

Pluscarden Benedictines

No. 198 News and Notes for our Friends Pentecost 2022

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Cover: Fr Prior lights the Paschal Candle

Back Cover: Dawn at Camperdown Abbey, Australia
by Sr Raphael Stone OSB

FR ABBOT'S LETTER

Dear Friends,

On 5th March our two newest brothers, Br Patrick and Br Edmund, made their first vows. The following is a reflection on this event.

In our calendar 5th March is the Solemnity of St Aelred. St Aelred was one of the great monastic leaders and teachers of the Twelfth Century, important for all followers of the Rule of St Benedict. However, he was a Cistercian. It is unusual that we as Benedictines would upgrade his feast day to the high rank of a Solemnity. It is because it was on his feast day that the community of Caldey, from which we derive, came into full communion with the Catholic Church.

The Feast of St Aelred is a good setting for the vows of our brothers. Profession brings them into a succession of generations of monks and nuns going back to the time of St Aelred, and beyond to St Benedict and the early centuries of the Church, a communion extending back in time. And it brings them into a deeper communion with the Church as she is now, placing them at the service of all God's people through fraternal life and prayer.

The first reading at the Mass of Profession was the story of the call of Samuel in 1 Samuel Chapter 3. The most memorable feature of this story is that Samuel did not at first understand who was calling him. The boy, sleeping in his place in the temple, thought it was the old priest Eli calling. This mistake enables us to recognise in his experience how God's call can come in stages.

The first stage is that when the call comes, we hear. That seems straightforward, a choice we make. But Samuel is asleep. In this state, it is a matter of chance whether an ordinary noise, a voice, will wake him. The spark that lights a vocation often seems some chance event, some meeting, that might easily have not happened, and is outside our control.

And it is an interruption. A vocation doesn't flow naturally out of our pursuits, as a career might. Samuel's call doesn't come out of his dreams. It interrupts them. He might easily have turned over

and gone back to sleep. But he gets up and goes to find the one calling him.

In that instant of deciding to get up, the interruption becomes a journey and the chance occurrence a new purpose. All this happens before Samuel understands it. "Samuel did not yet know the Lord" (1 Sam 3:7). In fact he is positively mistaken; he thinks Eli is calling him. The same thing happens a second time, and a third. Samuel responds exactly as before, twice repeating the same mistake. He must realise by the third time that almost certainly Eli isn't calling, and he risks making himself a fool. He chooses to take the risk rather than do nothing.

Finally, Eli understands that it is the Lord calling, and he tells Samuel what to do. Eli doesn't explain. He tells Samuel how to enter into dialogue with God. Eli himself, old and experienced though he is, doesn't understand at first what is happening. Only the third time does he understand it is the Lord calling.

Eli comes to understand for two reasons. The first is that he takes Samuel seriously. He could easily dismiss him. But he treats him with kindness and respect. He doesn't tell him he's dreaming, or accuse him of a childish prank. He says only what he knows: that he hasn't called Samuel. Secondly, Eli has experience of God. This doesn't give him a crystal ball in which he can see Samuel's future, or his own. He knows something is happening and it doesn't come from him. He knows enough of God to realise that he is present. He introduces Samuel to God, and steps aside.

The novice in a monastery is like Samuel. God calls him. God's call is to a community: the community of the needy; the community of the faithful; the community of our family; for the monk, the monastery. The call is generally without much understanding on our part. We are led by circumstances. We can be led because we are open. Then when we are in community, we learn by trial and error and obedience to recognise and listen to God's voice.

It is not only the novice who is changed when he enters community. The community is changed. The community is like Eli. Eli saw something in Samuel that didn't come from him, and

he understood this was God acting. The community sees in the novice something it didn't put there. It doesn't just look for a reflection of itself in the new brothers, it isn't looking for an extension and prolongation of itself, it is looking for God and his work.

We pray that in our new brothers, and in us, and in all of you, God will bring his work to completion.

Yours devotedly in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Fr Anselm". The "Fr" is written in a simple, slightly stylized font, and "Anselm" is written in a more fluid, cursive script.

St Charles de Foucauld's Prayer of Abandonment

Father, I abandon myself into your hands;
do with me what you will.
Whatever you do I will thank you.
I am ready for all, I accept all.
Let only your will be done in me, and in all your creatures.
I wish no more than this, O Lord.
Into your hands I commend my soul.
Father, I offer if to you with all the love of my heart,
for I love you Lord,
and so need to give myself,
to surrender myself into your hands without reserve,
and with boundless confidence, for you are my Father.
Into your hands I commend my soul.

St Charles de Foucauld, Pray for us!

Canonised May 15, 2022

FROM THE ANNALS

FEBRUARY 2022

1. There was no power when we awoke this morning. Gas mantles gave light for Vigils and Lauds. Day was dawning by the time Mass began at 9.00, but we still needed extra light in the sanctuary at the start of Mass. Br Michael has bought a number of rechargeable work lamps which we can use as spotlights. We did have heating as we attached the generator to the gas boilers and heating pumps. After Storm Arwen, Br Michael had made provisions for electricians to fit more connections to allow us to connect generators to the electric system in the house. The work began last month but is delayed due to lack of parts.

The power came on again at about 4.10 this afternoon.

2. **CANDLEMAS.** Before Mass the community and the small congregation gathered in the transepts. We lit tapers. Fr Abbot blessed the candles; the supply of candles for the year was under a cloth on a table. We went in procession round the transepts before entering the church. That day was also the diocesan day for religious. After Mass Fr Abbot, Br Michael and Fr Benedict went into Elgin, where the religious gathered at the Dominican Sisters' house for a Mass with the bishop.

3. At present we are using the gas boilers because the wood boilers are not working; the touch screen that controls the boilers was cracked some time ago, but it continued to work until now. It cannot be repaired but must be replaced.

8. Today is the Day of Prayer for Victims of Trafficking. On the front drive yellow aconites and snowdrops are in flower.

11. The usual community meeting took place after Mass. The wood chip boiler is now back in action with a new touch screen and updated software.

16. There was a Chapter Meeting today at which Bros Patrick and Edmund were accepted for Simple Profession. The profession will take place (DV) on 5th March, St Aelred's day.

21. Fr Benedict departed early this morning for Ryde Abbey on the Isle of Wight, where he is giving the community their retreat.

22. Every year or so some adolescents in cars come out to the Abbey at night and drive around, sounding their horns and shouting. They will sometimes drive on the lawn, shine lights at cell windows and commit minor vandalism or theft. Clearly each year it is a different group, but they always act in the same way. This year the actions have been the same as before, but they are more frequent and more blatant. Br Michael and Fr Giles met them near the front gate this evening and have talked to them. One of the young men offered them a “square go”. Both monks are old enough to be his grandfather.

23. The adolescents came again and Fr Giles and Br Michael called the police, who came out at about 10.30 to interview them and take details of recent incidents, including car numbers. It seems that the adolescents had kicked the door of the lodge and also broken a window there. Also brethren had found items from the shop thrown away beside the drive and the road to the main road.

24. We heard that the Russian army has invaded Ukraine from all directions. Bros Patrick and Edmund went into retreat this morning in preparation for their simple professions on St Aelred’s Day.

26. We heard that the police returning to Elgin the other night had met one of the cars involved in the recent incidents coming towards the Abbey. They stopped the car. We understand that they are to be or have been charged with breach of the peace.

MARCH 2022

1. Shrove Tuesday. As today is Shrove Tuesday, we had pancakes at lunch. In the afternoon there was an optional long walk.

2. Ash Wednesday. Lent begins today. Ash Wednesday is always a day of fasting and abstinence, but this year the Holy Father has asked that we make it a day of fasting and prayer for Ukraine.

Bros Patrick and Edmund came out of retreat this morning.

In the afternoon we had Stations of the Cross and then went to the Chapter-Room where Fr Abbot preached a homily, then received the Lenten intentions from the brethren before handing out to each of them a book to be read during Lent.

4. Recollection Day. The Blessed Sacrament was exposed from Sext until after Vespers. Vespers was first Vespers of St Aelred in choir, at which Fr Abbot presided.

5. SOLEMNITY OF ST AELRED. Today is always special as the anniversary of the reception of the Caldey community into the Catholic Church; on this St Aelred's Day we also witnessed the simple professions of Bros Patrick Obiejinwa and Edmund Norby.

Br Edmund's family were able to be present at the ceremony, but Br Patrick's parents were not. There were two Nigerian priests present in the sanctuary and a number of other Nigerians formed part of the congregation and indeed formed a choir which sang Igbo hymns in harmony at the Offertory and the Recession.

After the Gospel Fr Abbot preached before receiving the vows, first of Br Patrick and then of Br Edmund.

We ate a festal lunch. Because we are in Lent, Vespers were first Vespers of the first Sunday of Lent, rather than second Vespers of the Solemnity. Br Joseph is the hebdomadary for the coming week and he presided at the Office. We sang the *Te Deum* after Vespers in thanksgiving for the graces received from the Caldey conversion. A *gaudeamus* followed.

6. FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT. Fr Benedict presided at Conventual Mass today, but Br Joseph preached at the Mass as well as presiding as hebdomadary at the day's Office.

7. Fr Martin McLaughlin, former Abbot of Prinknash, is staying with his sister Rita Sim. He came down for Mass this morning, at which he concelebrated as guest priests normally do at the moment. He sat near the organ and received from a separate chalice and paten.

8. There was a gale overnight during which a tree fell and cut the fibre optics cable which provides our internet service. The cable is strung out on high posts. Br Michael telephoned the internet service provider who said that an engineer would come tomorrow.

9. The engineer arrived to repair the internet cable. Br Michael had mentioned in his call yesterday that the cables were strung high up and that the engineer would need a cherry picker to reach the tops. The engineer who did turn up was surprised to find that the line

was high up and said that a cherry-picker was needed for the repair and that someone else would have to come out to make the repair.

10. Feast of St John Ogilvie. Today is the anniversary of Fr Abbot's profession – as well as that of Bishop Hugh.

11. The Oblate Weekend began this evening.

12. Fr Abbot gave conferences to the oblates at 11.00 and at 3.00.

14. Tonsures. Fr Mark departed to act as Chaplain the nuns of the Benedictine monastery at Largs. The first daffodil here blows.

15. Today is Bishop Hugh's 70th birthday.

17. Four brethren went to participate in a 70th birthday lunch at Bishop's House in. There were around 20 guests for that.

The Scottish Bishops made a public statement, ahead of most other Conferences, sharply condemning the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Bishop Hugh said he had been commissioned by his colleagues to write personally to Patriarch Kirill, who actively, but regrettably, supports President Putin.

20. THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT. These days Fr Matthew is poorly. He receives Holy Communion each day in his cell. Many tests are being done, to ascertain the root cause of his decline. He remains cheerful and smiling, but mostly these days, he just sleeps.

21. BT engineers at last restore our broadband line. So live streaming resumes, after an interruption since the 8th.

25. At 4.00 pm Fr Abbot stood before the Lady Shrine to read out the Act of Consecration of Russia and Ukraine to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, written by Pope Francis, and shared in by the world's Bishops. It took around 10 minutes to read. After that we had Exposition for a Holy Hour: then Vespers and Benediction.

27. FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT. Our clocks were put forward an hour – after Lauds. So we got up at the usual time – but the poor Hebdomadary had an hour less homily preparation time.

28. Mid Lent long walk. Nice weather. Only 5 brethren were able to take part this time.

A group of Glasgow University students is here for some days, with their Chaplain Fr Ross Campbell.

29. Fr Abbot issued everyone with a new ESVCA (Anglicised) Bible – SPCK hardback edition.

APRIL 2022

7. Today is a day of prayer for victims of abuse.

Fr Giles went to Inverness to the Chrism Mass this evening.

9. Fr Giles has tested positive for Covid. He is isolating at the lodge. In the afternoon the sacristan and helpers covered crucifixes, statues and images with purple cloth veils.

10. PALM SUNDAY OF THE LORD'S PASSION. Fr Abbot presided at the Mass of Palm Sunday. A number of laity were present for the blessing of the palms and for a short.

In the afternoon Br Michael tested positive for Covid and has gone to isolate in St Benedict's guest house.

11. Bros Joseph and Cyprian have set up in the east cloister a table with lateral flow testing kits, Paracetamol disinfectant wipes, hand-gel and masks for those that need them. Fr Mark tested positive for Covid this morning and has gone to St Benedict's.

12. Both of the newly simply professed have tested positive for Covid, as well as Bros Joseph and Timothy. They too have taken the walk over to St Benedict's. Rita and Bros Daniel and Finbar are cooking for the community, both in the monastery and in the guesthouse. Tony Broderick is here, and he is going between the abbey and St Benedict's bringing meals and other necessities to St Benedict's and taking back the dishes and serving plates.

There is no timetable in St Benedict's, except for meals. There may be some liturgy in the monastery, but none communally in St Benedict's. Those brethren who are there mostly keep to their rooms, though some do go for short walks. Some people are worse affected by Covid than others. All feel tired and chesty.

13. Fr Benedict has joined the quarantine. There is a table in the middle of the hall in St Benedict's upon which are crockery and cutlery. The hot table from the abbey kitchen has been moved to St Benedict's and meals are put on it at the usual times. Tony Broderick is doing sterling work in bringing meals over and anything else that is needed.

Br Cyprian is taking care that he and Fr Matthew in the abbey keep clear of infection as much as is humanly possible.

14. HOLY THURSDAY. In St Benedict's the brethren continue their idiorhythmic life. Today there was the first communal liturgy with the Mass of the Lord's Supper at 7.00 in the evening

For Mass in parlour 1 in St Benedict's, the priests vested in alb and stole, except for Fr Prior who wore the only chasuble. We use parlour 2 to vest in. Mass was in English without a homily. There was no washing of the feet. As everyone at this Mass was suffering from Covid, we all exchanged the kiss of peace and received from the chalice. Fr Martin was taken by the fact that this was the first time this had happened for two years. We could not repose the Blessed Sacrament.

15. GOOD FRIDAY. We hear that Fr Abbot has succumbed to the virus. He is staying in his cell and office in the north cloister, as he has all he needs there and he can isolate himself there.

At three in the afternoon in St Benedict's, there was the liturgy of the Lord's Passion, though much simplified. Fr Giles led the liturgy. Priests and deacon read St John's Passion in parts. There were no solemn intercessions, and the Adoration of the Cross was as simple as it could be. We could not have Communion today.

16. Today Bros Daniel and Finbar arrived bearing their burden of the virus. This means that only Bros Cyprian and Gabriel and Fr Matthew have not yet tested positive.

We did have an Easter Vigil in St Benedict's, though it began at 8.00, rather than later. There was a Paschal fire outside the door. Fr Prior Giles blessed the Paschal candle and Br Joseph carried it into parlour 1. He recited the *Exultet* in English. We read only three of the Old Testament readings. Again we exchanged the sign of peace and all received from the chalice.

17. EASTER SUNDAY. We had Mass in parlour 1 at 11.00 am. This followed what has become our usual method with the Mass kept simple and said in English. Rita provided a memorable Easter lunch.

18. Each of the brethren has settled into his routine in St Benedict's. Mass was held in parlour 1; otherwise there is no communal liturgy. Each prepares his own breakfast, while Tony

brings lunch from the abbey, where Rita is slaving over a hot stove. We serve ourselves from the hot cupboard.

20. We heard that Fr Giles has returned to the monastery, having completed ten days in isolation, and that he celebrated Mass in the Lady Chapel. Br Michael has also completed ten days in isolation and so he returned to the monastery this afternoon.

21. Mass was held at 11.00 both in the main parlour of St Benedict's with 3 priests and a deacon and in the Lady Chapel in the monastery with Fr Giles. Fr Mark returned from St Benedict's in the afternoon.

22. Mass was celebrated in both St Benedict's and in the Lady Chapel. Br Joseph, the simply professed, and Br Timothy returned to the monastery.

23. Fr Benedict returned today to the monastery. Fr Martin remains to say Mass in St Benedict's.

24. SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER. Fr Benedict is acting as hebdomadary, and he presided at Mass today in the Lady Chapel. Fr Martin returned to the monastery.

25. Feast of St Mark. Fr Mark presided at the Mass in the Lady Chapel. Fr Martin went back to St Benedict's to say Mass for those still there. Fr Abbot came out of isolation this afternoon. The community greeted Fr Mark for his feast day. There was no recreation, but chocolates were available at supper.

26. Br Michael departed for Douai Abbey where he is to take part in a meeting of the Chant Forum. Bros Daniel and Finbar returned today from the guesthouse. This leaves the guesthouse empty of monks. We continue without any communal liturgy except for Mass. Most of the brethren still suffer from fatigue.

Br Patrick had a first British driving lesson this afternoon.

28. Mass was at 11.00 this morning in the Lady Chapel. We celebrated Vespers in the main church at 5.30. We intend to have a skeleton liturgy from now on until the community has fully recovered. Vespers was simplified. We are reciting everything *recto tono*, which means that we sing or chant it on one note. Some items have been shortened, but Vespers is structurally the same. Compline, which followed Vespers, has been shortened.

NEWS FROM ST MARY'S MONASTERY

On February 2 we had a visit from the Rev. Geoff Smith, the new minister at the Orthodox Congregational Church in Petersham. After lunch both communities met with him at St Scholastica Priory for conversation and refreshments. He told us about his life and we had an opportunity to ask questions. Rev. Geoff is very ecumenical and often attends Compline here on Sunday evenings.

We were pleased to have a visiting monk with us on Ash Wednesday, Fr Isaac Haywiser OSB of St Vincent's Archabbey in Latrobe, Pennsylvania. Fr Isaac teaches marketing at Saint Vincent College, and during his spring break he went on a monastic pilgrimage which included Petersham as one of his stopovers. He came to community recreation that night and we had a very interesting talk with him, learning more about life at St. Vincent's.

On March 3 we had another lecture via Zoom, organized for us by Carol and Phil Zaleski. This one was given by Fr Brian Daly SJ on the topic of St Augustine's eschatology. Fr Brian is an old friend of the communities and used to come here regularly for the Triduum when he lived in Cambridge, Mass. After he was transferred to Notre Dame in Indiana, he had to curtail his visits. He now lives in California, but with the new technology he was able to visit us "virtually." After questions Fr Brian was introduced to the newer members of the communities, whom he hadn't met before.

From March 7-11 Fr Gregory was away at Mount Saviour Monastery in New York State. He was acting as co-visitor for their canonical visitation, along with Prior Dominic of Thien Tham in Texas, who was visitor.

Last year during Holy Week diocesan regulations were still in place which put restrictions upon processions, because of COVID. This year on Palm Sunday and on Holy Thursday evening we were able to process around the church again amongst the laity. Unfortunately it was raining heavily on Holy Saturday night, and we couldn't have our bonfire on its usual place on the grass

outside. Instead we had a smaller fire under the porch of the church which was sheltered from the rain.

Finally on April 23 we had a student group visit us. Fr John Gavin SJ, from the College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, brought thirteen students with him who are in his seminar on early Christian monasticism. They've been reading monastic texts, such as the Rule of St Benedict, the Life of St Anthony, the works of Cassian, and therefore wanted to visit an actual monastery. After Mass Br Isidore and Sr Emmanuel spoke with them and answered their questions. Some of the questions could be rather thought provoking, such as "Since the Rule of St Benedict places such a great emphasis on humility, how do you practise humility in your daily life?" The meeting took place in our recreation room in the newly renovated carriage house, which was a very suitable place for such a meeting.

DIC

St John Henry Newman on Repeated Cholera Epidemics

"What a dream, to be sure, that coming of cholera is! How it threatened, and how it went away! The most mysterious circumstance is that it was not overcome. It was not that medical science met and foiled it; but after showing its invincible powers it retired in triumph, as mysteriously as it came...

"There is something awful in the silent restless sweep of time – and, as years go by, and friends are taken away, one draws the thought of those who remain about one, as in cold weather one buttons up greatcoats and capes for protection...

"One's consolation under such trials, which are our necessary lot here, is that we have additional friends in heaven to plead and interest themselves for us. This I am confident of – if it is not presumptuous to be confident – but I think, as life goes on, it will be brought home to you, as it has been to me, that there are those who are busied about us, and in various daily matters taking our part."

(Letters & Diaries IX:76, XIX:277, XXX:67)

My Stay at Kristo Buase Monastery

My name is Genevieve Odamtten, a PhD candidate from the University of Bonn, Germany. As part of my studies, I travelled back home after seven long years in Germany to conduct field research work in parts of the Bono East and Greater Accra Regions, and later extended to the Ashanti Region.

I had discovered the Kristo Buase Monastery two years prior. I casually found their website after having been reading about Keur Moussa and Pluscarden Abbeys. You see, for several years, I had been listening to songs performed by monks from these Abbeys on my “Pray as You Go” App (a prayer and retreat app initiated by the Jesuits in the UK). And so, when it was time for field research in Bono East and Ashanti, I quickly made contact with Kristo Buase for accommodation. It was just right for me as it checked off my three key requirements for suitable accommodation, namely, location (to make it simple to attend daily Mass and reach target communities), good food and serenity.

I have always understood that a PhD student’s life could be likened to monastic life, in that, historically, Catholic intellectual tradition has been fostered by the monastic life. And monastic life, particularly, the western monastic tradition of the Catholic Church, has been defined on two key pillars, *Ora et Labora* (in English, “prayer and work”). It is these two foundational principles that underpin the monastic tradition in the Catholic Church and have fostered and enabled Catholic intellectual life. Writing a PhD thesis is like monastic life because the rigorous work of research, of asking questions and finding answers to them through a very deep thought process, through solitude, silence and writing, really requires these two foundational principles of prayer and work. Really, calling on God for the grace of clarity of thought and action has been practised from the time of the Church Fathers – from Origen through to Tertullian, to Anthony of Egypt through to the end of the Roman Empire. After the fall of the Empire, the rebuilding process of church and society was aided by the emergent western monastic life and intellectual tradition, of which

one of its key architects was St Benedict of Nursia, who came up with the Benedictine Rule embodied in *ora et labora*. This continued through to the medieval years, to the time of Thomas Aquinas when he was in Cologne and in Paris, until today. The intensity of their intellectual development, which was embedded in their monastic life, is akin to today's PhD process. The intense nature of writing up a research work requires prayer in an atmosphere of silence and solitude to enable one to be in deep thought to be able to write.

As determined as I was to stay in a Monastery during this research trip, I requested to break up my stays into chunks, and thankfully, it worked! I was elated! I knew that as comparable as my life as a PhD was to monastic life, staying at Kristo Buase would be such an effective way of conducting field work and working on my research. And so it was! I loved every bit of my stay there and thank each of the monks and postulants for their hospitality and prayers. Thank you very much Fr Bede, Fr Anthony, Brothers Basilio, Gabriel, Patrick, and the postulants, Francis and Joseph. God bless you for your hospitality!

Yours,
Genevieve

“Let us take to ourselves these comfortable thoughts, both in the contemplation of our own death, or upon the death of our friends. Wherever faith in Christ is, there is Christ Himself. He said to Martha, ‘Believest thou this?’ Wherever there is a heart to answer, ‘Lord, I believe’, there Christ is present. There our Lord vouchsafes to stand, though unseen – whether over the bed of death or over the grave; whether we ourselves are sinking or those who are dear to us. Blessed be his name! nothing can rob us of this consolation: we will be as certain, through His grace, that He is standing over us in love, as though we saw Him. We will not ... doubt an instant that He is thoughtful about us.”

St John Henry Newman, *Tears of Christ at the Grave of Lazarus*

EASTER ANTIPHONS

Angelus autem Domini descendit de caelo - The Angel of the Lord came down from heaven, and approaching the stone he rolled it back, and sat upon it, alleluia, alleluia!

This first Antiphon of Easter Day, like most of those that follow it, is set in the eighth mode. It begins with a vigorously rising fourth interval, from Sol to Do, Tonic to Dominant, via a quilisma on La. This at once sets a tone, or mood, for all that follows: confident, bright, brisk, naturally flowing; almost jaunty. The word “descendit” is set on a rising group, passing through the high reciting note “Do” to the “Re” above. So: about this Angelic descent there is nothing whatever fearful, or sad, or negative. How about an Angel coming down from heaven, though, moving a huge stone aside and sitting on it? The Antiphon sings of this as if there were nothing surprising here. This is what happened today! Our business now is only to respond to it with our glad Alleluias!

The Antiphons set for Easter Day Lauds become extremely familiar to monks. They are repeated each day through the Octave, including on the Second Sunday of Easter. In the previous Antiphonal, which we used up to 2005, they were repeated also at Vespers, and at each of the Little Hours, each day throughout the Octave.

The texts of these Antiphons are taken from the Resurrection account of St Matthew’s Gospel. The risen Lord himself remains, for now, as it were, off stage. Instead, all the focus is on the Angel who greeted the holy women at the tomb. The Chant is not then (yet) attempting to express the dogmatic fact of Christ’s resurrection. It does not (yet) sing of his abiding presence, not does it (yet) recount his appearances. Instead it draws us into those first moments of dumbfounded astonishment, of awestruck surprise, of slowly dawning realisation: when crushing grief trembled on the brink of transformation into uncontainable joy. The Event had already taken place. Christ’s body was gone. We enter the scene just as the darkness of night and despair is turning into brilliant

daylight; just before the news is finally announced, that Life, beyond all hope, has definitively overwhelmed death.

Who moved the stone? It stood as an obstacle to revelation. So, according to St Matthew's account, the Angel effortlessly sets it aside, and nonchalantly sits on it. Admirers of Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* might be reminded here of the insouciance of the hobbits Merry and Pippin at the ruined gates of Isengard, after the overthrow of the evil wizard Saruman. They recline at their ease, smoking the best pipe weed, as they wait to welcome the party hastening to rescue them, through so much toil and danger, from a mortal peril that has now passed.

Et ecce terraemotus – Behold, an earthquake! Preserving its focus on the Angel of Resurrection, the liturgy inverts the order of Matthew Chapter 28 verse 2. So: the opening words of the verse are assigned to the second Antiphon. The words *Angelus enim Domini descendit de caelo* are then repeated. We have now a different melody, though again the word “descendit” is set on a rising group. Then the third Antiphon dwells on the appearance of the Angel: *aspectus eius sicut fulgur, vestimenta eius sicut nix – his appearance was like lightning, his clothing like snow, alleluia, alleluia*. Of course this dazzling brightness reflects something of the nature of the Angel's perpetual abode in heavenly glory. But also it reflects the nature of his message. This is the central message of the Gospel; the Good News of Christ's victory, and of our salvation in Him. This message gives light; it is clear and clean; it is full of energy; it radiates outwards in all directions; it is more than merely earthly.

At last in the fifth Antiphon the Angel speaks. The opening musical formula here echoes that of the first Antiphon. *Respondens autem Angelus, dixit mulieribus: Nolite timere, scio enim quod Iesum quaeritis, alleluia – The Angel replied and said to the women: Do not be afraid. I know that you seek Jesus, alleluia*. And this is where these so oft-repeated Antiphons leave off. We still have not actually got to the Resurrection announcement. Of course we know it; we sing of it with every Alleluia; we proclaim it in the Chapter and Hymn of this same

Office. But for now we are to savour this precious moment: the first moment of dawn, of birth, of faith, of joy. *Do not be afraid*, says the Angel. You, standing in Choir singing these Antiphons two thousand years on: have total trust in God, and in Jesus. All is in his hands. He brings good out of evil. His victory does away not only with death, but also with all and any sin whatever. And your long search for him has not been, will not be in vain. Your Lenten observance here meets its consummation. You came, weighed down with grief, expecting to find a corpse, and instead you met a messenger from heaven. He indicates the open door of the tomb, thereby evoking also the door that is now open to paradise, to God, to eternal life. So sing, and rejoice without ceasing! And as once again you re-live these moments, let your Alleluias ring out to the ends of the earth!

DBH

A. VIII g



A N-ge-lus autem Dó-mi-ni * descéndit de cæ-lo,



et accé-dens revólvit lá-pidem et se-dé-bat super e-um,



alle-lú-ia alle-lú-ia. E u o u a e.

PRAYER WITH ST BENEDICT¹

*Allowing the work of God to be done in us*²

If we are to speak of prayer with St Benedict, we have first to establish it in the context of continuous prayer in which the Rule immerses us. The Benedictine community is gathered, formed, informed by the Word of God. In the community, God comes first. It is he who has called each one by his name. He has called us in line with our tastes and leanings, our skills and qualities, but by his choice alone. And he gathers us by his Word, around his Word, heard, meditated, celebrated. And the whole discipline of the Rule fits into the Bible's wisdom tradition, to turn the monk into a disciple who listens to the Word and puts it into practice.

This fundamental attitude of listening and obeying is the condition for all human and spiritual development. It makes the monk mature and grow, to reach the full stature of Christ. The monastic community is the place where the Word of God calls, resounds, grows, is incarnated and grows like a seed. It becomes the life of men and of women who allow themselves to be formed and informed by it. This listening requires a complete conversion; a selective listening will not do, it must be all-encompassing. An essential element in the life of a monk is the need for conversion, so that he can become capable of listening. In order to provide a favourable environment for this conversion to listening and to the Word and to putting it into practice, St Benedict suggests a complete ascetical scheme, made up of listening silence, obedience and humility, the fertile soil in which the Word can germinate. We need to understand Benedictine prayer in this context. It will tend to become continuous, and will be characterised by being very close to the Word of God and, as it were, complementary to *lectio divina*, to the liturgy and to prayer of the psalms.

It gradually becomes continuous. Once it has become continuous, it accompanies the monk in his work as well as in the

¹ This was a conference given to various groups in the Abbey's guesthouse

² The titles are the work of the editors.

liturgy and relationships, in *lectio divina* and in solitude. More and more the monk becomes not so much someone who works for God as someone who allows the work of God to be done in him and by him. In him, prayer shows the work of God celebrated in the liturgy, continued in manual or spiritual work, the discovery of Christ in the other, the deepening interiority in his personal life. This prayer breathes through all the monk's activities and is inseparable from his life. This continuous prayer is nourished by the Word of God, the word on which he ruminates in his personal *lectio divina*, the word sung in the liturgy, the word shared in meeting others, the word incarnated by his hands in the matter he works with. Work is as it were ennobled and set free by its original relationship to the work of God. Thus a single breath brings about the unity of a balanced life and the life of prayer. Because the monk's goal is the achievement of unity. He tries to bring about the unity of all his desires by directing his whole being to doing God's will, the work of God.

Prayer nourished by the word celebrated and meditated.

St Benedict gives us the chapter of his Rule on prayer (Chapter 20) after having spoken to us about the Divine Office. He concludes the series of chapters on the Divine Office with a chapter devoted to pure prayer, inspired by the attraction of divine grace; prayer which is heard, not on account of a flood of words, but for purity of heart and tears of compunction... In the whole of monastic tradition, it is essential for prayer to be bodily. This is a different kind of prayer from liturgical prayer. During the Divine Office we are present to God by attention and watchfulness, and there is a whole series of bodily actions, made up of chants, movements, psalm-singing, and that is a task. But to that task must be added adoration. Adoration is the best demonstration of that spiritual fear in which the spirit must be in harmony with voice and action in order to express something of the mystery which the liturgy is celebrating.

For that, we need to attain a deeper and more secret intimacy, that of the heart. But that can only be touched by the attraction of

divine grace. We must ask God to be introduced into this heart-to-heart, where words are silent, actions become pointless, the thoughts are calmed... All that remains is the pure prayer of the heart and the tears that rise up as though the Lord was weeping in us for our own faults and those of humanity. We are given this time of prayer, a gratuitous time of devotion. It is no longer the fruit of our effort, even if it does require our perseverance. It is a “short” time, St Benedict tells us, because it cannot be measured. But St Gregory speaks of the hours that St Benedict spent in nocturnal watches. It is an altogether personal time, and the Rule asks that this time of prayer should not be prolonged in community, because it is necessary to respect the grace of each.

Prayer is that time when the understanding of the Word descends into the heart and then nourishes liturgical celebration. But despite that, we cannot transform vocal and bodily liturgy into prayer. On the other hand, faithfulness to the Office is a marvellous preparation for the grace of pure prayer. Even if this prayer becomes ever simpler, it mysteriously remains nourished by the Word, celebrated and meditated. Prayer, if not nourished by the Word, could become a sort of transcendental meditation with nothing to do with the heart-to-heart of prayer. That remains trust and silence exchanged in the unbroken thread of the theme of the covenant between God and his creature about which we sing in the Office. The Doctors of prayer pass on to us all their experience of prayer in Biblical language which they have most frequently drawn from the choral office or *lectio divina*. Without this incorporation of the Word and its assimilation by mind and heart, there is no doubt there would not be that silent rumination of the heart, the repetition of four or five words which have become dense with the meaning of the whole, and which is touched/wounded even to tears by the reality of the love celebrated and sung in the Office, becoming conscious of who God is for me.

This is why St Benedict speaks to us about prayer following what he says about the Office. And the monk who is faithful to that Office can hope to know, to experience, that devotion of the heart which knows it is loved despite its unworthiness. And if

liturgical prayer does not reach down and if it is not fulfilled at this deep level, then it is a real lack in our lives, as if we have missed the mark. So let us learn to “dwell” after the Office, after the Eucharist in order to savour the fruit of the Word and to cause it to go down into the depths of the heart where it can spring up into new life, shown by our conversion in the everyday things of our lives.

To sum up: St Benedict’s teaching on prayer

- 1) To purify the disciple’s heart through an asceticism made up of silent listening, obedient listening, humility.
- 2) To organise life in such a way that it becomes entirely the work of God: manual work, relationships, liturgy, personal time. In this way the whole of life becomes continuous prayer.
- 3) That through this organisation of his life, the monk brings about unity in himself. That he should make the passage from a multiplicity of desires to the sole desire for God. That he should become a being at peace, one-d, *monos*.
- 4) That liturgical prayer might become a preparation for silent prayer. That silent prayer might give depth to liturgical prayer, that thus prayer and work might be but a single activity, a single praise, a bringing about of the work of God.

And this in community, in such a way that the pairing of community and person should grow together in charity. Because where charity is growing, God is present.

Fr Bernard Ducruet OSB
(trans. DGC)

IS THE POPE A CATHOLIC? *continued*

Perhaps there are three biographical keys to Pope Francis. One is his Latin American identity. It gives him such things as a spontaneous faith and warmth, a deeply-rooted Catholicism, a sense of people and “the people”, especially the poor, of the symbiosis of faith and culture, as well as a social and political sensitivity. A second key, surely, is his Jesuit identity. This gives him a strong Christocentricity, the notion of discernment, an orientation to decision, action, mission, to the individual and his or her personal path. A third key is his experience of collaboration (collegiality) as a leading Latin American bishop, especially at the 5th General Assembly of the Latin American bishops held at the Marian shrine of Aparecida in Brazil in 2007, and the document it produced: a pastoral blueprint for the Church in Latin America.

All of this has run on into his pontificate. As Karol Wojtyła’s personality and experience and formation flowed into his Papacy, so does Jorge Bergoglio’s. Every Peter includes a Simon.

He belongs to a philosophical-theological current of Catholic thought that favours dialectic thinking, not of the either/or but of the both/and kind. He thinks in complementary opposites, in a bipolar way, seeking reconciliation neither in elimination of one of the poles or in a compromise, but at a higher, supernatural level, in Christ. Many misinterpretations of his mind spring from missing this. In his teaching on married love in *Amoris Laetitia*, for example, he simultaneously combines the classical teaching of the Church on marriage as an indissoluble, lifelong union of a man and a woman, open to life, with a clear-eyed recognition of life’s complexities and an insistence on merciful pastoral accompaniment of those in irregular situations. What holds these two together and prevents them degenerating into black and white alternatives (the doctrinal versus the pastoral) is the summons to conversion, discipleship and holiness in view of the fullness of eschatological communion. Even his recent remarks on civil partnerships follow this pattern. He can describe same-sex marriage as an unacceptable incongruity and declare homosexual

acts illicit, yet simultaneously call for acceptance at a family level of gay members and, in reference to debates in Argentina before he was Pope, also envisage the possibility of some legal systems allowing couples of the same sex, independently of the question of sexual relations, access to the legal protection civil partnerships can provide, for example in health care and inheritance. Or to take more familiar, less subtle examples, he can simultaneously call to evangelisation and warn against proselytism, can advocate the quest for holiness and full-blooded social engagement, can be clear that Christ is the fullness of truth and grace and yet seek common ground with Muslims. It is not a matter of oppositions, but complementary opposites; not of contradictions but of contrasts harmonised by a Christian vision which is not monocular.

I am not going to parse my way through every controversy, every controversial off-the-cuff remark, “who am I to judge?”, Pachamama and all the rest. There’s no need to defend every action and gesture and statement. I will say, though, and forthrightly, that suggestions that this Pope espouses heresy are awry. He is, and he intends to be, an orthodox Catholic. He is, as he says, a “son of the Church”. Neither is he a moral relativist. To take terms from the history of moral theology, he is neither a rigorist nor a laxist, neither an “objectivist” nor “subjectivist”. He holds the poles in tension, once again. Nor is he some kind of intellectual gaucho who makes things up as he goes along, nor a leftover hangover from liberation theology. He’s possessed of a serious spiritual, literary, philosophical and theological formation.

He is misread on the left and the right. Why do we, positively or negatively, so often prefer half a Pope? What is he then? He is a man of clear priorities. Let me name some: the mercy of God, the centrality of Christ, the primacy of the kerygma. He wants mission to prevail over self-preservation, love to be the primary law. He would have warmed to a phrase of my novice master, “Christianity is something you do”. “Christianity is meant above all to be put into practice” (*Gaudete et Exsultate*, 109).

He is a reformer. He does not want an introverted Church. He wants a “missionary conversion”. “I dream of a ‘missionary

option’, that is a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the Church’s customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channelled for the evangelisation of today’s world rather than for her self-preservation” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 27). This is not advocating a “new” Church, as some fear, but, vividly expressed, a renewal of the Church, precisely as Vatican II, John Paul II and Benedict XVI desired, a thorough transformation in view of the realisation of the Church’s final purpose, the salvation of souls. “If something should rightly disturb us and trouble our consciences, it is the fact that so many of our brothers and sisters are living without the strength, light and consolation born of friendship with Jesus Christ, without a community of faith to support them, without meaning and a goal in life” (*EG* 49). He wants clergy, especially bishops and priests, to eschew clericalism and careerism, to come off all pedestals, to be close and connected to Christ to their people, with the smell of the sheep upon them and willing to touch the flesh of Christ in the wounded.

This is timely and refreshing and smacks of the Gospel. And what has he done? He has been Pope now for 8 years. Undoubtedly, if he has bewildered some in the Church, he has still touched many within and without the Church. He has brought a freshness. He has spoken to the *orbi* as well as the *Urbi*, especially by gestures. He is listened to by unlikely people. He has conveyed Christian goodness.

As teacher of the faith, he has already delivered a substantial body of work. He has exercised papal magisterium and devoted his major writings to such subjects as faith (*Fidei Lumen*, 2013), evangelisation and mission (*EG* 2013), “care for our common home” (*Laudato Si*, 2015), marriage and the family (*Amoris Laetitia*, 2016), the pursuit of holiness (*Gaudete et Exsultate*, 2018), the role of young people (*Christus Vivit*, 2019), the situation in the Amazon (*Querida Amazonia*, 2020), and most recently universal human fraternity and social friendship (*Fratelli Tutti*, 2020).

If we want to learn him, I suggest especially *Evangelii*

Gaudium, Laudato Si, Gaudete et Exsultate and now, *Fratelli Tutti*. In LS and FT he has added, in particular, to the social teaching of the Church and brought it into engagement with burning contemporary issues. He has thrown a bridge over the chasm between “Church teaching” and today’s reality.

He has a gift for touching contemporary sensitivities and issues and people, and at the same time for speaking in a decisively Christian way.

In the realm of Canon Law, he has also made a contribution: as regards, for example, women’s contemplative life, the authority of Bishops Conferences in liturgical matters, in responding to sexual abuse and cover-ups, and not least, in introducing the possibility of a briefer process of nullity.

Lastly, he has had an impact on the liturgy. He has opened the washing of the feet to all. He has enriched the yearly calendar, adding three Popes (John XXIII, Paul VI, John Paul II), making Mary, Mother of the Church, an obligatory memorial for the Monday after Pentecost, adding our Lady of Loreto to Advent and raising St Mary Magdalene to the level of a feast. A senior official of the Congregation for Divine Worship has remarked that it is simply untrue that the Pope isn’t bothered about liturgy. Further, Pope Francis has beatified more than 1220 people and canonised about 900 (admittedly one group of 813). Among the former is the recently beatified Carlo Acutis, a 15-year-old internet expert. Among the latter, three recent Popes, Oscar Romero, Teresa of Calcutta, the parents of St Thérèse, the children of Fatima. In 2015, he declared an Armenian poet, mystic and monk, St Gregory of Narek, a Doctor of the Church.

Admittedly, I am drawing up something of an inventory here. I am not, for example, exploring his teaching or legislative acts in depth. My point is other. Once again, if one stands back from these achievements, not getting lost in details, taking them in the round, not focussing on unfinished particulars, what does one “pick up”? I find it hard to read them as the actions of a sower of discord and a wrecker of the Church. They stand within the recent practice of the Papacy. They are in general substantive and positive. For me, they

confirm Pope Leo the Great's insight that, in the course of history, "blessed Peter has not abandoned the government of the Church". Once more, I am not saying that one has to hail every one of them or that they are free of all blemish or ambiguity, or that every action of this pontificate is beyond reproach. Every Pope, like Simon Peter once again, is a mysterious blend of strength and weakness, of limit and grace. Every Pope misjudges, or misses opportunities, or because of events or the resistance and inertia of others, is simply unable to do all he could. "On earth, the broken arch." One day indeed, Pope Francis will be in the past. There will be a sifting of what was of the moment and of what will last, of Simon Bar-Jona and Peter. And we will find ourselves "among new men, strange faces, other minds", or hopefully preoccupied with eternity. But, as of now, it seems to me the jury is in rather than out. Taken in the round, as a whole, there is something solid, good, wholesome and Catholic being offered here in Pope Francis' exercise of the Petrine, papal ministry. There is something worth learning, something of Christ, something of being a contemporary disciple and of how to be the Church in our troubled "now". There is something worth living "together with", realistically, confidently, gratefully, even joyfully.

Dare I say, dare I suggest, Pope Francis is a call to conversion?

On the Path to Synodality

Last October, the Holy Father began what is called the "synodal path". We Christians are God's people following Christ through history towards the final Kingdom of God. In other words, we are a People who are travelling together. We are a synodal people. You remember the story of the twelve-year old Jesus and his parents going up to Jerusalem for the Passover. They travelled as part of a larger group. And the word for that is "synod" (Lk 2:44). They travelled together, Jewish people, to Jerusalem. We the Christian people are travelling together to the heavenly Jerusalem.

So, the Pope would like us to meet together to see how we can better travel together, along Christ's way.

Within our Catholic community, within this People of God, the Church, the Body of Christ, there are many different roles, ministries and ways of serving. There are lay people, the great majority (1.3 billion) living out their Christian lives in different ways. There are religious or the consecrated (about 1 million, I believe). There are ordained ministers who have the task of shepherding the flock (more than 400,000). Jesus is clear on how this shepherding is and isn't to be done. But beyond the variety is a unity. We have one Lord and Master, Jesus Christ. One faith. We are all children of God through baptism. The Holy Spirit is part of our lives. We are all under the same commandment to love as Christ loved us. We are all called to the same Table. We share a common Christian freedom and dignity and a common goal: the heavenly kingdom. (Cf. Lumen Gentium 10). We each have a contribution to make. We are all singers in the choir. We are fellow travellers. This is what "being synodal" means.

The Holy Father is simply asking us to ask: how are we doing with this? Are we a synodal parish or diocese or lay association or society or religious community? Do we allow each other to make our contributions to the whole? As we know, there are people in the Church who are disconnected, who feel marginalised, sometimes hurt. Are we listening to and supporting one another as much as we could? What forums do we have for doing this? Could they be improved, or new ones created? What is our experience of walking together? Are the clergy too clerical, control-freaks? Or, conversely, are we allowing them to shepherd us as they are called to? How do women feel? Young people? The elderly? And so on.

When this came out, I first thought: come on, here we are going into winter and recovering from Covid, how can we do this? But then it has come to me: this pandemic has scattered us, disheartened us. Here is an invitation to come together again and pick up.

Bishop Hugh Gilbert OSB

THE AMBIGUITY OF GOD'S SILENCE

The moral choices a faithful Christian has to make are seldom easy, and rarely crystal clear. The recent pandemic has highlighted this in many ways; one of the decisions one has had to make is whether one should, in conscience, make use of a vaccine to fight the covid virus when it comes from foetal stem cells? And for another example: while I lived in France, a young woman who belonged to a youth group I ran and who was studying to be a midwife, told me that it was compulsory for all midwifery students to be present at an abortion... should she continue? The examples could go on and on.

Shushako Endo, a Japanese Catholic author of the late twentieth century, wrote what is now considered a classic novel, *Silence*, which highlights, among other themes, the ambiguity made present in the life of those who try to love God. It is the story of two very idealistic, young Portuguese Jesuit priests at the beginning of the seventeenth century. Missioned to Japan in order to give succour to the persecuted Christians in that country, they must also try to discover the fate of their mentor, who is rumoured to have apostatized. The novel has been filmed twice, once in a Japanese version, and most recently, in a remarkably moving remake by Martin Scorsese. I highly recommend viewing the Scorsese version. It is long and not an easy watch, but worth the effort.

Silence is a much harder novel to discuss than the other works I've commented on in these pages. Its plot is disarmingly straightforward: the young Jesuits arrive in Japan and are immediately confronted with the very harsh reality of the persecuted Christians of Japan: torture, martyrdom, and the apostasy of those who choose to abandon their faith outwardly in order to stay alive. In fact, the Japanese man sent to be their guide was once a faithful Catholic who apostatized when confronted with potential martyrdom. As he states, if he had been able to live in a time when the faith was not persecuted, he would have been a very pious and faithful Christian. Soon our young Jesuits have to

make the same choice: will they remain faithful to the proclamation of the gospel message under duress and relentless pursuit, or will they reject Christ to stay alive, and thus dishearten their fellow Christians? Which is the right choice to make?

That's exactly the main reason for the difficulty in writing about this book. Endo doesn't give cut-and-dry answers and presents the story in all its varying shades of grey. The young Jesuits do eventually meet their former spiritual mentor, who has indeed apostatized, is now married, and is writing anti-Christian propaganda for the Japanese government. He implores his two young proteges to give up the faith. Which path will they choose? They could choose death, but what good would that bring for those undergoing persecution? They could continue to try to hide and minister to the underground Christians, which would mean a life of constant fear and running. Or, they could apostatize and live comfortable, bourgeois lives. Another possibility would be to only "seem" to reject the faith, still keeping it in their hearts; yet this would imply stepping on a "fumie"—a ceramic image of Christ crucified—an act that would be repeated yearly (if not oftener) in the face of fellow Christians in order to discourage them.

And through it all, the other main theme of the book comes through: the absolute silence of God in the face of suffering. This is something every single faithful Christian has to come to grips with: how can, and why does, God remain silent in the darkest moments of our lives? Why does He allow His faithful ones to undergo torture, murder, sickness, etc.? The main protagonist, Fr Rodrigues, begins the book as a fervent, prayerful (if overly idealistic) Jesuit. Once the reality of the situation in Japan and its underground Church become concrete, he begins to question God's love, especially in the face of His constant silence. He witnesses much suffering, including the martyrdom of some of the faithful entrusted to him: instead of being edified, he becomes disgusted at God's seeming impotence and at the martyrs' willingness to die.

Fr Rodrigues is eventually captured after weeks of hiding; his torturers place him in one of the most hideous and harrowing

situations I have ever read in a book: he is imprisoned in a cage and forced to listen to the muffled screams and agonized cries of his faithful flock, who are being slowly tortured; meanwhile he is told that he alone can save them from their suffering by apostatizing. What should he do? Should he save his faithful, or stay faithful to God while letting them go to their deaths? And does he even have the right to make that decision for them? And *where is God?* A voice speaks to him, urging him to go ahead and reject God; is the voice that Rodrigues hears, imploring him to step on the fumie and save himself and his fellows really the voice of God, or is it the devil tempting him? And as one of his jailors (a former Christian himself) asks, should Rodrigues even be attempting to evangelize a nation that already has its own religion and culture?

As mentioned above, Endo doesn't give us any easy answers. I won't reveal any more of the plot by giving out spoilers, but I will say that even after two times reading the novel and watching the film twice, I am constantly haunted by the choices that Endo sets before Fr Rodrigues and the readers of this novel. What would I do, if placed in that situation? I'd like to think that I would choose martyrdom and not apostatize, come what may. But would I really stay faithful when I know that my own personal choice would mean life or death for dozens of others? And what choice would I make *if God remained silent*, not letting me know in a clear way what His will is? How would I know right from wrong? The truth is... I don't know. I can only hope that the Holy Spirit would be with me and help me choose.

In spite of all the ambiguity of the book, there is one group of people in the novel who are, in my opinion, the real heroes of the narrative: the simple, faithful Catholics of Japan, mostly uneducated peasants, who refuse to reject Christ and instead undergo martyrdom. The book describes a few scenes of martyrdom, movingly filmed by Martin Scorsese in his film version. The most remarkable is that of an older Christian man, tied to a cross at the edge of the sea, who sings hymns while the

tide and waves slowly rise and drown him. His courage and steadfastness in the face of death is awe-inspiring.

The fate of martyrs has inspired Christians since the very beginnings of our faith. I have a friend who will soon be ordained a priest for the underground Church of China... the stories he tells me and the photos he has shown me of innocent people beaten, churches and convents destroyed, and much more, have made clear the reality of a persecuted faith. Their examples have helped spread the message of Christ over the entire planet. Endo takes this example and upends it, using it to stir up unfamiliar questions and disturbing emotions. He challenges us to look at our faith and our relationship with God and ask: what would we do in the face of the silence of God?

Br Benedict Joseph

From the Annals

April 29. Feast of St Catherine of Siena. A shortened Vigils and Lauds took place at 6.15 this morning in the chancel. The *Te Deum* we recited.

Today many people turned up to make preparations for a concert which is to take place tomorrow in the transepts. They set up many seats and constructed a platform for the performers at the south side of the transepts. A small marquee has been set up in the transepts. The concert is a performance of a new work to commemorate the lending of the *Book of Deer* by the University of Cambridge to the University of Aberdeen for a year. The *Book of Deer* is a Gospel book dating from the tenth century which has additional texts in Scottish Gaelic from the twelfth century, recording land grant to the monastery of Deer in Buchan.

30. The *Book of Deer* concert took place this afternoon in the transepts. The music was composed by Richard Ingham who led the musicians. The concert organiser was Tom Griffith, who is a neighbour at Mains of Edinvale.