

Ab AUSTRo

Newsletter of
Notre Dame Priory

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Priory update

It has been a busy time around the Priory of late. Major work has taken place on the Chapter House project, which we announced early last year; the interior was finished last September in time for Our Lady's Nativity, but there has been much work left to do on the outside. With the help of good friends, and several monastic work days, things are finally taking shape. No longer a dilapidated barn, the building is now starting to look like a place worthy of its function as a monastic place of prayer and sacred teaching. There are still a few major expenses to meet to complete the staircase and deck – if you would like to support the “finishing touches” with a tax-deductible gift, please send us an email at donations@notredam-emonastery.org. With our gratitude and prayers!

Mid-February saw the blessing of our Stations of the Cross, installed some time ago in our church; the delay was due to the fact that we wanted the blessing to be given by a Franciscan using the special blessing which was once reserved to the Franciscan order. We profited from the presence of Fr Terence Mary, OFM Conv. to achieve this ritual. Our thanks, and our prayers, go to him for his fraternal and priestly assistance!



As has become the tradition, the monks went on a pre-Lent outing to get a good hike, and to refresh themselves before the coming Lenten austerities. This year, on Shrove Tuesday, the brethren made their way to Bruny Island for the first time, enjoying being in the midst of God's creation, taking in the sights of sand and ocean. We give thanks to God for being in such a beautiful place like Tasmania!

Last but not least, Fr Prior travelled to Sydney in late March to take part in the annual Day of the Unborn Child. He was blessed to join the procession from St Mary's Cathedral to Parliament House, praying for an end to the great tragedy of abortion and protesting the evil bill now before the NSW Parliament. Fr Prior was also able to meet Australia's newest cardinal, His Eminence Mykola Cardinal Bychok, recently raised to the Sacred College, and the world's youngest cardinal. Cardinal Bychok gave a rousing address at Parliament House, encouraging the faithful in their witness to the sanctity of life.

Brother Chronicler





In the school of St Benedict

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

Daily in one's prayer, with tears and sighs, to confess one's past sins to God. To amend those sins for the future.

These two tools are a simple reminder from the catechism: we must be sorry for our sins and make amends for them. Making amends, or at least having the firm intention to do so, is an essential part of contrition. If we do not want to change our lives and, as much as possible, repair the harm done, we can hardly be considered truly contrite. If, for example, a thief were to confess his sins but refuse to restore what he had stolen, he could not receive absolution until that disposition changes. He is not truly contrite. In the same way, an adulterous husband could not be absolved if he is not resolved to be faithful to his wife, or if he persists in thinking that occasional infidelity is not really adultery, or that he is justified because his wife is not nice to him or any other asinine alibi imaginable...

All that is basic knowledge that every Catholic who has learned a good catechism should know. What is less obvious is why St Benedict gives this advice to monks, some of whom may have been in the monastery for quite a long time and, one would hope, not have any recent serious sins to weep over. He gives no time limit to the advice, but says that the monk should, each day of his life, weep for his sins and confess them, and make sure his future life does not involve whatever kinds of sin he may have fallen into in the past.

This is an important point. It is not uncommon for people to think that if you have made a good confes-

sion of your sins, you should not think back on them at all. There is a sense in which this is true. If we have made a good confession, we should remain at peace and not let the enemy waylay us with scruples. Nor should we think over past sins in detail, as this would just bring back the same old temptations that caused our fall in the first place.

**It is never a good
idea to forget where
WE ONCE WERE.**

What St Benedict means is that we should remember where we were, that is to say, far from God, children of wrath destined to damnation. It is never a good idea to forget this. Remembering where we once were serves a double purpose: it keeps us humble, reminding us that we are entirely indebted to the Divine Mercy, and therefore cannot judge others; but it also keeps us on our guard against future temptations, for where we once were, we could fall back if we are not careful to avoid occasions of sin and remain under the influence of God's grace. St Peter writes of this when he mentions *the dog returned to his vomit; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire* (2 Pt 2:21-22). In summary, it is a good and wholesome thing to mourn for our sins, for it keeps us humble and wards off temptations, opening us to the many graces that God wants to share with us, but which He reserves for the humble of heart.



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Br Paphnutius Tours the Summa

Fr Germanus begins today's lesson in theology:

“Brothers, Passiontide is just around the corner. Let’s leave aside momentarily our reflections on God and His creation, and turn our minds to the Passion of Our Lord, which, the saints tell us, is the most powerful subject of meditation that we can possibly find. For today I propose some considerations on why Our Blessed Lord wanted to die on a cross.

“While it is relatively easy to demonstrate from the Old Testament that the Messiah was to suffer to atone for sin, the question as to why He wanted to be crucified is an intriguing one. There is no precedent for it in the prophetic literature. It is no surprise that the Fathers examined this point and, in their contemplation of the mystery, found several reasons for which it was fitting that the sacrifice of our redemption be offered up on the cross.

“First of all, it is an extraordinary example of virtue. St Thomas points out that truly holy people do not fear death. Even so, there are holy men who are not afraid to die, and yet, would be afraid to die in certain ways. By dying the worse kind of death, the God-Man teaches us not to fear any kind of death. In other words, since Our Lord was the Head of all martyrs, it was fitting that He die the most atrocious kind of death, for in this way, He gives inspiration and courage to His members when they are confronted with pain and torture.

“The second reason takes us back to the Garden of Eden, in which sin entered the world by the plucking of the apple from the forbidden tree in disobedience to God’s command. Christ Our Lord was attached to the tree, in order to restore by His death what Adam had taken away by his sinful disobedience, which also explains why Jesus was obedient even to the death of the cross (cf Ph 2:8).

“The third reason comes from St John Chrysostom, who teaches that by dying lifted up in the air, as opposed to lying on the ground, Christ sanctified the air. As His blood flowed to the ground, He sancti-

fied the earth. Thus did His death on the cross bring about peace both to the earth and the heavens as St Paul teaches: *Through Christ God reconciled all things unto Himself, making peace through the blood of His cross, both as to the things that are on earth and the things that are in heaven* (Col 1:20). Similarly the fourth reason is that by dying lifted up on high, He prepares for us a path to ascend into Heaven.

“A fifth motivation points to the shape of the cross. As St Gregory of Nyssa observes, ‘the shape of the cross extending out into four extremes from their central point of contact denotes the power and the providence diffused everywhere of Him who hung upon it.’ Furthermore, Christ died with outstretched hands in order to draw with one hand the Jews, and with the other the Gentiles, as St Paul again teaches: *For Christ is our peace, who hath made both one* (Eph 2:14).

“The sixth likewise points to the shape of the cross as indicative of the various virtues signified by it. Referring to St Paul (Eph. 3:18), St Augustine writes: ‘For breadth is in the beam which is fixed transversely above; this appertains to good works, since the hands are stretched out upon it. Length is the tree’s extent from the beam to the ground; and there it is planted – that is, it stands and abides – which is the note of longanimity. Height is in that portion of the tree which remains over from the transverse beam upwards to the top, and this is at the head of the Crucified, because He is the supreme desire of souls of good hope. But that part of the tree which is hidden from view to hold it fixed, and from which the entire rood springs, denotes the depth of gratuitous grace.’

“Finally, even though this kind of death is not referred to in the prophets, it does correspond to many figures of the Old Testament, either by the fact that it is made of wood, is in the form of a rod or staff, or by its shape causes the hands to be outstretched.

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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

“When one is in desolation, he should strive to persevere in patience. This reacts against the vexations that have overtaken him. Let him consider, too, that consolation will soon return, and in the meantime, he must diligently use the means against desolation which have been given in the sixth rule” (Sp. Ex. # 321).

In the preceding rules we were admonished to not change our resolutions in time of desolation, but rather to change ourselves, that is to say, to practice more prayer, penance and examination of conscience. Here we are told not to be in a hurry, but rather to arm ourselves with patience. Patience, like all the moral virtues, safeguards the good of reason against the impulse of the passions. The particular passion that patience arms us to overcome is the passion of sorrow which is most often present in desolation.

One must not underestimate the power of sorrow to undermine all the good in a person’s life. This is so true that St Paul tells the Corinthians: *The sorrow of the world worketh death* (2 Cor 7:10). Already the Old Testament had taught that *sadness hath killed many, and there is no profit in it* (Ecclus. 30:25). It becomes clear that there must be a virtue to ward off such sorrow, lest our reason itself fail to guide us. This is precisely what patience does.

St Augustine tells us: “A man’s patience it is whereby he bears evil with an equal mind,” i.e. without being disturbed by sorrow, “lest he abandon with an unequal mind the goods whereby he may advance to better things.” He also points out that patience is such a great virtue and gift of God that when we preach



this virtue, we take the example of God Himself who showed Himself so patient in His sacred Passion. In fact, it is from a single Latin verb that our words for patience and passion have come: *patis*, meaning to suffer. Interestingly, St Benedict says that it is by patience that we take part in Christ’s passion.

We must also add that patience is sometimes misused or misunderstood. Some think they are patient or convince others they are, when in reality they are weak or apathetic, have a lack of initiative or simply lack intelligence or imagination. Many people bear with things and wait, simply because they do not know what to do or because, knowing it, they don’t dare do it. This is not true patience. True patience is not accepting with resignation what we cannot overcome without a struggle. True patience is not weakness, but strength. It is a virtue of struggle, of combat, of the true warrior, which is why St Thomas places it among the virtues that are under the sway of the cardinal virtue of fortitude. To be patient, one must be strong. Patience teaches the Christian to stand his ground and not run away in time of clouds and darkness, to endure manfully, and hope for the divine aid to be mercifully granted in its time.

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Indeed, an ark of wood preserved the human race from the waters of the Deluge; at the exodus of God’s people from Egypt, Moses with a rod divided the sea, overthrew Pharaoh and saved the people of God. The same Moses dipped his rod into the water, changing it from bitter to sweet; at the touch of a wooden rod a salutary spring gushed forth from a spiritual rock; likewise, in order to overcome Amalek, Moses stretched forth his arms with rod in hand; lastly, God’s law is entrusted to the wooden Ark of the Covenant; all of which are like steps by which we mount to the wood of the cross.

