

# Pluscarden Benedictines

No. 199 News and Notes for our Friends Autumn 2022

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Cover: Sanctuary in Sunlight by Tony Scott

Back: *St Benedict blessing books* by Br Cyprian Bampton OSB

## FR ABBOT'S LETTER

Dear Friends,

This letter is devoted to Br Gabriel Potter, of our community. Br Gabriel died on the 21st of July, after sixty-three years on earth and thirty-four years in our community. To understand our Br Gabriel, it is important to recall the facts of his life:

That he was a Lancashire man. That he was born into a loving family, which accompanied him all his life and still does, in the persons of his brother Nigel and his nephew James. That his first job after school was as a labourer in a Liverpool engineering works. That on completion of his degree in Accountancy Studies he became a highly successful and much respected accountant – the “best in the Northwest”, we are told. He undoubtedly loved what he did, but he left that work when he was 26, feeling a call to the priesthood. He went to the Venerable English College in Rome and excelled in his studies at the Gregorian University. He loved his life in Rome, but he felt a further call to the life of a monk, so again he left what he loved to embrace what he believed God wanted for him. And so he came here, in 1988, aged 29.

Here, besides the praise of God, he did all the things monks typically do: he cooked, and well. He worked on wood and in the garden, perhaps not so well, not being particularly suited, but he did it. Then he became guest master in 1995. The guest master's life is one of real service: to the guests who come, and no less to the monks, because he ensures that guests can be served without disturbance to the quiet of the monastery. Br Gabriel gave us this service for about half his monastic life. Then, for the last decade of his life, he served us as bursar. This was a task to which he was very well suited, but it was nonetheless demanding, especially as this last decade was marked by increasing physical weakness. He remained at his desk until eight days before he died.

St Benedict speaks of the *utilis frater*, the “useful brother”. Br Gabriel was such. Not only in the obvious sense as can be deduced from all the useful service he carried out among us; but in the

sense intended by St Benedict, that he turned his mind, his whole inner being, towards God. Br Gabriel hated waste. Everything had to be useful. And the main work of his last two years was to try to make his whole soul useful, to give his whole mind and heart to prayer. This was his last service.

It is important to recall all this because all of this was important to Br Gabriel. He was a man of great renunciations, and yet in a deeper sense he never let go of anything. All the connections he formed in the course of his life remained to the end: to his family, to his working-class background – he was very political and very much for the workers – to friendships formed in his work years and his time at the English College. He was an intensely private person, yet in his own way he took people into his heart. He had his own way of giving love and friendship, and he attracted love and friendship. If a life is to be evaluated by whether it increases or decreases the amount of love in the world, Br Gabriel's life was valuable.

We remember Br Gabriel out of a sense of duty: to pray for his soul, to preserve among us the testimony of his faith and his certainty that at his death he would go to be with Christ, who will raise him again in glory. Br Gabriel will approve of our feeling this sense of duty, because he was a man of duty.

We remember him out of love. This also is in line with how Br Gabriel lived. For him, there was no duty that was not followed by love. For example, when he handled cheques, he always wanted to know, if he could, about the persons who gave them. He saw in every donation he handled, the love behind it, that he felt and reciprocated. So, he will appreciate that we remember him and pray for him out of love.

We remember Br Gabriel because we have hope. That is to say we hold him in our minds and hearts not only because of the life that just passed but because of the life to come, because of the resurrection. This seems obvious, but here I find I have to pause. Reflecting on duty, reflecting on love, it is easy to recall the Br Gabriel we knew, to feel a deep connection with him through our own duty and love.

Hope? Certainly, Br Gabriel was a man of hope. Deep, immense hope. He could say with St Paul: “My desire is to depart and be with Christ.” But if in duty and service and love he seems connected to us, the hope he had seemed to disconnect him from life as we experienced it. His great hope for heaven sat uncomfortably in his mortal flesh. This was a suffering to us, and to him, because he didn’t want to make others suffer. In this regard, he couldn’t understand us any better than we could understand him.

For Br Gabriel, the time for hope has passed. He is in the hands of God. We continue to hope: for Br Gabriel, for ourselves. For him, may everything that was obscured by the shadows of this world shine brightly now; may he see the face of God. For us, may we one day see what he sees, and as we shall see God as he really is, may we see Br Gabriel as he really is.

Yours devotedly in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Fr Anselm". The letters are cursive and fluid, with a prominent cross at the beginning of the word "Fr".

“Contemplative men who are highly burnt with the love of everlasting life are forsooth highest in this most lovely burning, and most beloved of the Lover Everlasting; so that they seldom or never go out to worldly business, nor yet receive the dignity of prelacy nor honours; but rather, certainly, withholding themselves within themselves, with joy and in song of praise they always in mind ascend to Christ. Truly in this, the Church follows the hierarchy of angels, in which the highest angels are not sent outward, being evermore near to God. They that are high in Christ’s love and contemplation are so busy in the sight of God alone, that they take not sovereignty among men.”

Richard Rolle, *The Fire of Love* I,3

## NEWS FROM ST MARY'S MONASTERY

On April 29, Rick Chaffee, a long-time friend of both communities died. Shortly before his death he was visited in his home by Fr Dunstan who anointed him, heard his confession and gave him Holy Communion. Rick's funeral was held here in our church on May 14. Fr Gregory presided and Fr Dunstan gave the homily. As an excavator and general handyman, Rick might be described best as a Renaissance man, since he could do basically everything. All over our property he left his mark. As an excavator, Rick dug trenches so that generators could be installed at our monastery and the guesthouse, and levelled the ground around the carriage house in preparation for the renovation. He and the men he employed came to the rescue in the library by installing a new ceiling after the old one caved in when one of the toilets in the guesthouse upstairs was leaking. They also installed new linoleum tiles in the library when the original tiles started cracking. Behind our monastery, Rick levelled our old garden area after it had become overgrown with trees and bushes, making it possible for us to start a new garden with raised beds. He also did plastering, various repairs and much more. One of his last accomplishments was to roll a very large boulder down our driveway which now rests in front of the renovated carriage house, inscribed with "St Mary's Monastery". Rick was a childhood friend of Mark McCurn and Richard Shaw. He was also a friend of Fr Bede who composed some words for the funeral which were read out by Fr Dunstan during his homily. After the funeral, a reception was held in the town of Royalston which was attended by Fr Gregory and Br Vincent.

From May 17 to June 21, we were very pleased to have Fr Abbot visit us for five weeks. He stayed longer than usual since Covid had prevented him from coming sooner. His last visit was in February 2020. At that time, he said he would be back in May. As he himself noted, he kept his promise, only it was May two years later! While he was here, we went on a community outing to the American Heritage Museum in Hudson, Massachusetts, a military

history museum specializing in tanks. The tanks on display are fully functional and the museum even offers tank rides and tank driving lessons. However, we decided to forgo this pleasure since the price for a ten-minute tank ride is \$595, and a twenty-minute driving lesson costs \$995. The tour guides are all veterans. One of them, Colin, originally from England and a veteran of the British Army, was pleased to have a chat with Fr Abbot and Fr Dunstan.

When Fr Dunstan was ordained a priest in 2009, he didn't expect to be performing many marriages. However, he did just that on June 18 when he officiated at the wedding of Emma Delisle and Andrew Schulman in Northampton, at their request. Emma is the eldest daughter of our good friends Andy and Susan Delisle, whom we have known for many years. In fact, we have known Emma since babyhood, as she was baptized in Petersham by Fr Abbot when he was local superior of St Mary's Monastery. Thus, it was fitting the wedding should take place when he was over for a visit.

Normally we have a common meal with the sisters on July 4, Independence Day. But this year we had to eat our meals separately after one of the sisters tested positive for Covid. For several days after this the sisters came only to Mass. When no one else tested positive in their community, the sisters resumed coming to all of the Divine Office in our church, and we were able to have a festive meal together on July 11 for St Benedict's Day.

On July 7 the sisters had another visit from Sr Lynne McKenzie OSB of Sacred Heart Monastery in Cullman, Alabama, President of the Federation of Saint Scholastica, one of the principal congregations of American Benedictine women, and Moderator of the CIB (*Communio Internationales Benedictinarum*). She was here to give our sisters further assistance with the drafting of the constitutions of the new congregation which the nuns formerly aggregated to the Subiaco Congregation are currently forming. While she was here, Sr Lynne gave a talk to both communities, based on a talk she gave in June at the Centennial of the Federation of St Scholastica. Afterwards there was time for some questions and answers.

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## AN APPRECIATION OF THE 2022 PENTECOST LECTURES

After an interval of three years, during which the annual Pentecost lectures at Pluscarden were suspended due to the pandemic, the event returned with a bang. Dr Christopher (Chris) Ruddy, a theology professor at the Catholic University of America in Washington, DC, gave an outstanding series of lectures entitled “Praise in an Age of Agitation”. To say that the topic was apropos would be putting it mildly: war in Ukraine and Africa, Brexit, immigration crises, scandals in the Church, rampant inflation, weekly mass shootings, and of course a global pandemic, have us all wondering what could possibly come next and how can it get any worse. We all worry now about the future and the place of God in all of this—is He present? Does He care about our suffering? And, most of all, is He at work in any visible manner?

Dr Ruddy proposes that instead of worry and anxiety, the best response for a Christian is rather praise and thanksgiving. He began his lecture series with a quote by rock singer (and cradle Catholic, by the way) Bruce Springsteen: “It ain’t a sin to be glad to be alive.” Are we glad to be alive, even in these admittedly difficult times? He then showed us how anxiety about the state of current affairs in both global and personal affairs lead almost inevitably to sinful attitudes of anger, acedia, and even gluttony, which the fathers of the desert saw as a gateway to other sins by making us a slave to our passions. He concentrated on acedia—characterized by early monks as the “noonday devil”—during this first lecture. Dr Ruddy reminded us that for Thomas Aquinas, acedia is a sadness about spiritual things, a lack of hope in God’s providence, and a disgust with activity that leads to laziness and despair. He quoted largely from a recent work by Abbot Jean-Charles Nault, *The Noonday Devil*, which deals with the question of acedia in modern religious and secular life, and then gave out some extremely helpful remedies for this despair: patience in adversity, true repentance/compunction for our sins, using Scripture to counteract the suggestions of Satan, meditation on death (the *memento mori* of classical monasticism), and a

recommitment to prayer—especially psalms of praise. These acts of praise will lead us to accept our own existence and God’s place in it.

The second lecture was an examination of the relationship between God as Creator and His creation. He began this talk with a long citation from philosopher Joseph Pieper, which I will summarize by saying that recognizing the “divinely guaranteed goodness of God” keeps us from despair. If we see the world as necessarily created in a pure act of love, then we can have a hopeful confidence in our salvation. He then moved to talking of French philosopher Remi Braque, who speaks of modernity’s vision of itself as a project that works toward radical freedom—freedom to do as one chooses at all cost. This project neglects a fundamental aspect, however, says Dr Ruddy: it fails to answer the question of “why are there humans?” Why do we exist? What are we made for? Our modern acedia and its resulting despair have led us to develop the capacity to destroy ourselves and our world entirely by nuclear war, environmental neglect, and by contraception and abortion. We are increasingly tempted to destroy ourselves; some even claim that humanity is a parasite upon the planet and the best thing for its future is to annihilate human beings! However, if we reaffirm our dependence upon God, claims Dr Ruddy—the God Who is entirely other and Who creates only in love, freely, and in goodness—then we have a key for getting ourselves out of our despair. Dr Ruddy turned again to Pieper, as well as to Ratzinger, in order to remind us of the importance of feast and leisure, which are only possible if we believe that life is fundamentally good. Acedia takes away our possibility to praise God and replaces it with sadness and a disgust for activity. Yet, God’s creative activity ended with a sabbath, a taking rest, and enjoined upon His creation the need to worship and take time to enjoy itself.

“Christ and the Church” was the topic of the third lecture. Here, Dr Ruddy began with a quotation from Psalm 21/22: “In the midst of the assembly I will praise You”. He reminded us that this psalm was prayed by Jesus as He died in agony on the Cross;



praise is not turning a blind eye to evil or pain, but a turning to God in the midst of it. One of the most impressive things Dr Ruddy told us during these lectures is that the core of Christian life is not salvation, it is not a moral code, but the core of Christian life is praise of God. We need to return constantly to “doxology” or giving praise. We need to recognize our estrangement from divine glory (due to sin) and constantly put ourselves back onto the path that leads to that glory. He ended this conference by referring to documents from Vatican II, *Sacroscanctum Concilium* and *Lumen Gentium*, stating that the liturgy (and thus praise) is the source and summit of Christian life, and that the vocation of the Church is both the communion of charity and praise of the Holy Trinity.

The last lecture took “Consequences” as its title. Dr Ruddy quoted Ps 33/34, reminding us that we need to “keep our tongues free from vicious talk”. Words are never just words, after all, and Christianity is a religion not only of words, but of *THE* Word, Jesus Christ. He recalled to us the importance of the sabbath, of taking rest and pleasure in the Lord’s Day, neglecting unnecessary activity and spending time with God and those whom we love. He extolled monasticism and its “rightful uselessness”—monastic life is paradoxically useful inasmuch as it is useless. We monks exist purely and solely to praise God and to seek Him, for no other purpose than that He loves us, and we want to love Him in return, by means of our prayer and praise.

I must say that I was totally enchanted by these talks. The atmosphere was far more that of a retreat than of a scholarly lecture series, and I found myself constantly challenged to look at my monastic daily existence and repent of my failings. All Christians, but especially we monks, are called to a life of praise, worship, and thanksgiving, even in the midst of the Cross and the terrible anxiety caused by the status of the modern world. This series of lectures was incredibly timely, challenging, and providential. May God bless Dr Ruddy and his family for the time he took to lead us to a renewal of our vocation.

Br Benedict Joseph

## DIOCESAN PILGRIMAGE SUNDAY 26 JUNE 2022

Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> June saw a happy resumption, after a three-year break, of the annual Diocesan Pilgrimage to Pluscarden. Perhaps because of this gap imposed by covid restrictions, or maybe in spite of it? the pilgrims came in great numbers. It was lovely to see so many, including lots of children and young people, and good representation from our Polish, Indian and Nigerian Catholic communities. The weather remained kind, so plenty of people were able to picnic in our grounds before the Mass, with the opportunity also for confession, or for adoration of the Blessed Sacrament exposed in the Lady Chapel.

Bishop Hugh chose to celebrate the pilgrimage Mass in honour of Our Lady Mother of the Church. Following our well-established format, the liturgy was scheduled to start at 3.00 p.m., followed by a Marian procession to St Benedict's garden.

No one present could fail to notice the joyful atmosphere that marked the whole event, which incidentally was extremely well organised. The sound system and video camera coordination were set up and managed by Pluscarden's own technically minded monk. Refreshments for lunch and teatime were served in a marquee on the Nave lawn; doubling as additional seating accommodation for those unable to get a space anywhere in the Church. Five large screens ensured that all were able to watch the whole liturgical action as it unfolded. No fewer than four Choirs were deployed: the Diocesan Choir, the children's Choir, the Nigerian Choir and the monks' Choir. To be noted especially: a wonderful rendition of Elgar's *Ave verum* was sung by the children at Communion time. Also: with their portable drums and other percussion instruments, the Nigerians were able to enliven everyone's departure from the garden at the end: blending at last with the very Scottish sound of bagpipes for the farewells.

In addition to those of our Diocesan clergy able to attend, the Religious Sisters of the Diocese were well represented. Their presence much appreciated by all: the Dominican Sisters in Elgin, the Daughters of Divine Love in Inverness, the Holy Family

Sisters and the Community of St. John in Aberdeen, and the Community of St Andrew in Dingwall.

Since the arrival of the Dominican Sisters at Greyfriars convent in Elgin in 2013, Sr Anna Christi has acted as their Superior. Now she has been re-assigned by her order to a new position back home in America. Almost her last public act here was to scatter rose petals before the statue of Our Lady carried in procession. Before the conclusion in the garden, Bishop Hugh spoke words in her honour of praise and gratitude, and presented her with a gift, to remind her of happy years amongst us.

Anyone wishing to watch the whole Pilgrimage Mass may do so on our live streaming page, scrolling down to 26 June: <https://www.pluscardenabbey.org/live>

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“Full great marvel it seems that mortal man may be taken up into such high love for God that he feels nothing but heavenly solace in his most privy substance; and so, like the notes of an organ, he ascends on high to contemplate high desire. That which is done by others to sorrow then turns to joy, so that they seem unable to suffer pain in soul; also they cannot be troubled with the dread of death, nor in any way be moved from restfulness to unease. Truly he who is stirred with busy love, and is continually with Jesus in thought, full soon perceives his own faults, the which correcting, henceforward he is aware of them; and so he brings righteousness busily to birth, until he is led to God and may sit with heavenly citizens in everlasting seats. Therefore he stands clear in conscience and is steadfast in all good ways, and is never annoyed with worldly heaviness nor gladdened with vainglory.”

Richard Rolle, *The Fire of Love*, I,4

## **DIOCESAN PILGRIMAGE**

### **26<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 2022**

How good it is to be together again – and to be together around this altar and in this place, Pluscarden Abbey, the spiritual heart of the diocese as bishops of Aberdeen like to call it!

Today's pilgrimage is in honour of Mary, our Lady, and especially of her as Mother of the Church. This explains today's Prayers, Readings and the Preface of the Mass. Mary, mother of the Church. Mother of the Church, which is God's family, "the household of God in the Spirit" (*Lumen Gentium* 6) and of which we are part too. Mother of the Church because Mother of Christ who is the Head of the Church and inseparable from it. Mother of the Church because established such by Jesus from the Cross when he entrusted his beloved disciple to her, and her to him; he was a symbol of all Jesus' disciples. Mother of the Church already before Pentecost, at the heart of the first Christian community in the Upper Room, praying for the coming of the Holy Spirit, a sign of her role for all time and beyond. Mother of the Church too, please God, in our own experience, and in our diocese which has her as its primary patron, and has so many churches dedicated to her.

Today's pilgrimage is also linked to the World Meeting of Families which has been taking place in Rome these last few days and concludes today. Today is also a special day for the children's choirs of the diocese, who are represented here.

Jesus once said, "My Father is working still and I am working" (Jn 5:17). Today is a sign, yet another sign, that it is so. The sabbath of eternity lies before us, when we will rest in God and God in us; but on pilgrimage to that, as we journey together, "my Father is working still and I am working." Working for what? St John would say, to undo the works of the devil, the divider; to bring together; to gather into one the scattered children of God; to draw all things and all people to the One lifted up on the Cross; to weave a seamless tunic; to pull ashore the unbroken net with its 153 fish. A name for this work, believe it or not, is precisely "Church". The English word "Church" unfortunately rhymes with

“lurch”, and often the Church herself can seem to lurch from crisis to crisis, from scandal to scandal. But, oh, if we only see that, how myopic we are! Look at the Cross: God revels in being in the overlooked and easily despised, and when he rises only eyes of faith can see him. “My Father is working still and I am working”. And it is to weave the seamless tunic, to fill the untorn net, that Son and Father are at work. The Church, the great re-gathering, is God’s intent.

In that first reading from Genesis, we could almost hear the sound of tearing. We sense that something has slipped, the centre hasn’t held, and things are falling apart. “Where are you?” calls the Lord God in the garden. It was the call of a mother looking for a child. It was a call to repentance, to come back. Adam’s answer could have been Abraham’s or Moses’, “Here I am”, or the prodigal son’s, “Father, I have sinned”. Instead: “I was afraid and so I hid”. Something has been torn, something has slipped. Adam even has the nerve to say, “it was the woman you gave me, she made me eat.” It’s the original “it wasna me”. The inner evasion of responsibility and the outward projection of blame. And the woman in turn blames the serpent. And the cracks run out in every direction. The rest is history.

But “my Father is working still and I am working.”

Take that little Gospel cluster around the Cross: three Marys (two of them sisters) and one beloved disciple. It is the micro-Church. “When I am lifted up, I will draw all people to myself.” Here, atom-like, molecule-like, it’s happening, an imperceptible turn of the wind, an alternative, a new beginning. In the group in the Upper Room, some forty days later (the 2nd reading), the Church is growing further. St Luke speaks of 120 people: women and men, disciples and relatives, the apostles and the mother, meeting together, persevering in prayer. Small, but one.

“My Father is working still and I am working.”

Here are we, in the garden of the monastery, a reminder of Eden, around an altar which stands for the Cross, under the mantle

of Mary and the saints, with a bishop in communion with the Pope, the successor of Peter, united in the faith we will sing in a moment. Here are we, laity, clergy and religious, from four continents at least, mothers, fathers and children, married, single, old, young, and somewhere in the middle. For all our limits and littleness, we are a sign that “my Father is working still and I am working”, a sign that even here, even now, the world is more than torn clothes and broken nets. As St John would say, “Little children, let us love one another.”

This moves seamlessly into the thought of family life. Pope St John Paul started World Meetings of Families, held every three years. The latest, the Tenth, is concluding in Rome today. In family life too, another micro-Church, the word holds true: “my Father is working still and I am working.” There too there’s a force to lift us above the constant irritations and squabbles, and to take us to the other side of the more serious difficulties. There is the power of grace. If every Christian can say, “God gives me my baptism every day”, every couple can say, “God gives us our marriage every day.” The other day the Pope, talking of the Sacrament of Marriage, said this: “God solemnly promises his presence in your marriage and family, not only on the day of your wedding, but for the rest of your lives. And he keeps supporting you, every day of your journey.”

Last night the Holy Father issued a Missionary Sending of Families. It included this: “Be [families] who ‘sew’ the fabric of society and of a synodal Church, creating relationships, multiplying love and life. Be a sign of the living Christ, do not be afraid of what the Lord asks of you, be generous with Him. Open yourselves to Christ, listen to Him in the silence of prayer. Accompany those who are most fragile, take charge of those who are alone, refugees, abandoned. Be the seed of a more fraternal world! Be families with big hearts! Be the welcoming face of the Church! And please pray, always pray!” And when the wine runs out, turn to Mary. Specifically, he asked older families to support younger ones. We can be part of God’s working too.

One last thought, sparked in one way by our singing children and in another by those sad conversations between the Lord and Adam and Eve, the unravelling. What are we made for? As we cling aboard our lurching Church, seasick perhaps but undrowned, what do we do? We're not made to be pampered or endlessly entertained. We are made to celebrate. We are made to praise. And we can begin with each other. Yesterday, in a parish, I met a woman with two boys, perhaps around 8 or so. I wasn't sure who was related to who. Surprisingly, one of the boys suddenly said of the woman, "she's a very intelligent person." And "who is she?", I asked. "My mother." I just hope he's still thinking that at 16, but wasn't it delightful? When I'm miserable, I'm instantly cheered when I hear a woman spontaneously, sincerely speaking well of her husband or vice versa. "My Father is working still and I am working." The opposite is horrid. St Benedict forbade his monks to murmur and told them to praise God seven times a day. "What's your vision for the diocese, bishop?" That we sing. Do we think Mary said the Magnificat? Come on! She sang it, as her namesake Myriam sang at the Red Sea. The New Testament opens with Mary singing. Thank you, children, as so often, for showing us the way.

Let us stand now and sing our faith.

Bishop Hugh Gilbert OSB

"Indeed, the Mother standing beneath the cross (cf. Jn 19:25), accepted her Son's testament of love and welcomed all people in the person of the beloved disciple as sons and daughters to be reborn unto life eternal. She thus became the tender Mother of the Church which Christ begot on the cross handing on the Spirit. Christ, in turn, in the beloved disciple, chose all disciples as ministers of his love towards his Mother, entrusting her to them so that they might welcome her with filial affection."

*Decree on the Celebration of Mary, Mother of the Church 2018*

## MASONS' MARKS: AN INTERESTING CLUE

Every observant visitor to the Abbey will have noticed that there are many examples of mason's marks on the stones which make up the fabric of the Abbey church. Mason's marks are the geometric symbols on the stones, incised by the masons who created the stone blocks, so that they would be credited for their work and paid for it. Probably an element of pride in workmanship was also present. The symbols are many and varied, but generally fairly simple and composed only of straight lines such as a mason's chisel would cut. We have a catalogue of the different marks which have been noted in the Abbey.

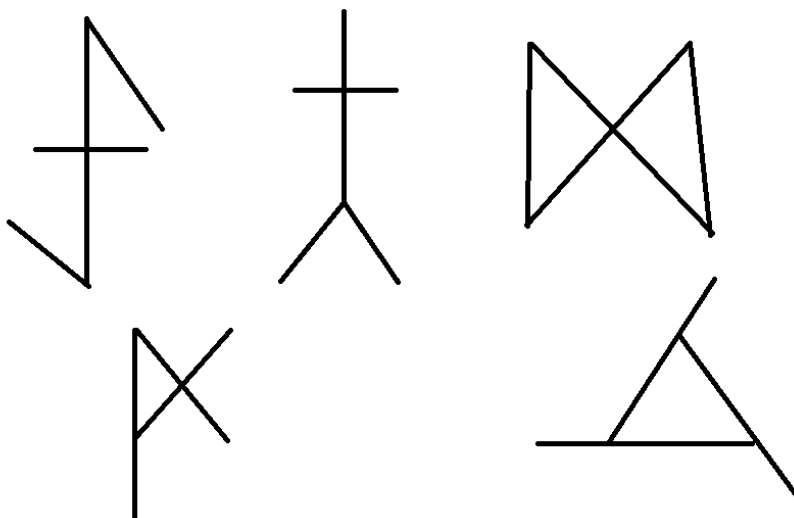
Another striking feature of the Abbey as we see it today, is that the building has quite clearly undergone major rearrangement from the original design. Evidence of building alterations, abandonment of previous constructions, vanished partitions, new partitions, changed objectives and plans meets the eye in almost every direction. All this has largely been brought about by the occurrence of serious damage to the building, caused either by violence or chronic decay, which has been repaired with the aim of continuing to use the building in some fashion.

The first major disruption, famously attributed to the Wolf of Badenoch, occurred at the end of the 14th century: a large and catastrophic fire rendered the church unusable for many years. It is not easy to set light to a stone church. That the fire was deliberate and designed to create chaos and destruction is evident from the signs of fire damage: areas of discoloured and cracked stonework indicate where the fiercest blaze occurred, and these are placed at several of the key structural points of the church. Probably the wooden furniture of the church, together with firewood brought in for the purpose, was stacked against the walls and then set alight.

There are contemporary records which refer to the sorry state of the church in the aftermath of the fire and how much it was in need of major restoration. This restoration seems to have been accomplished only by the middle of the 15th century, when the layout of the church was changed to make the best use of what



remained. The most dramatic alteration was the abandonment of the nave, the area now laid to grass to the west of the current church buildings. The stone blocks from which the nave was constructed were used to reinforce the parts of the church which were key to the structure and damaged by the fire. The most evident of these reinforcements is the area under the church tower to the east of the crossing: there, we behold a massive assemblage of rectangular blocks, which serve to bolster the eastern pillars of the crossing and create a screen between the crossing and the chancel. On the arch above the screen there remain scraps of mural painting, which have been identified as 15th century in style.



*Examples of mason's marks in the Abbey church. Bottom right is the symbol found in both the chancel and crossing reinforcement wall.*

How might we know if the stones built here were actually previously situated in the nave, now ruined? A lab analysis of the stone which remains in the lowest courses of the nave and the stones making up the reinforcing wall to the east of the crossing could confirm that the stones were taken from the same part of the same quarry, which would be a good indication. A more

compelling indication might be found in a comparison of the mason's marks in the nave and the reinforcing wall. There may well be mason's marks on the nave stonework, but, alas, none visible above current ground level.

However, if one turns instead to the fabric of the chancel, especially the lowest courses, which have suffered no interference since they were first laid in the 13th century, there is some important evidence. One of the mason's marks, on a stone partly hidden behind the choir stalls to the east of the sacristy door, is a mason's mark identical to one on the reinforcement wall. The stones were, then, probably cut by the same mason; but one stone is where it was laid in the 13th century, and the other was laid in the middle of the 15th century. It seems probable, therefore, that the latter was taken from some other part of the building, no longer extant.

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“It is said in the Canticles: ‘Love is strong as death and love is hard as hell.’ Death truly kills the quick; hell truly spares not the dead. So, certainly, the love of God not only utterly kills the love of this world in the man that it perfectly ravishes, but also, being slain to the world and quickened to heaven, it stirs him to suffer full mickle tribulation and worldly wretchedness for God. Wherefore whosoever you may be that hopes that you love Christ, to this take heed; for if you yet behold earthly things with delight, and also find your soul high to suffer wrongs or else death, you show forsooth that you are not God's true lover. Truly, a true lover neither dresses his eyes to the world, nor dreads to suffer all that seems heavy or hard to the body for God; and whatsoever happens to him, yet he is not let from the thought of Jesu his Beloved.”

Richard Rolle, *The Fire of Love*, I, 10

## **THE PLUSCARDEN *MESSIAH***

### **A Fund-Raising Event for the South Range Project**

It was, quite simply, stupendous!

Pluscarden's scratch Choir and ad-hoc Orchestra started to gather mid-morning on Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> May 2022. Cars, models modest and eye-catching, were parked up neatly on the lush lawn left of the Abbey's curving drive, although fears of churning up the ground and getting stuck, if it came on to rain, prompted others to use the firm-ground public carpark below. Just on the right, over the little entrance bridge, the car park is overlooked by St Scholastica's, the women's retreat house. Scholastica was the sister of Benedict of Nursia, who established the Benedictine Rule at Monte Cassino in Italy. It was Scholastica who founded Benedictine women's communities during the sixth century; they continue today in the UK and Ireland, across Europe and in the United States.

The South Range Project is raising funds to build on existing ancient foundations, a new retreat centre for women and families, to be named St Joseph's. Of course, this will cost! You will all know there is an appeal to raise the £3,000,000 necessary. And you may remember a similar appeal in the 1990s funded the construction of St Benedict's men's guest house. A key fundraising event in 1990 was a performance of Handel's *Messiah* at the Abbey, with, guess what, a scratch Choir and an ad-hoc Orchestra. The 1990 Soprano Soloist was a very young Frances Cooper, who on 21 May 2022 found herself arriving at Pluscarden to do it all again!

It was a casual question from my brother (Brian Smith, Harpsichord) that caught my interest. "Have you got my *Messiah* score?"

"No... why?"

"I need it for the *Come and Sing Messiah* at Pluscarden."

"Oh ... would I be allowed to join in?"

I contacted David Broadfoot to join the Alto section as directed and received a very warm message of welcome:

“Delighted! I will forward you all the details!”

So then a mad scramble to locate scores and my Dunedin Consort *Messiah* double CD for sing-along practice in the car. It came back very quickly, with memories of our school choir’s *Messiah*, conducted by Gillian Eason. Her fiancé, Michael, was the Bass Soloist. When he sang “The Trumpet shall Sound” all those years ago, it was electrifying. And our spines tingled on Saturday when Andrew McIntosh, our *Come and Sing* Bass Soloist began with “Behold, I tell you a mystery!”

We took our places in the transept section of the Abbey, comfortable seats for Sopranos and Altos, and the Tenors and Basses stacked up on the stone staircase at the side – they did have cushions, though! What I enjoyed at the start of the day was the opportunity to talk to singers from choirs all over Moray and Aberdeenshire. Immediately, conversation ranged from the joy of resuming live singing post Covid, to the many ways of following Jesus, and covering the grounds for common understanding as well as conflict between the three Abrahamic faiths, the *Messiah* of course being fully within the Christian strand of the faiths. Clearly, many of us had been starved of broader and more thoughtful conversations during lockdown, and we were anxious to make up for lost time. Fr Giles, the Guest Master, was making sure people knew where to be and when. And throughout the day, he and Br Michael took photos with an enormous and professional-looking camera. Br Michael was seen hanging dangerously from a high alcove, I-phone in hand. And it was he who set up the live-streaming facility so folk could watch the event as it was happening.

Phoebe Csenki was our Musical Director for the practice and the performance. Energetic and focused, she launched the Orchestra into the Sinfony with enthusiastic verve and expertise. She had set the stamp on the day with that, and there was no looking back. Off we went with “And the Glory of the Lord”. Pretty good for a first sing-through from a collection of voices all new to each other. The improvements we were asked to make throughout the morning were deceptively simple ones. But it was

the mark of our excellent MD, that she identified the little things that made a big difference.

We broke for lunch when Part One was finished, and we were ready for it. Generous hospitality in the Brothers' Cloisters served us lots of soup, sandwiches and fine pieces, and the sun came out for us to sit in the Quadrangle; a great privilege to be able to relax in what are normally enclosure areas. The nestlings in the central tree were a bit put out, judging by the squawking, but no doubt the tasty crumbs left would have more than compensated. Back inside for Parts Two and Three, we met Soloists Frances Cooper (Soprano), Carole Clarke (Alto), Petro Wichrij (Tenor) and Andrew McIntosh (Bass). And in the music we continued to make with them, the Glory of the Lord was indeed revealed.

Welcome cups of tea were available in the Cloisters later in the afternoon, while Phoebe worked on some finer points with the Orchestra and Soloists. The Brothers of the Community were in the Chapter House when we singers were chatting outside, and the peaceful atmosphere of normal days might have been just a little lacking. But we remembered again how good it was of the Brothers to welcome us into what is their home.

By 5pm, we were spruced up in concert-appropriate clothes, ready to deliver the best *Messiah* performance of our lives. It is an Oratorio full of tremendously dramatic and memorable moments, and the 60-odd singers, and 10 musicians, did ample justice to them all. The Tenor and Bass voices of the Chorus rang out full and true, with Sopranos and Altos blending so well it was as if we'd all been singing together for years. The Orchestra was consistently wonderful and the Soloists perfect. My own highlight? Well, it was the Hallelujah Chorus, wasn't it? Thanks to Br Michael's technological wizardry, it's available for you to watch online. It would have been difficult to better this roof-raising performance. And I for one cannot wait for the next *Come and Sing* event at Pluscarden. Especially if Phoebe conducts it.

It was, quite simply, stupendous!

**Maeve McDowall, Inverurie Choral Society**

## THE FEAST OF THE ASSUMPTION

Sometime in the late 700s the Benedictine monks of Blandinium Abbey, or Abbaye Mont Blandin, situated in what is now Northwest Belgium, made a compilation of all the Chants sung at Mass throughout the year. Their manuscript is very precious, because it's the earliest such compilation that has come down to us. It lacks any musical notation because that had not yet been invented. In this manuscript, every single Chant for the Feast of the Assumption sets a text from Psalm 44, or 45 in the Hebrew numbering: the Royal Marriage Psalm.

In the two-hundred-year period that followed the writing of the Blandinium Gradual, hundreds of similar manuscripts appear all over Europe, giving exactly the same texts. With the development of musical notation over these texts, we see that the music sung was also the same. Then, from the late 10th century, variety started to come in. Sometimes different Chants would be selected. Then almost everywhere there would be embellishment, expansion, adornment. New compositions in prose or poetry would be added to the Scriptural text, in the form of Sequences, Tropes and Prosulae. And the single line of Chant would be ornamented by "Organum", or simultaneous singing by other voices on other notes, with other melodies, and often other words. This whole process was to be severely cut back by the Council of Trent.

Then after Pope Pius XII solemnly defined the Doctrine of the Assumption, the monks of Solesmes were asked to add Chants that would be more explicitly proper to the feast. So in the mid-1950s, they produced our present wonderful Introit, *Signum magnum* (and the Communion *Beatam me dicent*). Then Vatican II happened. But the Post-Conciliar Mass also sets Psalm 44 as the Responsorial Psalm for today's feast. So it is that, through all the revisions, adaptations and reforms of the past 1200 or so years, on the Feast of the Assumption we still sing the Gradual *Audi Filia* (Ps 44:11-12, Vulgate numbering), just as we find it in the Blandinium Manuscript. And so it is that, still today, in accordance with long standing tradition, we express our joy in the mystery of our Lady's

Assumption into heaven, using the words of a Marriage Hymn from the Ancient Near East.

In its first part, Psalm 44 addresses the Israelite King, or Bridegroom. The second part then turns to his Queen, or Bride. No name is given to either of them. Scholars make various suggestions about the identity of the original subjects. But for the devout Jews who agreed to include this poem in the canon of Holy Scripture, already the King represents the Messiah, or God himself, and the Queen his Bride Israel. In the New Testament, the letter to the Hebrews at once identifies the King of this Psalm with Christ (Heb 1:8-9). Elsewhere in the New Testament we read that Christ has a marriage, and a Bride, who is the Church (cf. Eph 5:32; Apoc 21:3; Mk 2:18 etc). But Mary is figure of the Church. That is made very explicit in the passage from Apocalypse 12 which is read at Mass on 15<sup>th</sup> August. The inspired seer speaks of a great sign in heaven: a Woman, clothed with the sun ... who gave birth to a son who was to rule all the nations... The dragon made war on all the children of this woman: those, that is, who obey God's commandments and bear witness to Jesus. So Mary is called not only the Mother but also the Bride of Christ, and for her Assumption we rightly sing a joyful wedding Hymn: *Audi Filia, et vide, et inclina aurem tuam... Listen, daughter, and see, and incline your ear; for the King has desired your beauty* (Ps 44:11).

The Mont Blandin manuscript actually gives only the first two words of this Gradual, together with a marginal indication that it is to be sung in the VIIth mode. That was enough: it could be assumed the singers would know exactly how to do the rest from memory. The VIIth mode is the mode of heavenly exaltation, and of youthful exuberance. The melody pours out as if in an ever-flowing stream. It gives the impression of tending always upwards, often soaring on the heights of *Fa*, a minor third above the Dominant *Re*, or even on occasion higher yet; while never ceasing its impulsive movement forward, until it reaches its gentle and peaceful end.

*Audi; vide; inclina: Listen; see; incline:* the verbs are all in the imperative. It's as if we all, with the Psalmist, are encouraging,

cheering, urging Mary on. Go to him, we cry! Do not be afraid! He's waiting for you, in love and joy. At last the moment has come for him to receive you into the fullness of heavenly glory, into the perfection of endless union. *He desires your beauty!* Of course he is God, who needs nothing from anyone. Nevertheless, he longs and longs for the consummation of all he has done. He longs for you! For in you he will receive the accomplishment of all his work: of Creation and Election and Redemption; his calling of the Patriarchs and of his people Israel; his Incarnation, and Passion, and Death; his Resurrection and Ascension into heaven. In you he is finally able to say: *It is accomplished!* And yes, it was all worth it! For what grace has perfectly achieved in you is seen now as wholly good, and beautiful, and desirable.

Then we have the second part of the Gradual, the verse. *Specie tua, et puchritudine tua intende: Set out in all your beauty and loveliness* (verse 5). The Latin text here differs somewhat from the Nova Vulgata edition currently used in the Pluscarden Office. As so often elsewhere in this Psalm, the Hebrew lying behind it is difficult to interpret, and has produced considerable variety in translation. It's anyway noteworthy that the Chant here takes words not from the second part of the Psalm, but from the first part. These words are addressed, in context, not to the Queen, but to the King. Surely, we have a hint here that our Lady's Assumption is simply her full and final participation in the Resurrection of her Divine Son. With him she is glorified not just in her soul but in her body also. With him she is now beyond the reach of death, or pain, or sorrow. Yet also with him she can be addressed by us! With him she hears our prayers, and as our Mother, wants us to turn to her, and to come to her, so that we might share, one day, in her glory.

*Specie tua, et puchritudine tua intende* – *Set out in all your beauty and loveliness*, we cry to Mary. *Prosperere procede, et regna!* – *Proceed prosperously, and reign!* Be our Queen, and Mother. Stand waiting for us, as your Lord stood waiting for you in heaven. Bring it about that his Kingdom will be established in our hearts and lives; that his will be done in us, as it always was in



you. Help us to live as he wishes us to, as you always lived: in humility, in obedience to him, in love and in goodness. *Et regna!* Reign over the Church; reign especially over our community, dedicated to you. May your reign be felt with particular intensity on the day of your Assumption, August 15<sup>th</sup>, our patronal Feast! Reign also over all who visit us! Keep us all united in love for one another, fruitful in Apostolic witness, always faithful to our vocation. Teach us how to pray, and how to deepen our prayer! Preserve us from all attacks, whether from without or within. Help each of us to respond to God's love and grace, with courage, and steadfastness, and with answering love.

DBH

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“O sweet Charity, you are plainly the dearest sweetness; that catches and takes the mind to your love; and so clearly you moisten it that quickly you make it despise all passing things and vain joys, and only to yearn marvellously after your desires. You have come into me, and behold, all my inward soul is fulfilled by the sweetness of heavenly mirth, and plenteous in the fervour of ghostly joy. Therefore, truly I long after love, the fairest of flowers, and I am inwardly burned by the flame of fire. Would God I might go from the dwelling of this exile! Thus it warms, man thinks not how, save that he feels solace in himself; the heart singing ditties and taken captive with the charge of charity. Truly this that I thus receive is most merry, and I nearly die while it is thus made steadfast with burning love. Now grant my best Beloved that I may cease; for death, that many dread, shall be to me as heavenly music. Although I am sitting in the wilderness, yet I am now as it were set stable in Paradise, and there sweetly is sounding a loving song in the delights that my Love has given me.”

Richard Rolle, *The Fire of Love*, I,16

## GREGORIAN CHANT AND CONTEMPORARY PIANO

Pluscarden monks have recently collaborated in a most unusual project. It involved the singing of Gregorian Chant, to the accompaniment of free piano improvisation. Over two intense days, on Thursday 30<sup>th</sup> June and Friday 1<sup>st</sup> July, some twenty or so Chant pieces were sung and recorded in this way.

The idea for such a collaboration was conceived full fifteen years ago by Australian virtuoso pianist Tom Donald. Tom is now based in London, where he teaches at the London School of Contemporary Piano. Tom began his career as a concert pianist, performing what might be regarded as the usual classical repertoire. He then went on to make a reputation as a jazz pianist. But Tom eludes classification. His particular interest is free improvisation, and the creative exploration of different genres of music, interacting together, to produce something both old and new; both familiar and (excitingly) unfamiliar.

What about really ancient music, like Gregorian Chant, crafted exclusively for use in liturgical worship, put together with something belonging properly to the 21st century? Tom experimented, at first, playing to recordings of Chant. He liked what came out of that, but it did not satisfy him. What he really wanted was to play spontaneously, interacting directly with a group actually singing the Chant. For this, a Choir of professional singers would not do at all. He wanted to accompany real monks, singing Chant that is an integral part of their daily life: for them an expression of all they believe and stand for.

Agreeing (eventually) to cooperate in such a project was of course a risk for the community. On its completion though, the brethren involved more or less reached a consensus: that Tom Donald is a genius, and that this experiment had given glory to God.

We began by singing some pieces with which Tom was already familiar, having listened carefully to our previous recordings. But he seemed happiest when someone would suggest some piece he had never heard of and knew nothing about. We

would start singing that, and he would start playing, his eyes fixed on us. To be sure, this was a brand new and quite remarkable experience for everyone involved!

The project was carried out without any help from external funding. Nevertheless, it certainly seemed that, for its effective realisation, no expense was spared. A Blüthner grand piano was brought up for the purpose from London, to occupy a temporary place by the Pluscarden Choir organ. Top end professionals were recruited, to act as sound engineer and photographer, deploying powerful modern equipment, so that the whole apparently crazy venture could be captured for a wider audience. No serious thought has so far been given to question of how best to publicise or market the material thus produced: if at all. There is however a firm intention to produce a CD, available for sale, hopefully by the end of this year; also an accompanying film: either or both of which could perhaps prove to be of interest to many people.

After the event, the project manager wrote to the community:

“It has given me personally untold joy to witness something entirely unique, spontaneous, beautiful and unrepeatable coming into being amongst us all. A sound which, before we all came together, simply never existed: rooted in a deep respect for an ancient way of life and worship. We said we’d be asking for the Spirit’s presence upon our endeavour. I believe our collaborative and fresh soundscape truly sang His praises!”

Please God this is true. If so, Pluscarden monks will be well content.

## THE GOD WHO SMELLS OF HIS FLOCK

Pope Francis has often reminded the pastors of the Church, as well as all who minister to the faithful, that they need to have the smell of their flock; in other words, they need to be not afraid to get dirty and be with people as they are and where they are. This means taking one's gloves off and mixing with the sinners and broken people of all shapes and sizes, meeting them and loving them with in all their woundedness.

Pope Francis reminds us of this because, in spite of our rather prudish and perhaps overly pious ideas of who and what God is, He is the Good Shepherd who goes to all lengths necessary to be with His beloved sheep. Not only is He more than willing to leave the ninety-nine faithful sheep behind merrily chomping their grass on the hill, but He will seek that lost sheep at all costs, no matter what condition they are in or what kind of sinful lifestyle they may be leading. Even if His sheep is in the act of committing a mortal sin, He is there seeking for it, calling it, loving it, and seeking to save it.

Having recently read Graham Greene's Catholic novel *The End of the Affair* for the first time, I was struck at how Greene depicts God's readiness to meet sinners in the depths of their sin. I cannot discuss this aspect of the novel without discussing the plot, so be forewarned of spoilers! I had seen the brilliant, recent movie adaptation (starring Ralph Fiennes and Julianne Moore) around 20 years ago and liked it, but after so much time I didn't remember much of the plot. It's the story of a married woman, Sarah, living in London during the Blitz. Her husband, though kind and gentle, is impotent and seemingly incapable of real emotional engagement. They meet a novelist in their neighbourhood, Maurice, and he and Sarah fall in love and begin a torrid affair. They truly love each other, but Sarah remains committed to her marriage with her husband and refuses to leave him. After some time, having just made love, the house they are in is bombed during an air raid. Maurice disappears under the rubble and seems to have died, only to escape. Sarah, shaken by the incident, breaks

off the affair with almost no explanation to Maurice. He pays a private investigator to have her followed, and evidence soon turns up pointing to her being in love with someone else. Maurice has always been extremely jealous of Sarah and her love, but this goes into overdrive as he seeks to find out who exactly she is seeing on the sly. He perversely keeps in contact with Sarah and her husband, seeing them socially on occasion. Sarah goes out one stormy evening and contracts pneumonia and dies. Maurice, in the meantime, has got hold of a journal she kept in the last weeks of her life, in which she speaks of her “lover” and his demands, of the changes this new person is making in her life. But here Greene throws in an amazing plot twist: just when we have been led to believe that Sarah had just moved on to yet another man, Maurice is angered and devastated to find out that in fact, her new love is God Himself.

It turns out that at the moment of the bombing, when Maurice seemed to be dead under the rubble, Sarah had cast herself onto her knees and begged the God that she had up to that point only barely acknowledged, to save Maurice. She promises God to end the affair with Maurice if He will only save his life. Maurice surprisingly lives through the traumatic bombing, and Sarah keeps her word. Through the journal entries, Greene describes Sarah’s struggles to accept God into her life, and the incredible hunger for Him that awakens once she does. She had been baptized, practically on a whim, by her mother when she was a child, but has never practiced any kind of faith before. And just on the cusp of being received into the Church after a period of instruction, she dies. Not only that, but miracles begin to be attributed to her intercession, much to Maurice’s disgust and astonishment. For most surprisingly of all, because of all this, Maurice, too, has come to accept God’s existence, though at the end of the novel God is for Maurice an object of anger and jealousy because of His effect on Sarah’s life and conversion.

This amazing novel makes use of tawdry, daily, humdrum events that are commonplace in just about everyone’s life and allows them to become vehicles of God’s amazing grace and

providence. A husband's neglect, a sordid affair, a purloined journal, a private eye, a walk in the rain: all become the means by which God seeks to enter into the lives of His creatures. However, what keeps coming back to my mind, having read the novel, is that it's at the very moment of mortal sin, or at least its aftermath, when Sarah and Maurice have just made love, that God enters their lives and changes everything. The Good Shepherd, like the Good Samaritan, is not afraid to go to the bleeding, dirty, and wounded people He loves infinitely and touches them just at the very moment they are seemingly farthest from the reach of His grace. God will even take a muttered prayer of anguish, cast off perhaps unthinkingly, and use it to enter our lives, just as He does with Sarah's despairing prayer for Maurice. God's love is so forgiving and selfless, so utterly merciful, that He will touch us in the blackest moments of our lives if we only let Him do so.

Graham Greene wrote this novel using his own affair with a woman named Catherine as a springboard. Greene had a tortured relationship with his religion and his God, dying in a state of some sort of Catholic agnosticism. Yet somehow, he must have had a belief in the merciful, mad Shepherd who is not afraid to enter into the very blackness of our souls, in necessary, to manifest His infinite, compassionate, loving forgiveness.

Br Benedict Joseph

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“Truly since my soul was incensed with holy love, I am set in longing to see Your Majesty ... That joy certain is full delicious after which I yearn, and no man may be more covetous in such desire. Wherefore my loving soul, as it were arraying a spouse for the King of the high Empire, says thus: Love holds my heart with unloosened bands, and sets it in such governance and binds it so greatly with a marvellous mastery that it is pleased to think rather to die than to live.’ This flower certainly cannot end for my friend is so burning in love, he sings the melody and joy of death.”

Richard Rolle, *The Fire of Love*, II,12

## BENEATH THE WINDOW

*(A window at Pluscarden Abbey depicts the visitation of Mary to her cousin Elizabeth.)*

Five years have passed while we've been coming here.  
You, in a wheelchair now, have no idea  
where we are or why.  
Still, it is place where we can come,  
not greeted but we're not unwelcome here.

We sit beneath the window where the child stands,  
his body wrapped in cloth;  
ready for birth, clothed ready for the grave.  
His garment glimmers like the larch in spring,  
his steady gaze surveys our human journey.

It is the visitation. Mary, Elizabeth and John  
reach for each other but he looks at us.  
The story's hardly started, they can't know  
just how it will unfold, where it will end.  
But there's the shadow of a cross behind his head,  
his empty hands; perhaps he's chosen this?

Encircling them the arc which compasses  
all the beginnings, all the unknown ends.  
Its source is hidden but there's room to bring  
all that we've lost or broken, all the wounds sustained  
and sorrows still unborn, our stories too.

And round about the arc I think I see,  
half hidden in the glass, small boats,  
tossing and tumbling in a summer squall.  
Their sails remind me of the machair flowers; harebell and clover,  
thrift from the rocky shore,

warmed by the sun and washed clean by the spray.

And I recall another morning when  
we hauled our dinghy to the ocean's edge  
and out toward the green Atlantic swell;  
sun streams on the water  
hearts light as wheeling seabirds overhead,  
and steady as the wood beneath our feet,  
with all the voyages still to come  
and promises unbroken.

It's time to go; the chant ends  
and the monks disperse. We bow and turn,  
leaving the hill country, taking up the yoke  
of hours and days,  
wheels halting as we cross the uneven floor.

Our Lady of the Sea, in your blue firmament, remember us.  
Our clumsy passage through the darkening church  
where glass grows grey and evening shadows fall,  
then out into the dusk and down the drive  
that always takes us back the way we came.

*In firmamento caeli* pray for us  
both now and later where the bright boats ride,  
in shallow waters waiting for the tide.

Sarah Akehurst, Oblate OSB

*(Sarah's two little collections of poetry, 'In Firmamento Caeli'  
and 'Vigils' may be purchased by emailing her at  
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