

Ab Austro

Newsletter of Notre Dame Priory

July 2022

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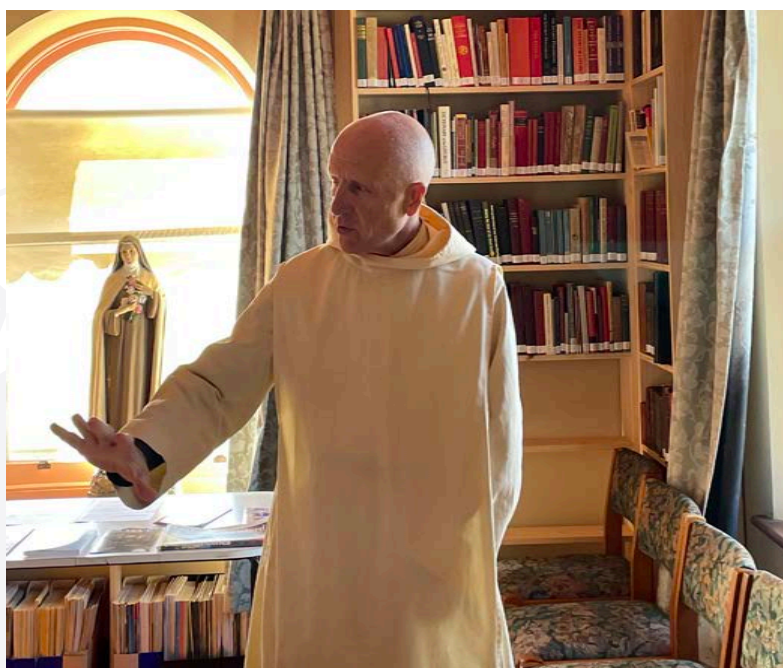
This issue:

- † Galong Retreats
- † Visiting Monk
- † Trusting Providence
- † Second Kind of Humility

Priory update

The month of July saw Fr Prior and Br Gregory at St Clement's Retreat Centre in Galong NSW for what turned out to be the first retreat outside the monastery in over eighteen months. This was a men's retreat that ran from 17 to 22 July. The retreat team had visited this amazing Redemptorist retreat centre in January 2021 and plans were made for a retreat later last year, but travel restrictions forced us to cancel. The wait was worth it. The monks were very much impressed with everything: natural setting, facilities and staff all made it a memorable experience. We are looking forward to the women's retreat which will take place at the same place in September. To book: www.notredamemonastery.org/retreats

The big news at the Priory is the arrival of Fr Mark Bachmann from Our Lady of the Annunciation Abbey in Clear Creek, Oklahoma. Fr Bachmann is no stranger to our community. He came to Tasmania in 2018 to lead our community retreat and returned in 2019 for a two month period. His abbot has graciously accepted to let him stay again for two months. Originally from Vancouver, Fr Bachmann was a monk of the abbey of Fontgombault before being sent to Oklahoma with the founding group of Clear Creek Monastery in 1999. He appears to be



happy to have escaped the summer Oklahoma heat (who wouldn't?!). We hope that the cool Tasmanian winter will invigorate Father as he takes on an impressive workload: moral theology and monastic history classes as well as help with the chant, and any number of manual tasks presently required at the Priory.

The resumption of international travel has also meant pilgrimage time for a number of our friends. One of the pilgrims who recently went to Fatima, obtained for us special relics of Sts Francisco and Jacinta Marto, accompanied by a statue of the same and one of his sister St Jacinta. They are now exposed and honoured in the monastery chapter room. Needless to say, Br Francisco is walking around on a cloud....

Brother Chronicler





In the school of St Benedict

(Chapter Two, What Kind of Man the Abbot Should Be, 35-36)

And if the abbot be tempted to complain of lack of means, let him remember the words: Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His justice, and all these things shall be added unto you (Mt 6:33). And again: They that fear Him lack nothing (Ps 33:10).

In the Church, the same person is ultimately responsible for both the spiritual and the temporal order of things (parish priest, bishop, pope, abbot, prior...)... This is most conspicuously the case in a monastery. The abbot is spiritual father to his monks, but he is also the provider of material goods. In other words, his duty is to do on earth what God does in heaven. This is a daunting burden that one must not accept lightly.

After stressing the spiritual role of the abbot, St Benedict takes care to warn him of the dangers of having to provide for material matters. The danger is greatest when the monastery is lacking in resources, for then one can easily be tempted to “get down to business” in order to get the community on its feet or make it prosper. It’s an easy step to go from being abbot to being a business manager. It is for this reason that St Benedict created the cellarer, a monk who, under the abbot, is in charge of all the temporal goods of the monastery. The abbot can rest in peace, assured that a man of confidence is taking care of the monastery’s belongings and he can thus concentrate his efforts on the spiritual side of things. In the end however, he remains responsible before God.

St Benedict quotes two passages from Holy Scripture. The first of these is taken from the Sermon on the Mount in which the Lord tells His disciples not to be concerned about the necessities of life. If the kingdom of God is sought after first and in all sincerity, everything else falls into place. If one’s first concern is one’s livelihood, then one lives exactly like those who do not have the faith. When we look at monastic history, we notice that the holy abbots were ones who, precisely because their first interest was to help their monks become saints, never lacked the necessary resources. A wise abbot and hard-working monks are the perfect recipe for promoting the temporal prosperity of monasteries. One need only glance at the powerful abbeys of the Middle Ages to see how, due to the harmonious union of holiness and hard-working diligence, they became havens of peace for the

sick and the poor thanks to the greatness of their abbots who did not reverse the perspectives. They knew what they were about. Feet on the earth, head in Heaven. Such is the secret.

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The second quote is from the Psalm *Benedicam Dominum*, David’s prayer when he was pursued by Saul and, in order to save himself, had to feign madness before Abimelech. The psalm shows us that when we put our trust in the Lord, however critical the situation, we are never let down. *Fear the LORD, you holy ones; nothing is lacking to those who fear Him. The powerful grow poor and hungry, but those who seek the LORD lack no good thing. Many are the troubles of the just, but the LORD delivers from them all. God watches over all their bones; not a one shall be broken.* (Ps 33:10-21)



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via newsletter@notredamemonastery.org

Br Paphnutius discovers the liturgy

Following the solemn evening prayer of Vespers, the monks dedicate a full hour to lectio divina. What is this “divine reading”? To give oneself to divine reading is to be attentive to reading divine things in a divine way, that is to say in the presence of God. It is not a matter of simply learning about spiritual matters. The monk does not read to become learned, not even in matters of the soul. The monk reads in order to come to a deeper, more intimate knowledge of God, and this supernatural knowledge increases his love for God. What better way to do that than by reading what God Himself has inspired (Holy Scripture) or what has been written by the saints in order to explain to us the mysteries of God’s word? God’s friends are the ones who have learned the path that leads to Him, and if we walk in their footsteps, we too will arrive at the goal.

To practice lectio divina, then, is to enter the realm of God with the only attitude that is becoming of such a privilege: humble and silent docility. When God speaks, the creature can only listen. Listen with great attention, as to a Word upon which depends our eternal beatitude. When it comes to listening to God, no one has any excuse. Just as no one is deemed ignorant of the fundamental precepts of the moral law (such as the immorality of murder, lying, cheating, stealing, impurity, etc.), so no one is deemed incapable of understanding that there is a God. If there is a God, every rational person must exert every effort to discover as much about God as possible and in particular what God has said. The monk, by his life, by his constant searching of God’s word, reminds the world that it is only when a man listens to God that he can become great and find lasting fulfilment.

Divine reading, which is done with the intellect, involves the heart. In fact, for lectio divina to be truly divine, one must read with the heart, that is to say, one must read with love, with growing desire to meet God, to see God. When lectio is performed in this way, it clearly opens the path to contemplation, to

silent adoration, to entering into the mystery of the Triune God. In this way, we can see why it is that for the ancients, there really was no difference between reading, meditating and praying. The one leads to the other and reaches its full potential in it.

Br Paphnutius is taught to read at least a chapter of the Old Testament and a chapter of the New Testament each day. But God’s word is so deep and full of mysteries that it is not possible to comprehend them without a guide. This is why the Holy Spirit has given the Church so many fathers and doctors to open up for us a path to a fruitful understanding of what God has revealed to us. This in turn should inspire us with greater love for the Lord and a stronger desire to imitate Him.



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JESUS MARIA JOSEPH

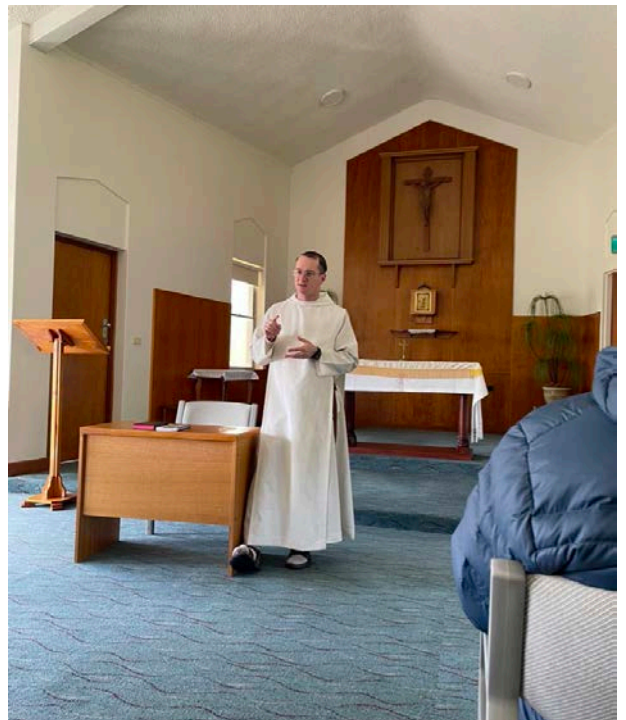
I am come to cast fire on the earth,
and what will I, but that it be kindled?

Lk 12:49

“The second kind of humility,” writes St Ignatius, “is more perfect than the first. I possess it if my attitude of mind is such that I neither desire nor am I inclined to have riches rather than poverty, to seek honour rather than dishonour, to desire a long life rather than a short life, provided only in either alternative I would promote equally the service of God our Lord and the salvation of my soul. Besides this indifference, this second kind of humility supposes that not for all creation, nor to save my life, would I consent to commit a venial sin” (Sp. Ex. # 166).

The first kind of humility taught us that the minimum required for salvation is to avoid mortal sin. Today, we are told that it is a sign of greater humility to avoid even venial sins. Venial sins, being sins that of their nature do not destroy the life of communion with God, can appear, even to good people, as being without great consequence. And this explains why even holy persons commit venial sin. Holy Scripture tells us that the just man falls seven times a day (cf. Prov. 24:16), that is to say, that he cannot avoid sins of frailty that are inherent in our fallen nature. The deliberate venial sins that this second kind of humility refers to are therefore ones that are committed without having the excuse of frailty. They are deliberate. We know it is wrong, but we also know it is not a seri-

ous offence against God. It might be a “white lie”, a sin of gluttony to satisfy a craving, an act of disobedience, an unkind word, etc.



The point of the second kind of humility is that a truly humble person will not do those sorts of things. Just as in the first kind, we saw that humility is sufficiently anchored in the soul to keep it from any serious falls, so here, that humility has grown to the point of making even small sins unthinkable. How could I offend God, even in a small matter, when I have come to be fully conscious of the tremendously underserved place He has given me in His beautiful universe? Would I “mess things up” even in an insignificant way? Or rather, is anything insignificant when you take the full measure of your place and the gratitude you owe to God?

In the end, it is this great thought that makes such a soul indifferent to all created things, that is to say, free, detached, capable of letting go and allowing God to be God, at all times and in all places.

