

Ab AUSTRo

Newsletter of Notre Dame Priory

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Priory update

On St John's Day (27 December) the community had its annual cooked Christmas Breakfast after early low Mass, then headed off to the Launceston Carmel where they enjoyed the traditional parlour with the Carmelite sisters. On the way back, we stopped in Campbell Town to sing Vespers in the beautiful little church of St Michael where we were greeted by the parish administrator Fr Sunil de Silva.

On the feast of Our Lady of Cana, this year 13 January, the community made its way to our new vineyard for its solemn blessing. The vines seem to have taken root and are prospering, but so are the weeds! Br Francisco has been working like a Trojan (and enlisting as many guests as are able) to keep them under control. Did Fr Prior use the blessing for weeds?!

From 15 to 19 January, for the second year in a row our Bethany guest house hosted the Christopher Dawson Centre Language school, the only difference from last year being that this year's group was the Greek school, whereas last year's was Latin. There were four in attendance under the guidance of Dr David Daintree. Fr Prior joined the group for lunch at the end of the week.

That same week, the entire community followed a breathing course with Dimitri Feoktistov, the goal of which was to help us all progress in the technique of chant.

From 22 to 27 January, Fr Prior and Br Isaac were at St Clement's, Galong NSW for the summer men's retreat which counted 25 participants. The day after their return, Monday 29 January, we had the pleasure of welcoming Archbishop Porteous for afternoon tea and Vespers, after which Br John presented His Grace with the first jar of Our Lady's honey from this year's copious harvest.



Brother Chronicler





In the school of St Benedict

Chapter Four: The Tools of Good Works (Cont'd)

The two tools for good works to which we are come encapsulate, as it were, what many, even outside the Church, consider to be the quintessence of the Christian spirit. *Not to render evil for evil. To do no wrong to anyone, and to bear patiently wrongs done to oneself.*

We all know by experience that the tendency of fallen nature is to retaliate when wronged. This was even codified in the Mosaic Law with the famous “An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth”.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Our Blessed Lord, without abolishing the need for legal justice, for wrongs must be redressed in any society that expects to last, asks us in our personal lives to go further than a simple desire to “get even”.

It is very hard to do, and that is precisely why the Lord insists and gives us a practical way of handling injustices done to ourselves: *But I say to you not to resist evil: but if one strike thee on thy right cheek, turn to him also the other...* (Mt 5:39).

Let’s be honest and admit that this precept seems to us to be beyond human strength. It actually is, and God knows it; that’s why He offers us His grace. Only the grace of God can make it possible to not only refuse to retaliate, but even to brace oneself for more. Only the grace of God and, we should add, the example of God.

People slap God in the face very day, multiple times a day, by offending Him in so many ways, showing

incredible ingratitude for His goodness, and yet, *He maketh His sun to rise upon the good, and bad, and raineth upon the just and the unjust* (Mt 5:45). If God gives us such an example, it is so that we may imitate Him.

**Only the grace
and the example
of God can teach
us to not retaliate.**

Furthermore, Our Blessed Lord incarnate came to teach us the way to Heaven; He spent all His energy in enlightening our minds, in healing our bodies, in casting out demons, in bearing with reproaches, and then, in spite of so much love, He bore with being rejected by His own children, who proceeded to beat him savagely, to crown Him with thorns, and then nail Him to a tree as if He were the worst of criminals.

In the midst of it all, He prayed for His enemies, thus confirming by example what He Himself had taught: *Love your enemies: do good to them that hate you: and pray for them that persecute and calumniate you: that you may be the children of your Father who is in heaven. Be you therefore perfect, as also your heavenly Father is perfect* (Mt 5:44-48).



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

Community Announcement



On Easter Wednesday, 3 April 2024, at 11 AM in St Canice Church, Sandy Bay, Tasmania, our Brother Bede Mary Cannavo will be ordained to the sacred priesthood by Bishop Geoffrey Jarrett, Bishop Emeritus of Lismore, longtime friend of the community and former priest of the archdiocese of Hobart. Archbishop Julian Porteous will preside over the ceremony in choir and give the homily. The following day, 4 April, at 10 AM in St Patrick's Church, Colebrook, Fr Bede will offer his first Solemn Mass.

If you would like to attend either of these events, you are most welcome to do so. For the ordination ceremony, given St Canice Church has limited capacity, **it is imperative that you send an RSVP to the following address before 23 March:** rsvp@notredamemonastery.org

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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

In our last instalment, we examined the conduct of the good angels with souls that are getting closer to God. Their task is to be helpful, to lead the way, to help the soul avoid obstacles and overcome hurdles. They want the soul to remain in peace and even to progress in it. The enemy, as one might expect, is going to do the opposite of all that.

“In the case of those who go on earnestly striving to cleanse their souls from sin and who seek to rise in the service of God our Lord to greater perfection..., it is characteristic of the evil spirit to harass with anxiety, to afflict with sadness, to raise obstacles backed by fallacious reasonings that disturb the soul. Thus he seeks to prevent the soul from advancing” (Sp. Ex. 315.2).

The verbs harass, afflict, disturb, are indicative of a reality that we have all experienced, even though we may not have been fully aware of what was going on. The reason the enemy acts this way is all too obvious: he wants us to stop dead in our tracks, to cease working towards sanctity, and ultimately to fall back into mortal sin. For him the first thing to do with a soul who is really progressing towards sanctity is to take away the peace they have found in God, so that they will imagine that their spiritual life was just an illusion, and thus be pulled back into the pleasures of the world and fall victim to its temptations.

In subsequent rules, St Ignatius will tell us what to do when this happens to us, but this rule contains already a priceless bit of truth. Anyone who practices regular prayer knows all too well that one of the most formidable attacks of Satan is to cause sadness in the soul, leading it to imagine that God does not really love us, or that prayer is not so important, or that whatever we do, we'll still be sad anyway. We also know by experience that many of the disturbances of our souls are

backed by reasonings that, upon closer examination, are fallacious, that is to say, pointless, groundless, or outright false. They are made up by the enemy who is a liar. It is true, however, that he is perfectly capable of reminding us of certain truths and using them to his own subtle ends.

In his autobiography, St Ignatius himself tells us of an experience he had at the end of a long period of prayer for a specific intention. As he began his prayer in one room of the house, the thought came to him that he simply could not pray there because of certain noises that were audible from that spot, and so the urge to move to another room became very strong. Upon discernment of this question, he was able to recognise an obstacle raised by the devil to keep him from praying, and so he did not move, and brought his prayer to a happy conclusion.

I personally experienced something similar as I was beginning a retreat, after having completed a number of tasks that were required of me. As I began the very first meditation, the memory of one particular thing I had forgotten imposed itself with such vehemence, that it seemed to me in that moment as if it were a matter of life and death. Fortunately, knowing the rules for discernment, I remained in prayer for the full allotted time, even though this took quite a bit of effort, and proposed to examine it at the end. As I concluded my prayer, and turned my attention to the cause of my trouble, it was then clear to me that this particular point was not so important at all and could wait till after the retreat. The enemy had used this small detail, which was true, to “harass with anxiety, to afflict with sadness, to raise obstacles backed by fallacious reasonings ... to prevent the soul from advancing.” Thank God for St Ignatius and his Rules for Discernment of Spirits. They are a real treasure, if only we know how to make good use of them.

