

# Ab AUSTRo

Newsletter of  
Notre Dame Priory

January 2025

No. 76

This issue:

- † Christmas and Epiphany
- † Lectio Divina
- † Beatitude of God
- † How to Navigate Desolation

## *Priory update*

In late December, the community travelled to Launceston for their annual parlour with the nuns of the Carmel of the Immaculate Heart of Mary in Launceston. It was a joyful time, exchanging Christmas greetings and spending about an hour in fraternal conversation. The brethren then took the opportunity for a good hike in the Launceston Gorge, getting some exercise and observing a few of God's interesting creatures up close!

On the Saturday within the Octave of the Epiphany, the brethren celebrated the patronal feast of Our Lady of Cana—this was the eighth time that the feast has been celebrated, and the monks are most grateful to the friends who helped compose the beautiful chants for the special day. For the feast, Br Cook prepared a special Epiphanytide dessert – the famous *Galette des Rois*, or King's Cake. This is traditionally prepared in France for the feast of the Epiphany, and is accompanied by a game; the *galette* has a small prize inside, and the person who receives the piece with a prize (in our case a coin) receives a crown and is king for the day. Observing such little traditions is a



good example of incorporating the liturgical season into our ordinary lives in a very tangible way.

Also in January, Fr Prior and Br Isaac travelled to the mainland to offer a retreat for men at St Clement's Retreat Centre, Galong, NSW. 25 men attended and all went well!

Brother Chronicler



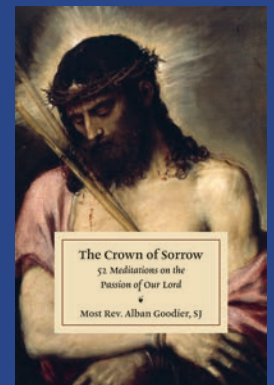
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## In the school of St Benedict

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

*To listen gladly to holy reading. To apply oneself frequently to prayer.*

These two instruments are intimately connected. Without holy reading, one cannot have consistent dedication to prayer. Serious prayer in turn nourishes the desire for more holy reading.

Note that St Benedict does not write that we should “read holy things gladly”, but rather that we should *listen* to them. There was a practical reason for this. In antiquity, books were not readily available as they are now, and not everyone actually knew how to read. This is why reading was often done in common, with one monk reading aloud and the others listening – as monks still do today in refectory and in chapter. In our day, while almost everyone can read, the challenges most people face is setting aside time for good reading, which entails making good choices and eliminating reading that is useless or serves little purpose. This demands a strong resolve to allot time each day to read holy material and not squander precious moments by surfing the internet or watching the extra YouTube video...

What qualifies as “holy reading”? First of all, Sacred Scripture and good commentaries on it. Secondly, the writings of the saints and in particular the Fathers and Doctors of the Church. An old abbot used to say: “Don’t read good books. We don’t have time

for them. Read the best books!” And then he would proceed to define the best books as those written by or about saints and their teachings. Such reading is always profitable. Remember how St Ignatius was converted by reading the Lives of the Saints, even against his will!

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Modern technology, through its capacity to record, has provided us with the means of imitating our forebears. We can now actually listen to any number of audio books. This is a wonderful resource that should not be neglected. When travelling or even when not having the energy to read, one can easily listen to the holy Word of God and nourish one’s soul with it. So many excellent books can be read this way.

If we succeed in nourishing our minds and hearts with holy thoughts, these will seek to blossom in prayer. Some wonder that St Benedict provides no treatise on mental prayer. The time for this in history had not come and it was reserved to other great saints (for example, St Teresa of Avila, St Ignatius of Loyola, St Francis de Sales...), to describe the various ways in which the Holy Spirit leads souls to deeper prayer. For St Benedict, frequent contact with Sacred Scripture through the liturgy, especially the psalms, was enough to nourish the monk’s desire to plunge into intimate conversation with God throughout the day. This is certainly not to say that the monks in his day spent no specific time in what we call mental prayer or meditation. It’s rather that the holy reading, or *lectio divina*, as of itself, led the soul into prayer. This is what happened to St Benedict when, while “watching and praying” he had his famous nocturnal vision of God that St Gregory describes for us in chapter 35 of his life of the saint.



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## Br Paphnutius Tours the Summa

*Fr Germanus opens today's lesson on the beatitude of God:*

“Brothers, we all learn at the beginning of our spiritual life to put ourselves in the presence of God whenever we want to pray. Did you ever think, as you begin your prayer, that this God we pray to and strive to love, is plunged, as we speak, and from all eternity, into the most ecstatic joy and happiness? Indeed, the Three Divine Persons, being immersed, as it were, in the knowledge and loving embrace of each other, give to each other a joy that none of us could ever possibly imagine, but into which we will one day be admitted. We know this because at the end of the parable of the talents, the Master says to the good servant: ‘Well done, enter into the joy of your Lord’. He does not say: ‘you will take part in the joy of your Lord’, but ‘you will enter into it’. The joy of God precedes us; we will be plunged into it; it will encompass us and we will be intoxicated with it.”



Br Paphnutius, his mouth wide open, can't contain himself: “Wow, Father! That is absolutely awesome. I can't wait to get there! But can you explain why you said that the Three Divine Persons are happy because they know and love each other? What is the most important? The knowing or the loving?”

“Yes, Brother, it is, as you say, ‘awesome’. It will be even more so when we are there. Your question is an excellent one. It has intrigued scholars for centuries. St Thomas uncompromisingly takes the view that for a being endowed with intelligence, beatitude, that is to say perfect happiness, can only consist in the perfection of knowledge. Interestingly, one of his contradictors held that since beatitude implies completion which requires a choice, that is to say, an act of the will, it would seem that beatitude consists in an act of the will and not an act of the intellect. St Thomas has no difficulty demonstrating that it is of course true that since beatitude is a good, it must be the object of the will, that is to say, the will is drawn towards it. But in order for something to be willed, it must already exist for the will to find rest in it. We must know God before we can love Him. So, ultimately, it is the knowledge of the truth that will make us eternally happy.”

“That makes sense, Father,” said Br Paphnutius. “But can it not be said that the knowledge of the truth makes us happy in this life too?”

“It can, but there is a nuance. In this life, we cannot grasp God, that is to say, we cannot take hold of Him with our intellect. In Heaven, we receive a special gift called the ‘light of glory’ which makes us capable of seeing God face to face, and this is what constitutes perfect bliss. On this side of eternity, our happiness is based more on our love. The person who loves God and neighbour more, is happier in this life, and where there is no love, there can only be misery and despair.”

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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

Last month we had a close look at what is probably the most important of all the rules of discernment, namely, that in time of desolation we must not change our resolutions. Today, we consider two other rules that complete St Ignatius' thinking on how we are to navigate times of desolation.

In the sixth rule, we are notified that, even though we must not change our resolutions (time and quantity of prayer, etc.) there is something that does need some change, and that is ourselves. "Though in desolation we must never change our former resolutions, it will be very advantageous to intensify our activity against the desolation. We can insist more upon prayer, upon meditation, and on much examination of ourselves. We can make an effort in a suitable way to do some penance" (Sp. Ex. # 319). There are then four points that we are free to change, but only in the sense that we do more of them than usual: prayer, meditation, examination of conscience, penance.

It is not possible to exaggerate the importance of this advice. Indeed, in time of desolation, the evil spirit is at work, pulling us downwards towards ourselves and ultimately towards sin. We have at our disposal a most powerful weapon to not only not be swayed by his cunning, but actually to counter-attack and win the battle. If the enemy opens fire with automatic rifles, we respond with much more powerful weapons: air cover.

This is not to say that it will be easy. In times of desolation, it can be very hard to pray more and even harder to practice mental prayer and penance. If we can

muster the courage to do those things, the power of the enemy over us is neutralised and even annihilated. He cannot bear the pressure that Almighty God puts on him. He will relent and go away. On the contrary, if we do not do this, if we consent to his temptations and stop praying and, worse, go and seek comfort in creatures (sensual pleasures, distractions, internet, etc...), then his victory over us is virtually certain.

This is the reason for the next rule: "When one is in desolation, he should be mindful that God has left him to his natural powers to resist the different agitations and temptations of the enemy in order to try him. He can resist with the help of God, which always remains, though he may not clearly perceive it. For though God has taken from him the abundance of fervour and overflowing love and the intensity of His favours, nevertheless, he has sufficient grace for eternal salvation" (Sp. Ex. # 320).

This rule gives us priceless instruction as to why God allows such trials. These help us grow, first of all in humility. When we undergo such assaults, we feel helpless and that is good, because we are, that is, we cannot help ourselves unless God helps us. Our sanctity consists in acknowledging this and reaching out to grab the divine hand that God is ever stretching out towards us. But even though He allows us to be tried so that we can progress, He never allows the temptation to be beyond our strength. We always have the grace to pray, and through prayer, all other graces are at our disposal. "Ask and you shall receive. Seek and you shall find. Knock and it shall be opened unto you" (Mt 7:7).

