

# St Cecilia's Abbey, Ryde

## Chronicle

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Advent/Christmas 2025

No. 57

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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 2025

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

Midnight Mass: Just after midnight.

Day Mass: 10.00 a.m.

#### HOLY WEEK 2026

2<sup>nd</sup> April, Maundy Thursday: Missa Vespertina: 5.00 p.m.

3<sup>rd</sup> April, Good Friday: Actio Liturgica: 3.00 p.m.

4<sup>th</sup> April, Holy Saturday: Paschal Vigil: 10.45 p.m.

5<sup>th</sup> April, Easter Sunday Mass 10.00 a.m.

2026 Ascension Day: Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> May, Mass 10.00 a.m.

Corpus Christi: Thursday 4<sup>th</sup> June, Mass 10.00 a.m.

Feast of the Sacred Heart: Friday 12<sup>th</sup> June, Mass 10.00 a.m.

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**Cover Illustration:** Statue of Our Lady in cloister by Sr Agnes Mary Tomlin.

**Illustrations:** p.7 Icon of St Michael, Archangel by Sr Anne Eason.

p.8 The Nativity. Wikimedia Commons.

p.9 Saint John the Baptist: Adam Elsheimer 1602.

p.11 Judaeen desert. Wikimedia commons. Photocollection Van de Poll.

p.15 Dr Kathryn Wehr: image used with permission.

## *From Mother Abbess*

It was my privilege to go to Solesmes for the celebrations relating to the 150th anniversary of the death of Dom Guéranger. Two moments stood out. Before the grand Mass we abbesses were ushered into the cloister of S-Pierre, so that we could be part of the procession. There was a scene of happy chaos, as monks and nuns were arriving and greeting each other, while the monk in charge of the ceremony was trying to get us into orderly lines. Eventually we sorted ourselves out, the bells rang and the procession moved off. I thought of Dom Guéranger starting his monastic life in the half-ruined building, with a small group of companions, most of whom left, and all those years of slow growth, with lots of disappointments. And now here we all were, processing along joyfully, from communities all over the world, where we may have our difficulties and shortcomings but are generally living the monastic life as Dom Guéranger had hoped, and we were here to give thanks. The other moment was at the end of Vespers when we were going to have Exposition and Benediction. A deacon went to the tabernacle to fetch the Blessed Sacrament, and immediately without any instruction all present dropped to their knees – all those monks and nuns and friends, learned or simple, from so many countries, united in adoration.

Another great man who combined learning and holiness was of course our new Doctor of the Church, St John Henry Newman. He and Dom Guéranger had rather different personal styles and did not really appreciate each other – no doubt a sign of the breadth of the Church. We do not all have to be the same. They are surely rejoicing to praise God together now in heaven. To celebrate the announcement of Newman as a Doctor of the Church, we had a community recreation devoted to prose and poetry by or about or vaguely relating to the new Doctor. One Sister produced the following prayer, written by Newman to be said before Mass and which is particularly suited to the Christmas season, when we contemplate Mary's motherhood:

*O Holy Mother, stand by me now at Mass time, when Christ comes to me, as thou didst minister to thy infant Lord – as thou didst hang upon his words when he grew up, as thou wast found under his cross. Stand by me, Holy Mother, that I may gain somewhat of thy purity, thy innocence, thy faith, and may he be the one object of my love and my adoration, as he was of thine.*

Christmas blessings and peace.

*L. Eustochium*

*The homily of Abbot Xavier Perrin for Sr Anne-Marie O'Keeffe's  
Diamond Jubilee of Profession, on 25<sup>th</sup> September 2025*

Last Monday, we celebrated a Mass in Thanksgiving for the harvest. At the time of the Offertory, three young nuns with beaming smiles presented spectacular baskets of fruit and vegetables to be blessed.



Today, too, we give thanks to God as we celebrate another harvest. You come forward, dear Sr Anne-Marie, with a beaming heart and a smiling face. You present to God His work in you and your work with Him during the past 60 years. You have in your hands the marvellous fruit which has been produced – that is: your good self. You offer yourself to be blessed once more. You give yourself once more. You once more consecrate all that you are and all that you have been and done to the Father of mercy, through His Son our Saviour Jesus Christ, in their common Spirit of Love and Truth.

By calling you to this monastery, Jesus invited you to sacrifice from the start. In order to join this community, you had to leave your family and even your country. Like Abraham, you left everything to follow Jesus. Green Ireland and lovely Cork have probably undergone a number of changes since they last saw you. Thank God and your good prayers, they still produce a number of good Catholics and even Benedictine vocations who, like you, consent to move from a big island to a smaller one.



There is a special freedom at serving the Lord in a foreign location, as many of us will know. This is the place He Himself has chosen for us. With the years, this little corner of the world grows, as it were. It becomes ever more universal, Catholic, Ecclesial. Our homeland is the Church of Christ. It is vast and ample, for Christ reigns in it. The monastery is our doorway to the mystery of the Church and indeed to the very Heart of Christ. The peaceful Heart of Jesus is our dwelling. From His Heart and in His Heart we obey our Superiors and

the Rule, and we serve our Brethren. Jesus kindly transforms the water we patiently pour into the humble vases of our daily observance into to the good wine of His life, given for the salvation of the world.

At Cana, the best wine is reserved for the end. This is often true in our lives, too. The joy of belonging to Christ, of serving Christ, of giving oneself totally to Christ can only grow. Even if you do less than you used to do, even if physical pain is becoming a more or less constant companion of your life, even if you feel more tired some days, and less active generally, your heart renews itself constantly in simplicity, in faith, hope and charity. This is a peaceful and silent transformation. Step by step, you reach the season of lasting joy. You know that you have received everything from God, and you give it back totally to Him alone. Your heart is really poor and really given to Jesus. Jesus is free to enter your life and to live in you His full mystery of death and life, suffering and victory, service and love to the end. He is free in your heart because you are His loving servant. You are free in His Heart because you are His beloved spouse.



To serve till the end, to love to the end: this is the simple and powerful programme of your life. This is the source of your inner joy. And just by being faithful to this programme, you give great joy to your sisters and to the Father in heaven.

Like you, Jesus is the Son of the Handmaid of the Lord, Our Lady. He learnt from her what it means to serve and to love the Lord. We pray to her that she be ever more present at your side, on your lips and in your heart as you pray the Rosary. We repeat with great trust the beautiful prayer to Our Lady of Graces:<sup>1</sup>

*Mary, Mother of God,  
my mother and my queen,  
may I be one with you in your love for Jesus,  
and one with Jesus in his tender love for you.*

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<sup>1</sup> The image of Our Lady of Graces is a 700-year-old miniature ivory carving venerated in St Mary's Dominican Church in Cork, where Sr Anne-Marie prayed and attended Mass before entering religious life..

*Extract from the Homily of Fr Abbot Xavier Perrin for the Feast of the  
Queenship of Our Lady and First Profession of Sr Agnes Mary Tomlin  
22nd August 2025*

Dear Sister Agnes Mary, God called you to holiness from the heart of your deeply Catholic family. St Agnes, St Cecilia and St Thérèse very early became inspiring models on your way to Christ. You received a lot from the formation and guidance given in the circles of Opus Dei, as well as in Student Cross. Through your studies of history of art, you have been more especially initiated to the *via pulchritudinis*, the way of beauty, so dear to the late Pope Francis. We can go to God who is being and goodness by the way of Beauty, because in God's creation and in human arts, something of God's glory reveals itself to us which stimulates our desire for the eternal beauty of our God.



Dom Guéranger liked to present the liturgy as the summit of beauty, the place where all the arts find their supreme expression because they are put at the service of the praise of God. This is a very Benedictine vision, well rooted in the tradition of Solesmes, and, beyond Solesmes, of Cluny and so many monasteries of monks and nuns all over Europe. When the soul of the artist is touched by Christ and inspired by His Holy Spirit dwelling in the Church, the arts express the truth and the beauty of Christ. The beauty we meet in the Liturgy is the beauty of the Church at her best, that is to say at the point when she is closest to Christ who is Himself her life and her beauty. The City of Light, the eternal Jerusalem filled with the

light of God, is reached by those who follow Jesus, the Light of the world: *Ego sum lux mundi; qui sequitur me non ambulat in tenebris*. 'I am the Light of the world; whoever follows me will not walk in darkness.' (Jn 8:12). The path Jesus treads is a path of beauty, in the sublime light of the Transfiguration but also in the apparent darkness of the Cross. On the Cross, the beauty of love alone is to be seen. Those who love see this beauty. They desire it and they give themselves totally to Christ, saying with St Agnes: *Ipsi me tota devotione committo*. 'I put myself wholly at Christ's service.'

With Mary our Mother, dear Sister, you are called to the Beauty which only the Beloved gives. May the Holy Spirit who overshadowed her at the moment of the Incarnation come over you abundantly today and create in you the Benedictine beauty of humility and charity to the glory of the God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit, eternal love and eternal beauty. Amen.

## *The Hymns of Christmas: Vigils*

It may come as a surprise that the text of the hymn for Christmas Vigils, despite the antiquity of the feast, is a modern composition. It is by Dom Ambrose Lentini, a monk of Monte Cassino (d. 1989) and a skilled hymnodist who contributed extensively to the revised Liturgy of the Hours. *Candor æternæ* is surely among the loveliest of his verses.

*Candor æternæ Deitatis alme, / Christe, tu lumen, venia atque vita / advenis, morbis hominum medela, / porta salutis.* ‘Loving radiance of the eternal Godhead, You come, O Christ, as light, forgiveness and life, medicine for men’s sicknesses, the gateway of salvation.’ *Candor*, ‘radiance’, is not a word used very frequently in the Latin Bible, and usually appears in its literal sense for something white or shiny (as for diseased skin in Leviticus). Here, however, we have to think of Wisdom 7:26 and its lyrical description of divine wisdom: ‘the radiance (*candor*) of eternal light, and a spotless mirror of God’s majesty, and the image of His goodness’. And we address this radiance as *alme*, ‘loving’, ‘dear’, even ‘holy’. It is not an uncommon word in our repertoire of hymns, but perhaps it has a special ring at this time of year; the first half of Advent is marked by the fine hymn *Conditor alme siderum*, and the antiphon to Our Lady in Advent and Christmastide is the *Alma Redemptoris Mater*. Just over a week ago, on 17<sup>th</sup> December, we used the words of Wisdom 8:1 in singing the great Antiphon *O Sapientia*, acclaiming the awaited Messiah as the Wisdom which disposes all things sweetly. Now He has come – or rather, in the immediacy of a present tense verb, He is coming, now, at this moment, with all that mankind needs.



This immediacy continues in the next verse. *Intonat terræ chorus angelorum / cælicum carmen, nova sæcla dicens, / gloriam Patri, generique nostro / gaudia pacis.* ‘A choir of angels intones a heavenly song to the earth, proclaiming a new age, glory to the Father, and the joys of peace for our race.’ We can take ‘intones’ in a liturgical sense: the angels are beginning a song which we are supposed to continue. The *Gloria in excelsis* was first heard over two thousand years ago, but it keeps re-echoing in the Church’s worship.

From the heart of the Trinity, then, we have moved via the angelic world to the human realm – which is possible, of course, because tonight God has revealed Himself in human nature. *Qui iaces parvus dominans et orbi, / Virginis fructus sine labe sanctæ, / Christe, iam mundo potiaris omni, / semper amandus.* ‘You who lie there, a little one,

while ruling the world, fruit of the spotless holy Virgin, O Christ, now you are possessed by the whole world, always to be loved.’ What characterises this hymn is less theological wonder at the mystery of the Incarnation and the virgin birth, than joy in the accessibility and gentleness of God’s self-gift. The contrast between *parvus* and *dominans*, ‘little’ and ‘ruling’, is striking in its concision (poorly captured in English), but Christ’s rule over the earth is quickly passed over in favour (so it seems) of His availability to the world; He has been acquired by the world, if only it will love Him. The atmosphere is that of a visit to the crib, and this continues in the next verse:

*Nascereis celos patriam daturus, / unus e nobis,  
caro nostra factus; / innova mentes, trahere caritatis/  
pectora vinclis.* ‘You are born to give heaven as [our] homeland, one of us, made our flesh; renew souls, draw hearts with the bonds of love.’ The work of the redemption can be pondered from many angles. Here, it is God’s willingness to enter into our humanity, and the love by which this has an effect in us, that is emphasised. The Incarnation is divine condescension, in the literal sense of that word; but the sheer closeness of God’s presence is so perfectly fitted to our need that, in the gentle light of the stable, we hardly notice the grandeur of its source. It could remind us of St Irenaeus’s remark that ‘not for His own sake, but because of man’s own infancy, the Word



of God was “co-infanted” with man... in order to be received in the way that man was capable of receiving Him’ (*Adv. Hær.* IV.38.2). The ‘bonds of love’ remind us of Hosea 11 – ‘When Israel was a child, I loved him... in the bonds of love (*in vinculis caritatis*) I will draw them...’. It is ultimately by means of His exaltation on the Cross that Jesus will ‘draw’ all to Himself (John 12:32), but only love of the Incarnate Son enables us to respond to the force of that pull. In a lesson read at Christmas Vigils, St Bernard asks, ‘What are you afraid of, O man?... [The Lord] has not come to judge, but to save the earth... He has become a little one, the Virgin Mother wraps His tender limbs in swaddling clothes, and are you still shaking with fear?’ (*Sermo 1 de Nativ.*).

What response but praise? *Cætus exsultans canit ecce noster, / angelis læto sociatus ore, / et Patri tecum parilique Amori / cantica laudis.* ‘See, our assembly too sings in exultation, joined with the angels with joyful lips, and [sings] songs of praise to the Father, to You and to the co-equal Love.’ Amen!

*Sr MTB*

## TUES QUI VENTURUS EST?

"Are you the One who is to come?"

### *A Meditation on John the Baptist's last question.*

The figure of St John the Baptist is surrounded by a sense of paradox: although he is the "greatest among those born of woman", he is "the least in the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 11:11). On the one hand he appears as a severe ascetic and stern preacher of repentance, on the other, we see him on several occasions overflowing with joy and tenderness for the One whose way he was sent to prepare. Furthermore, although all the Gospels portray him as an intimate associate of Christ's work of redemption, he is nevertheless separated by a strange distance from Christ – a distance, which by no means stems from a lack of mutual love or understanding, but rather, it seems, from a superabundance of them.

The greatest riddle connected with St John, however, is presented to us in his final question to Christ: "Are you He who is to come, or shall we look for another?"



(Mt 11:2). John asks this question *in vinculis*, near the end of his earthly life and ministry – a life and ministry that had been entirely devoted to the "One who is to come", that is, to the manifestation of the Christ to Israel (Jn 1:31). The Gospel of John in particular tells us that the Baptist's knowledge of the identity and mission of Jesus by far surpassed that of the early disciples. It was precisely John who had led those first disciples to the "Lamb of God", the long-awaited Messiah. How was it possible for him now to question the identity of the One he had proclaimed?

As far as I can see, in the tradition of the Church two kinds of answers have generally been given to this riddle: one sees in John's question a mere pedagogical device, a way for John to formulate his own disciples' secret question and thereby to bring them to Christ. The other strand of interpretation sees John's question as manifesting some kind of uncertainty, whether blameworthy or not. Nothing I can propose works without some measure of speculation. Yet I think the issue merits close scrutiny, not only because it tells us much about the relationship between Christ and His Forerunner, but also because it throws a surprising light on the virtue of faith.

Taken at their face-value the words of John clearly express an uncertainty – a question is usually an expression of ignorance, even if it be a pretended one. Any interpretation must therefore take this element into account, and so I take my starting point from it. However, this very examination will show, I hope, that a pedagogical

meaning as well as the elements of prayer and praise ring out, as it were, as strong overtones of John's struggle for certainty.

The most banal solution to the riddle posed by John's question would surely be to view it as a simple query for information. It is not entirely impossible to imagine that John had indeed recognized Jesus as the Messiah and the Lamb of God when the latter came to be baptized by him, but now, in prison, he was hearing rumours of a mighty preacher and miracle-worker, and he simply was not sure if both were the same person. While such an interpretation cannot be directly disproved, it remains unsatisfactory for at least two reasons: first, why should the sacred authors (Matthew and Luke in this case) have bothered to include this rather perplexing episode in their sparse narratives, although (if we accept the above interpretation) it adds virtually nothing to the development of the narrative, nor to the reader's knowledge of either Jesus or John? Second: All the Gospels (though John more explicitly than the Synoptics) present John as gifted with an exceptional prophetic insight: he immediately recognized Jesus as the Lamb of God (Jn 1:29) or the One, by whom he, John, himself would need to be baptized (Mt 3:14) or indeed as the Lord, hidden in the womb of His Mother (Lk 1:43). So even if John's question *in vinculis* were a mere query for information, it would signify the deprivation of prophetic intuition, which he had formerly enjoyed. Thus, this rather low-key interpretation points us to a more mysterious reason for John's question, to be discussed below.

The possibility that John's question is an expression of disappointment cannot be excluded either. For instance, one could surmise that the news John was hearing about Jesus did not really match his own expectation of the Messiah. John's expectation had been focussed on what we would now call the Second Coming of the Lord: His coming as the dread judge, as the One whose "winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor, and to gather the wheat into His granary, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire" (Lk 3:17). But instead of executing judgement, the Messiah was now going through the villages, preaching good news to the poor, healing the sick and proclaiming the acceptable year of the Lord (cf. Lk 4: 18-19 / Is 61:1-2). Perhaps John found it difficult to accept such a meek and merciful Messiah?

The interpretation is certainly not illogical, but against it stands the fact that, as said above, all the Gospels credit John with a unique insight into the character and mission of the Messiah. The Fourth Gospel in particular underlines John's role as the primary witness to the Incarnation. In the first chapter of this Gospel, several persons (John the Baptist, Andrew, Philip, Nathanael) attribute messianic titles to Christ. As Richard Bauckham<sup>1</sup> points out, the titles used by the early disciples express the very common messianic expectation of the time: the Messiah as teacher, as king of Israel, as the prophet promised by Moses.

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Bauckham: *Gospel of Glory*, Chapter 7

John the Baptist's identification of Jesus as "the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world", on the other hand, is of a totally different order and betrays an insight into the mystery of Christ that will be fully accessible to the disciples only after the resurrection. Is it conceivable that, despite such intuitive knowledge, John was struggling to reconcile his own expectation of the Messiah with the actual character and mission of Jesus?

What seems beyond doubt, in any case, is that John did not stubbornly insist on his own view of the Messiah. His question was not a way of cynically distancing himself from Jesus; rather, it was a real question, and John was completely ready to submit himself to the reply he would receive. Would it otherwise be imaginable that Jesus, in response, praised John as the "greatest among those born of woman" (Mt 11:11) and sharply distinguished his firm faith from the "reed, shaken by the wind" (Mt 11:7)? Even after John's death, Jesus continues to refer to His Forerunner with great respect (e.g. Mt 21:23-27, where He questions the Pharisees as to whether John's baptism was "from heaven" or "from men". Or Jn 5:35, where He calls John a "burning and shining light"). So I think it should be asserted quite firmly that there cannot have been anything blameworthy in John's question.



There is something very mysterious about the fact that John is sent to "go before" the face of the Lord. As we know, Jesus usually called His disciples by inviting them to "follow after" Him. This latter expression summarizes not only our imitation of Jesus, but also our total dependence on Him as our Creator and Redeemer: every good work that we do, every act of faith that we make, and even our very existence has to be preceded by the grace and sustaining power of God. Of course, strictly speaking, all this is true of John as well. No creature can "go before" the Lord in the sense of achieving anything apart from Him. And yet the Lord permits human beings to strive by their own powers for what is great and noble, and He even allows Himself to become dependent on them as they "prepare His way", whether consciously or not. There exists the desire for what is true, good and beautiful in men and in cultures who have never come into contact with the revelation of Christ and who are still longing for the "One who is to come". In his abandonment and struggle for faith, John, I think, becomes a representative of all these and carries their burning question before Christ. He is, as Bulgakov says, "a call to the heavens, an open mouth, the dry earth thirsting to receive the rain of heaven. He is the dying of the old man. In John was accomplished the voluntary, loving, conscious self-renunciation of the human essence before the presence of the Divine."<sup>2</sup>

*Sr CS, To be continued.*

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<sup>2</sup>Sergius Bulgakov: *The Friend of the Bridegroom*, p.10

## ***Dom Guéranger and Joy: Part 4***

*by Dom Jacques de Préville OSB, St-Pierre de Solesmes*

For Dom Guéranger, the whole Christian life must be a source of joy; it demands to be lived with joy, and this is even more true of the religious life, the monastic life. This is the teaching he constantly gives in the *Règlement du noviciat*. In it, he speaks of "enthusiasm for the divine mysteries." "Faith is the element of the religious, his nourishment, his joy..." "Hope will keep in them [the novices] joy of heart; inner sweetness, the deepest peace..." "We can only be happy through the love of the good, and the good is God." Finally, he writes, "the religious must consider himself the happiest of men."

It is to this supernatural joy that he invites those whom he guided. He knows that melancholy, the tendency to sadness, discouragement, anxiety, withdrawal, can only be cured by faith, trust in God, hope, even if, in their place, natural means are also useful. He expressed this so well in a letter to Dom Piolin, whom he loved very much and whom he familiarly called "my poor fellow" when he wrote to him:

I fear that the sight of your weaknesses will overwhelm you. God is infinitely more merciful and good than you are weak and needy. Whenever sadness dominates the soul, so that it produces boredom and a black mood, it is no longer compunction that is gentle, calm, and confident. What is it? It is a little bit of self-love combined with the accidents of physical temperament. Nothing else. So you must shake it off and try to be cheerful. Cheerfulness takes courage, as does everything else; so, it is for God's sake that we must be playful in this way. *Gaudete in Domino semper; iterum dico gaudete...* [Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say, rejoice.] We must crush this black mood underfoot; it isn't good for this world or for the next.

And again, to the same monk, then master of novices:

I trust that the devil of sadness, who is not made of wood, will have let you alone more this Lent, or that, if not, you will have broken his horns; it is true that there is a sadness at the sufferings of Our Lord, but these sorrows are sweet and do not put one in a bad mood; let us ask Mary to participate with her and like her... I look forward to being with you to show the *'simplicity of the just'*.

These last words, which recur several times in the letters to Dom Piolin, remain enigmatic to us; they must allude to a common memory. But what affection the Abbot had for this easily worried monk!

And these beautiful pieces of advice to Dom Fonteinne:

When the imagination says to you 'black', answer with 'white': it is

absolutely necessary to stun you and bring you back by force to God and to cheerfulness, even if while grimacing a little... Imagine that you are another, that all your miseries are dreams, and live with God as one who knows and loves Him would live there. God not only permits it, but commands it.

And above all: "Let us devour with joy the tribulations that put the seal of providence on our work. *Non turbetur cor vestrum*. [Let not your heart be troubled.]"

He gave the same advice to his penitents, showing them where they would find true joy: "Be good, gentle, united, cheerful, open, and above all things calm and happy in God who is so good," he wrote to Euphrasie Cosnard. "There is a joy, a peace in us that must not be disturbed by any circumstance, because it abides in that part of us where God reigns and dwells."

And to Cécile Bruyère: "Be joyful in everything, offering yourselves to Our Lord as you are." "Be joyful of heart, since you possess everything." "I have asked St. Francis de Sales for you to be obedient both interiorly and exteriorly, with constant joy of heart." And Dom Guéranger goes on to give this beautiful definition of spiritual joy: "This joy of the heart must be the effect of the intimate possession of Him who is the supreme good, and it is perfectly compatible with compunction and humility, just as love and reverent fear live together very happily in a heart that is plainly Our Lord's, on the condition that love always prevails." ...

Mère Cécile had learned her lesson well. In a letter of 1872, she wrote these words, with which we can conclude: "We are already singing in heavenly gladness: *Ecce quod concupivi, jam video; quod speravi teneo; Illi sum juncta in caelis quem in terris posita.*" ("What I have desired, I now see; what I have hoped for, I now hold; I am united in heaven to Him whom I loved with all my soul on earth.") Beyond that, what have we to desire and crave? What are the troubles, the trials, the sufferings, the thousand miseries of time? *Jam* (from now on), we are no longer of time, and it seems that we can no longer be reached except by joy."



*Translated by Sr MBR.*

*This essay was first published in Le Charisme de Dom Guéranger (Éditions de Solesmes, 2008), and is printed here in translation by kind permission of the publishers.*

## *House Chronicle Advent 2023 – Advent 2024*

As another liturgical year comes to a close, we give thanks for the many blessings of this year. Just after last year's Advent Chronicle went to press, we had the joy of Sr Joseph Marie O'Riordan's first profession on the feast of St Cecilia, then on the feast of St Joseph we rejoiced in thanksgiving for Sr Marie Germain Fiévet's sixty years of monastic profession. Both those celebrations were described in more detail in our Easter Chronicle, as were those for the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Dom Guéranger's death on 30<sup>th</sup> January when we welcomed our brothers of Quarr and the abbots of Farnborough and Douai. In



*Sr Marie Germain*

February came the canonical visitation conducted by Dom Geoffroy Kemlin, Abbot President of the Solesmes Congregation, and Mother Abbess Benedict McLaughlin of Immaculate Heart of Mary Abbey in Westfield, Vermont. All these occasions renewed our gratitude for our shared dedication of our lives to Christ, in the particular form outlined by the Rule of St Benedict.

The Easter Chronicle had gone to press too soon to register the death of Pope Francis on Easter Monday, when we joined the universal Church in praying both for him and for his successor. In the monastery, we were spared much of the speculation in the media about who might be elected to the See of Peter and so we saved ourselves much time and energy with such an unexpected candidate being chosen in Pope Leo XIV. We were delighted to learn of his devotion to Our Lady of Good Counsel, who is secondary patron of this monastery and to whom the community prays a perpetual novena for the Holy Father.

Just after the Easter Triduum, when after the Easter Vigil our body-clocks are too confused to take notice of such things anyway, we introduced a small tweak to our timetable in order to create a longer stretch of time for *lectio divina* before Mass: getting up and going to bed fifteen minutes earlier than we were previously doing.

Still within the Easter Octave, we had a very unusual recreation in the parlour with one of our retreatants, Dr Kathryn Wehr, who has published an annotated edition of Dorothy L Sayers' *The Man Born to be King*, a series of BBC radio plays based on the Gospels originally broadcast in 1941.



*Dr Kathryn Wehr*

Dr Wehr prepared suitable sections from the resurrection scenes for us to read aloud together and guided our discussion. Some in the house were already great fans of Dorothy L Sayers, but by the end of the recreation she had gained many more by the new and often touching angles she opened to us in narratives that are so familiar.

In May, Mother Abbess travelled with Mother Anna of Stanbrook to attend a special day at the Abbey of St Pierre, Solesmes, to mark the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Dom Guéranger's death. They made a brief stop with our sisters of Notre Dame de Wisques before safely reaching Sainte Cécile, the nuns' monastery in Solesmes. The jubilee year has seen a range of events, but this spring-time date had been chosen for a monastic celebration, with most of the abbots and abbesses of the Congregation, and many friends from around the monastic world. A Mass, festive meal and speeches, a concert of sacred music, and the singing of *Laudes Festivae* composed for the occasion, made for a day of joy and thanksgiving.

Soon after Mother Abbess's return, we had a series of sessions with a friend of the community, Susanna Todd, to work on our elocution. It is not controversial to say that this is becoming something of a lost art in society at large, but it is particularly important that we do not lose it in a monastic community where we regularly read in public (often from Scripture), have such a wide variety of accents and have some members who are hard of hearing. Susanna put us through our paces in her engaging manner, recalling us to taking more care in how we speak and encouraging us in this courtesy which is so consonant – and indeed she was keen to emphasise every sort of consonant – with our charity.



*Dormition of the Virgin,  
Abbey of St Pierre, Solesmes.*

In June, Sr Mary Benedict journeyed to her native land – albeit to an unfamiliar part of it – for some days in order to take part in a meeting of monastic bursars at Kylemore Abbey in Galway, Ireland. She received a very warm welcome from the community, with stimulating talks from the speakers and discussions with fellow participants.

On the feast of the Sacred Heart, the community enjoyed a performance of an original play by the novitiate about the temptations faced by the monks of the



community of St Pierre, Solesmes, in the early days of the foundation when Dom Guéranger left on a long journey to Rome. Humility and faith won the day (had it not, the play would not have been at all historical) in an accomplished script, well performed.

In July, we were privileged to spend recreation with Martha Hennessy, the granddaughter

of Dorothy Day. Mrs Hennessy is an oblate of our sister-abbey of Westfield, Vermont, and in this follows in her grandmother's footsteps, as Dorothy Day was a Benedictine oblate herself. We enjoyed listening to her memories of her grandmother, her own journey to faith and the challenges facing the Catholic Worker Movement, in which she takes an active part.

We were honoured to be joined by Archbishop Miguel Maury Buendía, who is the Apostolic Nuncio to Great Britain, for First Vespers of the feast of St Benedict. Since nuncios belong to the very small category of people with permission to come inside the enclosure to visit, we were able to give him a brief tour of the house



*Archbishop Miguel Maury Buendía  
with the Community*



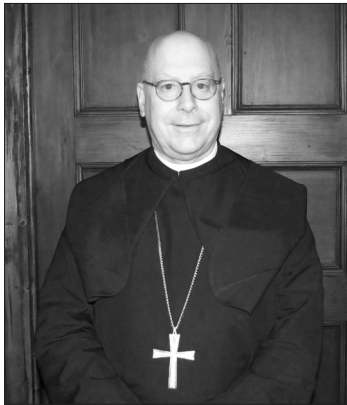
and grounds, before gathering in St Scholastica's for conversation, during which Archbishop Buendía answered our questions. When we learned that both he and his secretary, Fr Andrew Coy, played the piano, we managed to convince them both to play in turn, to our immense delight.

Just two days later, the enclosure doors were opened to welcome Mother Mary Bride Njoku OSB, Abbess of the Nativity Abbey in Nigeria, for a few days' rest. It is M. Mary Bride's first visit since being elected abbess in 2023 but she has stayed here before, most recently when she was completing studies in Sant' Anselmo over twenty years ago. We very much hope she will not wait so long until her next stay.



*M. Mary Bride OSB*

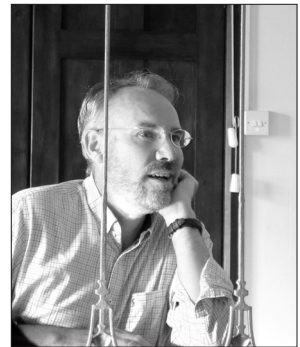
Coming from much closer to home, at the end of July our annual retreat was preached by Abbot Paul Gunter of Douai Abbey. He kept us thoroughly engaged



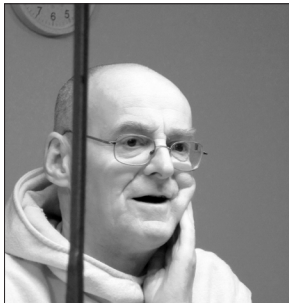
*Abbot Paul Gunter*

throughout, and in true Benedictine fashion, he took his starting points from the Mass readings for that very week: 'The liturgy always sets the agenda.' Abbot Paul's academic background, especially his deep understanding of the liturgy, added great richness to his conferences, but his central message was a simple one: there must be no compromises in our fraternal charity.

To round off a month full of interesting guest-speakers, Dr Timothy Kelly, who lectures at both Blackfriars in Oxford and the International Theological Institute in Austria, kindly interrupted his time of retreat at the abbey with his family: he gave us a talk about the gift of friendship with God in the thought of St Thomas Aquinas.



*Dr Timothy Kelly*



*Fr Benedict Hardy OSB*

We took advantage of Fr Benedict Hardy's presence at the Chant Forum at Quarr in September to book him in for a Triduum of conferences, and we were treated to a mix of topics from St Athanasius and the Council of Nicaea to St John of the Cross, with a selection of essential monastic practices in between.



*Chant Forum 2025*

It is becoming redundant to say that the Chant Forum was a great success as this has become so typical, thanks to the organisation by the monks of Quarr and the quality of the speakers. Members of the schola at St Cecilia's Abbey were in attendance at Quarr, but the Forum came to St Cecilia's for one of the days and so the whole community

were able to profit from the expert guidance of Giedrius Gapsys, Jaan-Eik Tulve,

Fr Abbot Xavier and our own Sr Bernadette as we looked at the chants of Christmas at various levels of theory, practice and spirituality.

Although we do not usually mark the feast of St Finbar, Patron Saint of Cork, 25<sup>th</sup> September is still dear to us as the profession anniversary of Sr Anne-Marie O'Keeffe. This year we celebrated her Diamond Jubilee and our affection was poured out in the form of various home-made gifts, a bumper festive recreation with all of her musical favourites and even a six-hand reel. We gave thanks for her vocation as she renewed her vows during Mass, for all that she has contributed to the life of the community, and we wish her many more happy returns of the day.

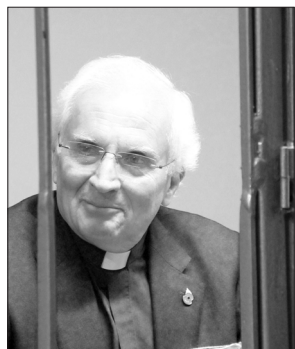
We were inspired by Dr Wehr's Eastertide visit to celebrate Mother Abbess's feast in September with a play based on extracts from D L Sayers' scripts for the Wedding at Cana and the healing of the centurion's servant. The novitiate's refectory decorations, meanwhile, paid homage to Pope Leo, Dom Guéranger, and St John Henry Newman's imminent elevation to the ranks of the Doctors of the Church.

In mid-October we hosted our annual Oblate Weekend to offer our oblates some monastic refreshment in sharing in our celebration of the liturgy, time for prayer and reading, talks from members of the community and fellowship with one another. The topics of the talks were the Book of Sirach, the spirituality of icons and the Incarnation. A few weeks later, Sylvia Vernon who made her affiliation on the 8<sup>th</sup> of November, feast of all the saints of the Benedictine Order.



*Sylvia Vernon's affiliation*

Soon afterwards, Sr Mary Antonia, Sr Elizabeth and Sr Mary Thomas travelled to Solesmes for a formators' training week which was attended by most of the novice masters and mistresses of the Congregation. Ste-Cécile and St-Pierre once again offered most fraternal hospitality. Besides appreciating the contributions from the invited speakers, participants enjoyed the rich opportunity to drink at the wellsprings of the Solesmian tradition and to be encouraged by exchanges with those who share the particular responsibility for handing it on to the next generation.



*Mgr Roderick Strange*

As mentioned in the introduction by Mother Abbess to this Chronicle, we marked the occasion of St John Henry Newman with a special recreation of readings, which demonstrates but the tip of the iceberg of our joy. Ever before the announcement that Newman would be made a Doctor of the Church, we had arranged for Mgr Roderick Strange to give us talks about him just days after the official event took place in Rome. Mgr Strange

wrote his doctoral thesis on Newman but perhaps his time as a chaplain at Oxford University afforded even more insight into the great man. His talks were entitled: 'Newman and Holiness and Humanity'; and 'Newman as a Theologian and Doctor of the Church'.

To turn to news of those in formation, on the feast of the Transfiguration Sr Maria Michaela de Paula renewed her simple vows four years after her first profession. On 19<sup>th</sup> November, Sr Cæcilia Schenke also renewed her simple vows, three years after her first profession. On the feast of the Queenship of Mary on 22<sup>nd</sup> of August, we rejoiced with Sr Agnes Mary Tomlin as she made her first profession of vows. She was joined by family and friends at a Mass concelebrated by Fr Abbot Xavier, Fr Paul Wilkinson, her former chaplain from Student Cross, and Fr James Norris of Belmont Abbey. On 7<sup>th</sup> October, we rejoiced to witness our postulant Allison Graham transform into Sr Joanna, receiving St John the Evangelist as her patron.

We commend to your prayers all the family members of the community who have died this year, especially Mrs Teresa Dempsey, mother of Sr Marie-Thérèse; Fr Gerard McGuinness, uncle of M Eustochium; and Fr Bernard Scholes, uncle of Sr Laetitia. Among our wider monastic family, we also pray especially for the repose of the souls of our oblates Doris Heptinstall (Sr Gertrude) and Lynne Atwood (Sr Julian), and Virginia Rawlings who spent many years working in the abbey.

We wish all our readers, family, oblates and friends a happy Christmas and that the Christian hope we have been meditating upon in this Jubilee year may carry us all forward into 2026 with courage and joy, confident in the Lord's closeness and care.

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

Sr Eustochium Lee

Sr. M. Bernard Edhardt

Sr. Ninian Eaglesham

Sr Elizabeth Burgess

Sr. M. Germain Fildes

Sr Maria Faustina Sinclair

Sr Cecelia Schenke

Sr. Gertrude Quigley

Sr Mary Benedict Ryan

Sr. Anne-Marie O'Keefe

Rachel Leul

Sr. Joseph Marie O'Riordan

Sr. Modeline McCann

Sr. Bede Barker

Sr Bernadette Byrne

Sr Constance Neame

Sr Margaret Ross

Sr. Marie Angela Conway

Sr. Joanna Graham

Sr. Luiz Maria Pimenta

Sr. Marie-Therese

Sr Mary Antonia Budge

Sr Mary Thomas Brown

Sr. Anne Eason

Sr. Lucy Theisen

Sr. Lactitia Payne

Sr Blaise Waddelove

Sr. Agnes Mary Tomlin

Sr Rachel Appleby

Sr. Maria Michaela de Paula

Sr. Anselma Scotland

Sr Mechthild Hammer