

Ab Austro

Newsletter of
Notre Dame Priory

Advent 2025

No. 80

This issue:

- † New Archbishop
- † On Becoming Holy
- † Cana Press Update
- † Causes of Desolation, 3

Priory update

Dear Friends,

Shortly after the last issue of Ab Austro, on Tuesday 12 August, Hobart welcomed its twelfth archbishop in the person of the Most Reverend Anthony Ireland, formerly auxiliary bishop in Melbourne. Fr Prior and Fr Bede represented the community at this important ceremony, which saw His Grace take possession of his cathedral and officially commence his time as chief shepherd of the Church in Tasmania. We remain most grateful to his predecessor, and our founding archbishop, Archbishop Julian Porteous, whose support has been vital in the establishment of our community, and who continues to reside in Hobart.



We are happy to announce that after many prayers for rain, the heavens opened a bit in mid-October. While we still need much more, what has come is a great blessing. At the same time some high winds caused us to lose power on a few occasions. In particular, twice in the middle of Matins we had to light the candles to continue the chant (unfortunately the monks do not yet know the entire psalter by heart!). On another occasion, we received news that we could be without power for several days. We got the generator up and running and then – power was restored!

In late August and mid-October, Fr Prior travelled to the mainland to give retreats to two groups of ladies in Lysterfield VIC and Galong NSW; both retreats were well attended and went very smoothly. We also



held a men's retreat at the Priory in mid-November, and another men's retreat is planned in Galong in January.

We take this opportunity to wish one and all a blessed Advent as we prepare for the coming of our Saviour at Christmas. Please keep us in your prayers, as we do you.

Brother Chronicler

2026 Liturgical Calendar
Now Available
\$20.00

Featuring 1962 and Benedictine feasts and a saint from the martyrology for those days without feasts. Images from the monastery.

Christmas Cards and Books also available. Please see the included Catalogue for some items. The complete catalogue is available online.

www.notredamemonastery.org/monk-shop/

QUODCUMQUE DIXERIT VOBIS FACITE





In the school of St Benedict

Chapter Four on the Instruments of Good Works, cont'd

Not to wish to be called holy before one is holy; but first to be holy, that one may be truly so called.

We can imagine St Benedict smiling as he wrote this tool. He had no doubt encountered characters who thought they were holy and wanted to be considered as such, the Pharisees of every age who somehow think they are better and look down on others, though they would never admit it.

It is also noteworthy that St Benedict considers that the truly holy person can be acknowledged as such without danger to his virtue. Indeed, to be truly holy means to be truly humble, and to be truly humble means to be fully conscious of one's unworthiness, and even one's nothingness before God. The

person who has come to fully grasp that he is entirely dependent upon God even for his existence, in such a way that if God forgot him he would cease to exist, that person has attained true humility, and whatever praise is heaped upon him just flows like water over a raincoat. Whatever people might think or say about him doesn't really touch him, because he knows deep down that he is what he is before God; nothing more, nothing less.

But perhaps the greatest lesson is that we can aspire to become holy. We should. Holiness is not just for others. Many people live according to the mentality of drifting through life without being extreme. "Being a criminal is extreme. Being a saint is extreme. So I'll just stay in the middle and be an ordinary person"! The problem with this mentality is that it opens the person up to a life of mediocrity. Furthermore, either we become saints or we are damned. Ultimately, every soul will either be a saint or will go to spend eternity in hell with the demons. This consideration alone should be enough to convince us that we must, with every fibre of our being, strive to become saints.

The inclination of our nature, due to original sin, is to go away from God, not to God. We are all conceived and born in sin, and if we do not let grace rule in our lives, we will definitely turn our backs on Him. Sadly nowadays, the opposite conviction reigns among most people, even in the Church. "Most people are nice and as long as they don't do really terrible things like murder or child abuse, they will be saved". But that is not what the Gospels and the Tradition of the Church tell us. There are Ten Commandments in the Decalogue and a body of revealed dogmas to be accepted on faith. We will be, furthermore, judged on our works (see Mt 25). In reality, if we do not make serious efforts to become saints, we will not. Out of pure mercy, in spite of our not taking Him too seriously, God might send us a grace that will allow us to die in His friendship, but this is purely gratuitous and in no way deserved. Death bed conversions happen, but they are not to be counted on. Let's strive to be saints every day of our lives, starting right now.

Fr Prior next to the miraculous staircase at the Loretto Chapel in Santa Fe, New Mexico, USA.

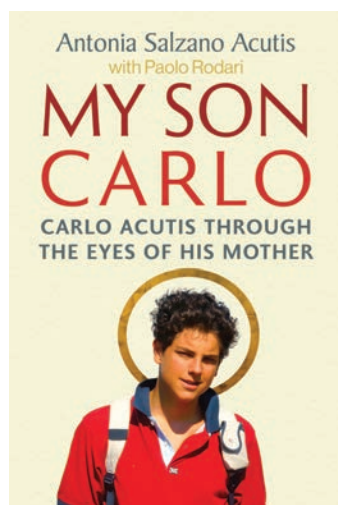


We happily receive the details of anyone who might be interested in receiving our newsletter
via newsletter@notredamemonastery.org

Cana Press 2025

Cana Press has continued to grow this year, adding several titles to its catalogue. The purpose of this little update is to draw your attention to some of these as well as let you know about some of the titles we are working on and hope to publish in 2026.

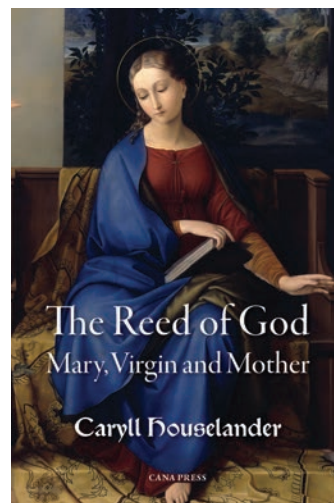
The monastery was approached by devotees of now St Carlo Acutis about the possibility of obtaining the Australian rights to the book *My Son Carlo*, written by his mother, in order to make it more available and affordable in Australia. This also marked our first international agreement and has been a resounding success. St Carlo was such a remarkable young man and the depth of his spiritual life can be seen in this book which includes many of his writings.



We have just released *Preces Gertrudianæ*, a seventeenth century compilation of various prayers of St Gertrude and St Mechtilde first translated and published in English in 1861. Our edition has been newly typeset with a beautiful hard cover with gold foil embellishments and gold foiled page edges.



Another book that is fast becoming one of our best-sellers, though only recently published, is *The Reed of God* by Caryll Houselander. Houselander shows how Mary's virginity is the key to her universal motherhood and that by finding or reclaiming our own virginity—an emptiness waiting for the loving presence of God—we can imitate Mary in finding Christ in every situation and every person.



These are only some of our titles, but we encourage you to look through our entire catalogue online. We try always to publish books of the highest calibre from which much spiritual fruit can be gathered.

We have several projects in the works for 2026. We hope to publish an edition of the combined Gospel commentaries of Archbishop Alban Goodier SJ, something that has never been done. There is also the potential reprinting of a beautiful hand missal with both the pre-'55 and '55 Holy weeks included. We are also hoping to make the writings of John Senior more readily available in Australia.

New books tend to be announced in the newsletter email, but please visit the Monk Shop on our website or email info@canapress.com.au to receive a current catalogue. This is one of the best ways to support the monks' life and mission.

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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 principal reasons why we suffer from desolation are three: ... The third reason is because God wishes to give us a true knowledge and understanding of ourselves, so that we may have an intimate perception of the fact that it is not within our power to acquire and attain great devotion, intense love, tears, or any other spiritual consolation; but that all this is the gift and grace of God our Lord. God does not wish us to build on the property of another, to rise up in spirit in a certain pride and vainglory and attribute to ourselves the devotion and other effects of spiritual consolation” (Sp. Ex. # 322).



We have already considered the first two reasons for desolation, namely as a punishment and as a test. This third we could say is part of our ongoing formation. Anyone who has given themselves over to the spiritual life with any amount of sincerity and perseverance will know of the sweetness of divine love that comes with great consolation in the Lord, and can even lead to the shedding of tears of joy. Such consolations are not uncommon in the beginning, but they are destined to lead further.

The danger lies in thinking that such consolations can be conjured up by our own efforts. This would be to make a fundamental mistake about the nature of the spiritual life. Here we have an important lesson for those people who today seek help from forms of meditation found in eastern religions (such as yoga or transcendental meditation, etc...). All these methods have one thing in common: they are human efforts at reaching a state that is qualified as peaceful and conducive to fulfilled living. Nor are they without their dangers. Since they often appeal to powers that are not those of the one true God and not identifiable as powers of nature, they can only be those of evil spirits. The consolation found in Christian meditation is a gift of

the Holy Spirit and, really, is found only in the true religion. Human efforts and technique can afford a relative peace, but they cannot produce grace.

St Ignatius, one of the greatest masters of Christian prayer, does insist that we perform certain actions and give prayer certain times. He is fully conscious, however, that unlike in the oriental religions which have nothing to offer because they do not believe in a transcendent God, the true joy and consolation that comes from being in communion with the Creator of the universe is not something one is entitled to. God is not a vending machine into which we put a certain amount of time and effort, and out comes our personal satisfaction. The true God is the eternal communion of Three Divine Persons calling each of us to a personal intimacy with Him. This intimacy is the greatest thing that could happen to a person. Nothing else that we know of bears any resemblance to it. But again, God is not conquered. He is not our plaything. He remains beyond, and the only way to access Him is through humility, that is to say, being conscious that of ourselves we deserve nothing and can do nothing. *Without me you can do nothing*, says Our Lord (Jn 15:5).



Learning this lesson is one of the most important in the spiritual life, and that is why God sometimes deprives us of consolation. There is no greater grace we can receive than that of not just realising, but accepting the reality of our metaphysical, ontological nothingness. Utterly dependent on the mercy of God even to exist, we cannot aspire to any joy unless He gives it. And His gifts are given only to the humble, for God, who is infinite, finds nothing more repugnant than a tiny creature who thinks he is something. On the other hand, when He sees one fully conscious of his nothingness, He cannot resist: He fills that soul to the brim with ineffable joys, and gives them a mission that will take them, through Calvary, to the joy of the Resurrection.

