

Pluscarden Benedictines

No. 204 News and Notes for our Friends Advent 2023

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Cover: Fr Giles on his Golden Jubilee with stone carved by Philip Chatfield

Back: *Fuit vir vitae venerabilis gratia Benedictus*: based on ms. Vat. Lat. 1202, designed by DCB

ABBOT'S LETTER

Dear Friends,

On 7th October we had the blessing of witnessing Br Benedict Joseph's profession of solemn vows in our community. Br Benedict Joseph came to our community as one already consecrated to God through profession of the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience in another religious community. It is a little unusual, but it happens sometimes that a member of a religious Order dedicated to apostolic ministry will feel himself called to the more contemplative life of a monastery, and with permission of his Superiors will make this transition. Such was the case of the first Abbot of our community, Abbot Alfred Spencer. He was a Capuchin friar for many years before becoming a Benedictine. We benefitted from the virtues inculcated in him by the friars: simplicity, love of poverty, skill in preaching and teaching. Doubtless we shall benefit from Br Benedict Joseph's experience as an apostolic religious.

What difference does his new profession make for him? The vows made by Benedictines and others whose practice is derived from the Rule of St Benedict are different from the usual religious vows. Instead of poverty, chastity and obedience, we profess stability, conversion of life, and obedience. (In case anyone wonders, poverty and chastity are included in our vows: they are understood as essential elements in our vow of "conversion of life".)

By the vow of stability, the monk attaches himself permanently to one local community. This makes possible the second vow, "conversion of life". The "life" that is the object of this vow is human life understood not as a period of time, or the list of achievements that would go into a "curriculum vitae", but the habitual daily acts and thoughts that make a person what he is, and the relationships that make him part of a family and a society. The monk's aim in embracing this conversion is that his ways of behaving and relating be transformed by the way of life that he

finds in the community. Or to put it another way, that he makes his own the values of the Gospel as these are expressed in the day-to-day life of the community he joins.

These vows concern very ordinary human realities: a place and the people who live there; staying in one place and living year after year and decade after decade with the same circle of people, only occasionally modified by new faces coming and old ones dying; a round of daily duties, little jobs, people needing attention, etc. Very like the experience of the vast majority of human beings who have ever lived. One distinctive thing about the monastic approach being that the monk tries to embrace these things rather than evade them. True, some of what the monk does is special: the hours spent in the Liturgy, and the hours available for personal prayer and sacred reading. But very much is ordinary and humdrum.

A question we might have is: how can these very ordinary human things be the object of a vow? The evangelical counsels, yes. But just staying put in one place? Washing the dishes? Good things, yes, but worthy of special consecration to God?

Much of the Law of the Old Testament is about how to offer God a worthy sacrifice. He can't be offered just anything. Only the best animals can be offered, in the way that God prescribes, in the place and by the people divinely appointed. The New Testament only raises the standard: now there is only one acceptable sacrifice, replacing all others, Jesus Christ's offering of his own body.

By our vows we attempt to express in daily life the intuition of faith, that Jesus taking our human nature makes everything human capable of becoming an offering to God. Stability is possible because we see in this local community – as we could in any community, any parish, any family – the Church of Christ, his bride, sanctified by him. We see that commitment to this community is the most real expression of love for the whole Church, an offering worthy of God and a sharing in the sacrificial love of Jesus. This notwithstanding all our limitations and blemishes.

Our vows and our attempts to live them out are signs of the nobility and holiness of all that is human: a living confession that the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us and we have seen his glory, in our place, in our brothers and sisters, in the works of our hands and minds and hearts.

Yours devotedly in Christ,

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

Sayings of the Desert Fathers

8. A brother asked Abba Isaiah a word. The old man replied to him, “If you wish to follow after our Lord Jesus, keep his word: if you wish to hang [i.e. be crucified] together with your old man, you ought be as one who is dead towards those who would cut you down and depose you from the cross and you ought to prepare yourself in order to bear contempt; and to those who do you wrong to keep your heart at rest and to humble yourself before those who would oppress you; and to hold the mouth in silence, and do not judge anyone in your heart.”

9. He again said, “Toil, poverty, exile, being courageous [lit. to be manly] and silence engender humility and it is humility which removes a multitude of sins. But whoever does not keep all these things his renunciation is vain.”

10. He said again, “Hate all the things which are in the world and the repose of the body, for these things make you an enemy of God. For, just like a man having an enemy warring against him, in the same way ought we also to wage war against the body and not give it rest.”

Trans. DCB

NEWS FROM ST MARY'S MONASTERY

On August 5, we had a visit from Abbot Benedict Neenan of Conception Abbey, Missouri. He was in Massachusetts to preside over the canonical visitation of St Benedict Abbey, Still River, which, like Conception, belongs to the Swiss American Congregation. Abbot Benedict had been Br Pius's novice master some years ago when Br Pius was a novice at Conception Abbey. Abbot Benedict stayed over for one night joining us for recreation in the evening. The next day after lunch, it being a Sunday, we all had recreation at the sisters' Priory. Afterwards Abbot Benedict gave a brief talk about his monastery before going on to Still River.

On August 16, Br Isidore went to Pluscarden for two weeks. He went primarily to represent our community at the Golden Jubilee of Fr. Giles. While there he was able to spend time with the brethren again, including Prior Bede who had come over from Ghana, and also visit Bishop Hugh in Aberdeen.

Towards the end of September, we had our canonical visitation, which was overdue because of the COVID pandemic. It was the first time in many years that our visitation was conducted by the actual Visitor of our province, Abbot Cuthbert. While Abbot Anselm was Visitor the visitations were carried out by the Abbot President, since Abbot Anselm was our local superior at the time when he became Visitor, and later after his election as Abbot of Pluscarden, our major superior. The co-Visitor this time was Br John, Prior of Mount Saviour Monastery, Pine City, New York. The visitation was helpful and we were given some sound advice as well as fraternal encouragement.

Fr Gregory also went away on a trip. On October 8, he went to Italy to attend the Provincial Chapter of the English Province, which was held in Subiaco. Afterwards he went on to stay at Pluscarden for about a week. Despite a severe storm the day he left, he was able to fly from Aberdeen to London, and on to Boston as scheduled.

On Saturday, October 14, we had a retreat day for the oblates, an annual twin community event. It was the first one in several years since the oblate retreats had been suspended due to COVID. Unfortunately, due to some health issues, Sr Mary Paula, the sisters' Oblate Mistress, was unable to attend. We ask our readers kindly to pray for her full recovery. In the past, the proceedings used to take place at the sisters' Priory. But this year we decided to split up the location, since after our building renovation, we have a nice large room available for gatherings. Thus, the day began with Mass, followed by coffee and cake in our new recreation room. After a brief reflection by Sr Mary Angela, Fr Dunstan gave a longer talk. Lunch was held at St Scholastica Priory. On their way from Sext in the church to the Priory, the oblates all went to visit the cemetery and pray at the grave of Br Jerome, who had been Oblate Master for many years.

Fr Columba too was away from the monastery. In late October he spent a week at Regina Laudis in Bethlehem, Connecticut, while they had their annual retreat. He has also been working hard in the garden this summer, and at the time of writing is planting some new apple and pear trees.

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Sayings of the Desert Fathers

18. A brother asked an old man saying, "What kind of good deed is there, that I may do it and live by it?" The old man said, "[Only] God knows what is good. But I have heard that some of the fathers inquired of Abba Nisteros the Great, the friend of Abba Anthony, and he said to him, 'What kind of good deed is there, so that I may do it?' And he said to him, 'Are not all works equal? The scriptures say that, *Abraham was hospitable and God was with him*, and *Elijah loved stillness (hesychia) and God was with him*, and *David was humble and God was with him*. Therefore, that which you observe your soul desires [to do] which accords with God, do it and keep watch over heart."

Trans. DCB

A VISIT TO KRISTO BUASE ON MISSION FOR MARRIAGE

We, Annette and Paul O'Beirne, have been married 43 years. It all began in November 1976 over cold macaroni cheese at Pluscarden Abbey!

Annette was the CathSoc Secretary at Aberdeen University and had arranged the weekend retreat at Pluscarden. Fifteen students travelled by minibus, arrived late and as promised by the Guestmaster, food was available in the ladies' accommodation. So was breakfast to be there too. But in the morning, we could not find any breakfast. After quite a search and some deduction, Annette and Paul found the macaroni cheese in the oven – we'd eaten the breakfast in the evening, so it was now cold and a bit dried up! As Annette and Paul are both one of six children, we did not have any problem in eating what the Lord had provided. Others were not that impressed! We not only enjoyed the cold macaroni, but we recognised a spirit in each of us of accepting what the Lord provides.

It was more than a year later that we started going out together and we engaged to marry in April 1979.

On moving to the south coast of England after our wedding in August 1980 we were introduced to Equipes Notre-Dame by the parish priest. Teams is strictly a lay-led movement; it is couples who organise, of course with prayer and the support of our spiritual accompanist. In 2021 we were commissioned with responsibility for the English-speaking countries with Teams around the Atlantic. So, this includes Ghana.

Since the start of Teams in Ghana, Br Gabriel has been the main link to the monastery, supporting a team and the movement generally. The community at Kristo Buase welcomed us, by assisting with transport and wonderful hospitality – such that we did not have to worry about those arrangements, and we could focus on visiting Teams in Ghana.

We were delighted to find Teams in such a strong position. While we have been here, it is likely that a further three Teams of five or six couples will begin. We have been able to leave

resources in a corner in the monastery, for the future needs of Teams here. Yes, Teams is strictly a lay-led movement, but we all need the power of the Holy Spirit and the support of friends; Kristo Buase has given that support to enable the mission to marriage. The mission is to enable couples to move “closer to God, closer to each other”.

It was a blessing to be able to participate in prayer and Mass during our stay. We used one line of a reading at Compline as part of our talk the next day: “blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God”. It was a hectic six-day programme. Our last day, on All Saints, allowed an afternoon off; how wonderful it was to celebrate the feast with the community.

Thank you, Kristo Buase community.

For more about Equipes Notre-Dame – Teams see www.TeamsGB.org.uk or www.Equipes-Notre-Dame.com

Sayings of the Desert Fathers

24. Abba Poimen again said, “If the monk hates two things he will be able free to be from the world.” And the brother said to him, “What are these things?” And the old man said, “Fleshly repose and vainglory.”

25. It is reported of Abba Pambo that at the very hour of his death he said to the holy men standing by him, “From the time when I came to this place in the desert and built my cell and dwelt in it, I do not remember having eaten bread except that which was the work of my hands, nor do I repent of a word which I have spoken until this present hour and yet I am going to God as one has not even begun to serve Him.”

26. Abba Sisoës said, “Become as one despised and cast behind you your will and be unconcerned about worldly cares and you will have rest.”

Trans. DCB

HOMILY FOR FR GILES' GOLDEN JUBILEE

21ST August 2023

We blow the trumpet for Fr Giles today. It is his Golden Jubilee. In the book of Leviticus it is prescribed that after counting off “2seven weeks of years, seven times seven years, so that the time of the seven weeks of years shall be to you forty-nine years, then you shall send abroad the loud trumpet ... you shall send abroad the trumpet throughout all your land, and you shall sanctify the fiftieth year and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all who dwell therein. It shall be a jubilee for you” (Lev 25:8-10).

The law of the jubilee laid down in Leviticus is something very beautiful. It is founded in God's saving actions by which he freed his people from slavery in Egypt and brought them into the promised land. In the land, everybody had his own allotted portion, his own tribal and family inheritance, his own place. In the course of time people might be forced to sell their land. They might fall into debt and have to sell themselves into servitude. In the fiftieth year, the jubilee, all this was to be reversed. Israelites who had gone into slavery were to be set free. The land was to be restored to its original owners. Freedom, and the economic means to live in freedom, were given back to all who had lost it. It was a great renewal of God's original gift to his chosen people. It was the great sign of what God really wants for his people and his whole creation. This was indicated already in every sabbath when the labourer rested, and in every seventh year when the land lay fallow. In this great sabbath of sabbaths, the jubilee, there was to be total rest, freedom, joy.

In celebrating the jubilee every Israelite enjoyed his birthright, his allotted place among God's people. When he renews the vows he made fifty years ago, Fr Giles claims his allotted place.

In the jubilee celebration we look back. Fr Giles renews now what he did then. But it is not as if the intervening fifty years don't matter. Counting the years and accounting for what happens over the years is necessary to make the jubilee happen. For the fulfilment of the law of the Old Testament there had to be a careful

record of all the transactions made during the fifty years, so that land could be restored and debt remitted. And our jubilee celebration also requires an account, the record of all that Fr Giles has done over the fifty years. But who could remember it all? He served many years as Prior and Cellarer. At one time he was kitchen master. There are of course his years of service at Kristo Buase. Within our monastic Congregation he has been a liaison between the Anglophone and Francophone parts of the Congregation, a part-time activity that for some might have been a whole career.

The jubilee seen from the perspective of the law of the Old Testament is a remembrance and celebration of what God has done. There is another perspective within the Old Testament, which is that of prophecy. This is in Isaiah: “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good tidings to the afflicted; he has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour. They shall build up the ancient ruins, they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations” (Isa. 61:1-4).

The language is that of the jubilee: the proclamation of liberty and of “the year of the Lord’s favour”. What is described however is not just a revival of the past, but something new that God will do when he establishes his kingdom on earth.

“They shall build up the ancient ruins.” Some of us at our jubilees will be fairly described as “ancient ruins”. Not Fr Giles. He remains as youthful and fresh as ever. But we don’t need the feeling of being a spent force to make us long for the Lord to come and give new life. God’s love manifest in the prophetic promise makes us long for what is to come even in the full flow of present blessing. Our jubilee celebration is an expression of this anticipation. We “press on, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, toward the goal, the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:13-14).

God's mercies of the past, his proven faithfulness, and the great mercy that awaits us. These are as it were two divine wings reaching out to enfold and carry us. Where the two wings meet is this present moment. The present moment is Jesus and the Gospel that he proclaims:

“He went to the synagogue, as his custom was, on the sabbath day. And he stood up to read; and there was given to him the book of the prophet Isaiah. He opened the book and found the place where it was written, ‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.’ And he closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant, and sat down; and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say to them, ‘Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.’” (Lk. 4:16-21)

Today is the jubilee, “the acceptable year of the Lord”, the time of liberty and healing, made real for us by Fr Giles' renewal of his vows and our being gathered around him by the gracious favour of the Lord.

Fr Abbot

Sayings of the Desert Fathers

32. An elder said, “The life of the monk is this: work, obedience, meditation, not to judge, not slander, not to grumble. For it is written, ‘Those who love the Lord hate evil (Ps 96:10).’ The life of the monk is: not to approach upon injustice; not to look with the eyes at bad things; not to meddle in others' affairs; not to listen to strange [doctrines]; not to be grasping with the hands but rather to give; not to be arrogant of heart; not to commit evil in your thoughts; not to fill the belly; to do all things with discernment. In these things is the monk.

Trans. DCB

BUILDING PROGRESS AND SPONSORS

Progress on the building of our new women's guest house, Saint Joseph's, has been very heartening. Soon after the blessing of the building site on Our Lady's Birthday, we signed the final contract with Robertson's Construction (Northern) and were issued with a detailed building schedule, which anticipates the completion of the building to be in early autumn 2024. The firm have been very easy to deal with and have shown every consideration in ensuring that the project proceeds smoothly. John Gleeson, our own project manager, was given much assistance in presenting the final working drawings for approval by Moray Council's Building Standards department, who have likewise been remarkably helpful and proactive in guiding us through all the complications of meeting the current building requirements. It has been delightful to encounter so many professionals who have a thorough grasp of their particular science.

Watching the daily progress from the sidelines has been helped by a convenient "viewing gallery" just outside the men's guest house, which affords a fascinating perspective on all the construction activities. As I write this, we are awaiting the import of vast quantities of concrete to be poured out upon the intricate network of steel reinforcement for the foundations, which the workers have been patiently constructing over the past two weeks. Before this, we were impressed by the digging crew which had to unearth the tangle of existing cables and pipes which serve the current buildings, without damaging any of them. This was accomplished using an astonishing machine which breaks up the soil with compressed air and water and then sucks it all away through a giant vacuum hose. Once everything was unearthed, a drone camera recorded the layout for future reference.

We have been very fortunate to renew our relationship with Philip Chatfield, stonemason and sculptor, who carved the capitals beside the squint window in the south transept aisle in 2013. Philip has been carving several stone panels which will be incorporated in the walls of the new guest house. Two of these, an Agnus Dei to

go above the entrance porch and a copy of our medieval seal, have already been completed, using stone kindly donated by Peter Grant-Peterkin of Grange Hall. We would be very happy to receive donations from anybody who would like to sponsor these items. Philip's major task is to be the carving of a statue of Saint Joseph to stand at the foot of the stairs in the entrance hall. The block of Portland stone is already here, awaiting his creative touch. A further carved panel, depicting the sleeping Saint Joseph, has already been sponsored.

Further items of interest to sponsors are two stained glass windows, depicting scenes from the life of the Holy Family, which are destined for the entrance floor corridor and the dining/common room. The stained glass will be incorporated into a triple-glazed unit. If you are interested in contributing to any of these, please send us a message through the contact form on our website or by any convenient mode.

In addition to sponsorship of these artistic works, we are still welcoming donations towards the stones and slates of the buildings: £10 will contribute a named slate to the roof; and £200 will contribute a numbered and photographed stone to the external fabric.

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Sayings of the Desert Fathers

34. An old man said, "Beseech God in order that he may give to your heart compunction and humility. May you be beware at all times of your sins, and do not judge others, but be as one who is lower than all. Do not keep friendship with a woman or with a child or with heretics. Avoid bold speech, rule your tongue and stomach and abstain from wine. If anyone would speak with you concerning a matter, do not at any time contend with him but if speaks well you are to say, 'Yes.' But if he speaks what is evil, you are to say, 'You know how you are speaking.' And you are not to argue with him about the things he has spoken. Then your thoughts will be at peace."

Trans. DCB

ST JOSEPH'S CARVINGS

It was a great honour to be invited to come back up to Pluscarden Abbey to work once again. I was last here ten years ago carving stones round the Squint to the Lady Chapel, to celebrate the centenary of the Caldey Conversion in 1913. I later worked at Prinknash Abbey carving the small statue of St Aelred as a gift for Caldey Abbey. This time it is for the new building of St Joseph's Retreat House for women. After my arrival in mid-August, I was soon working with the architect John Gleeson and Br Michael. I was delighted that they wanted a variety of stone carved elements for the exterior of the new building. A complete surprise was the inclusion of an internal carved stone statue of St Joseph, to be cut from a five feet tall block of freshly sawn Portland stone, which has already been shipped up from the quarries in Dorset. I am very familiar with that stone, having spent half a year on Portland carving a war memorial weighing thirty tons, dedicated to the merchant seamen of South Wales. That was not long after I had survived the shipwreck of the 1858 built Brig MARIA ASUMPTA northeast of Padstow in 1995, with the loss of three lives. The ship was named after the Virgin Mary in Barcelona. Clearly, she had work for me to do in my on-going life after that. *Salve Regina.*

I soon set up a work area in the woods, some fifty feet due north of the "tattie shed" west of the abbey, constructing an enormous wooden easel to support stone panels while I worked on them under cover from the weather. The easel is strong enough to withstand the repeated blows of hammer and chisel, and very much the same as would have been used in the 13th century when the abbey was first being constructed. Nothing really changes, which is what I like about the form of work I do. This is a central tenet in my own attitude to work that is a centuries old craft. The rhythm of hammer and chisel. The stonework of the abbey structure has resonated to the chant of the monks for centuries, and still continues each day. This is a reassurance for all who visit here and will visit here in the future. The work is a prayer.

Most of the stone I am carving comes from the old Hopeman and Clashach quarries on the coast just east of Burghead. These are Permian and Triassic sandstones of what is known as New Red Sandstone in Moray. Colours vary but are predominantly yellow to buff coloured. Occasionally a dull red stone has been quarried. A source of these stones has been the generous gift of Peter Grant Peterkin of Grange Hall near Forres. Slabs and blocks of this stone have been in store near his historic “Dooocot” for decades awaiting use. We are grateful to him. He enjoys it when Colin Sim and I drive over in the abbey van to collect more fruits from his rock store.

The first block of Clashach stone from Grange Hall yielded the Agnus Dei carving. This is the Lamb and Flag set within a deeply carved quatrefoil. This was inspired by a visit I took with the Aberdeen University Catholic Society, along with Bryan Miller, in late August to churches in the Buckie area. Most notably to St Gregory’s church, Preshome, with its most beautiful carvings under the altar designed by Peter Paul Pugin. The quality of the craftsmanship there is breathtaking – do make an effort to see it when you can. The Agnus Dei under the altar provided me with my inspiration but I wanted it to be carved in the medieval way and not the Pugin way. So, the Agnus Dei was begun.

The Agnus Dei, near to completion, was on display during the open day on 8th September, celebrating the 75th anniversary of new monastic life at Pluscarden Abbey. The finished carving is now in the Cloister for people to see, until it is finally built into the new building above the entrance porch. Some of the carved-off fragments of the stone I made into a mini hand-held cairn with a carved cross on it. I asked Bryan Miller to take it to Rome when he went for the Oblate conference and throw it into the Tiber for me. Instead, he took it and placed it on the tomb of St Benedict and later presented it to the Holy Father himself at a private audience with Pope Francis, who heard the story and blessed the stone. One could preach a sermon about how even discarded fragments are of value and these have been held in the hands of the Holy Father.

The stone was returned to Pluscarden for display in the cloister. So much for throwing it into the Tiber!

The next panel of stone on the easel was a large red sandstone slab which I managed to dig out of the rock pile at Grange Hall. Covered in moss and tar from over a century of use elsewhere in some form of architectural context, the stone gradually rose phoenix-like from its slumber in the rubble. Br Michael was keen to see a large bas relief carving of the Abbey Seal which dates from 1230 AD. Set in the shape of a “Vesica” the scene is known as the Harrowing of Hell: Christ leading Adam and Eve out from the jaws of Hell at night, indicated by the two stars. The lettering around the outer band says:

SIGILL CONVENTUS VALLIS
SCTI ANDREAE IN MORAVIA

This panel is now stored on a pallet near the visitor hut close to the abbey. Many people think it was carved a very long time ago. I was inspired by the old memorial stones fixed up against the walls of the north transept: time-worn stones. The Abbey Seal stone is to be set up on the South facing elevation of the new building at the top of the stair tower framed by new stone.

Two new Clashach stones are on the easel at the moment. These are horizontal stones to take large carved raised letters in an Uncial font which will read REDEMPTORIS CUSTOS ORA PRO NOBIS (Guardian of the Redeemer, pray for us). These two stones will flank the Abbey seal and also face south.

The last external carved stone element will form the gable to the front porch. This large block of Darney sandstone is already on site stored near the tattie shed and will eventually have a carved relief of the Sleeping Joseph. I have yet to design this, and it will require a large amount of masoning before I can get to the carving stage. The sleeping Joseph is very much to the heart of Pope Francis and will be a lovely detail above the outside of the new retreat house, up where the dormitories are, which is wholly appropriate.

The statue of St Joseph for the inside of the new building is to be placed in the centre of the stairwell and will be carved from a single block of Portland stone weighing nearly one ton. The aim is to carve Joseph as a “working” man, with a basket of tools. I am really looking forward to carving this; it is at the design stage at the moment but will take many weeks to carve.

Lastly for St Joseph’s, there will be a pair of stone Celtic crosses carved to sit atop the two end gables on their Darney stone apex capstones. The design of the two Celtic crosses is based on the cross I made for the roof of a small chapel I built back in 2009 in Gower, South Wales, that looks out over the Bristol Channel, not that far from Caldey Island where Fr Aelred Carlyle founded the order.

I have enjoyed sharing ideas and enthusiasm for the projects with both Br Cyprian and Br Daniel in the abbey, both very fine artists in their own right. Br Cyprian has designed a lovely sleeping Joseph, available in the abbey shop. Fr Giles has from time to time appeared with his top-notch camera to capture progress at discreet times. While being here, I have also been called upon to do more practical chores such as tiling and fixing things. Part of the ship, part of the crew.

Pluscarden Abbey is seeking sponsorship for the stone carved elements of the new building of St Joseph’s. This is an opportunity to be forever linked as a part of this historic addition to the oldest working medieval monastery in Britain.

Agnus Dei stone £2000
Abbey Seal stone £2000
Lettered panels £1500 each
Sleeping Joseph gable £10,000
Celtic Crosses £2000 each
Statue of St Joseph £20,000

Philip Chatfield

“THE LATTER GLORY OF THIS HOUSE SHALL BE GREATER”

On the 5th of November we celebrated the solemnity of the rededication of our church for the eighth time. It's always a glorious occasion. The first reading at Mass is not taken from the common of the dedication, as you probably know, but from the prophet Haggai, because it includes our motto: *In loco isto dabo pacem*. The full verse runs: “The latter glory of this house (the Temple in Jerusalem, that is) shall be greater than the former, says the Lord of hosts. And in this place I will give peace, declares the Lord of hosts” (Haggai 2:9 ESV). It is fitting for many reasons. *Pax* is the motto of our Order, of course. But we are also quietly hoping that the first half of the prophecy will be fulfilled, that the glory of the current monastery “shall be greater” than the glory of the pre-Reformation Pluscarden. You could be forgiven for thinking that this is completely unrealistic. And yet a somewhat paradoxical consolation comes from studying the historical background to the original prophetic pronouncement.

Haggai prophesied towards the end of the year 520 BC, so nearly seven decades after the second siege of Jerusalem by the Babylonians, which resulted in the destruction of the Temple and the final wave of deportations. Somewhat surprisingly, but just as Jeremiah had predicted, the exiles thrived in captivity, both culturally and economically. Meanwhile, in 539 BC, Babylon itself fell to the Persians, who took over the empire and soon expanded it considerably. Crucially from our point of view, they succeeded in conquering Phoenicia with its great trading ports on the Mediterranean coast. Under Cyrus, the Jews were allowed to go back to Judah and to rebuild the Temple. They soon started on the latter project but suspended it, having encountered hostility of the local population and local officials. It was Haggai who, in the name of the Lord, urged them to finish the job. He was successful. But as for Judeans returning from the Exile in great numbers, now that they were allowed – this never really took off the ground. Jerusalem remained a small town, with perhaps as few as 1500

inhabitants, through most of this period. Some 70 years after Haggai, Nehemiah made a fresh attempt to repopulate it, but according to archaeologists he was a lot less successful than he claimed in his memoirs. Why was that?

Some description of the economic situation in Judah (or rather the much smaller Yehud district) under the Persians now seems in order. As an added bonus, it happens to be a fascinating topic in its own right. The Empire had a clear plan for its Western outskirts: taking advantage of the Phoenician maritime expertise and connections, to maximise gains from the Mediterranean trade routes. The whole vast province called Beyond the River – which covered everything West of the river Euphrates, all the way down to Egypt and up along the coast to Cilicia – seems to have been geared primarily to that end. As a result, cities located near or on the Mediterranean coast not far from Judah (like Ashdod, Ashkelon, Gaza and Acco) were undergoing periods of unprecedented growth, both in population and in wealth. Towns along the highways joining the coast with imperial heartlands (and then the Far East) were thriving too. They benefitted from the presence of the army (deployed to protect merchants on route) and were often used as local administrative centres for collecting taxes and agricultural produce. Lachish, Beersheba and Samaria are good examples here – but not Jerusalem. And that not so much because it had been ruined and depopulated for nearly four decades by the beginning of this period (539 BC) – the Empire had resources enough to remedy that, many towns were raised from ruins to great prosperity at that time – but simply because it was out of the way. The whole of the Hill Country was, in fact. All the central imperial authorities cared for with regard to places like Yehud was that there were no disturbances and that taxes and olive oil kept flowing in. Urban centres were not needed there; they could only be sources of potential trouble. The situation changed somewhat for the better from about 450 BC onwards, so from around the time of Nehemiah, but not dramatically. And so, while it is possible that Yehud was well-established as a district of Beyond the River right at the beginning of the Persian rule, there is

no evidence that it was properly functioning as such until after Nehemiah. Before his arrival, Yehud had been probably ruled from Samaria, and its administrative centre seems to have been Ramat Rahel anyway, and not the ruined Jerusalem. In other words, what we now call Palestine was clearly divided into two very different economic zones under the Persians: the thriving coast with its connecting trade routes and the scarcely populated, largely poor, rural Hill Country – a provincial backwater effectively.

This adds an interesting twist to the whole saga of the return from the Exile. Jerusalem was not only destroyed in 587 BC, but it had also subsequently lost its geopolitical position in the region. From a strategic centre of crucial importance in the Assyrian period (as a small buffer state between competing powers, and a crucial link to the Phoenician ports), it fell to being a small town in an unimportant, rural district of the Persian Empire. It had been stripped of all “worldly” significance, without much hope for recovering it under this new economic and administrative arrangement. All that the city could realistically aim for was Yehud’s independence from Samaria and, possibly in due time, replacing Ramat Rahel as the regional centre. In other words, there were no material incentives for resettling there; religious zeal had to suffice for motivation. And yet the Jews kept on hoping and trying. We can take heart from this and keep on hoping and trying too.

DSP

Sayings of the Desert Fathers

35. An elder said, “We are to exercise ourselves in gentleness and endurance and to be longsuffering and love because in these things is the [life of the] monk.”

36. He again said, “The definition of a Christian is an imitator of Christ.” That it is necessary to pursue stillness [hesychia] with all earnestness, seriousness, actively, with haste and zeal.

Trans. DBC

RETREATS

Why have a retreat, you may ask. The first and best answer is, “Because Jesus did so.” Maybe that surprises you – after all, you won’t find anywhere in the Gospels, “Jesus went on a retreat” – but we do find him doing what people do on retreat, withdrawing from his usual haunts and occupations, going off to a quiet or lonely place, either on his own or with his disciples or apostles, and having withdrawn, he prayed.

His retreats varied from his long, forty-day retreat in the desert, before starting his public ministry, to his mini-retreat in Gethsemane, before his Passion. He took his disciples aside for quiet and prayer after busy episodes, to recharge his batteries – as after healing St Peter’s mother-in-law, and then all the multitudes who came to the door once Sabbath was over. The Apostles had a retreat, the first novena, after the Ascension and in preparation for Pentecost. There are several occasions in Acts where we are told of the local Church praying and fasting, before making a choice, a decision, or sending someone off on mission.

We too need time with God, perhaps making an important decision or preparing for a significant moment in our lives – the Church lays down that people must make a retreat before religious profession, or ordination, for instance. It would be a good idea for anyone undertaking RCIA, or getting married, expecting a baby, starting retirement, to prepare spiritually by a retreat.

What is the purpose of a retreat? St Ignatius of Loyola suggests that it is to produce a burning, personal love of Christ.

But what is a retreat, you ask? It’s setting aside a time and place for God, to seek him, to become more aware of God seeking us, making time and space for him. Every day, the Church starts her prayer with the words of the psalm, “Today, if you hear his voice, harden not your hearts” – but are we listening for God? And if he does speak, will we be able to hear him, above all the racket going on in our hearts and lives?

So silence is an essential part of a retreat. I remember a wise and experienced missionary Sister in Africa saying to me, “You

cannot have a serious spiritual life without silence.” We all know someone who talks continuously, so you can’t get a word in edgeways. How often is that God’s experience with us? Maybe we should make our own the little prayer that Heli the priest taught to the young Samuel the prophet, “Speak, Lord, your servant is listening.”

Most people go away for a retreat. If you stay at home, all the day-to-day cares preoccupy you. The phone or the doorbell, so many things clamouring for your attention. You need to leave them behind. The prophet Hosea said, “Come apart for a while.” He wanted his rather dodgy wife to come with him into the desert, because there were no distractions there, only Hosea and the sand, no shopping, no social media, no chores, no escapes. Her fickle heart could concentrate on loving him. God offers us the same invitation, “Come apart, for a while”, just to be alone with him, for we, like Hosea’s wife, have a roving eye and a roving heart.

Nowadays, of course, we’re a bit like snails; we carry our whole lives with us – our phones, our laptops, our i-pads and tablets. The phone cheeps, a message, a call, an email, something social... So perhaps it’s even more important to switch off our electronic pseudo-lives, maybe a self-imposed fast from the screen, or a resolution not to check anything before midday, for example. Maybe all those important calls we’re worried about missing means the line’s engaged when God is trying to get through to us...

Just God... Isn’t that a bit boring, is that all you can offer? But we remember the Apostle Philip being called, and saying, “Only show us the Father, and we shall be satisfied” – how true! But unless we give God a chance to make his pitch, show us how he can and will satisfy our every longing, we will remain unconvinced. St Augustine knew it by experience, “We are restless until we rest in you.”

Some retreats are very organised, with a fixed timetable, talks on a specific theme at set times, with indications about which passages of Scripture you are to read and meditate on. Often there will be someone to accompany or direct you in this, to help you

see, discern, what God is saying to you, asking of you. Ignatian, Jesuit spirituality is often like that. It is helpful, because it takes you by the hand and guides you, teaches you the way of meditating and praying according to that school of spirituality.

St Benedict tends to be a bit more free and flexible. Since we are Benedictine monks, Benedictine monastic spirituality is the product we know and sell, so as to speak. People who come to the monastery can plug into the nuns' or monks' prayer, what St Benedict calls the "work of God", by which he means the succession of services, from early morning until night-time, which punctuate and structure the monastic day. St Benedict mentions eight services a day, excluding Mass, but different monasteries have different rhythms, how many services, at what times, in what language, sung or said, and so on.

You can immerse yourself in the flow of prayer, passively active, or maybe join in with the words, whatever works for you. That's important – Mother Janet Stuart used to say, "Pray as you can, not as you can't." There's no right or wrong way of praying.

Reading is another aspect of a retreat – again, there's no hard and fast rule, not everyone is happy reading, and that's fine. What you read is another multiple-choice question. Obviously, the Bible, the Word of God, is ideal, if you want to hear what God is saying. But there are all those books within the Bible, and some of them are quite unintelligible... Well, you can read about what Jesus said and did in the Gospels. In fact, since the whole Bible is about Jesus, you'll always find him there.

While you're on retreat, it's a good opportunity for a spiritual MOT, a 5,000-mile service, lifting the bonnet and seeing what's going on out of sight, and then fixing whatever needs fixing. First comes the inspection, and just as a mechanic has to look underneath your car, at the places not usually seen, so we need to inspect our lives, by an examination of conscience, seeing what's gone wrong. We can notice the things that are good, too, and thank God for them. Making a good confession is a good way to clear the decks. We can prepare for it by reading the conversion gospels of St Luke, that we read in Lent, the stories which emphasise

God's mercy. We can pray the penitential psalms, to get ourselves in the mood, stir up our contrition. We can make a real examination of conscience, giving time to it, looking into our hearts, my thoughts, what I have done, what I have said, what I have left undone. We can look for the giveaway signs that point to my sinful tendencies, and concentrate on them, rather than trying to cover everything, superficially, what the Curé d'Ars, St John Vianney, used to call "hot air confessions".

Once we're clear about our spiritual balance-sheet and have been to confession, we can experience the joy of the Divine Mercy, and that leads naturally to the Eucharist, to receiving Jesus sacramentally into our very being, our hearts and souls, our lives, to give us joy and strength, thanking him for his love.

A retreat offers an opportunity for adoration, whether in a formal setting, or simply resting before the tabernacle, happy to be in the presence of the Lord, not necessarily saying or doing anything, simply communing with Him, making ourselves available for him. After Mass, there is the chance for a more serious and extended thanksgiving than perhaps we usually make. "Always be giving thanks," the Scripture says, so we should put our hearts where our mouths are, so to speak.

Sunlight warms you. Focus it through a magnifying glass, and it can start a fire. Put light through a laser, and it can cut steel. If we focus the light of Christ on our thoughts, our attention, we can cut through the clutter and see more clearly.

We can take advantage of a retreat to concentrate our reading and praying on one book – one of the Gospels, for example, or a New Testament letter, the Psalms. You can read St Mark's gospel in no time at all – so read it several times; no commentary, let it ask you questions, speak to you, challenge you...

Prayer – don't just "say prayers". Pray, yes, but then slow down, stop, reflect... Sit down, kneel, leave space for God. Just be content to be with God, for God to be with you.

Let the Liturgy lead you. Advent, Christmas, Lent, Eastertide... read the Mass-readings, the prayers in the Missal, the readings in the Divine Office; they are "the authentic source of the

Christian spirit”; every season has something to say to you. The bits of the Mass no-one notices, the entry antiphons, the antiphons at Communion, the Prefaces, they are all full of goodness, but we pay them no attention. Take time to savour them, chew them over, hear what God is saying to us through his Church’s liturgy.

The same is true of the Saints; they are there alongside you, the Communion of Saints, praying for you and with you, each with their own example of how lived out the universal call to holiness – they are inspirational models for each of us. Get to know them, they are your friends, they care for you, they love you – you’re going to spend eternity with them! Read their biographies and writings – there is a whole series of books, “A fortnight with Saint X.”

But remember Martha and Mary. A retreat doesn’t have to be an assault-course of things to do or read – Martha was doing a very good job, and Jesus commended her for it, but Mary was “doing nothing”, just being there for and with the Lord, and Jesus told Martha that that was the “better part”. Sometimes we’re desperate to keep busy, so as to avoid facing up to realities, or getting really involved with someone – even Jesus!

They say that if you are on a retreat, there are three important people involved, the preacher (if you have one), you and the Holy Spirit. So invite the Holy Spirit to guide and help you, invite the Holy Spirit into the temple that is your body, to illumine your mind, set your heart on fire.

And when your retreat is over, don’t just go back to old clothes and porridge! The disciples who went to Emmaus with our Lord had their hearts set on fire by him, the Good News he showed them, and they went straight back to Jerusalem to share the good news of Jesus’ resurrection; they never forgot those wonderful miles with Jesus, and nor should we – we should try to keep alive the flame of our retreat, and invite Jesus to walk with us throughout our lives.

Of course, there are different styles of retreat, and maybe you need to find one that suits your current needs and situation, maybe you need to explore the options, places and styles.

Try going on retreat “off-peak”, mid-week rather than weekends, not during mid-terms or holiday periods; you’re more likely to find space. Try to be clear about your wants – just saying, “I want to go on a retreat next year” is too vague. Have an idea of the length of retreat you’re looking for and when. Remember to specify if you have special dietary needs, can’t manage stairs, that sort of thing. But just do it!

DGC

Sayings of the Desert Fathers

1. Abba Antony said, “Just as fish if they spend any length of time on dry land die, similarly monks delaying outside of the cell or passing their time with worldly people tend to slacken the intensity of [hesychia] their recollection. Therefore it is necessary, just like the fish [need] for the sea that likewise we also should be eager for the cell lest, by delaying outside it we forget the interior watchfulness.”

2. He again said, “He who sits in the desert living in stillness has been released from three conflicts: hearing, speaking and seeing; but he has only one conflict left that is of the heart.”

3. Abba Arsenios while he was still in the palace prayed to God saying, “Lord, show me the way by which I may be saved!” And there came a voice to him saying, “Arsenios, flee from men and you shall be saved.”

4. Having withdrawn to the solitary life he again prayed to God in the same words. He heard a voice saying to him, “Arsenios, flee, be silent, and pray for these are the roots of sinlessness.”

5. Abba Markos said to Abba Arsenios, “For what reason do you flee from us?” The old man said to him, “God knows that I love you, but I am not able to be with God and also with men. The myriads and thousands above have only one will but men have many wills. I am not able to leave God and also to come and be with men.”

Trans. DCB

THERE IS NOTHING FREE EXCEPT THE GRACE OF GOD *Some Christian Themes in the Coen Brothers' "True Grit"*

Joel and Ethan Coen have together achieved a series of masterworks in modern filmmaking: *Blood Simple*, *Fargo*, *The Big Lebowski*, *O Brother Where Art Thou?*, and *No Country For Old Men* are regularly cited on critics' lists of the best films ever made. Their films are often violent but never in a gratuitous fashion, and show a love of modern English, especially as it is spoken in American regional dialects. However, their exploration of religious themes (most especially the battle of goodness and common human decency with evil) often goes unremarked.

I've had the pleasure of seeing the Coen Brothers' remake of the 1969 classic Western *True Grit* a few times. The original stars John Wayne, of course, as U.S Marshal Rooster Cogburn, a dissolute drunkard tasked with bringing a murderer to justice. In updating the film, the Coen Brothers went back to the original novel, which was written by Charles Portis. In doing so, the Coen Brothers highlight the character of the novel's narrator Mattie Ross, a 14-year-old girl who hires Cogburn to seek out a hired hand who has betrayed her father and murdered him. Mattie and Cogburn head out into Indian Territory to bring the man to justice, since Mattie can find no one in her hometown or family who cares enough to do so. Let's see how the Coen Brother manage to bring forth the Christian elements neglected in the 1969 original version of the film. There are many spoilers ahead, so be forewarned!

As the film begins, we hear an orchestral version of the Christian hymn "Leaning on the Everlasting Arms". In fact, that hymn and a few others serve as the basis for almost the entire soundtrack of the film, appearing repeatedly as the story progresses. We hear an overdub by the adult Mattie as the orchestra plays, setting up the story by describing the murder of her father. We see the escape of the hired man, Tom Chaney, as he rides off free into the night, leaving Mattie's father dead as snow begins to fall gently. But Mattie assures us, in life "... there is nothing free except the grace of God."

Mattie Ross exemplifies a very Calvinistic interpretation of duty and justice. She is driven by a need for vengeful justice; not only does she want Chaney brought to justice, but she seeks to kill him herself and purchases a revolver almost as large as she is to do the job. She realizes that she can't find the murderer on her own and asks around town to get advice on the best U.S. Marshal for the job. When she is informed that there are currently three marshals available but that two of them are best known for finding their man and bringing them back for trial, she decides on Rooster Cogburn (the third choice) because he is especially renowned as a trigger-happy man who'd rather shoot first and ask questions later. For Mattie, there can be no mercy possible for such a person as the man who'd shot and robbed her father, leaving him to die. All Christian charity disappears as she seeks an all-consuming justice. In fact, Mattie shines with virtue but like an avenging angel of death rather than an angel of mercy.

Cogburn having accepted the contract, they head off into the wilderness to find Chaney, accompanied by a Texas Ranger, Le Boeuf, who is also in search of Chaney, but who seeks to bring him back to Texas to face trial for murder there. Mattie will accept this help, but wants nothing to do with the desire to bring Chaney to justice for any other death but that of her father. In fact, several times Le Boeuf and Cogburn seek to rid themselves of the girl's company, seeing her as only a hindrance on the trip. However, Mattie single-mindedly reminds them constantly of their contract and their need to fulfil their promises. Mattie is courageous and spunky, showing the true grit referred to in the book and film's title, but it is only a consequence of her pursuit of justice. Whether they get lost in the wilderness or sidetracked by Cogburn's drunkenness, Mattie is there to bring them back on the trail and to drive them forward in pursuit of Chaney.

At one point in the film, when all seems lost and Chaney's trail has gone cold, Mattie literally stumbles upon the murderer while filling water buckets. She shoots and wounds Chaney yet ends up kidnapped by him and the gang he is currently running with. Cogburn and Le Boeuf chase after them to rescue Mattie. At

the film's climax, as Rooster and Le Boeuf take down the outlaw gang, Mattie succeeds in freeing herself from her bonds. She grabs a rifle and shoots and kills Chaney, but in the very moment of doing so, the gun's recoil forces her back and she falls into a deep pit inhabited by rattlesnakes. She is bitten by one of the snakes and faces certain death, as no one seems to hear her screams for help. Just as we watch the "triumph" of Mattie's version of justice, we watch her pay the consequences, it would seem, of her single-minded quest.

And yet here we see the tables turn. In a twist worthy of Flannery O'Connor, the virtuous and self-righteous Mattie is saved by the sinful drunkard Rooster Cogburn, who lowers himself by rope down into the pit and saves her. He draws as much of the venom out of her wound as possible and heaves the two of them back up out of the pit. In the film's most touching moment, he rides tirelessly through the night to find a doctor to save her life, carrying her in his arms. When his mount dies of exhaustion, he picks her up and runs the next few miles with her in his arms. All the while, we have the magnificent orchestral hymn "Leaning on the Everlasting Arms" playing as Cogburn rides, runs, and then finally stumblingly walks to the doctor's house. In a nod to the parable of the Good Samaritan, Rooster leaves Mattie in the doctor's care, never to see her again once he has made sure that she will be cared for. In Mattie's single-minded search for an all-consuming justice, she has achieved her goal and her life is saved; yet she loses an arm to the effects of the snake's venom. It's hard to get more explicit an illustration of the consequences of Mattie's sin! Yes, she is pure as an angel but is also as proud as a devil and pays the price for her justice. And yet God has shown mercy by saving her through the efforts of the drunken sinner, Rooster Cogburn.

We see, though, in the epilogue that Mattie never learns the lesson God has tried to teach her. Having grown up, she seeks to find Rooster Cogburn again, but she has grown into a bitter and sharp-tongued spinster, cold and judgmental. Meanwhile, the sinful drunk Rooster Cogburn has retired from service as a marshal

and achieved fame as a performer in a Wild West Show. He has lived life on his own terms while she has eschewed all human warmth. Does Mattie really believe in the free gift of grace as she proclaims in the film's prologue? It would seem not, and that she only ever gives lip service to the idea of providence and grace. After all, by the time she is finally able to kill Chaney, she has left a trail of eight corpses in her wake!

True Grit is a masterpiece of film making and it is hard to encompass all its themes in one article. It is both funny and dramatic, with star turns by all three of its lead actors and won a well-deserved nomination as Best Picture for its year. I highly recommend a viewing, or a few.

DBJM

Sayings of the Desert Fathers

14. Abba Joseph the Theban said, "Three things are precious before the Lord: when a man is sick and afflicted with temptations and accepts them with gratitude; the second is when he makes all his works pure before the Lord, not holding to anything human and the third is when he remains in submission to a spiritual father and wholly renounces his own will."

15. Abba Cassian relates concerning a certain Abba John the Cenobiarch, for he was great in life. This man, it is said, when he was about to die and depart from this world to God with joy and longing, being surrounded by the brethren, they demanded of him some concise and salutary word as a kind of inheritance to leave to them, by means of which they would be able to progress towards perfection in Christ. But groaning he said, "Never have I done my own will, nor have I ever taught anything which I had not first practised."

Trans. DCB

PETER AITKEN OBL. OSB

March 14, 1927—October 23, 2023

Peter was born on 14th March, 1927 in Glasgow. He was baptised, received first Holy Communion, and was confirmed, at St Alphonsus Church there. He was a member of the Boy Scouts, the Boys' Guild, the Men's Sacred Heart Society, and the Youth Club, all attached to the Parish. He grew up with his elder brother John and his younger sister Lally.

He attended St Alphonsus Primary School before going on to St Mungo's Academy, and left school in 1941, aged 14. He was 12 when World War II broke out and 19 when it ended in Europe.

His first job was as a "van boy" for R.W. Forsyth, then later as an "apprentice plater". His uncle, Johnny Finnigan, spoke on his behalf and he managed to get an apprenticeship as a bricklayer with Wilson Brothers Ltd. During the war, they built air raid shelters in schools and even installed an emergency mortuary under Barrowlands Ballroom, at the "Barras".

Peter loved cycling and bought his "Flying Scot" bike when his apprentice time was out, at a cost of six weeks' wages. made to his own specifications. He would often go on cycle trips with the local Cycling Club. They would leave from the centre of town and chalk their destination and time of leaving on the street, so that any late arrivals would know where they were going. In summer, the average run was between 75 and 100 miles. In winter, it was around 30 miles. After the war, he cycled through Holland with his lifelong friends, Jim and Jack Timoney, and they also visited Paris the following year. I think there was a group of four: Jack and Jim Timoney, Danny Cree and Bobby Hill.

His cycling years lasted until 1952, when a newly ordained priest started a Youth Club in St Alphonsus where he held talks on logic and philosophy. The priest also started a drama club and started producing pantomimes and one-act plays. Peter always said this gave him self-belief and when he later became a Shop Steward, it gave him the confidence to stand up and talk.

Peter did a 3-year course on Bricklaying at Night School and a year on Building Construction. He was exempt from the forces until his time was out in 1947, by which time the war was over.

He later went back to Night School and sat Highers in English, History and Geography, and in 1968 he started a job as Clerk of Works with Glasgow Architects Department. When working on Hillpark Secondary School, he was made up to a Grade 1 Clerk of Works. His final days as a Clerk of Works were spent on maintenance of all the swimming pools, washhouses, and laundrettes in Glasgow. In 1987 he took early retirement at 60.

At this time, Peter met Anne McKinlay who was to become his wife, and they spent many wonderful years together, travelling to the Holy Land, Rome, Lourdes, and went on cruises on the QE2. They were together until she passed on 20th November 2003.

In 1953, his brother John (later to become Br Mungo) suggested he come on holiday with him to Pluscarden Priory, as it was then. Peter was met there by Fr Maurus and formed many friendships at Pluscarden. It was on this first holiday that he started to help build cells along the North Cloister at the monastery. From that time on, Pluscarden became a big part of his life. He became an Oblate of Pluscarden after a holiday there in 1956, along with his brother John and others, when they were asked by the then Oblate Master Fr Maurus to start Oblate meetings in Glasgow. Peter was coordinator for the St Mungo Glasgow Chapter for decades, until recently when he spent his last days in a care home.

If you were to ask him what he was grateful for in his life, he would say: his mother for her wisdom; his brother for his guidance; his friends for their companionship; Anne for her love and guidance; his religion; Pluscarden Abbey and the monks, particularly Fr Maurus. He would also mention cycling for keeping him fit; football – both watching and playing; ballroom dancing and dance music. He also loved singing and songs. Reading was important to him, and he liked doing crossword puzzles.

Of his longings – there were only four: Celtic Football Club winning! To be taller; to achieve heaven; to see Anne again and his family and friends. “Well done, thou good and faithful servant!