

# **Pluscarden Benedictines**

No. 200 News and Notes for our Friends Advent 2022

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## ABBOT'S LETTER

Dear Friends,

On November 5<sup>th</sup> we celebrated the dedication of our Church. The first reading chosen for the Mass is Haggai 1:15–2:9. It is chosen because it contains our motto, “In this place I will give peace.” In a film recording of the Mass for the re-opening of Pluscarden in 1948, the commentator reads parts of the same prophecy, in the Douai-Rheims version then current. Here in abbreviated form and in the language of Douai-Rheims is the passage we heard at Mass:

“Who is left among you, that saw this house in its first glory? And how do you see it now? Is it not in comparison to that as nothing in your eyes? Yet now take courage ... take courage, all ye people of the land ... and perform (for I am with you, saith the Lord of hosts) ... and my spirit shall be in the midst of you ... Yet one little while, and I will move the heaven and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land. And I will move all nations: and the desired of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory ... The silver is mine, and the gold is mine ... Great shall be the glory of this last house more than of the first, saith the Lord of hosts: and in this place I will give peace, saith the Lord of hosts.”

The prophecy was delivered in 520 BC, 66 years after Solomon's temple was burnt by the Babylonians. After decades of exile some of the Jewish people had returned. They had resumed the offering of sacrifice on the site of the old Temple, and they had begun rebuilding the Temple. Haggai's prophecy was for the encouragement of the builders. There were some among them, old people, who had seen Solomon's temple. To them the temple they were building seemed “as nothing”.

The book of Ezra records how, when they laid the foundations of the sanctuary, “many heads of families, who were then old and had seen with their own eyes the earlier Temple on its foundations, wept aloud” (Ezra 3:12). It seems these were tears of sadness and even disappointment, that blended with the cries of joy of others.

Many, perhaps all of us, and not only the old, have had this experience: the return to a place of past joy, we might say even “glory”, to find it is no longer there. Things have changed. People have moved on. We have changed. This was the experience of the old people going back to the Jerusalem of their childhood or youth, to a city that had occupied their imagination and been their hope all through their adult lives. The reality did not match up. The glory had gone.

It was not just about the external splendour of the house. Four years after Haggai’s prophecy, the building of the temple would be finished, and the temple dedicated. At this point in the biblical narrative, we are bound to remember the dedication of Solomon’s temple, centuries earlier. Then, “when the priests came out of the holy place, a cloud filled the house of the Lord, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud; for the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord” (1 Ki. 8:10-11). The cloud is the visible divine presence. The Israelites had experienced it during the journey from Egypt to the promised land. The Lord led them in a pillar of cloud by day, of fire by night. At the dedication the divine presence, the glory, occupied the temple.

At the time when Solomon’s temple was about to be destroyed by the Babylonians, the prophet Ezekiel saw in a vision, and prophesied to the people, that the Lord was leaving the temple. In his vision, the glory of the Lord became visible again in the cloud that filled the temple. Then, the cloud rose, left the temple, and left Jerusalem (Ezekiel Chapters 10 & 11). One of the most pointed omissions in Scripture is that, in the account of the dedication of the second temple, there is no mention of the cloud, the glory of the Lord. The Lord does not return and occupy this new temple as he had Solomon’s temple.

The Lord is not absent. Haggai’s prophecy affirms that the promise made in Egypt remains valid and will be fulfilled: his spirit will be among them, and he will give peace in this place. Finally, God will “shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land ... all the nations”. He will change all creation, and after that great change everything desired by all nations will be here in

this place. This is God's answer to the people's experience of the poverty of their temple. In the meantime, this second temple is deliberately empty, waiting for God to come and fill it. To this temple in the fullness of time Christ comes. He is the fulfilment of Haggai's prophecy that creation will be shaken and "the desired of all nations shall come".

By the time of his coming, the little, inadequate, poor temple will not seem so mean: rebuilt by Herod, its treasury filled with the gifts of the rich. But Jesus disregards the wealth. As a child he is presented in his Father's house as a child of the poor, with the offering of the poor. As a man he sees, as no one else does, the offering of the poor widow.

Christ comes to the temple we have built, inadequate as it is, and gives peace. He is God's answer to our keenly felt sense of poverty and inadequacy. We bring these to the temple, and he comes, the desired of all nations.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Fr Andrew Clark". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

### ***Vestment making re-launched at Pluscarden***

Among his many other tasks in the monastery, Pluscarden's Junior Br Patrick has been studying the art of sewing. Already he has made or repaired many habits, scapulars, work smocks, cowls, and cloaks for the brethren. More recently he has been working to enhance his sewing skills, so that he can repair or make liturgical vestments. Hearing of this, our friend Fr Andrew Clark decided to mark his Silver Jubilee of Ordination by ordering a new vestment, to be made for him by Br Patrick. Fr Andrew is seen in our picture wearing his beautiful new vestment, Br Patrick's first completed commission, which was delivered in time. The cloth of chasuble and stole is pure white wool, with gold trimmings around the edges, and a blue embroidered orphrey. The design is quite simple; nevertheless, the finished product is a result of very many hours of painstaking work.

## NEWS FROM ST MARY'S MONASTERY

The big news here is that we had an outbreak of COVID in our monastery. On September 17, after Compline, we found out that one of the brethren, who had been feeling feverish, had tested positive for COVID after taking a home test. We all then took tests after Compline. Two of the brothers found they were also positive. By Monday two more had tested positive. In the end five monks got COVID while two didn't.

We had to make adjustments to our way of life, of course. In addition to self-isolating we no longer had Mass since both priests had COVID. We did the Divine Office privately on our own. The church remained open, however, since the sisters of St Scholastica Priory continued to pray some of the liturgy in church, although without the brothers. We also closed the guesthouse. One of the healthy brothers did the cooking and was soon helped by another brother, who had been the first to get COVID, and who was thus the first to recover. The healthy monks ate separately from the sick, and the meals were all informal.

As the brethren improved, and no longer tested positive, we began to resume our regular routine in stages. At first, we had Mass and Vespers again in church, with the sisters, but we brothers all wore masks and spaced ourselves out in choir. We resumed common meals but spaced out in the refectory. We also resumed reading at supper, but instead of reading at lunch we listened to music. In time we gradually increased the amount of the Divine Office which we did in common in the church. Eventually we went back to our normal seating arrangement in choir and in the refectory, allowed guests into the refectory, and had common recreation. Finally, on Sunday October 23 we were able once again to have Vigils together in church at the usual time of 5:00 a.m., just in time for the retreat.

We had our annual retreat from October 24-28. For the last two years we didn't have a visiting retreat master because of the COVID pandemic. Instead, we listened to recorded conferences or watched a video of a monk giving conferences to another

community. This year, however, we were pleased once again to have a live person leading our retreat. He was Abbot Austin Murphy OSB of St Procopius Abbey in Lisle, Illinois. It was his first visit to Petersham. Abbot Austin's conferences were very helpful and informative. They dealt largely with the passions (emotions) and their role in the spiritual life. When the conferences were over Abbot Austin also gave a very interesting talk to both communities about St Procopius Abbey.

DIC

## **NEWS FROM KRISTO BUASE MONASTERY**

Fr Antony has attended courses in cashew processing and has now received the licence. Although Ghana is a large producer of cashew, very few of the nuts are processed in the country. The raw nuts are exported. If the monastery is able to process its harvest of nuts, our income would increase greatly. It would also give employment to local people and the possibility of processing the cashew of farmers in the region.

August to October is a busy time in our guest house as many priests and religious come on retreat, especially groups of novices and junior professed of the many religious congregations in the country.

Br Louis, after some difficulties over obtaining a U.K. visa, was able to visit Pluscarden, Prinknash, Farnborough during the summer vacation from his studies at the Pontifical Beda College, Rome. Fr Prior was able to see him during this time.

Our postulants were clothed as novices on the memorial of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, 21st November. Please pray for them – Brothers Benedict and Michael.

Prior Bede

## FR MATTHEW'S DIAMOND JUBILEE OF PROFESSION

Our Fr Matthew took his first vows as a Benedictine monk at Quarr Abbey on the Feast of Our Lady's birthday, 8 September 1962. Here we keep that day as the anniversary of the resumption of monastic observance at Pluscarden, which officially took place on 8 September 1948. This year, therefore, we celebrated not only our own 74th anniversary, but also dear Fr Matthew's Diamond Jubilee.

An attractive leaflet was produced for the celebration Mass, adorned with reproductions of Fr Matthew's water colour paintings. All the monks of the community together renewed their vows at the Offertory, in solidarity with the Jubilarian, who is now quite infirm: although habitually smiling, content, grateful, and never complaining!

In the evening, Fr Matthew joined in with a festive community recreation. He is particularly partial these days to corn on the cob, which our garden has been producing in abundance. He was much enjoying a selection of such corn, suitably roasted, while surrounded by his admirers, when a phone call informed us that Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth had just died.

So our recreation was brought to an early end. We recited a *de Profundis*, and went in for Compline.

How touching it is that, just a few days beforehand, a card had arrived, sent from Buckingham Palace, and addressed to Fr Abbot and the Community. It was a message of thanks from Queen Elizabeth – not indeed quite individually handwritten, but still very pleasing, with two colour photographs – graciously acknowledging our message of congratulation, sent on the occasion of her Platinum Jubilee earlier this year.

The following day our flag flew at half-mast; our Bell tolled for half an hour from midday, as has been done in many other Churches nation-wide, and the "Subvenite" was sung. A full Office and Mass for the dead is to be offered for Queen Elizabeth here at an appropriate time in the near future.

**MESSAGE TO THE DIOCESE**  
**on the Eve of the Funeral of H. M. Queen Elizabeth**  
**18 September 2022**

In today's 2<sup>nd</sup> reading, St Paul encourages prayers "for everyone – petitions, intercessions and thanksgiving – and especially for kings and others in authority." This is timely. Tomorrow the late Queen will be laid to rest and already the new King has taken on his duties. We pray for the repose of the soul of Queen Elizabeth and for wisdom and strength for King Charles III.

It was Queen Victoria who made Deeside "royal". Our late Queen, her great-great granddaughter, shared that love for the northeast of Scotland. We remember her regular visits, her summer stays, and her local presence when she came. It was in Balmoral that she died, passing to the Lord on the feast of Birthday of our Lady, and it was from Balmoral that her body began the long journey south.

Queen Elizabeth will be remembered for many things. She reigned longer than any British sovereign before her. She was a sign of stability. She showed that a nation is something more than its politics. She brought out much of the best of our country. She was a woman of influence. Though ceremony was preserved, there was a refreshing absence of fuss and posturing about her. She was unflaggingly faithful to her duties, great and small. She weathered personal, family and national difficulties and transitions. As at her death, so during her life, she fostered reconciliation, unity and peace; she brought people together. She combined dignity and charm.

As human beings who are trying to navigate life, we can learn from her fidelity and spirit of service: "When I was 21," she said in later years, "I pledged my life to the service of our people and I asked for God's help to make good that vow. Although that vow was made in my salad days, when I was green in judgement, I do not regret, or retract, one word of it." And so she proved to the very end. As Christians especially, we can be inspired by her loyalty to the teaching and example of Christ and her trust in the



power of his grace. She read Scripture daily, attended church weekly and prayed regularly. While respecting other faiths, she was not ashamed to profess her Christianity.

St Paul asked for prayers for rulers “so that we may be able to live religious and reverent lives in peace and quiet”. Catholics have not always had an easy relationship with Crown and government. There is a history of exile, restriction and even martyrdom. This can enhance our appreciation for the freedom of religion we now enjoy, as well as for the improved relationships between Christians. The late Queen contributed to this in no small measure. In her time, she met five popes. In 1982, she met St John Paul II and in 2010 welcomed Pope Benedict XVI at Holyrood for the first ever State visit of a Pope. In her time too, full diplomatic relationships were established between the Holy See and the UK Government. Her visit to the Republic of Ireland in 2011 helped move beyond old hostilities.

We are blessed as Catholics by our tradition of prayer for the departed. We cannot all file past her coffin or attend her funeral, but we can express our gratitude and respect by praying that Elizabeth, our late Queen, may receive what we too hope to receive: a merciful judgment, and that she may flourish in the joy of eternal life.

May her soul, and the souls of all the faithful departed, rest in peace. Amen.

Bishop Hugh Gilbert OSB

## ALMA REDEMPTORIS MATER

The Marian Antiphon sung after Compline during Advent and Christmastide is the “Alma Redemptoris Mater”. As with the *Salve Regina* (tempus per annum), *Ave Regina caelorum* (after Christmastide until Holy Thursday), *Regina caeli* (Eastertide), or the *Sub tuum praesidium* (conventionally sung on the eve of Solemnities), this is a direct, fervent, heart-felt, theologically and musically rich cry to Mary.

In its Pluscarden context: the day’s liturgy is now completed. Already it’s night: in Advent and Christmastide certainly quite dark. The Great Silence of the monastery is beginning. Thoughts before bed turn naturally to one’s own sinfulness, and the certainty of death. Then also: we try to gather together the intentions for which we have wanted to intercede; to put in our prayer all our personal concerns, worries and troubles; also to express our gratitude for graces and gifts received. And so, with the soaring notes of ancient melody, we call on our heavenly Mother. Of course, all our hope is in Jesus. But Mary is our way to Jesus. And we know that, like her divine Son, she sees us, hears us, and stands always ready to help us.

The first word of this Antiphon is an adjective, addressed to Our Lady. “Alma”, is a word naturally used of a mother nursing a small baby. It carries connotations not only of loving, but also of nourishing, cherishing, fondling, indulging. Our Lady was all this for Jesus, of course, and she is all this also for us. Then immediately we pronounce the first of four titles which this poem ascribes to her: “Mother of the Redeemer”, “Gateway of Heaven”, “Star of the Sea” and “Virgin”.

Pope St John Paul wrote an Encyclical on Our Lady (1987), whose opening words, *Redemptoris Mater* were taken from this Antiphon. Catholic theology teaches that Our Lady was not merely a passive recipient of redemption, but that, in a unique and outstanding way, she cooperated with her Son in his redeeming work. And in principle we all, each in his own way, can do as Our Lady has done.

Mary abides as the always open, always accessible Gateway of Heaven. But, cry our Protestant brethren, surely only Christ is the gate, as he himself taught us (cf. John 10:7)? Far from somehow rivalling or undermining that, Our Lady's whole business is to affirm it. And therefore, she mediates our way to him, just as once she mediated his way to us. The Apostle Andrew once brought Peter to Jesus (John 1:42). So, with perfect efficacy, Mary can bring us, with all her children, to her divine Son.

Mary is the Star of the Sea. Apparently, St Jerome derived the descriptive title *stilla maris*, "a drop of the ocean" as an etymology of Mary's name. Early mediaeval devotion easily turned that into *Stella maris*. The Star referred to must be the Pole Star, situated on the tail of Ursa Minor. This star remains always fixed in its place, as the heavens revolve around it. If mariners can only spot it, they know where due North is. In a storm at sea, even a brief glimpse of this star can be for them the difference between life and death; between making it back home, or being lost forever.

*Virgo prius ac posterius*. Already in the fourth century St Ambrose taught that Mary was a Virgin before she conceived Jesus; she remained an intact Virgin even as she gave him birth, and she remained a Virgin ever after. She is all holy, all pure, and therefore all loving, with no trace of selfishness or pride or any narrowness of heart whatever.

In an apparent aside, our Antiphon dwells on the astounding miracle and paradox of the Incarnation. "You who bore your own Begetter, to the wonderment of nature." Nature was astonished at the apparent impossibility of this physical event. Perhaps even more, nature was astounded at the revelation of this metaphysical event. For here the Eternal entered time; the Infinite became constrained; divine Omnipotence made itself present to us in human weakness. Here God displayed (who could ever believe it?) divine humility, divine compassion, divine love, without measure.

All this happened when the Angel Gabriel addressed our Lady with his celestial greeting: *Ave Maria!* As we sing now, we take up this Angelic Chant, so full of the atmosphere and savour of heaven. And as our Lady listened to Gabriel, surely we dare trust

that she will listen also to us. Even though we are sinners, we aspire nevertheless to praise her no less than does the whole heavenly host!

Two requests we make. “Come to the help of this people which is falling down, though longing to rise up.” We fall when we sin, and we rise up when, with the Prodigal, we repent and return to graced friendship with God. But more deeply: we are doomed to die. Our life is ebbing away. Our works will all come to an end. Yet we long to rise up from that to eternal life; to the transformed life of the new creation in Christ; to our predestined share in his divine Sonship. We know that, in principle, this is utterly beyond what we can achieve unaided. So then at last we come to the punch line of the whole piece. The final word is, as it were, quietly whispered in perfect simplicity, modesty, and humility, though also surely with perfect confidence. Three notes, gently descending in whole tone steps, come down to the repeated tonic: *miserere* – have mercy on us.

Musically, this piece shows every sign of post-dating the classical period of Gregorian composition, which had ended by the tenth century. Set in the Fifth mode, its note Ti or B is marked as always flattened. This gives exactly the effect of a modern major scale. The first syllable – *A-lma* – traverses the major arpeggio in a single neum of 15 notes. The structure of this arpeggio insistently recurs, as cadences that close phrases fall on the tonic (five times), the third of the scale (5 times) and the fifth (3 times). Also: the melody leaps about in a way unknown in the classical repertoire. There are 5 jumps of a fifth, 2 jumps of a sixth, and 1 leap of a whole octave. Surely our composer permitted himself to set these wide intervals, in order somehow to evoke his theme? That is: extremes are here paradoxically brought together: the high and the low; the divine and the human; perfect purity and wretched sinfulness. A strong impression is anyway given of energy and fervour throughout.

Nevertheless: the piece, if somewhat demanding, is not technically difficult to sing. Apart from the long intonation, the neums are all relatively simple, of 4 or 5 notes at most. Several

times, structures, or melodic formulae are repeated (cf. *Redemptoris, peccatorum; cadenti, mirante; tu, Vir-go, post-erius; tuum sanctum, sumens illud*). So we should sing this indeed with the heart, but also quite briskly and confidently. For interest: the Pluscarden Choir has recorded the Solemn Alma for a (hopefully soon!) forthcoming Advent CD.

There is an associated simple tone, usually sung on weekdays of the same season, as with each of the other regular Marian Antiphons. The simple tone Alma was composed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by a monk of Solesmes called Dom Fonteine.

As for our text: alone among such Antiphons, this one was composed in classical Latin hexameters. That is, the poetic rhythm depends not on stress but on quantity: whether the vowel in any syllable is pronounced long or short. Each line has six “feet”, comprised either of a spondee: | – – | (dum, dum) or a dactyl: | – ~ | (dum didi). A marked text is set out below for anyone interested in such things.

The author cannot be identified with certainty, but a most likely candidate is Hermanus Contractus – “Herman the cripple” - (1013-1054). He was a Benedictine monk of Reichenau; a polymath scholar and artist. To him also is commonly ascribed the authorship of the *Salve Regina*: both text and (solemn tone) music. Among his many other works, Hermanus devised his own system of musical notation. It works very well, but it never caught on, and would now be of interest only to academic musicologists. Whoever wrote it: the Alma became extremely popular during the High Middle Ages. Chaucer gives it great importance in his Prioress’s Tale. In the Sarum Office, it was attached as an Antiphon to Sext on the Feast of the Assumption, but generally it is classified as an extra-liturgical piece: normally nowadays sung after Compline.

Almă Rē|dēmtōr|īs Mā|tēr, quāe | pērvīā | cāelī  
pōrtā mǎ|nēs, ēt | stēllā mǎ|rīs, sūccurrē cǎ|dēntī,  
sūrgērē quī cū|rāt, pōpū|lo; tū / quāe gēnu|isti,  
nātū|rā mī|rantē, tū|ūm sānct|ūm Gēnī|tōrēm,

Vīrgō prīlūs āc | pōstērīlūs, Gābrī|ēlīs āb | ōrē  
sūmēns | īllud A|vē, pēcc|ātōr|ūm mīser|ērē.

Most loving Mother of the Redeemer,  
who abide always as our way to Heaven  
and Star of the Sea: come to the help of this people  
which is falling down, though longing to rise up.  
You who bore your own Begetter,  
to the wonderment of nature,  
a Virgin both before and after; receiving that “Ave”  
from the mouth of Gabriel:  
have mercy on us, sinners.

DBH

Ant.  
5.



**A** L- ma \* Redemptó-ris Ma- ter, quæ pér-  
vi- a cæ-li por-ta ma- nes, Et stel- la ma- ris, succúrre  
cadén- ti súrge-re qui cu- rat pópu-lo : Tu quæ genu-í-  
sti, na-tú- ra mi-rán- te, tu-um sanctum Ge-ni-tó-rem :  
Vir- go pri- us ac posté-ri- us, Gabri- é- lis ab o- re  
sumens il-lud Ave, \* pecca-tó-rum mī-se-ré-re.

## JULIAN OF NORWICH: A REVELATION

I have come to read Julian of Norwich only fairly recently, and at first, I made the mistake that many people who read her make: I figured that she was just one of a number of female mystics and visionaries that, especially in the Middle Ages and early modern period, not only wrote about their visions but outlined a path of spirituality that would lead one closer to God. I first read Julian as one might read many such writers, pulling out nuggets that I found appealing and heart-warming and trying to apply them to my spiritual life. Indeed, Julian provides many such easily quotable and famous sayings, such as: “All shall be well, and all shall be well, and every manner of thing shall be well” and “As truly as God is our Father, so truly is God our Mother”, quotes that look equally good on a flowery poster or on the side of a coffee mug. Taken out of context, they become as innocuous as any quote from a New Age guru. In fact, Julian is often hijacked by that movement and stripped of anything that makes her Christian in search of a “modern” relevance. For many, she has become a patroness of a hippy-style universalism and a naïvely blind and optimistic view of God

But who is Julian of Norwich? Briefly, Julian was a woman of the English town of Norwich, who lived in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. We know very little about her actual life and much ink has been spilt in conjecture about the details: was she a Benedictine nun? Was she ever married, and did she raise a family? What was her station in life ... noble? Middle class? We have only a very few details and the only solid information that can be gathered is that she was most likely a recluse (or hermit) living in a small cell attached to the church of St Julian in her hometown. We don't even know for certain if “Julian” was her real name or if she was just called that because he was the patron of her parish church. We do know that when she was about 30 years old, she almost died of a mysterious illness, during which she received a series of visions from God. She recovered from her illness and spent the rest of her days meditating on what she saw. She later wrote about her visions in a

book usually called the *Revelations of Julian of Norwich*.

Having been asked to write an article on her theology, I read two brilliant and very readable books, *Julian's Gospel: Illuminating the Life and Revelations of Julian of Norwich* by Veronica Mary Rolf and *Julian of Norwich, Theologian* by Denys Turner. I thus awakened to the profound depths of Julian's writings and discovered in fact that Julian is not truly a writer of spirituality at all. What I mean by that is she did not write a manual of prayer or a book on how to better life one's life with God, as St Teresa of Avila did. She speaks only briefly in her writings about prayer. She was a visionary, yes, but only in a limited sense. She was not even a mystic in the modern sense of the term. Julian was rather a woman of deep prayer who spent much of her later life in solitude, reflecting on an intense experience of God that happened during a very brief period in her life and then discerning what God was really trying to tell her and us, her "even-Christians" as she calls us, by those visions or "showings".

There is not space or time enough to go into detail about her writings. My purpose here is to look at some of the most remarkable aspects of her theology, a theology which has profoundly affected me and the way I look at life in Christ. The core of the visions received on what she was certain was her deathbed was a vision of Christ Crucified, which she describes in horrific detail. Her depiction of the dying Jesus makes Gibson's film of *The Passion of the Christ* look almost tame! Yet she doesn't limit herself to a pious meditation on the sufferings of Christ—she asks herself the question about the place of sin in God's plan... simply put, if God is good and omnipotent, then why is there sin at all?

God told Julian that in His plan of salvation, sin is *behovely*. This is a Middle English word related to our modern word "behooves" and meaning suitable or befitting. It is also close to the Latin term *conveniens*, that Scholastic theologians such as Thomas Aquinas use in describing the actions of God in salvation history. For instance, Aquinas would say that the death of Christ on the



Cross was *conveniens*, meaning that Christ could have saved us in any other way or by any of His actions, but His death on the Cross was the most fitting. To illustrate the point, here is an example: just as it is possible for one to get from London to Glasgow by walking, it is more *conveniens* to drive a car. But how can sin, which is inherently bad, be fitting, or behovely? God does not will us to sin, as He cannot be the author of evil. He does allow it, however, because it allows us to grow in grace and virtue by means of our repentance and conversion. It also allows Him to come to us in love and mercy and heal the wounds and divisions in our souls caused by sin. In fact, Julian states that in heaven, our sins will one of the sources of our glory, as they will be seen as the means by which God transformed us into His image by His mercy and love!

Julian doesn't stop there. Another fascinating aspect of her theology is her statement that there is *no anger in God*. As she puts it, "It was astonishing to me and I was... continuously shown that our Lord God, as far as He Himself is concerned, does not have to forgive because He is unable to be angry. It would be impossible for Him!" This can seem surprising and shocking, given both that there are biblical passages that speak of God's anger and the centuries of self-hatred, anger, and bitterness projected onto our images of God. However, if we consider who God is in His person, we know and believe that He is totally and completely perfect and has absolutely no need or lack of anything. It is therefore impossible for us to hurt or anger Him in any way. Being given that He is also infinite love and mercy, Julian says that there is nothing for God to forgive when we sin. We hurt ourselves and our relationship with Him, but we cannot hurt Him directly. Therefore, there is no reason to hold neurotically onto the image of an angry and vengeful God. No, Julian insists repeatedly that God, like the father in the parable of the prodigal son, is constantly there, waiting for the least sign of our turning back to Him so that He can rush to us and envelop us in His mercy. This realisation can radically change one's relationship with God and one's path towards holiness.

There are many other aspects of Julian's theology that could be discussed, but time and space sadly preclude it. I highly recommend reading a good modern translation of Julian's writings (for instance, I use the translation by Walter Melnyk, which is easy to read and yet manages to keep the flavour of her medieval English) and then one or both works cited above. You will discover a treasure trove of insight into God's loving plan for salvation.

One thing to mention in conclusion: avoid any of the modern New Age-leaning translations that seek to make her more "appealing" to modern mentalities by stripping her of references to sin and other specifically Christian aspects of her teaching. It is helpful to remember that when Julian was on what she considered to be her deathbed, a local priest brought a large tabletop crucifix and demanded that she gaze upon it. Thinking she was about to die, she preferred to gaze heavenwards; the priest insisted that she gaze upon the cross as the sign of her salvation. It was only when she did so that she began to receive the revelations that changed her life and gave us her theology—like the bronze serpent of Moses, it is only by keeping our gaze on the suffering Christ that we are able to open ourselves fully to the Christian mystery of sin, forgiveness, and redemption.

Br Benedict Joseph

"He beholdeth His heavenly treasure with so great love on earth that He willeth to give us more light and solace in heavenly joy, in drawing to Him of our hearts, for sorrow and darkness which we are in...And I saw full surely that ere God made us He loved us; which love was never slacked, nor ever shall be. And in this love He hath done all His works; and in this love He hath made all things profitable to us; and in this love our life is everlasting. In our making we had beginning; but the love wherein He made us was in Him from without beginning: in which love we have our beginning. And all this we shall see in God, without end."

Dame Julian, *Sixteenth Revelation*

## PLUSCARDEN ABBEY AS A PEOPLE OF GOD?

“Christ is the Light of nations”, is the famous opening phrase of *Lumen Gentium*, and he himself is the primordial sacrament, while “the Church is in Christ like a sacrament or as a sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race” (§1). All men are called to this union and unity. We had been created for it to begin with, but then lost it through sin and now need to be called back to it. Once reality of the original fall from grace is acknowledged and accepted, we can simplify the equation, as it were, and say with some of the Fathers (like Justin Martyr, Tertullian or Clement of Alexandria) that the world was created for the sake of the Church. Or that the Church is to salvation what the world is to creation. But the Fall also implies that the Church’s ultimate purpose will not be accomplished before the end of time. As it is then, it journeys through the ages as “the kingdom of Christ now present in mystery” (LG §3), or as Christ’s body, “the universal sacrament of salvation” (LG §48). It is important to hold this grand vision always in mind. The “Church-mystery”, as this reality is sometimes called, precedes creation and gives birth to “churches” in space and time, to “church” as we experience it on a regular basis – a concrete local phenomenon made up of people, rituals, places, buildings and so on. And yet faith and baptism insert a believer directly into the mystery! Only thinking in sacramental terms can help us here, as the term “sacrament” encapsulates the basic theological structure of the Church, the fundamental interplay between mystery and what can be directly experienced.

How is “my” church, Pluscarden Abbey, related to this grand vision then? At the most basic level, as the Catechism teaches, “The Church of Christ is really present in all legitimately organized local groups of the faithful, which ... are also quite appropriately called Churches in the New Testament” (§832). As a baptized Catholic, I am a member of the eschatological community of all the elect throughout the ages. This “mysterious” community, however, becomes real, open to direct experience, in my local

church, especially when gathered for the celebration of the Eucharist. My church is therefore not a miniscule and insignificant fragment of the “great” Church, it is Church in that it makes Church real in a given place and time. But while the term “sacrament” is the dogmatic model concept for the Church, its actual content is made up of, or deduced from, Biblical images. The New Testament uses nearly eighty different metaphors! But the two principal ones are clearly the Body of Christ and the People of God. The latter, though strongly rooted in the Bible, had faded from the Christian theological consciousness from very early on, and was only fully brought back into it by Vatican II. The previous neglect had to do with Christianity defining itself at least partly in opposition to the Jewish synagogue after 70AD, but many other factors contributed over the centuries.

This is not the place to go into this process at any depth. The phrase itself has always been used, of course, but was more or less completely taken out of its vital context – that of salvation history. The Council remedied that; “the People of God” has come to stand for its ecclesiology. In the words of *Lumen Gentium*, this people may be small, yet it is “nonetheless a lasting and sure seed of unity, hope and salvation for the whole human race ... used by [Christ] as an instrument for the redemption of all” (§9). This is the salvation history concept of the Church par excellence, one which also highlights its communitarian nature. Johann Auer defined the Church as “the wandering people of God of the end times”, a definition which stresses both continuity with the election and mission of Israel (extending to the whole of humankind), and the eschatological character of the Church, capable of embracing imperfection and sinfulness in the present. It was the achievement of the Council to bring all of this into a balanced post-Tridentine ecclesiology, which was previously focused on more outward, visible, and hierarchical aspects, complementing the most important image of the Church, that of the Body of Christ.

With the Church as a people journeying through times and places, one can think of degrees of incorporation (see LG §14-16),

which opens possibilities for ecumenical dialogue; or of development and growth, which gives basis for healthy criticism and reform. It also underlines and explains the Church's universal, "catholic" character, with its multiplicity of peoples, cultures, gifts, offices and ways of life. As an eschatological people, the Church is rooted in heaven, so to speak, in the divine plan and election (rather than being grounded in culture or even in dogma, for example). And yet it is very much a people with its own history. Centred on Christ as the fulfilment of God's promises, the Church is a community whose source is the Eucharist: that is, in the intimate union of each believer with Jesus, which then must be translated into communal, "horizontal" unity within the Church – "The Eucharist makes the Church".

How then is the Church-mystery seen as the People of God manifested in my monastic community then? First of all, it barely needs demonstrating that it is present there, even if the community is understood in the narrowest sense, as a group of professed monks. The Church manifests itself precisely insofar as we succeed in being one, and it is made real primarily in our liturgical gatherings, which happen to be very frequent and regular. There needs to be some correspondence though between what we profess (the vows, the evangelical counsels), project outwards (the overall image: medieval buildings, monastic habits, how we behave) or celebrate (the Liturgy, especially the Eucharist) and the quality of our fraternal life, strength and depth of our relationships with each other, openness and love towards others. We could think of it as a form of "realised eschatology". Certain monastic procedures, such as regular visitations or periodic revisions of the customary by the Chapter, help ensure that there is scope for healthy criticism and reform. Does Pluscarden Abbey serve as "a place of reunion for the eschatological people of God"? The religious state "more fully manifests to all believers the presence of heavenly goods already possessed here below"; in the words of *Lumen Gentium*, "it not only witnesses to the fact of a new and eternal life acquired by the redemption of Christ, but it foretells the future resurrection and the glory of the heavenly kingdom" (LG §44). At least that is the

theory. And it should be even more true of monastic life such as ours, lived out in a fairly remote location, with no real pastoral commitments, nor even with any specific work or charism within the Church. Ours is meant to be a “contemplative” life. We make a point of not justifying our own existence in any way – though, of course, we do hope to bring some benefits to our environment, but these are essentially by-products. Without “the heavenly goods” already present here on earth, and the future resurrection, our life simply would not work or make much sense, and it is precisely here that our witness is strongest. As “a place”, the abbey is quite literally a sacred place, a place of peace (*locus pacis*), a sanctuary, open to whoever wants to visit. All sorts of people are drawn to it, for all sorts of reasons, often quite subconscious. One way or another, they are led to us by grace, we believe.

Let me now take a broader view of the abbey and see it as extended in time, as a pilgrim church marching through history but with its own history, while also being sensitive to the varying degrees of “incorporation”, and to “links” and “relations” which it has with a variety of people. As we know, the abbey was re-founded in 1948, on a site the medieval monastery which, founded in the thirteenth century, closed down since the Reformation. The first group of monks came from Burgundy in 1230 and they were Caulites (or Valliscaulians), that is, members of a semi-eremical monastic order which no longer exists. There is no direct continuity here, of course, and yet their bones are buried somewhere in the abbey grounds, where the old medieval walls are saturated with their psalmody and prayers. These connections are real. Having said that, after World War II Pluscarden was re-founded from Prinknash Abbey, a community with roots in the nineteenth century Anglican Church which became Catholic in 1913, and this “post-Reformation” heritage is important to us, too. One could also take a much broader view and look at monasticism as a whole: on the one hand, an attempt to keep alive the fervour of pre-Constantinian Christianity, the Church of the martyrs, and on the other a movement with roots in the prophetic traditions of the Old Testament.

As members of the Subiaco-Cassinese Benedictine congregation, we belong to a global network of monasteries and this network does not exist on paper only. It exists through a variety of formal and informal contacts, friendships, news sharing and prayer. The abbey is obviously also plugged into the local life, in a great variety of ways. We are active within our diocese and in the wider Christian community, of course, but we have also built up many friendships in the area over the years – among our neighbours, local shopkeepers, doctors, tradesmen and so on. Again, the vast majority of them are not Catholic or even particularly religious, and yet they will often treat us with warmth and respect. on account of what we are doing, on account of what we do, because of our way of life. One cannot help thinking that these purely “secular” relationships somehow strengthen their (and our) participation in the eschatological People of God (Mt 10:42). The same can be said of our guests who come to stay at one of our two guest houses, though here more explicitly spiritual motivations are usually at play.

Within the monastic community itself there are various degrees of incorporation. Formally speaking, only the solemnly professed are full community members. There are other forms of incorporation, such as becoming a regular oblate, or brethren in formation. As for the “catholic” or “universal” characteristics of this group, a certain variety of cultures is there, and definitely a variety of charisms, offices, personal gifts, and stories. All of this is actually enriching and a boost to the strength of our witness; perhaps we could do better in exploiting this richness. To this we ought to add a few hundred lay oblates, that is, people living “in the world”, tied to us by promises (oblation) and unite with us in prayer, especially the Liturgy of the Hours. Though all of them are baptized Christians, a good proportion come from the various Protestant denominations. They receive guidance and support from the Oblate Master. Looking at things from a less formal and more spiritual point of view, however, it is possible that an individual monk can withdraw himself from full participation in the eschatological reality that is our community, our “church”. There

are countless ways of evading one's vocation, from downright sin, through to complacent mediocrity and comfort-seeking, to more subtle strategies, like hiding behind excessive piety or an unhealthy attachment to certain forms of the liturgy, or just by maintaining cold distance in personal relations. To counter this, our monastic tradition resounds with a call to conversion.

All in all, it makes good sense to look at our community as a people of God, at least from time to time, to see it as a fairly loose (or at least fuzzy on the edges) pilgrimage group on its way to heaven, with the *avant-garde* already there and yet somehow also with us also, among them the long dead Caulites, our oblates and benefactors, our families and friends, the shopkeepers in Elgin, all those who perhaps profess no faith of their own; we may even include people we may have encountered randomly just once at the airport. Perhaps we should not take our own membership in this group for granted, even if “one” happens to be a professed monk.

DSP

### *Prayer consists of welcoming*

God comes to us in the daily round of encounters, necessities, trials, and joys...

Prayer consists of welcoming him, just as He comes to us, and equally of freely consenting to the events and necessities of the moment, as well as the states of soul in which we currently find ourselves. It is enough to come before God with all that we are and in the reality of our present situation, and then to offer him all that we have to live, with all our subjectivity, made up of weakness, fear, anxiety, or, on the contrary, of joy, desire, and requests.

You seek God and you can find him everywhere. Even to the limits of your hell, Jesus has gone there before you, and it is there that he is to be found, when you thought he could only be found in the blue sky and peace of heaven. Jesus descended to the deepest depths of our human existences, and the disciple is happy to rediscover him there.

Abbot Bernard Ducruet OSB (trans. DGC)



## FUNERAL OF ARCHBISHOP MARIO CONTI

### St Andrew's Cathedral, Glasgow, 18 November 2022

Remembering Mario, and his long, rich and fruitful life, it's hard not to smile. He had a certain manner, shall we say, a certain sense of the *bella figura* and his own dignity. As a boy at Blairs and at the Scots College, it was well-known that he had no love for football but plenty for designing stage-sets for, and performing in, Gilbert and Sullivan. In later years, Cardinal Winning, God forgive him, found the mannered, aesthetic side of Mario an irresistible target. But the more one knew Mario, the more one realised that, despite appearances, he would not have been finally or fully happy as a Renaissance Prince-Bishop or as a Prelate of the *Ancien Regime*. He had too much heart, too much humanity. The “boy from Barga” or, more strictly, the “Elgin loon”, always came out on top. An Aberdeen parishioner told me how luridly Mario had been described to him, and how then, on a pilgrimage, he met this warm, humorous, approachable bishop who was just happy sitting on the grass and chatting with the folk for an hour and a half.

Here, I suppose, I must declare an interest. I first set eyes on Mario when I was 25 and very recently professed as a monk. I can still picture him. It was a February day of fearsome winter weather, and he was sitting by the fire in the Chapter House of Pluscarden Abbey, the early 40s parish priest of Wick and Thurso, bright-eyed and with a notable nose. A few days later we heard that he had been appointed Bishop of Aberdeen. Later, he would ordain me as a deacon, and as priest, bless me as abbot, and co-ordain me as bishop – all that over a span of 30 years. I think of him as sacramentally a father. And it was a grace to visit him, with others, on the day he died.

An addendum to his will, written twenty years ago, just after his coming here, reads: “I desire to proclaim my confidence in God's mercy, as I end my days – and to acknowledge the gift of his grace when called to priestly and episcopal service”. In the light of that last phrase, and of today's Gospel (his choice), of his episcopal motto (drawn from the liturgy) *sincero corde servire*, “to

serve with a sincere heart”, it’s natural for us today to recall something of that service. He was 64 years a priest and 45 years a bishop. In his Elgin Primary School, he famously declared his desire to become Pope. Well... His priesthood, and its fullness as bishop, was his life and his love, and they touched many lives over those many years. Ordained in 1958, his youthful ministry would have coincided with the pontificate of St John XXIII and then with the Second Vatican Council. The latter shaped him. He was always a man of the Council. After a spell at St Mary’s Cathedral, Aberdeen, he was sent to Caithness, far to the north and a world of its own. Wick was already a church and a parish, but Thurso was not. He had the church and the presbytery built there. So, at St Anne’s, Thurso, all those years ago, an interest in design and church architecture found an expression that culminates in this St Andrew’s Cathedral, so transfigured by his renovations. And today, coincidentally, is the memorial of St Fergus, patron of Wick. After 15 years in Caithness – too long he thought in one such place – he was nominated bishop. And the rest is history and part of the story of many of us here. For the dissertation for his Licence, he had written on Newman’s *On Consulting the Faithful in matters of Doctrine*. Newman remained a luminary for him. He had his episcopal heroes, too: the Servant of the Servant of God, Pope Gregory the Great, from whose feast he chose two of today’s readings, and with him the gracious Savoyard, St Francis de Sales. “A Christian gentleman” was how an Aberdeen worthy once described Mario to me.

One can only touch on some features of his episcopal years – almost 25 of them in Aberdeen and some 10 in post in Glasgow, a tale of two cities. It was an episcopal service, framed we could say, by the two papal visits to Scotland, St John Paul’s in 1982 and Pope Benedict’s in 2010. In his unique way, Mario traversed that particular epoch of Scottish Church history, perhaps yet to be defined and already different from where we are now. He enjoyed civic events, knew how to work a room and was a good dinner companion. I was always struck how consistently, in such settings, he confessed the faith. He would speak up for the Church and

Christian tradition. He was never embarrassed at being Catholic. “As far as I am concerned,” he said, “we are part of Scottish society. The Catholic Church is not foreign to Scotland.” He relished recalling Catholic history. After one of his lengthy sermons in an historic Moray church, a visiting prelate commented that “Mario has turned the pages of history for us, indeed leaving no page unturned.” He will be remembered for his ecumenical sensibility and his wide and appreciated involvement in dialogue with other Christians and the workings of the various ecumenical bodies. In later years, he engaged, with no less commitment, in inter-faith relations. He supported the Catholic knightly orders (represented here). He could be a sharp and perceptive critic of the extravagances of secularism, the errors of government and social injustice. He was an eloquent advocate of a bioethics that respected the dignity of the human person, from conception to natural death and consistently upheld the Christian vision of marriage.

On another front, he was always well-disposed to Religious Orders and Congregations. To my own community, he was a stalwart friend and always a welcome visitor. He remembered picnicking as a boy with his parents and sister in the Priory grounds before the monks returned. His father prophesied that they would, and when in 1948 they did, the teenage Mario served at the official opening Mass. Undeterred by contemporary barbarians, he championed the cultural heritage of the Church, both in Scotland and more widely as part of a Pontifical Council for Culture. Indeed, the future of St Mary’s Chapel, Blairs was a preoccupation of his last days. If in some domains, he didn’t always hit the right note – or was it just the politically correct note he didn’t hit? – there was never any doubt of his commitment. In the northeast, I can say from experience, he brought the Church down from the glens, as it were, and out of the back streets. He wasn’t willing for it or its bishop to be consigned to the footnotes. The University of Aberdeen was the first to give him an honorary doctorate and he celebrated the first Catholic Mass since the Reformation in Bishop Elphinstone’s University church. It said a lot that at the time of the

Piper Alpha Disaster in 1988, it was he who led the mourning in Aberdeen. An obituary that described Mario as “effete” was seriously wide of the mark. He was perceptive, practical, and firm, sustained by a sense of self and of mission.

I don't mean to weary you by recalling all this nor to degenerate into eulogy. I want to find the way, rather, to the heart of this multi-faceted ministry. What held it together? It was, surely, the ideal of service, the service of the Lord and of his people. And at the centre of this service stood the liturgical-sacramental-preaching role of the bishop, energising its every ramification. He was a natural celebrant. He must have confirmed a great number of young people over the years, celebrated many ordinations and performed the Eucharist in many varied settings. He liked to recall that. He cared for and about the liturgy. His first pastoral letters as bishop were a commentary on the order of Mass. He encouraged communion under both kinds. He introduced the permanent diaconate to Scotland. It was in his cathedrals and elsewhere that he could, in St Paul's words, “preach Christ Jesus as Lord” and “ourselves as his servants” and could, albeit an earthenware vessel, communicate the Treasure. How he will enjoy the Isaian banquet!

Remembering Mario, we remember a good and faithful servant, and we pray that through the intercession of our Lady of Aberdeen, and of Ss Peter and Paul, and St Mungo, his judgment may be merciful. And we, the Catholic people of Scotland, as well as our friends of other denominations and religions and in civic society, have much to be grateful for. It is much more than a smile at some human foibles he leaves with us. It is real affection and appreciation. “Heart speaks to heart”. He certainly speaks to mine, and I know I'm not alone.

When he spoke at his own ordination as bishop in 1977, he quoted St Gregory the Great: “‘Son of man, I have appointed you as watchman for the house of Israel.’ Now a watchman takes up his position on the heights so that he can see from a distance whatever approaches... Who am I? What kind of watchman am I? I do not stand on the pinnacle of achievement; I languish rather in

the depths of my weakness. And yet the Creator and Redeemer of mankind can give me, unworthy though I be, the grace to see life whole and power to speak about it effectively. It is for love of him that I do not spare myself in preaching.” He wrote those words out again privately in 2002, and in another note of 2016 called them “still dear to me”.

Dear Mario, your preaching, celebrating and pastoring done, may you rest in peace and enter into the joy of your Lord. Amen.

Bishop Hugh Gilbert OSB

### *The Quest for the Unknown of God*

An explorer sacrifices many things which might be important in order to concentrate on his expedition and the goal he has set himself. The monk is an explorer of God, and this long-haul expedition demands many sacrifices of him and commits him to a long journey, into depths which go beyond the limits of understanding. We can fear to venture there, because it is necessary to detach yourself, be stripped, to let yourself be snatched up by God’s welcome, and so we can prefer to remain in the country we know, and content ourselves with superficialities, remaining on the surface of ourselves. The restlessness of the searcher for God turns him from empty curiosity. It draws him into the quest for an ever-new encounter in the longing for this God who cannot be grasped and yet is so close, always new. A disquiet which is not something exterior, but which comes from the depths of the being which God knows better than we do ourselves. Whoever descends into these depths will be able to discover the divine in humility, to encounter the other, not at the surface of himself, but in those divine depths where we recognise that we are alike. True relationship is that in which we dare to make that leap which projects (us) into God. That is why there is no other friendship than that which consents to lose the friend in God.

Abbot Bernard Ducruet OSB (transl. DGC)

## **THE REDEMPTION OF A REBELLIOUS HEART:** *Kristin Lavransdatter*

Sigrid Undset was a Nobel Prize-winning author from Norway and is best known in the English-speaking world for her novel *Kristin Lavransdatter*. Raised a cultural Lutheran by her atheist parents, she converted to Catholicism in her 40s, which was a source of scandal to her largely secularised peers. She became a lay Dominican and wrote a well-regarded biography of St Catherine of Siena. Undset wrote many novels, but her crowning achievement is widely recognised to be *Kristin Lavransdatter*. Actually a trilogy, it is set in the High Middle Ages in Norway, around the middle of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Scandinavia had only recently converted to Christianity and so Undset depicts a culture that was still highly tinged with pagan superstitions, including belief in the existence of elves and fairies. At the time, it was not unusual or even a source of scandal if priests married or had children. However, the faith had developed strong roots and was slowly doing away with the pagan morality of the older Viking times.

Undset's main novels were translated fairly early into English, but in a somewhat difficult-to-read style. Seeking to impart a sense of the medieval milieu in which they are set, the earlier translations of her works used very stilted language filled with archaisms which can make them hard to read. A newer translation by American author Tiina Nunnally (published by Penguin Classics) has finally put this novel into an easy-to-read language that maintains, however, a sense of the differentness of the medieval milieu. With the new translation, it is a delight to get lost in the world of Norway in the 1300s, when the faith was strong and real and the search for one's place in the world naturally included a recognition of one's place in God's plan. The writing is breathtakingly beautiful. As I reread the novel, I find myself taking a very long time to do so, letting the language, the scenery, the characters, and the plot slowly wash over me. It's like taking a time machine, so fully and vividly does Undset evoke the time and people of so long ago. The novel depicts with gritty

realism the actualities of life in the Middle Ages, no doubt due to Sigrid Undset's meticulous research of medieval literature and culture.

*Kristin Lavransdatter* is the story of a young woman raised in a pious family. Her father, Lavrans, is a rich farmer, a man with connections to royalty but not specifically of noble birth. He sends his daughter, Kristin, to a convent school in a nearby town where she meets a noble young rake, Erlend, who has been excommunicated by the Church because he has entered into an adulterous relationship and had illegitimate children. Kristin has been betrothed to another young man by her father, but she is headstrong, spoiled, and selfish and finds herself falling in love with Erlend. Flying in the face of convention and her father's wishes, they rebelliously embark on a whirlwind relationship that, though they eventually marry and have several children, will cause scandal and heartache for all concerned. The amazing thing about this novel is Kristin's relationship with God and how she eventually allows the working of grace to transform her. She learns to repent of her bad choices and to allow God's providence to mould her into a better person.

The trajectory of this novel reminds me in many ways of another novel set in a tumultuous period: Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind*. Both are set in times of great social upheaval and disaster and have as a main character headstrong and rebellious women who fly in the face of social niceties in order to get their desires. The main difference comes in the souls of the two heroines: GWTW's Scarlett O'Hara remains fixed in her naiveté, stubbornness, and wilful blindness to the suffering of others; though charming (why else would anyone continue to root for her through an entire novel?), she is a narcissist through and through. Kristin, on the other hand, marries rather in haste but has time to repent in leisure, as the saying goes, and she allows that repentance to change her into a truly Christian woman. In short, Kristin shows herself able to learn from her mistakes; Scarlett just marches forward over every obstacle in her path. Both women must deal with the death of their societies: Scarlett's antebellum South is

destroyed by the chaos of the American Civil War, and Kristin's world nearly completely collapses with the onset of the Black Plague in Norway. Again, there is a marked difference in the way the two women handle their crises: Scarlett manipulates herself into wealth and consequence, further entrenching herself in her selfishness, while Kristin becomes someone who goes out of herself to take care of the plague-stricken victims around her.

It seems that what distinguishes a truly Catholic novel from others is the depiction of the work of grace in the lives of its protagonists. In this novel, we have an unruly and spoiled young girl who, forged by the crucible of suffering, is transformed into a woman of God. Kristin becomes an example of the public sinner turned saint, in the line of St Augustine and St Margaret of Cortona. In *Kristin Lavransdatter*, Sigrid Undset gives us a heroine, a culture, and a land full of depth and mystery, ready to be explored by those lucky enough to open the pages of this marvellous book.

Br Benedict Joseph

### ***Vocal prayer and Interior Prayer***

May our heart be in tune with our voice.) Rule, 19) We might expect that the words would come from our heart, and try to be in agreement with them. St Benedict takes a different view of things: it is our heart which must be in agreement with our voice; the heart must agree with the Word of God which we speak ... St Benedict prefers truth to sincerity. He wants our heart and our interior life to be in harmony with the Word of God which our lips speak during the Office. He asks us not to express the feelings of our hearts, but that our hearts should welcome the objective truth of the Word of God and conform themselves to it. He exhorts us to allow the intimate depths of our hearts to be converted by the Word of God spoken by our lips in such a way that that Word may resound within us, sowing seed in our interior soil, fertilizing it and causing it to bear fruit.

Abbot Bernard Ducruet OSB (transl. DGC)