



nothing Dearer than Christ

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**A Talk for the Congress of Abbots. Sant'Anselmo September 2000
"Monks, empty lives and beauty." by kind permission of Fr. Timothy
Radcliffe, O.P. in full to mark our 75th anniversary of re-foundation.**

It is a great honour for me to be asked to speak to this Congress of Abbots. I want to say a little about the role of monasteries in the new Millennium. I feel so little suited to speak about this that I wonder whether I ought to have accepted the invitation. I did so just as an act of gratitude to St Benedict and those who follow his rule. I was educated – more or less – by the Benedictines for ten years, at Worth and Downside Abbeys, and I have the happiest memories of those years. Above all I remember the humanity of the monks, who helped me to believe in a God who was good and merciful, though very English! I probably owe my religious vocation to a great-uncle who was a Benedictine, Dom John Lane Fox, whose vitality and enthusiasm for God was a great gift. And finally, I would like to thank God for that good Benedictine and friend, Cardinal Basil Hume.

Benedictine abbeys have been like oases in the pilgrimage of my life, where I have been able to rest and be refreshed before carrying on the journey. I did my diaconate retreat in Buckfast Abbey, and my retreat before ordination to the priesthood in Bec-Hellouin in Normandy. I spent holidays at La Pierre qui vire, and Einsiedeln, and celebrated

Easter at Pannenthalme in Hungary, visited Subiaco, Monte Casino, Monte Oliveto and a hundred more abbeys.

Everywhere I have gone, I have found crowds of people who were visiting the monasteries. Why are they there? Some no doubt are tourists who have come to pass an afternoon perhaps hoping to see a monk, like a monkey in a zoo. We might expect to find notices that say "Do not feed the monks". Others come for the beauty of the buildings or the liturgy. Many come hoping for some encounter with God. We talk about "secularisation", but we live in a time marked by a deep religious search. There is a hunger for the transcendent. People look for it in eastern religions, in new age sects, in the exotic and the esoteric. Often there is a suspicion of the Church and all institutional religion, except perhaps for the monasteries. Still there is a trust that in the monasteries we may glimpse the mystery of God, and discover some hint of the transcendent.

Indeed it is the role of the monastery to welcome these strangers. The Rule tells us that the stranger must be welcomed like Christ. He must be greeted with reverence, his feet must be washed and he must be fed. This has always been my experience. I remember going to visit St Otilien, when Bishop Viktor Dammertz was Abbot. I was a poor, dirty, hitch hiking English Dominican student. And I was taken in by these very clean German Benedictines, and washed, scrubbed, my hair was cut. I was almost respectable when I left to take to the road again. It did not last for long!

Why are people so drawn to monasteries? Today I would like to share with you some thoughts as to why this is so. You may think that my thoughts are completely crazy, and proof that a Dominican can understand nothing of the Benedictine life. If so, then please forgive me. I wish to claim that your monasteries disclose God not because of what you do or say, but perhaps because the monastic life has at its centre a space, a void, in which God may show himself. I wish to

suggest that the rule of St. Benedict offers a sort of hollow centre to your lives, in which God may live and be glimpsed.

The glory of God always shows itself in an empty space. When the Israelites came out of the desert, God came with them seated in the space between the wings of the cherubim, above the seat of mercy. The throne of glory was this void. It was only a small space, a hand's breadth. God does not need much space to show his glory. Down the Aventine, not two hundred metres away, is the Basilica of S. Sabina. And on its door is the first known representation of the cross. Here we see a throne of glory which is also a void, an absence, as a man dies crying out for the God who seems to have deserted him. The ultimate throne of glory is an empty tomb, where there is no body.

My hope is that the Benedictine monasteries will continue to be places in which the glory of God shines out, thrones for the mystery. And this is because of what you are not, and what you do not do. In recent years astronomers have been searching the skies for new planets. Until recently they could never see any planets directly. But they could detect them by a wobble in the orbit of the star. Perhaps with those who follow the rule of St Benedict it is similar, only you are the planets which disclose the invisible star which is the centre of the monastery. The measured orbit of your life points to the mystery which we cannot see directly. "Truly, you are a hidden God, O God of Israel." (Is. 45. 13)

I would like to suggest, then, that the invisible centre of your life is revealed in how you live. The glory of God is shown in a void, an empty space in your lives. I will suggest three aspects of the monastic life which open this void and make a space for God: First of all, your lives are for no particular purpose. Secondly in that they lead nowhere, and finally because they are lives of humility. Each of these aspects of the monastic life opens us a space for God. And I wish to suggest that in each case it is the celebration of the liturgy that makes sense of this

void. It is the singing of the Office several times a day that shows that this void is filled with the glory of God.

Being there

The most obvious fact about monks is that you do not do anything in particular. You farm but you are not farmers. You teach, but you are not school teachers. You may even run hospitals, or mission stations, but you are not primarily doctors or missionaries. You are monks, who follow the rule of Benedict. You do not do anything in particular. Monks are usually very busy people but the business is not the point and purpose of your lives. Cardinal Hume once wrote that, “we do not see ourselves as having any particular mission or function in the Church. We do not set out to change the course of history. We are just there almost by accident from a human point of view. And, happily, we go on ‘just being there’” . It is this absence of explicit purpose that discloses God as the secret, hidden purpose of your lives. God is disclosed as the invisible centre of our lives when we do not try to give any other justification for who we are. The point of the Christian life is just to be with God. Jesus says to the disciples: “Abide in my love” (Jn 15.10). Monks are called to abide in his love.

Our world is a market place. Everyone is competing for attention, and trying to convince that others what they sell is necessary for the good life. All the time we are being told what we need so as to be happy: a microwave, a computer, a holiday in the Caribbean, a new soap. And it is tempting for religion to come to the market place and to try to shout along with the other competitors. “You need religion to be happy, to be successful and even to be rich.” One of the reasons for the explosion of the sects in Latin America is that they promise wealth. And so Christianity is there, proclaiming that it is relevant for your life. Yoga this week, aromatherapy next week. Can we persuade them to give Christianity a try? I remember a lavatory in a pub in Oxford. There was a graffito written in tiny letters, in a corner of the ceiling. And it said: “If

you have looked this far then you must be looking for something. Why not try the Roman Catholic Church?"

We need Christians out there, shouting along with the rest, joining in the bustle of the market place, trying to catch peoples' eyes. That is where Dominicans and Franciscans, for example, should be. But the monasteries embody a deep truth. Ultimately we worship God, not because he is relevant for us, simply because he is. The voice from the burning bush proclaimed "I am who I am". What matters is not that God is relevant to us, but that in God we find the disclosure of all relevance, the lodestar of our lives.

I think that this was the secret of Cardinal Hume's unique authority. He did not try to market religion, and show that Catholicism was the secret ingredient for the successful life. He was just a monk who said his prayers. Deep down, people know that a God who must show that he is useful for me is not worth worshipping. A God who has to be relevant is not God at all. The life of the monk witnesses to the irrelevance of God, for everything is only relevant in relation to God. The lives of monks bear witness to that, by not doing anything in particular, except abide with God. Your lives have a void at their centres, like the space between the wings of the cherubim. Here we may glimpse God's glory.

Perhaps the role of the Abbot is to be the person who obviously does nothing in particular. Other monks may get caught up in being bursar, or infirmarian, or running the farm or the printing house, or the school. But perhaps I can be so bold as to suggest that the Abbot might be the person who is guardian of the monks' deepest identity as those who have nothing in particular to do. There was an English Dominican called Bede Jarret, who was Provincial for many years, a famous preacher, a prolific writer of books. But he never appeared to do anything. If you went to see him, then I am told that he was usually doing nothing. If you asked him what he was doing, then I am told that he usually

replied, “Waiting to see if anyone came”. He perfected the art of doing much while appearing to do little. Most of us, including myself, do the opposite; we ensure that we always appear to be extremely busy, even when there is nothing to do!

When people flock to the monasteries, and look at the monks, and stay to hear Vespers, then how may they discover that this nothingness is a revelation of God? Why do they not just think of monks as people who are either lazy, or without ambition, uncompetitive failures in the rat race of life? How may they glimpse that it is God who is at the centre of your lives? I suspect that it is by listening to your singing. The authority for that summons is found in the beauty of your praise of God. Lives that have no especial purpose are indeed a puzzle and a question. “Why are these monks here and for what? What is their purpose?” It is the beauty of the praise of God that shows why you are here. When I was a young boy at Downside Abbey, I must confess that I was not very religious. I smoked behind the classrooms, and escaped at night to the pubs. I was almost expelled from school for reading a notorious book, “Lady Chatterley’s Lover”, during benediction. If one thing kept me anchored in my faith, then it was the beauty that I found there: the beauty of the sung Office, the luminosity of the early morning in the Abbey, the radiance of the silence. It was the beauty that would not let me go.

It is surely no coincidence that the great theologian of beauty, Hans Urs von Balthasar, received his earliest education at Engelberg, a Benedictine school famous for its musical tradition. Balthasar talks of the “self-evidence” of beauty, “its intrinsic authority” . You cannot argue with beauty’s summons or dismiss it. And this is probably the most resounding form of God’s authority in this age, in which art has become a form of religion. Few people may go to church on a Sunday, but millions go to concerts and art galleries and museums. In beauty we can glimpse the glory of God’s wisdom which danced when she made the world, “more beautiful than the sun” (Wisdom 7). In the LXX,

when God made the world, then he saw that it was *kala*, beautiful. Goodness summons us in the form of beauty. When people hear the beauty of the singing, then they may indeed guess why the monks are there and what is the secret centre of their lives, the praise of glory. It was typical of Dom Basil, that when he talked about the deepest desires of his heart, then he talked in terms of beauty: “what an experience it would be if I could know that which among the most beautiful things was the most beautiful of them all. That would be the highest of all the experiences of joy, and total fulfilment. The most beautiful of all things I call God.”

And if beauty is truly the revelation of the good and the true, as St Thomas Aquinas believed, then perhaps part of the vocation of the Church is to be a place of the revelation of true beauty. Much modern music, even in Church, is so trivial that it is a parody of beauty. It is kitsch which has been described as the “pornography of insignificance” Maybe it is because we fall into the trap of seeing beauty in utilitarian terms, useful for entertaining people, instead of seeing that what is truly beautiful reveals the good.

I hope that you will not think it too bizarre if I say that I believe that the monastic way of life is in itself beautiful. I was fascinated when I read the rule to see that it says at the beginning that, “It is called a rule because it regulates the lives of those who obey it.” The *regula* regulates. At first that sounds all too controlling for a Dominican. In my experience, it is very hard to regulate the friars! But perhaps *regula* suggests not control so much as measure, rhythm, lives which have a shape and a form. Perhaps what it suggests is discipline of music. St. Augustine thought that to live virtuously was to live musically, to be in harmony. Loving one’s neighbour was, he said, “keeping musical order” . Grace is graceful and the graced life is beautiful.

So once again it is the singing of the liturgy that discloses the meaning of our lives. St Thomas said that beauty in music was essentially linked

to temperantia. Nothing should ever be in excess. Music must keep the right beat, neither too fast nor too slow, keeping the right measure. And Thomas thought that the temperate life kept us young and beautiful. But what the Rule appears to offer is especially a measured life, with nothing in excess, though I do not know whether monks stay any younger and more beautiful than anyone else! The Rule admits that in the past monks did not drink at all, but since we cannot convince monks not to drink, then at least it must be in moderation. Nothing to excess.

I am reminded of my Benedictine great-uncle who had a great love of wine, which he was sure was necessary for his health. Since he lived to be almost a 100 then perhaps he was right. He persuaded my father and uncles to keep him well supplied with a daily bottle of claret, which I suppose could be called moderate and in accordance with the Rule, a hemina (Chapter 40). When he smuggled these back into the monastery, the monks always wondered what caused the clinking noises in his bag. Elaborate explanations were prepared in advance with the help of his nephews!

When we hear monks sing, we glimpse the music that is your lives, following the rhythm and beat of the tune of the Rule of St Benedict. The glory of God is enthroned on the praises of Israel.

Going nowhere

The lives of monks puzzle the outsider not just because you do not do anything in particular, but also because your lives go nowhere. Like all members of religious orders, your lives do not have shape and meaning through climbing a ladder of promotion. We are just brethren and sisters, friars, monks and nuns. We can never aspire to be more. A successful soldier or academic rises through the ranks. His life is shown to have value because he is promoted to being a professor or general. But that is not so with us. The only ladder in the Rule of St Benedict is that of humility. I am sure that monks, like friars, sometimes nurse

secret desires for promotion, and dream of the glory of being cellarer or even abbot! I am sure that many a monk looks in the mirror and imagines what he might look like with a pectoral cross or even a mitre, and sketches a blessing when no one looking – he hopes! But we all know that the shape of our lives is really given not by promotion but by the journey to the Kingdom. The Rule is given, St. Benedict says, to hasten us to our heavenly home.

I am reminded of a very beloved Abbot who used to come and stay with our family every Christmas. He was admirable in every way, except a slight tendency to take being an Abbot rather too seriously, unlike anyone present today I am sure. He expected to be met at the railway station by the entire family, and for all six children to genuflect and kiss the abbatial ring, on platform four. This reverence was so ingrained in my family that a cousin of mine was reputed to often genuflect when she took her seat in the cinema. Every time our family Abbot came to stay, there would be the annual fight of the candle sticks. He strongly maintained that as an abbot he had a right to four silver candle sticks, but my father always insisted that in his house every priest had the same number of candlesticks!

For most people in our society, a life without promotion makes no sense, for to live is to be in competition for success, to get ahead or perish. And so our lives are a puzzle, a question mark. They apparently lead nowhere. One becomes a monk or a friar, and need be nothing more ever. I remember that when I was elected Master of the Order, a well known journalist wrote an article in the NCR, which concluded remarking that at the end of my term as Master, I would be only 55. “What will Radcliffe do then?”, he asked. When I read this I was deeply disturbed. I felt as if the meaning of my life was being taken from me, and forced into other categories. What would Radcliffe do then? The implication was that my life should make sense through another “promotion”. But why could I do except go on being brother? Our lives

have meaning, because of an absence of progression, which points to God as the end and goal of our lives.

Once again, I wish to claim that it is in the singing of the Office that this claim makes sense, by articulating that longer story of redemption. Earlier this year, I went into the Cathedral Church of Monreale in Sicily, beside the old Benedictine abbey. I had little time free but I had been told that whoever goes to Palermo and does not visit Monreale arrives a human and leaves a pig! And it was an astonishing experience. The whole interior is a dazzling jigsaw of mosaics, which tell the history of creation and redemption. To enter the Church is to find yourself inside the story, our story. This is humanity's true story, not the struggle to get to the top of the tree. This is a revelation of the structure of true time. The true story is not that of individual success, of promotion and competition; it is the story of humanity's journey to the Kingdom, celebrated every year in the liturgical cycle, from Advent to Pentecost, which climaxes in the green of ordinary time, our time.

This is true time, the time that encompasses all the little events and dramas of our lives. This is the time that gathers up all the small defeats and victories, and gives them sense. The monastic celebration of the liturgical year should be a disclosure of the true time, the only important story. The different times in the year – ordinary time, Advent, Christmas, Lent and Easter – should feel different, with different melodies, different colours, as different as the spring is from the summer, and summer from the autumn. They have to be distinctive enough to resist being dwarfed by the other rhythms, the financial year, the academic year, the years we count as we grow older. One of our brothers, Kim en Joong, the Korean Dominican painter, has made wonderful chasubles, which explode with the colours of the seasons.

Often the modern liturgy does not communicate this. When one goes to Vespers, it could be any time of the year. But in our community in

Oxford, where I lived for twenty years, we composed antiphons for every season of the year. I can still hear these when I travel. For me Advent means certain hymn tunes, antiphons for the Benedictus and the Magnificat. We know that Christmas is drawing near with the great O antiphons. Holy Week is the Lamentations of Jeremiah. We have to live the rhythm of the liturgical year as the deepest rhythm of our lives. The monastic liturgy is a reminder that where we are going is to the Kingdom. We do not know what will happen tomorrow or in the next century; we have no predictions to make, but our wisdom is to live for that ultimate end.

Perhaps I would add one final nuance. It is easy to say that the religious lives for the coming of the Kingdom, but in actual fact often we do not. The liturgical years sketches the royal road to freedom, but we do not always take it. According to St Thomas, formation, especially moral formation, is always formation in freedom. But the entry into freedom is slow and painful, and will include mistakes, wrong choices, and sin. God brings us out of Egypt into freedom of the desert, but we become afraid and enslave ourselves to golden bulls, or try to sneak back to Egypt again. This is the true drama of the daily life of the monk, not whether he gets promoted up the ladder of office, but the initiation into freedom, with frequent collapses back into puerility and enslavement. How can we make sense of our slow ascension into God's freedom, and our frequent descents back into slavery? Once again, it is perhaps in again music that we may find the key.

St Augustine wrote that the history of humanity is like a musical score which gives a place for all the discords and disharmonies of human failure, but which finally leads to a harmonic resolution, in which everything has its place. In his wonderful work, *De Musica*, he wrote that "Dissonance can be redeemed without being obliterated". The story of redemption is like a great symphony which embraces all our errors, our bum notes, and in which beauty finally triumphs. The victory is not that God wipes out our wrong notes, or pretends that

they never happened. He finds a place for them in the musical score that redeems them. This happens above all in the Eucharist. In the words of Catherine Pickstock, “the highest music in the fallen world, the redemptive music....is none other than the repeated sacrifice of Christ himself which is the music of the forever-repeated Eucharist” .

The Eucharist is the repetition of the climax in the drama of our liberation. Christ freely gives us his body, but the disciples reject him, deny him, run away from him, pretend that they do not know him. Here in the music of our relationship with God, we find the deepest disharmonies. But in the Eucharist they are taken up, embraced, and transfigured into beauty in a gesture of love and gift. In this Eucharistic music we are made whole and find harmony. This is a harmonic resolution that does not wipe out our rejection of love and freedom, and pretend that they never happened, but transforms them into steps on the journey. In our celebrations we dare to remember those weak apostles.

So the meaning of the monk’s life is that it goes to the Kingdom. Our story is the story of humanity on its way to the Kingdom. This we enact in the annual cycle of the liturgical year, from Creation to Kingdom. But the daily drama of the monk’s life is more complex, with our struggles and failures to become free. The annual symphony of the journey to the Kingdom needs to be punctuated with the daily music of the Eucharist, which recognises that we constantly refuse to walk to Jerusalem, to death and Resurrection, and choose unfreedom. Here we need to find ourselves every day in the music of the Eucharist, in which no disharmony is so crude as to be beyond God’s creative resolution.

The space inside

Finally, we come to what is most fundamental in monastic life, what is most beautiful and hardest to describe, and that is humility. It is what is least immediately visible to the people who come to visit your monasteries, and yet it is the basis of everything. It is, Cardinal Hume

says, “a very beautiful thing to see, but the attempt to become humble is painful indeed” It is humility that makes for God an empty space in which God may dwell and his glory be seen. It is ultimately, humility which makes our communities the throne of God.

It is hard for us today to find words to talk about humility. Our society almost seems to invite us to cultivate the opposite, an assertiveness, a brash self confidence. The successful person aggressively pushes himself forward. When we read in the seventh step of humility that we must learn to say with the prophet, “I am a worm and no man”, then we flinch. But is this because we are so proud? Or is it because we are so unsure of ourselves, so unconfident of our value? Perhaps we dare not proclaim that we are worms because we are haunted by the fear that we are worse than worthless.

How are we to build communities which are living signs of humility’s beauty? How can we show the deep attractiveness of humility in an aggressive world? You alone can answer that. Benedict was the master of humility, and I am not sure that it has always been the most obvious virtue of all Dominicans! But I would like to share a brief thought. When we think of humility, then it may be as an intensely personal and private thing: Me looking at myself and seeing how worthless I am, inspecting my own interiority, gazing at my own worm-like qualities. This is, to say the least, a depressing prospect. Perhaps Benedict invites us to do something far more liberating, which is to build a community in which we are liberated from rivalry and competition and the struggle for power. This is a new sort of community which is structured by mutual deference, mutual obedience. This is a community in which no one is at the centre, but there is the empty space, the void which is filled with glory of God.. This implies a profound challenge to the modern image of the self which is of the self as solitary, self-absorbed,

the centre of the world, the hub around which everything gravitates. At the heart of its identity is self-consciousness: "I think therefore I am".

The monastic life invites us to let go of the centre, and to give in to the gravitational pull of grace. It invites us to be decentred. Once again we find God disclosed in a void, an emptiness, and this time at the centre of the community, the hollow space which is kept for God. We have to make a home for the Word to come and dwell among us, a space for God to be. As long as we are competing for the centre, then there is no space for God. So then humility is not me despising myself, and thinking that I am awful. It is hollowing out the heart of the community of to make a space where the Word can pitch his tent.

Once again, I think that it is in the liturgy that we can find this beauty made manifest. God is enthroned on the praises of Israel. It is when people see monks singing the praise of God, then we glimpse the freedom and the beauty of humility. In the Middle Ages, it was believed that good harmonious music went with building a harmonious community . Music heals the soul and the community. We cannot sing together if each person is striving to sing more loudly, competing for the spotlight. We make music together. In a similar way, I am sure that singing together in harmony, learning to sing one's own note, to find one's place in the melody forms us as brethren, and shows to other people what it is like to live together without competition and rivalry.

What is the role of the Abbot in this? I hesitate to say, since in the Dominican Order we have only ever had one Abbot, a certain Matthew, and he was rather a disaster, so we have had no more Abbots since. But perhaps the Abbot should be the person who keeps open the space for Christ at the centre. To put it musically, he refuses to drown out the voices of the other monks, to grab the principal role, to be the Pavarotti of the Abbey. He will let the harmony rule. You can see how a community lives together when you hear it sing. And you can see

immediately how different are Benedictines and Dominicans in our way of singing!

The climax of humility is when one discovers that not only is one not the centre of the world, but that one is not even the centre of oneself. There is not only a void in the centre of the community where God dwells, but there is a void at the centre of my being, where God can pitch his tent. I am a creature, to whom God gives existence at every moment. In the mosaics in Monereale, we see God making Adam. God gives Adam his breath and sustains him in being. At the heart of my being I am not alone. God is there breathing me into existence at every moment, giving me existence. At my centre there is no solitary self, no Cartesian ego but a space which is filled with God.

Perhaps this is the ultimate vocation of the monk, to show the beauty of that hollowness, to be individually and communally, temples for God's glory to dwell in. You will not be surprised that I think that this is shown through the singing of the praises of God. And here I am really going beyond what I am competent to talk about, and will only have a go because it is fascinating. If you think I am talking nonsense, then you are probably right!

Every artistic creation echoes the first creation. In art we get our closest glimpse of what it means for God to have made the world from nothing. Its originality points back to that origin of all that is. Every poem, every painting, sculpture or song, gives us a hint of what it means for God to create. George Steiner wrote that "Deep inside every 'art-act' lies the dream of an absolute leap out of nothingness, of the invention of an enunciatory shape so new, so singular to its begetter, that it would, literally, leave the previous world behind."

In the Christian tradition this has been especially true for music. St Augustine said that it is in music, in which sound comes forth from silence, that we can see what it means for the universe to be grounded in nothing, to be contingent, and so for us to be creatures. "The

alternation of sound and silence in music is seen by Augustine as a manifestation of the alternation of the coming into being and the passing into non-being which must characterise a universe created out of nothing” . We hear in music, to quote Steiner again, “the ever-renewed vestige of the original, never wholly accessible moment of creation.....the inaccessible first fiat” This is the echo of the big bang, or as Tavener said, the pre-echo of the divine silence.

At the heart of the monastic life is humility. Not, I suspect, the grinding depressing humility of those who hate themselves. It is the humility of those who recognise that they are creatures, and that their existence is a gift. And so it is utterly right that at the centre of your life should be singing. For it is in this singing that we show forth God’s bringing of everything to be. You sing that Word of God, through which all is made. Here we can see a beauty which is more than just pleasing. It is the beauty which celebrates the burst of creation.

To conclude, I have argued in this conference that God’s glory always needs a space, an emptiness, if it is to show itself: the emptiness between the wings of the cherubim in the Temple; the empty tomb; a Jesus who vanishes in Emmaus. I have suggested that if you let such empty spaces be hollowed out in your lives, by being people who are not there for any particular reason, whose lives lead nowhere, and who face your creaturehood without fear, then your communities will be thrones for God’s glory.

What we hope to glimpse in monasteries is more than we can say. The glory of God escapes our words. The mystery breaks our little ideologies. Like St Thomas Aquinas, we see that all that we can say is just straw. Does that mean that we can just be silent? No, because monasteries are not just places of silence but of song. We have to find ways of singing, at the limits of language, at the edge of meaning. This

is what St Augustine calls the song of jubilation, and it is the song of this Jubilee year.

“You ask, what is singing in jubilation? It means to realise that words are not enough to express what we are singing in our hearts. At the harvest, in the vineyard, whenever men must labour hard, they begin with songs whose words express their joy. But when their joy brims over and words are not enough, they abandon even this coherence and give themselves up to the sheer sound of singing. What is this jubilation, this exultant song? It is the melody that means our hearts are bursting with feelings that words cannot express.. And to whom does this jubilation most belong? Surely to God who is unutterable?”

NOTES

1. In praise of Benedict p. 23 2. Aidan Nichols OP The Word has been abroad. Edinburgh 1998 p.1 3. To be a Pilgrim Slough 1984 p.39 4. George Steiner Real Presences, London 1989, p.145 5. De Musica VI. xiv 46 6. Catherine Pickstock, “Music:Soul, and city and cosmos after Augustine” in Radical Orthodoxy, ed John Millbank, et al., London 1999, p.276, footnote 131 7. ibid, p 265 8. To be a Pilgrim Slough 1984 p67 9. cf Pickstock, op cit. p. 262 10. op cit. p 202 11. Pickstock op cit p. 247 12. Steiner, op cit, pp 210, 202 13. On Ps 32, Sermon 1.8

FROM THE OBLATEMASTER'S DESK

I am most grateful to Sister Ann Marie Farasyne Diocesan hermit of Aberdeen SDiocese for so timeously putting this article in my hands "Thank you!"

And....Simply to repeat in this 75th year of re-foundation Of Pluscarden Abbey " *What we hope to glimpse in monasteries is more than we can say. The glory of God escapes our words. The mystery breaks our little ideologies. Like St Thomas Aquinas, we see that all that we can say is just straw. Does that mean that we can just be silent? No,*

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BOOKS AND MEDIA:

Fr Timothy Radcliffe O.P. who gave me permission to quote his article on Benedictine monks in full for our 75th anniversary year. All his books and sermons are memorable and edifying.

- See UK Oblate Team website for Fr. Martin's talks at Douai "transcribed".

Pluscarden Benedictines Br. Cyprian Bampton: For inclusion on the mailing list write Br. Cyprian Bampton

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

or a form through the website www.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.

DIOCESAN PILGRIMAGE HERE 25TH JUNE MASS 3.00 PM

The Summer 75th Anniversary Oblate Retreat--
NOTE THE DATES!!!--Anything else incorrect NB
**2023 SUMMER FRIDAY 11TH TO MONDAY
14TH AUGUST BISHOP RICHARD MOTH**

5TH INTERNATIONAL OBLATES CONGRESS.THEME 'MOVING FORWARD: LIVING THE WISDOM OF THE RULE'SATURDAY SEPTEMBER 9 – FRIDAY SEPTEMBER 15 2023 www.collegiosantanselmo.com --See Lenten Oblate Letter for more details. Neil Zoladkiewicz,Oblate of Ealing Abbey UK National Coordinator for Rome Congress 2023.

There will be one Grand Retreat(as of yore) next Summer 2024 for the Golden Jubilee of Pluscarden becoming an ABBEY--dates probably the four days following the Pilgrimage 2024--30th June: namely 1st - 4th July--multiple speakers and meals provided in common in marquee(as of yore)

PRAYER INTENTIONS For newly Ordained Father Joseph Carron and for his mother Jacqueline and family. For Fr. Giles on his Golden Jubilee of Profession! This Summer! For Br. Simon newly Ordained Deacon. For Abbot Anselm's intentions especially thanksgiving for the New Ladies' guesthouse going ahead. Bishop Hugh's & Bishop Richard

Moth's intentions. Br. Simon, ordained Deacon. --Vocations here at Pluscarden and to St Mary's and St. Scholastica's, Petersham U.S.A and Kristo Buase Priory. For the repose of the soul of Dawn Cole Br. Thomas's mother and for his safe return. Fr. Benedict's health.

Health of Oblates: *Peter Aitken* , George Brand's wife Yvonne, Justyna Tymecka and Marvia McCulloch, Joe Bagley, Mrs Sheila Barr, Robert Cantafio and his mother Margharita, Ursula Humphrey, Jane Coll's granddaughter Natasha Gunn. Fr. Francis Wilson, Connie Reid, Mary Frances McGregor. Please pray for the health of, Rev. Christopher Mayo, Rev. Angus Macleod. For Siobhan Gilmour's husband, Margaret Johnston's mother, for Gitte Mackay, Leonora Duson, Robert Johnstone & his father, for Joe Barrett senior, Maureen Woodhead & her Sister Doreen, Bob Barr, Brian Milne, Fiona Sellar, Nick MacCrae,(97!) Martin MacCrae, Jacqui Heath-Anderson and daughter Sally, Poppy Sinclair, Ian, Fred's Twin, Pamela Nelson Shaw's brother, Pam Woodhead(nursing home),Alison Donald(nursing home),Carolyn Campbell, Carolyn, Marshall & Malcolm Boardman, and also for Eileen Kerr, Elizabeth MacKay, Alistair Macdonald, Fr. Martin's older sister Annie who is dying **and for ALL the housebound and the sick.**

Our three sponsored seminarians *are all doing well. Josaphat will be ordained Deacon this year God willing. They are extremely grateful for the financial support we give them and pray for us. 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 or Contact me-- details at the head of every letter.

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

St. Peter's Chapter, Aberdeen: 7.00-8.00 pm Mondays as below, Cathedral Presbytery, Huntly Street, Aberdeen contact Chairman Mr. Robert Ian Johnston, 31, Tay Road, Mastrick, ABERDEEN AB16 5LA or secretary Mr. George Brand geobra@msn.com:- prayer & discussion & centred around Compline from the Abbey---contact chairman & secretary. See Addenda to Lenten letter for programme.

St Andrew's Chapter. Moray. Live-streamed Oblates at None –next, resumed, 2.30pm, 20th June 2023 followed by tea in the Visitor Centre.

Past Oblate None at <http://pluscardenabbey.org/live> Warm regards and prayers

Eileen Fitzpatrick Oblate OSB Co-ordinator St Andrew's Chapter

Benedictine Prayer Circle- Oblates may like to join John McKinlay's Benedictine Prayer Circle, see Links on the UKOT website— John McKinlay jgim07@yahoo.co.uk

Our Holy Father St Benedict Pray for us, St John the Baptist and St Andrew, pray for us! Prayers for Peace and Blessings

Fr. Martin PAX