

# Ab AUSTRo

## Newsletter of Notre Dame Priory

October 2022

No. 61

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## Priory update

The month of the Holy Rosary and the Guardian Angels brought our community the honoured visit of two abbots and a prior. From Pluscarden Abbey in northern Scotland, Abbot Anselm Atkinson and Prior Giles Conacher, and from New Norcia Abbey in Western Australia, Abbot John Herbert. From 7 to 11 October the three eminent guests were received in community, and took part in our daily horarium. Abbot Anselm gave the homily at Sunday Mass. One of the highlights of the visit was a trip up to Mount Olivet with its grandiose view and presentation of plans for the future monastery buildings. Fr Prior also drove them to see St Patrick's Church in Colebrook and St John the Evangelist Church in Richmond.



A few days after their departure, Fr Prior was heading off to the recently founded Carmel of Mathoura, NSW, where he had been asked to guide the nuns through a week-long retreat. Getting there and back turned out to be an adventure, recent heavy rains and flooding preventing the drive directly up from Melbourne. The morning of his scheduled departure, Fr Prior received word from his driver that it was impossible to get through the floods. No worries! Flying on the wings of holy obedience, Br Bede hopped on the computer and found a way around the waters. Instead of flying to Melbourne, Father flew to Albury via Sydney, and from Albury was driven to

Mathoura by a friend, arriving somewhat late, and to tell the truth, not without adventure: one of the roads was under water for a distance of a couple hundred meters. It looked manageable, but to make sure, Fr Prior removed his sandals and waded through the ankle deep water, allowing the driver to follow safely. (Fr Prior just wanted to make sure everybody knows he walked *through*, and not *on*, the waters, whence the photo!).

Father had been to this Carmel before, but this was his first extended visit. He remains deeply grateful for the graces of this retreat, and was delighted to see the progress the nuns have made in just a few years. He did not leave without obtaining the assurance of a special place in the nuns' prayers.

Back at Jerusalem Estate, Fr Prior's new office – dedicated to St Rita of Cascia by request of the donors who financed its building – is completed and serving its purpose, having been furnished thanks to generous donations of a friend who has recently left Tasmania and gave us numerous items, in particular a large desk and bookcases (with excellent books!). To one and all, we once again express our immense gratitude. May the Lord grant all our benefactors eternal life in exchange for their temporal gifts.

Brother Chronicler

The 2023 Spiritual Exercises calendar, including retreats in Tasmania, Victoria, NSW and Ohio, is now available on our website at: <https://www.notredamemonastery.org/retreats>.





## In the school of St Benedict

As it can come as a surprise that St Benedict feels the need to remind his monks of the fundamental precept of love of God and neighbour, so can it cause even greater surprise to read of him reminding the monks, in chapter 4, of the Ten Commandments: “*Not to kill. Not to commit adultery. Not to steal. Not to covet. Not to bear false witness.*” Do monks really need to be reminded not to do these things?

Then we remember that St Benedict had a particular reason for not omitting these commandments: he himself twice made a narrow escape from being murdered, once by his own monks (!) and once by a neighbouring priest who was envious of his sanctity and success (the same priest tried to corrupt the young monks by sending them lewd young women...)... Becoming a monk does not remove the base inclinations of our fallen nature. If it did, who would not want to become one?

Of course, when one enters religious life, one leaves behind the world and its ways; the very thought of committing any serious sin would not even occur. But nature does not die (not until death, that is...), and if one is not careful to progress in the spiritual life, one can find oneself slipping back into old ways. There is a Latin saying that goes: *corruptio optimi pessima*, which means that the corruption of the best makes for the worst. Or, in the words of Shakespeare: “For sweetest things turn sourest by their deeds; lilies that fester smell far worse than weeds” (Sonnet 94).

When God calls a soul to His special service in the religious life or the priesthood, He has higher demands of one so highly favoured, and greater expectations. This incidentally, is one of the reasons for monastic enclosure and for grilles in the convents of nuns. If one, however, does not correspond with those graces, then lukewarmness can set in, and the stage is set

for serious falls. Sadly, the annals of Church history furnish us with plenty of examples... And so now we can understand the holy patriarch’s not omitting the fundamental precepts of God’s law which bind all of

### When one enters religious life, one leaves behind the world and its ways

us, clergy, religious and laity alike, at all times and in all places, with no exceptions whatsoever for anyone. St Benedict had his head in Heaven, but his feet were certainly on the ground. It is never a good idea to forget where we are, nor is it wise to underestimate our invisible enemies who are evil and never sleep.



Looking for the ideal Christmas gift?

Consider the Notre Dame Priory 2023 Liturgical Calendar as well as our Advent and Christmas cards which are now available for ordering from our website.

[www.notredamemonastery.org/monk-shop](http://www.notredamemonastery.org/monk-shop)

We happily receive the details of anyone who might be interested in receiving our newsletter via [newsletter@notredamemonastery.org](mailto:newsletter@notredamemonastery.org)

## Br Paphnutius Tours the Summa

*As Fr Germanus commences his first lesson in theology to the young scholastics, Br Paphnutius, according to his invariable custom, is the first to ask a question:*

“Father, I remember a religion teacher at school saying that faith is basically just an interior feeling, and we are all good as long as we are true to ourselves. One fellow feels cool with Jesus, another likes Buddha, that one reckons there is no God at all – they’re all being true to themselves and to their feelings, so all is fine! If faith is just subjective, and based on our feelings, how can we be sure that our faith is true?”

Old Fr Germanus chuckled. “Hey, since when do we base important decisions just on feelings? As everybody knows, feelings can lead astray. If there is anything in us that will lead us to God, it’s not likely to be feelings, but reason.”

The eyes of all in the classroom widened with awe.

“But not reason alone. For Thomas, reason is one of the wings by which we soar to God; faith is the other. Throughout the *Summa*, you will find that he is constantly going from one to the other. He will speak to you about nature and the amazing powers God has put there, and he will then proceed to show how the same God who made nature is the one who revealed supernatural truths to us. Since it is the same God who speaks to us through reason, through nature and through faith, there is perfect harmony between them, and never any real contradiction.”

“But, Father, if God gave us reason, isn’t that enough? Shouldn’t we be able to get by with our own wits?”

“We could, Brother, if God had not lifted us up to His own realm, to give us a share in His divine life. Now, we might be pretty gifted rational animals, but if we are destined to see God, we stand in need of some serious supernatural help, and first of all, supernatural doctrine. So God stepped in to teach us, in person, the truths of the faith that are necessary for salvation, and to securely hand it down to us in a body of teach-

ings that St Thomas simply calls *sacra doctrina*.”

“W-wait! You mean objective truth is necessary for salvation?”

“Absolutely, and salvation is not a given. You are not saved just because you are a man. Our nature has been elevated to the supernatural order, but that does not establish each soul in God’s grace. Grace comes through Christ, through Christ alone, and it is mediated to us through the Church and the Sacraments, and that is why we need access to Christ through faith, and faith comes from hearing God’s word, and giving one’s internal assent to it.

“In St Thomas’ words: ‘it was necessary for the salvation of man that certain truths which exceed human reason should be made known to him by divine revelation. ...Man’s whole salvation, which is in God, depends upon the knowledge of this truth. Therefore, in order that the salvation of men might be brought about more fitly and more surely, it was necessary that they should be taught divine truths by divine revelation. It was therefore necessary that besides philosophical science built up by reason, there should be a sacred science learned through revelation.’ And that is *sacra doctrina* (see *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, q. 1, a. 1).

“In other words, Brother, we have to know the end in order to orient ourselves towards it. That’s why God reveals Himself to us, to build on our nature and lead souls to eternal life, one by one”.



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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 contemplation of the passion of the Saviour as St Ignatius presents it in the Third Week is to be considered in relation with the rest of the *Spiritual Exercises*. Indeed, it could be said that the Exercises are summarised in the Third Week. How could they not be, when we know that the passion of the Lord is the very reason for which He has come, the culmination of His mission and the ultimate proof of His love for us?

When we are told to “consider that Christ suffers all this for my sins” (S.E. # 197), all the meditations of the First Week are brought back before us. We are put on the spot, as it were, and summoned to take our responsibilities. As the Catechism reminds us: “We must regard as guilty all those who continue to relapse into their sins. Since our sins made the Lord Christ suffer the torment of the cross, those who plunge themselves into disorders and crimes crucify the Son of God anew in their hearts (for He is in them) and hold Him up to contempt” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, # 598, quoting the *Roman Catechism*). It is as if to say that all we need to do in order to start out resolutely is to be conscious of what we have been saved from and how much we are indebted to our Redeemer. In similar fashion, the Second Week is brought back to us by the following words: “and what I ought to do and suffer for Him” (S.E. #197), which is but the climax of the grace we had been instructed to ask for: “I will ask for an intimate knowledge of our Lord, who has become man for me, that I may love Him more and follow Him more closely” (S.E. # 104).

That is not all, however. The phrase from St Luke’s Gospel at the top of this page that has figured as a motto for these reflections for nearly 20 years, is followed immediately by this other verse: *And I have a baptism wherewith I am to be baptised. And how am I straitened until it be accomplished?* (Lk 12:50). By means of these expressions, the Lord was referring to His passion, the baptism of blood by which He would redeem the world. We mortals have such a difficult time coming to terms with this, and this is no doubt why St Ignatius does not hesitate to stress it: Jesus wants to suffer: “Consider what Christ Our Lord suffers in His human nature, or according to the passage contemplated, what He desires to suffer”

(S.E. #195). Clearly, He does not want to suffer for suffering’s sake. Suffering remains an evil, but in



God’s plan of redemption, it is what saves us and atones for sin. Christ knew that it is through suffering that we could be saved, and He also knew that in this way He would give the greatest proof of His love to each of us. Because of this, each soul is compelled to answer that love with love. As one Benedictine Abbot expressed it: “Love that has given all, demands love that holds nothing back.”

When we have understood that, and see how very true it is, then we find ourselves wanting to undertake great and arduous tasks for Christ. When this truth has dawned upon our freedom, we feel compelled to put it in the service of Christ and His salvific plan.

