

Ab AUSTRo

Newsletter of Notre Dame Priory

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This issue:

- † Visit with Apostolic Nuncio
- † The Honour Due to All
- † Existence of God
- † The Joy of Christmas

Priory update

This end-of-the-year chronicle traditionally joins the months of November and December. No doubt the most important event of this period was the visit to the Priory of the Apostolic Nuncio to Australia, Archbishop Charles Balvo. His Excellency – originally from Brooklyn, New York – who has spent many years in the diplomatic service of the Holy See, was only appointed earlier this year to Australia. He was in Tasmania for a whole week, the main event of which being the dedication of the new altar at St Mary's Cathedral in Hobart. The project of a new altar and the general Cathedral renovation, dear to Archbishop Porteous, has finally been completed, and part of our community was able to attend this landmark event in the life of the Archdiocese. It was earlier that very day of Our Lady's Immaculate Conception that His Excellency the Apostolic Nuncio paid us a visit, in company with our parish priest, Fr Terry Rush. Both joined us for the office of Sext, a festal lunch for the feast and a pleasant time of recreation together.

On 13 December took place another significant event, this time in Cygnet. Three of the brothers were able to attend the diaconal ordination of Brother John Joseph of the Little Eucharistic Brothers of the Divine Will. We have had good fraternal ties with this community ever since we came to Hobart, and are very happy to see Br John Joseph now on the way to the priesthood. Congratulations Brother, and to the whole community.

The month of November also saw our two final retreats of the year, one at Jerusalem Estate, the other at Don Bosco, Lysterfield. In all 29 women were able to follow the Spiritual Exercises. At the end of two intense back to back weeks, Fr Prior finally got his own time of retreat, returning this time to the Carmel of Jesus, Mary and Joseph in Mathoura to enjoy a week of silent meditation. Father says there's nothing like having a community of Carmelites backing you up in prayer! He says: Thank you, Sisters!

Finally, we cannot forget that the month of November reminds us to pray for all the faithful departed. Since the community does not (yet!) have its own cemetery, we make the effort to drive to Colebrook each day during the first week of the month in order to hold the absolution on All Souls Day and to gain the plenary indulgence available for the first eight days of November. It's always a salutary reminder of where we are all heading, and also an opportunity to pray for all the deceased members of our families, as well as those of our friends and benefactors.

As we wish you all a very happy and holy Christmas season, we also look forward to touching bases in the new year with the next issue in February.



Brother Chronicker

Men's Retreat at St Clement's,
Galong 6-11 Feb 2023 has
places available. Visit: [https://
www.notredamemonastery.
org/retreats](https://www.notredamemonastery.org/retreats).





In the school of St Benedict

The next instruments of good works which St Benedict brings to our consideration go together: *To honour all men. Not to do to another what one would not have done to oneself.* We might be inclined to have reversed the order, but St Benedict is of the mind that the best way to apply the golden rule is to have at heart the honour due to others. St Peter writes in his First Epistle: *Give honour to all, love the community, fear God, honour the king* (1Pe 2:17). It is clear that, for the Prince of the Apostles, there is a social aspect to fraternal charity which establishes us in a given group in which each has a special role to play and in which each is due honour, everyone according to rank.

There are some to whom it is easy to pay honour, either because of their position in society or the Church, or because of a natural demeanour that inclines one to show reverence. St Benedict's injunction however is absolute, and excludes no one. To honour all men means to see in other people, whoever they might be and however far away from us either by cultural background, education or any other of the roles that make human society so diversified, their inherent dignity as son or daughter of God, created in the image and likeness of God, called to become part of the one, true Church and save their soul. Indeed, if all men are created equal before God and endowed with reason and will, it is only so that they might make their way to God, all the while helping others follow the same path.

In St Benedict's mind, this attitude is fundamental for life in common. We need only remember that in his day, alongside those who would have come from the ancient Roman aristocracy, there were also many

who took their origins from one of the "barbarian" tribes that by his time were overrunning the Roman Empire. It was no easy task to make such very different men live in harmony with each other. The precept *to honour all men* is one of the major tenets that made it possible.

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One final point that we must add, that we can see in the Rule, and which in turn has vast consequences in any society: to honour others does not imply to condone in them what is either false or erroneous. St Benedict makes this clear in the Rule, where all are called to seek God and His truth, to convert, to repent, to practice virtue. Personal dignity does not put us beyond discipline and correction when we need it. On the contrary, it calls for it. Just as good parents discipline their children *because* of their human dignity, so in the Church, God has established authority to guide, to instruct, to reprimand when needed and to lay down laws, all with the goal of leading to the fulfilment of His plan of salvation.



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via newsletter@notredamemonastery.org

Br Paphnutius Tours the Summa

Following up on last month's conclusion about reconciling faith and reason, Fr Germanus is about to initiate his students to the primary object of theology, namely God, when Br Paphnutius interjects:

“That’s all well and good, Fr Germanus, but what’s the point of natural reason in theology if we can only know that God exists by faith?”

“What makes you say that, dear Brother?”

“Well, I know God exists, but I only know God exists because I believe He exists.”

The old man, venerable and discreet, smiled. “Speak for yourself, Brother. Have a look at what the Apostle St Paul says to the Romans (1:20): *Ever since the creation of the world, His invisible attributes of eternal power and divinity have been able to be understood and perceived in what He has made.* Thus Aristotle knew there was a God. Thus Cicero knew there was a God. What you knew by faith in an instant, they had to search out by dint of wits.”

A little flabbergasted, Br Paphnutius responds: “So how exactly could they have worked it out? I feel so dull now.”

“Fear not! I am actually glad you brought this up, it leads straight into our next topic. Aquinas comes to the rescue, a light to dispel ignorance, a whetstone to sharpen the faithful. From the opening pages of the *Summa*, five proofs for the existence of God through natural deduction are suggested. Entire books have been written on these five ways. One will suffice for today.”

Brother Paphnutius sighs in relief. Fr Germanus raises a hand and points at one of the classroom walls. “Take this clock over there.” The sea of tonsured heads turns in unison to behold the clock.

“That clock exists, but it does not *have* to exist. It did not always exist and it certainly did not make itself. Haphazard, random assembly of its parts is absurd. Clocks prove the existence of clockmakers. It is self-ev-

ident. Now, while some smart alec might say it’s mathematically plausible, everyone can see that if you had all the parts of a clock and were to put them in a box and shake them up, it would be ridiculous to expect to find a perfectly functioning clock when you open the box. Even that godless revolutionary, Voltaire himself, admitted: ‘The more I think of it, the less I can convince myself that this clock (*the universe*) works and that there is no clockmaker.’

“St Thomas elaborates on his argument along these lines: Things act in a definite way and were manifestly designed to do so; they are governed in their activities by the specific nature they have received. We can see there are design and government in the world. Hence, there is ultimately a first designer and first governor. And since both design and government involve intelligence, there must be governor and designer who is the first and absolute intelligence. This is God.”

“That’s simply awesome!”, replied Paphnutius.

“Simple, awesome. Yes, that’s St Thomas. Yet, many prefer to stop at the level of the natural sciences without pushing through to find the principles that govern them, and thus run the risk of making natural science into a religion that they ‘believe’, instead of putting their trust in the Creator. These are the fellows St Paul wrote of in the passage I quoted earlier. It didn’t end well for them. Just read the rest of the chapter. This is probably why, when God decided to save the world, He entered it as a speechless, defenceless Babe. Not until we can look at reality with the pure sincerity of a child can we really understand it. Now, *that’s* something to think about over the holidays. Happy Christmas to all!”



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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

Both major penitential seasons of the year contain a special day given over to joy. In Advent, the Third Sunday is called *Gaudete*. In Lent, the Fourth Sunday is called *Laetare*. Even though there are nuances in the two Latin verbs, the underlying theme is the same: the Christian life is one of joy, for we all take our origin in the eternal joy of God and we are called to “enter into that joy” as Our Lord tells us in the parable of the talents (see Mt 25:21).

In the Spiritual Exercises, joy is not limited to the fourth week, but it is certainly the primordial grace of that week. For St Ignatius, the resurrection of Jesus is the most fundamental cause of joy. He who suffered so cruelly for us can no longer suffer or die, and if we have come to love Him, even just a little, this should occasion within us a very deep and tranquil joy. It is not necessarily an exuberant joy that bubbles over – that is more a matter of temperament and a special grace of the Holy Spirit –, but it is a joy that is all the more real and stable since it is anchored in the depths of our soul.

This can also be understood for the celebration of the Lord’s birth. Indeed, the angels address the shepherds with the words: *I announce to you a great joy which shall be to all the people. A Saviour is born.* At Christmas He is born in the lowliness of our humble flesh, in complete destitution. At Easter, He is “brought back into the world”, as the Epistle to the Hebrews tells us (see Heb 1:6), bringing to it new, unending, transcendent life.

Be it Christmas or Easter, we always have good reason

to rejoice in the Lord. We could also add that we never have a valid reason to give ourselves over to the sadness of despair. Indeed, as St Paul insists in writing to the Philippians: *Rejoice in the Lord always, again I say rejoice, for the Lord is near* (Phil. 4:4-5). And he repeats to the Thessalonians: *Rejoice always* (1 Th 5:16). What does this mean if not that when we have joy we are bearing witness to the truth of our faith? Our God is almighty, He loves us, and He wants our eternal happiness more than anything else.

This Christmas, and next Easter, when we hear those words: *Rejoice*, let us take them to heart and ask ourselves if we truly have the joy that is a fruit of the Holy Spirit. And if we do not, perhaps we need to ask for it in prayer. We might also examine our conscience to see if there is anything there that is preventing the joy of God from reigning supreme, anything that would offend the pure gaze of the Infant God, anything that is incompatible with life in the Spirit, the Risen Life of the glorious Jesus.

