the end of April we were saddened to learn of the passing of Sister Mary of the Holy Ghost who was the last surviving founding member of the Carmel of Launceston. Fr Prior and Br Francisco represented the community at Carmel as the beloved sister was taken to her final resting place on 29 April. Her life, with over 75 years of fidelity to her religious vocation,



was an edification to all of us. We pray that her joy is now full in the presence of the Lord. On 27 May the entire community returned to Carmel so that Fr Bede could offer a first Mass for the nuns, after which he offered first blessings to the community and then to a number of faithful who came for the happy occasion.

A few weeks earlier, we headed in the opposite direction, way down in Dover, to have lunch with the Little Eucharistic Brothers of the Divine Will. It was the occasion not only for fraternal conviviality, but also this year for the two new priests (Fr John Joseph and Fr Bede) to offer first blessings to those who had not yet received them.

Cana Press has put out some new titles. The most important among them is our own edition of the *Rule of St Benedict*. Another little book recently published by Fr Prior is entitled *Fig Leaves Are Not Enough, Open Letters on Modesty in Dress*. It deals with the delicate but crucial topic of feminine attire, even though there are a number of good points made about male attire as well. It covers literally everything (pun intended...) Please discover the rest for yourselves! (<https://www.notredamemonastery.org/monk-shop/cana-press/fig-leaves-are-not-enough/>).

Brother Chronicler

QUODCUMQUE DIXERIT VOBIS FACITE





In the school of St Benedict

To love one's enemies.

Most people would recognise the precept to love one's enemies as that of Our Lord. But how many actually live it? In the Old Law, the Jews were commanded to love only their own people. Our Lord brings the commandment of love to its perfection, telling His disciples to love not only friends but even enemies.

Let's be honest and admit that this is hard to hear. It is theoretically possible to love an abstract enemy. Of course, I love the militant anarchist as long as I don't have to have any dealings with him, but when that enemy becomes very real and concrete, when he happens to be the one who has taken my possessions or hurt someone I love, that's another matter altogether. It takes grace, divine grace, to practice love in that situation.



Photos of the progress in the Chapter House



St Benedict goes on: *not to render cursing for cursing, but rather blessing*. He is only quoting St Peter here (cf. 1 Peter 3). Obviously if we love our enemies and do not curse back when we are insulted, this is going to entail suffering, here described as a form of persecution.

Our Lord brings the commandment of love to its perfection, telling His disciples to love not only friends but even enemies.

To bear persecution for justice's sake. When that happens, we are told, then we are truly Christian. Then we know that the Spirit of God rests upon us, for then we are like Our Lord who went about doing good to all, but who received evil in return. It's not until then that our imitation of Christ is complete, and this is why the holy martyrs went to their torture with joy: they had been found worthy to suffer, not only for, but with and like Christ. *He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in His mouth. When He was reviled, He did not revile in return; when He suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting Himself to Him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By His wounds you have been healed* (1 Pt 2:22-24).



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Br Paphnutius Tours the Summa

In today's lesson Fr Germanus evokes the mysterious beginnings of life:

“It’s quite amusing, is it not, dear Brothers, to see how evolutionists twist and squirm when they attempt to explain the beginnings of life. They all know that, while the theories of evolution do not satisfy the demands of logic even when it comes to such a simple thing as the conglomeration of inanimate matter, the theorists leave the real world completely behind and enter into fairyland when they try to explain how life came to be within that matter. And even when they have conjured up any number of elements and somehow managed to suggest that these inexplicably found themselves in the same spot at the same time, and voilà, with a stroke of lightning, there is life! They do not realise the essential difference there is between the most complex chemical compound, and life. And when they themselves put all those things together, they can’t manage to create a single living cell.”

“Father,” said Br Paphnutius, raising his hand. “I hear there are a number of modern biologists who are pointing out that the whole theory of evolution is simply impossible because, especially when it comes to the complexity of biological matter, the odds of things just happening are simply impossible. I wonder, what does St Thomas say about the origins of life?”

“For St Thomas, and indeed for the whole of the Christian tradition, it’s all very simple. St John tells us in the prologue to his Gospel: *In Him (the Word) was life*. If there is any life at all, it can only come from One who contains all life in Himself because He is not just alive, He does not just have life, He *is* life. It is because God is life itself that He is able to give other things to have life.

“As the Father hath life in Himself, so He hath given the Son also to have life in Himself (Jn 5:26). This is the reason for which we cannot *make* life. Life is given by God, even the life of the simplest living creature. It is emphatically not within the power of another crea-

ture to give life, unless it is by sharing the life that it has. For example, human parents cooperate with God to bring children into the world. They do not give life, but only provide the matter into which God infuses a living soul. This is a wonderful participation in the act of creation, and that is why it is called ‘procreation’.

“You might find it intriguing, as I do, that there is another reading of that passage of St John’s prologue, one that was dear to both St Augustine and St Thomas and which goes like this: *What was made, was life in Him*. What this means is that all of creation, including the inanimate part, is, in a way, alive in God, in that it exists, and has always existed in the mind of God. It is a fascinating concept. The entire cosmos is envisaged as being alive for and through God, and by its very existence, singing the praise of His glory. And we are privileged to be part of it.

“When you begin to comprehend these things, you understand why it is that both C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien place the harmony of song at the beginning of the worlds they created. The universe is indeed a magnificent song to the glory of the Lord, in which each creature exults with joy in the very fact of its existence. Were it not for the breaking of that harmony through Original Sin at the instigation of Lucifer (that Lewis calls “Jadis” and Tolkien “Melkor”) the entirety of creation would be one big, unending celebration of joy in the gift of life. Since sin happened, however, we must now wait for the new heavens and the new earth, and, more importantly, we must make sure we are on the right side in the end, and not thrown out into the exterior darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Indeed, it is one of the most preposterous heresies of our day that somehow everyone will in the end be saved, that is, on the good side. Not at all. You have to sing your part in this life, and in unison with God and neighbour, or you won’t sing at all in eternity. And if you’re not singing, you’ll be wailing...”

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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

St Ignatius gives us this definition of spiritual consolation: “I call it consolation when an interior movement is aroused in the soul, by which it is inflamed with love of its Creator and Lord, and as a consequence, can love no creature on the face of the earth for its own sake, but only in the Creator of them all. It is likewise consolation when one sheds tears that move to the love of God, whether it be because of sorrow for sins, or because of the sufferings of Christ our Lord, or for any other reason that is immediately directed to the praise and service of God. Finally, I call consolation every increase of faith, hope, and love, and all interior joy that invites and attracts to what is heavenly and to the salvation of one’s soul by filling it with peace and quiet in its Creator and Lord” (Sp. Ex. 316).

It is of utmost importance to understand what spiritual consolation really is and what it is not. If we don’t, we could end up thinking we are being spiritually consoled when in reality we are dealing with some natural cause of contentment. The casual observer might be wondering why this is such a big deal until he realises that it is key to discerning God’s presence in our lives. Indeed, God speaks to us, or rather, gets His will across to us in a variety of ways. One of them is to give us a spiritual relish for heavenly things that will draw us further along the path of conversion and perfection. If, however, we confuse such spiritual relish with the natural way in which we can feel good because we happen to be in good health, have a happy family life, a pleasant job, good food and nice friends, then we are clearly open to thinking that when we have those things we are good and holy, and when we don’t we are sinful. That is bad theology and can lead to a spiritual wasteland.

This is why St Ignatius wants to make it exceedingly clear that true spiritual consolation consists first and foremost in the love of God, and not just any love, but a love that is inflamed, that burns like a fire and does not want to go out. It is a fire that prevents us from loving any creature on earth for themselves. This is true even of the most sacred and true of human loves, such as the love between husband and wife, between mother and child, between the closest of friends. When a soul is truly inflamed with this pure love and pure consolation, even though his/her love for another person may be very great indeed, it remains clear to them that it is always second to the love of God. If their love is true, it is so only because

there is first of all the love of God in whom and for whom we love that other person.

It is not uncommon to encounter people who seem almost offended that we would love them for God’s sake. It’s almost as if this would mean they are not worthy of love on their own merits. Actually, such a love does not devalue, but rather increases the value of love for neighbour. For any love of another person, however sincere and natural, is only as good as that person, and we know that all creatures will vanish like the grass of the field. If however we love God first and foremost and in Him and for Him we love others, then our love for them takes on an entirely new dimension. It deepens, blossoms and endures, even in the midst of trials and sufferings in the relationship.

It may also be a surprise that St Ignatius places tears among spiritual consolations. When our love for God has grown to the point that our sins cause us to weep, or when we shed tears because of how much Christ has suffered for us, then, even though there is a certain sorrow involved, it is a sorrow that causes consolation because it establishes us in the truth, grounding us once again in the One who is the source and fulfilment of all our desires. As St Paul writes: *I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting* (2 Cor 7:9).

Finally, anytime that we are moved to heavenly things and to the practice of true virtue, then we are experiencing spiritual consolation. How crucial this is will become apparent as we go along. For now, let’s just point out that our God is a God of consolation. It’s the enemy, the devil, who is eternally sad and desolate. God is eternal joy, and He seeks to share that joy with those who love Him. This is why St Paul commands us to rejoice and why it is one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit. May such spiritual joy always be ours.

