

# **Pluscarden Benedictines**

No. 194 News and Notes for our Friends Pentecost 2021

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Cover: Br Michael singing the Exultet

Back Cover: Beatus Vir illumination by Br Cyprian Bampton OSB

## FR ABBOT'S LETTER

Dear Friends,

St Benedict concludes his Rule for Monks (the “Holy Rule” as we Benedictines say) with a chapter entitled “The Full Observance of Justice Is Not Laid Down in This Rule”. The Chapter says, in effect, that practitioners of the Holy Rule have nothing to boast about. It is a “little rule that we have written for beginners”. For the perfection of the monastic life we are to look to the Scriptures and the holy Fathers. These are “tools for the cultivation of virtues for monks who lead good lives and are obedient monks”, though they will make us who “slothful, ill-living and negligent” blush for shame.

When St Benedict says that “we” blush for shame, there is no reason to think he is being rhetorical or showing false modesty. He says one stage of humility is “that a man not only admits with his tongue but is also convinced in his heart that he is inferior to all”. This is not evidence that St Benedict had an inferiority complex! By the work of Christ’s grace, the Christian sees with ever-increasing clarity his own sinfulness and becomes proportionately less focused on the sins of others, while he does see their real goodness. St Benedict wrote from experience. We should take him at his word.

It does not follow that St Benedict sees his Rule as inferior or imperfect. He has a limited objective. He does not try to say the last word about the way to God. He wants people to find the way and know how to stay on it. He is confident that then it will take them to their goal. This explains the brevity of his teaching on the spiritual life and prayer. It also informs his provisions for the practical arrangement of daily life.

We see this in his regulation of the Divine Office and of food and clothing. Clearly St Benedict has given much thought to all these matters. He has reflected on his own experience and the needs and capabilities of others. He does his best to come up with arrangements that he thinks will work. But in all these matters he

recognizes that his is not the last word. His Rule might be practised in another climate where other clothes will be needed. Monks might need more food. Somebody might think of a better arrangement of the psalms in the Divine Office. So changes can be made.

However, the changes will come from within the institution. St Benedict is not a theoretician engaged in academic discussion, happy to try any experiment. He teaches from experience and offers his teaching as a valid introduction to the spiritual life. It is because he has experience that he expects there will be change. But the change will come from those who have followed his teaching and come to share his experience. It will come from lived experience applied to new situations or incorporating new understanding. It will not be a change of direction but an adjustment to keep on course.

This is a key to understanding what St Benedict is saying in his final Chapter. It is not that he sees the way of life he institutes as imperfect or provisional, so a monk might move on to something better. In his day it was possible for a monk to leave one monastery and find another where he might live a more advanced form of monastic life. St Benedict excludes this. He wants his monks to live and die where they are. When wandering monks looking for the more perfect monastic life come to his monastery, if they are good monks, he wants them to stay. Clearly, he has confidence that within the structures he provides the heights of perfection can be reached. There is no need to look elsewhere.

It may be that St Benedict calls his a “little rule” to avoid overwhelming the beginner. Nonetheless he knows that he is proposing a way that leads to God because it is the way of the Gospel. He wants the novice to share this confidence that he will reach his high goal. It is very necessary to have such confidence. As St Benedict foretells, there will be difficulties. It will seem that one has been led into a trap, or come to a dead end. Perseverance will be possible only by faith. A “generic” faith will not do. What is needed is confidence in a divine promise that includes the circumstances of one’s life, giving assurance that fidelity to the

state of life and the duties in which God has placed us will bring us to God.

The Holy Rule is not the last word. For those called by it to be disciples of St Benedict, it is a divine word, showing us our way to God following the Gospel. God will continue to speak to us, we shall grow in understanding. Perhaps we might wander from the path and need to be called back to it. It is a straight road and there are no “alternative routes”. This applies to all of us: God’s call to whatever state of life is ours shows us our way to God. If we keep to it, and keep listening to his voice, all we need will be provided. We shall arrive.

Yours devotedly in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Fr Andrew". The letters are cursive and fluid.

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### **Novitiate Clothing**

On Thursday, 6 May, our postulant Lewis Scarpellino was clothed as a novice, receiving the monastic name Br Andrew.

Our new novice was born and brought up in Warwickshire, England. Before coming to the monastery, he gained a degree in Classics at Oxford University. He also spent time at an Institute of Classical Languages in Rome. From this he acquired his somewhat unusual ability to converse with fluency in Latin or Ancient Greek. Since being at Pluscarden he has worked in the laundry, the refectory, the sacristy and the garden.

## FROM THE ANNALS

### February 2021

**2<sup>nd</sup>:** THE PRESENTATION OF THE LORD (CANDLEMAS). Though we could not have the laity with us, we did have a procession in the transepts after the blessing of the candles.

In the afternoon we had the traditional Candlemas community long-walk. Led by Fr Prior, we walked along the ridge of Heildon hill until we took a downward path to return home for a common-room tea before a roaring fire.

**16<sup>th</sup>:** Shrove Tuesday. There were pancakes at lunch.

**17<sup>th</sup>:** ASH WEDNESDAY. In the afternoon the Stations of the Cross were followed by a conference by Fr Abbot. The members of the community then handed in their Lenten resolutions and received their Lent books.

**21<sup>st</sup>:** FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT. Fr Giles presided and preached at Conventual Mass. Fr Prior Benedict was the celebrant at the 8 o'clock Mass, the main Mass for the laity. We are regularly livestreaming Mass, Vespers and Compline.

### March 2021

**5<sup>th</sup>:** SOLEMNITY OF ST AELRED. As usual, we celebrated St Aelred as a solemnity at which Fr Abbot presided at Office and Mass. He also preached at Mass. There was a festive lunch with meat and wine. We sang a Te Deum at Benediction after Vespers to give thanks for the reception of the Benedictine community on Caldey into communion with the Catholic Church. A gaudeamus followed shortly after Benediction.

**10<sup>th</sup>:** Feast of St John Ogilvie. This is the anniversary of Fr Abbot's profession. Lunch was still soup and fruit.

**11<sup>th</sup>:** Some of the older members of the community have received their first dose of an anti-Covid 19 vaccine. As infirmarian, Br Cyprian arranged for the remaining members of the community to be vaccinated all at the same time. We are equivalent to a care

home. A local health team gave a first dose of the Astra-Zeneca vaccine to all who had not yet received it. Some people did have side-effects; Br Patrick was especially affected.

**15<sup>th</sup>:** The mid-Lent long walk took place this afternoon.

**16<sup>th</sup>:** We now have a new cat, from the family of David Cunningham. He is to be an outside cat, living in the deep litter. He is a dark-brown/black cat with long hair and has the name Dusty. He is settling in at the moment.

In the evening after supper we greeted Br Patrick for his feast-day.

**18<sup>th</sup>:** After supper this evening we greeted Br Joseph for his feast.

19. SOLEMNITY OF ST JOSEPH. Today we follow a Sunday timetable. Fr Prior presided at Conventual Mass and preached.

**29<sup>th</sup>:** Vernal Equinox. The sacristy team covered almost all the images and crucifixes with purple cloths. St Joseph in the squint is still uncovered. Fr Abbot gave a conference on the Holy Rule and the refectory.

**22<sup>nd</sup>:** After Mass a team of two organ tuners arrived to tune the organ. In the meantime, Br Finbar gave tonsures to the community.

**25<sup>th</sup>:** SOLEMNITY OF THE ANNUNCIATION. Fr Prior presided at Office and Mass. He also preached at Conventual Mass.

**26<sup>th</sup>:** From this Sunday we will be able to have some laity at Mass. 8 o'clock Mass on Sunday will be the main Mass for the laity and they will once again have to maintain social distancing and to book places by email. After None there was an extended choir practice.

**28<sup>th</sup>:** PALM SUNDAY. The clocks went forward overnight.

Coming into choir at Vigils this morning, we were met by a much brighter choir. Br Michael has changed the lights in the ceiling of the chancel to a much brighter variety for the sake of the cameras used for livestreaming. We left Lauds shortly before 8 o'clock and found a congregation of laity in the transepts, waiting for Mass. It was good to see a congregation (of 18) from outside again.

Fr Abbot presided at Conventual Mass. We did not have a procession with the palms, but Fr Abbot did bless palms for distribution. The Gospel was the Passion according to St Mark, but this year we read it with only one reader.

## NEWS FROM ST MARY'S MONASTERY

This year Ash Wednesday was a little different due to COVID. Following the directives of our diocese, ashes were sprinkled on top of people's heads, rather than having the priest make the sign of the cross on each person's forehead. The idea was for the priest to avoid touching anyone. Likewise, the blessing of the throats on St Blaise's day, February 3, was done in a health-conscious way as well. The main celebrant simply stood at his chair and gave the blessing to the whole congregation at once at a distance, without the crossed candles.

Our Holy Week liturgy was very similar to what is normally is, although we had a few minor changes due to COVID. This year on Palm Sunday we began our procession in our newly renovated carriage house. But we didn't invite the laity inside our building, due to COVID restrictions. Upon entering the church we followed a slightly different route this time to avoid contact with the people. On Holy Thursday, we omitted the foot washing. We used our main altar as the altar of repose for the Blessed Sacrament during the watch period after Mass. This was likewise to avoid contact with the people. On Good Friday, we still had the veneration of the cross, but we bowed instead of kissing the cross. On Holy Saturday, we had an outside fire, which we didn't have last year. This year it was in a different position from where it normally is. It was closer to the church, near the end of the walkway leading to the door of the church. This enabled us to have a separation between us and the lay people, by using our driveway as a barrier. Other than that, our Holy Week liturgy was much the same as it usually is.

On March 18, Stephen Watson entered the community as a postulant. Stephen came via Nebraska, where he has lived for several years, working as a bank manager. However, he is actually a native of Texas. This is not his first experience with monastic life since, several years ago, he was a novice at Conception Abbey in Missouri. Stephen has been doing various jobs so far, such as

cleaning, cooking, assisting the gardeners, helping Br Vincent with yard work.

Finally, all of the brothers have now had both shots of the COVID vaccine.

DIC

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### **From the Annals**

**April 1<sup>st</sup>:** HOLY THURSDAY. The evening meal was a talking meal with flowers at the table and it was prepared by Rita Sim.

The Mass of the Lord's Supper began at 7.00 and followed more or less the normal form. We rang all the bells in the tower and hand bells as well at the beginning of the Gloria. From then on all bells are silenced until the Easter Vigil. There were 13 laity at the Mass. The Blessed Sacrament was not taken to an altar of repose after Mass, but was placed in the tabernacle. Compline followed and there was veneration of the Blessed Sacrament for some time after. The Blessed Sacrament was then taken to a place of safety.

**2<sup>nd</sup>:** GOOD FRIDAY. About 15 laity attended the liturgy at 3.00 which was livestreamed. It was also slightly modified from the usual. The Passion according to John was not sung in Latin but was read by three priests in English.

**3<sup>rd</sup>:** EASTER VIGIL. The Vigil began at 11.00. We had the ceremony of the Easter Fire and the lighting of the Paschal candle inside the enclosure in the cloister garth with only the community present. Fr Abbot presided at the Vigil and at Mass. The community processed to the church, led by Br Edmund carrying the Paschal candle. Br Michael sang the Exultet by the light of candles. Only a few people were in the laity chapel. There were only four readings at the Vigil, all read by members of the community. At the Gloria brethren rang the bells, while the remainder of the brethren rang hand-bells in the choir.



## HOW DO FRIENDSHIPS ENDURE?

How do friendships endure? It is certainly an interesting question. Both classical philosophy and St Thomas Aquinas applied the term friendship (*philia*, *amicitia*) to a wider range of human relationships than we are used to doing. Or rather, to be more precise, the Greek and Latin words which they used covered a wider range of meanings. Still, these terms obviously included our ordinary friendships. I cannot help but think of my best friend Paul in this context. We have known each other for over twenty years now. Our friendship endures and thrives, even though twelve years ago I entered a contemplative Benedictine monastery, while he has since become a husband and a father of four. That, plus a busy professional life, consumes more than 100% of his physical, mental and spiritual energies. We see each other a couple of times a year, at best, and yet the bond between us is stronger than ever, I would say. Why is this?

Basing myself solely on Aristotle, I could already say a great deal: true human friendship is based on virtue, on worth; there has to be a certain equality between friends and the attachment must be mutual, but once it exists, friendship provides an ideal setting for growth in virtue; this growth in its turn strengthens the bond, and so it goes... For St Thomas, this is how we prepare “the ground” for charity, which alone can carry us to God and life everlasting. Still, Aquinas would obviously want me to move beyond these basic truths and see my natural love for a friend itself as (with the help of grace) charity – so not just a mere setting for something greater, but the privileged means of achieving life everlasting. This is how we make our way to heaven: “not by bodily movements but by the soul's affections”, by enlarging the scope and the intensity of our human loves (2a2ae.24,4). Even though there can be no “natural” equality between God and man, charity (what God is in his essence and that thing “with which” we love him in our turn) is a kind of friendship! Charity “is our friendship for God arising from our sharing in eternal happiness” (2a2ae.24,2). It “is not based principally on human virtue, but on the divine goodness”

(2a2ae.23,3), expressed in “his sharing his happiness with us”. In this present life, we can only experience it within our souls where “we have intercourse with God and the angels, though imperfectly” (2a2ae.23,1). My friendship with Paul then is ultimately a participation in this “divine friendship” – a unique virtue, the highest of all virtues, which alone “attains God himself so as to rest in him without looking for any gain” (2a2ae.23,6).

Let me take a few steps back and start again. I could say that my friendship with Paul has endured because somehow we found each other equal in worth (more or less), and we mutually affirmed one another with (more or less again) the same intensity. Before that could happen, “life” somehow had to throw us together. We started off as what people would call “colleagues” nowadays (as students in the same department of the University of Warsaw) and teammates (representing our university in volleyball), not friends as such. But Aristotle would already apply the term *philia* to both of these fairly superficial connections, and St Thomas took up this broad understanding: “the chief concern of any friendship is with the main source of that shared good on which it is based” (2a2ae.26,2). In other words, any shared good can become the basis of an *amicitia*. Yet I had studied and played volleyball with dozens, if not hundreds of people over those five years, and the vast majority of these “friendships” lasted only as long as the shared good on which they were based lasted, that is, only as long as we had the same preoccupations. Moreover, I had been in relationships with women which, at the time, seemed deeper and stronger than anything else in my life – but they all ended. Not so with Paul. Our friendship has survived all sorts of losses of lesser goods over the years. Why? Because we found *each other* good somehow, I think. Man always aims at some good, Aristotle would say, even when in the middle of making a complete mess of his life. We love and desire “goodness” naturally, wherever we see it, even when we are deluded and the good is only apparent. So I can love the genuine good that comes with playing volleyball and, by extension, “love” all those who share this experience with me, especially when they are on my team and play well. But it is

slightly different when it comes to good people as such, because the “shared good” is hardly separable from them. What is more, it is also hardly separable from me, as I want to be good too. Not in some flat, moralistic sense; I just want to be a good instance of man, or even simply a good me. What happens when I see a man who appears good? “There are two things that we love in friendship,” wrote Aquinas, “our friend himself, for whom we desire good things; and the very good itself that we desire for him” (2a2ae.25,2). This “very good” in the case of people has to do with virtue, according to the classical tradition: a good man is a virtuous man; his virtue constitutes his worth as a man. Our friendship began because Paul’s goodness somehow manifested itself to me through the dispositions which constitute his character, and *vice versa* – though back then we would never think of it this way. It endured because these dispositions are stable, repeatedly manifest themselves in what he does, and so they tend to strengthen the initial affirmation. This provides an ideal setting for growth in virtue for both of us; these “two things that we love in friendship” – we love them more and more, as the “two loves” and the two friends reinforce one another.

St Thomas went further by placing friendship in the grandest of all possible schemes of things – “within” the theological virtue of charity, which then, in its turn, takes it right “into” God. I am able to love other people, including my friend Paul, because God loved me first – and that, for Aquinas, is specifically by sharing his eternal happiness with me. This is how God’s love manifested itself, this is “God’s virtue”, so to speak, through which I am able to know what he is like, to know his “character”. Astoundingly, since eternal life is what I have in common with God now, I am able to have a personal relationship with a Being utterly beyond my reach otherwise. And this, in turn, enables me to love others (with various types of love and degrees of intensity), even my personal enemies and grave sinners, ultimately as also belonging to God, as his (potential) friends. Love, says Aquinas, “derives its species from its object, but its intensity from the lover” (2a2ae.26,7). Therefore, I will naturally desire greater good for

people whom I consider nearer to God, but the nearer the person is to *me*, the more intense this desire. No two relationships in my life will be the same then; their quality will depend on people's nearness to God and their nearness to me. Or perhaps, more precisely, on my inevitably skewed perceptions of these "nearnesses".

So really, in the final analysis, my friendship with Paul endures because, to a large extent, it has *eternal* life as the shared good on which it is based. Consequently, our friendship provides us with an ideal setting not merely for further growth in virtue, though it does – it is rather a training ground for heaven. In eternity "the entire order of love will be determined with reference to God, so that the closer another is to God the more dearly will we love him and see him as our own," says St Thomas (2a2ae.26,13). In other words, the closeness to God will be the same as nearness to me. There is therefore no form of *amicitia* better than true friendship in approximating what will go on in heaven. This is the best "simulator" available, if you like. But it does not stop at this, there is one more final consolation: Paul and I will still be friends "up there", according to Aquinas (providing we both make it, of course, one can never presume that). True, closeness to God will be by far the most important factor in determining the order of our loves in heaven, but our earthly attachments will survive also – grace does not supplant nature, it perfects nature.

DSP

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### **News from Kristo Buase Monastery**

Br Louis Osei of Kristo Buase has been admitted as a student to the Pontifical Beda College in Rome, and the process of obtaining a visa for Italy is not simple. Fr Antony Buaful and Br Louis visited His Excellency Archbishop Henryk Jagodzinski, Apostolic Nuncio to Ghana, as part of the process and to obtain his help.

## SPIRITUS DOMINI: INTROIT FOR PENTECOST

Not infrequently in Gregorian Chant, the first word or phrase of an Introit (Entrance Chant at Mass) will somehow set the tone for the whole liturgy being celebrated. We might think for example of the Christmas Day Mass – *Puer natus est* – with its triumphant opening leap of a fifth, set in the exuberant seventh mode; or Easter Day – *Resurrexi* – with its gentle, discreet, deeply interior affirmation, so replete with happiness, set in the fourth mode; or Pentecost, which is our particular interest here – *Spiritus Domini* – a solemn statement of faith, evocative of power, and tremendous majesty, set in the regal eighth mode.

The text for the Pentecost Introit is taken from the Book of Wisdom. “The Spirit of the Lord has filled the whole world, alleluia; and this which contains all things has knowledge of what is said, alleluia, alleluia, alleluia” (1:7). Our figure sets out the music for this Chant as given in the Solesmes Graduale Triplex (1979). Above the large letter S of *Spiritus* at the beginning, the editors have put the letters RBCKS. These denote the oldest extant manuscript Antiphonals of the Mass, all from within the Frankish Empire, and from the period around the ninth century: Rheinau, Mont-Blandin, Compiègne, Corbie, Senlis. The manuscripts bear unanimous witness to the inherited tradition of texts to be sung at Mass: including of course our Pentecost Introit. The scribes had to presume that the music for their texts would be known by heart, through long aural tradition: because up to that point no scheme of musical transcription had been devised. But then: to the left of the same large printed S we see a small box giving the information: L 125; E 255. The references here are to manuscripts which witness the earliest attempts at writing music. More precisely, they provide signs indicating the neums, or strings of notes, on which the words are to be sung. They are the Laon Cathedral Gradual, dated around 930 (page 125) and the Einsiedeln Monastery Gradual (p. 255). The Solesmes editors have carefully copied the signs from these books above and below the more familiar and somewhat later four-line stave. The Einsiedeln Gradual adopts the Saint Gall system of

neumatic signs, but fills in all the Chants, such as Introits, omitted from that earlier manuscript; while adding additional details of expression throughout. It is dated around the year 1000. The Pluscarden library has a fine colour facsimile of it, frequently consulted.

The first word of our Chant – *Spiritus* – is intoned on a low pitch, immediately rising on a minor arpeggio. With the word that follows, our opening phrase – *Spiritus Domini* – then falls back again, as if unwilling to rise too far. Here we have an example of a well-established convention in Gregorian Chant, that any reference to the Holy Spirit, especially at the beginning of a piece, will be set at a low pitch, usually with a somewhat restrained rising figure. In this way something of the mystery, the invisibility and the awesome greatness of the Holy Spirit is indicated. On the day of Pentecost, however, the singers are not allowed to stop there, or even to pause. The seamless musical phrase sweeps them onwards. For the Spirit of the Lord has filled the whole earth: so with the word *replevit* a second, major arpeggio takes us immediately soaring upwards, to our reciting note *Do*, then higher yet to top *Re*, a full octave above our starting note; then momentarily even higher, touching on the *Mi* above that, on the word *orbem*. Then, with the word *terrarum*, we have a solemnly repeated fourth interval – Dominant *Do*, Tonic *Sol*, Dominant *Do* – as it were massively establishing the eighth mode structure of our piece. This fourth interval, as of bugles announcing the Entrance of the King, will be repeated in the third line at *hoc*, and again at *continent*, and again at *omnia*; then also in the Psalm verses that follow.

The whole of our first phrase, up to what the Solesmes editors mark with a full bar line, is very finely constructed, shaped, and balanced. It's as if a great wind blows irresistibly through it: starting from nowhere and proceeding to fill everything. The word *terrarum*, with its five repeated unison notes on *Do*, grounded by the single central *Sol*, evokes expansion, and plenitude, and strength. But we need a cadence on final tonic *Sol* to bring the phrase to an end, and this is most wonderfully achieved with the word *Alleluia*. For we are still in Eastertide, and indeed at its

climax. Pentecost is the fruit of the Passion and Resurrection of the Lord: so we Christians sing *Alleluia* by the grace of the Holy Spirit, and in the light of Easter. The *Alleluia* at the end of our first phrase is almost identically repeated at the end of the piece. It is most wonderfully under-stated, economical of notes, nobly simple: the note *La* sung four times; *Sol* sung four times, a single *Fa*: and that is all. The manuscript signs mark it to be sung broadly: Laon gives a little ‘t’ meaning *tenete*, “hold this note”; and a little ‘a’ meaning *augete*, “expand this figure”. Einsiedeln indicates the same nuances with its own system, adding a little ‘I’ – *inferius* – to make sure we go all the way down to *Fa* at the place indicated, and insisting we carefully pronounce both of the ‘I’s in the first syllable of “Alleluia”. The effect is that our *Alleluia* is conveyed as strong, serene, full, accomplished, stable, unanswerable.

The second part of the piece begins with the link word *et*, “and”. This word is well grounded in the two notes *Fa-Sol*, because it’s a springboard for another strongly rising figure, passing then onwards, with a terrific sense of movement and progression, towards the end: for the Spirit contains all things – *omnia* - and has all knowledge. The Chant scholars tell us that the three last notes of *omnia*, marked by Solesmes as *Do*, should really be sung a semi-tone below that, on *Ti*. That would give an even stronger sense of inexorable build-up towards the magnificent climax of *scientiam habet vocis*: “the Spirit has knowledge of what is said”. Surely, we can hear in these Old Testament words echoes of familiar texts from the New Testament. For example, St Paul speaks about the Spirit who explores the depths of everything, even the depths of God; who comprehends the thoughts of God; who is given to us, in order that we might understand the gifts of God; who interprets spiritual truths to those who possess the Spirit (cf. 1 Cor 2:10-13). Or again, by the Spirit people are given utterance of knowledge, and the ability to interpret tongues (cf. 1 Cor 12:8-10). Or again, on the day of Pentecost that same Spirit was manifested in the miraculous gift of tongues, understood by every language on earth (cf. Acts 2:6-12). The musical setting of *scientiam habet vocis* echoes the earlier *orbem terrarum*. In this

way the Chant hints at how the same divine power which fills the Universe also fills Christians, giving them the gift of understanding of divine mysteries, and of the divine word. But we are left hanging here, as it were, on the intermediate cadence of *La*. In a masterful way the Chant then leads us gradually and easily down to the final cadence on *Sol* by means of the final three Alleluias. As they sing these words, so fraught with meaning, the cantors at the Pentecost Mass must deliberately fulfil what St Paul wrote to the Corinthians: “I will sing with the Spirit, and I will sing with the mind also” (1 Cor 14:15).

A Psalm verse follows, according to custom, taken from Psalm 67 (68): “Let God arise, and let his enemies be scattered: and let all who hate him flee from before his face”. Is this a strange sort of text to be singing on the Day of Pentecost, when we naturally think first, not of war, and conquest, but of love, unity, reconciliation and shared joy? In fact, the chosen verse is most apt. It exactly repeats a text from Numbers 10:35. Whenever the ark of the covenant set out from the camp of Israel, Moses would say: “Let God arise, and let his enemies be scattered: and let all who hate him flee from before his face”. Later, in the time of the synagogue, whenever the scrolls of the Law were ceremoniously taken out from their tabernacle, the same text would be sung. But Pentecost is the feast of the giving of the new Law, the law of the Spirit, the law of love. Pentecost is also the starting point for the Church, as she sets out on her journey to evangelise the whole world. Let the enemies of God then be scattered! Let all sin, alienation from God, un-love, division, disunity, enmity, mutual incomprehension, and ignorance of the saving work of God’s Son Jesus Christ be overcome, and driven far away!

Our Psalm verse ends with a formula designed to lead easily into a repetition of the Antiphon. In case we were still unsure: *how* are these enemies to be driven out? *Who* can accomplish such a work? The Introit leads us on in the repeated refrain: *Spiritus Domini replevit orbem terrarum...*

DBH



## **BR DANIEL MORPHY OSB: LIVING INSIDE AND OUTSIDE THE RULES**

*What is, is, and what might have been could never have existed*  
(Edward Gorey).

In the far north east of Scotland, lies the beautiful Benedictine Monastery of Pluscarden Abbey. Founded in 1230, it is surrounded by trees and a succession of rolling hills, whose purpose appears to be to simultaneously protect it from the outside world and embrace it in a deep sense of peace. The community of monks who live here, live as their brothers before them have done, following the Rule of Saint Benedict. Amongst their community is Br Daniel Morphy who was born in Bromley, Kent in 1957.

Br Daniel spent part of his childhood growing up in Greece with his family. Whilst he was there, he found himself becoming more and more absorbed in the local religious culture of his adopted community. Of particular interest to him was a new series of frescoes which had been painted in the interior of a local church, which was part of the iconographic revival occurring in the country at the time. Following his period in Greece, Br Daniel moved to London. It was during this period when, sometime around 1982, he says: “I discovered by chance in a newsagent in Fulham Road a fat volume called ‘The Apex Treasury of Underground Comix/The Best of Bijou Funnies’. Featuring the work of American comic artists such as Robert Crumb, Art Spiegelman, Justin Green, Kim Deitch and many others from the sixties generation. This changed my life; I started taking the idea of an art vocation seriously and thought I would make comix just like them.” This led to a creative phase culminating in a degree at Camberwell School of Art in the nineties.

After his studies in London, Br Daniel moved to Pluscarden Abbey and began his juniorate for the Brotherhood. It was during this chapter of his life that he also began to study Icon painting, a pursuit which both deepened his appreciation of art and enhanced his love of the iconographic revivalism he discovered in Greece.

And so it was, that as well as his daily duties as a Monk, Br Daniel began to make sculptures, paintings and illustrations.

Books and manuscripts have always been central to the life of Monks; indeed, the forty-eighth rule of Saint Benedict prescribes extensive and habitual “holy reading” for the brethren. This is enabled through the preservation and collection of sacred texts, which before the invention of the printing press, monks themselves would write and illuminate. Within the margins of these medieval handmade books, we are fortunate enough to regularly stumble across the imagery of the bizarre, where everything from monkeys playing the bagpipes to human-animal hybrids, weapon wielding rabbits and mermaids have been depicted by the monks who illustrated them. This strange and irreverent illustrated humour is today known as “Marginalia” and artists themselves are often the greatest admirers of these peculiar and challenging drawings, for they seem to clearly encapsulate the mind of a creator when it is at its most inventive and free. Indeed, it was upon seeing “The Rutland Psalter” (made in England in c.1260 and which contains some of the finest examples of marginalia) that the textile designer and Poet William Morris said: “Such a book! my eyes! and I am beating my brains to see if I can find any thread of an intrigue to begin upon, so as to creep and crawl towards possession of it.”

Today, marginalia can be said to have moved out of the margins and into the mainstream, where it proudly constitutes our comic and carton culture. This is exemplified by practitioners such as Hillaire Belloc, Edward Gorey and David Shrigley, who have built on the work of artists of the past such as Lewis Carroll, Edward Lear and a host of anonymous monks to create a new language which speaks to our childlike fascination with the darker side of human nature and the humour which can be found within it. And it is within this tradition where Br Daniel is producing some of his most interesting and engaging work, with cartoons such as “The Fisherman”, “The Motorcade of the Lamb” and “Chorus” which appear to effortlessly fuse the medieval with the contemporary. In his work “Transfigurations” for example, we see

four suited men standing before us in a landscape which could or could not be underwater, each with some kind of animal head that links them directly to the human-animal hybrids found in books like “The Rutland Psalter”.

I asked Br Daniel if he could explain a little about his work and what it is trying to say to us, and he replied: “When they ask me what is it? What does it mean? I can only say ‘well, nothing really’. But the work does say something, only I can’t put it into words.” And that is perhaps our answer. Br Daniel spends his life at Pluscarden Abbey operating to a daily routine and habit of devotion which has been observed there for 800 years. This practice gives his mind the gift of freedom to contemplate and wander, to visit places and people which could not possibly exist in our physical world. And he has then made them manifest, brought these new realms into being through the exercise of his imagination. Like faith itself, he has rendered the invisible, visible.

Robert Priseman, November 2019

*Robert Priseman, founder of Contemporary British Painting and co-founder of the Priseman Seabrook art collection, is a British artist, collector, writer, curator and publisher who lives and works in Essex. Over 200 works by Priseman are held in art museum collections worldwide, including the V&A, Museum der Moderne Salzburg, Honolulu Museum of Art and the National Galleries of Scotland.*

*One of Br Daniel’s drawings: “The Fisherman” is currently on long-term loan to the Priseman Seabrook collection. Prints and cards of this and other drawings are available through the Pluscarden Abbey website shop:*

<https://www.pluscardenabbey.org/shop/prints-by-br-daniel-morphy>

## THE DIARY OF A “FAILURE”

*Le Journal d’Un Curé de Campagne*, or *The Diary of a Country Priest*, by French Catholic author Georges Bernanos, may just be the best Catholic novel of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Written during the worldwide Great Depression of the 1930s, it was also a time when French Catholicism was still struggling to find its feet again after the triple attacks of the Jules Ferry Anti-Catholic laws separating Church and State, the dissolution of the majority of religious communities in 1901-1905, and the First World War. The novel tells the profoundly touching story of an anonymous, young diocesan priest assigned to a village lost in the desolate countryside around Lille, in French Flanders.

Purporting to be the diary of the young pastor of souls, it describes several weeks of his daily life, until the moment of his death from a cancer of the stomach. It makes for truly moving reading and is best sampled in small doses (like the finest of French wines or Scotch whiskies) in order to appreciate the full impact. It is also not a plot-heavy novel in which much action takes place; indeed, it is almost entirely made up of conversations noted down by the priest, reporting various encounters he has with parishioners and acquaintances.

It begins sardonically, almost despairingly: “Mine is a parish like all the rest. They’re all alike... My parish is bored stiff; no other word for it. Like so many others! We can see them being eaten up by boredom, and we can’t do anything about it.” Thus begins his diary, and it shows him to be utterly and, indeed, devastatingly honest with himself. He himself is never named by the author and is never referred to by anyone by any other name than “M. le Curé” (roughly translatable as “Father”). This nameless priest tells us that he comes from a very humble, poor, peasant background. He attended minor and major seminary in a very undistinguished way, was a rather poor scholar, and never really remarkable to his fellow students except perhaps for his piety and kindness.

As a matter of fact, his piety and zeal for the honour of God may be his only “positive” traits! Otherwise, he shows himself over and over again to be almost completely incompetent, a fact which he recognizes and laments constantly. He is horrible with money, which seems to slip through his fingers like sand; he is socially inept and shy and thus unable to make himself loved or even understood on a basic level by his parishioners and associates. Because of his stomach condition (he is unaware that his constant stomach aches are symptoms of the disease that will kill him), he is only able to eat stale bread soaked in wine, which inevitably leads those around him to assume he is a hopeless alcoholic. His only real friend is the pastor of a parish in a neighbouring town who, though he seems to have great affection for our hero, patronizes him and treats him like a child. Indeed, the hero of the novel *is* a child – childlike in the manner of which Christ speaks, “Unless you convert and become like little children, you cannot enter the kingdom of Heaven” (Mt 18:3). He is a man who, in spite of his weaknesses and failures, constantly trusts in God. Even in crises of faith and times when crushing pain or overwhelming difficulties make it hard for him to maintain his prayer life, he continues to march blindly forward, trusting in God.

Bernanos, fervent Christian that he was, was convinced both of the reality of the devil and the presence of evil everywhere, even in the most mundane of human activities. Conversely, he was also convinced of the absolute necessity of fighting the evil in ourselves and in others. The protagonist in this novel became the embodiment of this conviction. The young priest exemplifies the path of spiritual childhood outlined by St Thérèse of Lisieux, although she is never mentioned at all in the novel. The man continually errs, makes terrible mistakes, angers many of his parishioners, is even ridiculed and mocked by parish children, and alienates friends with his constant ineptitude. Yet this young man of God continues to have confidence in God’s ultimate goodness, and to fight for God’s honour when he comes face to face with sin. In fact, one of the most truly moving episodes in the novel comes about because he mistakenly shows up at the chateau of the local

aristocrat (a philandering count) and manages to blunder his way into a conversation with the countess; his zeal for the Lord and his total trust in Him leads to an almost miraculous event in her life. That conversation, the centrepiece of the book, is without any doubt the most remarkably written conversation I've ever read in a novel: it is first the encounter between a hopelessly maladroit peasant priest and an upright, pharisaic aristocrat; then of a zealous man of God with a woman lost in despair; and finally, two broken, sinful human beings finding their way to God together. And yet, because of the jealousy engendered in her family, this miraculous tête-à-tête becomes the catalyst for the priest's downfall.

The young priest can't even get his own death "right": instead of what would be considered to be a holy, "good" death in pious eyes, he goes to God on a dirty mattress stuffed into a corner of the squalid apartment of a defrocked priest living in sin. It resembles in many ways the sad end of Graham Greene's whiskey priest in *The Power and the Glory*. In fact, the two novels are remarkably similar: both novels refuse to give a name to their main character; both depict priests who are chronically inept and yet who are driven to serve God in spite of their weakness; both take place when the Church in their countries is weak and/or persecuted, and both meet rather ignominious ends. However, both novels describe the conversions of otherwise "unconvertible" people because of the protagonists' examples.

Which leads to the moral of the story. At the end of *The Diary of a Country Priest*, the young priest dies in the arms of that defrocked priest, who tells him that although he has alerted the local pastor of this approaching death, he most likely won't be able to arrive in time to give the dying man the Last Rites. In the English version, translator Pamela Morris maladroitly translates our hero's last words as "Does it matter? Grace is everywhere..." rather anti-climactic, in my opinion. In fact, what he says in the original French version is better translated as "Does it matter? *Everything is grace...*" ("*Qu'est-ce que cela fait? Tout est grâce*" in French). This is a direct quotation from St Thérèse of Lisieux, words spoken to her sisters on her deathbed, and captures her

spirituality in a nutshell. Yes, grace is everywhere, but the point Bernanos is really trying to make in quoting St Thérèse, and indeed the point of the whole novel, is that everything that happens in life can be a vehicle of grace. It may be “grace like a bullet in the gut” as Flannery O’Connor described the death of her father, but it is still grace. All of the mistakes, all of the stumbling and falls, all of the failures in our lives are vehicles of grace if we would only allow them to be, if we allow God to work in us through them.

This is a novel of hope for the losers of this world, thus for me, for you, for all of us. We are all of us, even the greatest saints, total failures without God’s help. Not one of us, without grace, can do even a single act that merits heaven. *That is not the end of the story, however.* By grace God works in and through us nevertheless, even in the bleakest moments of darkness and catastrophe, for the good. We are loved infinitely both in spite of and because of our faults and imperfections, and the loving grace of God can transform even a bumbling, inept priest, an insignificant, cloistered Carmelite nun, or the world’s greatest failure, into a saint.

Br Benedict Joseph

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### **From the Annals**

**April 14<sup>th</sup>:** Bishop Hugh has asked Fr Abbot to preside at the constitution of a new diocesan hermit, a lady on the West Coast. The ceremony has been postponed already due to Covid 19. Br Finbar drove Fr Abbot to Kyle of Lochalsh, where they picked up the hermit and took her to Dornie where she was instituted as a hermit.

**29<sup>th</sup>:** We have heard reports that the district of Moray, and Elgin in particular, has had the highest rate of Covid infections in Scotland.

## JEAN-PIERRE CAMUS

Policemen, they say, are getting younger – but what about bishops? Bishop Jean-Pierre Camus was ordained bishop when he was only 24, needing a dispensation from Pope Paul V. Many people have heard of Albert Camus, the 20<sup>th</sup> century French novelist, who wrote *The Plague* and much else. But this 16<sup>th</sup>/17<sup>th</sup> century Catholic bishop's literary output was considerably greater; he wrote more than 40 novels in the decade between 1620 and 1630. So, was he one of these dis-edifying prelates who are ordained very young, just for prestige or a salary, only nominally a cleric, more taken up with literature than God? Far from it!

Our Camus was born on the day that St Charles Borromeo died, 3<sup>rd</sup> November 1584, a fact that he regarded as significant. His initial formation was aimed at the Law and a legal career, but then his thoughts turned first in the direction of becoming a Carthusian, and then towards the priesthood. Once ordained, he was immediately famous as a preacher, and so was chosen as Bishop of Belley. He was a close friend and disciple of St Francis de Sales, who ordained him Bishop, praised his writings and directed him. He was faithfully resident in his diocese, a zealous preacher, pious, loyal to the Pope, with undying admiration for St Francis de Sales. St Francis arranged for him to be appointed court preacher at Paris. He was spiritual director of his first cousin, St Louise de Marillac and other serious souls. He founded three monasteries, and after resigning his see, became titular abbot of Aunay (which he reformed) in the diocese of Bayeux, where he continued to write more than ever, sixteen books in the year 1630-31 alone. For three years he returned to episcopal duties, as auxiliary to the Archbishop of Rouen, after which he retired to the Hospital for Incurables at Paris, where he lived a holy life, fasting every day, sleeping on straw or passing the night in prayer. In a spirit of poverty, he retained but 500 livres of his revenues, and out of these paid for his board and lodging and gave the rest to the unfortunate. He hoped to see out his life in this way, but was named administrator of the diocese of Arras. Death, however, intervened



on 25<sup>th</sup> April 1652, and he was buried simply in the Incurables' church, where he lay until 1904.

Above all, he was an author and wrote around 200 books. He knew people read a lot, so set himself to “serve his neighbour by writing things that were moral or sensible, historical or spiritual, uprooting vice and planting virtue”, countering the malign influence of fashionable novels.

One of his key ideas was that true devotion meant not that people should seek the state of perfection, something which is only *counselled*, but that they should seek the perfection of their state, which is *commanded*. He wanted to show that the devout life was not the exclusive property of religious – he was attacked for this, but was able to demonstrate, from the teaching of St Francis de Sales and others, that he was right: parish priests, just as much as monks, were called to the devout life, which he was trying to “secularise”, making it available to people living “in the world”. His zeal led to misunderstandings of his view of the religious life, with ensuing polemics.

Why has he been largely forgotten? Because he wrote too much, too fast, so that his teaching is difficult to summarise and absorb; much of his writing is polemical, and once the argument has died down, the polemic is irrelevant; Cardinal Richelieu and Louis XIV were opposed to him; after his death, Fénelon espoused him, and Bossuet in response condemned him – “there’s no point in paying attention to anything he wrote.” He had his faults, but he was a great bishop and a remarkable mystic, and very clear about the matters in which he was involved with so much animation, such a correct understanding. Here are a couple of tasters to whet your appetite:

### **Am I sinning, or just being tempted?**

“One of the things that causes us worry and pain is the inability to discern clearly whether temptation is within our heart or trying to gain entry. “But,” you ask me, “how can you tell the difference?” This is the acid test: See if the temptation pleases you, or if it displeases you. And since I know that the opinion of our blessed

Father [*he means St Francis de Sales*] is like a revelation from God, here is one of his sayings about this: ‘While temptation displeases you, there is nothing to fear; for why would it displease you, unless it was because you didn’t want it?’ Temptation may bother us our whole life long, and as long as it displeases us, it cannot cause us to fall into sin; quite the opposite, if it disagrees with us, besides the fact that this displeasure preserves us from its poison, it builds up our virtues and thus our heavenly reward.

But I’m afraid that maybe I did take pleasure in it? This fear shows that it did not please you. Let me offer you an excellent lesson that I learned from our blessed Father about this: ‘Whenever you are doubtful about whether or not you have consented to evil, always take this doubt as a sign that you did not; and this is why: it is because if there is to be a real sin, there needs to be true and full consent of the will, there being no sin if it is not willed; however, full consent is so clear that there remains no shadow of doubt about it.’”

Jean-Pierre Camus

*The Spirit of Blessed Francis de Sales*, XVII, 31

### **Advice on Scruples**

“You say that since you began to order your way of life more devoutly than before, a swarm of scruples has begun to gnaw at you and devour you, and that, in the judgement of your confessor, the flies of imperfection seem to you like elephants of sin...

It’s a good sign when newly-cleared ground produces a crop of thistles and brambles: it’s clear evidence of its goodness, and therefore of its future fertility, once it’s been well dug and seeded. It’s quite a good sign when a soul is attacked by scruples at the beginning of a devout life; because it is evidence that grace has impressed in it a great aversion to sin, since the mere shadow of sin (which is what we should call scruples) frightens it.

But your scruples make you realise that you do not abstain from evil, and that the very little good that you do, is more for yourself than for God. My dear Sister, if that is what you fear, then it’s a good fear!... If you’re afraid of putting your interests ahead

of God's, then you will certainly not do so... Anyone who fears God, does good and will do it well, if they fear with love; and they fear with love, if they fear that they will not fear with love, because only love can produce such a fear. Blessed are they who fear God in this way: it is a sign that they do not put their trust in themselves, but cast all their thought and trust upon God, and that finally they will abound in delights, having relied on this beloved.

You say that the remedies I suggest to you deceive your spirit by raising false hopes, more than they uproot the thorns. That's fine! The thorns which annoy us are blessed thorns, my dear Sister, the discomfort comes from pain, rather than from guilt. For my part, I make no claim to offer remedies for any but the thorns of guilt, certainly not for the other kind, because they are a dear sharing in the thorns of Jesus Christ on the cross, whence comes all our glory. Provided that God is not offended in and by these scruples, it doesn't matter that they worry you and somewhat interrupt your rest: that will make you watch yourself more closely, and be less likely to fall asleep, into a dangerous confidence.

...These scruples bother you so much that when you pray, all you have is distractions and wanderings of the mind, which you are quite sure are voluntary. Well, if you are quite sure, it is even more sure that they are not voluntary... Whoever is afraid of having a bad will, undoubtedly has a good will. I am well aware that these distractions are annoying to a soul which wishes peacefully to unite itself to God in prayer; but for one who wishes strongly, powerfully to be united to him, despite all obstacles, I cannot see that they need cause a lot of trouble. God is the Lord of armies and battles, as well as being God and Prince of peace. He loves peaceful Sulamites, but he also loves warrior Sulamites and valiant Amazons!"

Jean-Pierre Camus

*The Spirit of Blessed Francis de Sales, XI, 30-31*

<https://archive.org/stream/thespiritofstfra09184gut/7fran10.txt>

DGC

## BOOK REVIEWS

*The Seaborne* by A. G. Rivett; (WordcatcherPublishing 2019).

John Finlay, a mechanical engineer running a small business in Vauxhall flees from unpayable debts and failed relationships. He winds up in the Western Isles of Scotland where he takes a job as a deck hand on a boat. The boat is lost at sea.

Thus ends the story of John Finlay. Or not exactly, because he is rescued half drowned by fishermen who take him to their village of Fisherhame on “The Island”. The Island is a fictional setting which, according to the author’s introduction, “exists in a world both like and unlike our own”, and notionally “far to the west of Scotland and well north of Ireland” – could this be the lost Island of Atlantis? In fact, John seems not only to have left our world, but travelled back in time to something like the Celtic Christian world of 1000 or more years ago. The scene is set for an encounter between two very different cultures. This could be very instructive and uplifting; it turns out to be so much better, in fact it’s unputdownable. We follow with bated breath John’s slow recovery, his gradual awakening to his new situation. The Islanders cannot get their tongues around modern English, and so John becomes *Dhion* (pronounced “Hiorn”). Likewise the Islanders awakening to the fact that this is no ordinary half drowned man, but someone *very* different. They are awestruck by the zip on his jacket; he must be someone of great importance to possess such exquisite craftsmanship.

Dhion’s gradual acceptance into the community causes controversy when he constructs a simple electric generator using some magnetic *waystones*, which the Islanders have in their possession, plus some copper wire he has carefully constructed as an apprentice to the local blacksmith. Even more controversy is aroused when he is inadvertently instrumental in the death of Dermot, a young fisherman, who is jealous of the affection that Shinane, the blacksmith’s daughter, shows him. To prove his innocence, he must undergo a trial in which he is cast adrift in a

small boat; that is, to “let the ocean decide” whether he will survive or not. Dhion’s calm acceptance of this trial turns the whole tone of his situation in the community around. From being accepted, if he is, on sufferance, he is elevated into something like moral leadership, even before the trial actually takes place. This underpins the essential character of this story as a Christian parable, which is the more effective for being subtly done – and apparently unintentional. It ultimately leads to a white-knuckle finale in which Dhion has to make a choice between returning to his own world or not.

*The Seaborne* is the first volume of *The Island Trilogy*, presently in production, in which (the author tells me) the encounter/conflict between the Island’s ancient Celtic type of Christianity and “conventional” Western Christianity is explored. Look out for volume 2: *The Priest’s Wife*. The work, Andrew likewise tells me, owes much to the “captaincy” of his wife and collaborator Gillian Paschkes-Bell. Andrew is at ease with the English language; his literary fluency makes this book a pleasure to read and makes one wonder that this is his first novel. Andrew and Gilli are committed to eco values (as is your reviewer) and this sensitivity to nature informs the sense of *place* in the novel and its beauty. Twenty per cent of the royalties goes to Trees for Life, the charity devoted to rewilding the Scottish Highlands; but even if trees are not your up your street, it’s a really good read.

DDM

***Vigils*** by Sarah Akehurst, Obl. OSB (Handsel Press 2021; £6)

“Did you agree to this, agree to be  
grafted to the wood that made the Cross?  
... here you will leave us – Mungo’s city,  
Mungo’s dear green place,  
where he stayed to comfort the forlorn –  
and pray, may he pray now for us  
until day breaks and all the shadows flee.”

Readers may remember Sarah's first little collection, *In Firmamento Caeli* (still available). Her second little book of poems, entitled *Vigils* after the night office of monastic prayer, chanted before the dawn, is a "series of beautiful and closely observed elegies on the life of her late son Jonny, threaded together like the rosary of broken shells we find in the poems themselves" (poet Malcolm Guite). Jonny was born with a genetic condition, Neurofibromatosis Type 1, which caused him a range of problems, including learning difficulties. It also eventually led to him developing a rare kind of cancer, an aggressive nerve-sheath tumour, diagnosed in the summer of 2018. Despite radiotherapy and chemotherapy, the cancer spread to his lung and around Christmas 2019 a brain tumour was diagnosed. He died on 15th January 2020, shortly after his 21st birthday. Sarah says of him, "Jonny suffered a great deal, but he rarely complained. He kept his smile and his sense of humour – rather dark at times – and enjoyed life as far as he could, right up until the end."

This little collection of poems covers Jonny's last months and afterwards – his dying, death and the memories that will never die. But they are not gloomy or mawkish. If, as an Ancient Greek writer, Simonides, once wrote, two and a half millennia ago, "poetry is eloquent painting", then in these poems we glimpse through the tears and ache of loss, the eternal beauty of God's Creation and the hope to be found therein. Another poet once said of poetry – the best poetry – that it echoed "what oft was felt, but ne'er so well expressed". In the shining beauty and pathos of her poetic testament, Sarah has eloquently expressed emotions so many of us have struggled to articulate, while at the same time offering us a gleam of light that shines through the darkness of grief and loss.

Poet Malcolm Guite tells us: "Put the murmuring shell of these poems up to your ear and you will hear the sound of the sea, not just the 'sea of troubles', but the wider, deeper sea of God's mystery and his mercy."

Stephen Cottrell, Anglican Archbishop of York, who spent one week a year for over ten years in Jonny’s company at a summer camp, says in his Foreword: “These beautiful poems bring his memory back and also pierce the heart with the painful knowledge of a mother’s love and the unimaginable sorrow of having to let go. In one of them – ‘Christmas Day’ – Sarah writes that ‘the hearts affection is a fire, the only fire/whose brightness can illuminate the night.’ I remember Jonny waiting for the campfire to be lit; and poking in its embers the next day, coaxing it back to life. These poems do the same thing, prodding at the embers of memory and sorrow, joy and longing. Bringing them to life: ‘In the morning let me know your love,/that is the only prayer I can manage now.’”

And from our own Bishop Hugh: “These poems chronicle a slow and painful parting. They do so with the kind of detail that comprises reality. They made me aware of what a wonderful medium poetry is, with power ‘not to forget the smallest thing’, to honour a living and dying like Jonny’s and add discreetly to the sum of hope.”

“For now there’s silence,  
milestones, memory, I hope  
never to forget the smallest thing.”

*Vigils* may be purchased from Handsel Press/Sanctus Media or directly from Sarah, email [sarahakehurst7@gmail.com](mailto:sarahakehurst7@gmail.com)

Eileen Clare Grant, Obl. OSB

## A CALL

I rose before the sun was up but it was nearly morning for,  
outside, the world was waiting as musicians wait, their song  
compressed and coiled round and round and round into a spring  
releasing not a sound until the maestro's wand allows their song  
to fly and then God breathes again.

And that was how the morning was before it was. The waiting sky  
held night in bluest tone and stars – a few remained and gleamed –  
and I stood still, and all the garden stood still, too – still:  
with every cell and dream alive. The summer air seemed  
thick and tasted sharp as silver.

At last a small and feathered voice sang six soft notes and ceased.  
I thought it asked if it should sing, if it was right – its little tune  
so hesitant. It seemed surprised in heart to find itself apart  
from all the universe, the first to sound the dawn – the first to play  
its note in the cacophony of day.

But it was right – no doubt of that, and I was finally free to smile  
and turn and go and kneel and pray in peace and in the gentle fear  
of God who wears his might as lightly as that feathered thing,  
whose song,  
so soft, so small, was all I'd ever longed to hear.

Sr Johanna Caton OSB<sup>1</sup>, St Mildred's Priory, Minster

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<sup>1</sup> This poem was previously published in US Christian based literary journal  
*Time of Singing* and also in Catholic Poetry Room at [integratedcatholiclife.org](http://integratedcatholiclife.org)