

Pluscarden Benedictines

No. 192 News and Notes for our Friends Advent 2020

Contents

Fr Abbot's Letter	2
From the Annals	5
News from St Mary's	14
Fr Martin's Silver Jubilee of Profession	15
The Pluscarden Arms	17
Fr Benedict's Silver Jubilee of Ordination	23
The Angel Icons	26
The True Vine Vestment	29
Dickens's "Catholic" Carol	30
Autumn at Pluscarden	33
Pluscarden 1230 Pilgrimage	35

Cover: Autumn at Pluscarden – Apple Picking

Back Cover: The True Vine Vestment

FR ABBOT'S LETTER

Dear Friends,

On the night following VE Day in 1945, the sky over London was bright with the light of many fires, as it had been night after night during the War; only now the light came from bonfires lit in celebration. Once more the city's searchlights were turned on and up. Some were aimed to form intersecting beams of light in the air. During the war, such intersecting beams would have been aimed at incoming bombers. Now, they guided the eyes of onlookers to a place in the air, over the cross on the dome of St Paul's.

We devote the month of November to prayer for our dead, beginning with the Feast of All Souls, on which we heard the conclusion to Jesus' priestly prayer in St John's Gospel:

“Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to behold my glory which you have given me in your love for me before the foundation of the world. O righteous Father, the world has not known you, but I have known you; and these know that you have sent me. I made known to them your name, and I will make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them” (Jn 17:24-26).

This prayer of Jesus, his last to, and for, his disciples before he goes to his Passion and Death, is like a great beam of light shining up into the darkness.

St John makes a connection between Jesus' priestly prayer and all that follows: with these words, he sets across the Kidron valley into the garden, where he will be betrayed. What follows in John is not just something that *happens* to Jesus, but mysteriously he *does* it; he surrenders himself; and when it is over, at his death, he can say with reference to all his work of redemption, “It is done.” This – that the suffering and death of Jesus are not the triumph of evil and negativity, but the fulfilment of the most meaningful thing

ever done in our world, his life and work, – makes his suffering another beam of light shining out of the night that falls around him.

Jesus' prayer lifts up our hearts. Evoking our experiences of home and being with our loved ones, it invites us to look forward to when we shall be united with him in love, at home with the Father. He draws us so completely into his prayer that in our hearts we are already there, where he now is.

Certainly, Jesus' actions following the prayer go to the same place: he dies precisely so as to gather the scattered children of God, to bring us all home. But for now, it hardly seems so. What follows immediately is the coming of the dark, the scattering of the disciples, the apparent victory of evil, death. Yet our faith draws these events into our hearts with our own experiences of separation and loss and lifts us up.

So, as winter presses in, the days shorten, and our thoughts turn towards the endings of things, we feel our mortality and a natural sadness. We draw comfort from happy memories, and, please God, present experience, of family, friendship and home. We remember Jesus' promises, which assure us that these things are a foretaste of what is to come.

The sadness of things on the one hand, promise and comfort on the other: in winter, they seem opposites. We don't have to reconcile them or choose between them. The sadness is not an intruder; it can be accepted as it is, along with the welcome promise of Jesus. Human beings feel sadness at the thought of death, and not only the already present experience of separation from loved ones, but also the sadness of our own death. Certainly, we hope for eternal happiness, but we leave behind our familiar world. Even Saints felt this. The Curé d'Ars, when Viaticum was brought to him, said how sad it was to receive Jesus in the Eucharist for the last time. We know Jesus was sad at the death of his friend Lazarus, though he would raise him, and he felt terrible anguish in anticipation of his own death.

We can use both our sadness and the prayer of Jesus with its promises as beams of light, both lifting our minds and hearts

upwards. Perhaps we shall see the point where they converge and cross. Perhaps for now it is enough to know that they do converge, that they do cross, beyond our sight, and we keep looking up.

Yours devotedly in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Fr Anselm". The "t" is written as a simple vertical stroke with a horizontal crossbar. The "Fr" is written in a cursive style, and "Anselm" is written in a more formal, slightly cursive hand.

Errata

Pluscarden Pentecost Lectures

Apologies to readers – and lecturers! – for errors at the beginning of the list of Pentecost Lectures. The corrected list begins as follows:

- 1994 – Fr Aidan Nichols OP – Jesus Christ
- 1995 – Fr Paul McPartlan – The Eucharist makes the Church
- 1996 – Fr Thomas Weinandy – The Father’s Spirit of Sonship
- 1997 – Fr Tom Norris (Maynooth) – Hans Urs von Balthasar
- 1998 – Patrick Sherry – The Holy Spirit
- 1999 – Fr Ian Ker – Newman & the Church of the Next Millennium
- 2000 – Canon Michael Evans – Sharing God’s Mission

Quotations

Apologies also for the unfortunate slippage of digits at the end of our quotations from Benedict XVI’s *Spe Salvi*. The correct references are n.30 (p.14), n.32 (p.18), n.38 (p.23).

FROM THE ANNALS

AUGUST 2020

4th: Br Michael went into Elgin to do the shopping. He called at Curry's in order to make arrangements for a replacement washing machine to be delivered because the old one broke down while under guarantee. He had to go over all sorts of hurdles to make arrangements.

6th: Feast of the Transfiguration. This is the patronal feast of Kristo Buase Monastery in Ghana.

7th: Recollection Day. After Mass we had the usual short community meeting. Br Michael pointed out that we now had a new robot mower. The old one could not be repaired.

8th: Br Michael set up notices from the gate and all up the back drive and into the laundry room to direct the drivers who were to deliver and plumb in the new washing machine. The machine arrived shortly before we were due to go into Mass. The driver and the plumber were grateful for the clarity of the instructions. The machine was ready when we came out of Mass.

Lewis Scarpellino came out of quarantine and went into the novitiate for his month's trial period. Fr Mark presided at first Vespers of the 19th Sunday of Ordinary Time.

9th: NINETEENTH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME. Fr Mark presided at Conventual Mass and preached.

10th: Feast of St Laurence. Today we went to Elgin for a barbecue with the Dominican Sisters. It was unusual because of social distancing. Fr Giles said Mass at Pluscarden at the usual time of 9.00, but the Conventual Mass was said later at Greyfriars in Elgin. Terce was at 10.15, after which we departed for Elgin. Mass in Elgin began at about 11.15. The priests concelebrated, while the community of Pluscarden Abbey sat in the nave of the church while the Dominicans were in the choir.

Lunch took place in the small cloister garth at Greyfriars at four tables with one sister to each table. The meal was soup, burgers and a sweet. The sky had been overcast early in the day,

but the sun came out strongly during the meal. It was a most enjoyable gathering.

12th: We heard that a train had crashed at Stonehaven on account of the rain with three dead and six injured.

13th: Sr Tamsin Geach is staying alone at St Scholastica's; she is here for Fr Martin's Silver Jubilee of Profession.

14th: The community meeting took place after Mass. There were some announcements in preparation for Fr Martin's Silver Jubilee of Profession, which takes place this Sunday. Sr Margaret Byrne arrived this afternoon before Vespers. She has come for the Jubilee and is staying at St Scholastica's.

16th: SOLEMNITY OF THE ASSUMPTION. This is our patronal feast and Fr Martin made profession on this feast twenty-five years ago. Due to the coronavirus regulations, Fr Martin was unable to celebrate as fully as he and the community would have liked. He did make a great effort to celebrate the day as well and as joyfully as he could. He presided at the Sunday public Mass at eight o'clock in the transepts. Conventual Mass took place an hour later than usual at 11.00 and in the main church. This church cannot take as many laity under the covid-19 social distancing regulations. At this Mass, there were people, appropriately distanced, in the transepts and in the transept aisles. The centre doors behind the altar were opened, allowing them some view of the main altar.

Fr Abbot presided. He gave a homily, after which Fr Martin renewed his vows. Sext followed and lunch started about 15 minutes after the end of Mass. Only the community could be at the lunch. The gaudeamus to celebrate the jubilee began at 5.45. We saw a documentary about the Cistercian monastery of Mount Saint Bernard Abbey near Leicester. We ate supper during the gaudeamus. Compline was in the Lady Chapel afterwards.

18th: Archbishop Bernard Longley came to Mass today with a friend.

20th: First Dies Non. The day began windy, but remained sunny and pleasant. Many of the brethren went out for the day. There was a Common Room tea in the afternoon as is customary.

21st: Second Dies Non. As there were no antiphoners at Sext or None, these offices were sung *recto tono*.

22nd: Before Vespers Fr Abbot gave a conference. Fr Martin presided at first Vespers of the twenty-first Sunday of Ordinary Time.

23rd: TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME. Fr Martin was hebdomadary and so presided and preached at Conventual Mass.

24th: FEAST OF ST BARTHOLOMEW (SILVER JUBILEE OF ORDINATION OF FR BENEDICT). Due to Covid-19 there could not be many guests. Mass was at 11.00, at which Fr Benedict presided and preached. Sext followed the Post-Communion Prayer and lunch was twenty minutes after the end of Sext. There was a refectory tea at 4.00 and Vespers was at 4.30.

Rather than a film, Fr Benedict had arranged through Peter Zanré for a concert by the Moray String Quartet in the church. The quartet kindly played for an hour from about 6.00, after which the community had supper in the calefactory.

27th: Memoria of St Monica. Fr Abbot and Br Finbar drove over to Kyle of Lochalsh in connection with a lady who wishes to become a diocesan hermit. They had a successful day and returned late in the evening.

Some pears came in from the garden; many of them are still hard.

30th: TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME.

SEPTEMBER 2020

1st: Annual Outing to Hopeman. We are rather a large group to live in the one house, but we do, so we did not have to keep two metres from each other and so forth. After Mass we cleared up and got changed into casual clothing. Most of the community set off as soon as they were ready. With Rita, Brs Simon and Daniel cooked bacon, sausages and burgers, putting them into expanded polystyrene containers as well as making coffee and so forth. They put all the eatables and more into the van and drove over to

Hopeman, where they received a warm welcome at the beach hut, lent to us by the Coate family.

The weather was clear, warm and sunny. The tide was in as we arrived. Some few brethren dipped more than a toe in the sea, others went for hikes, while others strolled or lazed. Of course, the brethren ate what was edible and experimented with various combinations of flavours from all that was available.

As the tide went out a gang of four took up the petanque boules and played on the now hard sand. Play continued until the ice-cream arrived. This generally is the final traditional moment of the outing. Licking the final cone, the brethren then loaded the vehicles and returned to the Abbey for Vespers, Compline, supper and bed.

3rd: Memoria of St Gregory the Great. It is customary for the precentor to preside at Mass today. Fr Benedict abided by the custom.

4th: Recollection Day. The now customary, short community meeting took place after Mass. Fr Abbot gave a conference. We exposed the Blessed Sacrament from the beginning of Sext until after Vespers.

5th: Fr Giles presided at first Vespers of the 23rd Sunday of Ordinary time.

6th: TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME. Fr Giles presided at Conventual Mass and preached the homily.

8th: Feast of the Birthday of Our Blessed Lady (Anniversary of the Resumption of Monastic Life at Pluscarden, 1948).

Today the Dominican sisters from Elgin came to lunch. We sat at long, lightweight tables with collapsible tubular legs, hiding their plastic tops under paper banqueting roll. The tables are over six feet long. In order to preserve social distancing, we set up four sets of tables, each in a T shape. A sister sat at the far end of the T while three or four monks sat at the crossbar of the T.

Rita Sim cooked the meal, which was much enjoyed. Despite the distance between guests and hosts, we were able to maintain conversation.

As usual on this day we followed Vespers with Benediction and *Te Deum* to give thanks for the graces received in the past seventy-two years.

12th: After Mass we had the usual community meeting. Fr Abbot gave a conference shortly before Vespers. Fr Mark presided at first Vespers of the twenty-fourth Sunday of Ordinary Time.

13th: TWENTY-FOURTH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME. Fr Mark presided at Conventual Mass and preached.

14th: Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross. Today was a pleasant warm day. The first fields in the valley were harvested in July. There have been several wet days since then. Today the field beside the abbey to the east was finally harvested. The combine was running until after dark.

We venerated the relic of the true Cross at Vespers. We did not kiss the relic, as we would have done before Covid-19, but bowed profoundly before it.

15th: Memoria of Our Lady of Sorrows. Moray Council has granted permission for a housing development at Abbeylands, just over the Black Burn from the Abbey ground. A reporter from the *Press & Journal* came this afternoon for comment.

Br Joseph returned from Birmingham today. He has been at Kingstanding, the house of a community of former Anglican nuns near Birmingham. While there he has been doing community business, seeing family, and especially trying to find time to study and complete essays. He is in quarantine at the lodge for the next fourteen days.

We greeted Br Cyprian for his feast after supper.

16th: Feast of St Ninian. In Scotland this is the feast of St Ninian, founder and patron of the diocese in Galloway. Elsewhere it is the feast of St Cyprian of Carthage.

We greeted Fr Matthew after supper to celebrate the 60th anniversary of his arrival at Quarr Abbey.

18th: Second Dies Non. Br Simon went into Elgin in order to take an exam at 8.30 am. One of the Dominican sisters invigilated.

As today was their dies non, the novitiate had a novitiate tea.

19th: Fr Abbot gave a conference before Vespers. Fr Martin presided at first Vespers of the twenty-fifth Sunday of Ordinary Time.

20th: TWENTY-FIFTH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME. Fr Martin presided at Conventual Mass and preached.

We greeted Fr Matthew after supper for his feast day, then dispersed.

21st: Feast of St Matthew. We had chocolates in honour of Fr Matthew's feast-day at recreation after supper.

22nd: As part of the application for building permission for the South Range we had a geological survey company drilling at and near the site of the proposed building.

23rd: Memorial of St Pio. Because of the publicity which has come about as a result of the recent decision of Moray Council to permit a housing development at Abbeylands, a TV news camera team was here during Mass today. They filmed at Mass and conducted interviews afterwards.

The geological crew did more drilling today, probably the final.

24th: We greeted Br Finbar for his feast.

25th: The Mass today was a requiem for the repose of the soul of Abbot Alfred, on the anniversary of his death. It is also the feast of St Finbar.

26th: There was a funeral today of the ashes of an oblate. Three of the family were present, and she was buried in the cemetery.

Before Vespers, Fr Abbot gave a conference. He then presided as hebdomadary at first Vespers of the 26th Sunday of Ordinary Time.

27th: TWENTY-SIXTH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME. Fr Abbot presided and preached at Conventual Mass.

28th: Fr Peter Kelly arrived this afternoon before Vespers.

After supper we greeted Bros Michael and Gabriel for their feast days. We ate chocolates at recreation in celebration.

29th: Feast of St Michael and all Archangels. Br Michael is the cellarer and today is his feast. We have the custom of having

bacon and eggs on the cellarer's feast day. This year we also had chips as well as mushrooms and tomato with them.

30th: Today Br Joseph returned from the lodge. He is going immediately into various activities.

This morning Colin Sim and others were chipping wood for the boilers. Just as they finished, it came on to rain heavily. In the course of the afternoon leaks appeared in the library, the East cloister and the chancel.

OCTOBER 2020

1st: Br Joseph with Colin Sim took apples in the van to be juiced this afternoon.

2nd: Recollection Day. At noon Fr Abbot gave a conference on St Luke's Gospel. After the conference, he exposed the Blessed Sacrament. It remained exposed until after Vespers while the brethren took it in turns to watch before the Blessed Sacrament. As usual on a Friday, there was a short meeting afterwards.

3rd: Memorial of Blessed Columba Marmion OSB. This is the anniversary of Fr Abbot's blessing in 2011.

Fr Prior Benedict presided as hebdomadary at first Vespers of the twenty-seventh Sunday of Ordinary time.

4th: TWENTY-SEVENTH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME. Fr Prior presided and preached at Conventual Mass.

Fr Martin's brother Peter arrived today to stay at the lodge. His other brother Timothy is due tomorrow.

5th: Feast of the Dedication of Aberdeen Cathedral. Today's weather was more mixed.

6th: Normally, the community receive their annual influenza injection at the Abbey from the district nurses. Fr Mark received an appointment to go himself for the injection at Elgin Community Sports' Centre at Linkwood. He kept the appointment, but Br Cyprian, the infirmarian, is getting in touch with the clinic to see if we can have the injections as a community, as we usually do. This will stop a trickle of monks going in on different days at different times, often needing drivers and, in some cases, carers.

10th: Fr Abbot gave a conference on St Luke's Gospel with reference to *lectio divina* before Vespers. At Vespers Fr Giles presided at first Vespers of the twenty-eighth Sunday of Ordinary Time.

11th: TWENTY-EIGHTH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME. Fr Giles, presided at Conventual Mass and preached.

Mgr Patrick Burke of St Andrews and Edinburgh Diocese arrived today to spend a week at the Coate family's cottage at Foresterseat.

13th: The juice from the apples sent for juicing last week returned today.

14th: Today there was a delivery of stone for a mason to make different styles of stone panels. These different styles will be adjudged by Historic Scotland to find out which style of rubble building would be appropriate for the South Range.

15th: First Dies Non. Many of the brethren went out. In the afternoon, there was the customary common-room tea.

16. Second Dies-Non. At the short meeting after Mass Br Michael mentioned the arrival of the stone.

The novitiate had its customary novitiate tea in the afternoon before Vespers. The two novices are to be joined by Lewis Scarpellino. Lewis arrived this afternoon with his family. They are staying in the lodge tonight. When they go, Lewis will stay in St Benedict's for two weeks' quarantine.

17th: Before Vespers, Fr Abbot gave a conference. At first Vespers of the twenty-ninth Sunday of Ordinary Time Fr Mark presided as hebdomadary.

18th: TWENTY-NINTH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME (Mission Sunday). Fr Mark presided at Conventual Mass and preached. There was a letter for Mission Sunday, read after the Post-Communion Prayer.

Fr Dunstan at Petersham has multiple health problems. Before Compline Fr Abbot made a special request for prayers for his health.

19th: Br Finbar gave tonsures to the community this morning.

Baxter the cat is limping badly this morning and is to go to the vet tomorrow.

20th: Baxter the cat went to the vet who trimmed his claws and gave him drugs for his other conditions. Rita Sim also did the weekly shopping.

22nd: Rain fell heavily overnight. Water came under the north door of the transept. Br Michael used a dustpan with a rubber strip to clear the concrete path to the door of lying water. He also mopped up the water on the floor of the transepts. Meanwhile outside, the burn had risen to such a degree that it just entered the second arch before the water-level fell. The day itself was mostly dry and overcast.

23rd: There was more heavy rain overnight, though again the daylight hours were mostly dry and even sunny, though there were some showers in the sunshine.

24th: Fr Abbot gave a conference just before Vespers. Fr Martin is the hebdomadary for the coming week and presided at first Vespers of the thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time.

25th: **THIRTIETH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME.** Fr Martin presided at Conventual Mass and preached.

26th: A dunnock found its way into the main church and could not find its way out. It perched on various ledges in the church causing dust and dirt to fall into the choir.

This afternoon the team from the district nurses came to give flu injections to those of the community who have not already had one.

27th: We greeted Br Simon for his feast-day after supper and at recreation ate home-made chocolates which had been made by Br Michael.

30th: We held the usual meeting of the community after Mass. Fr Abbot gave some details of our approaching community retreat.

Lewis Scarpellino has joined the community as a postulant.

31st: Fr Abbot gave a short conference before Vespers. He is in fact the hebdomadary for the coming week, but he presided at first Vespers of All Saints in his role as Abbot.

NEWS FROM ST MARY'S MONASTERY

This year on September 14, the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, we began a new custom. We decided to venerate publicly a relic of the Holy Cross, which we have on display in our monastery. It was given to us a few years ago by our long-term friend, Fr George Berthold, who died earlier this year in February. At the end of Mass we all venerated the relic individually, but because of COVID-19 restrictions, we didn't kiss it. Instead we bowed before it while it was held up by Fr Gregory. The relic was then on display for the rest of the day until Vespers.

In September we had an observer here living with community for a month to discern his monastic vocation. His name is Stephen Watson, a native of Texas, who currently lives in Nebraska. With the COVID-19 crisis the beginning of his observership was a little different. Stephen had to quarantine in the guesthouse for a while until he received a negative result on a COVID test. As soon as he was cleared he was able to reside in our monastery and begin his observership.

From October 19 to 23 we had our annual community retreat. Due to the COVID-19 situation we didn't have someone from outside the community come to conduct the retreat. Instead we listened to some recorded talks on monastic life and spirituality. Normally we have conferences in the church but this time, since the talks were pre-recorded, we had them in the sisters' priory since the acoustics were better there for listening to recordings.

Work is now complete on our carriage house renovation. We are now adding the finishing touches, such as moving books into the house library, decorating the walls, moving in furniture and so forth.

The garden season is now over as it has started to snow here. Br Benedict Joseph has put a lot of work into increasing the size of the garden. We now have several new raised beds, and he has planted a variety of new vegetables and fruits, such as eggplants, peppers, strawberries, melons and herbs of various sorts.

DIC

FR MARTIN'S SILVER JUBILEE OF PROFESSION

Fr Martin is a rare kind of monk. St Benedict says there are four kinds of monks. You will not find among them Fr Martin's kind. St Benedict is cautious about admitting persons of this kind into the monastery, and he avoids classifying them. He wants any distinctive collective identity such persons might have to be submerged in the community. One refers of course to priests.

However, monastic history sometimes defies monastic tradition. The great figures of the modern Benedictine revival were often secular priests who became monks. These were men of bold imagination and initiative, without whom the monastic world now would be much the poorer: Prosper Guéranger, founder of Solesmes, the Wolter brothers who founded Beuron, Père Muard, founder of La Pierre-qui-Vire, later Blessed Columba Marmion. And Fr Martin.

These were great priests, who made enormous contributions to the monastic life because they were great priests, and we remember them with gratitude and veneration. If the monastic tradition expresses reluctance to accept priests into the ranks of monks, it isn't out of lack of love and respect for the priesthood and priests. On the contrary. It is out of respect, a recognition that the priesthood is a vocation complete in itself, containing a complete programme for a man's life to which he gives his whole person. Why then should a priest become a monk? One might say also of a monk who goes on to be a priest, why, since the monastic vocation also is complete in itself? I don't intend to answer those questions. We have before us the evidence that it can and does happen.

When a man is both a priest and a monk, does this mean he has two vocations? That would seem strange, like saying of a married person that he or she has two vocations, to be a spouse, and to be a parent. Surely it is one vocation, realized in a diversity of relationships. Vocation is not a job to be done or a role to be filled. It is a call from the Lord that gives direction to the entirety

of one's life, to which the response is total commitment of one's self, not a balancing act.

The vocation of a monk-priest is one vocation. There are different ways in which it is arrived at. Most often, a man is a monk first. The later acceptance of priesthood is a development of his monastic vocation. The possibility that a monk might become a priest says something about the monastic vocation: the prayer for the Church and world; the pastoral dimension that can extend outside.

The possibility of a priest becoming a monk says something about the priesthood. A priest's pastoral care is not confined to the time he spends with his people or his physical proximity to them. Retired priests have not really retired. They are completing their ministry to all who have been part of their flock, through their prayer and especially their daily offering of the Mass.

Once a priest, like the Good Shepherd, has taken one of the flock onto his shoulders, as it were, he doesn't put them down, he carries them wherever he goes. When he moves on to a new place, he takes with him all those he has cared for, in the spirit.

Fr Martin, following the example of Our Lord Jesus Christ, is relentless in pursuit of every member of his flock, and having found a sheep he never lets it go. For him being a monk has not meant leaving the flock. It has given him a wider vision so he can keep them all in view, and can go to them, in the spirit, in whatever crevasse they might have fallen into or on any isolated ledge or peak where they might have stranded themselves.

Most suitably his years of monastic profession are framed by the Feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The Good Shepherd, having taken to himself flesh from the Blessed Virgin, never let go of that flesh, never abandoned it to the power of death, but carried it to the throne of God, where she shares already in the fullness of his resurrection, in anticipation of the resurrection from the dead of all who have fallen asleep in Christ. May she who has kept Fr Martin all these years continue to protect him and keep him faithful to his vocation in the years to come.

Fr Abbot

THE ORIGINS AND MEANING OF PLUSCARDEN PRIORY'S ARMS.

Pluscarden is fortunate in possessing very striking and properly matriculated arms; various theories about their origins have been advanced. Thanks to the kindness of Sir Malcolm Innes of Edingight we are in a position to supply our readers with unimpeachable facts, thus putting an end to theory and speculation.

On page 36 of the second, revised and enlarged edition (1956) of his Scots Heraldry, Sir Thomas Innes of Learney, then Lord Lyon King of Arms, makes mention of the granting to Pluscarden Priory (6th April 1550, Lyon Register xxxvii, 151) of the Prior's armorial bearings. Behind that simple mention lies a whole story...

On 23rd November 1949, the Lyon wrote to Abbot Wilfrid Upton. He had been looking into the old seals of the Priory of Pluscardine,

“and these essentially consisted of two, one with three niches with figures in them, which may be regarded as non armorial, and another containing rather an elaborate device with a St. Andrew's cross and two stars in chief and in base a human being or human spirit escaping from the mouth or clutches of the devil towards Christ. It is a crude device and is like a number of badges of American States, and requires to be reduced to orderly terms to make it a good coat-of-arms. I should say, however, that it is intended in part to be heraldic, and it is certainly quite capable of being reduced to heraldic simplicity.”

He goes on to make suggestions as to how this should be done, and why:

“I would suggest that there should be a chief upon which are placed St Andrew's cross and two stars, relating to the Province of Moray and the dedication to St. Andrew. In base I would suggest that the elaborate design could be simplified into a hellish monster with a human arm issuing from its mouth and firmly grasping a cross crosslet fitchee issuing from the base, symbolical of the fact that through their grasp of the cross the evil monster is unable to

succeed in devouring the faithful.”

He raises the possibility of having a complete human body, “with the monster only grasping the feet or suchlike,” but goes on to observe that such a solution would not result in “quite such spectacularly simple heraldry” and there would be the risk that “the beautiful simplicity which makes heraldic shields easily memorised” might be lost, and the striking juxtaposition of gold and black.

The ecclesiastical hat and tassels above the crozier might be white, rather than the usual black, in view of Pluscardine’s occupation by White Monks?

As Sir Malcolm points out, “The important point was that the relatively crude device on the second seal was deemed to constitute ‘ancient use’ of armorial bearings prior to the Lyon King of Arms Act of 1672, and such use enabled a **matriculation** of arms to be effected rather than the issuing of a new Patent of arms.” His father, in his letter, points out to Abbot Wilfrid that this would allow the record to be made in the Public Register of All Arms and Bearings in Scotland at the cheaper government fee of £18.10.6. “The parchment [which has been framed and now hangs in the Dunbar Vestry sacristy] becomes the title-deed to the coat-of-arms, and the Priory is thenceforth entitled to the protection of its arms under the Scottish Acts of Parliament.”

Evidently, Sir Thomas had visited Abbot Wilfrid at Pluscarden, as he goes on to say,

“As I mentioned to you at Pluscardine, Abbeys and Priors were not abolished by the changes of 1560 [a delicate reference to the Reformation], and accordingly the titles of Abbot and Prior continued to be used throughout most of the 17th century in Scotland, and there is no reason why the arms of a Priory should not be treated as an entity capable of recognition under the Acts of Parliament.”

This elicits a swift response from Abbot Wilfrid, writing on the 26th (an indirect testimony to the speed of the postal service). He is very pleased with Sir Thomas’s “invaluable suggestions” and

agrees with the suggestion of a white hat and tassels, but the crozier gives him pause: “I am wondering a little bit about the crozier, as to whether this is justified at the present time” – croziers are for Abbots and Abbeys, and although “I should very much like to leave the crozier in, if it is in order, but doubt if it would be the correct thing to do... I would like to know your opinion about this point.”

He expresses his appreciation for the cheaper rate of Government due and his thanks for the Lyon’s interest in and investigation of the matter.

Abbot Wilfrid’s letter receives a swift response from Sir Thomas, who wrote on 29th November,

“I am glad you like the suggestion I have made for conventionalizing the old seal into simple and striking heraldic emblazonment, and also that you like the white hat and tassels which I shall be very happy to put in the Register. It is to be a further interesting piece of heraldic definition in matters ecclesiastical.”

He then goes on to deal with Abbot Wilfrid’s scruples about the crozier – one wonders if he feared the Prior of Pluscarden might take to himself airs on the strength of such an ornament?

“I quite appreciate what you say regarding the crozier, but it is undoubtedly the case that at any rate the last two Priors of Pluscarden, Dunbar and Seton, both used croziers behind their shields. Perhaps the Priors in Scotland who had rather an important position and sat in Parliament may have assumed the crozier where this would have been abbatial insignia in other realms. If you feel you would like it included, my sentiment is that there is no reason why I should not incorporate such a crozier, but it may well be that we should do something special to make it, as a subsidiary form, appropriate to a Prior and keep it distinct from the varieties which are heraldically depicted for Bishops and Abbots.”

He then spells out the different styles of crozier:

“The Bishop gets a golden crozier with the end of the crook pointing downwards; the Abbot’s crozier, golden so far as I know,

though we have not actually recorded one since the statute of 1672, had an end that turned inwards. It occurs to me for your consideration whether it would be appropriate, if a crozier is allowed to a Prior, to make it of silver with the crook end turned inwards. Now that Pluscardine is recording arms, it is quite possible that Fort Augustus might bring up the question of an Abbot's achievement, which would be very interesting."

Fort Augustus certainly used arms (though there was some difficulty relating to use of a charge referring to the Lovat connection), and clearly at the date of this correspondence Nunraw Abbey, founded in 1946, had not recorded arms.

Abbot Wilfrid's reply is not long in coming, he has an eye to the future, when Pluscarden becomes an Abbey, and thinks an Abbot's crozier, even if jumping the gun, will do. Some of his monks, of a carping turn, thought it possible that the two gouts of flame might be mis-read as horns, and suggested the insertion of a "third flame" – though what was their acquaintance with fire-breathing monsters, and the number of orifices from which they flamed, is unclear! He also raises the question of a motto.

On 16th December, Sir Thomas, a humble man, admits that he had depicted two horns atop the monster's head, "in order to make it a particularly hellish animal!" and he accepts the suggestion of tongues of flame, but since the beast's mouth is already full of human arm, "I think it will have to snort the tongues of flame out of its nostrils, which I believe is a particularly dragonish piece of behaviour." In order to avoid misunderstandings, he thinks two spouts of flame per nostril will "prevent anyone taking them for tusks or something of that sort." He promises to investigate the question of a motto.

There is evidently a gap in the correspondence, presumably in relation to the motto. Fr Alberic Styles, in a letter of 17th March, refers to a letter from the Lyon of 16th March 1950, implying that Abbot Wilfrid had failed to enclose his suggestion for a motto, which Fr Alberic says was "IN LOCO ISTO DABO PACEM which are from the Prophecy of Haggai, II, 10, and he hopes you will approve of them."

In reply, Sir Thomas thanks Fr Alberic, approves of the motto and says he has now pronounced an Interlocutor, defining the arms, that he would now get the Extract of Matriculation prepared, and asks for the date of the Disposition by Lord Colum Crichton-Stuart of the Priory, as also the date that Disposition was recorded in the Register of Sasines, so that the parchment can be completed.

In the event, the mooted white hat and tassels did not come to pass – they are black – and the crozier is neither Prioratial nor abbatial – it is described as a bishop’s, “as appropriate for a Prior in Scotland.” The dragon is “Erminois” (like Ermine, but with the difference that the background colour of the fur is Or, rather than Argent). I asked Sir Malcolm the significance of this, and he replied,

“With regard to the fur Erminois this appears to have been employed relatively rarely, and in this instance I think that the intention may have been to fortify the fearsome nature of the dragon’s head on the Sable (black) Field (background).”

Below follows the text of the document itself:

**“EXTRACT OF MATRICULATION OF THE ARMS OF THE
PRIOR OF PLUSCARDINE**

“The Right Reverend Dom Wilfrid Upson, Order of St. Benedict (Abbot of Prinknash in the County of Gloucester) PRIOR OF PLUSCARDINE in the County of Moray, having by Petition Shewn that by a Disposition of date the 26th day of April 1945 recorded Register sasines of date the 1st September 1945 the Honourable Colum Edmund Crichton-Stuart of Pluscardine in the County of Moray, commonly called Lord Colum Crichton-Stuart, third son of the late Most Honourable John Patrick, 3rd Marquis of Bute, did dispose and convey unto the Petitioner the Priory of Pluscardine in Moray aforesaid.

“THAT whereas by legislation in the Parliament of Scotland Bishops were in various ways affected, Abbacies and Priories of Scotland remain in effect legal subjects, & that the holders of such continue to be, in the Law of Scotland, Abbots and Priors of the same, so that the Petitioner is now Prior of Pluscardine as aforesaid: THAT certain Ensigns Armorial were used long anterior to the Act 1672 cap. 47 by the Priors of Pluscardine, who also bore a pastoral staff in pale behind

their armorial escutcheon: AND the Petitioner, being now Prior of Pluscardine according to Law in Scotland, having prayed that he might bear and use the Ensigns Armorial of old belonging and appropriate unto the Priors of Pluscardine and to that effect that Ensigns Armorial might be ascertained and determined conform to the Act 1672 cap. 47 and matriculated in his name as Prior of Pluscardine in the Public Register of All Arms and Bearings in Scotland, The Lord Lyon King of Arms by Interlocutor of date 20th March 1950 Granted Warrant to the Lyon Clerk to matriculate in the Public Register of All Arms and Bearings in Scotland in name of the Petitioner the following Ensigns Armorial, *videlicet:- Per pale Or and Sable, a dragon's head Erminois issuing from the sinister armed Gules, its nostrils spouting flames proper, and issuant from its mouth a human arm proper grasping a cross-crosslet fitchee of the fourth issuant from the dexter base; on a chief Azure a saltire between two mullets Argent; behind the Shield is placed in pale an episcopal staff Argent, as appropriate to a Prior in Scotland, the whole ensigned by an ecclesiastical hat stringed with three tassels on either side Sable, and in an Escrol under the same this Motto "IN LOCO ISTO DABO PACEM."* Matriculated the 6th day of April 1950. Extracted furth of the 151st page of the Thirty-Seventh Volume of the Public Register of All Arms and Bearings in Scotland this 6th April One Thousand Nine Hundred and Fifty.

H.A.B. Lawson
Lyon Clerk
Keeper of the Records"

We are very grateful to Sir Malcolm for providing copies of the documents which formed part of the process of matriculation, making this article possible, and for his friendship and help over the years.

DGC

Sadly, after a struggle with cancer, stoically borne, Sir Malcolm died in Edinburgh on September 20. One of the last things he read was the September issue of this magazine; it brought back many happy memories of his visits to the abbey with his late wife Joan. He commended this article to our readers. RIP.

FR BENEDICT'S SILVER JUBILEE OF ORDINATION ST BARTHOLOMEW, 24 AUGUST 2020

God the Holy Trinity is perfectly blessed in Himself. He is an infinity of subsistent being, needing nothing whatever outside himself. God the Father eternally begets God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit eternally proceeds from Father and Son together. These three divine Persons perpetually and infinitely rejoice in each other, and in the love and unity that They are. As absolute Truth, and absolute Goodness, God rightly praises Himself, and this praise is His endless and unbounded glory.

But then also: in order to pour out His benefits; to share His glory; to draw created beings into participation of His own infinite blessedness, God created the Universe. In the first place He made the Holy Angels, who are forever blessed by dwelling perpetually in God's presence, and by blessing Him with all the power of their pure spiritual natures. God also made the material Universe, in all its vastness and multiplicity. None of this adds anything whatever to God, but it serves in some measure as an echo, a sign, an indication of the super-abundant fullness of God's life and being, and of His boundless generosity in giving. God also made the human race. According to an inscrutable decree of His foreknowledge and predestinating plan, in the fullness of time, by a miracle of grace it's impossible ever to fathom, God himself became a human being, a man, in Christ Jesus our Lord. This man, who was also God the Son, died for our sins, around 2,000 years ago, and rose again for our justification (Rom 4:25). In him we become Sons of God by adoption. In him we are called to holiness, and destined for heavenly glory.

Those who are baptised in Christ now have the blessing, the dignity, the vocation of being able to give back to God the glory that is his due. We praise and thank God in a way that is at last truly fitting, worthy, right and just. We praise and thank Him simply for being God. We praise and thank Him for creating all things, including ourselves, out of nothing, and for giving us life and all the blessings of life that we need and enjoy. And we praise

and thank Him for sending Jesus Christ to be our Saviour and Redeemer, and our life, and our love, and our Lord.

All those blessings from God, you would have thought, should have been enough. But no: there's more. Not content with becoming Incarnate, and teaching, and working miracles, and suffering, and dying, and rising again, and sending the Holy Spirit to be with us until he comes again; Christ Jesus also gave us the Catholic Church, and the Holy Eucharist. These blessings are, as it were, supererogatory, un-looked-for, surprising; but also in themselves they most wonderfully somehow contain, express, mediate, communicate all other blessings. They respond to our deepest need, to our perfect fulfilment, and to our greatest possible happiness. To live in the communion of the Catholic Church; to partake of the Holy Eucharist: this is to live as a member of Christ's mystical Body; to belong to Him; and to possess Him as belonging, without reserve, to us.

The Holy Eucharist is given to us as our perfect sacrifice: our best means of participation in God's praise of Himself. Through the Holy Eucharist we are caught up in Christ's obedience to his Father, to the end; in his total self-gift, out of love; in his dying, in order to wash away our sins, and to unite us to God. In the Holy Eucharist we even receive Christ himself, in his Body sacrificed and his Blood poured out. We do so in order that in him no possible blessing might be held back, and that we might receive all, all, all that God has and wants to give.

Of course, the essential place for the Holy Eucharist is the Catholic Church. Receiving all God's blessings, she then pours them back, and invokes them over the whole world. She exists in the first place in order to give God glory, in Christ Jesus, by the power of the Holy Spirit. She is our mother, who nourishes and teaches us, and intercedes for us. Sometimes too she makes us suffer. Sometimes she asks us to suffer with her, and to bear the wounds she must always carry, until she is consummated in glory.

Not of the essence of the Church, but nevertheless at her heart, is monastic life. I suppose that of all men monks are most supremely blessed, in that their vocation and life is simply to thank

and praise God; to do that in which lies all the blessedness and ultimate joy of everyone. Some monks are also called to be Priests of the Catholic Church, in order to ensure the continuation in the monastery of her Sacraments, and above all the Holy Eucharist, which it is our joy to celebrate here every single day.

25 years of all that passes by with bewildering rapidity. Nothing much ever seems to happen. But at least Mass has always been said. I was wondering how often? Well, it's possible to multiply 25 by 365. To that sum you need to add one for every leap year, and subtract one for every Good Friday; but then add two for every Christmas and All Souls Day. For me the calculation is thrown out a bit because on a few particular occasions I've had to say more than one Mass in a day. On two or maybe three days – but I truly think no more than that in 25 years – I missed saying Mass altogether. That brings me to a sum of (round about) 9,206 Masses. Let me assume more or less the same for Fr Ambrose, who was ordained with me; though he's had a lot more illness than I have; but then again many more occasions for saying more than one Mass a day. Anyway, $9,206 \times 2$ makes 18,412. Each Mass, we say, has infinite value; nevertheless, the value of one Mass has been multiplied around 18,412 times, because of a ceremony conducted here, by Archbishop Mario Conti, 25 years ago. Thank God for that! A lot of blessing has been involved there, for which to thank and praise Him!

What, though, is to be said of one who, without the slightest deserving, in fact massively to the contrary, has received the gift of faith, and reception into the Catholic Church, and consecration as a monk, and ordination as a Priest, and that for 25 years? Having received so much, what is there to do – but to ask for more? Exponentially more, and more yet after that! Among other graces and blessings without number for which we all ask, one or two stand out. The grace to be conformed truly to our vocation. The grace to be able to give God true glory with our whole life. Finally, the grace to persevere in His friendship, and in the faith of the Catholic Church, to the end.

DBH

ICONS: “CLOSER COMMUNION WITH THE GOD OF LOVE”

Henri Nouwen has written, “Icons are painted to lead us into the inner room of prayer and bring us close to the heart of God. Every time I entrust myself to these images, move beyond my curious questions about their origin, history and artistic value and let them speak to me in their own language, they draw me into closer communion with the God of love.”¹

Indeed, the pictorial language of the icon can forge a path to a secret forgotten region of the human soul. Although mysterious, it can give a sense of recognition because it puts us in touch with our own numinous nature. We gaze through its beauty onto the Divine. The icon becomes therefore, as it were, an enabler for a higher presence and for an encounter with the kingdom of Heaven, man’s spiritual home.

A similar function can be attributed to angels, it seems to me: they, too, are enablers, a kind of go-betweeners. As described in the letter to the Hebrews, angels are “ministering spirits sent forth to serve, for the sake of those who are to obtain salvation” (Heb 1:14) They are ethereal figures who “mediate between heaven and earth as messengers, protectors and guides”.² Higher than humans in the hierarchy of created beings, angels are closer to God,³ although partaking the created status with us, human beings.

In my depiction of Adoring Angels, I have tried to emphasize that ethereal quality, while keeping in mind their nearness and connection to us. Minimizing the use of colour by using a limited palette, I wanted above all to depict figures of light, beauty and serenity. I used therefore mainly white for their garments, trying to create an effect of iridescence by shading and layering it with glazes of cool colour on the angel on the left and warm colour on

¹ Henri Nouwen, *Behold the Beauty of the Lord: praying with icons* (Ave Maria Press, 1987)

² Solrunn Nes, *The Mystical Language of Icons* (Eerdmans, 2009)

³ Richard Temple, *Icons, Divine Beauty* (Saqi Books, 2004)

the angel on the right. “The shining and glowing raiment”, writes Dionysius, describing the appearance of angels, “signifies the Divine likeness after the image of fire, and their enlightening.”

Two thirds of the background surface on these icons is covered with gold leaf, which represents God’s perfect and divine light. The dark greenish-brown of the soil connects the angels to the earth, showing the dichotomy heaven/earth and their function as intermediaries. Bowing respectfully to the Tabernacle, these angels are totally aware of God’s presence and providence and pay homage to Him, whilst at the same time they half-turn to us, comforting and reassuring.

The iconography here is simple and effective. We see the angel on the right raise his hands in praise and prayer, while the one on the left has his hands covered with a cloth as a sign of great reverence and humility before the Divine Presence. This was an Oriental practice passed on to the Greco-Roman world and the Roman court, and later to the Byzantine court. We see this motif in many icons, and its technical Latin name is *manus velatae* – or *manibus velatis*, veiled hands.⁴

The wings stand for power and swiftness: the angels are travellers and communicators over the distance that separates human beings from the Divine Realm. These angels have wings with peacock feather-like details. Across many cultures, peacock feathers are linked to a rich symbolism of nobility and glory, watchfulness, and also incorruptibility and immortality: the ancients believed peacock flesh did not decay after death.

The angels’ hair is neatly and elegantly curled, as in Greco-Roman art. The Byzantine-Slavic tradition has adopted the motif, giving it a spiritual dimension. The haloes attest to the angels’ holy powers, as carriers of divine authority.⁵ They wear diadem-like hair bands with floating ribbons extending behind their ears – like antennae, that can instantly alert them to the will of God or to the distress of humans.

⁴ www.russianicons.wordpress.com

⁵ Nouwen

The robes are reminiscent of those worn by men and women of ancient Greece and Rome. They consist of a tunic (*chiton*) and a cloak (*himation*), worn wrapped around the body and over one shoulder. On the fore part of the tunic we see a vertical dark stripe, woven into the fabric. This is called the *laticlave* or *clavus* (it starts at the shoulder) and it is a sign of dignity and high status. It was worn by Roman senators and other high-ranking people in ancient Rome, and we find it also on other figures depicted on icons, including Christ.

The luminosity and light-suffused quality of these images is enhanced by pure white highlights on the angels' countenance and garments. In iconographic tradition, pure white highlights represent and remind us of the Transfiguration of Christ on Mount Tabor: this is the triumph of Light over Darkness; this is the uncreated Light of God's presence.

In these dark times of uncertainty and sadness, I like to think of angels watching over us, their wings "heard as far away as the outer court, like the voice of God Almighty when he speaks" (Ezekiel 10:5.)

And I like to repeat to myself these words of Julian of Norwich: *All Shall Be Well, and All Shall be Well, and All Manner of Things Shall be Well.*

God bless.

Maria Manuela Guerreiro

On Prayer

"Prayer is the height of our blessings and communion with God; for it is both companionship and unity with God. Just as the eyes of the body are enlightened when they look upon light, so a soul intent on God is illumined and enlightened by his inexpressible light. It is not indeed formal prayer that I refer to, but prayer offered from the heart, and so not confined to suitable times and fixed intervals, but continuing in action without ceasing day and night."

St John Chrysostom, *De Precatione* 6

THE TRUE VINE VESTMENT

The last edition of *Pluscarden Benedictines* carried an article about our St Benedict Vestment, inherited from Fernham Priory when it closed in 2002. That article evoked several responses expressing interest, with a desire to see more of the same.

Here then are some comments on another Fernham vestment held in the Pluscarden Sacristy, also made in about 1930 by Sr Mary of St Francis de Sales Rhymer, assisted by Sr Walburga Campbell. The theme of this one is Christ the Vine. The vestment was worn this year for the Maundy Thursday Evening Mass of the Lord's Supper, and also for Corpus Christi.

The fabric, rather similar to that of the St Benedict vestment, is in ivory and gold silk brocade, with a pattern of pineapples and flowers. The front of the vestment has a single wide pillar orphrey, of cream silk velvet, edged with red and gold metallic braid. On it are hand stitched silk embroideries of purple grapes with vine leaves and tendrils, in shades of greens, reds and browns. The leaves are edged with couched gold thread.

The ample back orphrey is in the shape of a Roman Cross, running the full length of the vestment. The entire orphrey is filled with a depiction of Christ crucified, in trapunto silk hand embroidery. The crown of thorns and halo are in laid gold work. Bunches of grapes, with leaves and tendrils adorn the top of the Cross, the outstretched arms, and the feet. At the base of the Cross the tendrils become heavy. At the extreme base of the orphrey they entwine an oval space, in which the embroidered word *Sitio* ("I thirst") appears. The cross, the neck and the edges of the vestment are edged in braid. Gold coloured satin is used for its lining. With the vestment come the accompanying stole, maniple, Chalice veil and burse. All of these are in gold fabric, adorned with rather small panels, each depicting a similar vine leaf pattern. All remain in pristine condition, having always been most carefully stored.

As before, descriptive details here are drawn from the report of NADFAS (2011-2015).

DBH

DICKENS'S "CATHOLIC" CAROL

Every Christmas, for the past thirty years or so, I make a sort of pilgrimage back to the Victorian London of Charles Dickens. I reread his novella *A Christmas Carol* with relish and more than a little delight, happy to rediscover his wit and vivid characters. This is arguably the last of his novels written with the boundless enthusiasm and explosive genius of his youth. One has only to read his description of the lugubrious, foggy, and bitterly cold Christmas Eve that opens the story and compare it with that of Christmas morning when Ebenezer Scrooge walks about with the Ghost of Christmas Present, to see a young master of English prose at work. One imagines him being frustrated at his inability to get his quill pen to write quickly enough to capture his thoughts as dazzling prose poured forth from his brilliant brain!

Dickens's vision in this work helped crystalize his contemporaries' ideal of a perfect Christmas, as well as to re-popularize its celebration in the Victorian era. This can be seen in the oft-repeated anecdote of the father who, when he tells his young daughter of Dickens's death, receives the shocked reply, "But does that mean Father Christmas will die, too?" It is true that since the time of the Protestant Reformation, and more specifically since Cromwell and his Puritan reforms, the celebration of Christmas – so tied to the Catholic past and "Merry Olde England" – had been disappearing, and the apparition (pun intended) of *A Christmas Carol* restored it to the forefront of the public mind on both sides of the Atlantic. However, I feel that it did far more than dust off an old winter holiday and make it presentable again to the public mind – it also injected a dose of Christian morality into the world of Victorian greed and indifference.

The true genius of the story is found in Dickens's description of the *conversion* and *redemption* of his protagonist, Scrooge. I use those words on purpose, because I truly believe that *A Christmas Carol* is not only Dickens's most Christian work, but also most Catholic! How can I say this? If one googles the question "Is *A Christmas Carol* Christian?", one immediately finds dozens of

articles proposing both points of view. Most of academia seems to prefer the view that Dickens proposed a very secular Christmas, wherein the chief virtues are philanthropy, good will, cheerfulness, and sharing one's goods with those less fortunate. Dickens does mention God and Christ in the story, but only in a very oblique manner: (such as in the greeting "A Merry Christmas, Uncle! God save you!"); therefore, many authorities say that it's just a secular story. Even Dickens's greatest critic, G.K. Chesterton, points out that the story *is* a defence of Christmas, but that we "must not ask Dickens what Christmas is, for with all his heat and eloquence he does not know." Dickens was also notoriously anti-Catholic; how, then, can it be said that this is a Christian or even Catholic work?

It must be remembered that in spite of his many imperfections and grave faults of character, Charles Dickens was a practising Anglican until his death (although he did flirt briefly with Unitarianism mid-career). He believed strongly in the fundamental tenets of Christianity, and this can be seen in this story of the redemption of Scrooge's soul.

The tale begins with a brilliant description of Scrooge as a typical, Victorian man of business, sitting in his counting house like a spider in its web, expounding Malthusian and Utilitarian doctrines of over-population and the righteousness of seeking wealth and security while coldly rejecting those who solicit him for money or affection; in short, he is "a covetous old sinner." He returns home on Christmas Eve, having terrorised everyone with whom he has come into contact, to be visited by the spirit of his former business partner and sole friend, Jacob Marley. Marley, who in terms of greed and selfishness was Scrooge's equal in every way, seems to be serving a kind of *purgatorial expiation of his sins*, being forced to travel incessantly over the earth and witness scenes of poverty and suffering that he no longer has the power to change; he even speaks of having to do penance. However, we know he is not in hell because it is he who procures for his friend Scrooge the chance at what he refers to as his "reclamation": the visitation by the three Sprits of Christmas.

These three Ghosts of Christmas Past, Present, and Future bring Scrooge progressively into an ever deeper *examination of conscience* – by seeing where he comes from and how his choices made in the past affect him, how he is seen in the eyes of those in his present (Bob Cratchit and Fred, his nephew), and faced with a gruesomely imminent death, he is confronted over and over again with his self-righteous, hateful attitudes and their effects on those around him. We see almost immediately how these scenes begin to affect him and bring him, over the course of the three nightly visits, to not just a secular change of heart, but to a true *conversion of soul*. Not only does he become the caring and sharing uncle and businessman that secular academia is comfortable focusing upon, but as soon as he is able to get dressed on Christmas morning, he goes to church for the first time in years.

I don't mean to say that Dickens set out to write a specifically Christian story; *A Christmas Carol* is neither allegory nor a fable written with a view towards Christian apologetics. But, somehow in spite of himself, Catholic Christian elements keep popping up. I believe it is because the aspects of the holiday that Dickens most revelled in: the plum puddings and gin punches, the family visits, the gift-giving, the games, the ghost stories, the Christmas trees and boughs of holly, are all remnants of Merry Olde England's Catholic tradition, a tradition which was not afraid of celebrating the good things in life and making sacramentals out of meals, songs, and all that brings joy. The feast of Christ's birth had been nearly put to death by the Puritan outlawing of its celebration. Dickens, by writing this tale at one of the darkest periods of his life, when Utilitarianism and the Industrial Revolution were threatening to engulf the world in smog and grease, gave a new impetus to the rebirth of Christmas in the heart and spirit of the novella's readers. He gave us a truly Christian tale of hope and joy, and (as his friend and fellow author Thackeray stated), bestowed "a benefit upon the nation." And not only upon Britain, but upon Western Civilisation.

Br Benedict-Joseph

AUTUMN AT PLUSCARDEN

We may hear of bad news from here and there, and even find some cause for despond because of it, but at Pluscarden anyway it's not hard to find reasons for which to thank and praise God.

Merely, as it were, at the natural level: at this time of year we are surrounded by the breath-takingly beautiful colours of Autumn. Maybe they are richer and deeper even than usual? And we have rejoiced in yet another excellent Autumn harvest. May all this be a little reminder, in case one were ever needed, that the Lord does not withhold his blessings in our day, and sometimes he lavishes them in almost bewildering variety and abundance.

Autumn produce flows these days almost ceaselessly from garden to house. Already the monastery's capacious freezers are crammed to the lids with (especially) redcurrants, raspberries, gooseberries, blackcurrants and plums, plums, plums. Following all that: our picture shows an enormous pumpkin, recently brought in for consumption at supper. Outsized marrows, squash and courgettes from the same source have tended to be served at lunch.

One particular success from our poly-tunnels this year has been maize, or sweet corn. This year we've had more corn cobs appearing on the table than ever before. They make a fine accompaniment to a main meal at lunch, or an easy to prepare and most acceptable supper on their own.

Just now, though, by far the heaviest crop at Pluscarden is apples. We have a large number of varieties. Learned commentary on each is supplied at request. We consume carefully stored apples on all possible occasions, to keep ourselves both healthy and happy. But the quantity of apples far exceeds what the community could ever eat, so crate upon crate goes to the mashing and pasteurising machines, to reappear as bottled Pluscarden Apple Juice for sale, or for our own Solemnity consumption. Very good it is too, with some different blends or varieties for the connoisseur.

Our bees are all back now from their usual late summer trip up to the heather moors. Not one colony there failed this year to secure a good honey surplus. These bees had only to turn sharp left

from their apiary site, and they were straight into limitless acres of flowering ling heather. A favourable location with sufficient sunny days enabled strong colonies, headed by vigorous young queens, to produce large quantities of highly prized, utterly delicious, unmistakably distinctive heather honey.

But one colony, in the middle of the apiary, produced no heather honey at all. For reasons known only to themselves, these bees ignored the heather entirely. Instead of turning left, they turned right. Instead of heading up the hill, they headed down: towards the clover flowering all amidst the cattle pasture below. Our picture shows Br Patrick holding a comb of honey produced by these particular bees. We have of course no complaints. Clover honey is very different from heather honey, but some people even prefer it. It's more delicately flavoured, though certainly with its own unique tang: light, smooth and exquisitely delicious; a taste of a fine summer's day.

Autumn is also the time for trimming and clearing up. Br Simon has the task of maintaining in good shape the hedges of hawthorn and holly on either side of our long front drive. Our picture shows him after very many hours' work: the job now almost done!

On Prayer

Prayer is illumination of the soul and true knowledge of God. It mediates between God and men; it heals suffering and counteracts disease. It calms the soul and guides it to heaven, for prayer has no earthly life, but follows a path leading to the very heights of heaven. It transcends the created world, and in the spirit cuts through and soars above the air; it passes beyond the circle of stars, opens the gates of heaven, and taking precedence over the angels enters the very presence of the unapproachable Trinity. There it worships the deity, and is held worthy to be the companion of the king of heaven. The soul, raised by it high into heaven, embraces the Lord in an ineffable embrace.

St John Chrysostom, *De Precazione* 6

PLUSCARDEN 1230 PILGRIMAGE: DECISION, HARDSHIP, AND WHAT TO NAME THE BOOK

Sidney and Mary Lee Nolan, in their book *Christian Pilgrimage in Modern Western Europe*, make two important observations about pilgrimage sites. First, a pilgrimage site becomes a pilgrimage site when believers decide that it is and begin to act like pilgrims traveling to that site. This was certainly true of the Holy Land, which for the first 300 years after Christ had little more than a “documentary” importance to Christians. Only after Constantine’s 4th century conversion and construction of the Holy Sepulchre did the Holy Land become a pilgrimage site.

The second observation made about pilgrimage sites is that they are usually difficult to get to: the very hardship of the journey is an essential element. This was also true of the Holy Land in the Middle Ages. One need only think of Egeria in the 4th century or Margery Kempe in the 14th, two female pilgrims who chronicled the hardships they encountered while travelling to Jerusalem.

Memoir of a Pilgrimage for Eight, my account of the “Pluscarden 1230 Pilgrimage”, which took place in the summer of 2017, has just been published. The conceit of this project is that our pilgrimage from Val-des-Choues to Pluscarden somehow “reconstructs” the journey made in 1230 by medieval Valliscaulian monks, on their mission to found three priories in Scotland. Was our reconstruction accurate? Did it constitute a pilgrimage?

For starters, the 13th century monks who departed Val-des-Choues for Scotland left no record of their travels. Although, they did undertake a long journey with a spiritual goal at the end – to found new monasteries – I don’t think they would have seen themselves as pilgrims. Pluscarden didn’t yet exist, so how could it be a spiritual destination? Yet, since its construction in the Middle Ages and its reconstruction in the 20th century, Pluscarden has become a pilgrimage site because, according to the Nolans’ first criteria, the abbey’s many visitors act as if it is.

During the Pluscarden 1230 Pilgrimage, some of us dared to envision our “reconstructed” route as the basis for an established

pilgrimage path. Like the Camino de Santiago or the Via Francigena, we imagined that our reconstructed “Via Valliscaulia” might become a standard route in the pilgrimage canon. This notion was ambitious for a number of reasons. To start with, we don’t know how the Valliscaulian monks travelled from Burgundy to Scotland, or what route they took: by foot, on horseback, by sea across the channel and up the coast to Scotland? Historically speaking, any of these seems reasonable.

In contrast, the route taken by our modern-day, “reconstructed” pilgrimage was not the most direct path. For example, we began by heading south, for no other reason than we wished to visit the Valliscaulian daughter houses of Val-Saint-Benoît and Val-Croissant. In the UK, instead of going from Dover straight up the east coast to Pluscarden, we cut west from London across to Prinknash, the Benedictine monastery that founded modern-day Pluscarden. From there we headed northeast again to Edinburgh, then west again to Ardchattan, the second Valliscaulian foundation in Scotland, then north and east again, visiting the third Valliscaulian foundation at Beaulieu before finally arriving at Pluscarden. All of this zig-zagging would have seemed senseless to our medieval counterparts, but for the modern-day pilgrims it meant the chance for deeper spiritual encounters, like visiting the great cathedrals at Reims, Laon, and Westminster or connecting with other monastic communities. Although our path was “invented”, it fulfilled the Nolans’ second criteria for pilgrimage sites, that they are “difficult to get to”.

What’s with the book’s title, *Pilgrimage for Eight*? Since we don’t know how many monks left Val-des-Choues for Pluscarden, this title more readily refers to the core group of pilgrims who undertook the entire journey. Even though their numbers fluctuated as new pilgrims joined and departed on a weekly basis, I needed a catchy title.

Tea for two. Dinner for four. Pilgrimage for eight. Not bad, but would the Nolans recognize this as a pilgrimage? I’d say yes.

Phillip C. Adamo