



Nothing Dearer than Christ

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Monastic Voices:Fr André Louf "Tuning in to Grace"---- "POSTSCRIPT"

"When believing fifteenth- and sixteenth-century artists wanted to convey an idea of committed faith, they usually referred to a remarkable event in the life of Saint Jerome. Most museums in Flanders, and some churches, have preserved records of it. We want to conclude("Tuning in to Grace"" with this story, for it speaks with exceptional clarity to the issues we have discussed.

Long before he became a learned and famous Bible scholar and flourished on the Aventine in Rome as the spiritual leader of a group of high-society ladies, Jerome had first tried to live the life of a hermit in one of the wadis of the Judean desert, a wadi known even then for its grottoes and caves. This experience was not, however, what he had expected. With the somewhat reckless over-confidence of his age the young Jerome had diligently devoted himself to the many forms of asceticism then practised by the monks. The benefits, however, escaped him. Time would soon show that his true calling lay elsewhere in the Church and that his stay among the monks . in Palestine would be merely the prelude to this.

Jerome still had much to learn, for as a young novice he was hopelessly stuck. Despite all his noble efforts, no answering voice came to him from heaven. He drifted directionless on the troubled waters of his mind, so that long-familiar temptations again began to creep up on him incessantly.

Jerome lost his courage. Where had he erred? Where lay the cause of this breakdown in his relationship with God? And how could he again tune in to the wavelength of grace?

So Jerome worried and brooded, until suddenly he glimpsed a crucifix that had positioned itself between the dry branches of a dead tree. He threw himself on the ground, beating his breast with firm, sweeping movements. It is in that humble, but at the same time insistent, posture that most painters depict him. .

It was not long before Jesus broke the silence and addressed Jerome from the cross. 'Jerome,' said he, 'what do you have to give me? What am I getting from you?'

That voice alone put fresh heart into Jerome again and he immediately began to wonder what he could offer his crucified friend. .

'The loneliness, Lord,' he answered. 'I offer to you the loneliness with which I am struggling.'

'Excellent, Jerome,' replied Jesus, 'and thank you very much. You have certainly done your best. But have you anything more to give me?'

Not for a minute did Jerome doubt that he had much more to offer Jesus.

'Of course, Lord,' he resumed. 'My fasting, my hunger and thirst. I only eat after sundown!'

Again Jesus answered: 'Excellent, Jerome, and thank you very much. I know it. You have really done your best. But have you anything else to give me?'

Again Jerome reflected on what he might be able to give Jesus. Successively he trotted out his vigils, his long psalmody, his study of the Bible night and day, the celibacy to which he devoted himself as best he could, the lack of conveniences, the poverty, the most unexpected guests he tried to welcome without grumbling and with a not too unfriendly face, and finally the heat of the day and the chill of the night.

Each time Jesus congratulated and thanked him. He had known for a long time that Jerome meant very well.

But with a half-smile on his lips, he also persisted with his questions, asking for more: 'Jerome, is there nothing else you can give me? Or is this all?'

At long last Jerome had summed up all the good things he was able to scrape together from his memory .So when Jesus asked the question one more time he had no choice but, in great perplexity and almost total defeat to protest: 'But, Lord, have I not given you everything? I have nothing further to

offer.

Then Jesus replied -and it became deathly quiet in the hermitage and in the whole Judean wilderness -and said: 'But you do, Jerome. You have forgotten something: you must also give me your sins, that I may forgive them.'"

FROM THE OBLATEMASTER'S DESK:-

The Rule of St Benedict directs our Lenten efforts thus:-

CHAPTER 49 *On the Keeping of Lent*

"The life of a monk ought always to be a Lenten observance. However, since such virtue is that of few, we advise that during these days of Lent he guard his life with all purity and at the same time wash away during these holy days all the shortcomings of other times. This will then be worthily done, if we restrain ourselves from all vices. Let us devote ourselves to tearful prayers, to reading and compunction of heart, and to abstinence.

"During these days, therefore, let us add something to the usual amount of our service, special prayers, abstinence from food and drink, that each one offer to God "with the joy of the Holy Ghost" (1 Thes 1:6), of his own accord, something above his prescribed measure; namely, let him withdraw from his body somewhat of food, drink, sleep, speech, merriment, and with the gladness of spiritual desire await holy Easter.

"Let each one, however, make known to his Abbot what he offers and let it be done with his approval and blessing; because what is done without permission of the spiritual father will be imputed to presumption and vain glory, and not to merit. Therefore, let all be done with the approval of the Abbot."

Fasts, vigils, austerities, penitential exercises are all associated in the layman's mind and the novice monk's with monasticism and the serious quest for union with God.--- Inasmuch as monastic profession is separation from the world and worldliness this may not be totally baseless. Worldliness can be typified as a flabby fixation on pleasure and a narcissistic focus. To take strides against this and break free from this fixation on self must surely be laudable then in the extreme for the monk or nun because as the Rule also says " death lurks at the door of pleasure". (RB Ch. 7). Yes exactly so-- laudable, praiseworthy--difficult like the skills of the Winter Olympics and requiring austere training but for this very reason attracting the limelight at least within the monastic community. The pleasure of self-assertion(presumption) and vainglory (man-pleasing rather God-pleasing) lurks at the door of this trumpeted observance that our Lord deploras (Mtt 6.2)

Pelagius the 4th/5th century British/Celtic monk (too stuffed full of Scots porridge according to St Jerome!) who emphasised the "by-your -own-bootstraps" monastic asceticism, gives us the paradigm of what is to be avoided in our Lenten observance.. Pelagius apparently died in orthodoxy but the muscular Christianity he gave rise to especially amongst monks and nuns was condemned as erroneously putting the spotlight on **my** efforts and not God's grace(championed by St Augustine) Despite his bad press St John Cassian (admired by our Holy Father S Benedict -- "the conferences") may have kept a balance.

Asceticism, hard enough in itself especially in our present suit yourself culture, has to be rooted in and harnessed to obedience, Church discipline, monastic discipline represented by the abbatial, holy moderation and authorisation. What was to be **my** practise becomes the monastic practise authorised by the abbot and henceforth by my agreement required of me -- at least for a

time, during Lent.

D.I.Y. Lenten athleticism becomes humble sharing in the sufferings of Christ(RB Prologue) in union with all our brethren with hopefilled yearning for the joy of Easter.

Even the great Scripture scholar, Father of the Church, arch-monastic St Jerome had to be reminded that his observance was a grace not a possession; only his sins acknowledged and confessed and offered to the Lord's merciful love were a title to the Divine life. Our observances are shallow, dry pits until connected through the grace of forgiveness, by the channel of our sins forgiven, connected to the sea of God's love. This was a discovery for the high achieving Cistercian Abbot of the strict observance, Dom André Louf, may he rest in peace, like his long-time predecessor, Abbot De Rancé, founder of the Trappists. (The O.C.S.O.s)

BOOKS & MEDIA

"TUNING IN TO GRACE"--THE QUEST FOR GOD BY ANDRÉ LOUF CISTERCIAN PUBLICATIONS ISBN 0-87907-929-0 BEING A SINNER THE QUALIFICATION FOR KNOWING GOD.

Pluscarden Benedictines: See Lent 2022 for details of 3 books translated By Fr. Giles and available and published! (The Christmas edition had a review of a fictionalised account of life at Stanbrook Abbey "House of Brede"!) Br. Cyprian Bampton is the editor. All enquiries about the magazine, that so many of you enjoy, to him, please. £10 is a suggested subscription donation. For inclusion on the mailing list write Br. Cyprian Bampton OSB at the Abbey address -- similarly subscriptions and changes of address to him, Br. Cyprian. The Magazine and the Oblate Letter(just that, brief letter) are both quarterly, usually the third month of each quarter.

Pluscarden Live Streaming--go to our website and you will find a drop-down list leading you to livestreaming-- click onto that and choose past or present items.
or click on this link

<http://pluscardenabbey.org/live> Br. Michael is in charge of the live streaming. All queries to him.

RESIDENTIAL BOOKINGS:- FR. GILES BY LETTER (S.A.E. ALWAYS A GOOD IDEA!)-----OR
EMAIL--or form through the website

guestmaster.pluscarden@gmail.com for bookings or officially **guestmaster@pluscardenabbey.org**

The Pluscarden website is the primary source for day to day information: Please keep an eye on it--especially if you have a "booking"---and for livestreaming.

www.pluscardenabbey.org

THIS YEAR 2022

- **1st Weekend of Lent Saturday 5th of March the simple, first professions of Br. Patrick Obiejinwa & Br. Edmund Norby --time to be decided (see website or ask nearer the time.)**
- **LENTEN RETREAT NOW--- 2022--moved back!--to the 2nd Weekend of Lent Fr. Abbot Anselm Friday 11th March to Monday 14th March**

Book in with Fr. Giles please for guesthouse or simply come to the talks or follow livestreamed. Men have still to self-cater at time of writing. All simply join in liturgy of the day, Mass, Divine Office(Timetable as advertised on website and notice-boards and guest rooms and talks, times as follows:-

Friday March 11th Arrive simply and settle in.

Saturday March 12th Fr Abbot first talk 10.45; second talk Fr. Abbot 3.00 pm.

Sunday March 13th Fr. Abbot 10.00 am Mass & sermon; third & final talk Fr. Abbot 3.00 pm

Monday March 14th Final Mass 9.00 am (opportunity of renewal of Oblation during) & departures.

Fr. Martin available for Sacrament of Reconciliation throughout and/or chat.

Will also be livestreamed through the website

‘ St Irenaeus of Lyons: Scripture, Unity and Synodality’
How can the newest Doctor of the Church help Oblates with 21st-century challenges?
UKOT Oblates National Online Retreat/Day of Reflection Saturday 30th April 2022.
Led by DAME LAURENTIA JOHNS O.S.B. (STANBROOK ABBEY)
AUTHOR OF ‘THE WAY OF BENEDICT: EIGHT BLESSINGS FOR LENT’
More details available soon.

PENTECOST LECTURES THIS YEAR ARE 7TH-9TH JUNE AND ARE LIVE-STREAMED--FOUR TALKS--DR CHRISTOPHER RUDDY " IT AIN'T NO SIN TO BE GLAD YOU ARE ALIVE"--PRAISE IN AN AGE OF AGITATION.: Tlks1. Tuesday 7th June at 3.00pm 2 Wednesday 8th June at 10.30 am 3 Wednesday 8th June at 3.00 pm 4 Thursday 9th June at 10.30 am. see Abbey Website for link: www.pluscardenabbey.org Recordings will also be available

- **SUMMER OBLATE RETREAT NEXT YEAR 2022- Friday 29th July to Monday 1st August Fr. Stuart Chalmers, Oblate, Spiritual director of the Scots College in Spain.**
NEXT YEAR 2023
- **2023 Lent Friday 24th February to Monday 27th February Fr. Abbot.**
- **2023 moved back!! N.B. to Summer 18th to 21st AUGUST Bishop Richard Moth, Oblate-----You can check everything on the website**

WORLD CONGRESS It has been decided that the "5th World Congress of Benedictine Oblates" will be held at the *Badia Primaziale Sant'Anselmo*, in Rome, from 9 to 16 September 2023. Abbot Primate Gregory Polan, O.S.B

PRAYER INTENTIONS Abbot Anselm's intentions. Bishop Hugh's & Bishop Richard Moth's(Oblate) intentions. Br. Patrick Obiejinwa & Br. Edmund Norby first professions 5th March. --Vocations to St Mary's and St. Scholastica's, Petersham, U.S.A and Kristo Buase Priory. Repose of the souls of Oblates: Johan(Joy) Baillie, Edmund Young, Dr David Paterson ééand his widow Angela.. Health of Oblates: Justyna Tymecka and Marvia McCulloch, Joe Bagley, Robert Cantafio and his mother Margharita, Ursula Humphrey,,Jane Coll's granddaughter Natasha Gunn. Fr. Francis Wilson(any news **still** welcomed by Oblatemaster), Janet Boyd Moss, Connie Reid, Mary Frances McGregor and her daughter Ruth. Please pray for the health of Fr. Matthew, Br. Cyprian, Br. Finbar, Br. Gabriel, Rev. Christopher Mayo, Rev. Angus Macleod(Lost & found!), for Netta Ewing. For Siobhan Gilmour's husband, for Mrs. Allie Brien, Margaret Johnston's mother, for Gitte Mackay, Leonora Duson, and her daughter, Joe Barrett senior, Maureen Woodhead & her Sister Doreen, Bob Barr, Brian Milne, Fiona Sellar, Nick MaCrae. Martin MaCrae, Jacqui Heath-Anderson and daughter Sally, , Poppy Sinclair, Ian Fred's Twin, for Pat Foster, Pam Woodhead, Carolyn, Marshall & Malcolm Boardman, and also for Eileen Kerr, Elizabeth MacKay, Peter and Brian Wynne, Susan Stephen serious illness, Cindy's husband, Danielle seriously ill & her son Osyp, Evelyn, and Sheila, Martin Drinkwater, Alistair Macdonald, Elizabeth Mackay, and all the friends of the Abbey and for all Oblates, and for ALL the sick and those who care for them--and for our 3 sponsored seminarians. For vocations and all our novices Brothers Patrick, Edmund and Andrew, monks and Oblates, and all our Oblates living and dead. Br. Jerome Leo Oblatemaster of St Mary's Petersham. All we have omitted or forgotten, living and dead--- also not least all those **still** traumatised by the covid years.

Our three sponsored seminarians are all doing well. Uganda is now returning to normal and the seminarians have all returned to their formal studies. Please pray for them and for Sr Catherine OSB, who does so much to keep everything running smoothly & our new coordinator of the seminarian programme. Penelope Coate's contact details: penelopecoate@yahoo.com. 0794 9399592.

OBLATE CHAPTERS

PLEASE MAKE USE OF THE CONTACT DETAILS BELOW TO FIND OUT HOW THINGS ARE PROGRESSING.>>>>▼▼▼▼OR--Contact me(details at the head of every letter!) I can forward or:-

St Mungo's Chapter: Contact can be made via Peter Aitken. Tel. 0141 427 2084.

St Margaret's Chapter: All details contact Deacon Pat Carrigan smcb_oblates@live.co.uk

St. Monica's Chapter for far North -- Thurso. Contact Jane Coll. "Scaraben", Westside, Dunnet, Thurso, Caithness, KY14 8YD. Phone 01847 851467 & Orkney and Shetland by zoom I understand!

St. Peter's Chapter, Aberdeen: 7.00-8.00 pm Mondays as below, Church Hall, St Joseph's, 2 Tanfield Walk, Aberdeen contact Chairman Mr. Robert Ian Johnston, 31, Tay Road, Mastrick, ABERDEEN AB16 5LA or secretary Mr. George Brand geobra@msn.com:-Schedule: As arranged--contact chairman & secretary.

"**St Andrew's Chapter**" Just to let you know that we will be taking a break for the winter, returning dv in the spring; date to be advised nearer the time. I will send out an invitation email to you in good time. Live-streamed Oblates at None have resumed & are available on:

<http://pluscardenabbey.org/live> Warm regards and prayers

Eileen Fitzpatrick Oblate OSB Co-ordinator St Andrew's Chapter (local to Moray)

St Columba's Chapter in Dundee -- contact Mrs. Georgina Quinn 2D, Church Street, Broughty Ferry DUNDEE Fife DD5 1EZ"

Benedictine Prayer Circle-If interested some oblates may like to know of John McKinlay's Benedictine Prayer Circle, see Links on the UKOT website—John McKinlay igjm07@yahoo.co.uk

The Transfiguration-Second Sunday of Lent St Luke 9.28-36

About eight days after men, Moses and Elijah, Jesus said this, he took appeared in glorious Peter, John and James splendour, talking with with him and went up Jesus. They spoke about his onto a mountain to pray. departure, which he was As he was praying, the about to bring to appearance of his face fulfilment at Jerusalem. changed, and his clothes Peter and his companions became as bright as a were very sleepy, but when flash of lightning. Two they became fully awake,

they saw his glory and the two men standing with him. As the men were leaving Jesus, Peter said to him, "Master, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." (He did not know what he was saying.)

While he was speaking, a cloud appeared and covered them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. A voice came from the cloud, saying, "This is my Son,

whom I have chosen; listen to him." When the voice had spoken, they found that Jesus was alone. The disciples kept this to themselves and did not tell anyone at that time what they had seen.



Lenten Blessings, Love and Prayers

Fr. Martin PAX