

Ab Austro

Newsletter of Notre Dame Priory

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Priory update

This past month saw Fr Prior and Br Gregory make a second trip to Galong, this time for the women's retreat from 5 to 10 September which had 24 in attendance. But the monks also need their retreat, and so we were blessed with our annual community retreat from 18 to 24 September at the Priory. This year's session was guided by Fr Paul Rowse, O.P., who is now parish priest in residence at St Dominic's Priory in Camberwell, VIC. As one would expect from a good Dominican, Fr Paul spoke to us of St Thomas Aquinas, dwelling in particular on his presentation of the virtue of charity in the second part of the *Summa Theologiae*. We were given reflections on many of the Angelic Doctor's insights into this queen of all the virtues, beginning with his adaptation of Aristotle's teaching on love as a kind of friendship. We delved into the awesome revelation that God has chosen us for His friends through the gift of His grace and that the love we have for our brethren is of the same nature as that which God has for us. We also pondered the vices and attitudes that fight against true love of God and neighbour, and how to avoid letting them take hold in our lives. The whole retreat was a powerful stimulant to progress in our religious life. Thank you, Father Paul!

A few days earlier, on the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, which is the commencement of monastic Lent, we were saddened to send Fr Bachmann back to Clear Creek, but our regret was tempered by the hope of future returns. Thank you, Father, for travelling half-way across the world to spend your summer in the Tasmanian winter!

With the generous help of some benefactors and the hard work of some volunteers we now have a boardwalk from the guesthouse so that future retreatants (and guests) will not need to borrow gumboots!

With this month's edition, our dear Br Paphnutius embarks upon a new part of his monastic life. Having made his first vows, he finds himself in the monas-



tic studium where he will learn all about the sacred sciences (philosophy, theology, canon law, etc.). We will do our best to join him and sit in on some of his lessons – I'm afraid many of them will be far beyond the capacity of this chronicler to comprehend and convey! Somebody mentioned something about Fr Prior wanting to get started on a quarterly theological review? Well, that will be something! But will it see the day? Time will tell, but for us simple-minded monks, let's learn what we can with Br Paphnutius on the benches of the Colebrook classroom.

Brother Chronicler





In the school of St Benedict

After having established the essentials of community structure and discipline in the first three chapters of the Rule, St Benedict proceeds with a chapter which, at first sight, may seem surprising. He entitles it: *Of the Instruments (or Tools) of Good Works*. He begins abruptly with the list of 72 (as many as there are chapters in the Rule), and only at the end of the chapter does he tell us how to use them. So reads the end of the chapter:

Behold these are the tools of the spiritual craft. If we employ them unceasingly day and night, and on the Day of Judgement render account of them, then we shall receive from the Lord in return the reward which He Himself has promised: Eye hath not seen nor ear heard, what God hath prepared for those that love Him (1 Cor 2:9). Now the workshop, wherein we shall diligently execute all these tasks, is the enclosure of the monastery and stability in the community.

We saw in the prologue how St Benedict calls the monastery a school in which one learns to serve the Lord. Here, we are told that the monastery is a great workshop in which the apprentices (the monks) learn how to use in a proficient way the tools of good works which are destined to lead to perfection and eternal life. The analogy is worth pondering. Tools are inventions of human intelligence. They are based on nature and seek to promote, foster and defend it. They must not harm it. So in the spiritual life there are spiritual tools destined to help us grow in spiritual perfection. Like any tool, they have a time, a place and a mode of use. Misuse of a tool can be detrimental to the tool itself, to nature, and even to the user. And that is why the very first instrument places us squarely before the ultimate reason for which we are in the workshop to begin with: *In the first place, to*

love the Lord God with all one's heart, all one's soul and all one's strength. Then, one's neighbour as oneself.

Some might be surprised to discover that St Benedict

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reminds his monks to love God. Do they really need to be reminded of the most fundamental precept of love? Isn't this just for beginners? Or for the ordinary Christian who is looking for the goal of life? Like everyone else, monks can get wound up in their daily activities and, if they are not careful, can be more or less mindful of the real purpose for their being in the monastery.

More fundamentally, however, St Benedict reminds us that we all came from love and that we are all destined for love, but we will only be immersed in eternal love if we learn how to love in this life. All the other tools will flow from these first two. *If you love me, keep my commandments*, Our Lord will tell His apostles after the Last Supper (Jn 14:15). If we truly love, then the practice of the other tools will come, as it were, naturally.



The 2023 Liturgical Calendar from Notre Dame Priory is available for pre-ordering from our website, with shipping expected to be early November and our Advent and Christmas cards are also available for immediate purchase.

www.notredamemonastery.org/monk-shop

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

Br Paphnutius Tours the Summa

Br Paphnutius sat in a classroom bright with the glowing faces of newly professed monks. Freshly shorn monastic coronae seemed like halos. Sufficiently initiated into the monastic life of prayer and work, they are now ready to embark on a several year long journey of serious studies. Their eyes and ears are wide open, as their master, Fr Germanus, begins:

“Young men,” began the old monk, “you are here to learn, and there is no one better to learn from than St Thomas Aquinas. Why Thomas, you may be wondering? Quite simply because he bears the title *Doctor communis*, that is to say, he is the common doctor of all the faithful. If you want to get things right, go to Thomas. If you know Aquinas, you’ll be fine, and what’s more you’ll be able to help others out. If you don’t know Thomas, my advice would be to keep to yourself.”

“Why is that, Father?” “St Thomas, my son, will teach you how to think, how to order your mind. Then, and only then, can you help others do the same.”

“But St Thomas can’t be the only one who teaches how to think, can he?”

“Of course not! But he is the best. When it comes to the most fundamental questions about reality, said that saintly man Pius X, if you don’t have Thomas for guide, you can find yourself pretty quick in deep water.”

“But how did St Thomas get so smart?” asked Paphnutius.

“Well, when he was a very young boy, his parents did a very smart thing. They put him in a monastery school to learn his letters. A Benedictine monastery, that is. (You see, just between us, most of what is good and worthwhile begins with the Benedictines! Not that we’re chauvinistic or anything, but it’s just a matter of giving credit where credit is due...). It is told that, when he was still a young lad, Thomas would come up to any old monk he could find, pull on the sleeve of his cuculla (pretty easy thing to do, given they fall

just about to the ground – what a nuisance!) and ask: ‘Who is God?’

“That, my son, is the most wonderful question anyone could ask. Who is God? Thomas Aquinas, at that tender age – he was much younger than you are, Brother – really wanted to know about God. That’s all he wanted to know. And the rest of his life would be an unending search for God, to know Him as much as possible, to love Him with all his strength, and to serve Him with all the might of his towering intellect. You know, he didn’t live to be very old; he died in his fiftieth year. Such is not uncommon among really great men. Multiple years are superfluous when wits so sharp suffice.”

“Well, with wits as dull as ours, we’ll need those long years to fathom this great mind!” cried Paphnutius. “Indeed, my son. Let’s get started.”



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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

Anyone who has made the Spiritual Exercises knows that the Election, or Choice of a State of Life, is in many ways the heart of the retreat. It is undoubtedly one of Ignatius' most valuable contributions to the lives of so many souls: to help them carefully discern what God is calling them to do in life, or what important decision they might need to make within the life already committed to.

Sometimes God steps into our lives unexpectedly, but with such great clarity that it cannot possibly be doubted. This happened to St Matthew who was collecting tax money when the Lord called him. It also happened to St Paul on the way to Damascus. Such divine interventions do happen, but not always in such a spectacular way. When they do, all we have to do is follow the Lord's lead. He opens a door, we enter, even though we do not know what lies beyond it, or where the next one will be. That is why life in the Spirit is so fascinating. While life in the flesh is dull and soulless because the attractions of the flesh are always the same old rubbish, life in the Spirit is new every day. When God calls, you go, you don't wait, you just go and let yourself be swept away by His grace.

There are other times, especially on retreat, when we receive a lot of consolation and insight into God's ways with us, or on the contrary, are very tempted and desolate. In this situation too, under the guidance of

an experienced mentor, we can come to discern the origin of the various influences and thus act to follow those that are from God and avoid those that are from the enemy.

More commonly, however, when it comes to a choice, we need to sit down and weigh the pros and cons. In doing this, it is vital that we be in a state of indifference, that is to say, that our soul be at a balance between the various options before us. If we are not, then we run the risk of being insensibly influenced by them. (How could Dorothy discern a possible calling to the religious life when she is passionately in love with Jules?) And so it would be helpful to consider ourselves on our deathbed, or before the judgement seat of Christ. We then ask ourselves what decision we will have wanted to take then. Again, we can imagine another person in another part of the world who would be in our situation. What advice would we give that person? Well, take it for yourself.

A final step in discernment is to ask the Lord to confirm the choice we have made, and this He does in two ways: an interior confirmation with a sense of having completed the process and found peace; and an exterior confirmation, which is the acceptance of the person or persons who are the object of our choice: Providence makes things happen to confirm our discernment.

In all of these cases, it is of utmost importance that, when we get clarity, we act and never delay. We must not keep the Lord waiting.

