

Pluscarden Benedictines

No. 203 News and Notes for our Friends Autumn 2023

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Cover: Fr Joseph with Bishop Hugh and Fr Abbot

Back: Aerial photograph of the St Benedict's Guesthouse garden:
Frank McLaughlin

ABBOT'S LETTER

Dear Friends,

Br Jerome Leo Hughes, a brother in our dependent house at St Mary's Monastery, Petersham, died on 3rd July this year. He was 74 years old and spent the last 27 years at Petersham.

For most of the monks and nuns at Petersham he is the first of their generation to die. Since the communities are relatively new, others who died before were founders, parents as it were, of the communities. They began their religious lives elsewhere and established new religious families in which others could begin the consecrated life. Br Jerome is the first to have begun and completed his religious life at Petersham. The monks and nuns there witnessed and shared all the stages of his monastic life.

He is the first of our generation to go to the Lord. (I say "our" counting myself, for the purpose of this reflection, one of the brothers at Petersham: as a dependent house they are part of our community at Pluscarden.) It is cause for reflection. Why in God's providence is he the pioneer, the first to reach the goal?

The manner of Br Jerome's entry into our life was most unusual. To understand this one must speak of his life before the monastery with a certain frankness, which he will not mind.

For some years following his youth, his life was openly divergent from the teachings of the Church. He was diagnosed HIV positive, at a time when the life expectancy following such diagnosis was short. His immediate response was a complete reorientation of his life into the way of the Gospel and a determination that, in his own words, he would die a loyal son of the Church.

He had attempted monastic life as a young man. Wishing to begin again without making himself a burden, as he saw it, to a community, he became a hermit under the Archdiocese of Boston, making vows in 1991. In fact, his life in Boston was semi-eremitical, including a good deal of ministry. In 1996 he moved to Petersham, still as a hermit, combining his eremitical life with a

ministry towards the guests of the two communities, men and women.

Returning to the theme of Br Jerome as a “pioneer”, I find it noteworthy that his point of entry to the monastic life at Petersham was to be a part – a vital part as it turned out – of a work that the nuns and monks carry out together, hospitality. The process of discernment by which we decided to receive Br Jerome was also, because of the circumstances, something the monks and nuns had to do together.

Over time Br Jerome, like many other hermits, like St Benedict, made the transition from the life of a hermit to life in community. In the end he was simply one of the brothers. His official status in our community, from 2001, was regular oblate.

There is a poem about dying by Henry Van Dyke, using the image of a ship crossing the ocean to a distant shore. From our sight standing on our shore, the ship seems smaller and smaller until it vanishes over the horizon and we say, “There, she is gone.”

Gone where?

Gone from my sight. That is all. She is just as large in mast,
hull and spar as she was when she left my side.

And, she is just as able to bear her load of living freight to her
destined port.

Her diminished size is in me – not in her.

And, just at the moment when someone says, “There, she is gone”,
there are other eyes watching her coming, and other voices
ready to take up the glad shout, “Here she comes!”

I love the image of Br Jerome as ship. He took on board much cargo during his time on this side of the ocean: many relationships, much love, many enterprises, in a way several lives, though with deep continuity between his different lives. You might say he stayed at many ports, but with each new load he took on board he kept what was already stowed away.

Like all children of Adam and Eve, he took on his burden of sin. His repentance was beautiful. He took on a considerable burden of suffering in body and mind, especially in his last years. This too he took on board and he sailed on.

He took on board something of all those whom he knew and loved, and many he didn't know he took to his heart through the good teaching he diffused and through his prayer of intercession.

All this he carries now to that other shore, to the glad shout, "Here he comes." There is much work, but joyful work, unloading the ship. The burden of sin is now taken by Christ, who alone can take it; all else onboard will be given its proper and lasting place. Nothing good lost. All hurts healed. All misunderstandings clarified. Angels and Saints set to work.

We join in the work by our prayers. This prayer for the faithful departed, the mysterious bond between us and them, is something Br Jerome was very devoted to. We owe it to him now to pray for him. It is our share in the joyful arrival.

Br Jerome died as he wished, a faithful child of the Church. May God give him a merciful judgement, and may he rest in peace until Christ calls him to rise and come forth.

Yours devotedly in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Fr Anselm". The letters are cursive and fluid, with a prominent crossbar on the 't' and a long, sweeping tail on the 'm'.

NEWS FROM ST MARY'S MONASTERY

From June 15 to 23 we had our annual retreat. Our retreat master this year was Fr Luke Dysinger OSB, of St Andrew's Abbey, Valyermo, California. Fr Luke is a popular speaker and author with a wide range of interests: moral and spiritual theology, medical ethics (he was a doctor before becoming a monk, and is still a licensed physician); art, not to mention monastic spirituality and the Rule of St Benedict, which he translated. The title of his retreat was "And let us open our eyes to the deifying light" (RB, Prologue, v. 8). He covered various topics such as asceticism, contemplation, the reception of new members, the themes of the ladder, and the garden, in monastic spirituality, and Benedict's path in life culminating in his final vision of the whole world gathered together into a single ray of light. The conferences were held in the sisters' priory, rather than in the church, so that Fr Luke could illustrate his talks with images of works of art, which were very helpful. Finally, he concluded with an interesting talk about his own monastery and its history.

On June 26 Fr Abbot arrived for a visit. His main reason for coming, in addition to seeing the monks and nuns here, was to attend Br Isidore's Silver Jubilee. However, the timing of his visit was providential. On July 3, Br Jerome died and Fr Abbot was able to visit him several times before his death, as well as preside at his funeral. His death was not entirely unexpected. He had grown progressively weaker in the last few months and was living in a nearby rehab facility when he passed away peacefully. Br Jerome suffered much during the last years of his life but did so with great resignation and calm acceptance.

Br Jerome Leo was born Philip Hughes on June 3, 1949, and had just turned 74 a month before his passing. Although born in New York State, he grew up in Tampa, Florida, and was always proud of being a Southerner. His interest in monasticism began early in life after visiting St Leo Abbey as a child. He attended St Leo University, and also tried his vocation at the abbey. Hence his full monastic name was Br Jerome Leo, Jerome being the name of

his father. Before finding his way to Petersham, Philip worked as a nurse, schoolteacher, and disc jockey. He was also very active for many years in the Catholic Worker movement. He first came to St Mary's in December 1991 as a guest while he was living in Provincetown, Massachusetts. After being a diocesan hermit with the Archdiocese of Boston, Br Jerome came to reside at Petersham in June 1996. He was given the status of regular oblate and made his profession on August 3, 2001. Br Jerome was Guestmaster for many years and later Oblate master. Both jobs enabled him to interact with people, which he enjoyed. He was widely known through his daily Holy Rule reflections which were read by numerous avid readers via the Internet.

Br Jerome's funeral was held on July 8 and was attended by many friends. After Communion, one of his closest friends, Sr Lany Jo Smith ASCJ, whom he had known since high school, sang "Veni Electa Mea". One of Br Jerome's last wishes was that Sr Lany Jo sing this at his *funeral*. Afterwards she gave a eulogy, in which she explained that this piece is sung in her congregation at professions, but it was also appropriate for Br Jerome's funeral. After the funeral Mass, Br Jerome was laid to rest in our monastic cemetery, which he used to visit daily while he was still able-bodied. He will be greatly missed.

On July 11, Br Isidore celebrated his Silver Jubilee of Profession. During the Mass he renewed his vows and sang the *Suscipe*, as is customary. After the Mass we had a festive meal held in the brothers' refectory. Br Isidore's sister Angela, his brother Brian and niece Julia came from Canada to attend. Several friends of the two communities were present, including Maureen Tynan, Dawn Sweet, Phil and Carol Zaleski, John and Teresa Zaleski, with their daughter Madeleine, Mark McCurn, Brian and Ginger Doerpholz, Lynne Shaw, Barbara Heffron, Mary McQueen, and Andy DeLisle, who took the photos. Someone who came from far away was Fr Antony of Kristo Buase in Ghana. Br Isidore had attended Fr Antony's diaconal ordination in Trinidad in 2019, and now he was returning the favour, and also representing Fr Bede who was unable to attend. Another visitor

from afar was Sr Stephen Phiri', originally from Zambia. She is a nun of Our Lady of the Desert in New Mexico and was visiting the sisters here for three weeks. In addition to cold cuts, the menu consisted of home-grown salad with homemade dressing, homemade cheese by the sisters, Polish beet salad, rolls, cake, and an Austrian Imperial dessert called *Kaiserschmarrn* – named in honour of the Emperor Franz Josef and his wife Elizabeth – and lots of Polish beer and champagne. A fine time was had by all.

On July 20, we were blessed with a new arrival to St Mary's Monastery – not a new postulant, but something which many of the brethren are just as excited about, perhaps even more so – a new pickup truck. The Ford F-250 Super Duty was donated by a generous benefactor. It will be used mainly as a work vehicle, performing such tasks as transporting trees which have been chopped down from the forest. Some of us will need a few lessons before driving it. In the near future the same benefactor will be donating a tractor and a woodchipper.

Finally, we brewed beer again for the first time since before COVID (the last time was November 2019). Fr Columba is now part of the brewing team, along with Fr Gregory, Mark McCurn and Br Isidore. The beer will have aged sufficiently by Christmas and will make a suitable gift for friends and benefactors.

DIC

Sunset and evening star,
And one clear call for me!
And may there be no moaning of the bar,
When I put out to sea,
... ..

For tho' from out our bourne of Time and Place
The flood may bear me far,
I hope to see my Pilot face to face
When I have crost the bar.

(from *Crossing the Bar* by Alfred, Lord Tennyson)

NEWS FROM KRISTO BUASE MONASTERY

23rd April

Angela, who is the head nurse of the ICU at Holy Family Hospital, and who is studying for a doctorate at Birmingham University, U.K., attended Mass today. She is the person who is looking after and dressing the wound on Fr Prior's leg.

27th April

Br Basilio attended in Nandom the wedding of his nephew, Richard, who is an oblate of the community.

3rd May

For the 70th birthday of Fr Prior, the community invited local priests and religious to an evening Mass of Thanksgiving. Most Rev. Yeboah Nyarko, Bishop of Techiman, presided at the Mass, Fr Antony gave the homily and V. Rev. Fr James Annor-Ohene, Chancellor of the diocese, gave the address of thanks. Afterwards a Holy Cross Brother, Medical Mission Sisters, Handmaids of the Holy Child Jesus, Fathers Martin Oduro Bilson, Augustine Takyi and Alfred (the Bishop's secretary) took part in the meal and festivities. Genevieve, a friend of the community, came from Accra.

4th May

We celebrated Genevieve's birthday.

6th May

The community attended the Perpetual Profession of vows of Sr Elizabeth Nabuguzi of the Medical Mission Sisters, and the launching of the 75th anniversary of Medical Mission Sisters' presence in Ghana. Bishop Dominic Yeboah Nyarko was the main celebrant with about 10 concelebrants. It took place at Our Lady of Calvary Grotto, Asueyi-Techiman.

7th May

The community attended at St Joseph's, Kintampo, the silver jubilee of priesthood of Fathers Alex Chandy SVD and Joseph Addai SVD.

28th May Pentecost

Sister Sheila MMS came for Mass and stayed for lunch and time of recollection. Later in the day, 2 aspirants and a postulant for the Jesus, Mary & Joseph Sisters arrived for retreat.

17th June

At St Paul's Cathedral, Techiman, Bishop Dominic Yeboah Nyarko ordained 4 priests for the diocese – Benjamin Asika, Emmanuel Nyarko, Stephen Kwabena Effah, Stephen Kwadwo Takyi. Most of the community attended.

23rd June

The end of year party of the formation courses for novices of Sunyani and Techiman was held at the monastery. About 60 attended with a number of Congregations absent. Fr Damian SDB presided at the Mass.

5th July

Eight formators of the Kumasi Archdiocese arrived for their 3 day meeting.

7-12th July

Father Bonaventure Quaidoo and Andrew Gyan, oblates from Accra, came for retreat. During this time they met daily with Fr Prior increasing their knowledge of Benedictine life.

15th July

Annual gathering in honour of St Benedict by Kristo Buase and the Sisters of the Incarnate Word.

This year it was held in the noviciate in Sunyani of the Sisters. It began with Mass of St Benedict celebrated with solemnity and using sacred vessels from the Benedictine Monastery of Tabgha in the Holy Land. Afterwards there was a festive meal and games, including football (mixed brothers and sisters teams). Br Martin, who is a good footballer, scored a spectacular goal despite the desperate attempts in goal of Sr Hagar.

16th July

Sr Celestina Dery, a postulant of the Benedictine Monastery of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Saltpond, spent two nights with us.

Before entering the Sisters, she had been attending our oblate meetings.

July

As we continue our tentative research into the possibility of processing cashew, Cocoa Research Institute of Ghana has come to our assistance. During July, 6 acres of our land has been cleared in order for the Cocoa Research Institute of Ghana to plant a number of varieties of cashew. These will be monitored to see how well they do.

1st August

Fr Antony and Br Michael pick up 300 plantain tubers for our farm.

6th August Patronal Feast of the Transfiguration.

Silver Jubilee of Brother Basilio Zaa-Liebe (see photo)

The large Solemn Mass was held by the mango tree. In honour of the jubilee, the solemnly professed members of the Monastery received new cowls which were worn for the first time at the Mass. Fr Prior received the renewal of vows after the homily which was given by Fr Stephen Koya. The Sunyani Novices Choir and the local Dagaaba choir provided the music. Bishop Dominic Yeboah-Nyarko of Techiman, Bishop Peter Paul Angkyier of Damongo, and V. Rev. Father Cyprian Kuupol SVD Provincial were in attendance as were many priests, religious including Fathers Etienne Adamadogbe Senah OSB, François Komi Amouzou OSB, and Sister Jeanne Kpokoudjo OSB of Dzogbégan (Togo), family and friends. Afterwards there was joyous festivity.

DGP

MONASTIC APICULTURE II

In the year 411, St Jerome wrote a long letter (number 125 in the collection) to a certain Rusticus, ardently commending monastic life. On the subject of the manual work suitable for monks, he lists various activities. There is basket weaving, horticulture, making (and presumably using) fishing lines, copying manuscripts... And there is beekeeping. “The Proverbs of Solomon send you to bees, and by watching the tiny creatures learn the ordinance of a monastery and the discipline of a kingdom.” Jerome is here referring to the text of Proverbs Chapter 6 verse 8, according to the Greek (LXX) version, which has a verse additional to our standard editions based on the Hebrew:

“Go to the bee, and learn how industrious she is, and how seriously she performs her work, whose products kings and commoners use for their health. Yes, she is desired by all and honoured.”

Honey is not only delicious, and good for you, but until the Atlantic was crossed, and cane sugar imported in quantity, it was the only available sweetener. Before the invention of movable frames, honey could only be extracted by crushing the whole comb, with all the wax left behind as gooey residue. Once cleaned, beeswax has multifarious uses: most notably for the manufacture of candles. There are special liturgical blessings for Church candles; especially of course for the Paschal Candle, solemnly blessed on Holy Saturday.

“Suscipe, sancte Pater ... quod tibi in hac cerei oblatione sollempni, per ministrorum manus de operibus apum, sacrosancta reddit Ecclesia...”

“Receive O heavenly Father ... what your holy Church offers to you in this solemn oblation of wax, made by the hands of your servants from the labours of bees...”

“Licet sit divisus in partes, mutuati tamen luminis detrimenta non novit. Alitur enim liquantibus ceris, quas in substantiam

pretiosae huius lampadis apis mater eduxit.”

“Although the flame of this Easter candle is divided into many parts, yet it suffers no detriment to its shared light. For it is fed by liquefying wax, which the mother bee has brought forth to make up the body of this precious lamp.”

Inevitably then, apiculture has been a feature of monastic life, almost everywhere and always. The mediaeval settings for bee skeps at Pluscarden are to be seen still in our ancient enclosure wall. The ruins of the Cistercian Abbey at Deer near Aberdeen also include a beautifully preserved enclosure wall, whose series of bee boles are stacked two high. One historical witness to beekeeping around Pluscarden is a legal Charter, written in Latin and dated 1586: that is, not long after monastic life had come to its official end in 1560. The (recusant Catholic) lay commendatory Prior of Pluscarden, Alexander Seton, comes here to an agreement with James Dunbar of Cumnock over certain lucrative fishing and other rights belonging to the Priory. Listing these rights, the document mentions rental income of salmon, by the barrel, and of beeswax, by the stone. That’s a lot of beeswax! So beekeeping must have been widely practised in those days, and on a large scale. Appended to this charter is the signature also of Thomas Ross, the last known monk of Pluscarden.

Abbot Aelred Carlyle kept bees on Caldey Island and advertised his honey for sale in the pages of PAX. In 1909 he was asking a price of 3 shillings and 7 pence for a 3-pound jar, to be sent post free. In new money, that would come to around 6 or 7 Pence per pound. I’m afraid nowadays we ask more like £10 for a 1 lb jar of heather honey. That would be a price increase somewhere in excess of 1500%!

Probably the world’s most famous beekeeper of the 20th century was Br Adam of Buckfast (1898-1996). He was sent by his parents to Buckfast aged 11, and spent more or less the next 80 years looking after the monastery’s bees. Br Adam would normally wear no other protective clothing than an apron over his black habit. Seeking to breed a bee perfectly adapted for

commercial purposes, he set up an innovative mating apiary at an isolated spot in the middle of Dartmoor, where he could be sure that only his own selected drones would be able to mate with his virgin queens. Subsequently, outside times of World War, he undertook travels all over Asia Minor, the near East, the Mediterranean, Europe and Africa, looking for suitable bees from which to breed. He is said to have travelled around 100,000 miles in this single-minded search.

The eventual result was the Buckfast bee, a strain that is still going and still very widely used. The first quality Br Adam wanted to establish in this bee was resistance to disease. Then, refining his technique, he selected for gentle disposition, and reluctance to swarm, and a tendency to produce huge colonies. As Bernhard Möbus used to say: "If you want a lot of honey, you need a lot of bees." We've had some Buckfast bees here, on various occasions, but find they don't suit us; or rather our climate doesn't suit them. Faced with inclement summer weather, which we do sometimes have, a Buckfast queen just keeps on laying, while our native black queens will more sensibly slow down, or even stop, in order to conserve food supplies. If the beekeeper is not on hand to give sugar feed in quantity, the Buckfast colony will rapidly starve itself to death. Given a warm year, though, as we can testify, these bees will store enormous crops of honey.

Among the modern monasteries of Britain there are (or have been until fairly recently) bees kept at Ampleforth, Buckfast, Farnborough, Fort Augustus, Minster, Mount St Bernard, Parkminster, Pluscarden, Prinknash, Quarr, Ramsgate/Chilworth, Ryde. As well as selling honey, not a few of these monasteries also sell home-made beeswax candles, beeswax furniture polish, and beeswax-based skin cream, or balm (extremely effective!) In some of our Italian and French monasteries, such bee products become a major side-line, with honey sweets; propolis tinctures or pills (excellent natural antiseptic); pollen (lovely on breakfast cereal, and good against hay fever); mead (of various recipes); even Royal Honey. This is honey with Royal Jelly mixed in. Royal Jelly can be extracted from queen bee rearing cells with a little battery-

powered vacuum pump. It's a nutrient of the most remarkable potency, which many people believe is as good for us as it is for queen bees. Please don't expect it to be sold cheaply though!

Lots of people nowadays rather fancy taking up beekeeping, because it's peaceful, gentle, eco-friendly, interesting and profitable. One may fondly reflect on how honeybees sustain themselves exclusively on the nectar and pollen gathered from flowers, which they then convert into a wonderful food, full of health-giving properties, which they will store in abundant excess of their needs. Once sealed over in its combs, honey will last in perfect condition for years. In this respect bees may be compared very favourably with creatures of less admirable diet, and habits, like flies, beetles, mosquitoes, hornets, cockroaches...

But actually, beekeeping involves often very heavy manual labour, and relentlessly demanding commitment, and a good deal of frustration and disappointment. Not infrequently, especially up here, a whole season's work can be ruined by poor weather, and all that effort and expense can land up producing nothing at all. Also: bees sting.

Bee venom is a very powerful poison: designed to hurt, and to kill, or at least to deter, and drive off potential honey robbers. Unlike wasps, each bee can sting only once. But when they put their mind to it, stinging bees can manifest quite astonishing energy and determination. Instinct teaches them to go in the first place for the eyes. Once the sting is successfully inserted, the bee flies off. Now doomed to die, it will often devote its remaining minutes to terror tactics, repeatedly battering itself against the face of its foe, just to emphasise the point. Meanwhile, the sting works itself more deeply into its target. For the next few minutes two barbed spikes, working with saw motion in tandem, ratchet themselves down, so that the hollow needle they surround may inject its load more effectively. Supplying this needle is the sac full of venom, torn out from the bee's insides. This sac has its own pump mechanism, ensuring that you get the full benefit of every last drop. For this reason, it's a very good idea to scrape the sting out, if possible, as soon as may be. On the other hand, if you don't

mind the sting, it's wonderful to watch this little bag pumping away independently of its bee. Normally bee venom causes a hot and itchy swelling that will last for hours or even days. An antihistamine pill can mitigate this reaction. Very occasionally people can react with anaphylactic shock. Such cases should go at once to hospital, or if suitably prepared, administer their own shot of adrenaline.

Of course, seasoned beekeepers get very used to stings, and pay rather little if any attention to them. Nice bees don't sting much, if at all, and the stinging instinct can be discouraged with the use of smoke. Those who know and understand their bees can work quite safely, in the right circumstances, without any protection. But bees should always be treated with respect. Once a general attack has well started, the scent of stings can induce a frenzy. Bees will then violently attack, in huge numbers, not only their immediate enemy, but anyone or anything else at all within range. They will also relentlessly pursue, in the event of a tactical retreat, over very considerable distances. Finding oneself the object of all that is actually no real fun, and could scarcely be described as a peaceful or pleasant experience. Should bees in such a mood catch you unawares and unprotected, they would certainly have the potential to kill you.

There's a story of the Cistercian nuns of Bosquet in France in the early 13th century. A gang of Albigenians once invaded their property with evil intent. A quick-thinking monastic beekeeper overturned a row of hives that happened to be placed exactly by the invaders' path. The inhabitants of these hives were by no means of sweet tempered Buckfast strain. Duly roused to wrath, they rapidly drove off all the invaders, and the monastery was saved.

Bee stings are reputed to be good for rheumatism, and arthritis. It is possible to collect bee venom, by getting bees to sting an electric plate without harming themselves, and to sell the product.

The current Pluscarden beekeeper once had an attack of rheumatism and tried applying several bee stings to the site.

Unfortunately, that cost the bees involved their lives. The stings hurt all right, but as a remedy, had no effect whatever.

This episode of Monastic Apiculture should end on a somewhat lighter note. So: a beekeeper once went into a bee shop, and spoke to the man behind the counter. “I ordered twelve bees” he said, “but you’ve sent me thirteen.” “Ah” said the bee man. “The extra one is a free bee.”

To be continued...

DBH

Community Retreat

This year the annual retreat for the Pluscarden Community took place from 16th - 22nd July. Our retreat preacher was Dom David Foster, a monk of Downside, who currently teaches Philosophy at the Collegio Sant' Anselmo in Rome.

Very boldly and originally, Fr David took as his theme Poetry, and how it can help us “re-enchant our disenchantment”; how it can help us live our spiritual and human lives more authentically; even, how it can help us, at times, simply survive! This was a wonderful, nourishing, mind-broadening, heart-expanding retreat.

Fr David would read us poems, or extracts from poems, that have meant a lot to him, with interwoven explanation and commentary. His chosen selection was in the first place Rainer Maria Rilke (translated from the German by himself); then George Herbert; R.S. Thomas; G.M. Hopkins; W.H. Auden and T.S. Eliot.

Fr David's guiding idea was that poets can help us grow in our contemplative life and prayer. Even if they are not Saints, or Catholic, or Christian, these are people who have explored their own hearts - who can therefore help us get in touch with our own deepest selves, and with our deepest aspirations – who can therefore help us find the One Pearl of Great Price, which is Jesus.

As usual the retreat ended with a public renewal of vows; celebrated this year, quite appropriately, on the feast of St. Mary Magdalene (22 July).

THE PRIESTLY ORDINATION OF BR JOSEPH CARRON

Pluscarden Abbey, Monday 12 June 2023

Dear Br Joseph, Christ is real, his power to ordain is real and the priesthood is real. Something real is happening to you today. Something real; something good, good for you and good for the community and the Church; something radiant too and beautiful.

“You are my Son, today I have begotten you” (Heb 5:5). We heard those words in the 1st reading, from the New Testament Letter to the Hebrews. They are words from the Old Testament, from Psalm 109. The Psalmist imagines God speaking to an Israelite king as he is enthroned: the king, who was becoming a father of his people, is first of all a son. The author of the Letter to the Hebrews applies this saying to Jesus becoming the true high priest. Through the paschal mystery of his Son’s death and resurrection, God the Father begot his Son to his role of priestly self-offering and heavenly intercession on behalf of all humanity.

“You are my Son; today I have begotten you.” Dear Br Joseph, as you are ordained to the priesthood, as you become a father, these words hold for you too.

We are having this ordination today precisely so that your parents can be part of it: so that they can see their son, the son they begot, the son they took to be baptised and to become a child of God all those years ago – see him today begotten to priesthood, becoming a priestly father. Isn’t this a fulfilment of their parenthood? Perhaps your mother feels as St Monica felt about her son, Augustine, whom, in answer to her prayers, she saw with joy not only become a Christian but God’s dedicated servant too.

“You are my Son; today I have begotten you.” St Benedict, as we know, wrote a rather chilly chapter about monks becoming priests (RB, Ch. 62). He saw the need but feared the possible pride. And yet he also opened a path for the priest: “let him make more and more progress towards God” (64:4). Perhaps St Benedict was saying: as you become a father, always remember that you are first a son. Never forget your parents; remember them in every Mass you will celebrate. Never forget you are a son of Mother

Church. Never forget you are a son of a community, living under a rule and an abbot and dedicated to the service of your brethren. Never forget that the gift of the Holy Spirit is given from above – “no one takes this honour on himself” (Heb 5:4) – and then you will indeed “make more and more progress towards God” – God the Father – and will share in his power of begetting and be secure and fruitful in your priestly fatherhood.

“Listen, my son” begins the Rule. I think monastic life is deeply tied to fatherhood and sonship, and that that is why it does allow for priesthood.

It is deeply tied to brotherhood as well. When a member of the community, a brother, becomes a priest, he doesn’t cease to be a brother. He becomes more of one. Through the rite of ordination, things, words, functions, possibilities, powers even, are put into the hands of one chosen by the abbot and the brethren. One of their brothers is now qualified to take bread and wine, pray the Great Prayer over them, and hand them on to his brethren and all to whom he ministers. He gives his fellow-servants their portion of food at the proper time, in due season (cf. Lk 12:42). He can absolve and anoint. He can, officially as it were, offer a word of grace. And he does all this as a brother, showing the “care” – St Benedict’s word (RB 2:8 etc) – each monk is to have for his brother, and for the brothers and sisters around him. Helping Br Cyprian for a good while in the care of Fr Matthew, you evidenced that brotherly heart; today, gratuitously, it is enlarged. It is enlarged to those who come to the monastery and ask your priestly help. You “can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since [you yourself] are beset with weakness” (Heb 5:2), having experienced that too. To “exercise the priesthood”, St Benedict’s phrase (RB 62:1), doesn’t take you out of the community, but deeper into it. You now have the priestly medicine of mercy from which to draw, with which to minister the “consolation of another” (RB 1:5), in and around the community. And the heart of the community is enlarged too as it humbly and warmly welcomes the gift which is given you for them (cf. RB 41:1).

A monastic priest is a blessed animal. He can focus on the essential of word and sacrament. His pastoral care is usually of individuals. He is not responsible for a monastic community. He is spared administration. He need not be concerned with finance or the fabric of the church and its other property. He doesn't have to badger people to boost the collections or ensure that electrical appliances are safety checked. He has an abbot, a cellarer, a bursar to care for these things. He can simply *fungi sacerdotio* and serve the altar, offering spiritual food at the proper time and, as a father does, bless.

Blessed you are too to stand at the altar in the church, with the brethren before you and lay faithful aside, with eyes raised to Br Gilbert's stained glass: the glorified Christ coming from the east, bearing paten and chalice, blue and gold above the flaming red of the earth and the world. It is beautiful to be ordained the day after Corpus Christi.

"You are my Son; today I have begotten you". Br Joseph, be a son and you'll become a father. Be a servant, and you will be a brother. Be a disciple, and you will be a teacher. The Psalm-verse is applied in the New Testament to the glorifying of the risen Christ. May the priesthood fill your life as a resurrection. May Mary, mother of priests, help you image her risen Son. May St Joseph keep your priestly stewardship "faithful and wise" (Lk 12:42).

May the Lord be ever more real to you!

Bishop Hugh OSB

DESIDERIO DESIDERAVI

A text to ponder.

Published on the 29th of June 2022, and available online on the Vatican website, the Apostolic Letter *Desiderio desideravi* is a moving call for the liturgical formation of the people of God. Its name is taken from the account of the Last Supper, “With a great desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer” (Lk. 22: 15). At a time of divergent ways of celebrating, and where different sensibilities oppose one another, Pope Francis once again takes up the theme of the motu proprio *Traditionis custodes* (16th July 2021), which aroused lively reactions by introducing restrictions on the use of the liturgical books from before Vatican II, and he clearly set out his goal: “Non-acceptance of the reform, just like superficial understanding of it, distracts us from the task of finding replies to the question which is, I repeat, how can we grow in our capacity fully to live the liturgical action?” (DD 31)

For Francis, the liturgy must make manifest the joy of the Gospel. Its criterion of truth is neither conformity to prescriptions, nor a show of “sacred” ceremonies, but its capacity to announce the mystery of God who loves and is merciful to all. As Jesus’ statement makes clear – “I have desired with a great desire” – the liturgy in general, and the Eucharist above all, is a response to Christ’s desire: it is simultaneously the proclamation and the realisation of the joy of the Kingdom to come. It is the demonstration of the fulfilment of the Scriptures in the person of Jesus of Nazareth.

In order to understand the precise character of the text of *Desiderio desideravi* and the renewed approach to the Eucharist which it offers, it is helpful to compare it with two earlier documents: the encyclical *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* (The Church lives by the Eucharist) of John Paul II, and the apostolic exhortation of Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum Caritatis* (*The Sacrament of Love*).

***Ecclesia de Eucharistia* (17th April 2003): doctrine, leading to ecclesial communion.**

Because the Eucharist is “the Church’s most precious possession in its march through history” (EE 9), John Paul II sets out to restate, in a personal style, the teaching of Tradition: that of the councils of Trent and Vatican II, but also that of his predecessors, in particular *Mediator Dei et hominum* of Pius XII (1947) or *Mysterium fidei* of Paul VI (1965). Following that line, the first chapter (“Mystery of the faith”) takes up the notions inherited from the Middle Ages which, following the debates with the protestant reformers, have become central to theology since the 16th century: the ideas of “sacrifice”, of “real presence” and “communion”. To these he also joined also the idea of “memorial”, a category rediscovered in the 20th century in the framework of ecumenical dialogue: the Mass is a “memorial”, not a simple commemoration, in the sense that it actualises Christ’s Passover, the source of our salvation (EE 11).

Beyond these statements, John Paul II emphasises the decisive link between the Eucharist and the Church, for “the eucharist makes the Church” (the title of chapter II). To his mind, this should stir people to a true respect for liturgical rules: he denounces an erroneous understanding of creativity and launches “a vigorous call” for the observance of norms, as an “concrete expression of the authentic ecclesial character of the Eucharist” (EE 52).

Summing up, considering Eucharistic practices since Vatican II, John Paul II, while noting progress, seeks to attack the “shadows” and “abuses”, because they risk “obscuring true faith and catholic teaching” (EE 10). The difficulty of this approach is that it runs counter to the rash of practices and ideas which characterise our age. The appeal to doctrine cannot alone neutralise this diversity, which sometimes leads to serious conflicts (these are not new in the history of the liturgy). Pope Benedict XVI showed that he was sensitive to this.

***Sacramentum Caritatis* (22 February 2007): charity, in order to live out liturgical diversity.**

This text of Benedict XVI, published in February 2007, followed on from the Synod of Bishops which met in autumn 2005, (on the theme, “The Eucharist, source and summit of the life and mission of the Church”). It is little known, because it was in some sense supplanted by the *motu proprio Summorum Pontificum*, published shortly afterwards (7th July 2007), which considerably broadened opportunities of celebrating according to the pre-Vatican II liturgical books, this document recommends – and to a certain extent, Pope Francis urges the same – that the Christian people should deepen the relationship between the *Eucharistic mystery, the liturgical action and the new spiritual worship* which arises from the Eucharist, insofar as it is the sacrament of love (SC 5). Its approach resolutely emphasises the Eucharist’s social character, which cannot be reduced to a private devotion to the presence of the Lord in the host.

Basically, Benedict XVI seeks to overcome the divisions caused by misunderstandings of the reform which followed Vatican II. Setting out from an historical perspective, he draws out the idea of a “development, ordered in time, of the ritual forms” (SC 3), which underlay the choice made in *Summorum Pontificum*, namely that the two forms of the liturgy should not lead to any division in the faith, being “two applications of the one Roman rite” (*Summorum Pontificum*, article 1). Nonetheless, the juxtaposition of liturgical forms which are, in the concrete, so different, is difficult to reconcile with the clear affirmation of the “beneficial influence” of the liturgical reform of Vatican II (SC 3). In other words, there is a continuity in the teaching of the recent magisterium, which regards the work of liturgical reform brought about under Paul VI and John Paul II, as a continuation of the liturgical Movement which Pius XII described as a “sign of God’s providential dispositions for the present time” and of “the Holy Spirit passing through his Church” (Assisi discourse, 1956). While John Paul II, by reaffirming the doctrine, was seeking to ensure the authenticity of the manner of celebrating, Benedict XVI, for his

part, had in view unity in the different ways of celebrating, and he invited people to read the changes sought by the Council as “a renewal in continuity” (see SC 43). The difficulty is that the liturgy remains an action which takes place within cultures; thus, developments over the course of time and certain decisions have at times introduced real discontinuities. One might think, for example, of the refusal of the chalice to the laity, which lasted from the end of the Middle Ages until Vatican II, or of the downgrading of holy days when they were suppressed from the list of feasts of obligation in 1642.

Ultimately, Benedict XVI relativises ritual differences in order to offer a firmer foundation for the search for unity in diversity. But in the light of experience, Pope Francis fears that this “unity” is being emptied of all content. He notes that what was “an opportunity offered (...) in order to restore the unity of the ecclesial body in respect of different liturgical sensitivities had in fact been used to widen distances, harden differences and construct oppositions which wound the Church, both by hindering progress and by exposing it to the risk of divisions” (Letter to the bishops, accompanying *Traditionis custodes*).

***Desiderio desideravi* (29th June 2022): contemplating Christ’s action at the Last Supper.**

By referring to the Lucan account, Pope Francis emphasises the “meal” aspect of the Eucharist (“to eat this Passover”), but above all the fact that we are invited guests, radically overtaken by the gift given us: “The disproportion between the immensity of the gift and the littleness of the recipient is infinite and cannot fail to surprise us. Nonetheless, through the mercy of the Lord, the gift is entrusted to the Apostles so that it might be brought to every man” (DD 3). Since “every reception of communion in the Body and Blood of Christ had already been desired by him at the Last Supper”, this gift implies an ascesis: one which consists of “abandoning ourselves to his love”, to “letting ourselves be drawn by him” (DD 6).

All the same, “the content of the broken Bread is the cross of Jesus, his sacrifice of obedience out of love for the Father” (DD 7). While accepting the doctrine of sacrifice, Pope Francis separates himself from former understandings which set the identification of the Mass and the Cross in an almost theatrical mode (see DD 9). He links three inseparable realities, the last Supper, the Death on the cross and the Resurrection: “If we had not had the Last Supper, in other words if we had not had the ritual anticipation of the death [of Christ], we would never have been able to understand how the carrying out of his sentence of death could have been the act of perfect worship, pleasing to the Father, the only true act of worship.” “When the Risen One returns from among the dead to break bread for the disciples at Emmaus, (...) this action (...) opens their eyes (...) and makes it possible for them to ‘see’ the Risen One, to believe in the Resurrection” (DD 7).

In calling to mind “the theological meaning of the liturgy,” Francis invites the Church “to rediscover, to safeguard and live the truth and the power of Christian celebration.” He refuses “a superficial and reductive understanding of its value”, and denounces “its instrumentalisation in the service of a theological vision, whatever that may be”. Because, for him, the prayer of Jesus at the Last Supper (Jn. 17: 21) “judges all our divisions around the broken Bread, sacrament of piety, sign of unity, bond of charity” (DD 16).

As distinct from John Paul II, Pope Francis does not take doctrine as his starting point to ensure the truth of the faith in its practices, and as distinct from Pope Benedict XVI, he allows ritual forms their importance. For him, the debates over “forms” can and must be tackled in the light of what is shown by the Scriptures, while the ultimate criterion of every liturgy is to be found in its corresponding with the Gospel of salvation. That is why liturgical life must be the place of a permanent discernment (DD 49).

Conclusion

In the three documents considered, the same concern for the unity of the Church is shown. But *Desiderio desideravi* shows the

face of a pope rooted in the 20th century liturgical movement, a current of thought which developed the idea of “noble simplicity” as a way of thinking about the actions and things of the liturgy, above all to foster the active participation of the faithful, a simplicity which recommends itself to the Franciscan spirit which is dear to the pope. Taking as his starting point the Last Supper and the desire of Jesus, Francis definitively invites to live the Eucharist as a place in which to welcome a liberating Gospel, antidote to subjectivism and elitism (see DD 17-20). In this way he makes his contribution to a great enterprise: the promotion of a liturgy in accordance with the Gospel.

Fr Patrick Prétot OSB,
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Translated from *Nouvelles de la Pierre-qui-Vire* 2023, by DGC

This article is summarised from one by the same author in *Rivista di Pastorale Liturgica*; its ideas are further developed in an article published in *La Maison-Dieu* 310, 2022/4, p. 81-107:

LA LETTRE APOSTOLIQUE DESIDERIO DESIDERAVI DU
PAPE FRANÇOIS UNE NOUVELLE MANIÈRE D’ABORDER
LE DÉBAT EN LITURGIE

There are also two other articles about the pontifical document but looking at it from another point of view: *Desiderio desideravi* as question for religious orders: those articles are published in *Vies Consacrées*:

Desiderio desideravi, un appel au discernement (1), *Vies consacrées* 95 (2023-2), 17-30, and *Vies consacrées* 95 (2023-3), 41-52).

PLUSCARDEN PENTECOST LECTURES 2023

After covid-induced interruptions, this year saw our Pentecost lectures happily returning to their usual setting in St Scholastica's, with anyone interested free to attend. Fr Richard Price of the Westminster Archdiocese was our speaker. He recently retired from his position as lecturer in Church History at Heythrop College London. As well as an historian, Fr Richard is a Patristics scholar, with a particular interest in the Council of Ephesus (431). Perhaps more than one person present was a bit disappointed that he chose not to speak about any of this, but instead to address the question, quite generally, of how to be a Christian today?

He began by surveying the current state of faith, not only in our secularised society, but also within the Church, and the Churches. The conclusions drawn were not encouraging. In particular he noted how social motivation has always influenced regular Church attendance on a Sunday. When this motivation largely disappears, as it has done, and when habits of Church attendance are broken, as during recent lockdowns, very many people, especially given a poorly formed faith, simply see no reason to come any more. As for those who continue to attend: the extent to which their faith really affects their daily lives would seem now to be ever more attenuated. In former times of natural disaster, such as the Black Death, or the Irish famine of the 1840s, the response of Church people was overwhelmingly religious. God's entire involvement was presumed, as was his ability to end the affliction, especially in response to prayer, penance, and genuine conversion of life. During our recent covid crisis, by contrast, all our Churches were locked up. Church leaders hastened to join politicians and journalists in looking to the technocrats, rather than to God, for solutions. According to the standard rhetoric we heard, God's involvement would seem to be confined to offering kindly encouragement and emotional support: to the sick, to mourners, to health care workers, and to scientific researchers. As for heaven, purgatory, and hell: far from being a primary focus of preaching, these subjects seem nowadays largely

cause of embarrassment, and so are barely even mentioned.

The second lecture was on Reading the Bible Today. Here Fr Richard noted the gulf between the approach to Scripture that held sway more or less universally up to the modern period, and the approach particularly of professional Scripture scholars today. He argued that many of these contradictions need only be apparent. The traditional way of interpretation was perfectly coherent and sound, based as it was on a strong theology of divine inspiration, which we need to recover. On the other hand, modern scholarship can help us see some of the richness and variety of Scripture, and of its possible readings. This variety can even reflect something of the infinitude of God.

A third lecture considered how extreme suffering can give a sharpened perspective on God and the world. The reference point for this was Silvio Pellico, an Italian layman imprisoned in the 1820s by the ruling Austrians, for activities subversive of the Government. On his release, Pellico became a director of St John Bosco, and so was prompted to write a memoir of his time in prison. This may be held up as a model of Christian patience, forgiveness, resignation, generosity. Under the harshest conditions Pellico always looked out for good points in his jailors, and refused to become bitter, in spite of torture, starvation, isolation and humiliations of every sort. “We cannot choose our contacts, but we can choose with what spirit we approach them,” he wrote. “The purpose of my book is ... to invite hearts to a generous love, without hatred of anyone, and to reserve their hatred for base fictions, cowardice, treachery and moral degradation.”

In a fourth lecture Fr Richard considered the place of religious experience in maintaining Christian practice amid an indifferent or hostile world. A sense of transcendent beauty, of the sacred, of the numinous, may be felt by many who have no formal religion at all: even by those steeped in the doctrines of Darwinism, that would seem to discard all this as mere irrationality. He noted the great popularity nowadays of prolonged Eucharistic adoration, and ended by recommending contemplative gaze at a crucifix, as an ideal way of nourishing our interior and spiritual life. (DBH)

HILLBILLY DICKENS

“At the time, I thought my life couldn’t get any worse. Here’s some advice: Don’t ever think that.”

A recent novel is making all kinds of waves on the other side of the pond, a modern retelling of Dickens’s coming-of-age story *David Copperfield*. The novel, *Demon Copperhead*, is by American novelist Barbara Kingsolver. A native of the Appalachian Mountains of Eastern Kentucky, she was inspired to write this story after spending the night in a B&B in Kent, a room containing the desk on which Dickens wrote *Copperfield*. She had been pondering whether to write a novel about her fellow Appalachians but was afraid that no one would be interested in hearing a story about hillbillies and their problems. Kingsolver states in an interview, “I just felt the presence of his (Dickens’s) outrage.” She’s not given to hearing voices, but she says: “I felt him saying, ‘What do you mean, nobody wants to hear this?’ He said: ‘Let the child tell the story.’ I thought, ‘well, I will. Thank you, Mr Dickens. I will let *your* child tell the story.’”

And that’s exactly what Kingsolver does so masterfully in *Demon Copperhead*. She takes the basic plot outline and characters of Dickens’s famous novel and brings them into the modern age, setting it in the Appalachians of Western Virginia and Tennessee. David becomes “Demon” (so named because of his red hair), his widowed mother is now a teenage drug addict living in a trailer next to the Peggot family (stand-ins for the Peggottys). Steerforth becomes a narcissistic high school football star called “Fast Forward” and Agnes Wickfield becomes a tough-as-nails tomboy nicknamed “Angus”. The Micawbers, Mr Dick, Aunt Betsy, and Uriah Heep have their updates as well. In fact, half of the fun in the story is finding the parallels between it and Dickens’s classic.

This isn’t glib, point-by-point updating of a classic, however. Instead of an indictment of urban poverty and the Victorian class system, we have a scathing depiction of systemic abuse and

neglect in the Appalachian region of the US. An area that until very recently was generationally dependent on coalmining as the only possible job-source for most of its inhabitants, it now struggles with the collapse of that economic structure. There is now no work for many, and this lack of opportunities and good education leads to despair for its residents. This despair in turn feeds into the opioid crisis brought on by unscrupulous pharmaceutical companies preying on the poor and ignorant. Add onto this bleak picture the fact that just being from Appalachia carries a social stigma in the rest of America (these people are almost always depicted as ignorant, lazy, redneck hillbillies) and you find a recipe for heartbreak. This is the tragic situation into which “Demon” (the nickname of Damon, our protagonist) is born.

The story follows Dickens’s plot in its grand lines. Demon grows up with his single mom; she marries an abusive disciplinarian then dies; Demon gets sucked into the child welfare system, struggles with life’s misfortunes, and becomes a well-known writer. But Kingsolver’s updating brings the story much closer to home for its modern audience. For instance, instead of a shoe-blackening factory, Demon works in a meth factory. Demon is mistreated and deceived by a malfunctioning child welfare system, he is used and driven into drug addiction by his high school’s athletic program (the one good thing in his life is being a gifted football player), and finds himself manipulated and finally abandoned by the people he most loves when they die.

Dickens seasoned the bleakness of his stories with an incredible sense of satiric humour and fun; *David Copperfield* has the feckless Micawbers and David’s silly child-bride Dora to help lighten the atmosphere. Kingsolver chooses to avoid this tactic and leaves all the humour to Demon’s lightning-quick observations. And he is funny, mordantly so. I quoted him in the subtitle above. Here are a few more examples of his wit: “The wonder is that you could start life with nothing, end with nothing, and lose so much in between.” “Like every boy in Lee County I was raised to be a proud mule in a world that has scant use for mules.” “Sometimes a good day lasts all about 10 seconds.” And so on.

This novel has just recently won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction, which to me is totally unsurprising. It is without question the best novel I have read in years. Seldom have I read a book that so moves me. It comes back to me all the time and invades my thoughts at odd times throughout the day. Let me try to explain why: Charles Dickens has been my favourite author for most of my adult life. I have read and re-read all his novels—including *David Copperfield*—several times. However, they haven't had the quite visceral effect on me that this novel has. The depictions of desperate poverty in the novels of Dickens, touching as they are, have never really affected me because they are so far removed from me and my experiences. 150 years have passed since the times Dickens described and much has changed. *Demon Copperhead* depicts a reality as it is *now*, being lived by *real* people. It awakened an anger in me that I am certain the first readers of Dickens must have felt when reading the plight of Oliver Twist, Tiny Tim, or Little Dorritt. Barbara Kingsolver brings the world of the poor, white, jobless class to vivid life. These are the angry and ignored people that are too easy to classify as hillbillies, trash, rednecks. They are caught in a system that dooms most of them to failure, and only a rare few like Dolly Parton or J.D. Vance break out and find success. They have heartbreaking stories to tell, if we would open our hearts and minds to listen.

Up to this point, I have only ever written about Christian literature in these pages. I love to talk about the effect of grace in the plotlines of those stories. I have to admit, though, that there is little mention of religion or God in *Demon Copperhead*, and grace doesn't outwardly seem to touch the protagonist's life. But his sheer bloody-mindedness and will to survive everything that fate throws at him (and my, oh my, does fate have a lot in store for young Demon!) are just as inspiring as anything found in a more overtly Christian story. I invite those reading this article to take Demon's hand and let him share his story with you.

Br Benedict Joseph

BOOK REVIEW

The Priest's Wife by A. G. Rivett; Pantolwen Press (2023).

Readers of Pluscarden Benedictines may recall a review of *The Seaborne*, the first volume of *The Isle Fincara Trilogy*, in the Pentecost 2021 edition. We now have the opportunity to review the second volume: *The Priest's Wife*. The fictitious 'Island' of *The Seaborne* now acquires the name 'Fincara' and some welcome maps. This story explores in greater depth the religious dimension of the islanders. This is presented as a harmonious blend of Christianity with aspects of druidical traditions which, if not rigorously orthodox by Catholic standards, strikes sympathetic notes: The Trinity: "the One, our Father Mother, the Christ and the Sacred Spirit" are invoked and also 'Ghea', the spirit of Mother Earth. A possible alternative 11th century type of Celtic Christianity at one with nature. An appealing scenario and one which is tested by circumstances.

Fr Hugh, the priest of the village of Caerpadraig, dies near the beginning of the book and this sets off two interrelated plot lines. One follows Fr Aidan, the replacement for Fr Hugh sent by Fincara's High Priest. Fr Aidan is young, zealous, well intentioned and covertly ambitious. He sees the druidical dimension of Caerpadraig's religion as an idolatrous pagan compromise and seeks to promote a 'purer' kind of Christianity which threatens to divide the community. Fortunately, or unfortunately, this project founders on his spiritual immaturity. The main plot line in the meantime follows Morag, Fr Hugh's widow and the main protagonist of the story. Her role of support for her husband's ministry is lost and she faces social marginalisation. She must undergo trials of overcoming her inner limitations and of discovering the mystery of her mother's identity. In the process she meets and adopts an engaging waif named Sorcha who turns out to be her niece and has hidden gifts. The denouement for both of them turns on an encounter with an enigmatic (druidical?)

company called the Guardians who oversee their onward inner progress...

As with *The Seaborne*, this novel evokes a profound sense of the beauty of the place and of the community that is bound to it. The reader is drawn in to and, in a way, joins the characters on their journey. If the setting is a putative thousand years in the past, the underlying themes are quite contemporary. Modern counter-cultural aspirations of an eco-good life runs alongside the question, at least for me, of the relationship of religion and society, of evangelisation and enculturation. *The Priest's Wife* allows one space to meditate on these and other themes that may rise up in the course of reading without forcing any conclusions.

This novel forms the second volume of a coming trilogy; the final, and yet to be, being *The Shareg*. It's a welcome addition to an existing genre of 'Christian fantasy' literature, if that is an appropriate designation, in which it easily holds its own; we can only hope for more to follow.

The Priest's Wife is out on October 20th. Since publication of *The Seaborne*, Andrew Rivett's wife Gillian has become his publisher and runs Pantolwen Press. More on this and other publications may be seen on the website: www.brynglasbooks.com

DDM

From the Annals: June 25: Annual Diocesan Pilgrimage

The crowd of pilgrims seemed larger than usual, but the weather was forecast to be wet. The Mass began at 3pm with Bishop Hugh presiding. There were groups at Mass from Ukraine, Poland, Africa and India. A Ukrainian priest gave a short address. One theme of the Mass was altar-servers. Bishop Hugh gave the homily. There were several choirs, a youth choir, the diocesan choir, and the African choir. Later after the Mass a Syro-Malabar group turned up with very loud drums. Marian devotions after the Mass had to take place in the church because it was raining outside. Fr Abbot led a decade of the rosary.