

St Cecilia's  
Abbey,  
Ryde

Chronicle

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Advent/Christmas 2023

No. 53

**St Cecilia's Abbey, RYDE,**  
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.

#### CHRISTMAS 2023

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

Midnight Mass: Just after midnight.

Day Mass: 10.00 a.m.

#### HOLY WEEK 2024

28<sup>th</sup> March, Maundy Thursday: Missa Vespertina: 5.00 p.m.

29<sup>th</sup> March, Good Friday: Actio Liturgica: 3.00 p.m.

30<sup>th</sup> March, Holy Saturday: Paschal Vigil: *Time TBC in view of clock change.*

31<sup>st</sup> March, Easter Sunday Mass 10.00 a.m.

2024 Ascension Day: Thursday 9<sup>th</sup> May, Mass 10.00 a.m.

Corpus Christi: Thursday 30<sup>th</sup> May, Mass 10.00 a.m.

Feast of the Sacred Heart: Friday 7<sup>th</sup> June, Mass 10.00 a.m.

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*Cover: Calligraphy from our art studio.*

*Illustration p.5: Ruth gleaning in the barley field.*

*Detail from the illuminated Genealogy of Christ (Matthew 1) used at Christmas Vigils.*

*Illustration p.10: Ryde Pier. ©The British Museum.*

## *From Mother Abbess*

As Christmas approaches, we want to make our hearts ready to welcome the Lord again and respond to his call. His mother, the first to welcome him, is a sure guide here.

The conclusion of Mary's song of praise is: *He has helped his servant Israel in remembrance of his mercy, as he spoke to our fathers to Abraham and to his posterity for ever.* (Lk 1:54-55)

In these words we hear Mary's consciousness of being a member of the family that sprang from Abraham, to whom God promised, *I will make of you a great nation ... and by you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves* (Gn 12:2-3). By the clarity of mind that came from her sinlessness, so that her thoughts were not befuddled by presumption or cynicism or any other corrupting attitude – by such clarity of mind she was able to grasp more than any other person in the whole of salvation history what it meant to be part of the people whom God had chosen as his own special possession. When she spoke of how he had *regarded the low estate of his handmaiden* (Lk 1:48), she was showing how well she had grasped what God had said to Moses: *It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord set his love upon you ... but it is because the Lord loves you* (Dt 7:7-8). When she responded to the Archangel, *I am the handmaid of the Lord* (Lk 1:37), she was expressing the total availability that should have been the response of all Israel to God's special choice.

Mary's words *He has helped his servant ... as he spoke to our fathers* reveal her awareness that she has not been called in isolation but in the specific context of her family and nation, with all the benefits and handicaps resulting from this context, just as we try to respond to our Christian and monastic calling in our context and amidst whatever benefits and handicaps that go with it. It would be foolish to try to guess what Mary was thinking about when the Angel Gabriel first arrived and spoke to her, but we do know what figures peopled her mental landscape. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church says, 'Throughout the Old Covenant the mission of many holy women prepared for that of Mary' (§ 489).

The first such woman is of course Eve, the ancestress of us all. 'The rabbinic writings praise the beauty and adornment of Eve' at the time of her creation from Adam.<sup>1</sup> For example, Rabbi Chama ben Chanina (260 AD) wrote that God first clothed her with 24 precious decorations before presenting her to Adam (those listed in Isaiah 3 – the anklets, headbands, crescents and so forth). We know how things turned out. As Tertullian says, 'While Eve was yet a virgin the ensnaring word crept into her ear which was to build the edifice of death'<sup>2</sup>, or, as St Jerome put it more

1 Fr Johann Roten, SM, *Old Testament Types of Mary*

2 Scott Hahn, *Hail Holy Queen*, p 47.

bluntly to St Eustochium, ‘Death through Eve’.<sup>3</sup> Through the mercy and power of God, that is not the end: the full saying is, ‘Death through Eve, life through Mary.’ The passage from Tertullian goes on: ‘Into a virgin’s soul ... must be introduced that Word of God which was to raise the fabric of life,’ or as Irenæus put it, ‘The knot of Eve’s disobedience was untied by Mary’s obedience. What Eve bound through her unbelief, Mary loosed by her faith’.<sup>4</sup> St Bernard recalls Adam complaining about *The woman whom thou gavest to be with me*’ (Gn 3:12) and invites him now to exult in his and Eve’s descendant, Mary. In Mary, he says, God ‘gave woman for woman, a wise one for a foolish one, a humble one for an arrogant one. Instead of the tree of death she offers you a taste of life; in place of the poisonous fruit of bitterness she holds out to you the sweetness of eternity’s fruit’.<sup>5</sup> Eve was so named by Adam because she was mother of all living; Jesus on the Cross tells John, *Behold your mother*, thus showing that she is mother of all who through faith are born to new life in him.

God’s call to Abram means that his beautiful but barren wife Sarai also gets caught up in the mystery of the call and election. In her treatment of Hagar she does not appear a sympathetic character, but people can be seriously flawed human beings and still be called by God. The author of the Letter to the Hebrews praises her faith in God *since she considered him faithful who had promised* (Heb 11:11), and 1 Peter commends her for her respect for her husband (1Pt 3:6). The great miracle of childbearing that comes to her in her old age is promised on the basis, *Is anything too hard for the Lord?* (Gn 18:13). In the case of Mary, the childbearing is more miraculous still, being without human involvement at all but through *the power of the Most High* (Lk 1:35), *for with God nothing will be impossible* (v 37). Mary’s kinswoman Elizabeth calls her blessed for believing in God’s promises (Lk 1:45), and this virtue of faith is apparent throughout Mary’s life. What St Peter says of the adornment of the holy women by *the imperishable jewel of a gentle and quiet spirit* (1 Pt 3:4) seems most fitting in application to Mary, whether pondering the events of Jesus’ infancy, standing at the Cross or praying in the midst of the apostles in the Upper Room.

The next matriarch of Israel, Rebekah, knows barrenness for twenty years before God finally grants Isaac’s prayer for her. Apart from this childbearing through God’s intervention, we do not find many Marian traits in her, unless you count her single-minded love for her son Jacob. In the genealogy of Jesus the next matriarch is Leah, mother of Judah (Gn 29:35). We can admire her faithfulness in steadily producing sons even though she was the less favoured of Jacob’s two wives. The faith of Mary is incomparably greater, yet Leah’s quiet integrity was part of the story that led to it.

Sarah, Rebekah and Leah were very much inside the family of Israel but there are other women in the story who could be classed as firmly outside. Tamar was a Canaanite who went to drastic measures to obtain justice from her father-in-law Judah

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3 Letter 22.

4 *Adversus Hæreses* 3.22

5 2<sup>nd</sup> Homily in Praise of the Virgin Mother, § 3

(Gn 38). Her machinations worked, however, only because God showed himself once again to be the author of life. Another outsider is Rahab, the harlot of Jericho. Nothing is said of Tamar's motivation, but Rahab, in spite of how she earned her living, was a woman of faith, telling the spies, *The Lord has given you the land. ... The Lord your God is he who is God in heaven above and on earth beneath* (Jos 2:9, 11). This faith-inspired hospitality won her admiring notices in both the Letter to the Hebrews (11:31) and the Letter of James (2:25). Rahab herself, being adopted into the family of Israel is, as St Gregory of Elvira says, 'already in outline a figure of the Church which comes from the Gentiles'.<sup>6</sup> Through Christ who bestows grace and virtue, says St Gregory, 'this Church that was at one time base and despicable' became 'the chaste spouse of the one Holy Spirit' (*ibid.*), which is of course what Mary is, equally through the grace of Christ. Thus Rahab won her place in the history of salvation. Fr Ronald Knox wrote, 'As Rahab betrayed Jericho to Joshua, so, through her, Jesus our Saviour entered the rebellious citadel of man's heart'.<sup>7</sup>



The third obvious outsider is Ruth the Moabitess, named along with Tamar and Rahab in the genealogy of Our Lord in St Matthew. As a foreigner, a widow, childless and poor, she was definitely among those of low degree of whom the Magnificat sings. She even refers to herself as 'maidservant' (Ruth 3:9; in the Greek version, *doulē*, the same word that Mary uses at the Annunciation and in the Magnificat). Her total availability to Naomi and obedience to her instructions – *All that you say I will do* (3:5) – foreshadow the obedience of Mary. Hers is also the story of the workings of loving-kindness or mercy (*hesed*). Ruth shows *hesed* to her mother-in-law (2:11); Boaz, struck by this, shows the same to her in allowing her to glean in his fields. When Ruth, to all intents and purposes, proposes to Boaz, he considers it a kindness (in Greek, *eleos*, 'mercy', 3:10) that she chose him and not a younger man, and he goes on to act towards her and Naomi as 'next of kin', that is *goel* or redeemer. Into this interaction of human kindness or mercy comes the mercy of God himself. At the start of the story, when the three widows Naomi, Ruth and Orpah are together, Naomi prays that the Lord may deal kindly with them (1:8; literally, show them mercy, *eleos*). The initiatives of the characters in the story could be considered the answer to this prayer, but then after Boaz and Ruth are married the author explicitly states that it was the Lord who granted that Ruth should conceive a child (4:13), who would carry on the work of mercy. The mercy of which Mary sings in the Magnificat is thus shown at work in manifold forms. For the Fathers Ruth is, of course, also a figure of the Church that comes from the Gentiles.

<sup>6</sup> Hom. 12.

<sup>7</sup> Sheed & Ward's *The Mary Book*, p 15

Another category of women in the history of Israel is prophetesses and wise women. First among these is Our Lady's namesake Miriam, the sister of Moses. Her vigilance, quick thinking and persuasive tongue rescue the infant Moses in Egypt just as Mary and Joseph will safeguard the infant Jesus in the same place. Her song after the crossing of the Red Sea celebrates God's glorious triumph: the vocabulary for 'glory' in Miriam's song and the Magnificat is different, but both songs describe the Lord as Saviour (Ex 15; Lk 1:47). Pharaoh and his mighty warriors are cast down; God's strong right hand (Ex 15:6) or his arm (Lk 1:51) is stretched out; most importantly of all, both songs celebrate God's steadfast love (Ex 15:13; Lk 1:54). Another wise woman who sang of God's marvellous deeds is Deborah. Her public role of judging, prophesying and leadership in war does not have a parallel in Mary's life while on earth, but we do see in Mary both practical wisdom and the celebration of God's power over his enemies. As our mighty intercessor now, we can see in Mary closer parallels with the feisty Deborah, and also with the resourceful Jael, who in Deborah's victory song is described as *Most blessed of women, of tent-dwelling women most blessed* (Jdg 5:24; similar but not identical vocabulary to Lk 1:42).

This leads us into another category of women, the heroines. First among these must be Esther and Judith. Both were models of faith in God, who prayed, fasted and then acted with immense boldness and courage. In the story of Judith we hear another blessing: *You are blessed by the Most High above all women on earth* (13:18), and Judith celebrates God's saving activity with song, mentioning especially his mercy: *To those who fear thee thou wilt continue to show mercy* (16:15 *phoboumenois*, 'those who fear', exactly the same word as in Lk 1:50). Esther's heroism lay in her act of intercession for her people. When the king says to her *I am your brother. Take courage; you shall not die, for our law applies only to the people* (15:9-10), it sounds (to me at any rate) a fair summary of Mary's exemption from the corruption that is the lot of the rest of the human race. Just as Esther pleaded for her people, we know that Mary will intercede on our behalf. With Mordecai we can say to her, *Remember the days of your lowliness ... Beseech the Lord and speak to the king concerning us and deliver us from death* (Est 4:8).

A particular form of intercession was that carried out by the Queen Mother (*gebirah*). Here I am drawing very much on *Hail Holy Queen* by Scott Hahn and *Jesus and the Jewish Roots of Mary* by Brant Pitre. In Israel, as in other kingdoms of the Ancient Near East, the pre-eminent lady at a royal court was not the king's spouse (of whom there might be several) but his mother. Thus when Bathsheba goes to see the aged King David in Chapter 1 of 1 Kings, she bows low, but after David's death in Chapter 2 when she goes to see King Solomon he rises and bows to her, and orders that a seat be brought for her (1 Kg 2:19) *and she sat on his right*. As Scott Hahn points out, the king's 'power and authority are in no way threatened by her. He bows to her but he remains the monarch ... Yet clearly he will honour her requests – not out of any legally binding obligation of obedience but out of filial love' (p 81). In this respect even poor Bathsheba (not otherwise much of a model) can be said to pre-figure Mary. 'Let us,'

says St John Damascene, ‘in holy reverence, with trembling hand and yearning soul, pay gratefully the humble fruits of our minds, as we must, to the “Queen Mother”, the benefactress of all nature’.<sup>8</sup>

There is another type of intercessor, where our example is not in royal robes but in garments of mourning. This is Rachel, the second wife of Jacob, mother of Joseph and Benjamin. She could have been included with the other matriarchs, especially as her barrenness was overcome by God’s intervention, but she deserves separate treatment. As you know, after a painful labour she died while giving birth to Benjamin, and was buried *on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem)* (Gn 35:19). Centuries later the prophet Jeremiah speaks of *a voice of lamentation and bitter weeping. Rachel is weeping for her children* (Jer 31:15). The implication is that Rachel is weeping for the Israelites who have been killed or taken into exile to Assyria or Babylon. In the very next verse the Lord replies, *Keep your voice from weeping and your eyes from tears for ... they shall come back from the land of the enemy* (31:16). The ancient rabbinic commentators therefore saw her as a most powerful intercessor for Israel. Brant Pitre makes three very interesting links between Rachel and Mary. First, there is the obvious one that the massacre of the Innocents took place at Bethlehem. Second, Revelation 12 shows a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, crying out in the pangs of childbirth. The only woman in the Old Testament whose anguish in childbirth is described is Rachel, symbolised as a moon in Joseph’s dream. Revelation goes on to describe *those who keep the commandments of God and bear witness to Jesus as the other offspring* of this woman (Rv 12:17). ‘Just as Rachel was regarded in a special way as the mother of God’s persecuted children in the Old Testament, so the heavenly woman is mother to those who believe in Jesus but are persecuted by the forces of evil’.<sup>9</sup> The third point is that Benjamin, the younger son of Rachel, is described in the blessing of the tribes by Moses in Deuteronomy as *The beloved of the Lord, he dwells in safety by him* (Dt 33:12). Pitre proposes that the *disciple whom Jesus loved*, who received Mary as his mother at the foot of the Cross, gave himself this appellation *disciple whom Jesus loved* precisely because he saw himself as a younger son, a Benjamin, to Mary, the new Rachel.

When Mary says to Gabriel, *I am the handmaid of the Lord*, she has before her the figures of the first woman Eve, the matriarchs, those who came into the people of Israel through God’s mercy, those who served Israel through their courage or intercession or even by their suffering and tears. In her fidelity to her calling she surpassed all of them. In her we find the example of what we should be, and also our mighty intercessor.

May her example and prayers hasten the coming of peace to the world.

Christmas blessings,

*L. Eustochium*

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<sup>8</sup> Homily on the Dormition 1,2.

<sup>9</sup> Pitre p174.

## *Material for Celebration*

At Regensburg University, where I was studying, religious wearing the habit would cross my path now and again. It was really quite odd to see this religious dress among the colourful throng of other fashions: tight, baggy, ripped, flashy... Amidst all that, on the one hand a habit seemed highly exotic, and on the other hand there was a naturalness about it which most other sorts of dress lacked. While in the colourful hotchpotch everyone was trying to express 'himself' as best he could, the habit gave its wearer an ordering to a community, to a meaningful whole, even if only that one member of the whole was to be seen. Curiously, the habit seemed to me to emphasise the essential personality of its wearer, in contrast to the elaborately accessorised conformity I could see all around it. That is not meant to be a general criticism of contemporary fashion – with hindsight, I would have to put my own dress-sense at the time under the heading of 'eccentric' too. I simply want to indicate that the habit exercised a unique force of attraction.

In my admittedly short experience so far, there are many things in religious life to which one becomes accustomed only very slowly. Other things may fill one with enthusiasm in the first months, and then afterwards have to be tended carefully so as not to become mere humdrum routine. The habit was something different for me. A year after entering the monastery, on the day of my clothing I formed a friendship with the habit which has remained unshaken to this day, even in the hottest summer months. The popular motto of the Benedictine Order, *Ora et labora*, 'Pray and work', is visibly expressed in our habit, which is at the same time a solemn garment and a practical one, apt for liturgy as for work. A unique scent clings to the wide sleeves, a mixture of incense, lamp-oil and basil for one sister, perhaps disinfectant or baking for another. On the hem of the long tunic are various loops and toggles, which allow the whole thing to be decently tucked up within seconds so that washing-up or bread-making can be done comfortably – or you could play football, or even climb a tree. For heavier work we have a special work habit. The habit reminds me continually who I am – a child of God whom the Lord has graciously placed in his service – and it demands of me that I do justice to this calling. What could better express a total self-gift to Christ than a garment which surrounds me entirely, like a second skin?

In fact, that is a prominent image in Sacred Scripture, especially in the letters of St Paul, who over and over again encourages his fellow-believers to 'put on Christ': 'Put on the new nature [lit. 'new man'], created according to the likeness of God, in

*The habit which envelops us entirely reminds us of the prayer which should envelop our whole life. The habit makes us like to one another, and there should be a union of hearts too.*

*Abbess Bernadette Smeijers, December 1957.*



true righteousness and holiness' (Eph 4:24). Of course, this image does not relate only to religious, but to all baptised Christians. And of course the dress is only a sign of an inward transformation. But we are forgetful creatures who stand in need of such signs. In Ps 73 (74), which describes the destruction of Jerusalem, the enumeration of woes culminates in the exclamation: 'We do not see our signs', *signa nostra non vidimus*. This verse expresses something very relevant to our own times, when sacred signs are so often absent or misunderstood.

Someone who resolves to hand over his whole life to the Lord must necessarily withdraw from the world. Where there is a pure intention, this is not done for one's own sake, nor out of fear or contempt for the world, but precisely for the world, in order to hold the world before God in solitude. There can be various degrees of this withdrawal; it will look different in apostolic orders as compared to contemplative orders. But it is always there in some form, and requires concrete expression if it is not to be covered up and forgotten.

This, too, holds good not only for religious. The final goal of man's life is, after all, not to be found 'in the world', but in God. St Paul's warning not to conform to the world (Rom. 12:2) is addressed to every Christian. The religious habit can remind each and every one of the faithful of the precious spiritual garment which each of us has been given in baptism and whose possession ought to fill us with boundless joy. 'I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall exult in my God; for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness' (Is. 61:10).

Sr CS

*A version of this article was first published in Die Tagespost.*

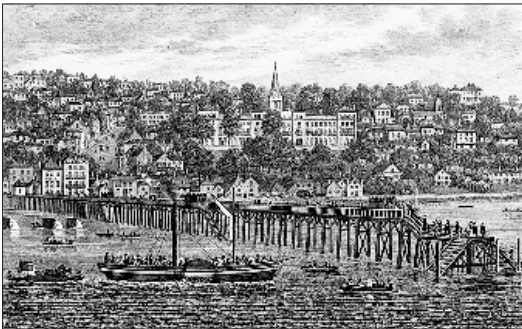
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### ***Appley House and its Inhabitants: Part 9: The Large Family***

It is not clear when Captain Hutt and his family moved into Appley House. The twelfth child, Amelia, was baptised at St Michael's, Bishop's Stortford, a few weeks after her birth in November 1807; perhaps they arrived in time for Christmas. At that point Elizabeth, the eldest, would have been sixteen; there followed Ann, Mary, John, Frances, Benjamin, Catherine, William, Charles, Richard, Matilda and baby Amelia. There had not been children running around Appley since the two Roberts girls in the 1730s, and after all those decades of being occupied by grave adults the house must have felt quite different. Upstairs in Appley House at that time there were only three large rooms, and two smaller ones, that could have served as bedrooms, so all the children must have been used to sharing.

What was the garden like? Here is a contemporary description:

‘This charming spot ... so long admired for its natural advantages of situation, is now finished in an improved style embellished with taste and may be said to rank with the first beauties of the island... The house, a handsome square stone building, stands on a smooth lawn elevated over a hanging wood towards the sea and bordered by a shrubbery where the fine trees long growing in great luxuriance are heightened by a flourishing plantation of evergreens. The gentle declivity and beautiful undulations of this lawn are but seldom equalled. The most agreeable pictures of Ryde and the Motherbank, Spithead, Portsmouth and St Helen’s are presented through the various vistas in the shrubbery and over the woods that extend along the margin of the shore. The principal entrance is now toward the East, where the carriage road ascends from the shore [this is where Ryde Inshore Rescue station is now], meeting the principal avenue [Appley Lane?] that descends past St John’s [now Oakfield Primary School] through the centre of the fine grounds above it. To the South the ornamented front has a bowed centre opening to the garden which in small compass is singularly beautiful [still quite beautiful, but now containing also our vegetable garden]. An undulating lawn bordered and interspersed with the fine evergreens and other foliage studded with flowers is terminated by lofty firs mingled with bay trees of considerable height. A fine wood rising behind confines the prospect and give the most sequestered appearance to this calm retreat. The arbutus, the most beautiful of shrubs, is here abundant and flourishes to great perfection: one in particular on the lawn behind is remarked for its magnitude and beauty.’<sup>1</sup>



When the Hutts arrived, the house was fairly isolated, but soon there began the great building boom in Ryde. In 1810 Jane Player, widow of the Lord of the Manor of Ryde, began to grant leases for buildings all along Union Street and elsewhere. On 13<sup>th</sup> July 1812 the first meeting of the Ryde Pier Company was held; on 29<sup>th</sup> June 1813 the foundation stone was laid; and on 26<sup>th</sup> July

1814 the nearly complete pier was opened. No longer did the retreating tide mean that Ryde was cut off for twelve hours out of twenty-four. Also in 1812 the first free school in Ryde was built in Melville Street (as the street became fashionable the school was moved to Green Street, but the dilapidated building remains).

The eldest son of the Hutt family, John, was educated at Christ’s Hospital (then on its original site in Newgate, London) and then at Haileybury, which at that time was a training college for clerks for the East India Company. In 1813, at the age of

1 William Cooke, *A New Picture of the Isle of Wight* (London, 1808), pp82-84.

eighteen, John Hutt sailed to India. The report of the College of Madras for 1815 shows him as in the second class for Tamil and in the first class for Telooگو (now usually spelt ‘Telugu’), and the examiners noted, ‘Mr Hutt, we observed, evidently applied to study during the late term with much assiduity, and fully established his claim to the highest of the increased allowances which we accordingly recommended.’

Given the distance between England and India it is likely that John Hutt was not at home for two sorrowful events at Appley House. His sister Mary died aged nineteen in the summer of 1813. Less than two years the mother of the family died, aged forty-seven. Both are buried in the church-yard at St Helen’s. The eldest daughter Elizabeth was engaged by 1815 but did not marry until 1817; one wonders if she deliberately delayed for the sake of her father (already aged sixty-five) and her much younger siblings left without a mother: Amelia and George would be only nine and six respectively.

*Next episode: the connection with Napoleon.*

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### ***‘The Saints Whose Relics Are Here’: Blessed Cyprian Michael Iwene Tansi***

*If you want to eat vultures, you may as well eat seven of them, so that when people call you ‘vulture eater’ you really deserve the name. If you want to become a Catholic, live as a faithful Catholic, so that when people see you, they know that you are a Catholic. If you are going to be a Christian at all, you might as well live entirely for God. - Bl. Michael Tansi<sup>2</sup>*

Do you ever wonder if you might be the unworthy object of the attention of a saint? One Saturday, a year before I entered St Cecilia’s, the Holy Spirit sent a few thousand Nigerians and me off in coaches to Leicestershire for a Tansi Day. The word Tansi doesn’t yet appear in the dictionary. I was too proud or too shy to ask at the parish. Everyone was dressed in green cloth adorned with medallions of Pope St John Paul II and a Nigerian priest whom he had beatified in Onitsha in 1998. We were bound for a field adjoining the Mount St Bernard Trappist monastery for an open-air Mass and a day of activities.

In 2008, here, we were graced with the presence of Mother Mary Charles Anyanwu, of Nike Monastery in Enugu State. Her Golden Jubilee gave the ideal opportunity to request a relic. Fr Abbot Joseph of Mount St Bernard kindly directed us to the postulator in Onitsha. Just three months later the precious package arrived from Nigeria. You can imagine the number of Masses we had for the Church in Nigeria. If only it were always that easy to procure relics!

Bl Cyprian Michael Iwene Tansi was born in 1903 to an exemplary Igbo family.

<sup>2</sup> The quotations and most of the information in this article come from Elizabeth Isichei, *Entirely for God: The Life of Michael Iwene Tansi*, Cistercian Studies 43 (Macmillan, 1980).

His father had been unjustly imprisoned by the British Royal Niger Company which dealt in palm oil but the name of his son translates as ‘let malice not kill’. He sent him to the Holy Ghost Fathers to gain an education as protection from future injustice. The boy was baptised at the age of nine taking the name, Michael. From childhood he displayed exceptional fervour and intensity of faith – prayer, penance and almsgiving. He became a teacher and then a headmaster. ‘During Lent, he went to school barefoot, as a penance, hurrying home for his shoes and socks when he heard an inspector was coming.’ He was strict, which often made him hard to live with, but he also demonstrated exceptional kindness and concern for his students. From 1925 he spent 12 years as a seminarian, exercising tenacity in the face of prejudice against Igbo candidates. Few of a large intake persevered in the face of multiple difficulties. In 1937 he was ordained priest, determined to stay close both to the people and to the teachings of the Church. He was assiduous in promoting marriage and preparing couples. He established houses where young women could live safely while preparing for marriage, building up groups of the Children of Mary to assist him. He did not shun those with smallpox and leprosy. Fifty years later his example was still warmly remembered. He baptised the future Cardinal Francis Arinze. Arinze, as a seminarian, has this telling memory of being sent off on a bicycle by him: *The brakes were very bad. He said: ‘Try to manage, put your foot on the tyre.’ I didn’t think I would ever get there, but anyhow, I went. When I came to the river, I stopped a long time before I went down the hill. That bicycle should have been written off long ago.*

However, in 1950 Tansi disappeared to Leicestershire. *After labouring in the mission field for several years, I was certain of a void in my soul. I felt an urge to give myself more completely to God by a life of prayer [although] there is so much work to be done here and so few priests to do the work ... I’d like to know from God Himself that I have the vocation. ... My Bishop is to make the choice of place. ... This thing must be begun properly. Do not spare me.*

In the spartan monastic conditions, putting up uncomplainingly with the cold, (he was ‘there two years before he realised which rooms were heated’), Tansi persevered quietly, practising humility. His novice master noted, *Most of the community did not know him at all. They didn’t know what he had done in the past, his achievements before he came.* Because of his accent he was even prohibited from hearing Confessions.

His perseverance in yet further trials, in his last days, can be an encouragement for us. One monk recalled: *He sometimes came to me for advice and encouragement. I think his trials were more a purification of his hope than of his faith, though it is difficult to separate the two virtues. He felt abandoned by God and used to get very discouraged. I had to reassure him of God’s special love for him. I think there was a resurgence of old pagan fears.* And he once said, ‘Father, I cannot pray at all.’ *I was impressed by his simplicity in admitting it. He must have felt that when he had given up so much he should at least be able to pray.*

Mount St Bernard now has a flourishing daughter house in Cameroon. Tansi was

destined for it but death, on 20<sup>th</sup> January 1964, intervened. The examining doctor exclaimed: *This man must be in terrific pain, but he will only admit that he has 'a little pain.'* All was endured for the sake of Christ.

One of his brethren concluded: *He was just an ordinary monk monking about.* Can there be a greater aspiration whatever our walk of life? Thank you Holy Spirit. Blessed Tansi, bless Nigeria now, intercede for us.

Sr CN

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### *Christmas at the Monastery: The Christmas Octave at PCJ*

One day could never be enough to meditate on what has been put before our eyes in the liturgy of Christmas, and so for seven more days we savour the prayers, chants and antiphons, returning again and again to the offices of Christmas day. Where people might find some aspects of Christmas at the monastery austere



(no spending the evening on the couch watching films and polishing off a chocolate selection box, perhaps), there is an air of indulgence in our celebration of the liturgy. Here is a feast for the soul with all the trimmings! So often we are asked how could we leave all the good things of the world behind to enter the monastery? The answer to this question is never more apparent than in the great octaves of Christmas and Easter: the sacrifices we made and make are to create this time and space

in our lives for the divine life to break in – *vacare Deo* – and to behold something of the Lord's glory that we hope to enjoy eternally. This is the essence of the Incarnation and so it is not surprising that this mystery finds a particularly strong resonance in the monastery, where we spend our lives trying to make Christ's life incarnate in our flesh.

During the Christmas octave, unlike the Easter octave, we have the feasts of saints to cast the Light of the World through different prisms – never without returning to Vespers of Christmas each day so as not to lose sight of what is illuminating them. The first is that of St Stephen, which takes us, with a bit of a jolt, to the post-Pentecostal Church under persecution, and we lift our gaze with him to the heavens opened by Jesus. Then comes the feast of St John when we return to the contemplation of the Word made flesh; then the Holy Innocents; the feast of the Holy Family; and finally, the octave culminates on the solemnity of the Mother of God on January the 1st. This seemingly discordant assortment of feasts provides us with a range of angles to reflect upon how humanity has been totally renewed under all its aspects.

When Christmas is already coming to an end, according to the notions of the advertising industry, on St Stephen's day, in the monastery it is only just beginning,

and our Advent sacrifices are a distant memory as each day in the refectory our meals mark the festive season. We continue to live by a slightly adjusted timetable on the 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup>, in order to get a little extra sleep after the disruption of Christmas night. During the octave, we have permission to write to friends or extended family members that we have not written to since Easter. We return to work (though many charges and duties never stopped, it must be said) and to the ordinary timetable after the 27<sup>th</sup>, and so this correspondence is squeezed in in moments of free time. On the feast of St John, we have an afternoon ‘talking tea’ in the community room, enlivened by gifts and treats – and not excluding the sound of crackers – given by kind benefactors.

The octave finishes by bringing us back to Christmas night and the Crib in celebrating our Lady as the Mother of God. As if to underscore this link, we repeat Christmas day dinner at midday, though this time we are noticeably much more awake to appreciate the kitchen’s hard work. We have festive recreations on special occasions throughout the year with musical pieces, poetry or apposite extracts from books to celebrate. On the 1<sup>st</sup> of January, however, we have a festive recreation quite unlike any other: we have ‘spontaneous’ items or pieces – the nature and approximate length of which are famously requested in advance by the sister who arranges the recreation. Perhaps the most familial of our familial customs, we participate in games, read, sing or perform things that don’t quite fit into the usual categories. The results are often hilarious and unexpectedly edifying; not taking oneself too seriously is an important monastic virtue, after all!

Life returns to a lower key on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of January, but as it is only in heaven that we shall enjoy celebrations without satiety, this comes as something of a relief. We see the kings afar off, however, making their way to Bethlehem (we strongly suspect that they will arrive on the eve of the 6<sup>th</sup>...) and know we have not yet exhausted the riches of this season – as if we ever could!

*To be continued. Sr MBR*

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### *House Chronicle October 2022-November 2023*



**I**n January, Mother Abbess travelled to Ste-Cécile of Solesmes to assist Fr Abbot Xavier of Quarr at their canonical visitation. Also in January was Quarr’s canonical visitation. One of their Visitors, Abbot Jean Pateau of Fongombault, came for recreation in the parlour with our community and also gave a conference to the novitiate. These contacts strengthen the fraternal bonds among the houses of the Congregation, and our gratitude for them.

At the Epiphany, the novitiate entertained us with

a musical which combined elements of Romeo and Juliet, *Les Miserables*, and the vicissitudes of two colonies of bees, all in celebration of monastic life under the title *Fratres in Unum*, 'Brethren in unity', the motto of our new Abbot President.

Some reorganisation of work charges was needed in January. M. Subprioress was appointed Librarian, Sr Lætitia was appointed as Garth Guest Mistress, Sr Mechtilde was given charge of the kitchen, and Sr Mary Thomas was appointed as a second assistant in the Novitiate.

Mother Abbess's Silver Jubilee of Profession was celebrated on 2<sup>nd</sup> February, Feast of the Presentation of the Lord, as reported in the Easter Chronicle. Family and friends filled the parlour, and the joyful day ended with Vespers alternated with our brethren of Quarr.

Fr Dominic Allain again came to be our much-appreciated celebrant for Christmas and Holy Week. In the parlour he updated us on the work of Grief to Grace for the healing of those deeply traumatised by abuse. We also enjoyed a visit from the Sisters of the Gospel of Life, who told us about their ministry to women in crisis pregnancy situations and those wounded by abortion. After Easter, Bishop Philip Egan of our diocese of Portsmouth came to say Mass for us and met us in the parlour.



In March, on the feast of St Frances of Rome, Sr Rachel Appleby's transfer to our community was completed. As providence arranged things, this coincided with a visitation of Covid, and so our newly-incorporated sister celebrated in quarantine, but not alone; a select band of fellow-sufferers were able to console one another during their time of communal isolation. Thankfully no cases were serious.

**O**n 19<sup>th</sup> November and 10<sup>th</sup> February respectively, Sr Cæcilia Schenke and Sr Teresa Benedicta O'Riordan made their First Professions, as reported in the Easter Chronicle.

Adding to the joy, in June it was the turn of Sr Maria Faustina Sinclair, who made her First Profession on the feast of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, in the presence of her sisters and a group of friends, who joined the novitiate for a recreation in the parlour. In his homily, Fr Abbot Xavier meditated on Our Lady's role: *We like to think of Mary's long, patient, and loving meditation on Jesus' mysteries. Mary was given to witness the preaching of a prophet moved by the Spirit; the powerful miracles of the Messiah sent by God; the dreadful death of the Servant of God; the humble and silent resurrection on Easter morning; the flames of fire of Pentecost; the humble and powerful beginnings of the Church.*

*Jesus' life and the life of His Spirit in His Church are the things which occupied Mary's Immaculate Heart. Today these things are given to you, too, dear Sister. Your life must be a resolute, constant meditation on the mysteries of Jesus seen from the Heart of Mary. You must be in our Father's house. Even, you must become the house of the Father, the perfect Temple of His presence. To answer this calling, draw near to Mary. May the Holy Virgin,*

*whose Heart was in perfect harmony with the holiness of God and the will of the Father, draw you, under your Abbess and together with your sisters, ever closer to the perfect peace of the Heart of Jesus.*

On 30<sup>th</sup> November, Martha O’Riordan from Cork received the monastic habit and the name of Sr Joseph Marie, confirming her devotion to the foster-father of the Lord. On 25<sup>th</sup> March, Frances Tomlin from Croydon also received the novice’s white veil, and the name of Sr Agnes Mary, after the Roman virgin martyr whose liturgy speaks so eloquently of consecration to God.



*Sr M Faustina, M Abbess, Sr Elizabeth*

On the feast of the Baptism of the Lord, 8<sup>th</sup> January, Adelheid Theisen from Görlitz in Germany entered as a postulant. Later in the year, on 2<sup>nd</sup> October, the Guardian Angels brought Martina Jelínková – from the Czech Republic, but a long-term British resident – to join her. Several young women have made visits in the course of vocational discernment. Please pray for all the members of the novitiate and their families, and all whom the Lord is calling to monastic life.



**D**om Geoffrey Kemlin was elected abbot of St-Pierre of Solesmes, and thus Abbot President of our Congregation of Solesmes, in May 2022. He has been trying to visit all the monasteries of the Congregation, and in June 2023 it was the turn of the Solesmian outposts on the Isle of Wight. While staying with our brethren of Quarr, the Abbot President came to our monastery for the day. After bestowing a blessing on the Altar Bread baking machine, and touring the garden and house, Dom Kemlin answered our questions during a talking tea, giving his admirable English language skills strenuous exercise. He returned on another day to give the novitiate a conference.

**O**ur annual retreat was planned for May, but the preacher, Fr Cajetan Cuddy OP of the Washington Dominican House of Studies, had to postpone at the last minute. Not wishing to lose the benefit of a week that had been jealously ringfenced against parlours or appointments, the community kept something of a retreat timetable, with extra silence and prayer. Mother Abbess nourished us with daily talks on the week’s liturgy, the rich season of the end of Eastertide. The official retreat took place in August. Fr Cuddy’s conferences were based on ‘the three most important questions’: three questions asked in Scripture which reflect profoundly different modes of engaging (or failing to engage) with reality, above all the reality of God. His preaching offered a highly enjoyable and very Dominican tour de force in demonstrating the powerful and



cheering implications of classical Thomist metaphysics for the spiritual life. We also listened spellbound to the story of his own conversion and vocation.

Fr Jean-Gabriel Pophillat OP spoke to us about his work as archivist of the Roman Province of the Dominican Order, and gave us a second talk on the theological underpinnings on the *via pulchritudinis*, the ‘way of beauty’, as a means of evangelization. Fr Stephen Buckland SJ told us about his experiences as a Jesuit and the many challenges faced by his native land of Zimbabwe.

Jim Towe shared memories of his friendship with St Teresa of Calcutta. In October, Caroline Hull, National Director of Aid the Church in Need UK, gave us an illustrated talk on her recent trip to Syria and ACN’s work there. The next week Fr Bruno Clifton OP spoke to us about the conflict in the Holy Land in light of the ancient Middle East and his experience teaching at the École Biblique in Jerusalem. Mr David Ross, Sr Margaret’s father, gave us a fascinating illustrated talk on the history of food production, from the discovery of fire to the triumph of Fife in the Tea Races of the 1860s. Visiting groups this year have included a group of Confirmation candidates and their families from Portsmouth Cathedral, a parish group from Bournemouth, the Island’s Divine Mercy group, and Ealing Abbey’s Chant Group.



Fr Cuddy



One day in August we discovered to our shock and sorrow that St Benedict’s Oak had split nearly in half. This tree had been a mighty and magnificent oak, of an unusually symmetrical round form; but now part of the trunk, with several massive boughs and their branches, had broken away and fallen to the ground – equivalent in size to the fall of an entire lesser tree. By the mercy of God, no one was near the tree at the time of the breakage. Apart from the oak itself, the only casualties were a fence, and part of the shelter of St Benedict’s statue at the base of the trunk. Our consolation is that an expert assures us that the remaining part of the tree is healthy and should continue to stand, with vigour if with less beauty than before. St Benedict’s house and his long-corroded crozier are now under restoration. As Monte Cassino’s motto has it, *Succisa virescit*: ‘If cut down, it flourishes.’

In September, the Chant Forum met at Quarr for the first time since the pandemic.

Some chantresses attended the sessions, and the whole Forum came to our monastery for one day. All could thus benefit from the expertise of Giedrius Gapsys, Jaan-Eik Tulve, and Fr Abbot Xavier of Quarr as we studied the rich repertoire of the Paschal Triduum. Four nun participants in the Forum gave us the pleasure of hosting them: M. Karol O'Connell of Kylemore, Sr Beatrice Brady of Glencairn, and Srs Julian Falkus and Mary Peter Smith of Stanbrook. M. Karol delighted us with a piano recital at a midday recreation, and the next day at evening recreation played piano duets with Sr Elizabeth to celebrate Mother Ninian's feastday.

Another Chant Forum participant, Fr Benedict Hardy of Pluscarden, stayed on afterwards to give us a triduum of talks on monastic subjects, beginning with one on the praise of God. He gave us the image of the monastic choir singing Ps 148 ('Praise Him, all His angels') as enthusiastic spectators in the great arena of angelic praise – 'Go! Go! Go! Keep on praising God!' We also met Jonas of Bobbio, a fascinating witness to seventh-century monastic practice and the reception of the Rule of St Benedict.

St Eustochium has an optional memoria in the calendar of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, but does not appear in our ordo. Mother Abbess's feast on 28<sup>th</sup> September was therefore kept with a Votive Mass and Vespers of St Eustochium – the first time the saint has been so honoured, we wonder? The community entertained Mother with a play, 'Bobby Balances the Books': the story of how a young girl comes to love the Old Testament even more than Georgette Heyer, with a little help from St Eustochium and the angels, and wins the Wooster Scripture Prize on the way. In the novitiate's refectory decorations, meanwhile, the sun, moon and nine choirs of angels rendered their homage to the Little King, the Infant of Prague. The ensemble was inspired by the year's motto ('To see the King in His glory' (cf. Isaiah 33)) via an antiphon from St Agnes's feast: it is Christ 'whom the angels serve, at whose beauty the sun and moon marvel'.

Jacqueline McCrea made her oblation in June, becoming our oblate Sr Joseph, while Primavera Moretti made her oblation in July and took the oblate name of Sr Hilda. Some fifteen oblates attended the oblates' weekend in October, hearing talks on the Luminous Mysteries of the Rosary, Lectio Divina, and prayer, as well as meeting the community in the parlour for Sunday midday recreation.

At the time of writing, Mother Abbess was about to travel to Stanbrook Abbey in Yorkshire to assist Abbot Christopher Jamison in their canonical visitation, and then to join our sisters of Westfield, Vermont, for the blessing of their first abbess, Mother Benedict McLaughlin. Westfield was founded in 1981 from Ste-Marie-des-Deux-Montagnes in Quebec, and was raised to the status of an abbey in June this year. M. Benedict's abbatial motto is *Respicite ad Eum*, 'Look to Him' (Ps 33). Sr Bede Barker collaborated with Westfield's artists on the heraldic design for M. Benedict's blazon.

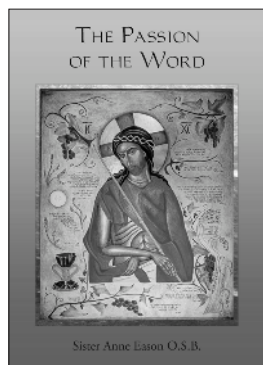
The garden and orchard held their own against the British weather. Shiny silver

tape and re-purposed tin foil were successful in warding off birds from the plums and apples. The celeriac gave an example of the virtue of perseverance, when after a sickly start the roots expanded to their biggest size yet. We ate our first asparagus, and enjoyed abundant tomatoes well into autumn, to name only a few of the crops.

In the course of the year, Fr Abbot Xavier of Quarr has given us various conferences, and Mother Abbesses has nourished us with her regular teaching, this year including conferences on the Collects. Sources for Collects commentaries include 'Geoffrey of Admont', the name under which a collection of twelfth-century monastic texts was published, some of which may in fact be by nuns.

Blessed Columba Marmion OSB, Abbot of Maredsous, was a renowned retreat-preacher, including to our own community. 2023 marked the hundredth anniversary of his death. Silverstream Priory in Ireland has published a commemorative volume of essays, *Beloved of God and Men: Essays in Honour of Blessed Columba Marmion*,

including a chapter by Sr Claire Waddelove: 'Meditations for the Rosary from the writings of Bl Columba'. Sr Claire's account of the beatification of John Henry Newman during Pope Benedict XVI's visit to Britain in 2010 appears in a new Isle of Wight Catholic History Society book published in memory of Benedict XVI. Sr Anne Eason's book *The Passion of the Word*, a study of the Servant Songs of Isaiah, has been published on Academia.edu, attracting an appreciative readership. *The Joy of God*, selected writings of Sr Mary David Totah (d.2017), is to be published in a Czech translation.



With the whole Church we mourned the passing of Pope Benedict XVI, and thank God for his rich legacy of writing and teaching. Family and friends who have been called home to God this year include: Sr Anne-Marie's sister Anne Hayes; Eloise Appleby, Sr Rachel's sister-in-law; Sr Cæcilia's grandmother Elisabeth Kositzka; Sr Iona Misquitta of Shanti Nilayam Abbey, Bangalore; Sr Deirdre Michael Clark, SBVM. We also learned this year of the death in 2021 of our oblate Anne Obermer, Sr Benedict, aged ninety-nine and ten months. May they rest in peace.

The many visits noted in this year's House Chronicle show that life is in many ways 'back to normal' after the pandemic. This world is nonetheless no place in which to settle down, as so many of our suffering brothers and sisters experience daily in their flesh. The newspapers speak of the horrors of war; our prayer requests board is a window upon many private sorrows. May the return of the Christmas season teach all men anew that a loving and all-powerful God has chosen to do his greatest work through the frailty of human nature; may the tiny hands of the Christ Child bring hope and peace.

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

Sr Eustochium Lee

Sr. Ninian Eaglesham

Sr. Scholastica Bacon

Sr. M. Bernard Eckhardt

Sr. Anselma Scotland

Sr Caecilia Schunke

Sr. Agnes Mary Tomlin

Sr. M. Angela Conway

Sr. M. Germain Fievet

Sr Mary Thomas Brown

Sr. Gertrude Quayle

Sr. Maselemie McCann

Sr. Anne-Marie O'Keeffe,

Sr. Bede Barker

Sr. Mary Antonia Badger

Sr. Marie-Thérèse Dempsey

Sr Margaret Ross

Sr Constance Neame

Sr. Marie Waddelone  
Adeleheid

Sr. Anne Gash

Maudlin

Sr Bernadette Byrne

Sr. Laetitia Payne

Sr Mary Benedict Ryan

Sr Elizabeth Burgess

Sr Rachel Appleby

Sr. Maria Michaela de Paula

Sr Mechthild Hansen

Sr. Maria Faustine Sinclair

Sr. Joseph Marie & Riboldi

Sr. Teresa Benedicta O'Riordan

Sr. Luiz Maria Pinelli