

Ab AUSTRo

Newsletter of Notre Dame Priory

May 2022

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Priory update

There must have been many graces pouring down upon Bethany for the five-day men's retreat that took place there from 2 to 7 May. As the retreat concluded, nature seemed to join in the chorus, sending us our first major rainfall of the year, which saw Jerusalem Creek regain river status. This was to the great delight of the monks and the grand dismay of the large rabbit colony whose extensive underground warrens were flooded! That was just the beginning of an amazing month of Mary.

On 12 May the community made its way south for a full-day outing to Hartz Peak. We had climbed this mountain in 2018, but it is a splendid adventure that we were delighted to do once again. Having reached the summit and then returned to civilisation, we gathered for some lunch at the Geeveston picnic area which, as it turns out, includes a pretty impressive playground. Any locals who might have been out for a stroll would have been surprised, if not shocked, to see a group of monks (young and old alike!) getting some exercise on the swing, flying fox and other fascinating contraptions (we must admit it takes little to amuse a monk!). That memorable day concluded with a lovely fraternal visit to the Little Eucharistic Brothers of the Divine Will in Dover.



The outing was also Lewis Cassidy's last day... as a postulant. The next day, on the Commemoration of the Relics contained in our church, he received the Benedictine habit and became Brother John Mary. For photos and Fr Prior's address on this happy occasion, see pages 2 and 3.

Another grace of the month, along with the retreat for women that took place at Bethany from 16 to 21 May, was the booking of further retreats this year. In addition to two more retreats at Jerusalem Estate, we have planned two in NSW and two in Victoria. Please see our website for details: www.notredamemonastery.org/retreats. For the moment, we need to promote the July retreat for men at St Clement's, Galong, as this retreat is just a little over a month away. Maybe we'll see you there!

Brother Chronicer



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13 May 2022
Feast of the Commemoration of the Relics in our Churches
and Our Lady of Fatima
Clothing of Br John Mary

The occurrence of cherished feasts and commemorations on this day and in this season gives us so much to choose from in the words that, according to the custom, the father must address to his spiritual son who is about to be clothed with the livery of the Immaculate Virgin. Clearly we are surrounded by many saints, as we were exactly six months ago when in this very place, we clothed Br Isaac. Then we honoured all the saints of our order; today we honour all the saints who accompany our divine praise in the church as we gather numerous times each day. So many friends with whom to share life in the Blessed Trinity.

So many friends: that word “friend” is one I would like to dwell upon tonight. To have a friend is to have an intimate relationship with another person with whom we share some of the more profound aspects of our life. To be a friend is to give to another and to receive in return, courtesies, encouragements, confidences, secrets. In short, it is to have a companion who is in some way an extension of ourselves, someone with whom we are closely knit and upon whom we can rely.

Humans need friends. One cannot live without a friend. A friend supports us when we are burdened, raises us when we fall, counsels us in doubt, admonishes us when we sin, gives us the hope of pardon. A friend softens all that is hard: *Vera amicitia in aeternum*, as the ancients said: True friendship lasts forever.

Friendship supposes a certain equality, teaches Aristotle, and therefore beings who are too different from each other cannot be united in friendship. That, *a priori*, would lead us to think that we cannot be friends with God, for God is the Other, the One who is beyond. This is where we begin to be astonished, and our wonder only increases, for as St Thomas tells us, “in order for friendship between God and

man to be more intimate, it was necessary for God to become man, since man is a natural friend to man. So that knowing God under a visible form, we might be enraptured by Him into love of the invisible” (*dum visibiliter Deum cognoscimus, per hunc in invisibilium amorem rapiamur*), as the Church sings in the Christmas preface (cf. *Summa Contra Gentiles* IV, 54).

True friendship lasts forever.

At the Last Supper, just before returning to the Father, Our Lord Jesus Christ revealed to us the full extent of the word that had been prophesied by Baruch: *in terris visus est et cum hominibus conversatus est – He was seen upon earth, and conversed with men*. Oh, the astounding revelation, that we hear from the very mouth of the Son of God: *Iam non dicam vos servos sed amicos – I no longer call you servants, for the servant knoweth not what his lord doth. But I called you friends, for all things whatsoever I have heard of my Father, I have made known to you!* (Jn 15:15).

Such is the ineffable reality that it is given to us to contemplate, or rather, to begin to contemplate in this life, for all eternity will not suffice for us to admire and adore the condescension of our God, who because of love pushed to what seems an excess, has made Himself in a way our equal so that He could converse and live with us. The monastic life is essentially the pursuit of that friendship; it is being attentive to the love of our God who pursues us, so that we will pursue Him.

Many reasons concur to bring a man to a monastery. Only one reason keeps him there definitively, and that is an intense, personal relationship with God Incarnate, with the Man on whose countenance shines the very light of God eternal. Only personal love for the Friend of our souls, Jesus Christ, gives a man the capacity, the energy, the spirit of self-sacrifice, required to persevere in a life that is so opposed to what the world has to offer.

Among the friends of Our Blessed Lord in the Gospel, one stands out. He himself tells us that he was the disciple whom Jesus loved. Jesus loved him the most, we are told by the liturgy, because he was the most pure, the virgin apostle. He is the only one who



made it to the foot of the cross and thus deserved to receive there the most precious trust of the universe, the Immaculate Virgin whom he took into his home.

St John has always been dear to monks, indeed to all contemplatives, because he was the most intuitive of the apostles. He missed nothing of what the Saviour said and did, even if it took him decades to formulate in his epistles and gospel all the depth of what the Lord meant to tell us. Let him be your model in prayer, your model in earnest searching for the fullness of all truth, to the point of becoming, as he tells us in his third epistle, a “co-worker of the truth”. St John, the only apostle who did not suffer martyrdom, nevertheless received the crown of martyrdom. Ask him to share with you that love for Christ which is ready to go nowhere and anywhere, to be silent and to speak, to pray and to preach.

Today we recall the first apparition of Our Lady in Fatima. But we can also recall the first great apparition in modern times, in Knock. There she had on her right St Joseph and on her left St John. Whereas St Joseph bows silently and reverently to her, St John, Gospel in hand and mitre on head, is preaching to the whole world the message of salvation. What an exquisite model for a monk of our community, called as we are to both silent contemplation and vigorous preaching of the mysteries of salvation, to personal holiness and openness to helping others find God and become saints, to self-oblivion in choral praise and self-sacrifice in patient listening, consoling and teaching.

The program is immense, and each of us can and does feel daunted. How can we perform this impossible task of building a monastery from scratch that will be a haven for souls thirsting for intimacy and a beacon of light for those who wander about in the dark? But we know from the example of the apostles, that it only takes twelve men to convert the entire world. Twelve saints can transform the universe, if only they are true friends of the cross and true sons of Mary Immaculate. Let us then entrust ourselves with renewed vigour to the love of our God. Let us ever abide at the foot of the cross and become friends of the cross. To be a friend of the cross is to be a friend of

Jesus, and if you are a friend of Jesus as was St John, you will never be lacking in anything.

Nor can we forget the great lesson the apostle gives us at the end of his long career when he would repeat unceasingly: “My little children, love one another”. And when asked why he repeated the same thing over and over again, he replied with those unforgettable words worthy of St John: “Because it is the commandment of the Lord, and if it alone is accomplished, it is enough”. Indeed, at the Last Supper, while John was resting on the Heart of God, he had heard from the very mouth of the Saviour: *A new commandment I give you: love one another. In this will all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.* That fraternal love alone is the sign that God is among us.

And so I too, in obedience to our Risen Saviour whose light shines upon us in this paschal joy, do give to you on this day, and at the same time to each and every one of you this single command: “Love one another”. Let there be no vying amongst us if it be not to love more. At this sign alone will all men know whom we serve. To this will all be drawn. *Si solum fiat, sufficit.*



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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).

When we saw last month that the minimum degree of humility in order to be saved is to avoid mortal sin, it was only to be expected that the higher degrees would involve avoiding venial sin. There are many venial sins that are not fully deliberate. These are what Holy Scripture refers to when it says: *For a just man shall fall seven times, and shall rise again* (Prov 24:16). Such sins of frailty are unavoidable in this world, and obviously are not what St Ignatius is referring to when he speaks of “consenting to commit a venial sin”. Rather, he is referring to deliberate venial sins: thoughts, words or actions that, while not directly violating communion with God in love, are nonetheless a sign of a love that is as yet weak. What’s more, the repetition of deliberate venial sins exposes the soul to the danger of mortal sin.

The real test, however, of the second degree of humility is the attitude of mind which it implies, and which anyone familiar with Ignatian spirituality will recognise as “indifference”, that detachment from

all earthly things, including those that are dearest to us, such as health, material goods, esteem, longevity, etc. The notion that humility is what allows us to reach that indifference is of the greatest consequence, for if one has a lowly opinion of oneself, then it is easy to understand that one will be inclined to not be too touchy about so many things. A truly humble person looks upon what happens to themselves as if it were happening to a total stranger. If I am not the centre of my own little universe, then I can step back from what happens to me and remain of unperturbed mind when some heavy blows hit me in my work or my livelihood, and even in my family, my health, etc.

An apparently insignificant episode recounted by St Therese of Lisieux illustrates this point. One day, going out into the small Carmel garden, she saw that the trees had been trimmed. This caused her great sadness, for she loved those trees (and God knows how important the smallest things can be behind the walls of a cloister!). But then she began to ask herself what would it matter if such a thing had happened in another Carmel on the other side of the world. Would that affect me if it involved other sisters unknown to me? Well no, so it won’t affect me either! St Therese had attained that second degree of humility. She was too little in her own eyes to be adversely affected for any length of time by such an event. She had become “indifferent” in the Ignatian sense, for her mind and heart were free, capable of soaring above all the contingencies of this lowly world. And with that indifference she had found great peace.

