

# Ab Austro

Newsletter of  
Notre Dame Priory

June 2022

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*This issue:*

- † Profession of Br Antony Mary
- † Visit from Pluscarden
- † The Jesus Prayer

## *Priory update*

The month of the Sacred Heart held in reserve for our community two very special graces. The most important was the ceremony of simple profession of first vows by Br Antony Mary Piat on the feast of the Sacred Heart, 24 June. Br Antony, who was born in Mauritius, was surrounded on this day by all of his immediate family: parents, siblings, niece and nephews, and godfather, as well as by a few friends who were able to come to Tasmania for the happy occasion. Before becoming a monk, Br Antony had extensive formation and practice in sacred chant, and so his presence in choir has been a great boon for all of us. In addition to his work for the chant, he is also in charge of the vegetable garden and the flowers. Please keep him and the rest of us in your good prayers.

The other significant event of this month was a visit from another monk, always a great event for our monastery so far away from all the larger communities in Europe and America. Br Thomas Cole, a professed monk of Pluscarden Abbey in Scotland, was able to spend two weeks with us. Br Thomas is originally from New Zealand, and it was from there that he flew to us. In addition to being a big help around the monastery for any number of jobs, he



also gave us two conferences. The first was on the history of Pluscarden Abbey, a 1948 foundation of Prinknash Abbey which in turn came into existence after the conversion of the Anglican monks on Caldey Island to the Catholic Church. The original Pluscarden community however was much older, going back to the 13th century. It was intriguing to hear of this unique community and its way of life, so similar to ours, and separated by the entire expanse of the earth! In a second conference, Br Thomas presented to us the Subiaco-Cassinense Benedictine Congregation, and especially its English Province, of which Pluscarden is a part.

The community also benefitted from a talk on the subject of the “Jesus Prayer” (*Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner*) given by our friend Mark Robinson who recently spent a few months with us, helping us in many ways before going back to his native Townsville. We wish him and Br Thomas all the best and we hope to see them again.

Brother Chronicler



†  
24 June 2022  
Feast of the Sacred Heart  
Simple Profession of  
Br Antony Mary

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Dear Brother Antony,

We opened this Holy Mass with these words from psalm 32: *Cogitationes Cordis eius in generatione et generationem - The thoughts of His Heart are from generation to generation.* In other words, His eternal project of salvation is never lacking. The love that was shown to our Fathers, beginning with our first parents down through the patriarchs, the prophets, apostles and martyrs, that same love, that same thought of His Heart reaches us today, reaches you today.

When we take a look back at our life we tend to consider our choices and decisions. But it is a much more fruitful exercise to consider *His* thoughts, *His* choices, the way *He* guided us. And His thoughts are thoughts of love. In the prophet Jeremiah He tells us: *I have loved you with an everlasting love, and therefore I drew you having mercy on you* (Jer 31:3). The apostle whom Jesus loved the most, St John, will tell us: *It is not we who have loved God, but He first loved us* (cf. 1 Jn 4:10). Furthermore, he tells us that the apostles came to believe in that love, *Credidimus caritati quam Deus habet in nobis* (1 Jn 4:10).



Such is the first and the most fundamental point of this feast which the Church, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, has given to us. God loves us. His love for us is such that He created all things for us, and when we had turned our backs on Him, He came down to earth and took flesh so as to prove His love for us. That love led Him to go so far that He poured out all His blood for us. This is why the feast of the Sacred Heart is celebrated on Friday, the day

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of the passion of Our Blessed Lord, for that Heart was pierced on the Cross, and out of that Heart came the Church and the Sacraments.

His love for us is such that He goes looking for the stray sheep, whom He calls back to the fold and back to His intimacy. Among them, there are those whom He calls to a more intimate share in His love. Brother Antony, you are one of those upon whom He has fixed His gaze, as St Mark tells us He did with the young man who came and asked how to attain eternal life: *Jesus looked at him and He loved him* (Mk 10:21). And at the Last Supper, He will tell us: *You have not chosen me; I have chosen you* (Jn 15:16).

When we come to gain a little bit of insight into that reality and we consider our own unworthiness, we can only ask: “Me, Lord? Why me? Why did you love me more?” But the love of God has no reason or justification but itself. God loves because He loves. Christ has loved you because He has loved you. He chose to love you and that should give you great joy.

That reality leads us to the second most important aspect of this feast, which is the love that we owe in return. The realisation that we are loved can only move us to love back, to give back, to acknowledge our gratitude for having been loved. And the expression of that love when it reaches its climax is the gift of self, which is exactly what this whole ceremony is about. You have come to know the love Christ has for you, and you wish to give yourself to Him in return. In the gift of self is of necessity included the sacrifice of self, the lowering of self. St Therese of Lisieux wrote: “Le

propre de l'amour est de s'abaisser" – it is proper for love to lower itself, to humble itself, to sacrifice itself, to take the last place. And that is exactly what monastic life is about. To quote St Elisabeth of the Trinity:

"It is knowing nothing else but to love; to love in adoration, to love in reparation, to love in prayer, in asking, in forgetting oneself; to love always and under every form!... to have one's eyes in His, one's thoughts haunted by Him, the heart completely taken up, totally possessed, as it were outside of self and gone into Him, the soul full of His soul, full of His prayer, the whole being captivated and given. It is, by setting one's gaze always upon Him, to discover the least sign, the least desire; it is entering into all His joys, sharing all His sadness. It is being fecund, being co-redemptrix, giving birth to souls through grace, multiplying the adopted children of the Father, the souls redeemed by Christ, the coheirs of His glory."

We could say that becoming a monk is about nothing more than letting oneself be loved and loving in return. And since it is only in the gift of self that we find ourselves, monastic life reveals itself to be the most effective means of establishing the heart in peace. *Seek peace and follow after it*, says the Psalm (Ps 33:15), quoted by our holy Father St Benedict in the prologue of the Holy Rule. Monastic life in its entirety, with all of its order, balance and sacrifices, is designed to foster that peace in the heart of each monk and among all the monks together, each of whom is called to pursue the perfection of charity in company with the others.

But there is a third aspect to this feast that is no less important, and that is the desire that everyone who has found Christ should have of bringing other souls into that love. Last night at Vespers we sang those astounding words of Our Lord recorded by St Luke: *I have come to cast a fire on the earth, and how I long that it be kindled!* (Lk 12:49). The Lord Jesus has come to set the world on fire with His love, and in every age He raises up souls who allow Him to kindle a fire in their hearts, in the hope that they will spread the fire far and wide. How could not a monk have that self-same desire that the apostle St Paul had and of which we heard in today's epistle, to let others know "*the*



*unsearchable riches of Christ and to enlighten all men, that they may see what is the dispensation of the mystery hidden from eternity"?* (Eph 3:8-9)

And so it is that a monk, however secluded and austere he might be, must have the passion for souls, a burning zeal to reach as many souls as possible by means of his prayers and sacrifices, but also by means of the contacts he might have with them. St Benedict never misses an opportunity to stress the care to be given to the sick, to the poor, to all guests. Each one is Christ and therefore each one is an opportunity to show our love for the Lord who has literally loved us to death.

We cannot fail to take note of the fact that this year, the feast of the Sacred Heart coincides with the Nativity of St John the Baptist, and therefore the annual commemoration of your profession will fall on the nativity of the Precursor. Fortuitous? I should think not. Indeed, after our Blessed Lady and St Joseph, who more than the Baptist understood the Heart of Christ? Our Lord was hardly conceived in the virginal womb when Mary carried Him to greet Elisabeth, and on that occasion, the baby precursor jumped for joy, his own heart suffused with choice graces of the Redeemer. From then on, he would take giant steps towards sanctity. From his youth he lived the life of an anchorite in the desert, and when the time of his

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mission came, he did not hesitate to leave his beloved solitude and confront the powerful men of his day. He knew he was risking his life in admonishing Herod, but for John there could be no compromise with error and vice. So it is for the monk.

St John the Apostle is the one who gives us what is perhaps the deepest insight into the deep communion there was between those two men. When told that Jesus was baptising and faced with the understandable rivalry of his disciples, John immediately lifts up the tone: *You yourselves do bear me witness that I said that I am not Christ, but that I am sent before him. He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, who standeth and heareth Him, rejoiceth with joy because of the bridegroom's voice. This my joy therefore is fulfilled. He must increase: but I must decrease.* (Jn 3:28-30). Such is the passion of the monk: to decrease so that Christ may increase.

Br Antony, you came to the monastery, like so many, to seek peace. Benedictine monasteries have always been considered to be havens of peace. That peace is found only in the Sacred Heart of Our Lord. One is reminded of the Carthusian motto: *Stat crux dum volvitur orbis* - the cross stands while the world goes round. In the world one is, as it were, in a whirlwind. Ambitions, passions and events conspire to take away the peace after which we all long. The man who enters a cloister does so because he knows that he will find there peace and tranquility. The prophecy of Isaiah here is fulfilled: *There shall be a tabernacle for a shade in the daytime from the heat, and for a security and covert from the whirlwind, and from rain... Thou hast been a strength to the poor, a strength to the needy in his distress: a refuge from the whirlwind, a shadow from the heat* (Isa 4:6 and 25:4)

But we also know that the peace of monastic life comes at a cost, as your patron, the great St Antony teaches us all. We must first pacify our own heart.



St Benedict also speaks on several occasions of the monastic life as being a state of warfare. The war is waged against ourselves, against the old man with the triple concupiscence of the flesh, of the eyes and of the pride of life. It is by perseverance in the monastery, sustained by the support of the brethren who fight the same fight with us, that we attain to a peace that the world cannot know, for as the prophet Jeremiah wrote: *Desolate, all the land, because no one takes it to heart* (Jer 12:11).

May your life, dear Brother, ever be such that you may truly take to heart the love that God has shown you and that you may draw many others into the secret of that love. If you do, your life will surely know its trials and crosses, but it will be one of immense fulfilment and spiritual joy. And God alone knows what marvels will happen! Such is my wish and that of all your brothers today. Let it be. Fiat!

