

Pluscarden Benedictines

No. 187 News and Notes for our Friends September 2019

Contents

Fr Abbot's Letter	2
From the Annals	5
News from St Mary's	11
Diocesan Pilgrimage	13
Our Lady of Aberdeen	14
Beauty will save the World	18
Chant Forum 2019	24
Philip Trower Obituary	26
Faith in the North	27
Handbook for Oblates	30
Book Review	31

Cover: Our Lady of Aberdeen, St Mary's Cathedral, Aberdeen

FR ABBOT'S LETTER

Dear Friends,

“You don't know what you are asking for.” These are Jesus' words to James and John when they, or in St Matthew's version, their mother, ask for the places at his right and his left in his kingdom. James and John are asking to be as close as possible to Jesus. They think this means occupying the most prestigious positions after his, the thrones on either side of his throne. They don't understand that closeness to Jesus is not through access to his privilege but by sharing in his suffering. Perhaps some awareness of this comes through Jesus' counter-question, “Can you drink from the chalice that I must drink from?” Yet if they understand the question, their answer, “We can”, reveals another level of ignorance. Like Peter later, they think their love of Jesus is strong enough for whatever difficulties will come.

The New Testament presents clearly the great difference between the apostles after Easter and Pentecost, full of knowledge, understanding and boldness, and the same men at the time of their first calling and long after, not understanding what Jesus taught them, full of illusions about what the call to follow Jesus would mean.

It seems not an exaggeration to say that after Pentecost they were like different persons. Jesus talks about being born again, and people often describe an experience of conversion as becoming a new person.

Yet there must also be continuity. We can see this if we think of the whole of our lives in this world in relation to the world to come. Then, please God, we shall be transformed, beyond our present imagining. But we shall still be the same persons, and still in relationship with those we love now. If not, if it is just a matter of beginning again with a new life in which we experience no connection with our present life, then what meaning does our present experience have? Similarly, the apostles described in the Gospels, with all their weakness and cowardice, are the same men

who after Pentecost will boldly preach before princes and kings and die for Jesus. The early part of the lives of the apostles is not just a series of misunderstandings and mistakes later happily rectified, like the embarrassments of youth that an adult prefers to forget.

To return to the petition of James and John: although they do not know what they asking, Jesus grants it. This cannot be a cruel trick on his part, a violation of their freedom by extracting a consent they cannot validly give. What does it mean, that they don't know what they are asking? Not, I think, that they are asking for one thing and they will get another. Rather, they know almost nothing about the real nature of the thing they are asking for. But they know something, and what they know is just enough for Jesus to act. Their request might be mostly self-importance and illusion. But there is a core of goodness and purity. This is their desire to be as close as possible to Jesus. This Jesus accepts and promises to fulfil.

It is noteworthy that although Jesus conferred on his followers power to do all that he did, it is not recorded that they asked for the power to work miracles or teach. It is recorded that they asked Jesus to teach them to pray: "One day Jesus was praying in a certain place and when he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, 'Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples.'" (Lk 11:1)

The Gospel speaks of many who were drawn to Jesus for a moment or a while then went away, or who opposed him. It is not obvious how we might at the time have known that the apostles would be different. One was called by Jesus "Satan" – the adversary – and another became a traitor. All failed him. We might speculate that what marked them as different was that, with all the false hopes they shared with others, when they saw Jesus praying to the Father, they wanted him to teach them to pray.

Maybe for us, prayer, or more precisely the desire to learn to pray, is a thread of continuity that gives our lives coherence. Maybe in the Church's treasury it is a gift we can continue to offer

the world when much of what we have to offer does not seem to be wanted. I think this is something we in monasteries experience. Commonly our visitors, who naturally are mostly not religious, comment on the peace they sense. Of course, it is really prayer that they sense. People might not respond easily when the doctrines of our faith or the moral demands of the Gospel are proposed. But they will walk into our Church, experience peace there, and sit for a while to listen to prayer. They are generally happy if we tell them we pray for them. It might not seem much. But it is a contact with Christ, and that surely makes everything else possible.

Yours devotedly in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Fr Anselm". The "F" is large and stylized, and the "Anselm" is written in a fluid, connected hand.

Our cenobitic life is situated by St Benedict in tension with the desert. We create a garden – yet somehow at root also we yearn for the desert - to be alone with God. The cenobium gives us *solacium* and *consolatio* in our fight against the devil: that's what it's for. It does not exist to cocoon us against life's troubles, to create a nice, warm and maternal environment where we can be protected and happy. Au contraire: it's there to help us win the victory. Sometimes we are tempted to reproach the community as having failed us - we can feel let down, abandoned, side-lined. Then we are indeed tempted to find other compensations - a group, within or without, who will give us the loving support we crave. But actually we are offered here a great grace: to confront alone the wind of the desert; to become at last truly a monk, alone with God.

Dom Guillaume Jedrzejczak: *Sur un chemin de liberte:*
Commentary on the Rule of St Benedict

FROM THE ANNALS

MAY 2019

12th: Br Thomas departed for New Zealand to see to the care of his parents, both now elderly and frail. Fr Mark takes over from him as acting sacristan.

13th: Fr Prior gave a community conference on Psalm 117.

17th: The novitiate celebrated a warm and sunny “dies non” by taking tea in the sunken garden to the South East of the old Prior’s Lodge.

18th: The annual meeting of the Moray Beekeepers’ Association here was cancelled due to persistent rain. Several beekeepers appeared anyway and left behind large quantities of cake.

19th: **FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER.** After our conventual Mass a High Mass in the Extraordinary Form was celebrated in the Lady Chapel for the St Ninian’s Pilgrimage Confraternity. Fr Abbot returned in the afternoon from his visit to Petersham, Mount Savior and the meeting of Abbots Visitor in the Canary Islands.

20th: Fr Abbot gave a glowing account of the small Benedictine community he had visited in the Canary Islands.

Fr Matthew underwent a minor operation on his foot in Aberdeen. Another will be needed.

21st: We hear that Br Cyprian Anasa of Kristo Buase has decided not to go on to Solemn Profession. Br Cyprian spent nearly two years here at Pluscarden before returning to Ghana last year. Br. Simon already has tickets to attend the profession. The decision is taken that he go anyway, to offer fraternal support to Fr Bede and the community there.

23rd: Pluscarden Benedictines 186 arrives from the printers.

24th: Two new portacabins appear, paid for by a generous benefactor. One will be an art studio for Fr Matthew, the other a soap factory for Br Thomas.

25th: In the afternoon, a fund-raising concert by the Moray String Quartet, to a packed out Church. The local 20-year-old violinist Shannon Mustard gave a stunning display of solo virtuoso playing.

27th: Rogation processions these days, according to custom, unsettled weather notwithstanding.

30th: **SOLEMNITY OF THE ASCENSION.** Fr Abbot presided at Conventual Mass and preached. Several members of the community have an unpleasant and heavy cold in the head.

JUNE 2019

1st: 9 colonies of bees are moved from the Lodge field to a new site in Califer wood at the West end of Heldon Hill. This move was made necessary because of proposed building operations in their former apiary site.

3rd: A reduced timetable “rest day” is held, especially for the benefit of those suffering from the current cold.

4th: Two recently ordained Polish Pallotine priests concelebrated Mass with us today.

7th: **Recollection Day.** Fr Abbot gave a community conference.

8th: Guests are beginning to arrive for Pentecost and the Pentecost Lectures. Among them is Canon Luke Smith, a former novice who is now a canon of Southwark Archdiocese and the spiritual director of Womersley Seminary. He drove up all day from Surrey (as is his wont). We hear that Bishop Steven Robson is unable to attend the Pentecost Lectures as planned because of a back injury.

9th: **PENTECOST SUNDAY.** Fr Abbot presided at Conventual Mass and preached.

11th-13th: Fr Martin Boland delivered 4 excellent Pentecost Lectures according to our custom, to the usual audience of guests and day visitors. His subject is *Beauty Will Save the World*.

15th: This morning a group from Moodiesburn arrived with Bishop Nolan to celebrate Mass at 11.30 in our Church. They numbered over thirty. Another group, this one from Germany, arrived in the early afternoon, and celebrated a German language Mass.

At 5.00 Fr Abbot gave a community conference.

In the evening there was a concert by *Musick Fyne*.

16th: **TRINITY SUNDAY.** Fr Benedict presided at Conventual Mass and preached.

18th: There is a Polish group with a Priest staying on retreat at the monastery. They are having a Polish Mass in the Lady Chapel before our Conventual Mass.

19th: Br Simon arrived back from Ghana. He spoke at Chapter about his adventures.

20th: The Police came following some trouble with wayfarers here. Our web site reports over 1000 regular subscribers.

23rd: **CORPUS & SANGUIS CHRISTI.** Fr Abbot presided and preached at Mass, followed by a procession with the Blessed Sacrament, then exposition until Vespers

24th: **SOLEMNITY OF THE BIRTH OF SAINT JOHN THE BAPTIST.** Patronal feast. Fr Abbot presided and preached.

25th: Deacon William McQuillan is here on a pre-Ordination retreat. Some years ago he spent a trial month in our novitiate.

27th: Preparations already begin for our forthcoming diocesan pilgrimage. 5 large flat television screens are set up; also extra speakers are put in place.

28th: **SOLEMNITY OF THE SACRED HEART.** Fr Prior presided and preached. Exposition between Mass and Vespers as usual.

29th: The log chipping machine for our bio-mass boiler is at work at the back of the house all day.

2 marquees spring up in preparation for the Pilgrimage, and many stacking chairs appear from St Sylvester's Elgin. A group of 36 young people of the diocese led by members of the St Andrew community is here for the weekend. George Brand, the diocesan MC is being assisted in his work of preparation by members of the Knights of St Columba. The statue of Our Lady of Aberdeen arrives.

30th: **SOLEMNITY OF SAINTS PETER AND PAUL AND THE ANNUAL DIOCESAN PILGRIMAGE.** Our fourth Solemnity in eight days. Fr Abbot presided and preached at Conventual Mass. Bishop Hugh presided at the Pilgrimage Mass in the afternoon. It all went very well, and everyone was happy.

JULY 2019

1st: Fr Balaraj, who is based in Inverness, stayed overnight and concelebrated at Conventual Mass.

Fr Jan-Maria of the Community of St John, a friend and former confrere of Br Benedict-Joseph, arrived to spend a short time here. Fr David Jenuwine and a party of American guests arrived; they celebrate an Extraordinary Form Mass separately.

The novitiate had an outing today, visiting the old “hidden” seminary at Scalan.

4th: Our friends Monsignors Paul McPartlan and David Manson are here as guests.

11th: **SOLEMNITY OF OUR HOLY FATHER ST BENEDICT.** Fr Abbot presided at Conventual Mass and preached.

12th: The Community met at noon to discuss the questionnaire that has been sent by the Congregational Curia to prepare for the next General Chapter.

13th: Fr Abbot gave a conference before Vespers. The Fernham Trustees, including Abbot Geoffey of Douai and Sr Mary Lucy of the former Fernham Community, arrived here for their annual meeting.

15th: Fr Benedict departed to take part in a Forum on Gregorian Chant at Quarr Abbey. Br Thomas returned from New Zealand.

16th: Fr Matthew had a second operation in the Aberdeen Royal Infirmary on his foot. The hospital will keep him for around five days to ensure necessary post-operation care.

17th: Fr Abbot departed to conduct Visitations at Farnborough and Chilworth; also to pay fraternal visits to our Sisters at Minster and Kingstanding; then to visit his mother, who recently moved permanently into a care home.

20th: Baxter, our well known black and white cat, is now too old to jump up to his former residence, or otherwise to look after himself. He moves to a retirement venue in our cloister, where he is well looked after.

23rd: The annual community coast day, spent as usual at Hopeman beach. Lovely warm sunshine all day, very much enjoyed and appreciated by all.

24th: Today our Schola, with the assistance of our friend Gedrius Gapsys, who is a scholar of Gregorian Chant, spent the day recording more chants for the season of Advent. This completes all necessary material for a new CD of Advent Chants begun some years ago. We were fortunate that, during these sessions, the chain saws and combine harvesters active locally took the day off; and the forecast thunder did not materialise. A large group of the Clan Innes came for a guided tour, which had to be rushed through in a few minutes between recording sessions.

25th: Fr Matthew these days is in a wheelchair to ensure he puts no weight on his wounded foot. He is perfectly cheerful and has no pain. He requires regular medical check-ups though: which have to be in Aberdeen.

We begin reading in the refectory the Story of a Soul, the autobiography of St Thérèse of Lisieux, in preparation for the visit of her relics in September.

Deacon Frederick Bauerschmidt, a theologian from Baltimore, is functioning these days at our conventual Mass.

Summer fruits pour into refectory and kitchen from the garden. Delicious! They are served at every meal; also as cordials, puddings and jams.

26th: Several acres of woodland to the South of the Black Burn opposite our hill field are felled.

AUGUST 2019

1st: Fr Dunstan arrived from Petersham, for his annual summer break at Pluscarden.

2nd: Reflection day. In the afternoon our now annual Monastic Experience Weekend began. This year we have just two participants. As usual a longer list of names whittled steadily down in the final days before the event.

PLUSCARDEN ABBEY AWARDED RTIF GRANT

Pluscarden Abbey has been awarded a grant of £80,500 from the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund. The purpose of the fund is to relieve the pressure of increased tourism in remote locations. The problem has become acute in Scotland in the past few years, where it is feared that popular places to visit might become degraded if provision is not made for extra vehicle parking, toilets and rubbish collection. Visitor statistics seem to indicate that numbers will increase still further.

The object of the award at Pluscarden is the provision of a new parking area outside the immediate curtilage of the Abbey. Day visitors will thereby be encouraged to leave their vehicles outside the gates and walk up the entrance drive, thus helping to preserve the tranquillity of the grounds beside the Abbey and also enhance their own experience of the beauty of the setting. However, there will be no need for those coming to daily Mass to do this, as the times for Mass do not coincide with the peak periods for day visitors.

The site chosen for the new car park is the field behind the Lodge, which for some years has lain fallow after we were obliged to quit the cultivation of potatoes. The site is conveniently located, well screened with trees and shrubs, and large enough to accommodate 30 parking spaces, including 2 for coaches. The road surface will be constructed of porous aggregate, so that there will be no run-off of surface water into the Black Burn adjacent to the field. Toilets, waste bins and some outdoor seating will also be provided; and some information boards will help visitors to gain more from their stay.

Until we are able to build the new women's accommodation in the Abbey's South Range (which we hope will be quite soon) there will be a fence and a screen of shrubbery between the car park and St Scholastica's to preserve the privacy and quiet for residents; furthermore, pedestrians from the car park will be discouraged from straying into the area outside the residents' accommodation.

NEWS FROM ST MARY'S MONASTERY

On Sunday May 12 we had a lecture by Fr Brian Dunkle S.J. This was another in the series organized by Phil and Carol Zaleski. Fr Brian is Assistant Professor of Historical Theology at Boston College School of Theology and Ministry, and author of the book *Enchantment and Creed in the Hymns of Ambrose of Milan* (2016). His talk was likewise on the hymns of St Ambrose. He spoke about their origins, doctrinal content and catechetical usage, aesthetic appeal, and their enduring influence. The lecture was followed by refreshments and conversation at the sisters' priory.

We hosted another Monastic Experience Weekend from May 31-June 2. This time there were three participants. Once again they sat with us in choir, did some manual labor and attended recreation. They also learned about *lectio divina*, were given a tour of the library, and had the opportunity to chat with a monk. It went well and we believe the young men profited from the experience as we did ourselves.

We had our annual retreat this year from June 16-21. It was given by Fr Andrew Hofer O.P., currently resident at the Dominican House of Studies in Washington, D.C., where he is associate professor of Patristics and Ancient Languages. He is the author of *Christ in the Life and Teaching of Gregory of Nazianzus* (2013), and more recently co-author, along with Fr Benedict Croell O.P., of *A Living Sacrifice: Guidance for Men Discerning Religious Life* (2019) in which St Mary's Monastery is featured. Although a Dominican, Fr Andrew has been influenced by the Benedictines, since he attended Benedictine College in Atchison, Kansas, his native state. As he pointed out, another Dominican, namely St Thomas Aquinas, also began with a Benedictine training. Before entering the Dominicans Fr Andrew studied medieval history at the University of St. Andrew's in Edinburgh, and during his time in Scotland visited Pluscarden.

The theme of the retreat was gratitude and was entitled "Deo Gratias." He emphasized the importance of gratitude in the

religious life, as well as in life in general. His conferences covered such topics as gratitude, ingratitude, the psalms, St Paul, the Blessed Virgin Mary, and Heaven. He made use of the Rule of St Benedict, C.S. Lewis, Dorothy Day, St Josephine Bakhita, and St Thomas. Fr Andrew also shared some lessons learned from his older Dominican confreres. The retreat was excellent and offered much food for thought.

DIC

It's notable how entirely absent is the whole notion of combat from modern books on monastic life. We like to speak about the search for God, or of the Absolute, of prayer, interior life, contemplative or mystical prayer... Yet universal experience, from the desert fathers to now, is that our life is indeed a daily combat. Those who forget this can find themselves easily flattened by it. So: Benedictine Peace has nothing in it of spiritual hedonism, that likes to pluck delicious fruits in each moment. Rather, it is a fruit of victory, that needs to be won over again each day, against a world swarming with temptations, desires not willed, dark thoughts. Our first task is then to be aware of this combat that has to be waged within our own hearts.

According to Cassian, if we could see all that in advance, we would run. The Curé d'Ars asked the Lord to show him his combat in advance - then very much regretted that. It doesn't diminish with time; it focusses on certain weaknesses, on the thorns in the flesh that each one carries. In this way we draw close to our only true friend, our only shield, Christ. (Dom Guillaume Jedrzejczak)

THE DIOCESAN PILGRIMAGE TO PLUSCARDEN 2019

According to annual custom, Bishop Hugh led a Pilgrimage of the Aberdeen Diocese to Pluscarden on Sunday 30th July. This year in Scotland, that day was kept as the transferred Solemnity of SS. Peter and Paul. As last year, our Pilgrimage congregation was much enlivened by the presence of many children and young people, led not only by parents or teachers but also by their parish Catechists, whose work in particular Bishop Hugh wanted to highlight. Every possible space in our Church was packed full for the Mass at 3.00 p.m., with the large marquee on the Nave also filled to capacity. Five large flat screens and an excellent sound system relayed the liturgy for those placed where they would otherwise be unable to see or hear. The Pilgrimage liturgy was enhanced by no fewer than four Choirs: the Diocesan Choir, a children's Choir, the African Choir and the Monks' Choir.

Steady rain was forecast for the day. Many prayers were offered for fine weather, so it seemed a true miracle when, in spite of leaden skies in the morning, the whole day turned out to be blessed by fair, dry weather. Folk were able to picnic on our lawns before the Mass, during which period Priests were available for confessions, and the Blessed Sacrament was exposed in the Lady Chapel for adoration. A team of helpers stood well prepared to serve refreshments for all. At the end of Mass the whole congregation processed to St Benedict's garden for Marian devotions, centred this year, for the first time, on the statue of Our Lady of Aberdeen, brought specially from Aberdeen Cathedral.

A group of 36 young people, led by members of the St Andrew Community, spent the whole weekend in the monastic guest houses, fully occupied with games, catechesis, walks, rosary, outings, adoration and attendance at various liturgies. Games for younger children before the Pilgrimage Mass were organised in front of the Church by the Elgin Dominican Sisters. Meanwhile some 16 hardy souls walked in for the occasion along the pilgrim way from Elgin.

OUR LADY OF ABERDEEN

In the Lady Chapel of St Mary's Cathedral, Aberdeen, stands a painted wooden statue, a statue with a long, chequered history behind it; a statue that has been the focus of much love and veneration to the Mother of Our Lord, whom she cradles next to her heart for us to worship. For Mary has never asked for worship for herself; always she directs our gaze and our worship towards her Son.

This statue is a replica. The original dwells today in the church of Notre Dame du Finistère in Brussels. The tale of her wanderings is a fascinating one. The statue is believed to have begun life in the Cathedral of St Machar, in what is now Old Aberdeen, one of four statues there, two of gold, one of silver, and our wooden one, carved from oak, the only one to survive the Reformation. She was carved in the 15th century, either in Bruges or in Aberdeen by craftsmen trained there. The style of carving and decoration is certainly Flemish. Devotion to Our Lady was very popular in mediaeval Aberdeen, with the then Cathedral being dedicated to St Mary as well as to St Machar. King's College, Bishop William Elphinstone's foundation, was known originally as St Mary's College, with the chapel there dedicated to Our Lady in her Nativity. Bishop Elphinstone also built the Snow Kirk nearby, as the parish church for the area, dedicated to Our Lady of the Snows. The cemetery is still there.

Bridging the River Dee in Aberdeen had long been a problem, but a bridge there was essential as most trade was with the south. Bishop Elphinstone had long desired to provide the city with a good solid bridge, but he died in 1514, before his plans came to fruition, though he left a goodly sum of money for the purpose. It was not, however, until 1527 that a bridge was eventually completed, thanks to Bishop Gavin Dunbar – with Our Lady's help. The bishop had a great devotion to Our Lady of Aberdeen and prayed continually for her assistance in finding the best spot to span the Dee. A vision, or a dream, showed him the exact place,

and the bridge was built there. It still stands today. At the time, a little chapel to Our Lady was built by the bridge and a statue (possibly our wooden one or perhaps the silver statue), was carried in procession from St Machar's.

Then came the Reformation in 1560, when the Catholic Church, along with all things Catholic, was overnight outlawed by an Act of Parliament. Old Aberdeen held out for longer than many other parts, but the tide of history was inexorable, and the iconoclasts had their way. Statues and sacred vessels made from precious metals were appropriated and melted down for their monetary value. Our statue survived this fate, being made of wood and thus of no value, although the silver crowns, which both Our Lady and her Son wore, were lost. No doubt even this humble statue would eventually have been smashed or burned and it was therefore taken in secrecy, into the safekeeping of the Gordons of Huntly. They kept her hidden and safe for around 65 years but, as life became more precarious for those who clung to their Faith, it was reluctantly decided to send the statue abroad, to the Spanish controlled Netherlands where the Governor, Archduchess Isabella Clara Eugenia, who resided in Brussels, was a friend of Henrietta Gordon of Huntly.

At some point in the 1620s, the statue was loaded on board a Spanish ship bound for the Spanish Netherlands, and her wanderings continued abroad. Spain was still engaged in a war with the Dutch, so Spanish ships were at constant risk from attack. The ship endured choppy seas and stormy weather which caused severe damage to the masts, was attacked by Dutch pirates, and eventually limped into the port of Dunkirk, the only harbour not blockaded by the Dutch. The sailors attributed their, to them, miraculous delivery from tempest and pirates, to the intercession of Our Lady. And so began the great devotion to Our Lady of Aberdeen, or Notre Dame du Bon Succès, as she is known there.

The port commander was at first reluctant to relinquish the statue, but eventually it was escorted to Brussels by Isabella herself. There the statue was placed in her royal palace where it

began to attract much attention, the fame of the miraculous escape of the Spanish ship having spread. However, in response to the petitions of her Augustinian chaplain, Fr Barthélemy de los Rios, Isabella agreed to hand the statue over to his monastery in Brussels, and with great ceremony it was carried in procession to the chapel there. An object of much devotion, it remained there until 1796, when French Revolutionary troops evicted the Augustinians from their monastery. An Englishman residing in Brussels rescued the statue and kept it in hiding for the next eight years. In 1805, the Augustinians were allowed back and the statue also returned briefly. In 1814, after the Augustinians were again forced out, the statue was moved to the church of Notre Dame du Finistère, where it dwells today, a focus of love and veneration.

Various attempts have been made since to return the statue to Aberdeen. When the church of St Mary's, later the cathedral, in Huntly Street, Aberdeen, was built in 1860, the parish priest Fr John Sutherland sent repeated petitions to the parish priest of Notre Dame du Finistère, and also to Pope Pius IX, asking that the statue be restored to its original home, but such was the devotion of the people of Brussels that they could not bear to part with her. After the Scottish Hierarchy was restored, and the new Bishop of Aberdeen took up the cause, a more favourable response was received from Pope Leo XIII, but the Belgians again refused. A more unorthodox plan to recover the statue was made towards the end of World War I, by a group of Scottish soldiers, led by Captain Andrew Grant, a parishioner of St Peter's, Aberdeen. When they entered the church in Brussels, however, they were greeted with joy by the hundreds of citizens praying before the statue of Our Lady for deliverance from their enemies. Faced with such devotion, the soldiers could not continue with their clandestine plot and, instead, joined the people in prayer.

When eventually it was accepted that the statue was likely to remain in Brussels, a copy was made in 1895, and was installed in the new convent of the Sacred Heart at Queen's Cross, Aberdeen.

This statue now resides in St Mary's House, in Old Aberdeen, just across the road from St Machar's, where the original first stood.

Since the Restoration of the Scottish Hierarchy in 1878, devotion to Our Lady in Aberdeen, known also as Our Lady of Good Succour (for she is also ready to come to our aid), throughout the diocese, and further afield, has focused on copies of this ancient wooden statue. As well as the statue in the Bishop's House, there are replicas in St Peter's and Our Lady of Aberdeen, Kincorth; St Peter's, Buckie, St Mary's Fochabers, St Nathalan's, Ballater; and in St John's, Fetternear, where neither Our Lady nor the Child Jesus are adorned with crowns, it is assumed because the Leslies who endowed the church there did not care for too much ornamentation. The Feast of Our Lady of Aberdeen has, in recent years, become a feast for the whole of Scotland, though a Solemnity in Aberdeen, and the evangelical movement, New Dawn in Scotland, has adopted Our Lady of Aberdeen as their patron, commissioning yet another replica of the statue. She has also been the subject of an icon by world-renowned iconographer Aidan Hart. All of Scotland is now dedicated to her motherly care. Perhaps, a little tour of these places might one day become a pilgrimage route. Our Lady of Aberdeen, in fact, in her various forms, has visited churches all over Scotland and England, including Westminster Cathedral.

G. K. Chesterton, more often known perhaps for his gruff humour and Fr Brown stories, had a great devotion to Our Lady. He probably never knew of Our Lady of Aberdeen but a lovely poem he wrote about "Regina Angelorum" could easily be attributed to our Lady.

Our Lady went into a strange country,
Our Lady, for she was ours,
And had run on the little hills behind the houses
And pulled small flowers;
But she rose up and went into a strange country
With strange thrones and powers.

**BEAUTY WILL SAVE THE WORLD:
a theological and pastoral reflection on the role of beauty in
the life of the Church**

This year's edition of the annual Pentecost lectures began with a quote from Dostoyevsky's novel, *The Idiot*. Prince Myshkin, the protagonist, states that "Beauty will save the world". This quote has become famous all over the world, but what exactly does it mean? Fr Martin Boland, a priest of the Brentwood diocese, took his audience on a four-hour journey, exploring the implications of that phrase with those in attendance.

In the first lecture, Fr Martin brought us into the modern world's varied conceptions of what the word "beauty" means. Some modern thinkers would like to get rid of the term altogether, since it can seem to be a source of shame to those who do not measure up to arbitrary standards of beauty. Some others would claim that beauty is only a social construct (along the lines of the word "gender"), designed to distract us from the ugly reality of life around us, even going as far as stating that post-Auschwitz and the genocidal furies of the 20th century, even talking about beauty has become irrelevant. Other, more "benign" atheists or agnostics, admit that the existence of beauty leads them to the threshold of perhaps the only sense of transcendence they experience in their lives. On the other hand, novelist and Nobel prize-winner Aleksander Solzhenitsyn preferred to see Dostoyevsky's phrase as prophetic, pointing to the trinity of Truth, Goodness, and Beauty as signs of God's presence, the "divine illumination of the triune God Himself", as Fr Boland put it.

Referring to the novel itself, Fr Boland pointed out that in the context of the story, Prince Myshkin is being mocked and treated as an idiot because of his Christian faith; the prince holds fast, however, to the idea that mankind's beauty can only be restored by Beauty Incarnate, Christ himself—it is Christ who will save the world. Fr Boland reminded us that we were created as beautiful, "conformed in loving obedience to the will of God," as he put it.

Our first parents' sin deformed us and robbed us of our primordial beauty, and this image, while not totally lost, can only be fully restored in us by the working of grace in our souls.

The second lecture of the series led us into a more philosophical discussion of beauty and its metaphysical relationship to being. Many scholars and philosophers refute the idea that there is an essential link between being and beauty, and believe therefore that beauty is not a “transcendental” (n.b., the *transcendentals* are abstract concepts that are considered to be convertible with *being* itself; thus by the very fact that something *is*, exists, it is also *good* and *true*. There has been contention, literally for centuries, over the proposition that beauty is also a transcendental). For these thinkers, the old adage that “Beauty is in the eye of the beholder” shows that beauty is completely subjective and therefore not an essential quality of the object being contemplated. Catholic thought has more often led to the idea that beauty is “an ultimate value; something to be desired in its own right”, as Fr Boland stated. He then pointed us to another Dostoyevsky novel, *The Brothers Karamazov*, in which a young monk named Alyosha has a mystical experience of the beauty of the night sky. Fr Boland said: “Alyosha’s heightened response to the mystery of being is not alien to us. It is the response that we make, above all, in the liturgy where we recognize every thing that is, that has being, as an outpouring of the Triune God’s life of goodness, truth and beauty. Being is a participation in the overflowing love of the Blessed Trinity... Thus, an encounter of transcendence within the immanence of an experience of beauty in the created order offers an encounter with the Glory of the Triune God. Before this Mystery we humble ourselves like Alyosha by falling to our knees in love and adoration...That which is truly beautiful brings us to our knees. The act of genuflecting is a physical recognition of Beauty Itself, the Triune God. In a secular age, where the emphasis is on standing on your own two feet, man quickly loses the ability to kneel, to genuflect and, as a consequence, to wonder.”

The rest of the second lecture was spent exploring the link between God, a contemplative outlook on life, and the recognition of the importance of beauty as seen in the writings of such saintly thinkers as Thomas Aquinas, Augustine and John Paul II.

Later that day, in the third lecture, Fr Boland discussed the idea of the Incarnation of Christ as a “key to interpreting beauty”. He opened by citing the Scottish writer Edwin Muir describing his impressions of Catholic Rome after his Calvinistic upbringing, an upbringing that while “severe and decent”, because of “its bareness and austerity” lacked anything that pointed to the fact that “Christ was born in the flesh and lived on Earth”. His time in Rome, however, struck him over and over again by its overt religiosity, with public devotions and religious art visible on almost every street corner. As Muir states in his autobiography, “A religion that dared to show forth the mystery for everyone to see would have shocked the congregation of the North, would have seemed a sort of blasphemy, perhaps even an indecency. But here it was publicly shown, as Christ showed Himself on the earth. But that these images should appear everywhere, reminding everyone of the Incarnation seemed to me natural and right...This open declaration was to me very much of Christianity.” Accordingly, Muir found in the very visible public art of Catholicism “a visual exegesis of the life, death, and resurrection of the Lord.”

Next citing Fr Aidan Nichols, OP, Fr Boland went on to affirm that any faith based on the Incarnation of its God will most certainly find a visible expression of itself. As a religion of the Incarnation, we need to recognize that the use of our senses is not idolatry, *per se*; rather our senses help us to “humbly approach the otherness of God,” said Fr Boland. Indeed, he stated later in the lecture, “works of [Christian] art played an integral part in the creation of a ‘symbolic consciousness’ where the things of finite, created reality were symbolically dense with the eternal, uncreated reality of the Triune God. The purpose of Art was not just to imitate reality, mimic the outward forms of existence, but to consider being and existence in terms of symbolic and religious

meaning.” For Fr Boland, since God had His hand in all of creation, in every creative act, all created things are touched with beauty; this is in order to awaken our desire for God, to rouse our desire to know Him and love Him. It is thus that it can be said that beauty is constitutive of being and therefore a transcendental. The beauty found in every creature is not accidental but willed by God. Therefore beauty, and specifically religious beauty, can help bridge the gap between the profane and the transcendent: “Where philosophy has become estranged from the realm of the transcendent, religious beauty can strengthen the connection between the two. Where liberal theologies have emptied religious belief of supernatural truth in favour of individual consciousness, beauty restores the supernatural to its proper place. Where our worship has become mere ceremonial or a sociological exercise, beauty places mystery at the heart of the sacred action. In a culture where activism and productivity are exalted, beauty challenges us to see beyond the utilitarian,” stated Fr Boland.

The last lecture was an in depth exploration of the *Letter of St John Paul II to Artists* (1999). Reminding us that this saint was an accomplished poet, playwright, and actor before ascending to the throne of St Peter, Fr Boland made us keenly aware of the light that St John Paul II could shine on the question of beauty in the modern world. Fr Boland stated that for this great thinker and man of the Church, the role of the artist was not to be a stereotypically introverted person remaining aloof from those around him or her, but rather to be a prophet who awakens his audience to God’s presence in the beauty that is before us. An artist’s very inspiration springs from “encounters with truth, goodness and beauty, [which] provide intellectual flares that illuminate the artist’s mind and enable him to catch sight of the splendour of truth. In these moments, the glory of the Triune God is caught sight of and, in the words of St Paul, ‘all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit.’ (2 Cor 3:18)” For St John Paul II,

all art that values beauty has the potentiality to awaken us to the transcendent. This doesn't necessarily mean that we need to treat all artists as celebrities, or romanticise them, but rather we should try to see the artist as an artisan or craftsman.

As Tolkien would say when speaking of what he referred to as "sub-creation", this reflects the infinite space between the "distinct creative roles of God and man." Indeed, for Tolkien, man is only able to "sub-create", to call forth into being something already present in the plan of God. Fr Boland puts it another way: "What is the difference between "creator" and "craftsman"? The one who creates bestows being itself, he brings something out of nothing...and this, in the strict sense, is a mode of operation which belongs to the Almighty alone. The craftsman, by contrast, uses something that already exists, to which he gives form and meaning. This is the mode of operation peculiar to man as made in the image of God."

In concluding his lectures, Fr Boland reminded us that every Christian has a duty, even a responsibility, to restore the importance of beauty as an expression of that which is deepest in mankind. As he stated so well, "Every time we turn to face God, when the operations of grace raise us into His life, we come to know the beauty of Christ's Church in all its richness and depth. The challenge of communicating this beauty is an urgent task... If the *kerygma* [the Christian message] is to be proclaimed in its fullness and without mutating into a form of evangelical Protestantism then it must be done so in a manner where its beauty speaks the truth. Where [there is] false opposition between works of beauty and corporal acts of mercy, we must show that the relationship between beauty and mercy is necessary if love of God and our neighbour is to be our common vocation. If some have lost confidence in the power of beauty to express transcendent realities, then we have a responsibility to restore beauty to its proper place in the life of the Church."

We were very glad indeed to be able to host this unassuming and modest parish priest here while he offered his ideas and

research to us. His straightforward and simple manner of presenting his thoughts on the subject of beauty made it very easy to enter into his train of thought. Especially insightful were his constant references to the essential link between beauty and the Holy Trinity, and how our appreciation of created beauty can thus become a path to a heightened love for and contemplation of God.

Br Benedict-Joseph

**At Pluscarden Priory – Feast of the Assumption, 1949
To Our Lady of Scotland**

Here, for thy gathering, blooms afresh the flower
of Scotland's faith: see, in this tranquil air,
its urgent beauty greets thee, hour by hour,
restored of love, reborn of Scotland's prayer!

Mark it unfold for thee and multiply –
dear, indestructible, through age-long strife –
its fragrance rising heavenward with each sigh to thee,
our hope, our sweeteners, and our life!

Here on each breeze thy name steals, lingering,
to haunt these hills, as once, with melody...
ah, shrine, we pray, like joy's celestial spring,
on this grey land too long bereft of thee!

Break through the gloom, that city, strath, and glen,
May hail thee, full of grace! For here, behold,
this day, from the deep peace of Pluscarden,
Scotland salutes thee, Mary, as of old!

M.W.S.

(From *Liber Pluscardensis* August 1949)

CHANT FORUM MEETING, QUARR 15-19 July 2019

The Chant Forum was founded in 2006 with the aim of promoting Gregorian Chant in the monasteries of these Islands. In recent years the coordination of these meetings has been done from Pluscarden. Our tenth meeting was held at Quarr, near Ryde on the Isle of Wight, this July. It's hard to calculate precisely the number of participants, because of the variable number of Ryde nuns attending, but we were (more or less) 36 in all, including not a few lay folk: truly an excellent group.

The most important thing to say about our meeting this year is that everyone present was happy! The content was so superlatively good, the company, setting and food so pleasant, the arrangements so well put together, the weather so favourable, the topic so limitlessly interesting! Giedrius Gapsys and Jaan-Eik Tulve perfectly complemented each other. Their doctrine is the same, but their methods very different: Giedrius is particularly interested in the theory and history of the Chant; Jaan-Eik in its performance. Our chosen theme this year was Chant connected with St John the Baptist. Abbot Xavier introduced this theme in his opening talk: firmly setting our musical reflections within their liturgical and doctrinal context.

Three highlights of this year to mention, though there could be plenty of others.

On the Tuesday we were blessed to have Bishop Philip Egan of Portsmouth with us. He presided at our Gregorian Mass, and preached eloquently in strong support of all our aims.

On the Wednesday we paid a visit to Appuldurcombe house. This stately ruin, set in beautiful and well-kept parkland, was the first place of exile for the Solesmes community at the beginning of the 20th century, before they moved to Quarr and built the present monastery. It was at Appuldurcombe that crucial work was done, especially by Doms Mocquereau and Pothier, preparing the standard *Graduale Romanum*, which essentially we still use. A

fascinating illustrated talk about all that was given there by Sr Bernadette of Ryde, after a delightful picnic lunch, as green woodpeckers yaffled in the huge trees all about, and dragonflies flitted over the nearby ornamental pond in the warm sunshine.

On Thursday 18th we were at St Cecilia's Abbey Ryde, in the midst of most informative instruction on some details of the Laon neumatic notation, when news trickled in that Sr Mary Columba had just died. Repairing to the Chapel, we listened, not without tears of emotion, as the St Cecilia nuns expressed their sorrow, and their prayer, by immediately singing the heart-rendingly beautiful responsory *Subvenite* (4th Mode). Being the nuns of St Cecilia's Abbey Ryde, their almost spontaneous rendition was exquisite: sensitive, supple, fluent, warm, strong, united. We were reminded that the ultimate purpose of our meeting was to learn how to pray, and we renewed our gratitude at being amongst those who were so well placed to teach us.

Lessons learned? Maybe above all a yet more enhanced appreciation of the Chant. The very subtle details conveyed in the early manuscripts are always important, and what they convey helps bring the Chant to life. We heard many times the oft-repeated watch words of our instructors: "we go to the accent"; "we don't stop between words; we must aim always for the end"; "we must feel the movement"; "we must hear the important, structural notes"; "we must understand the language of the Chant"; "what matters above all is the text". As we see these principles applied in practice before our astonished eyes, we appreciate them all the more, and resolve to observe them in future with ever greater care.

It is hoped by all participants, and by many who were not able to be with us for one reason or another, that the Forum will meet again for a similar session in two years' time.

DBH

PHILIP TROWER 1923-2019

Described by one biographer and admirer as “a Catholic gentleman”, Philip Trower was a distinguished and respected journalist and author. He will be particularly remembered for a trilogy of books on the Church: *The Church Learned and the Revolt of the Scholars* (a collection of articles first in a Catholic journal); *Turmoil and Truth: The Historical Roots of the Modern Crisis in the Catholic Church*; and *The Catholic Church and the Counter-Faith*, reflecting his concern (which he shared with Benedict XVI) about the ways in which the Second Vatican Council’s message had been distorted. His work was highly esteemed by Catholic scholars. He also wrote a novel about the suppression of the Jesuits: *A Danger to the State*.

Brought up as an Anglican and educated at Eton and Oxford, Philip’s university life came to an abrupt halt when he joined up in World War II. He finally got around to graduating 76 years later, at the age of 95, in a wheelchair, in July 2018.

Philip became a Catholic in 1953, partly under the influence of a friend, the American poet Dunstan Thompson, whom he met towards the end of the war. He himself had drifted away from his faith during the war, although he recalled a private meeting in 1945 with Pope Pius XII whom he much admired and of whom he remarked: “I have come across few men in my life whom I have so instantly warmed to and liked.” As with so many converts, Philip could look back to other “signposts” on the way, including something he had been told by an Oxford don: “You will never find love until you find it in the tabernacle.”

Philip visited Pluscarden Abbey at one time and painted a little water colour picture of the Abbey. He sent this to Abbot Hugh ten years ago, suggesting a card could be made in aid of the monastery. To date, several hundreds of the card have been sold in the shop and the painting is reproduced in this magazine. Philip died in Nazareth House, Cheltenham on January 9 this year. May he rest in peace.

FAITH IN THE NORTH: REVIVING CULTURES SYMPOSIUM

“Mercy, Connection, and Hope” were the particular notes that sounded through the “Faith in the North: Reviving Cultures Symposium” held 3-5 May 2019 at Pluscarden Abbey. Participants were led through a series of stimulating talks on the topic of faith and culture as it has been lived through the centuries by the Gaels and Orcadians in the north and west of Scotland.

The highlight of the weekend was the Gaelic-language Mass, thought to be the first of its kind ever publicly celebrated at Pluscarden. Mrs. Didi Fraser led the congregation’s Gaelic responses and hymns with beautiful simplicity. Mgr James MacNeil of Oban celebrated the Mass in honour of the Feast of Divine Mercy, a poignant sign of a theme which emerged over the weekend. In his homily, Mgr MacNeil explained that the Resurrection is a Person, Jesus Christ, whom we encounter when we recognize our need for compassion. The risen Christ also encounters our neighbours, similarly in need of mercy. The merciful love of Jesus Christ deepens our compassion for and unity with one another. This unity is God’s will for us, as Jesus prayed at the Last Supper, and is a powerful witness of the presence of the risen Christ amongst us.

This theme of connectedness was set by Bishop Hugh Gilbert in his keynote address: “Faith and Culture: Finding and Making Connections.” Bishop Gilbert stated: “If we don’t connect, we forget and if we forget, we fragment.” Referring to the book of Genesis, he recalled that man was formed from the dust of the earth and infused with a soul to be in communion with God for all eternity. As the centre of creation, humans are connected both to “soil” and “soul”. As humans use their God-given creativity to cultivate the soil, or nature, the work of cultivating their own soil, the spiritual life, must not be neglected. A genuine culture bridges these two realities and finds its highest expression in the “cult” or worship of God, using the goods of the earth, art, and music in the

liturgical actions of the Holy Mass. While modern secular art, music, and literature often foretell a nihilistic future, the Church has hope to offer. Because of its long memory connected to Christ's loving action of handing on the Eucharist which continues to be celebrated and because the Church is confident that this presence of Christ continues to transform humanity, there is hope for the future. Closing with an example, Bishop Hugh recalled the Scottish Catholic poet George Mackay Brown's poem, *Harrowing of Hell*. As Christ descends the stairs of hell to release the ancient biblical figures, he encounters last of all Adam, "the tall primal dust" who "turned with a cry from digging and delving." Culture's digging and delving are connected, not to futility, but to joyful fulfilment as we "turn" as Adam does in the poem "with a cry to Christ."

Bishop Gilbert's comments on connectedness framed the symposium speakers' reflections on faith and the Scottish culture. Each speaker spoke passionately and lovingly of their subjects, which inspired a great pride and joy in the listeners. In his talk on "Current Issues in the Gaelic Revival and the Place of the Catholic Church," Andreas Wolff spoke of Gaelic culture's draw to people of all backgrounds. Observing that other Christian denominations had Gaelic Societies to support their ministers in familiarity with the Gaelic language, Mr Wolff proposed a similar society for the Catholic Church. Such a society could have ecumenical ties with other churches, promoting greater unity in the Scottish Gaelic culture. His comments promoted a lively discussion centred around practising a faith that has been encultured in a particular locale.

Continuing this theme, Mrs Lesley Findlay and Ms Rebecca Blakey revealed the cultural richness of the Gaelic Catholic faith as devotedly recorded, preserved, and enriched by such figures of the last century as Alexander Carmichael, Fr Allan MacDonald, John Lorne Campbell, Margaret Fay Shaw, and Calum Maclean. As the daughter and great-granddaughter respectively of Scottish Catholic Renaissance writer George Scott-Moncrieff, Mrs Findlay

and Ms Blakey embodied the passion for the integration of Scottish faith and culture of the figures of whom they spoke.

The Orcadian culture also received attention during the conference when Dr Linden Bicket from the University of Edinburgh reflected on the writer George Mackay Brown and *The Catholic Imagination*. He believed that “everything is imbued, touched by the finger of God” and that the Orcadian history, landscape, and people could be fitting openings into message of the Gospel.

A fitting conclusion to the days’ thoughts and reflections came in the moving musical programme provided by Iain and Duncan MacGillivray, Iain Gordon, and Patricia Robertson.

As participants came together on the Sunday to discuss the conference and possible paths forward, the three themes of “mercy, connectedness, and hope” emerged. The participants felt the weekend was filled with the joy of sharing the Faith and the Scottish culture with one another and a desire to share this joy with others. “There was an enthusiasm to forgive and lay the past to rest,” Ms Maureen Woodhead reflected. This provided a sense of hope and purpose as we continue to plan for future events and initiatives.

Many of the talks for the weekend will be accessible through the Diocese of Aberdeen web site for those who could not attend.

Sr Anna Christi

“The imagination is not an escape, but a return to the richness of our true selves; a return to reality.”

“Here is a work for poets -
Carve the runes
Then be content with silence”

George Mackay Brown

HANDBOOK FOR PLUSCARDEN OBLATES

At last, following popular demand, a Handbook for Pluscarden Oblates is nearing completion and we hope to have printed copies available soon. There is a possibility of having both hard cover and paperback copies, the former obviously being more durable. The handbook will comprise a little over a hundred pages and feature various articles we hope will be of some help to oblates (and others) and provide enjoyment, as well as spiritual nourishment.

The contents include: a Preface by Fr Abbot, chapters on the life of St Benedict and his Rule, the Benedictine Medal, a history of Pluscarden Abbey and of the Subiaco-Cassinense Congregation; the Statutes of the Oblates; the calendar of daily chapters from the Rule as read in the monastery (of particular help to those whose edition of the Rule is not divided into small “chapters”). There are chapters also on the Divine Office, *Lectio Divina* and Reading the Scriptures. You will find also the “Little Office of the Oblates”, used by the first Oblates for many years and an alternative for those with very busy lives. Included are the Blessing of St Maurus for the sick and the “House Blessings”, used twice a year at the Abbey, and which may be adapted for domestic use. We’ve also added a piece about the late Dom Maurus Deegan, the very first Oblate Master, to whose memory the handbook is dedicated.

Three rites for Pluscarden Oblates are included: enrolment as a novice oblate, the actual Rite of Oblation, and the Renewal of Oblation. There is also a section on suggested reading, far from comprehensive, but a start!

It would be helpful to know how many people are likely to wish to purchase a copy, either hard or paper cover (we hope to keep costs for both to a minimum), so please let the Oblate Master know: oblatemaster@gmail.com

Eileen Clare Grant Obl. OSB, Handbook Editor

BOOK REVIEW

Northern Catholic History Notes, by Alasdair Roberts and Ann Dean. (Amazon: 69 pages; £6.80).

This little book is a compilation of 21 articles, written over a number of years by Alasdair for the Aberdeen Diocesan magazine, *Light of the North*, and beautifully illustrated by Ann. They cover, in suitably “bite-sized” essays, a wide range of topics, historical and biographical, ranging throughout this most northerly diocese of Britain, from Knoydart in the West, to Aberdeen in the East, and Shetland in the far North, the “Arctic Mission”. In these pages, we encounter a variety of characters (in both senses of the word), from “soldiers of fortune” – many recusant Catholics were forced to seek employment abroad where they could practise their faith while earning a living – to heroic and hard-working priests who built churches, gave aid to the poor and needy, and nurtured the faith of those who remained loyal to the Faith, in the towns and in the desolate scattered communities of the Highlands.

We meet many members of this part of Scotland’s notable recusant Catholic families, including the Leslies, the Gordons and the Frasers, then later, the Hays and the Ogilvie-Forbes. In other chapters, we encounter members of the clergy, some of whom risked their lives to preserve the Old Faith in hostile penal times, especially at Scalán, the secret seminary in the Braes of Glenlivet. Notables here include Bishop George Hay and Abbé Paul Macpherson. After Catholic Emancipation, we’re told, 3 churches were built here by the latter in a 7-mile area and, such were the numbers of attending Catholics, that many had to stand throughout.

Another chapter tells of the coming of the Benedictines to Fort Augustus. Alasdair writes of the numerous communities of friars who had houses in Aberdeen, most of which were ransacked and destroyed by “reforming” mobs. But we hear also of the lay faithful, from Isobel Grant of Chapelstown, with her “tales”, and

the Moran sisters of the “Cathedral Close” in Aberdeen. And no collection about Catholic people and priests in our diocese would be complete without a story about Priest Gordon of St Peter’s, Aberdeen, a man much admired and respected by Catholics and non-Catholics alike. His passing, Alasdair writes, “was marked by the city”. His funeral cortege was followed by a long procession of mourners, including the Lord Provost and several magistrates, escorted by soldiers of the 19th Highlanders. So many accompanied him on this final journey that they were still leaving the church in the centre of town when the coffin arrived at the Snow Kirkyard in Old Aberdeen.

The book is enhanced by Ann Dean’s charming watercolours, giving a vivid impression of our past glories. Alasdair and Ann have done a great service for the Catholics of our diocese, in highlighting the heritage we have of the courage, perseverance, compassion and, above all, faith, of our forebears.

Really there are only two kinds of monks for St Benedict: those who truly are, and those who pretend to be. What matters for him is not subtle distinctions of type, but knowing what is the authentic spirit or source of monastic life. How can we know a true monk, through all the differences of observe, time and distance? Not to discern other people, but to know whether our own path is taking us towards God, or leading us away from him? Ultimately this alone is what matters.

Negatively: to be a true monk, it isn’t necessary to live in community. It is necessary to be a combatant. Not one who seeks a gentlemen’s club of the spiritual life. Monastic life is not a sun-drenched holiday beach, but a mountain climb, or a sailing across the ocean, whether alone or in a team. The danger is not a little sun burn on the nose, but to fall into the abyss.

Dom Guillaume Jedrzejczak