

# St Cecilia's Abbey, Ryde Chronicle



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Isle of Wight, PO33 1LH  
Registered Charity 1088086

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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.

2023 Ascension Day: Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> May, Mass 10.00 a.m.

Corpus Christi: Thursday 8<sup>th</sup> June, Mass 10.00 a.m.

Feast of the Sacred Heart: Friday 16<sup>th</sup> June, Mass 10.00 a.m.

**Cover Illustrations:** *Two illuminations by our abbey scribes:*

*Front: The Harrowing of Hell and the Risen Lord's appearance to Mary Magdalen, from a medieval manuscript.*

*Back: In Testamentis... 'Their offspring stand **by the covenants**; their children also, for their sake, will abide for ever; their offspring and their glory will not be abandoned.' This text from Sirach 44 is used in the liturgy in the Common of Monks and Nuns, and contains Mother Abbess's profession motto, 'In Testamentis'. The scribe has incorporated the profession emblems of Mother Abbess' two novice mistresses (Sr Catherine's sanctuary lamp and Sr Mary David's tower), and also Mother Abbess' blazon together with the blazons of her three predecessors as abbess.*

*Illustration p.4: Christ in majesty from the Florence Baptistry (Wikimedia Commons).*

*Illustration p.8: © British Museum.*

## *From Mother Abbess*



What is the work of the Risen Christ? The illuminations on the front of this Chronicle show two aspects of it. The lower image of the encounter between Christ and Mary Magdalen in the garden on Easter morning is perhaps easier to imagine: Mary's anguish of grief, her inability to take in the implications of the presence and words of the angels, her inability to recognise Jesus, and then the moment when he calls her by name and she realises who he is. In this, as in all the stories of the appearances of the Lord after his resurrection, there is a pattern of recognition by the disciple and then some sort of correction by Jesus. We can see Our Lord choosing exactly what response each one needs. Mary Magdalene has to be told not to cling to him: when he ascends to the Father there will be a new way of relating to him. Thomas, on the other hand, and the group of disciples in Luke's Gospel, need to be encouraged to recognise that he is flesh and blood, not a ghost or figment of the imagination. The group of women who meet Jesus in Matthew's Gospel have to be told not to be afraid. The disciples on the road to Emmaus are rebuked for their lack of faith and then given the privilege of a Scripture lesson from Jesus himself. Peter needs to be taken back to his experience at the charcoal fire where he denied Jesus three times, and then led to re-articulate his love for him. The disciples sitting at table in the final part of St Mark's Gospel have to be sternly rebuked for their unbelief and hardness of heart.

In all of these encounters there is another stage: Jesus gives the disciples a commission: to Mary Magdalene: *Go to my brethren and tell them*; to Peter: *Feed my lambs, feed my sheep*; to the disciples as a whole: *Wait for the promise of my Father*, that is, the Holy Spirit; and then: *Go and make disciples of all nations*.

We are still weak disciples: how can we undertake such responsibilities? The other picture provides an answer. It shows Christ on Holy Saturday, going down to hell to rescue Adam and Eve and all who died before his coming. An ancient homily for Holy Saturday imagines him saying to them: *Rise up, work of my hands, you who were created in my image. Rise, let us leave this place, for you are in me and I am in you; together we form one person ... I forbade you the tree that was only a symbol of life, but see, I who am life myself am now one with you.*

Christ is the victor over sin and death; he invites us to share in this victory through union with him.

*L. Eustochium*

## *Mother Abbess's New Year Conference 2023*

In the first three weeks of Ordinary time, the opening chants at Mass form a group sharing themes of praise and adoration. The sequence of these introits and their place in the liturgical year are ancient. Amalarius of Metz, who wrote books about the liturgy at the beginning of the ninth century, discusses them, saying that 'they proclaim the favours of Christ that have been granted to us to delight our hearts.'<sup>1</sup>

In the first week is *In excelso throno*, 'Upon a lofty throne I saw a man seated, whom a host of angels adore, singing in unison: 'Behold him, the name of whose empire is eternal.'" Amalarius states, "This is the vision of the apostles and their apostolic successors – that is, that they understand in their minds that this same Lord, who was adored by the Magi as an infant, and whose Presentation at that time was awaited until the fortieth day after his birth, governs the powers of heaven and is adored by them."<sup>2</sup> The angels sing in unison, *in unum*, and those who have gathered in church and are singing this introit should realise that they are joining in his heavenly liturgy.



The next week's introit is *Omnis terra adoret te*, 'Let the whole earth adore you, O God, and sing to you; may it sing a psalm to your name, O Most High.' The previous Sunday had the song of the angels, now it is the turn of the earth. The Gospel on this Sunday in Year C, as well as in the older Missal, is the wedding of Cana, so that Dom Guéranger comments that this introit 'proclaims the joy of this day which shows us human nature espoused to the Son of the eternal Father.'<sup>3</sup>

Our third introit, *Adorate Deum*, 'Adore God, all you his angels; Sion has heard and has rejoiced, and the daughters of Judah exult', takes us back from earth to heaven, 'so that the dimensions of the church should attain their zenith of amplitude and splendour.'<sup>4</sup> Besides adoration it has the idea of listening, 'Sion has heard and rejoiced,' with the implication that the listening is the source of that joy.

These three introits, then, show us how to gaze on Christ in his human nature and at the same time in his state of glory, with frank admiration and delight and praise.

1 *On the Liturgy* 4.33.14, translated by Eric Knibbs (Dumbarton Oaks, 2014) p. 551.

2 *Ibid* 4.33.9, p. 549.

3 *Liturgical Year*, Christmastide, vol. 2, p. 243.

4 M Elisabeth Labat of Kergonan, *Louange à Dieu et Chant Grégorien* (Téqui, 1975) p 70.

As St Ambrose says, Christ is ‘our consuming interest, the object of all our wishes and desires. He is the fullness, the consummation of all the universe. He is the very sum and pinnacle of every virtue.’<sup>5</sup> Such an estimate of Christ is especially important for religious, since ‘it is the duty of consecrated life to show that the Incarnate Son of God is the eschatological goal towards which all things tend, the splendour before which every other light pales, and the infinite beauty which alone can fully satisfy the human heart.’<sup>6</sup>

Now, I should like to interpose into all this rapture that the Lord has as many ways of drawing people to himself as there are people on earth. It is worth remembering then that Christ will woo us in whatever way and at whatever pace he thinks is most likely to succeed. If our personality tends to grand opera, our relationship with Christ may be carried on in similar vein; if we are rather phlegmatic, he may decide to proceed in the courtship of our souls in a similar understated way, though at both ends of the scale, and everywhere in between, on the basis that he knows us better than we know ourselves, he may do something different, and we should not be surprised if he takes us by surprise.

We do have to give him a chance. This means spending time with him in prayer, pondering continually all his words and deeds in the Gospels, feeding on him in the Eucharist, deliberately living by his teaching, loving him in the people we live with and in all for whom we pray. It also means making frank confession of our failure and receiving his forgiveness and absolution through his ministers. Our attraction towards Christ will involve the awareness of our own drabness or even downright ugliness. Such an awareness is allowed to us only to remind us to look all the more at him who is love made visible. ‘In the countenance of Jesus, the “image of the invisible God” (Col 1:15) and the reflection of the Father’s glory (Heb 1:3), we glimpse the depths of an eternal and infinite love which is at the very root of our being.’<sup>7</sup>

Some people can point to a particular moment when some glimpse of him has impressed itself on their soul; others, not really; but the point is that we are trying to fix our gaze upon him now. As St Augustine says, ‘Our entire labour in this life, brethren, is to heal the eye of the heart so that it may see God.’<sup>8</sup>

What is our response to this Man whom we see – however dimly – seated upon a throne, whom angels adore? Hopkins answers in a poem about St Winifred: ‘Give beauty back, beauty, beauty, beauty, back to God, beauty’s self and beauty’s giver.’ Christ is the fairest of the children of men, and this is our motive for making the liturgy as beautiful as we can. This response to ‘beauty’s self and beauty’s giver’ flows from the liturgy to all our life in the monastery, and the same could be said of Christian lives outside monasteries. Of course, some parts of life can be more easily labelled as

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<sup>5</sup> St Ambrose, *Commentary on 12 Psalms*, tr. Íde Ní Riain (Halcyon Press, 2000), On Ps 40 §1, p 180.

<sup>6</sup> St John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata*, §16.

<sup>7</sup> *Vita Consecrata*, §18.

<sup>8</sup> Sermon 88:5

beautiful and giving glory to God, but the more one looks, the more one finds. If you will forgive in this context a much anthologised passage from Hopkins:

Smiting on an anvil, sawing a beam, whitewashing a wall, driving horses, sweeping, scouring, everything gives God some glory if being in his grace you do it as your duty. To go to communion worthily gives God great glory, but to take food in thankfulness and temperance gives him glory too. To lift up the hands in prayer gives God glory, but a man with a dung fork in his hand, a woman with a slop pail, give him glory too.

He is so great that all things give him glory if you mean they should.<sup>9</sup>

To go back to that introit *In excelso throno*: ‘Upon a lofty throne I saw a man seated, whom a host of angels adore.’ It recalls Isaiah 6, ‘I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up,’ and is also redolent of another verse, Isaiah 33:17, ‘Your eyes will see the king in his beauty.’ The Hebrew word for beauty is used elsewhere in relation to woman (Is 3:24; Ps 44[45]:11); the city of Zion (Ps 49[50]:2), a tree (Ezek 31:8) and wisdom (Ezek 28:7). The Septuagint translates it as *doxa*, with the implications of glory and splendour. The Hebrew word is used in Zechariah 9:17 for the appearance of the people who have been redeemed. We know that our redemption has already been wrought by Christ our King, and yet it has still to achieve its full effect in us. While we try to co-operate with him so that he can achieve this, the most effective and fitting use of our attention, in our prayer or during our work and throughout our day, is to look upon the One who is, as Hopkins said, ‘beauty’s self and beauty’s giver.’ I should therefore like to propose that our motto for 2023 should be, *Regem in decore suo videre*, ‘To see the King in his beauty’. This is both our future hope and the programme for our lives here on earth. As St Augustine says, ‘If you can find anything grander, better or sweeter, set your heart on that.’<sup>10</sup>

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### *Quinoa Citrus Cake*

*A very lemony cake with a texture more like a pudding. The quinoa is crunchy at first, then becomes chewier after a couple of days.*

In advance, rinse **4oz quinoa** (we used the red and black sort) and soak it in boiling water. Line a nine-inch round cake tin. Preheat the oven to 160°C. Cream together **4oz soft margarine, 2 ½ oz block margarine, 5 oz brown sugar and 1 ½ oz white sugar**; beat in **3 eggs** then stir in **8 oz roughly chopped cooking apples** (peeled and cored first), the **zest and juice of two lemons, 4 oz mixed peel, 8 oz self-raising flour**, and the quinoa (drain the quinoa first). Add a tablespoon



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<sup>9</sup> *Poems and Prose* (Penguin, 1953), p 144.

<sup>10</sup> Enn in Ps 26 (2) §23).



or two of **water** if needed to bring the mixture to a soft dropping consistency. Put the mixture into the cake tin and bake for about an hour and a half. Take the cake out and spread one or two tablespoons of **honey** over the top, then return to the oven for a final few minutes. Let the cake cool in the tin for a while before turning it out.

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### *The History of Appley House: Part 8: The Upholders*

When Captain Richards Hutt obtained probate of his cousin's will on 23<sup>rd</sup> October 1805, and so became the acknowledged owner of Appley House, he must have breathed a sigh of relief. His previous experience of wills had been disappointing. His grandparents, John and Elizabeth Hutt, appear to have made a good living as 'upholders' in St Paul's Churchyard, London. The south side of the Churchyard in the first half of the eighteenth century was a centre for purveyors of upholstered furniture and similar goods. Trading at the sign of the Three Pillows, John Hutt, for example, was paid by St John's College, Cambridge, in 1710–11, for supplying a bed and coverings, chairs, curtains, a walnut table, a looking-glass, a carpet and a quilt. Hutt died in 1729 but his wife Elizabeth carried on the same trade, also in the Churchyard, at the sign of the 'Blew Curtain'. She must have known her trade well, because between 1734 and 1745 she took five apprentices<sup>1</sup>, at least two of whom paid £50, a premium rate at the time.<sup>2</sup> In 1739 a bill for 'six mahogany chairs with carved feet, two seattys [sic] ditto, scarlet harrateen to back the seatty, a stool and pewter pan, and a pair of backgammon tables, boxes and men' indicates that the business was providing high class items to the wealthy. The settees, still extant, 'with claw-and-ball feet, acanthus and scrolls on the knees of their cabriole legs, scrolled arms with acanthus on their supports and eagle head terminations and drop-in seats are classic "Age of Mahogany" products.'<sup>3</sup> Another bill (illustrated) shows that Mrs Hutt supplied a dressing table and glass to 'Mr Howard' (the Duke of Norfolk). Perhaps there was similar furniture at Appley.

The 1739 bill was receipted by Richard Hutt, presumably the 'Son' of the partnership. When Mrs Hutt retired in 1753, however, her business at the Blew Curtain was taken over by her former apprentice John Iliffe, 'who marketed himself as "the successor to Mrs Hutt" on his subsequent trade cards, confirming the esteem in which Elizabeth's business was held.'<sup>4</sup>

Why was Richard Hutt not the successor? Had there been a rift? The following

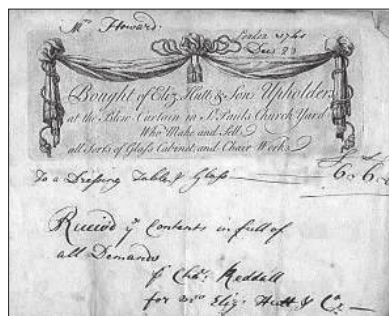
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1 Amy Louise Erickson, 'Wealthy businesswomen, marriage and succession in eighteenth-century London' *Business History*, 2022. Mrs Hutt's independent spirit can be surmised in that she continued in business for years while her daughter was living the life of a lady at Appley House.

2 Jessica Collins, 'City women in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century', *The Clothworker*, Autumn 2019.

3 Simon Jervis, 'A 1739 suite of seat furniture at Bowringsleigh', *Furniture History* (vol. 29), pp.38-44.

4 Collins, *ibid.*



report in the Daily Advertiser of 2<sup>nd</sup> January 1745 is all we know: 'On Friday, as Mr. Hutt, an eminent Cabinet Maker in St. Paul's Churchyard, and his Wife, were travelling the Essex Road in a Chaise, they were overturned, by which Accident she had the Misfortune to break her Leg, in so terrible a Manner, that her Life is despair'd of.' Her death on 3<sup>rd</sup> January 1745 was reported in the same paper on 9<sup>th</sup> January. Perhaps broken down by this tragedy, Richard Hutt was declared

bankrupt in the Penny London Post, 10<sup>th</sup> June 1748. Was he in such debt that his mother could not rescue him, or were they estranged?

At any rate, when Mrs Hutt made her will in 1754, Richard is not mentioned. 'Hoping for a joyful Resurrection through the Merits and Mediation of my blessed Saviour and Redeemer Jesus Christ' she goes on: 'Whereas I have received great friendship and assistance from my son John Roberts late of Appley in the Isle of Wight deceased I think myself in duty bound to make the best provision in my power for his children,' – that is to say, Betty Ann and Anne Roberts of Appley. Their two Hutt cousins, John and Richards, are not mentioned. We do not know of any other sons of Mrs Hutt, so if John and Richards are sons of the bankrupt, they have been passed over in favour of two girls who are already heiresses. It is puzzling that John Roberts should be described as 'son'. Although it could have been that he was really a John Hutt who had married a Roberts heiress on condition that he changed his name to hers, this seems very unlikely. There was a John in the Roberts family; there was also another Roberts brother who had estates on the Island, so no shortage of male heirs; the will itself contains another major error in naming Anne Roberts as Elizabeth; so it would seem that the copyist misread 'son-in-law'. One wonders if the reference to 'friendship and assistance' from this son-in-law (who, being from the minor landed gentry, was higher in social ranking than Mrs Hutt who was in trade) is meant as a reproach to the bankrupt cabinet-maker. One wonders too if the Roberts girls felt some compunction at their younger cousins being overlooked, and went on to assist them in their naval careers.

If John and Richards were the sons of the hapless Richard, there must have been a second marriage after the carriage accident, as they were born in 1746 and 1750 respectively. Another will which has recently come to light<sup>5</sup> appears to be the will of their widowed mother, another Elizabeth Hutt, who explains, 'As my two sons Richard Hutt and John Hutt are perfectly satisfied it is not in my power to leave them any thing and my effects being scarcely sufficient to support me in my present illness therefore recommending them to the Providence of Almighty God I wish them all manner of

<sup>5</sup> This is the result of the researches of Mr Richard Oliver, descendant of the Flower family. Captain Hutt was married to Gilly Flower.



prosperity in this world and Eternal Happiness in the world to come.’ She thereupon leaves all that she possesses to one Blissett Wooddeson, attorney of Lombard Street, and appoints him as sole executor. The will, written on 12<sup>th</sup> March 1778, must have been made on her deathbed, as probate was obtained on 27<sup>th</sup> March. Even if the sons expected no riches, were there no mementoes of their parents which they would have liked to have had? If Mrs Hutt really had nothing of value, why did she go to the trouble of making a will? A suspicious mind might wonder if Blissett Wooddeson had spotted something among her effects which was of value unbeknownst to her, and had ulterior motives in helping her settle her affairs in his favour.

With the Appley bequest, however, there were no such disappointments. England might still be waiting for the news from Trafalgar (the victory was won on 21<sup>st</sup> October, but the schooner *Pickle* carrying the despatch did not reach Falmouth until 4<sup>th</sup> November, and the despatch itself reached the Admiralty only on the 6<sup>th</sup>), but Captain Hutt could rejoice at now being the proud owner of an estate by the sea and a home for his wife and eleven children.

*To be continued.*

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***Homily by Abbot Xavier Perrin of Quarr***  
***2nd February 2023, Feast of the Presentation of the Lord***  
***Silver Jubilee of Profession of Mother Abbess Eustochium Lee***

Once upon the time, there was a city which God loved. The Lord had chosen Zion, saying: ‘This is my resting place for ever, here I will dwell, for I have desired it’ (Ps 132:13-14). ‘Mount Zion’ was ‘the city of the great King’, ‘the city of the Lord of hosts’ ‘which God establishes for ever’ (Ps 48:2.8). It was the place where God had ‘put His name’ (Dt 12:20). God was ‘in the midst of her’, she was not to be moved (Ps 46:5). When, nevertheless, the city was first besieged and then destroyed, the exiles ‘by the waters of Babylon sat down and wept remembering Zion’: ‘If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand wither! Let my tongue cleave to my mouth if I do not remember you, if I do not set Jerusalem above my highest joy!’ (Ps 137:1). Such was their love for the City of God.

Now this city so often destroyed and rebuilt expected the definitive visit of the Lord. He was due to come Himself, according to His promise in Malachi: ‘Behold, I send my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to His temple; the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold he is coming, says the Lord of hosts. But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears?’ (Mal 3:1-2)

There was a city which God loved ‘with an everlasting love’ (Jer 31:3) and, in this city, hearts waited for His coming. They longed for the royal visit of their Lord and

God. These were a few poor, humble and loving hearts who were ready for the coming of the Lord. St Luke tells us that they were led by the Holy Spirit. 'In the Spirit', Simeon 'came into the temple'. As for Anna, she 'did not depart from the temple'. She remained in the place of God.

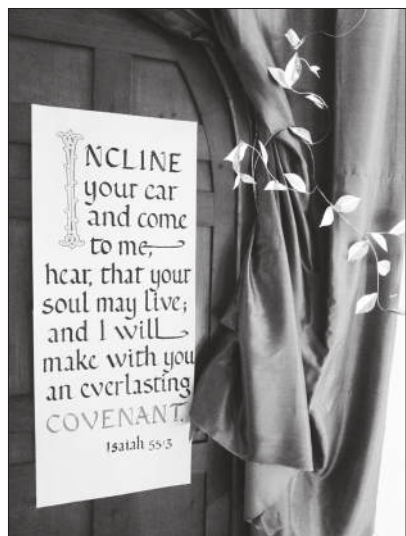
In the same Spirit, hearts, before and after those two venerable hearts, have been longing for the Lord's visit. Like Simeon and Anna these are men and women of one desire. Monks and nuns belong to this group. Monastic life attracts people who feel a calling to such a simplicity of desire. For a monastery is a holy city which God visits daily. In the silence of the cloister, through the peaceful breathing of psalmody, during the quiet hours of contemplative listening to the Word of God in the Bible and in the heart, souls are visited by the Word of God. Christ, the divine Messenger, encounters them. He brings them light and kindles love in their hearts. He nurtures their faith and strengthens their hope.

Dear Mother Abbess, your vocation to monastic life owes a lot to the climate of faith and love which your wonderful parents created in your family. It is wonderful to see your sisters and brothers-in-law present today. The Spirit of God led you to the 'city on the hill' (Mt 5:14), St Cecilia's Abbey, where you encountered the one who was to become the Lord of your life. You met Him; you understood He loved you; you gave yourself totally to Him. You left behind without hesitation another 'city', back in London, for you had found the genuine city of God, the place of His and your rest. Your first profession, twenty five years ago, was the first public expression of a commitment intended to be total.

Today your heart is filled with gratitude. You know all that you owe to Mother Ninian who welcomed you, whom you served as bursar, as subprioress and as prioress, before you were called to take over from her the task and the grace of the abbatial ministry. You remember also all that you received from Sister Catherine, who was your first novice-mistress, and from Sister Mary David who succeeded her and was able to add her personal touch in your formation. A close collaboration with her was certainly one of the graces of these very rich years. But your whole community, each and all sisters, should be mentioned here. As Dom Guéranger likes to put it, in the monastery 'on se sanctifie en famille' – you walk towards holiness as a member of a monastic family and with all the members of the community. Let me add that, as we can see, this family generously extends itself so as to reach to the other side of the city of Ryde and to climb up the hill of Quarr to embrace your brothers of the Holy City of Our Lady who are delighted to be here today with you.

This family, in turn, is much broader than the living and deceased members of our monasteries. It is the Church of God, the Holy City whom the Lord visits today. We sang during the procession an ancient antiphon possibly borrowed from the Greek liturgy. What it says of Zion can be applied to the Church as a whole and to each soul in particular – certainly to a jubilant soul.

Today the Lord enters His temple and Zion adorns her bridal chamber to



*Jubilee Decorations - see Notebook, p. 19.*

welcome Christ the King. The holy city – the soul possessed by the longing of the Spirit – welcomes Mary. She takes Mary in her arms, for Mary is the gate of heaven. She is carrying the King of glory who is the new light. Mary is a mother and, by a mysterious privilege, she remains a virgin while she brings in her hands the Son before the morning star begotten. Now, with Mary, through Mary who is the new Zion, the Holy Church welcomes the Son who is the Light of the world, the perfect image of the ‘Father of lights’.

The light comes from the child. He says nothing. He does nothing. But His presence fills the Temple whilst filling Simeon and Anna’s hearts, as well as ours. He draws us all, and the whole world, to Himself by the discreet and powerful attraction of His love. He is ‘the way, and the truth, and the light’ (Jn 14:6). We remember the words of the late Pope Benedict in his inaugural homily, on 24<sup>th</sup> April 2005: ‘It is not power, but love that redeems us! This is God’s sign: he himself is love. [...] If we let Christ into our lives, we lose nothing, nothing, absolutely nothing of what makes life free, beautiful and great. No! Only in this friendship are the doors of life opened wide. Only in this friendship is the great potential of human existence truly revealed. Only in this friendship do we experience beauty and liberation.’

Your twenty five years of profession, dear Mother Abbess, proceed from the encounter with Christ’s love. Similarly, the twenty five years ahead of you – at the very least – will be founded on this love, will express this love, will give testimony to this love. In the heart of the Church you will be, with your sisters, a source of divine love. And it is not difficult to imagine how this love coming from the Lord will be conveyed through some sort of spiritual viaduct to the world at large for which you pray, which you embrace in your gift of love to Christ.

The Child presented in the temple looks like a minute point long ago;

His coming happens today.

The temple has been destroyed;

you offer your heart today as you did twenty five years ago.

All this may look very private;

it happens in the heart of the Church and the whole world shines with God’s light!

## *The Hymns of Eastertide: Hic est dies verus Dei*

The repertoire of Easter hymns in our current Office is a rich one: in the weeks of Eastertide between Easter Sunday and the Ascension, Vespers, Vigils and Lauds have two each (one for the Easter Octave and subsequent Sundays, one for ferias after the Octave), while the Little Hours have special Eastertide hymns too. None is later than the tenth century, but their appearance together *en masse* dates only from the post-Conciliar revisions of the Office.

The hymn *Hic est dies*, used at Vigils during the Easter Octave and on Sundays in Eastertide until the Ascension, is one of the most ancient, but has only been in the Roman and monastic Offices for the last few decades. It has been taken (shorn of three verses) from the Ambrosian Breviary – that is, the Office used in the province of Milan – and its text has been attributed to St Ambrose of Milan himself since the sixth century. That is when we have our first witness to this hymn: St Caesarius of Arles included two of its lines in a collection of patristic quotations supporting the Augustinian teaching on grace at the Council of Orange (529). Despite this witness, and the hymn's use in the Milanese liturgy, modern scholars have been divided on the question of its Ambrosian authenticity. Hervé Savon, its most recent editor, thinks it a fifth-century composition, albeit one heavily influenced by Ambrose's thought and style, or possibly an Ambrosian work with later interpolation.<sup>1</sup> Although these discussions may help us to understand the text by suggesting the literary contexts in which its language is best understood, the question of authorship is not very important for its use as a prayer in the liturgy. And we can be grateful that it is available for this use.

*Hic est dies verus Dei, / sancto serenus lumine, / quo diluit sanguis sacer / probrosa mundi crimina.* 'This is the true day of God, bright with holy light, on which holy blood washed away the world's shameful crimes.' How often the Easter Office sings *Haec dies*, 'This is the day that the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it!' (Ps 117/118). Our hymn serves as a meditation on this day of days. It is a bright, clear day: *serenus* is the adjective used for a cloudless sky, used metaphorically to mean 'glad' or 'calm'. We wake up to a spring morning, in the new light of the garden of the Resurrection, the 'holy light' which shows us that all things have been made new. This newness does not blot out the memory of how we got here. It was through storms and a deluge, itself a renovation of the ancient flood: the 'holy blood' of the Son of God was shed to wash away mankind's sin and renew the face of the earth.

*Fidem refundit perditis, / cacosque visu illuminat. / Quem non gravi solvat metu / latronis absolutio ?* 'It gives faith back to the lost, it enlightens the blind with sight. Whom would the absolution of the thief not loose from oppressive fear?'

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1 Hervé Savon, Introduction and Commentary to 'Hic est dies verus dei', in Ambroise de Milan, *Hymnes. Texte établi, traduit et annoté sous la direction de Jacques Fontaine* (Paris : Cerf, 1992), 407-441. All historical information and patristic references are taken from this work.



*St Ambrose and the other Latin Doctors of the Church, Sts Augustine, Jerome and Gregory. St Benedict several times prescribes the singing of ‘ambrosians’, Ambrosian hymns, at the Office. (Picture: Wikimedia Commons)*

Impossible not to hear traces of the baptismal dialogue in the first two lines: ‘What do you ask?’ ‘Faith.’ The sacrament of Baptism has also been known as ‘Illumination’. For some in the Church, those who have just been baptised at the Easter Vigil, these are literally the first days of their new life in the Light. What was the Milanese spring morning like after Augustine had been baptised by Ambrose? Those who have just been received into the Church also have a privileged share in this spiritual re-creation. Those baptised as infants do not have a conscious memory of that first awakening, but the renewal of baptismal vows at the Vigil is an opportunity to enter more fully into the mystery once given them in seed, and to foster its flowering in the radiance of the Easter sacraments.

It is a little surprising that we then move, apparently quite abruptly,

from the light-flooded paschal morning back to the scene of the crucifixion and the Lord’s dialogue with the good thief. Savon tells us, however, that the forgiven thief was an emblematic figure in fifth-century meditation on the Paschal Mystery. He points to a fifth-century Easter homily with themes very close to those of this hymn.<sup>2</sup> The vision of the world renewed (‘Heaven rejoices, for it sees the earth, so long filthy with sin, purged by the blood of its Lord...’) moves on to that extreme example of salvation through faith in the crucified King: ‘Should not we too rejoice, whose sins are taken away by the sacrament of the new mystery, heaven given to us, paradise restored? In short, the Lord Himself said to the thief who was hanging on a cross – whose faith was disturbed neither by his own sufferings nor by Christ’s – “Truly I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.”’ No one can doubt the availability of God’s grace with the image of that exchange before his eyes; no one can doubt it with the knowledge that Christ returned from the grave in divine power and a genuine human body – ‘let us rejoice now that Christ has risen from the dead, and let us believe that He brought back that flesh of His from the underworld.’ Our hymn in fact continues with a verse, omitted in our hymnal, celebrating the thief’s hastening to paradise ahead of the ‘just’, thanks to his brief exercise of faith. Our next verse continues to wonder at the event:

<sup>2</sup> Quotations here taken from the text as found in Migne, *Patrologia Latina* 57.613-616 (under the name of Maximus of Turin).

*Opus stupent et angeli / pœnam videntes corporis, / Christoque adhaerentem reum / vitam beatam carpere.* ‘The angels marvel at the work, seeing the punishment of the body, and the guilty man who cleaves to Christ laying hold of the blessed life.’ Not only joy but astonishment in heaven at the return of a repentant sinner, and a return by such means. *Carpe diem*, said the ancients, but only in Christ can man seize the eternal day of life in beatitude. ‘Seeing the punishment of the body’: whose body? Interpreters including Denys the Carthusian have read it as the body of Christ – the marvel is at the exercise of divine kingly authority amidst the ignominious horror of the execution – while others have taken it as the thief’s own body. Savon argues that the context points to the latter. I am not so sure. We are about to hear more about the fact that it is flesh which has saved flesh, and death has brought new life – both refer to Christ. Yet in the end, need we choose? The sermon quoted above mentions both in one breath: ‘Neither his own sufferings (or punishment, *pœna*) nor Christ’s’ impeded the thief’s faith. Moreover, we will sing this hymn eleven times in the season; that is time enough both to ponder the vindicated authority of the Crucified and Risen One, and to be reminded again (probably) that our faith cannot claim to be as unswerving as the thief’s rapid but consummate adhesion.

*Mysterium mirabile / ut abluat mundi luem, / peccata tollat omnium / carnis vitia mundans caro!* ‘O wonderful mystery, that flesh washes away the world’s corruption, it takes away the sins of all, cleansing the flesh’s vices.’ Salvation was worked by means of the body, for bodily creatures. The ‘flesh’, which is the subject of the two verbs and necessarily placed first in the English, is placed emphatically at the very end in the Latin, as if to replicate the angels’ surprise: the cleansing and removal of sin, sin which is so manifest in the flesh, is the work of flesh itself. Flesh ‘washes away the filth of the world’, with a play on the Latin words *abluo*, wash away, and *lues*, pestilence, calamity or corruption. The second and third lines between them also nearly give us the liturgical *qui tollit peccata mundi*, ‘who takes away the sins of the world’, which we say so soon before Holy Communion. We could take the last verse (in our usage) as sketching the foundation of dispositions which will help us to receive that most direct gift of Christ’s flesh:

*Quid hoc potest sublimius, / ut culpa querat gratiam / metumque solvat caritas, / reddatque mors vitam novam?* ‘What could be more sublime than this: that guilt seeks grace, and charity undoes fear, and death renders up new life?’ This can still be a commentary on the advance victory of the good thief, but of course it embraces all who will want to accept his place. Our guilt can seek forgiveness, Christ’s love can undo our fear (and transform it into a fearless love of our own), Christ’s death gives us new life. The last line could also be read (Savon does) as an icon of the Resurrection: Death, having no hold on Christ, must restore to the world Him who is Life.

The hymn sung, the psalmody of Vigils is about to start. In a little while it will be broad daylight. May we be ready to walk again in the light of the Lord.

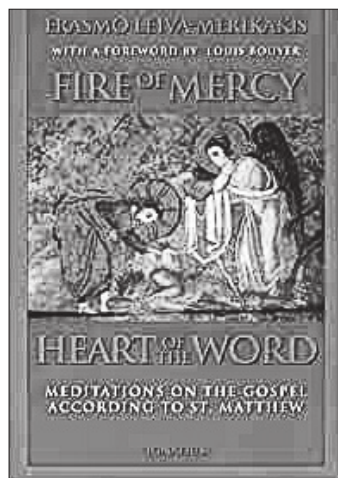
*Sr MTB*



## *Read in the Refectory*

**E**rasmo Leiva-Merikakis (Fr Simeon OCSO), *Fire of Mercy, Heart of the Word: Meditations on the Gospel according to St Matthew*, 4 volumes  
Ignatius Press, 1996-2021.

It has become a much-appreciated custom to interrupt the ordinary midday refectory reading on a Saturday (and the eve of some major feasts) with something on the next day's Liturgy. This year ('Year A' of the lectionary cycle, with most Sunday Gospels taken from St Matthew) our Saturday reading largely consists of extracts from *Fire of Mercy, Heart of the Word*. I was thrilled when we started delving into what I was going to call a gold mine, but it is really more of a vast vault overflowing with fine bullion. Originally just an extraordinary polyglot's personal jottings as he read the Greek New Testament during a sabbatical year, this work eventually became a 4-volume meditative commentary on the Gospel of Matthew virtually phrase by phrase and sometimes almost word by word.



The father of a family and erstwhile Professor of Literature and Theology at the University of San Francisco, now a Cistercian monk of St Joseph's Abbey, Spencer, Massachusetts, Fr Simeon writes with all the logic and clarity of a Greek mind and the burning passion of a Latin American soul (his father was Cuban, his mother Greek), in flawless contemporary prose, blissfully free of any distracting gender issues, on what is evidently the subject dearest to his heart. In the preface to volume 4, he very simply tells how much delight he took just typing the holy name of JESUS onto his computer screen as he wrote — 3,466 times in that volume alone. Yet there is nothing tedious or repetitive in his scholarly but thoroughly accessible writing. Well aware that most of his readers may not have any, or hardly any, Greek, while for him this language conjures up first and foremost all the warmth and familiarity of his grandparents' kitchen, he lovingly penetrates into the text, now zooming in to look at a detail, then out again to look at the wider picture. Then suddenly – with the talent of a born psychologist and man of God – he reverses the focus almost as if taking a 'selfie'... only you find that you are not looking *at* yourself but seeing *through* yourself with healthy discomfort!

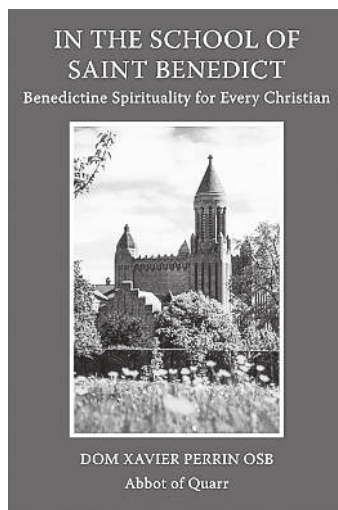
The author may humbly feel that his grandchildren 'giggling their way to the Wedding Feast' have 'no need to read what their Papou has written', but I suspect that this outstanding work, full of stunning and convincing insights, is going to be a timeless spiritual classic. Masterfully arranged in short sections punctuated with

deliberate breathing spaces, it takes the reader right into the burning Heart of the Word. The more you read, the more you want to read, peacefully, wanting never to get to the end. It is quite simply the best *Lectio Divina* I've ever had in my hands!

Sr LP

Dom Xavier Perrin OSB, *In the School of St Benedict. Benedictine Spirituality for Every Christian*, translated by Sr Laetitia Payne OSB and Dom Luke Bell OSB, with a preface by Bishop Erik Varden OCSO

Gracewing, 2022, xii+101pp.



Dom Xavier Perrin, Abbot of Quarr, has done a great service in producing this book, a service to all who are already acquainted with St Benedict, who even already live under his Rule, and equally to those outside the Benedictine family who wish to seek God, to understand the monastic calling, or simply to learn more about the great Patriarch of western monasticism. There is wisdom and insight for everyone, attractively presented in a good translation from the original French. Although we do not usually read spiritual books in the refectory (except for extracts to accompany the liturgical year - see previous review), it was a treat to have this one.

There are three distinct parts to it. The first is devoted to a sketch of St Benedict's life and the teaching of his Rule. Those already familiar with the life and miracles of St Benedict attributed to Pope St Gregory the Great will yet be charmed both by the broad vista and the interpretations of details found here. Likewise, the twenty-one pages on the Rule offer an accessible summary of its essentials together with the deep understanding of one well practised in living it.

Chapter Two consists of a brief history and a selected passage from the writings of ten representatives of the Benedictine family across the centuries: St Bede, St Gertrude of Helfta, Bl Columba Marmion, Thomas Merton and Henri Le Saux, for example, show the range covered in this 'rapid overview'. Having one's appetite thus whetted by these short spiritual fragments, the reader might feel drawn to a more extensive reading of the Benedictine spiritual classics.

'Is it possible for us to be included among those who follow in the footsteps of these great witnesses to the Benedictine tradition? Can the ordinary Christian life, occupied with family and social duties, lend itself to an adaptation of instructions drawn up for those living in the cloister? How can we benefit from Saint Benedict's wisdom in our daily lives? How are we to approach this holiness, the path to which he

showed so many men and women, disciples of his life and of his *Rule...*?' (p.67).

The final section, 'Living in the World According to the Spirit of Saint Benedict', outlines a response to these questions. The topics discussed include the liturgy, living in the presence of God, working for the glory of God, loving humbly, joy in Christ. The author's enlightened thoughts will be of benefit not only to Benedictine oblates but to all Christians.

'Dare to desire God, and life in God, Saint Benedict is still saying to us today, dare to entrust yourself completely to His infinite mercy, and enter ever more fully into the great joy of hope' (p.96).

Sr CW

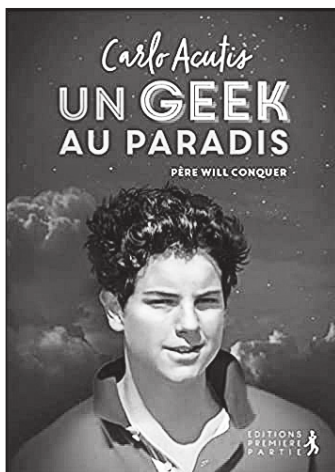
Père Will Conquer m.c.p., *Carlo Acutis. Un Geek au Paradis*  
Editions Première Partie, 2019, 221pp.

In October 2020, the Holy Father declared blessed a young Italian boy, Carlo Acutis, who had died at the age of 15 only 14 years before. This book, by the wonderfully named Père Will Conquer (priest of the Missions Etrangères de Paris), draws on information given him by Carlo's parents – an interview with his mother, Antonia, is included – and from his acquaintances and friends, to explore the spiritual life of this young Blessed. His approach is largely pedagogical, his aim being to encourage the young to see in Carlo an inspiring model and example of Christian life and to demonstrate that holiness is attainable. This aim is reflected in the design of the book, which includes at the end of each chapter some thought-provoking questions, scriptural texts to ponder and a prayer. But the book also serves as an interesting introduction for the general reader to the life and spirituality of this remarkable adolescent.

Remarkable? Certainly, he was remarkable as regards his growth in holiness but, as Carlo's mother and the Pere Conquer are keen to stress, he was an ordinary boy in all other respects. Born in 1991, a happy, lively, endlessly curious and sociable child, Carlo loved animals, people and nature. Not outstanding in his school work nor in sports, although he enjoyed them, it was his relationships with people that stood out: no one was excluded. The janitor, the neighbours in the building where his family lived, his parents' employees, fellow parishioners, the struggling or unpopular members of his class - all were the object of his open, genuine friendliness. His classmates, girls and boys alike, knew that they had in him a faithful, discreet and deeply sympathetic confidant and friend. The secret to Carlo's extraordinarily balanced maturity was his close relationship with Jesus. Showing an interest in religion from a very early age, Carlo took his faith seriously and made frequent use of the sacraments, particularly Confession and the Eucharist. He never shrank from witnessing to the faith amongst his contemporaries and while never pressurising others he was filled with a zeal for souls. He used his considerable computing skills to great effect in his study of Eucharistic miracles, a subject that fascinated him. His stance won him the respect of many, who

saw that his beliefs and his actions were all of a piece.

Carlo was subject to the challenges and temptations faced by any child in today's world, but from a very early age he understood that resisting temptation was a way of proving his love for Jesus. He was not perfect. Antonia Acutis admits that he was something of a greedy child with a very sweet tooth, but recalls her astonishment at the way, while still very young, he strove to overcome his inordinate love of Nutella! It took time and what impressed her was the systematic, determined and persevering way he went about it. No small victory for a little child (or for many of us, come to that!). Throughout his short life Carlo kept his eyes on the things that are above and experienced a full flowering of his baptismal graces of faith, hope and charity; a powerful reminder that a faithful adherence to Christ and His teaching in the Church and frequent reception of the sacraments are the normal means of sanctification for all Christians.



It was just as Carlo was putting the finishing touches to an exhibition on Eucharistic miracles (which, following his death, subsequently toured the world) that he experienced the first symptoms of an incurable leukaemia. 'God wanted to wake me up!' he exclaimed when the doctors explained that they could do nothing to cure him. He received the sacrament of the sick and after 10 days of intensive suffering, all offered 'for the Holy Father and the Church' and borne with a peaceful serenity, he slipped into a coma on 11<sup>th</sup> October 2006, and was pronounced dead the following day.

Sr MAB

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### Notebook

Sr Cæcilia Schenke made her First Profession on 19th November, feast of Saints Gertrude and Mechtilde. These great saints of the German monastery of Helfta had the joy of presiding over the profession of a compatriot of theirs. A group of Sr Cæcilia's family and friends came from Germany, and benefited from a bilingual homily brilliantly constructed by Fr Abbot. He told us: *Whoever obeys*

*enters the mystery of Christ. We obey like Him, but above all with Him and in Him. We enter His obedience which effects the reconciliation of the world. There is thus an essential link between the little action I am performing out of obedience and the divine mystery of Christ's obedience. One could say this link is love. When I truly obey, my heart is in Jesus' Heart. I abide in Him and He in me. We are one in love for the Father and for*

*the world.... By pronouncing the monastic vows of obedience, conversion, and stability, you engage, dear Sister, in a journey of the heart towards Jesus' Heart; a journey of love.*

He concluded with extensive quotation from Gertrud Von Lefort's poem, 'Litany of the Sacred Heart', with its thoroughly apt refrain, *Wir weihen uns deiner Liebe*, 'We consecrate ourselves to Your love.'

On the feast of St Scholastica, 10th February, Sr Teresa Benedicta O'Riordan in turn made her First Profession. This time the family and friends came from Ireland for the occasion. Fr Abbot's homily drew out the significance of names: St Benedict the man of blessing, St Scholastica the disciples, and the professura's special patrons: *We have here*



*today a Rachel who was called to be a Mary and therefore became a Scholastica; she received the name of Teresa Benedicta, and thus could act as an Esther. Or, to put it otherwise,*

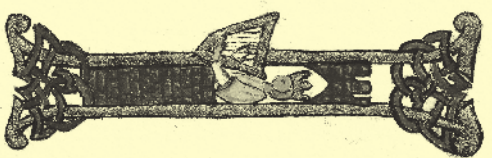


*your calling to enclosed monastic life is an invitation to the intimacy of love with Jesus, to whom nothing must be preferred, and, at the same time, to a living intercession for your family, your country, the Church at large, and indeed the whole world.*

Between these markers on the first stages of two monastic journeys came a milestone on a road already travelled for a quarter of a century: Mother Abbess's Silver Jubilee of Profession on 2<sup>nd</sup> February, Feast of the Presentation of the Lord. The door of her room was magnificently decorated with blue drapes and a silver vine (*see picture p.11*) – sisters had observed the vine's growth with interest as it was constructed around a door in a distant part of the house, before being transported to the abbatial office on the morning of the great day. Three of Mother Abbess's four sisters and a congregation of friends were at the Mass, representing her days in Stockport, Oxford and London, while most of the monks of Quarr were also able to attend. The beautiful liturgical celebration began with the procession of candles around the cloister, to the usual chants recalling the mystery of the Lord's coming to His temple. A lively festive recreation in the afternoon had contributions from both sides of the grille, including an impromptu rendition of Mother Abbess's old school song, which begins, 'Make of our youth, O God, a holy thing' ('You have to imagine this being sung by 740 girls at speech day in the Manchester Free Trade Hall'). The day was completed with Vespers alternated with the monks, followed by Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament.

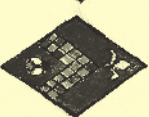
On such occasions, the 'beauty of the King' seems to shine through very clearly. While that may not always be felt, the Paschal Triduum tells us that Christ's light has truly overcome the darkness. May this light shine on all our readers.





**I**N TESTAMEN-  
TIS SEED SEED EORUM; ET  
FILII EORUM PROPTER ILLOS  
USQUE IN AETERNUM MANENT;  
SEED EORUM ET GLORIA EORUM  
NON DERELINQUETUR. Sirachi 44:12-13

Mother  
Eustochium



Silver Jubilee  
2<sup>nd</sup> February 2023