

# Ab AUSTRo

## Newsletter of Notre Dame Priory

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## Priory update

For us monks the new year began with the sad news of the death of Pope Benedict XVI. The office of Lauds on the feast of the Circumcision was thus preceded by the chant of the *Subvenite*, a beautiful responsory that is traditionally sung in monasteries as soon as the death of a monk has been announced. Pope Benedict XVI was dear to our community for numerous reasons. In his homily that day, Fr Prior stressed the fact that our existence as a community owes a lot to this Pope whose great heart opened up to the Church the riches of the traditional liturgy, which is one of the defining aspects of our identity. Pope Benedict gave us the assurance that the Church could never renounce the richness of its liturgical tradition. May the great wisdom of this unforgettable pontiff inspire us all for a long time to come. On 5 January, day of his funeral in Rome, the community sang a Requiem Mass and absolution for the soul of the deceased pontiff.

Hardly recovered from our mourning, we were saddened to learn of the passing of Cardinal George Pell on 11 January. Even though His Eminence was never able to pay us a visit, he was dear to us for many reasons, in particular his staunch defence of the faith and his veneration for the traditional liturgy which he gladly celebrated on certain grand occasions such as ordinations. The loss of these two great shepherds has saddened us, but also inspired us to pray for strong, holy shepherds in the Church of God.

Along with some gorgeous summer weather, the brothers are enjoying a well-deserved break from classes, which will soon come to an end! As of this writing our “theologians” (Brothers Bede and Gregory) have resumed their courses, this year focusing on moral theology, while three new “philosophers” (Brothers Antony, Isaac and John) – will commence shortly their cycle of studies, all the while continuing their noviciate formation.

Work around the Priory continues. Extra help this past few weeks has allowed us to nearly finish work on

the final six cabins. Immaculate Conception Church now sports a new plaque commemorating those who made it possible for us to obtain and renovate it. Finally, the community has been working for some time now on the plantation of a vineyard. Due to an exceptionally rainy springtime and the difficulty in finding competent personnel to help, it has taken longer than we had expected, but we do hope that sometime around Easter, it will actually be planted. If you are in the area then, there might be some work to do!

This first issue of the new year is principally dedicated to commemorating the beautiful ceremony that took place at the end of last year, namely the simple profession of Br Isaac Mary Scott, on 28 December, the feast of the Holy Innocents.

Brother Chronicler



The ongoing projects of greenhouse construction and the plantation of a vineyard find our resources somewhat stretched. If you are interested in becoming a sponsor for either of these projects, please let us know. Approximate amount needed is AUD\$30,000.

QUODCUMQUE DIXERIT VOBIS FACITE





## From Br Isaac's Profession

Dear Brother Isaac,

Exactly two years ago, you were just starting your first retreat, with a view to discerning a possible monastic vocation. During that retreat, you were enthralled by the contemplation of the life of Our Lord Jesus Christ, and moved with the desire to imitate Him. In the contemplation of the Nativity, you were drawn to that fact that Christ wanted to be born in extreme poverty and that after suffering hunger, thirst, heat and cold, He would be rejected by His own people and die an ignominious death on the cross. In doing this, He would open a new path for those who are taken with His love and seek to follow Him, a path that the world does not understand and for which reason it can sometimes come to the point of persecuting those who believe in Jesus.

The feast that we celebrate today brings to our minds the first fruits of the coming of Our Lord. The small crowd of infant boys who were atrociously murdered by a power-thirsty king in his futile effort to stamp out the newborn Messiah, reminds us that if the King of Heaven means business when He enters the scene and takes suffering upon Himself, so does the Prince of Darkness in his vile persecution of those who serve Christ. And all this reminds us of the seriousness of life and our eternal destiny. One day, the Incarnate God will summarise it in those immortal words: *He who is not with me is against me; he who does not gather together with me scatters* (Mt 12:30). And so it is today. The Person of Jesus Christ, as always, is the dividing point; it is the real issue, the only issue really. For if God exists and has taken our flesh to save us and lead us home to Heaven, then nothing else matters. Nothing else at all.

This is a truth that you have received the grace to see and understand. It is one that has blossomed in the desire to dedicate your life to Him. In this profession of first vows, the Church requires that you commit for a period of three years, to test further your resolve and suitability. But in your heart, your commitment is not meant to be only for a time.

**They play before the throne of God as children play before their parents, in utter confidence, in blissful and careless freedom.**

The Holy Innocents also bring to our mind your patron saint, the patriarch Isaac. He was a boy when Abraham his father, in obedience to God, made ready to offer him up in sacrifice. Isaac accepted to be that holocaust, and was only spared at the last minute because God rewarded the faith and obedience of his father. But those boys of Bethlehem were not spared. The blood flowed from their tender bodies as they were ripped from their mothers' breasts and pierced with swords – those poor mothers! By their silent holocaust they speak more to us than volumes of discourses. That crowd of innocents is the supreme homage to the Son of God who came to offer His



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life as a sacrifice. For the One Boy who escaped the massacre, would indeed be offered up in sacrifice too, after He had preached the Gospel of the Kingdom and founded His Church.

But there is another aspect to this feast, Brother, that you will do well to reflect upon. The hymn that we sing on this day tells us that the Holy Innocents play before the throne of God with their palms and their crowns. The palm of martyrdom which is their glory, the crown they wear as a sign that they are henceforth princes in His kingdom, these virginal souls play with them before the throne, as children play before their parents, in utter confidence, in blissful and careless freedom. In this they are the model of monks whose joy it is to play before the throne each day and night, singing songs of praise to the eternal conqueror of death. *Ludens coram eo omni tempore.*

So we can say that in a way the feast summarises the fundamental aspects of the monastic life: its austerity and seriousness: life is short and upon it depends our eternal destiny; but also a certain light-heartedness which people often notice in the monks: a joy, a smile, that betrays a man who, while working hard, knows that he has nothing better to do than spend his days playing under the loving gaze of His Father in Heaven. May the Holy Innocents always keep in your soul a like simplicity in all things, and a smiling and joyful demeanour. For if the world is just as cruel today as it was then – and if today’s loss of respect for unborn life gives us extra cause to intercede with the Holy Innocents for the safety of those in danger of abortion –, the true servants of God have just as much reason to sing and to shout and to jump for joy and play before their Lord and His most holy Mother. What a lesson is given to us in this feast! Even the evil designs of God’s enemies turn to the glorification of His elect.

Finally, allow yourself on this day, Brother Isaac, to revel in the certain knowledge that you are loved, as God already told us in the Old Testament: *Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name: you are mine. When you pass through the water, I will be with you; in the rivers you shall not drown. When you walk through fire, you shall not be burned; the flames shall not consume you. For I am the Lord, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Saviour. ... You are precious in my eyes and glorious, and because I love you, I give men in return for you and peoples in exchange for your life* (Is 43:1-4). No, dear Brother, we are not stray electrons in the cosmos. We are loved more than we can imagine, for *God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him might not perish but might have eternal life* (Jn 3:16).

May the Holy Innocent martyrs inspire you throughout your monastic life, to profess your faith more by dying to the world and to yourself than by any words you might speak.



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