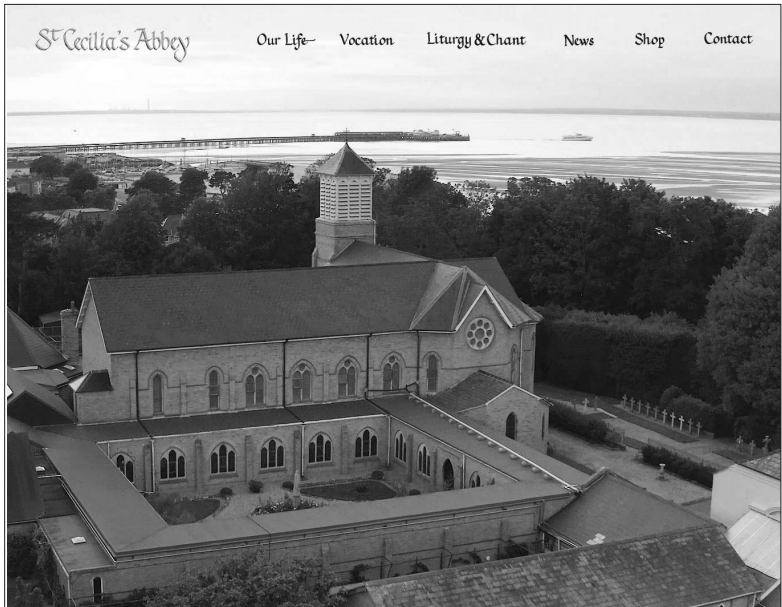


St Cecilia's Abbey, Ryde

Chronicle



Advent/Christmas 2021

No. 49

St Cecilia's Abbey, RYDE,
Isle of Wight, PO33 1LH
Registered Charity 1088086

Abbey website: www.stceciliasabbey.org.uk

Calligraphy website: abbeyscribes.org.uk



01983 562602

email: abbey@stceciliasabbey.org.uk

Retreats: garth@stceciliasabbey.org.uk

Altar Breads : hosts@stceciliasabbey.org.uk

Printery: printery@stceciliasabbey.org.uk

Sung Mass & the full Divine Office every day.

Usual times of principal celebrations:

MASS : 10.00 a.m. Sundays & Solemnities

9.30 a.m. Weekdays

VESPERS: 5.00 p.m.

COMPLINE: 8.00 p.m.

CHRISTMAS 2021

Vigils: Christmas Eve 10.00 p.m. (please check)

Midnight Mass: Just after midnight.

Day Mass: 10.00 a.m.

HOLY WEEK 2022

14th April, Maundy Thursday: Missa Vespertina: 5.00 p.m.

15th April, Good Friday: Actio Liturgica: 3.00 p.m.

16th April, Holy Saturday: Paschal Vigil: 10.45 p.m. (please check)

17th April, Easter Sunday Mass 10.00 a.m.

2022 Ascension Day: Thursday 26th May, Mass 10.00 a.m.

Corpus Christi: Thursday 16th June, Mass 10.00 a.m.

Feast of the Sacred Heart: Friday 24th June, Mass 10.00 a.m.

Cover: The cloister and abbey church, in a still from the homepage sequence on our new website.

Picture p.9: detail of an illumination in a Gospel Book made at the Abbey and used on some major feast days.

From Mother Abbess

The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you, therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God. (Lk 1:35)



There is a belief among the local Christians in Ephesus that Our Lady's material mantle will one day be found in the ruins of a monastery close to her last home. However this may be, the mantle's symbolism makes us reflect on the realities of shade, covering and protection in Our Lady's life. Let's begin with the Annunciation.

The overshadowing of Mary at the Annunciation promises a great fruitfulness, the shadow of the Holy Spirit being the source of a qualitatively new life. We associate shade also with protection and hiddenness. In the deep quiet of the Annunciation scene, there are no witnesses to the colloquy; Mary is alone; the atmosphere is one of mystery. Says Pope Benedict in *Jesus of Nazareth*: 'The sacred cloud – the Shekinah – is the visible sign of God's presence. It conceals the fact that God is dwelling in his house, yet at the same time points to it. ... Again, it is the sign of God's presence, of God's self-revelation in hiddenness ... Mary appears as God's living tent, in which he chooses to dwell among men in a new way.' Mary is often compared to the ark of the covenant sheltered by the sacred cloud. In a slight change of perspective, we might compare her also to the cloud itself. If Jesus is symbolised by the pillar of fire, Mary may be likened to the cloud into which he descends, in order to be cast upon the earth and ignite it. If in Jesus we see the Father visibly, in Mary we stand in awe of the invisibility of God, who veils himself in shadow.

We note the protection that God's shadow or invisible presence gives to Mary. There is a promise of unfailing fidelity in the words: 'The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David and of his kingdom there shall be no end.' This promise extends to Mary also, since she is the one chosen to bear the Father's Son. God's purpose is swift and sure in execution; nothing can happen to her or her Child which is not in the divine plan. Mary is an integral part of this plan, 'the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things' (Eph 3:9). Inseparable from the mystery of her Son, she has been in the shadow of the Most High from all eternity. During her lifetime, her own person will always remain imprinted with the eternal mystery of God. She is a creature like us, but no human being has ever been closer to the divine

than she. Our human description of Mary will always fall short of the mystery.

Now God's plan, and her rôle within it, is about to be realised in time by the birth from her of Jesus. Already, at the Annunciation, Mary is required to step out from the shadow by her *fiat*. But the sheltering wings are no less present and operative. Sensing them, she must have had the conviction that a vast, indeed infinitely great, power is enfolding her, above and below. Here is the reason for Mary's effortless trust and peace. As the narrative of Jesus' childhood unfolds, we gain the impression of the guiding hand of Providence at every turn. The choice of the just Joseph, for example, guarantees her safety and privacy. Himself a hidden man, a silent man, he will shield her from a whole gamut of extrinsic ills, from social embarrassment to the physical trials of long journeys and inhospitable inns and to the real threat of persecution at the hands of Herod the king. Joseph, obedient to dreams, to shadows, is the purveyor of a human and very necessary shade, in which the child and his Mother can be nurtured.

Her own reticence in the Gospel pages signals that she has absorbed some of the characteristics of shade. She speaks seldom and yet with a rare force: 'Do whatever he tells you.' She is content with anonymity, following Jesus along the road, yet appearing courageously at key moments of his life. She accepts that she must remain 'in the shade' in the other sense of the term. She must be a watcher of his suffering, yet, shaded herself, she provides shade for others. There is the protection she affords the

unborn child in her womb, where he is 'knit together ... in secret, intricately wrought in the depths' of her being (cf Ps 138/9). We see her hastening over the hills to her cousin Elizabeth, bearing her secret with a joy that has to break out in her Magnificat; a secret that is shared with John the Baptist, also shaded in his mother's womb. Then there is the protective care she gives to the newborn Jesus in the material shadow of Christmas night. The actions of the mother resemble those of the Holy Spirit. She was to the child Jesus, without doubt, 'sweet rest', provider of coolness in heat, consolation in tears: *In æstu temperies, in fletu solatium* (Sequence for Pentecost). She washes,



binds up, warms, takes care of all his human needs. A painting by Caravaggio of the Flight to Egypt shows the baby asleep in his sleeping Mother's arms, under the tip of an angel's wing. Yet another painting shows the sleeping Jesus sprawling on his back (as babies do) on a rock, completely vulnerable and unconscious of potential

dangers. He is under a protection both divine and human, the Father's and Mary's and Joseph's. Mary is not exempt, however, from the anxieties of motherhood and this will be foretold by Simeon and symbolised by the sword that pierces the soul. We may see this as a sign that she is ready to protect him to the point of death, that she holds her own life less dear than his. When protective measures appear to break down at the three day loss of the twelve-year-old Jesus, the mother suffers and breaks her habitual silence to express her anxiety. On this occasion we learn that she has continued the practice begun at the birth of Jesus, of pondering things in her heart. She stores away words and events carefully in the shade of her memory. Here, we can be sure, is a fertile place for a ripening understanding.

This understanding will be greatly needed when she stands beneath the arms of the Cross. Its shadow may not have been unfamiliar to her, since the obscurity of her life has prepared her for this hour. She knows its contours; she has a capacity born of patience and silence, to share in her Son's Passion. The com-passion with Christ of the hidden Mother; Jesus and Mary together once more as fire and cloud. At the tree of the Cross, it has been remarked that both guard the way to the Tree of Life, for it is through Christ and Our Lady that we return to Paradise, the heavenly Promised Land.

At Calvary we begin to understand the fruitful nature of Mary's hiddenness. While Jesus entrusts his Mother to John, who takes her into his home – *Ecce Mater Tua* – she takes him also under her wings. It is instructive how often 'house', the place of protection and shade, occurs in the Marian narrative. We think of her, traditionally as being at home in the Annunciation scene. Joseph 'takes her into his home', following his dream about her destiny. She enters the 'house of Zechariah', from whose shelter she pronounces her hymn of praise. She goes up to the house of God, the Temple, to present Jesus as an infant and to discover him among the teachers. At Pentecost, the house where she and the disciples are assembled is filled with the Holy Spirit. She herself is revealed as a 'house', the *domus divinitatis*, 'house of the divinity', of the Collect of December 20th. In a similar figure, the liturgy sees her as a city. Symbolised by Jerusalem, the daughter of Zion, she remains unshakeable, because God dwells within her (Ps 45/6). She is the mother of nations by a universal maternity (Ps 86/7). While the city is visible, a place of protection and defence against the invader and hung with battlements, it is also a place where pilgrims rest, where those who stream to her are gathered within her walls.

Thus we begin to think of her as Mother of the Church, the house and city of God, mediatrix of the graces won for us by her Son; yet she has this singular position as a condition of the hiddenness of her life in God. She has learnt the secret of the empty heart, over which the Holy Spirit hovers ceaselessly, and which is a humble conduit for his gifts to man. Her own being is a gift to us, also, for our imitation. In looking at her, we understand, firstly, how in the quiet stretches of our existence, we may rest in God, able to live in his presence without agitation and renewing our strength for the battle of life. Secondly, in trials and times of temptation, she teaches us how to stay

our hearts in peace on the God of peace; how not to flail and fight in a way that only tires and discourages us. She instructs us, rather, in the way of listening and of trust in the God who saves, showing us how to wait on his help with quiet hope. Mary waited by the Cross, as immobile in her fashion as her Son on the wood. Her pierced heart, her refusal to desert, her self-offering in union with and on behalf of Christ are all seen and received by the Father. Thirdly, in times of rejoicing, we see in Mary the purity of a joy that springs from the knowledge of the love and mercy of God. In Mary's joy there is always the accent of thanksgiving and the primary desire to glorify her Creator and Redeemer. 'My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour.' Not a superficial jollity, then, that can collapse at the first wind of discontent, but a pure happiness centred on God, given by him and returned to him.

In following Mary, in dwelling in her shadow, under the cover of her mantle, and taking her into our house, we shall begin to live by her virtues, to be close to the source of peace and fruitfulness. Mary does for us, as well as for Jesus, what she knows the Holy Spirit does. Thus, she provides rest for the weary, consolation for the troubled and joy for the believer. Loving us as a mother, she brushes us in passing, elusive as a fragrance, but leaving behind her an impression of an incomparable tenderness. This can only be because of her proximity to the Holy Spirit with his outstretched wings.

We learn from her how to be 'hidden persons of the heart' (cf 1 Pet 3:4), as a condition for receiving God's self-revelation. We learn silence and the words full of weight, full of God, which proceed from silence. We become more present to others by a kindly, universal sympathy and welcome. Thus we would have a share in drawing others into the Church of which Mary is Mother, into the tent of meeting with Jesus Christ, overshadowed by the wings of the Most High.

Wishing you the peace and protection of the Christ Child this Christmas and in the New Year,

Sr Ninian

A Surprising Succulent

Some years ago, we were given a large succulent which I had never seen before. It was not particularly attractive, but I added it to our collection of potted plants in the conservatory and duly watered it from time to time. It was a bit ungainly and top heavy, and I had difficulty in keeping it upright.

For years it did nothing but take up room, then one day, in late summer, I noticed

a very large, limp, closed flower at the end of a long, fat stem. It was obviously finished. 'Blow!' I thought, 'I've waited all these years and now that it has finally bloomed, I've missed it, and it might never bloom again.' Resolving to take more notice of it, I



moved it to a sunnier position.

The following year, 2020, I saw two small growths sprouting from the leaves, and watered them. They slowly grew bigger and bigger, and then one morning I saw the same large, limp, closed flower. I'd missed it again. Then I remembered what we had been told: it only blooms at night. The only way I was going to see this flower was by carting it up the four flights of stairs to my cell. There

was still the second flower to come. A week or ten days went by, then finally – I nearly missed it again! – there it was, after Compline, in all its glory: the most exquisitely beautiful white flower I'd ever seen, as big as two cupped hands, with a lovely, delicate fragrance.

Wanting to share the vision, I waylaid Sr Lætitia – recently returned from Canada. Night silence prohibited speech, and I couldn't invite her into the cell, so I halted her as she happened to pass by, and carried the exhibit to the door. She was a little taken aback, but it made a good story for recreation. The next morning, the flower was soon closed and limp. Not only does it only bloom at night, but each flower only blooms for *one* night. Tantalising!

This year there were fifteen or so flowers sprouting, but earlier in the summer when the days are much longer. I managed to miss the first four, which bloomed together, but by now I was getting to know this creature and could detect fairly accurately which night it would bloom. Not wishing the community to be deprived of the spectacle, I brought the plant in to the little oratory outside choir at about 4pm, and left it in a dark corner.

After Compline, three flowers were obligingly open, to the delight of the brethren, who, from their whispered 'oohs' and 'ahs' were not disappointed in their expectation.

Perhaps in South Africa, where Sr Anne tells us it grows wild, this flower is not unusual enough to inspire awe, but to me it seemed to belong to another world. It was a striking image of our Blessed Lady, pure warm white, perfect in all its intricate details, reflecting the divine, pointing to heaven, to the Creator, to the Author of all beauty.

Sr CW

The Hymns of Christmas: Christe Redemptor Omnium

The Vespers hymn of Christmas, *Christe redemptor omnium*, is thought to date from the sixth century. ‘O Christ, Redeemer of all...’ It is a prayer which is fuelled by meditation on why Christ is able to be our redeemer, and why Christmas tells us about it. First we are reminded that Christ is the Eternal Son. *Christe redemptor omnium, / Ex Patre, Patris Unice, / Solus ante principium / Natus ineffabiliter*. ‘O Christ, Redeemer of all, [who are] from the Father, the Only [Begotten] of the Father, Unique before the beginning, born in a manner which surpasses speech.’ *Ante principium*, ‘Before the beginning’: not St John’s *In principio*, ‘In the beginning’, in the eternal Beginning or Principle of the Godhead, but (presumably) before the beginning of creation and time. Our author may have wanted to exclude the Arian claim concerning the Son that ‘There was when he was not’, for Arianism was still alive and well in places at this time. No, the Son is co-eternal with His Father. The *ante principium* is perhaps a sharp-edged restatement of the Father’s declaration in Psalm 109: *ante luciferum genui te*, ‘before the daystar I begot you’. With or without a hint of polemic, however, it is in keeping with this hymn’s approach that it should set the eternal generation in contradistinction to our viewpoint from within time, as we will see further.

Tu lumen, tu splendor Patris, / Tu spes perennis omnium, / Intende quas fundunt preces / Tui per orbem famuli. ‘You [are] the light, the splendour, of the Father; You [are] the everlasting hope of all: attend to the prayers which your servants throughout the world pour out.’ *Tu*, ‘You’, twice relates the Son to the Father. Splendor keeps Psalm 109 within earshot – *in splendoribus sanctorum*, ‘in the splendours of the holies...’ (however we interpret those ‘holy ones’), as well as evoking Hebrews: Christ is the *splendor gloriae*, the ‘splendour of [the Father’s] glory’, in the Latin translation (‘reflects the glory of God’, has the RSV). ‘Light’ suggests the Creed’s affirmation that He is ‘Light from Light’. As verse one noted, this ‘from’, this divine nativity, is beyond our grasp or our speech. Yet it is not meaningless for us. The third *Tu*, ‘You’, is ours: Christ is our, everyone’s, lasting hope. We know that He is ready to hear our prayers.

Why? Verse three has the key. *Salutis Auctor, recole / Quod nostri quondam corporis, / Ex illibata Virgine / Nascendo, formam sumpseris*. ‘Remember, Author of salvation, that once You took the form of our body by being born of the spotless Virgin.’ Usually when we say we are reminding God of something, we are really reminding ourselves. Christ is the ‘author’, the source, of our salvation because He chose to assume our nature and redeem it from within. The ‘form of our body’ is no mere appearance. It is Paul’s word in Philippians 2: one who was ‘in the form of God’ took on the ‘form of a slave’, the ‘likeness of man’. It denotes the very reality of these things, the very ‘shape’ of what He is precisely because He is these. Our hymn reminds us – it cannot be remembered too often – that God has chosen physical kinship with us, and so in Jesus became the ‘pioneer of salvation’ (*auctor salutis* in the Latin translation) who ‘is



not ashamed to call [us] brethren' (Hebrews 2).

Christmas is the feast of that divine choice. *Hic praesens testatur dies, / Currens per anni circulum, / Quod solus a sede Patris / Mundi salus adveneris.* 'This present day bears witness, as it comes round in the year's cycle, that alone [or 'the only One'] You came from the Father's throne [or 'dwelling'] as the salvation of the world.' It matters that God's entry into time is celebrated in time, by means of time. A human birth on a specific day in history is brought home to us on that day every year; that is one of the ways that we who live in time can, in a sense, meet past events. Simple recollection is not enough for the kind of contact we need with Christ, but it is a beginning, an opportunity and a context for renewed meeting with the one who has come – the verb is the one which yields 'Advent' – as the 'world's salvation'. *Mundus*, 'world', can refer to the whole universe. The next verse hints at the cosmic significance of the Incarnation.

Hunc caelum, terra, hunc mare, / Hunc omne quod in eis est, / Auctorem adventus tui / Laudat exsultans cantico. 'This [or 'Him'] heaven, earth, sea, and all that is in them, praises [as] the author of Your advent, rejoicing with song.' What or who is 'this'? Is it the 'this day' of the previous verse? Possibly; but it seems odd to describe Christmas day as the 'author' of Christ's coming. Instead, then, we could interpret 'this/Him' as referring to the 'Father', also mentioned in the previous verse: the One who sent His Son. Such a turning of the gaze directly to the Source of the saving mission is a little unusual in the Christmas liturgy. Or is it? One Psalm which features repeatedly is Psalm 97: *Notum fecit Dominus salutare suum*, 'The Lord has made known his salvation' (verse 2), we sing often in Christmastide. *Viderunt omnes termini terrae salutare Dei nostri*, 'All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God' (verse 3) is the Communion antiphon of the Day Mass. Easy here to take 'salvation' as a gloss on 'Jesus', the name which indicates that its bearer 'will save His people from their sins'. The Father has made His Jesus known; the whole earth has seen His Jesus. Psalm 97 invites the earth and sea and all that is in them to rejoice at the Lord's coming. And it begins with the exhortation to 'sing to the Lord a new song, for He has done marvellous things'.

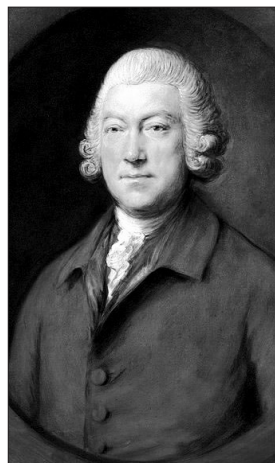
In our hymn's last verse, we discover that this new song is exactly what the hymn wants to be, and it tells us what the most marvellous works of God are: *Nos quoque qui sancto tuo / Redempti sanguine sumus, / Ob diem natalis tui / Hymnum novum concinimus.* 'We, too, who have been redeemed by Your holy blood, sing a new hymn because of the day of Your birth.' Fifteen centuries after this hymn's composition, many more after the Psalmist sang, the newness of the Incarnation endures for ever, as does the urgent invitation to admit its power into our lives.

Sr MTB

The History of Appley House: Part 6: The Wills of Dr and Mrs Walker

As it was not the time of high water, we drove along the shore, through Lower Ryde, to a house of Dr Walker, called Appley, which is charmingly placed on the high and woody margin of the sea bank, and from thence ascended, through two or three beautiful meadows, to the common road that leads from Ryde to St Helen's.¹ 'The house of Dr Walker is not large, though it is called Great Appley, but elegant; and the view of Spithead road and the town of Portsmouth appear from hence to the greatest advantage.'²

When Dr Walker died at Appley House on 4th May 1805, it seems reasonable to suppose that his nephew Thomas Richard Walker and Mrs Walker's cousin Captain Richards Hutt should have hurried to support the grieving widow. Finding the will which he had drawn up in 1800, they would have read through its innocuous clauses but then frowned in perplexity. Since Appley really belonged to his wife, Dr Walker left her only the income from his own property. After her death there were to be bequests of £300 each to three nieces, and £40 to the poor of his parishes of Shorwell and Kingsworthy, and £20 to the poor of his parish at Mottistone. (There is no indication as to why this parish's poor were to receive less. Perhaps it was just a smaller place.) He appointed as executors his brother Thomas Walker and his nephew (son of another brother) Thomas Richard, the latter being the residuary legatee. Thomas Walker had become solicitor to the University of



*Gainsborough's portrait
of
Thomas Walker*

Oxford at the age of 26 and then had a long career of service to the University, town and county, holding at the same time and apparently without conflict the posts of Auditor to the Duke of Marlborough, man of business to the Earl of Abingdon, Receiver General of taxes for the County of Oxfordshire and Town Clerk of Oxford, as well as servicing several other public bodies in positions of clerk, treasurer or administrator; he was also one of the founders of the University & City Bank. He had died in 1804 so the nephew (heir to his interest in the bank) was Dr Walker's sole executor. As we do not have a picture of Dr Walker, Gainsborough's portrait of his brother Thomas is the nearest suggestion of what he may have looked like. If Dr Walker in 1800 had consulted Thomas, or Thomas Richard, or indeed even Mrs Walker (who had written her will in 1782), they could have told him how to draw

1 Henry Penruddocke Wyndham, *A Picture of the Isle of Wight, Delineated Upon the Spot, in the Year 1793*, p.44.

2 John Albin, *A New, Correct, and Much-improved History of the Isle of Wight* (1795), p.503.

up a will, but apparently he did not. The will is written out clearly, signed and dated, but has no witnesses. Fortunately two respectable men were found: Richard Clarke, gentleman, and Edward Orrill Cowlam, surgeon, both of Newport; and swore 'upon the Holy Evangelists' that they were well acquainted 'with the manner and character of his Hand Writing and subscribing his Name' and were confident that the will and signature were his. As a result, the will was proved.

The loss of her husband must have prompted Mrs Walker to make a codicil to her will, dated 30th May 1805. This supplemented an earlier codicil of 8th February 1804. The codicils will be described before the will itself as they give a window onto Mrs Walker's life at Appley. The first codicil left to 'my servant Martha Witherirk'³ for the rest of her life an annuity of 30 pounds and 30 shillings, and to 'my servant Joseph Witherirk' (son of Martha) an annuity of 12 pounds and 12 shillings, provided that they were living with her at the time of her decease. The second codicil made further gifts to servants on the same condition: to Martha Wilkins ('my cook'), 20 guineas; William Day (gardener), 10 guineas; William Todderage⁴ (coachman) and Elizabeth Arnold (housemaid) a year's wages; 'and to the boy John Wheeler, 5 guineas': was he the garden-boy? The next set of bequests seems to be to friends or at any rate people in whom Mrs Walker was taking a kindly interest: to Mrs Elizabeth Gother, widow of Rev Andrew Gother, curate of Shorwell (assistant, therefore, to Dr Walker), £200; and to Robert Yelf, master of the Yelf Hotel, 20 guineas. Yelf was the executor of Margaret Collier to whom Mrs Walker's mother had shown kindness, and after her death he took over her cottage. In 1804 he bought the new hotel on Union Street⁵ built by a brewer called Cooper, and renamed and much expanded it. Perhaps Mrs Walker wanted to encourage this entrepreneur. He had witnessed her will proper in 1782 when he was only 21, so their friendship was of long standing. Mary Grimes, 'sister of Mr Thomas Grimes of Yafford', was left 20 guineas. Yafford House was in the parish of Shorwell and so Mary was perhaps a friend or goddaughter. The codicil concluded: 'My wearing apparel I give in the following manner: to Martha Witherirk if living with me at the time of my decease I give two of the best of every sort of my wearing apparel, caps, cloaks, gowns etc, to be chosen by herself, the remainder to be divided in two equal parts, and for her to make them one for herself, the other to be given to Martha Wilkins my cook if she be living with me at the time of my decease.'

Sr EL (to be continued)

3 The copper-plate handwriting looks like 'Witherirk' but it could be 'Wetherick'; there were people of the latter name on the Island.

4 This name too seems doubtful. Should it be Dodderidge?

5 Named after the union of the parliaments of England and Ireland, Union Street had been laid out in the empty fields between Upper and Lower Ryde only a few years previously.

What is Christmas like at the Abbey? Part 6: Christmas Morning

Getting up a few minutes earlier than everyone else, putting on one's best clothes (i.e. feast-day habit and veil, not patched and darned), tiptoeing downstairs, hurrying past the Christmas tree and going to light the gas under the kettles: the Sister who for many years made breakfast on Christmas Day says that she always felt a bond with all the women of the nation. The Angelus bell goes on for an extra five minutes: this is the signal for Lauds, and in spite of everyone having had only about four hours of sleep the singing is full of joy. The antiphons switch between the Gospel story: *Shepherds, what have you seen? We have seen the babe and a choir of angels praising the Lord;* and the theology of it: *A maiden has brought forth the King whose name is eternal, she has the joys of motherhood with the honour of virginity.* The atmosphere is one of wonder: *The Word was made flesh and dwelt amongst us*, and of praise: *Glory to God in the highest.* A festive breakfast follows, then Prime and Terce, and then most people are very busy indeed, as the sacristans prepare for Mass, the cooks are performing miracles in the kitchen, some dedicated souls are doing their singing practice, and everyone needs to fit in some silent prayer-time. Soon it is time for Mass. Last night all was mystery and awe: now it is a time of joyful proclamation: *Puer natus est nobis: A Son is born for us.*

Yesterday was still Advent, purple vestments and sober fare: now it is Christmas, with celebration on every level. Because the decorations went up only over the previous day or two, everything is fresh and exciting. There seems to be a crib round every corner and in some surprising locations. A few years ago someone thought that the wooden doors of the cupboard under the stairs looked like a stable, and made the connection stable-Bethlehem, and so the Holy Family sit in the cupboard with the mops and brushes round them. At this stage of the day some Sisters have a moment to start opening the mail they have been saving during Advent. From the novitiate comes the sound of laughter as the novices open the stockings their novice-mistress has prepared for them. Very soon it is time for Sext. The antiphons of the Divine Office punctuating the day keep bringing us back to meditate on the meaning of what we are celebrating: *Come, let us adore the new-born Christ, lying in the manger, whom the Virgin Mother bore.*

Now we go to the refectory for Christmas dinner, a magnificent feast, including, of course, turkey and stuffing and Christmas pudding. Instead of refectory reading, we listen to music: carols, or classical favourites. From the washing up we go to sing a carol at the crib outside the refectory. Then it is time for None where we sing: *The grace of our Saviour has appeared, and we have seen his glory.*

Sr EL (to be continued)

A Litany of Humility

This autumn, Dom Hugh Somerville Knapman OSB of Douai Abbey ended one of his retreat conferences to us with this list of 'graces for which to pray'.



Dom Hugh's parish church of St Elizabeth in Scarisbrick.

The capacity to recognise and accept truth when encountered.

The capacity to recognise truth about myself.

Detachment from self-opinion.

The willingness to accept failure.

The willingness to accept success, but not to dote on it.

The willingness to share the credit; the willingness to do without credit.

The willingness to be guided, to be led, to take orders.

A sense of due proportion.

A realistic perspective on self and others.

The capacity not to think of self first.

The willingness to accept that the fallen world is unjust. The readiness to accept that I might have to do something about it. The readiness to accept that perhaps I can do nothing.

The courage to propose and lead a project. The readiness to accept with tranquillity its rejection.

The readiness to accept that the problem might be me.

The readiness to accept what one finds and what one is given.

The readiness to put God's opinion about me above everyone else's.

The readiness to accept that one might not be first in others' thoughts.

The readiness to accept that Christ died for me. The readiness to accept that Christ died for my neighbour.

The willingness to repent.

The capacity to know one's limits, and willingness not to take refuge in them.

The willingness not to justify myself.

The willingness to admit I can't do something alone. The willingness to accept help.

The courage to risk mistakes in trying to do the good.

The courage to accept I can be wrong, and to admit it.

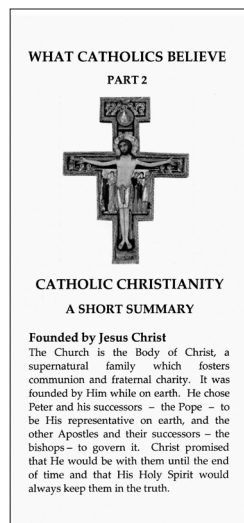
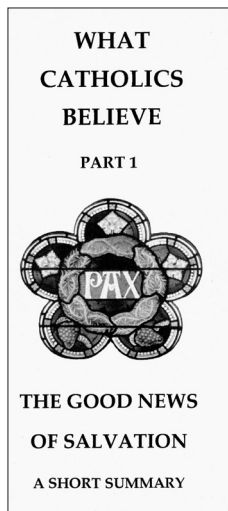
The capacity to accept that I should not be the centre of my world.

The readiness to accept being forgotten.

The willingness to carry on.

The capacity to accept when to stop and when to carry on.
 The readiness to give someone else's idea a go.
 The willingness to rejoice in another's success.
 The capacity for tranquillity when my success is ignored.
 The conviction that only God's plan for me (and my neighbour) is what matters.
 The capacity to fix one's attention on the duties for today.
 The capacity to accept that whatever mistakes I make, whatever burdens I carry,
 however tired I feel, God still loves me.
 The willingness and desire to be ready for death.
 The conviction that God is truly enough for me.

Our printery has produced
 two leaflets providing very
 short and simple explanations
 of the Catholic faith. They
 are available electronically at
 no charge, and are intended
 to support evangelization
 efforts, formal or informal.
 You are welcome to print,
 reproduce and distribute
 them as much as you like!



Just email
printery@stceciliassabbey.org.uk to ask for a free PDF.



For a second year, the passage of time has been marked by the ebb and flow of Covid restrictions. For many of us living within the enclosure, this has often been something of a background feature; we are conscious of the privilege of living a life designed for a kind of permanent 'lockdown'. Still, the winter lockdown did make itself felt, with the closure of the shop, the Garth and the parlours. Their stage-by-stage reopening has restored a sort of normality to relations with the exterior. We remain aware that many may still find returning to the public celebration of the Sacraments difficult. Sales in our Altar Bread Department are rising slowly, and are now a little over half of what they were before the pandemic, one indication of the real but slow return to church of the faithful in the world. Most importantly, however, the rhythm of the liturgical year and the monastic day continues unabated as we pray for the needs of the Church and the world.

On the feast of the Epiphany, the novitiate gave us their traditional performance of the play produced for the Novice Mistress's feast in November. It was the tale of a novice mistress's woes: a framing narrative for Mark Twain's hilarious translations of German cautionary tales, acted out with verve.

During Lent, we had several post-prandial talks from members of the community at midday recreations. Mother Prioress gave us another instalment of the History of Appley House, this time including a gripping account of the Indian Mutiny; Sr Marie-Germain spoke about her remarkable great aunts, Daughters of Charity in Turkey; Sr M. Antonia depicted a range of 'Deaths, Real and Imagined', from Anne of Green Gables to the inspiring Edith Cavell; Sr M. Thomas gave an introduction to the life and work of St Gregory the Great under the title '590 and All That: St Gregory's First Year as Pope'. We also had a new and highly enjoyable initiative of less formal mini talks at recreations, with subjects ranging from English Martyrs to the history of crochet.

Fr Dominic Allain once again came to be our celebrant during Holy Week, and we enjoyed his presence and preaching as always. We were grateful that, unlike in 2020, the faithful were able to be present in the outside church. Fr Dominic is pastoral director for Grief to Grace UK, which helps abuse victims - please join us in praying for this essential work.

At the end of May, our oblate Kitty Turley gave us three excellent talks on the theme of the heavenly Jerusalem in medieval culture. She linked passages from the Rule of St Benedict to various ways in which the memory of Jerusalem was cultivated: the remarkable fifteenth and sixteenth-century texts composed to allow spiritual pilgrimages to the holy places, the mnemonic devices of fifteenth-

century English pilgrim William Way as he sought ways to capture the memory of his travels and their significance, and the heavenly territory evoked by the Angel Choir of Lincoln Cathedral.

In June, Deacon Gary May spoke to us about his spiritual ministry as a prison chaplain at HMP Isle of Wight, emphasising the great need for prayer in this area.

Our annual retreat was preached at the end of September by Dom Hugh Somerville Knapman OSB of Douai Abbey, who is currently serving in Scarisbrick parish. The tradition of English Benedictine monks serving in parishes dates back to their missionary work in the post-Reformation centuries. We enjoyed Fr Hugh's pithy conferences on a variety of subjects, which turned out to have something of an unplanned theme in John the Baptist's 'I must decrease, He must increase': a prescription for spiritual life, and for the western Church's challenging current situation. It was heartening to hear that a large proportion of his own parish congregation have returned to Mass since the church's reopening.

In October, Mr David Ross, Sr Margaret's father, gave us a fascinating illustrated talk entitled 'Supplied by Sea', telling the remarkable tale of the shipping convoys of the World Wars. He concluded with a quotation from a German poet: 'There are no roses on a sailor's grave.' Also in October, Martina Jelinkova gave us three days of greatly appreciated singing instruction. Martina is a trained singer and experienced choir director who unites her technical understanding with a profound love of the chant.

In September, the Silver Jubilee of Sr Rachel's Profession at Wantage was celebrated with her brother's family in a lively recreation in the parlour. This included a rap song (a first in these walls?) composed by her nephew, which honoured the occasion in terms appropriate to the genre ('Sister Rachel, you know how it is; Sister Rachel, twenty-five years in the biz...'). The Mass of the day was the Saturday commemoration of Our Lady. Fr Abbot Xavier of Quarr preached beautifully on Mary's motherhood:

At the foot of the Cross, where we were all born, we find the Mother of Jesus whose motherhood opens up widely to include all those called to become sons and daughters in the unique Son of the Father. The Woman who stands at the foot of the Cross is the Mother of the Church. She gives birth to the new humanity which issues from the death and the resurrection of Christ. It may take us a while but eventually one day we, too, realise that we are present in that place, at that moment; or, to put it otherwise, we understand with



Jerusalem at the centre of the world, on a Mappa Mundi from a medieval Psalter. (Picture: Wikipedia.)

infinite gratitude that Mary already stands in our life, that her motherly presence, care and action have been with us from the start and will be with us until 'the hour of our death'. We encounter the Mother of Jesus who is already, without any choice on our side, our Mother. Who ever chose their mother? Your mother is given you, and so is Mary: 'Behold, your mother!' It is not for us to choose Mary, to adopt her, as it were, for our mother. Already, she keeps us in the shelter of her mantle and the universal embrace of her loving heart. As for us, we simply welcome her... At the heart of the Church, the contemplative life continues what Mary and the other women embodied at the foot of the Cross. These were not carers trying to do something. Their intense compassion took the form of a simple and intense presence. ... This is what the world expects from you, what it begs from you: that you be the compassionate presence of God's love for all who suffer in this world; that you stand at the foot of the Cross and love. With Mary, it is enough. Indeed, it is everything.

Sr Mary Benedict renewed her vows during Mass on 14th September, for the last year before her Solemn Profession, due in 2022. Since recent changes in canon law, the initial three year period of simple vows must now be followed by two annual renewals of vows.

The Feast of the Transfiguration, 6th August, was even more radiant than usual, as Sr Maria Michael de Paula made her First Profession at a beautiful Mass presided by Fr Abbot Xavier, with a fine homily from Fr Dominic Allain. A Profession, he said, is among those 'Transfiguration moments' when heaven seems closer. Nonetheless, the light and splendour is not really the point of the revelation on the mountain, and a desire in the first place for our own transfiguration is a temptation. The fear which the disciples felt on Tabor was not misguided; the ascent of the mountain is not in our power, and is by invitation only. The Father's purpose in that wonderful revelation was to bring us closer to Jesus. When the disciples emerged from the cloud, they saw 'Jesus alone': that is what we need, and that is enough – 'your heart knows that.' 'The Father invites you to intimacy with his beloved Son, to rejoice that in Him, your humanity may enter into a relationship with the divine love which will transfigure it, but only fully on the other side of death and resurrection.'

After the Profession, greetings at very close quarters were made inadvisable by Covid, but we offered some entertainment in the parlour to a group of guests. Items included a lively rendition of *Consider Yourself At Home* from the novitiate, who very literally surrounded their senior member with affection, while Sr M. Michaela herself concluded proceedings by singing a worship song in Portuguese and giving a moving testimony of her faith.

This year our novice Sr Caecilia has contributed articles to *Die Tagespost* in her native German. Daphne Sinclair from London received the habit on 12th June, feast of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, with the name Sr Maria Faustina in honour of the visionary of Divine Mercy. Sara Larsen from Copenhagen was clothed on 8th September and became Sr Petra Marie ('Marie' here is Danish rather than French!), under the



Sr M. Faustina, Serene and Sr Petra Maria

patronage of the prince of the apostles and the Virgin whose birthday was celebrated that day.

Serene Lai, from Singapore via Canada, entered as a postulant on 11th October. Other young women have made visits inside the enclosure as they discern their vocations. At the time of writing, we look forward to the arrival of Martha O’Riordan, due to enter as a postulant on 21st November. She will find a familiar companion in the novitiate: her sister Sr Teresa Benedicta

O’Riordan! Please pray for the Spirit’s continued guidance for all our novitiate and aspirants, and for blessings upon all their families.

The novitiate’s refectory decorations (*pictured on opposite page*) for Mother Abbess’s feast on 26th August honoured St Joseph under the title ‘Light of Patriarchs’. The names from the genealogy of Christ as found in chapter 1 of Matthew’s Gospel wound their way round the refectory from Abraham to the large golden *Ioseph Lumen Patriarcharum* behind the abbatial table. All the names of kings were decorated with crowns, but the diagnosis of the success or failure of each was clear to see – monarchs who had walked in the way of the Lord had a securely level crown, while the crowns of impious kings tipped perilously to one side; and poor exiled Jechoniah’s crown was tumbling away entirely. We enjoyed a summer picnic lunch for the feast day. Later in the year, on the Feast of the Dedication of the Church on 12th October, a special recreation celebrated the motto Mother Abbess chose for this year: *Ille Fidelis Manet*, ‘He remains faithful’ (2 Tim. 2:13). Within a framing narrative, seven moments of salvation history were illustrated with music and readings. The ‘PCJ Band’ (the monastery’s assembled instrumentalists) has acquired a new sound: one profession present which Sr M. Michaela received was a pandeiro, a variety of tambourine from her native Brazil. She has now joined Sr Anne Marie’s Irish bodhran in the percussion section. Can we claim to have developed a new genre of South American-Irish Baroque?

It has not yet been possible to resume oblate days and weekends, although some local oblates have started regular social get-togethers. Sheila Macrae made her oblation on 15th September, feast of Our Lady of Sorrows, taking the oblate name Sr Columba in honour of the Holy Spirit and our Sr Columba O’Halloran, who was instrumental in bringing Sheila to the Island and to the path towards oblation.

Ten years is a long time on the internet: our website, which was created in 2011, was increasingly affected by the ‘obsolete’ software it used. Our new website has

therefore been built, and went live on 11th November. Aiming to convey the beauty of monastic life and spirituality, it features many new pictures and short videos. The regular offerings of Chapter talks will now be joined by spiritual texts connected to the liturgy, and articles written by the community. The address is unchanged: www.stceciliabbey.org.uk.

The long, cool spring and less than effervescent summer were not ideal for either fruit production or bees this year. Something will always flourish, however. Crab apples and beans did well, while courgettes and tomatoes seemed to be in endless supply in their seasons – ‘Use as many courgettes as you reasonably can!’ was the instruction in the kitchen one day.

Sr Claire Waddelove’s book *Our Father: A Biblical Meditation on the Lord’s Prayer* was published by Gracewing in January. A review in *Faith* magazine points out ‘unexpected jewels of the essays’; the *Tablet*’s reviewer suggests that ‘it might do well in the hands of any Catholic seeking a more unified Christian life, in the hands of a catechumen, convert, revert, or to help enrich a Confirmation programme’; and a review in *Mass of Ages* appreciates how Sr Claire ‘draws out the most apposite quotes and stitches them together in a rich tapestry’.

We have enjoyed conferences from Fr Abbot Xavier of Quarr, including several on the perennial wisdom of the Desert Fathers. M Prioress has given us talks on the Feast of the Presentation and the Book of Proverbs. Mother Abbess’s weekly conferences give us regular rich nourishment. Series this year have taught us to climb John Climacus’s Ladder and to enter the Cloud of Unknowing.

Our oblate Sr Marie-Thérèse Cattoir was called home to God this year at the age of ninety-four. Her relationship with our community has witnessed a large part of the abbey’s history: Sr Marie-Thérèse first encountered St Cecilia’s during Mère Ambrosia’s abbacy in 1948. She later became a talented photojournalist (including at Vatican II). Some of her beautiful photographs appeared in *In the Heart of Christ*, the history of our monastery published in 2008. Other family and friends who have passed away in the last year include: Sr Luiz-Marie’s brother Raymond Pimenta; Clive Lambert, Sr Catherine’s brother-in-law; Fr Emilio Lobo, an old friend who was instrumental in Sr Luiz-Marie’s vocation.

May they rest in peace, and may the peace of the Christ Child bless all our oblates, friends, benefactors and readers.



With our prayers for peace at Christmas and in the New Year

Sr. Ninian Eaglesham
Sr Eustochium Lee
Sr Mary Thomas Brown
Sr. Beede M. Barker
Sr. Marie Angela Conway
Sr. Catherine Horsigan
Sr. M. Bernard Eckhardt
Sr. Mary Benedict Ryan
Sr. Mary Anthonia Badger
Sr. Anne-Marie O'Keeffe.
Sr Margaret Ross
Sr. Louis Marie Pimentel
Sr. Marie Brigid Dickinson
Sr. Marie-Thérèse Dempsey
Sr Rachel Appleby
Sr. Maria Michaela de Paula
Sr Petra Marie Larsen
Sr M. Germaine Finist
Sr. Sabine Waddelone
Sr. Scholastica Bacon
Sr. Marie Brigid Dickinson.
Sr. Michtilde Hammen
Sr. Gertrude Quayle
Sr Madeline McCann
Sr. Anne Eason
Sr Elizabeth Burgess
Sr. Anselme Scotland
Sr. Cecilia Schunke
Sr Bernadette Byrne
Sr. Iustitia Payne
Sr. Constance Neane
Sr. Teresa Benedicta O'Riordan
Serene
Sr. Maria Faustina