

Ab AUSTRo

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Priory update

Pentecost is just around the corner; in fact, you will probably receive this in the midst of the Pentecost Octave, a week given to the honour of the Holy Ghost who continues to guide His Church. The biggest news, of course, since our last newsletter, is the passing of the late Holy Father Pope Francis, and the election of the next successor of St Peter, Pope Leo XIV. We received news of Pope Francis' death immediately before supper, and promptly sang the *Subvenite* before Compline; this chant is from the Office for the Dead, and is sung by monks on receiving the news of the death of a monk, or of special friend of the community, or someone of particular importance in the life of the Church. We also sang a solemn Requiem Mass for the repose of his soul.

In the days following, we joined our prayers to those of many around the world, praying for a worthy new Pontiff to lead the Church in our days; each day, after Lauds and Vespers, we prayed a Litany for the Election of the Supreme Pontiff, invoking all the saintly popes through the centuries for their intercession. After the commencement of the conclave, the 'chimney watching' began; news reached us in the wee hours of the morning, and Fr Prior announced the news to the community before Matins—*Habemus papam!* Our prayers go with the new Holy Father as



he steps into the Fisherman's Shoes, and prepares to steer the Barque of Peter through stormy waters.

Amidst the excitement of the conclave, we must not forget the highlight of the liturgical year, the Paschal Triduum. The ceremonies here at Colebrook were dignified, and were also well attended by the faithful. The Lord granted us good weather for the solemn procession of Palm Sunday, which took place around the cloister of the monastery, and in fact, the weather was nearly perfect, until the Paschal Vigil... In the late afternoon, rain set in and the sacristy team scrambled for a solution for the outdoor blessing of the Paschal Fire; a temporary canopy was erected next to the fire, and all took place according to the usual rites. We were blessed to solemnise the Vigil with a 'semi-solenn' Mass, according to the Benedictine ceremonial, with Fr Prior celebrating and Fr Bede acting as deacon. Having become accustomed to the presence of the Paschal Candle in the church, the sanctuary now looks somewhat bare after the Ascension, when the candle is extinguished and taken away, symbolising Our Lord's glorious rising into Heaven.

Brother Chronicler





In the school of St Benedict

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

The instrument *Not to fulfil the desires of the flesh* strikes us by its very formulation, which is ever more clear in Latin, with the use of the verb *efficere*, which includes the sense of bringing something to its completion. He could have simply said: not to consent to the desires of the flesh, but this might possibly have led to the conclusion that the flesh is somehow bad, or that all its desires are in themselves disordered. In reality the flesh, created by God, is good (*And God saw all the things that He had made, and they were good, very good, Gn 1:31*). In the garden of Eden, Adam and Eve certainly had many pleasures, both of mind and body, while both were in perfect harmony with each other. Nothing came to disturb that harmony, because everything was in its place, its manner and its time. Since the soul was in perfect submission to God, it kept the flesh in perfect submission to itself.

All the trouble came due to Original Sin. Adam and Eve disobeyed God with their wills, and the immediate result for both was that the flesh revolted against the spirit. As soon as they sinned, they felt the bite of concupiscence, they were drawn to each other in a disordered way, that is to say, that whereas in God's plan they were to unite in a selfless gift of self to each other in order to bring new life into the world, now their mutual attraction is burdened by a lustful search for pleasure for its own sake, regardless of the other person and heedless of future progeny. It easily becomes a self-centred activity that makes of the other person an item of consumption that can be used and discarded.

And yet, the flesh in itself remains good. It was one of the errors of Luther to think that Original Sin had so corrupted our nature that sin is inevitable. He confused concupiscence (the urge for pleasure) and

sin itself (the choice of illicit pleasure). This is where St Benedict's expression is most enlightening, for it gives us to understand that the desires of the flesh in themselves are not evil. Even though they can be impetuous and are kept in check only by consistent prayer and vigorous discipline, experiencing them does not make us evil. Rather, it only shows that we are living in a fallen world in which we are beset by dangers, the first of which are within us.

If the will does not consent, the flesh may make trouble, but the soul is not wounded

When Benedict says that we must not fulfil, that is to say, bring to their perfection, the desires of the flesh, he is essentially saying that we must not be dismayed when we are confronted with them. They will come and go. They will solicit our attention and consent. They can lead us off into paths of death, as he says elsewhere when he teaches that death is placed at the entry of pleasure. What is of the most vital importance is that those pleasures be kept in their place. For those who are married, the consent to pleasure can only be with one's spouse in a way that respects the nature of the body and remains open to life. For the unmarried—St Benedict is primarily talking to monks here, but the principle goes for all—the consent to the desires of the flesh is never permissible. Such desires must never be allowed to obtain the consent of the will. If the will does not consent, the flesh may make trouble, but the soul is not wounded.

Our flesh is very much like a puppy. It will jump up and down at unexpected and unwanted times. It will embarrass us and cause us distress. Do not be dismayed. It does not mean you are evil or that you will inevitably sin. It just means you are a son or daughter of Adam and Eve and have inherited concupiscence, but concupiscence is not sin, even though it comes from sin and leads to sin. Following St Benedict's advice, by means of the power of grace always available through prayer, we must not allow sin to reign in us and fulfil its own desires. Let them be kept in check, like the little puppy, until they calm down. In this way, our soul remains at peace and our flesh is strengthened, gradually made capable of being the instrument of God's grace in our lives and those of others.



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Br Paphnutius Tours the Summa

Father Germanus commences today's lesson:

“Brothers, seventeen centuries ago, the First Ecumenical Council gathered in a town of Asia Minor called Nicaea. The reason? The Church was being agitated by the Arian heresy which taught that Christ Our Lord was not God, but simply the first and most perfect creature of God. This heresy thus attacked two of the most fundamental dogmas of the Christian faith, namely, those of the Divinity of Christ and the Blessed Trinity, Three Divine Persons in One God, which of course are intimately linked, because if Christ is not God, then neither is the Holy Spirit, and so there is no Trinity.”

Br Paphnutius interjects: “But Father, Arius had to be pretty stupid to say that Jesus was not God, no? It's pretty obvious that He was God and proved it by His miracles. How did he come up with this nonsense about Jesus being just the most perfect of creatures?”

“That's a very good question, Brother. To begin with, we need to remember two things. The first is that the ancient world was one in which there were multitudes of gods who were all ‘divine’, but there still was a supreme God over all. The second is that, because of this tendency to idolatry, God had revealed Himself to the Hebrews and insisted that there was only one God, and that no one else could receive the divine honours.

“When Our Blessed Lord came into the world, we see Him gradually reveal His full identity to the disciples. He did not declare His divinity from the start, as they would have found it incomprehensible. He began by showing His divine power and, bit by bit, making it clear that this power was indeed the power of the one true God, which was His. How this man, Jesus, could be God while also being man, and without taking anything away from the one true God, was not at all evident.

“This is precisely why the revelation was gradual, and not sudden. You are correct, Brother: Jesus did

make it clear that He was one in divinity with the Father, and He proved it by the countless miracles He performed, not to mention the prophecies He made and that were fulfilled. So, at the end of the day, we must say that it was Satan who inspired Arius with this idea that tore Christendom apart. St Jerome tells us that the heresy was so widespread that one day the Church awoke to find herself Arian!

“As we progress in theology we will see why this dogma is so important and why its corruption would have been the death of Christianity altogether. But we will also see how the Holy Spirit uses errors to strengthen and establish the truth with greater clarity. If Arius had not fallen, we would not have had the giants such as St Athanasius, St Basil, St Ambrose, St Hilary and many others whose glorious works have never ceased to enlighten holy Mother Church. So true it is that the Devil plays his own role, in spite of himself, in building up the Church and establishing the truth. And, I might add, in making great saints”.



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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 first is because we have been tepid and slothful or negligent in our exercises of piety, and so through our own fault spiritual consolation has been taken away from us (Sp. Ex. #322).

After having been instructed on what desolation is and how to deal with it, we might have thought we knew it all. St Ignatius is of another mind. He wants us to be aware of why it happens that we end up in desolation. He gives us three causes, the first of which we will look at this month.

The first reason, he says, is essentially our fault. A spanking is in store because we have misbehaved. Three adjectives are brought to describe in what our misdeed consists. We have been tepid, slothful or negligent. Trepid means that we have lost the fervour of former times and need to recover it by rekindling the flames of love we once had. Slothful means that we have been spending more time than we should in things which are not helpful to our spiritual life. Negligent means that while we were interested in worldly things, we left aside the more important ones, those which deepen our union with the Lord.

As regards tepidity, we are reminded of St Paul's words to Timothy, admonishing him *to stir up the grace of God* (2 Tim 1:6). The Greek word Paul uses here literally means to blow on the coals to reignite the flame. The image is that of a fire that is dormant but still there under the ashes, and all it takes is a good wind for it to start up again. So it is often in our spiritual lives. Through the lukewarmness we allow



ourselves to fall into, the liveliness of our faith and good works sometimes seem to vanish. We then need to get those coals burning again by exposing them to the gust of the Holy Spirit.

Sloth in the spiritual life is often referred to as *acedia*, which is essentially a disgust for spiritual things that comes from shortening our spiritual exercises and amusing ourselves with earthly distractions (such as internet surfing, video games, excessive time spent in watching the news or chatting...). Here too we can see that by failing to be diligent in spending time with the Lord, we find ourselves drifting, getting sad and seeking human consolations which take us ever further from God, like a swimmer who, conscious that he needs to head back to the shore, would foolishly let himself drift further out to sea, thus exposing himself to drowning and even to becoming the prey of sharks.

Neglect can be understood as not putting the proper amount of attention into our spiritual exercises, even when we give them the time we are supposed to. This is what happens when we do not take care to ward off distractions in prayer, or when we willingly let our mind drift here and there, avoiding the real work of serious mental prayer, which remains focused on the Lord, or returns to Him as soon as we become conscious of distraction.

The way to remedy this desolation is already known to us from our previous considerations: more and longer prayer, examination of conscience, suitable practices of penance. The key point is that as soon as we realise we are in desolation, we should have recourse to these means, as St James says: *Is any of you sad? Let him pray.* If we do this, then we may very well soon find ourselves in the disposition of the next part of the verse: *Is he cheerful in mind? Let him sing* (James 5:13).

