

# Ab Austro

Newsletter of  
Notre Dame Priory

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This issue:

† Solemn Profession of Br Francisco Maria

† Simple Profession of Br John Mary

## Priory update

Two memorable events marked the past month: the professions of Br Francisco Maria and Br John Mary. Br Francisco pronounced his solemn vows at St Patrick's Church on the feast of St Joseph the Worker, 1 May, surrounded by many members of his family from Perth as well as by a large number of locals, all presided over by His Grace Archbishop Porteous. Br John Mary made his first vows at the Church of the Immaculate Conception on the feast of Mary Help of Christians, 24 May, in the presence of his parents, brother, grandmother, uncle and cousin. In this edition of *Ab Austro* we would like to share with you a number of photos from these grace-filled events as well as excerpts from Fr Prior's homilies on these occasions. There was another momentous event this past month, but we will let Fr Prior explain that in the accompanying letter.

Brother Chronicler

## Excerpt from homily for the solemn profession of Br Francisco Maria

We read in the lesson for today's Mass a passage from Jacob's mysterious prophecy concerning the patriarch Joseph, in whom the Church has long seen a prefiguration of Our Lady's Spouse. *The God of thy father shall be thy helper, and the Almighty shall bless thee with the blessings of heaven above, with the blessings of the deep that lieth beneath, with the blessings of the breasts and of the womb. The blessings of thy father are strengthened with the blessings of his fathers: until the desire of the everlasting hills shall come* (Gen 49).

Beyond the literal meaning of this text in which Jacob calls down God's blessings upon the posterity of Joseph, we can see a prophetic blessing that is rightly applied to any man who gives his life to God in holy



religion as you are doing today. For the blessings of Heaven above we can refer to what Psalm 20 speaks us when it tells us: *For thou hast prevented him with blessings of sweetness... thou hast given him length of days for ever and ever* (Ps 20:4-5). Indeed, God has prevented you, in the etymological sense of the term, meaning, He has



Photo by Josh Low

gone before you (*pre-venire*); He did not wait for you to ask; He stepped into your life when perhaps you were not thinking so much about Him. In the Gospel, Our

QUODCUMQUE DIXERIT VOBIS FACITE





Lord will say: *You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you* (Jn 15:16). Such are those blessings from Heaven above which have been offered to you and which you receive in abundance today.

There are also blessings of the deep that lie beneath. What are these blessings of the deep if not the impenetrable designs of Divine Providence, the depth of the thoughts of His Heart, which, as Psalm 32 tells us *are from generation to generation... to deliver souls from death and feed them in famine?* We can also see in these blessings of the deep those challenges of our lives which, while causing suffering, take us down to a deeper level in our search for God. You have already experienced in the years of your noviciate the truth of those words of the book of Ecclesiasticus: *Son, when thou comest to the service of God, ... prepare thy soul for temptation... Wait on God with patience: join thyself to God, and endure, ... Take all that shall be brought upon thee: and in thy sorrow endure, and in thy humiliation keep patience. For gold and silver are tried in the fire, but acceptable men in the furnace of humiliation* (Ecccl 2:1-5). It is only by accepting to be tried in that furnace that a man becomes worthy of such a calling, that he truly becomes a monk and wins souls for God.

The blessings of breasts and of the womb: anyone



Photo by Josh Lowe



Photo by Josh Lowe

familiar with the writings of St Bernard of Clairvaux will immediately see the application of this blessing to the religious life which is indeed one of spiritual paternity. St Augustine said, referring to those who choose the path of consecrated celibacy, that “they are not without nuptials”, indeed because they are united with God Himself in a chaste, spousal union. But like any such union they are called to bear fruit, to give birth to souls. The monk, be he a priest or a brother it matters not, conceives spiritual children on the hard bed of the cross of his monastic life and he gives birth to them in the depths of his prayer. He feeds them at the breast of his daily sacrifices and spiritual attentiveness. For those who may be surprised by this, hear St Bernard commenting on the *Song of Songs*: “While the bride is conversing about the Bridegroom, he suddenly appears, yields to her desire by giving her a kiss.... The filling up of her breasts is a proof of this. For so great is the potency of that holy kiss, that no sooner has the bride received it than she conceives and her breasts grow rounded with the fruitfulness of conception; bearing witness, as it were, with this milky abundance. Men with an urge to frequent prayer will have experience of what I say. Often enough when we approach the altar to pray, our hearts are dry and lukewarm. But if we persevere, there comes an unexpected infusion of grace, our breast expands as it were, and our interior is filled with an overflowing love; and if somebody

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should press upon it then, this milk of sweet fecundity would gush forth in streaming richness. Let us hear the Bridegroom ‘You have received, my love, what you asked for, and here is a sign to show you, your breasts are better than wine; henceforth you will know that you have received the kiss, because you will be conscious of having conceived’ ”(*Sermons on the Canticle*, 9, 7).

There is more. Jacob also made reference to the blessings of *thy fathers strengthened with the blessings of his fathers until the desire of the everlasting hills shall come*. What is this if it is not to say that we are simply the heirs of our forebears who have given us the example and merited for us so many graces? We stand, unworthily for sure but with immense gratitude, in a long line of men who seek to serve the Lord, and that line actually goes back to the very beginning, since St Luke in his genealogy of Our Lord, which follows immediately the end of today’s Gospel, takes the ancestors of Jesus all the way back to Adam. We stand not alone, so many have gone before us, and now they are a great cloud of witnesses (cf. Heb 12:1) cheering us on as we take our share of the struggle for souls. If we look back to be inspired by those who went before, we also look forward to the *desire of the everlasting hills*. We know that this desired One is none other than Our Lord Jesus Christ Himself who has already come in the flesh but who will come again in glory. Monastic life is precisely the loving expectation of the Bridegroom and the continual appeal to Him to hasten the hour of His return, and we know, as we meditated yesterday, that it will be soon, for only a *modicum*, a little while, separates us from that event towards which all history converges...

The monk is called to prayer and work – *ora et labora* – but he is neither a robot nor a profiteer. By his work he develops God-given talents that he puts at the disposal of his community and its guests whom St Benedict admonishes us to receive as if they were Christ Himself; the monk imitates Christ and St Joseph who made a living at the sweat of their brow. The very structure of the monastic life assures that work is kept in its place and that the leisure time is precisely devoted to the *otium sanctum*, that holy idleness that our fathers held so dear, the hours of leisure

with God, to be with Him, to be before Him, to play and rejoice in His presence always as beloved children, contributing all the while to making the beauty of God more visible in the world, helping all to *taste and see how sweet the Lord is* (Ps 33).

And so my dear Brother Francisco Maria, may you be like the grape whose vine digs deep roots in the soil (*the blessings of the deep*) and matures slowly under the strong rays of the Tasmanian sun (*the blessings of heaven above*), and that becomes, through the process of being pruned, then pressed and crushed and losing itself, a sweet wine that is poured into the hearts of men to give them joy and lead them to sing with renewed vigour the glory of the Most High Jesus Christ, through Mary Immaculate, the wonderful Lady of Cana and her most chaste spouse, St Joseph.

## Excerpt from homily for the simple profession of Br John Mary

We see in the orations of the Mass that Holy Church has in mind three particular victories for which we need Mary’s help. The first is the victory over sin, over ourselves. Mary comes to our aid. She does not do the work for us, but as a good mother forms her children and educates them to live in society, so Mary teaches us her spiritual children how to renounce ourselves, and live in God’s grace in fraternal communion with others. We can say that the entire monastic life which you embrace today consists in attaining this victory over self, this openness to God and to others. This is one of the reasons for which we here in Colebrook have chosen to wear the white habit of Our Lady. By it we seek to render public honour to her perpetual virginity. By it we place ourselves under her protective mantle, confident that she will not abandon us in times of trial.

The second victory for which we need Mary’s help is that of the Church in the world. In every age, but in some more than in others, the Church is like a frail barque tossed about on the high sea. She has enemies

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on every side, and seems often to be on the verge of capsizing. Mary comes to the help of the Christian people as a whole. She protects the Church, the mystical body of her divine Son. In that battle, the monk might at first sight seem to play an insignificant role. He is not out there actively and visibly working to convert souls. Rather, he is in the heart of the Church,



striving to love with all his heart by means of the love which the Holy Spirit pours into his heart. He knows that the more he is faithful to his monastic life, the more the Church will be strengthened to overcome the forces of evil.

In that battle for the faith in a fallen and broken world, we need the maternal guidance and intercession of Mary. We are often disturbed by the thought that so many do not have the faith, that many consider the Church to be an enemy. Archbishop Fulton Sheen once said that in America there are not a hundred people who hate the Catholic Church, but there are millions who hate what they wrongly perceive to be the Catholic Church. For the monk who perceives this sad reality, there can be moments of anguish. What can I do to help souls discover the sweet consolations that the faith brings, symbolised by the maternal touch Our Lady offers to every aspect of our lives? He knows that his principal task is to intercede for the legions of souls who are lost, who do not know God, who have not come to “believe in the love God has for us” according to the amazing expression of your patron saint John the Apostle. With him, let’s make sure that at least we monks can say with deep conviction *credidimus caritati* – we have truly come to believe in the love God has for each of us (cf 1 Jn 4:16). And as St Augustine says: If you love you will sing. And if you sing, you will attract many souls to discover the beauty ever ancient and ever new by whom and for whom our hearts were created and without whom they remain restless.

And that leads us to the third and final victory for which we need our Mother’s help, namely the victory

over our infernal enemy the devil, especially at the hour of our death. At that supreme hour, when hell strives to snatch the soul from the divine embrace, we ask that Mother Mary be there to crush the head of the ancient serpent and open the gates of a blessed eternity to each of us. *Janua Coeli*, gate of heaven, is another sweet title of Our Lady that gives us the confidence that it will be given to us one day to pass happily into the realm of light, peace and love which is God Himself.

For us monks, it is our privilege to commence on earth what we will do throughout all eternity. Here below it is in faith, faith that is no vague feeling, but a certitude based on the word of God Himself. We know that when we come together to sing the Divine Office, we are fulfilling on earth what the angels and saints do in Heaven. We sing God. Far from being what some witless observers call “God botherers”, we stand daily in choir to tell our God how beautiful and glorious and sweet He is. We make efforts to pay no attention to ourselves, but rather to go out of ourselves and sing His glory, the only glory worth giving one’s life for.

And so dear Brother, go forward manfully but with the attitude of the babe who looks with confidence to its mother. The babe can do nothing without its mother, and the monk can do nothing without Mary. Turn to her, gaze upon the star, call upon Mary. Let’s give the final word to that great bard of Our Lady, St Bernard of Clairvaux: “In danger, in distress, in uncertainty, think of Mary, call upon Mary. Let her never leave your lips, let her never depart from your heart; and so that you may obtain the help of her prayers, never forget the example of her life. If you follow her, you cannot falter; if you pray to her, you cannot despair; if you think of her, you cannot err. If she sustains you, you will not stumble; if she protects you, you have nothing to fear; if she guides you, you will never grow weary; if she shows you favour, you will attain your goal” (Second Homily on the Praises of the Virgin Mother).

