



"Nothing Dearer Than Christ"

Oblate letter of the Pluscarden Benedictines

Elgin, Moray, Scotland IV30 8UA

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"Let nothing be preferred to the Work of God" (HR 43:3).

In Honour of Dom Maurus Deegan Golden Jubilarian

October 5 1947 - October 5 1997

Monk and Priest

A Founding Father of Pluscarden

Founding Master of Pluscarden Oblates

Novice Master, Prior, Cellarer

Spiritual Father to Many

Monastic Voices

"If a novice promises perseverance in his stability, let him be told: 'This is the law under which you wish to serve. If you can keep it, come in.' If after due reflection he promises to observe everything, let him be received into the community. But he must be well aware that, as the law of the Rule establishes, from this day he is no longer free to leave the monastery, nor to shake from his neck the yoke of the Rule. When he is to be received, he comes before the whole community in the Oratory and promises stability, fidelity to monastic life, and obedience. He then begins the verse: Receive me, Lord, as you have promised, and I shall live; do not disappoint me in my hope (Ps 118:116). Then the novice prostrates himself at the feet of each monk to ask his prayers, and from that very day he is to be counted as one of the community" (HR 58, abridged).

"One secret of the character and influence of the Benedictine life seems to be that the monks of a Monastery are bound together by ties that are particularly close. They are truly said to form a family; the old and the young grow up together under the same roof, under the same discipline, around the same Altar, until the old men pass away and the young grow old, and yet another generation is ready to receive from their hands that are growing feeble, the work of the Monastery, and thus, generation succeeding generation, the Life goes on, and the work never ceases" (Aelred Carlyle, *Our Purpose and Method*, p.27).

"How are we saved? The Passion of Christ. How do we share in the Passion of Christ? St. Benedict's answer is the answer hammered out in the Deserts...per patientiam participemus in passionibus Christi (Prol 50). Patience is a surer sign of the Apostle than raising people from the dead. Patience is THE charism. It was this truth that

led me to see that there was a true grace in the Benedictine Oblation for the Laity..." (Dom Maurus, Oblate letter May 1978).

"I was told by a priest once that I was excessively devoted to Mary (...) 'Chum', I wanted to shout down his ear, 'I am not excessively devoted to Mary, Mother of Christ. She's like her Son. She is excessively devoted to me. On His Orders. In fact, she's my Mother'" (Oblate letter Oct 78).

Dear Oblates and friends,

We celebrate on 5th (actually, 6th) October the 50 years through which Fr. Maurus has been faithful to the vows he took as a Benedictine monk at Prinknash Abbey in 1947. This Jubilee is particularly special for us, since he came to the ruins of Pluscarden with the pioneer party of 5 monks in 1948, and has been here ever since. He is therefore one of those to whom in large measure, under God, our community owes its existence. Throughout its history he has resolutely battled on its behalf, upheld and nurtured it; and inevitably he has marked it in a sense with the stamp of his character.

The sheer witness of perseverance in stability that the Jubilee represents is something for all of us, monks and Oblates alike, to celebrate and draw strength from. But there is more. As everyone knows, Dom Maurus has been involved from the beginning in the work of the monastery "ad extra". In 1953, 3 young guests from Glasgow asked to become Oblates. And so the Pluscarden Oblate association was born, and from then until 1995, Dom Maurus acted as Oblate Master.

I can't say what Fr. Maurus has been and has given to so many Oblates and friends of Pluscarden over so many years. From the glowing tributes I hear from so many sides, I can guess a little. He has been spiritual guide, confidant, confessor, consolation, inspiration, goad, rock of refuge and steady reference point for very many from all walks of life; by no means all of them Oblates, or Catholics, or Christians. But much of the good he has done has been hidden; known to the individuals concerned and God alone. His teaching, to be sure, found written expression in a steady flow of Oblate letters; these were all composed amid countless other pressing duties, and on what we would now regard as shockingly primitive equipment. I've never managed to get hold of anything like a complete set of them. Perhaps one day someone will undertake the enormous task of collating, selecting and editing them for wider publication?

What I can say, or at least will try to say here, is something of what Dom Maurus has been for me, since I entered here in 1984.

I am the last of Fr. Maurus' novices. Apart from all those who, for one reason or another, are no longer with us, those who served their monastic apprenticeship under him are Br. Meinrad, Fr. Giles, Fr. Hugh, Fr. Anselm, Fr. Bede, Fr. Mark, Br. Gregory, Br. Michael, Br. Finbar and myself. I will always be immensely grateful that Providence in this way gave Dom Maurus to me as spiritual Father for the crucial formative period of my monastic life. Not long after I left the noviciate, Fr. Hugh took over as novice Master, and so the next one to enter, Fr. Ambrose, was entirely formed under his direction.

Dom Maurus, to me, perfectly embodied the senior, mentioned by St. Benedict, who is "chosen for his skill in winning souls, and appointed to look after the novices with careful attention" (HR 58:6). I felt safe in his hands, because, manifestly, he was above all else a man of prayer. He practised what he taught.

On top of that, he had a tremendous weight of experience from which to draw. He had been in Seminary, in Liverpool dockland, in the wartime Fire Service; as an ardent member of the Legion of Mary he had worked with alcoholics, prostitutes, down-and-outs and the un-evangelised. His work of spiritual direction had made him familiar with all the charisms, graces, problems and darkness one is likely to encounter in the life of prayer, and his study of the Masters of prayer, in particular St. John of the Cross, gave him the confidence to guide with authority. He had seen, in his life, a great deal of folly, self deception, false religiosity and narrow complacency, and he was determined to arm us against these things. He found the principles for healthy Christian living in the pages of the Holy Rule. He took us through this, not with a technical commentary - "there are plenty of those in the books" - but with strings of illustrative anecdotes. He could be exasperating, deliberately contrary,

sometimes fierce. One did not always agree with him; but argument in these cases was seldom an option. Always though, we respected him. More: always, we loved him.

Everything Fr. Maurus gave us was coloured, somehow, by his devotion to Mary. 1947, the year of his monastic vows, very appropriately saw also the canonisation of 2 Saints intimately associated with his Marian devotion: St. Catherine Labouré, to whom we owe the Miraculous Medal, and St. Louis Marie Grignon de Montfort, author of the treatise True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin. Dom Maurus preached the Miraculous Medal, and the "true devotion", in season and out. I think it will do him honour, on the occasion of his Jubilee, if I end this letter by recalling the main lines of what he taught us novices about Mary Immaculate.

He would often begin by defining false devotion to Mary. Zero devotion is false, of course, and contrary to the last will and testament of Christ, expressed from the Cross in the presence of Her and the Beloved Disciple. But false also is superstitious or credulous devotion. And any Mariolatry that supplants devotion to Christ does no honour, of course, to His Mother.

True devotion to Mary can be known from its fruits. These are, first of all, increased love of Jesus Christ, and the earnest resolution to live one's baptismal promises to the full. Other fruits are devotion to the Church, and especially to the Pope as Vicar of Christ on earth; obedience to the duties imposed by one's state of life; love for the poor; love of the Eucharist; desire to carry the Gospel to those who do not know it...

The justification for devotion to Mary is that she leads us to Jesus her Son. When we praise her, she directs that praise to Jesus, to God, with the addition of her own pure and perfect love. So the closer you come to Mary, the closer she will lead you to Jesus. Can you then have too much TRUE devotion to Mary? Obviously not. So how much devotion should you have? The answer given by de Montfort, and echoed by Dom Maurus, is that devotion to Mary - "true devotion" - should be total. Pope John Paul II also accepts this conclusion. His motto, "Totus tuus", expresses it.

Once this is accepted, how much meaning do the Rosary, the Salve Regina, the Litany of Loreto, the pilgrimages to Lourdes and all the other familiar Catholic practices acquire! The doctrine of de Montfort is not of course imposed on anyone. Not everybody likes it. Fine. But let no-one say that his teaching is incorrect, or dangerous, or contrary to Vatican II. It has manifestly borne many fruits of holiness.

But is this quite what an Oblate Master should be giving to his Oblates? St. Benedict is, after all, notoriously silent on devotion to Mary (though see Prol 30: "...operantem in se Dominum MAGNIFICANT...").

I think that Dom Maurus was indeed justified in his teaching, and that Pluscarden Oblates should be aware of the special Marian orientation of our community. Pluscarden has retained its mediaeval dedication to Mary. We wear the white habit in her honour. This was adopted in Anglican days, before 1913. But in that year, the Anglican authorities insisted that the community abandon unconditionally its devotion to Mary in her Immaculate Conception and her Assumption. The demand could not be met: this, for us, was of faith - not a pious accretion, or Roman corruption, but central to all we believed in. Dom Maurus loves this story, and never tires of repeating it. He points to that crisis as a moment of grace, and of light; an answer to prayer. The community sought admission to full communion with the Catholic Church, and was speedily received, through the personal intervention of St. Pius X, and under the guidance of Abbot Columba Marmion. Devotion to Mary continues to mark our observance. Each night, the monks kneel before her shrine as a last act of homage before retiring...

Pray, then, of your charity, for Dom Maurus, that his life time's obsession with Jesus and Mary may be rewarded, and that he not have to wait too long before his ardent faith is fulfilled in perfect joy.