

Ab Austro

Newsletter of Notre Dame Priory Email Edition

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Priory update

Spring has sprung, as they say. Tasmanian springs, however, can be deceptive, and some days we wonder if we are not still in winter. A few hours later we are sweating under the merciless southern sun, and then we realise that although the winter was unusually mild, and we did get some rain, enough for the fields and hills to recover their green colours, we actually need much more if the farmers are to make any profit in the upcoming season. Pray for rain!

A rain of blessings we continue to receive. The annual visit of Fr Mark Bachmann from Clear Creek was certainly the greatest blessing of winter. Father's time with us was well spent in a variety of jobs and classes given to the brothers. As usual, we were sad to see him go in mid-September, but we live in the hope of his return next year.

Before Father Bachmann's arrival, however, Fr Prior took the community in mid-June on a five-day monastic holiday to a cabin near Mount Field. It was a much deserved and much relished time of fraternity which included several hikes in the mountains.

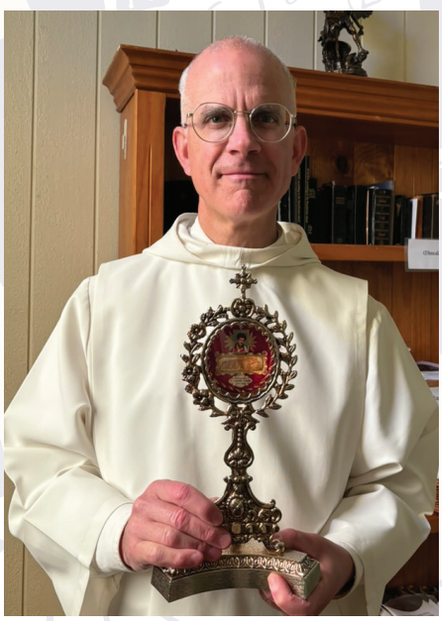
Thereafter Fr Prior made a trip to Europe, spending most of his time at the monastery of his profession, Abbaye Saint Joseph, in Flavigny-sur-Ozerain. While there, he was also able to visit the abbey's foundation in Solignac, an ancient abbey in the diocese of Limoges where the Flavigny monks have revived Benedictine life since 2021. He returned with three bottles of the tasty beer the monks have started brewing.

Solignac has its beer, but we have our wine! As announced in our previous newsletter, our first batch will soon be ready in limited quantities. The plan is to have it available as a fundraiser around Christmas in six-pack boxes. More information will be given in the Christmas newsletter.

The usual August ladies' retreat was given by Fr Prior in Victoria, but in a different venue from the one we had used in recent years. We returned this year to the



former Pallotti College, which is now in the hands of of the Syro-Malabar Eparchy. One of the memorable aspects of this retreat was the biggest monstrance Fr Prior has ever seen. He had some difficult in lifting it for benediction, but the Holy Angels were on duty to help!



On the first weekend of October we were blessed to receive an all too brief visit of the first class relic of St Carlo Acutis that is reaching the end of a long 4 month tour of Australia. The young saint inspired us in particular to pray for the world's youth and for vocations.

Please take note of our Christmas catalogue which is attached to this email. Now is the time to order for Christmas presents. Please be notified that this year we will not be producing a liturgical wall calendar.

Brother Chronicler

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In the school of St Benedict

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

Making our way through chapter four of the Holy Rule, we encounter the following four instruments: *Not to be jealous. Not to give way to envy. Not to love contention. To shun vainglory.* Envy is one of the seven capital sins. Like every capital sin, envy has daughters, that is to say, secondary sins or vices that spring from it. They are traditionally numbered as: hatred, tale-bearing (gossip), detraction (revealing someone's real faults to diminish their good name), joy at someone's misfortunes, and grief for someone else's prosperity or sorrow at their success.

Envy is the one vice that gives no satisfaction. Whereas other vices do give a momentary and fleeting gratification of some kind, envy gives none. Envious persons are wretched because they cannot get or have what other people have or what they think they must have in order to be happy; they cannot prevent other people from having the happiness they themselves do not, and it makes them miserable. The last two commandments of the decalogue forbid this sort of envy when they say: *Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's goods.*

Why is envy such a bad thing? Mainly because it is opposed to the greatest of the virtues, charity. This is why the best remedy to overcome envy is to increase our love for neighbour. When we grow in fraternal charity, we come to realise that the goods our neighbour has, be they goods of soul or body, far from causing me harm, actually benefit me too, for we are all part of the same body. This is most evident in the spiritual life where there is a veritable communication of goods between those who are in Christ. A saint, by his holy life, profits the entire Church. But the same principle also goes for human society in general. While others may have many things we could possibly like to have, what is given to them is actually for the benefit of others, although most people fail to recognise this.

Another powerful remedy to envy is to sit down and count your blessings, taking a long hard look at all the good things we have in life, and considering that there are many who do not have as much.

It is also helpful to pray to some of the saints who were victims of envy. St Benedict had to deal with the envy of a neighbouring priest who was jealous of all the good he was doing and of the veneration the people had for him. His jealousy was so great that he tried to kill the saint by sending him a poisoned loaf of bread. Fortunately St Benedict was inspired by God, knew of the evil, and had a bird take the loaf to an inaccessible place. Still the priest was eaten up by envy. He tried another tactic, and sent some girls to dance in the monks' garden, in an attempt to corrupt their virtue. That was enough for Benedict. He could accept the priest trying to kill him, but to try to kill the vocations and souls of his monks was too much. He decided to move the monastery. On the way, he was informed of the sudden death of this wretched priest. What does Benedict do? He weeps bitterly for the loss of this soul, but also for the joy that Maur had shown in announcing his death. We must not take delight in the fall of our enemies, even if they spent their life envying our success and trying to trip us up. *Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things* (1 Cor 13:4-7).





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Br Paphnutius Tours the Summa

In today's lesson Fr Germanus evokes St Thomas' teaching on creation, pointing out that everything that exists was created by God, and since God is good, then all things are good as well. Br Paphnutius however, is quick to object:

'But, Father, how you say that all things are good when it is all too obvious that there is a lot of evil in the world? Either God made some things bad, or else some things don't come from Him'.

'Excellent objection, Brother. You evoke one of the sorest problems theology has had to deal with, that of evil. If God is good, why is there evil? And if there is evil, then some other principle must be at work other than God. The Manichaeans responded to this by positing a "good god" and a "bad god", but it is all too evident that if there are two gods, then one of them cannot be a real god. Besides only good can possibly be at the origin of all things because, as you learned in philosophy, oneness, trueness and goodness are all facets of any being, and therefore of the ultimate Being.



'St Thomas shows that, far from proving the non-existence of God, evil actually tends to establish it: "If evil exists," he writes, "God exists. For, there would be no evil if the order of good were taken away, since its privation is evil. But this order would not exist if there were no God" (*Summa contra Gentiles*, B. 3, ch. 71). This is another one of those simple truths that our apparently sophisticated world has lost sight of, but which remains rigorously true: we would not even be able to detect evil, or give it a name, if there were no good, no absolute good, which is the measure of the goodness of all creatures.

'It is precisely because He is infinite goodness – "His nature is goodness," as St Leo the Great says so expressively in a homily for Christmas (*Sermon 22 on the Nativity*) – that God makes evil concur to the realisation of good, as St Augustine said: "For almighty God..., because He is supremely good, would never allow any evil whatsoever to exist in His works if He were not so all-powerful and good as to cause good to emerge from evil itself" (*Enchridion*, 11). There are few truths of our faith that are more consoling than that one.

'Even if we do not fully understand how this can be, it is certain from the point of view of faith that God can make use of the sins of His creatures to further the good of the universe. The greatest proof of this is the passion and death of Our Blessed Lord. The greatest sin ever to be committed on this planet, the murder of the Son of God, became the source of all grace and salvation. At the end of the day, or rather at the end of time, the triumph of the goodness of God will be evident to all, and even those who have rejected it and are lost definitively in Hell, will bend the knee and profess the truth. *At the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father* (Ph 2:10-11).

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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

With the twelfth rule of the first week of the Spiritual Exercises, we come to a series of three rules in which St Ignatius has recourse to the natural weaknesses and faults of human nature to draw lessons for the spiritual life. In the first of these, he will use feminine weakness, in the second male weakness and in the third, the natural cunning of both as exemplified in the way a military leader seeks to identify the weaknesses of an enemy.



'The enemy conducts himself as a woman. He is a weakling before a show of strength, and a tyrant if he has his will. It is characteristic of a woman in a quarrel with a man to lose courage and take to flight if the man shows that he is determined and fearless. However, if the man loses courage and begins to flee, the anger, vindictiveness, and rage of the woman surge up and know no bounds. In the same way, the enemy becomes weak, loses courage, and turns to flight with his seductions as soon as one leading a spiritual life faces his temptations boldly, and does exactly the opposite of what he suggests. However, if one begins to be afraid and to lose courage in temptations, no wild animal on earth can be more fierce than the enemy of our human nature. He will carry out his perverse intentions with consummate malice' (Sp. Ex. #325).

Our saint uses a reality which is all too common, even though not universal, to draw a spiritual lesson. And that lesson is that when it comes to being serious about the spiritual life, we must be fully conscious that we are dealing with an enemy who wants our death and damnation. He is ferocious. He does not want our good. When he offers attractive creatures to lead us astray, it is always with a view towards causing our downfall and utter destruction. But while he makes a show of strength, his only strength lies in convincing us that we are weak before him. Therefore, we must be fully conscious that the only way to deal with him is to be bold and courageous, not to let ourselves be influenced by any of his evil suggestions, above all, not to even appear to hesitate or to lose courage.

How are we to do this? The answer is of the greatest simplicity, and it will sound paradoxical to one who has never reflected upon it. It is to be fully conscious of our weakness and to rely solely on the grace of God. The Enemy of our soul is extremely cunning. On our own, we are really no match for his wiles. This is precisely why the grace of God is offered to us, because with God's grace, all things are possible. If we turn to the Lord in humble prayer, He shares with us His omnipotence to overcome our greatest enemies. If we are afraid, it is only because we are counting on our own strength, not on God's, in which case we can only fail.

St Paul gives us two lessons that are consonant with this rule. To the Corinthians he writes: 'God is faithful, and He will not let you be tempted beyond your strength, but with the temptation will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it' (1 Cor 10:13-14). And to the Philippians: 'I can do all things in Him who strengthens me' (Ph 4:13). Both these teachings are based on the reality that St Ignatius is underlining in this rule: By boldly relying on God's help we can overcome all temptations; without that help we will be the prey of the Enemy.

