

# Quarr Abbey Newsletter

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*Autumn bloom in the cloister garden*

## **Time for Silence**

The night was certainly quiet when the shepherds were awoken by the Angels' song. There was probably not much talk as the Magi drew near to Bethlehem, joyfully looking at the star which guided them on the way. All was even quieter in the crib, regardless of the number of people present. Of Jesus, the new-born child, nobody spoke. It was enough to look at Him, to be with Him, and to experience the utter simplicity of His presence.

There are all sorts of silences. Some are terrible and cruel; some are void and meaningless; others are full of peace and acceptance. A few open us to something greater. They respond to a Presence which is transcendent, which no word can properly express. That very sort of silence waits for us at Christmas. It is a gift of Christmas, a present we should not overlook.

I hope we shall find time for this silence in the days around Christmas. Time and heart. Finding a heart that is ready to listen is not always easy. It is difficult to shut up all noise in our minds and all clamour in our hearts. Yes, some of them at least need to be listened to carefully. But others – I assume: the majority – can without any difficulty be put aside. You need a little courage and the clear conviction that it is good to keep silent, to stay quiet for a while, and to listen to another Voice. This Voice has much to tell us, but as the wise men of old, it chooses to begin with keeping quiet and saying nothing. The Word can be heard only by those who enter the Silence it comes from. There is a Silence in God, but also a deep and profound silence in nature – beyond the cries of the birds, the music of the sea, or the whispers of the wind. There is a deep silence in you, in me. We are not only words. We have not only words to say and words to exchange. We are a presence, a gift, which is given to ourselves and offered to others also in silence.

According to Ecclesiastes, there is “a time to keep silence, and a time to speak” (Eccl 3, 7). In us, as in God, things begin with silence. Christmas is a good time for this and Quarr is a good place. May you find time and heart for this silence during Christmastide. Be sure you will all be within the silence of our Community during the holy season of Christmas. **Fr Prior.**

## Quarr Abbey Chronicle

### Recent events in the life of the abbey

**Sept. 10-15. Br. Duncan held an exhibition of his paintings and drawings** in Quarr Abbey Art Gallery this week.



He shared the venue with John Bateson-Hill, a regular visitor to the Guesthouse and a fine pastel painter and watercolourist. 750 visitors passed through the Gallery in the course of the week and both artists were pleased with the sales they made- a number of paintings sold and the cards flew from the rack. But, perhaps even more gratifying was the interest shown in their work by appreciative visitors. Many noted the differences between the strong and vibrant colours of John's flower pieces and interiors, and Br. Duncan's much more muted palette chosen for landscape studies. Examples of the work of both artists can be seen online at [www.quarrabbey.co.uk](http://www.quarrabbey.co.uk) under the tab views of quarr and at [www.johnbatesonpaintings.co.uk](http://www.johnbatesonpaintings.co.uk)

**Sept19-20** This weekend the community hosted an **international seminar on the life and work of Jacques and Raissa Maritain.**Fr. Luke gives a full presentation of the talks on pages 3-4.

Our singing teacher, **Linda Filby-Borrett**, has recorded and released a new C.D. of Christmas music, sung by her choir, *Voices of the Isle of Wight* together with a number of the community. Two recording sessions were held in the Abbey Church and the results combined with the best tracks of C.D.s Linda had recorded in the past. "An Island Christmas", featuring *The Voices of the Isle of Wight* is now on sale for £10 from the monastery shop and from the teashop at Quarr.

As well as traditional carols, the C.D. presents late medieval Christmas songs such as "Jesus Christ the Apple Tree" and "Gaudete", classical works by Handel and Mozart, romantic arrangements such as "O Holy Night" by Adolphe Adam and "The Three Kings" by Peter Cornelius, as well as modern carols from John Rutter, Margaret Rizza and others. The C.D. stands out, not only for its good choral singing, but also for the excellence of some very fine soloists, some of whom have just started a professional career as singers. This is an excellent Christmas gift and any C.D. bought at the monastery will contribute to supporting the Abbey at Quarr.

**Oct. 9-10. This weekend we received a visit from “Les Fauristes” chamber choir,** the French Choir of London which sings regularly at the French Church in Leicester Square. Under their musical director Blandine de Raulins they gave a concert of sacred music in the Abbey Church on the Saturday evening. The first half of the concert was devoted to French motets by the nineteenth century composers, Saint-Saens, Franck, and Fauré, while the second half was given over to the main piece of the evening, Faure’s *Requiem*. Judith Charron was the soprano soloist for the *Requiem* and she sang a moving and memorable “Pie Iesu”. It was all sensitively accompanied on the digital organ by our good friend and our titular organist Hamish Dustagheer. The Church was packed full and the prolonged applause at the end was testimony to the talents of this fine choir. On the Sunday the choir joined the community for Mass and sang the “Ave Verum” by Saint-Saens for a Communion Chant .We much look forward to a second visit from “Les Fauristes” in the not too distant future.

**Oct.31. Today the community was delighted to welcome Kevin into our novitiate** for the start of his postulancy. This lasts one year and- if all goes well- leads into the novitiate proper which lasts a further twelve months. The postulant and the novice lives with the community and shares in the full round of daily prayer, reading and work which makes up the monastic life. He receives regular instruction on the Rule, on the Liturgy, on monastic history and in monastic studies generally. Please pray for Kevin and for further vocations for our monastery.

## Awards

The abbey and those associated with it have recently won a number of awards. The Abbey was delighted to receive a **Certificate of Merit** from the Isle of Wight Society . This was given for the conservation work done on the walls of the medieval abbey and on the old barn built from the ruins of the west wing of the monastery. The architect, Oxley Conservation and the builders Stoneham Construction were given credit for the work. The National Farmers Union presented it with its **Conservation Award** (2015). The Abbey Gardens were ‘highly commended’ by ‘Ryde in Bloom’. The bee-master and apiarists won two second-place awards for the quality of Quarr honey. And Andrew Williams, apprentice in the Gardens and Grounds department at Quarr Abbey, has won an award for 'Outstanding Achievements.' [DS]

## THE FRIENDS OF QUARR.

The Friends of Quarr have now raised £17,500 towards *The Walled Garden Project*. Calendars of "Quarr through the Seasons" (£10 each), continue to sell well and can be bought from the monastery shop and Teashop. We would like to thank all the people that have supported the Friends this year by attending our events and donating so generously to our current project in the Abbey.

We wish you all a very Happy Christmas and a peaceful New Year .

Please contact the chairman: Dr Rebecca Ashton, for any information regarding the Friends: [chair.friends@quarr.org](mailto:chair.friends@quarr.org). or telephone 01988 882420 ext 209. [RA]

## **Fr Luke writes on the recent Maritain Seminar at Quarr**

I meet so many people wounded by education. For example, an extraordinarily intelligent and sensitive young philosophy student told me how he had been caught up in Kant's way of thinking, which seemed reasonable as long as he was in it, to the point of nervous collapse. Friends with faith were able to show him a fuller, more embodied way of living which eluded the academic process.

Others have minds closed by scientism, sometimes in uneasy coexistence with hearts opened by faith. There are noble minds at work teaching in tertiary education, but sometimes they have to put into parenthesis what matters most to stay in the system that sustains them.

The telling aphorism of Nicholas Taleb, that academia is to knowledge what prostitution is to love, finds many an echo. Learning seems to have left behind study that grows out of faith, is rooted in hope and reaches up with love to Truth somewhere in the process of leaving the cloister first for cathedral schools and then for universities and what they have over the centuries become.

So when the Prior proposed that we have a seminar at Quarr Abbey on the French Catholic philosopher, Jacques Maritain, and his wife, Raïssa, I was happy to give it my full-hearted support.

And the first paper given at the seminar, on Raïssa Maritain's creative intuition, showed us Jacques and Raïssa gravely wounded by their education. Sarah Maple spoke movingly of their suffering, dropping the level of her voice to the point where we had to pay attention to hear it and letting her dark red lipstick focus our eyes on her speaking lips. She told us, "Both having strong sensitivities, they were greatly affected by the Sorbonne's scientific materialism proclaimed by the professors of their day. Their intellectual circle was full of

pessimism..." They resolved to kill themselves if they did not find their way to truth. They were initially helped by the thinking of Henri Bergson (a critic of Kant) which was more intuitive and in line with Raïssa's naturally playful openness to reality than what they were generally taught. Their escape from death to life came definitively under the influence of the French novelist Léon Bloy.

Dom Bruno Drilhon, monk of Kergonan Abbey in Brittany, told us in his paper how they encountered this writer who was to be their godfather, quoting Raïssa: "They had within them that distress which is the only serious product of modern culture, and a sort of active despair lit only, they didn't know why, by the interior assurance that the Truth for which they hungered, and without which it was almost impossible for them to accept life, would one day be shown to them... What he showed them cannot be told; Christian fraternal tenderness and that sort of trembling of mercy and fear which seizes a soul marked with the love of God when encountering a soul."

Jacques Maritain identified the secret of their godfather's influence as "His extraordinary love for souls."

This, spiritual love, emerged for me as the over-riding theme of the seminar. It was clearly at the heart of the marriage between Jacques and Raïssa and their welcoming of others into their household, first Vera, Raïssa's sister who lived with them, and then the many writers and artists that came as their guests.

Perhaps it was shown most clearly in the paper by Doctor Florian Michel, a historian from Paris. He explained how Jacques fathered many god-children, bringing them to faith and baptism by spiritual love. They included people who continued to struggle in their lives, such as the novelist Julien Green.

Bonnie Wolfman, in her paper, shared her own return to faith in experiencing what Jacques Maritain articulated as a "transnatural desire

for beatitude or of absolutely and definitively saturating happiness, distinct from the strictly natural desire for happiness or felicity in general.” She spoke of how “Our age of scientism and secularization breeds the constancy of internal and external noise, and tends to render God’s voice indistinguishable” and cited an important teacher for the Maritains, Saint John of the Cross, as a guide to escaping it through “a contemplative quietude beyond the natural senses whereby the soul attaches to the object of its desire beyond the perceived external world.” She cited the same text from the poetry of Saint John of the Cross as our first speaker: “With no other light or guide/ Than the one that burned in my heart.”

As the latter expressed it, the intuition of the Maritains “burned in their hearts, and provided them, throughout their lives, with a light to venture towards the Truth they deeply longed for.” In an age when the teaching we get trains us to look outside ourselves in our search for knowledge, that repetition was good. It was heart speaking to heart, in spiritual love.

Love of course always sees the best in others and a paper from Father Thomas Crean O.P. discussed Maritain’s understanding of the work of the Spirit in those who do not self-identify as Christians.

Anthony Haynes, a young philosopher supple of mind and limb, considered a question that Maritain’s outreach to the artists of the day brought before him: the ethics of art. It is a question, Maritain argued, of purifying the source – of both the artist and the society in which he or she works allowing the motives of action to be made wholesome by alignment with the divine.

Mathematics, as well as art, can be linked to the divine love and Sister Nicholas Marie Polkowska O.P. explained with the aid of a power-point presentation how the power of abstraction in mathematical thought – for example in the consideration of a geometry

that goes beyond three dimensions – can be both a paradigm and a support for our reaching out to God whom we cannot imagine.

I confess that I nodded off to sleep for some of this paper, after an excellent convivial Sunday lunch on the terrace, but I heard enough to be persuaded that mathematics is a way into contemplation.

I have kept till last mention of a paper by Dom Michel Cagin, monk of Solesmes Abbey, simply because it summed up the theme of the conference by focusing directly on spiritual love. He cited Maritain’s conviction that “the spirit of contemplation is called to take on new forms, to become more supple, more free, to wear the livery of love for one’s neighbour in the measure that it flows out into ordinary life” and commented “it is not a question of just any kind of human or ‘humanitarian’ love, but of a love which has its source in God, which is God’s own love for men”.

Dom Cagin explained that through loving with this love (the love with which Jesus loves) there will be given to us what Maritain calls “a more mysterious grace” that of knowing Jesus experientially, of meeting Him in the act, of being one with Him in the very act by which He loves each one of the least of these his brothers”.

That love was surely present in this seminar. It was there in the discussions that followed each paper. As I watched a Dominican sister and brother in lively debate, the thought came to me: this is the Church. I saw the incarnational Christianity so dear to the founder of the Solesmes spiritual tradition, Dom Guéranger. Persons were fully engaged. Spiritual love motivated the thinking.

This is why it is beneficial for thought to make cloistered retreats; this is where healing of the mind is to be found. We hope to do this sort of thing again.

## The Parts of Quarr

### The Cell

Benedictine monks have read, prayed, and slept in cells for hundreds of years but St Benedict has nothing to say on the subject for he envisaged his monks sleeping in dormitories. He is mostly anxious that the beds of monks should be not a private preserve associated, for instance, with personal property but he does envisage monks being able to return to their beds sometimes for siestas or for reading.

Living in cells, however, is normal in the monasticism of the desert fathers and in the Eastern Church. St Benedict was mainly concerned with the primacy of community life though he could envisage community life being a preparation for solitary life in a cell. Camaldolese Benedictines have some monasteries based on community living and others which are based on a cluster of hermit cells but the tradition of the Solesmes Congregation, to which Quarr belong<sup>7</sup>, is for each monk to have a cell yet the emphasis is primarily upon communal life.

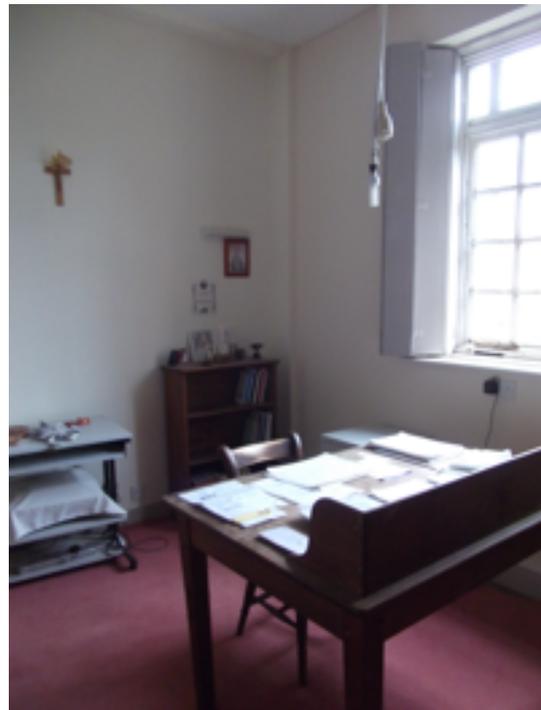
Solesmes insisted upon certain rules which are still in operation here.

No one is allowed into another's cell without permission of the superior (anything to be given a brother who is out is left at the door of his cell.) Cells have to be swept and tidied at least once a week, and the area of the cells is a region of especial silence. It is a part of the monastery where the strictest enclosure is practised (visitors are not permitted to visit the cells) This is all in order to make the cell a place where *Lectio Divina* and prayer can be practised without distraction. A monk here recalls what his novicemaster said about the Benedictine cell: it is not to be likened to a prison cell but to the cell of a beehive where a spiritual honey is made and stored.

The main purpose of the cell here is for sleeping and for that practice of reading, especially

the Scriptures, which turns into prayer. This is called *lectio divina*.

This is an essential part of Benedictine life and the necessary individual complement to the public Divine Office in the church. St Benedict is at considerable pains to stress its importance and character. The emphasis is primarily on the formation of spiritual life but Benedictines have always been readers so it is natural that the Order is associated with scholarship, most obvious perhaps in the Maurist Congregation of the Eighteenth Century of which Solesmes is the heir.



But sleep is important too. Benedict dislikes idleness ('the enemy of the soul') but he is careful to ensure that his monks have proper rest and undisturbed slumber.

As can be seen from the picture, the cells at Quarr, which are situated on the eastern side of the abbey, are quite large but simple. They always must have a crucifix. There is no running water so that must be fetched in a jug each morning. There are no carpets. Cells are austere but not uncomely. Like everything in a Benedictine house, they are there for a purpose—the sanctification of souls and the Glory of God. [BB]

## Fr Prior's Homily for the Feast of All Saints 2015

The liturgy is founded on the celebrations of the mysteries of the Lord but alongside and within this cycle there is a second rhythm: the cycle of the saints. They gravitate as a circle of disciples around the person and the teaching of Our Lord.

In their lives and in their death, the Saints speak of Jesus and bear witness to Him. We should love Jesus in the Saints and the Saints for Jesus. Benedict's humility is an image and a participation of Jesus'. Francis' poverty proclaims a feature which is fully realised in Jesus. Lawrence's or Oliver Plunkett's martyrdoms share in the love of Jesus' death for all. And so on.

When we enter an Orthodox church, we admire and reverence the icons. In the West too, many churches are full of representations, in carving, painting or stained glass. Our Abbey church is very poor in this respect. It belongs to another tradition, in which the stress is on simplicity and directedness. In many monastic churches, the number of images is limited.

The first tradition, with many images of the Saints, seems to announce: "God in all", whereas the tradition this building belongs to says: "God over all". These are two aspects of the mystery we celebrate today, the Solemnity of All Saints. God is great in His saints. At the same time, God is greater than all His Saints. All Saints, already during their life on earth, but now fully in heaven, focus on Him, adore Him, praise Him, and celebrate Him.

The heavens are full of a multitude of Saints, each with her or his personality and history, each of them showing a special aspect of God's greatness: His Mercy, His Love, His Strength, His Patience, His Humility. The communion of all Saints in glory is a harmonious concert of beauty and praise in which the diversity of the spiritual world echoes the infinite Beauty and

Riches of God's inexhaustible Mystery. Fra Angelico painted the Saints graciously dancing in paradisiacal landscapes in circles of love, light, colours and beauty, in the peaceful joy of a redeemed and renewed world.



All this beauty, all this love, all this light and peace come from God and are directed towards Him in an incessant chorus of praise. God Himself is celebrated by His Saints and in His Saints. God alone is manifested in the Saints as the communion He is in Himself. The Saints' dance is an echo and an image – indeed, an icon – of the communion of the Divine Persons in the One God which we call the mystery of Trinity.

And here is one of the teachings of the great feast we are celebrating today. Nobody ever became a Saint alone. Saints are men and women of communion. Holiness is charity, because God is Love in the Trinity of Father, Son and Spirit. We grow in holiness in the exact measure we become more and more women and men of communion. We open ourselves to the deepest mystery of God in the exact measure we make of fraternal love the most important task of our daily lives. May the example and the intercession of All Saints grant us the desire and then the grace to follow their way, to join in their dance of love within the Heart of God!

## **Fr Nicholas (Guest Master) introduces Quarr's Guest House.**

From the earliest days of monastic life in the deserts of Egypt monks have always considered hospitality as a vital part of their life. Did not Jesus say that we must welcome the poor and the stranger? And St. Benedict commands that his monks should welcome all guests as if they were Christ.

There has been a guesthouse at Quarr since 1914. Ten years ago we moved it to a different wing of the Abbey and renovated it. There are ten rooms, three en suite and one with full disabled facilities. We welcome all who wish to come apart to seek the Lord or who need peace and solitude. Guests come to Quarr from a great variety of backgrounds.

Over the last ten years we have had guests from almost every Christian denomination in this country as well as several Buddhists and Muslims. We have also had many who are seeking help or trying to find a meaning to their lives. All are welcome and we seek to show to each the love and peace of Christ.

Although our small guesthouse is not very good for organised retreats we have been experimenting with small group retreats. We have been pleased to welcome Ignatian retreat groups, groups of young people from schools and university chaplaincy groups among others.

We have also opened our guesthouse to women which has been a great enrichment. Normally, women are placed in one of our en suite rooms or in the Coach House flat, which can also accommodate married couples or small families.

We also try and help people who have real problems in their lives but obviously we cannot accept those who need specialist medical help

or those whose problems will disrupt other guests or the peace of the Abbey.

The guesthouse is a way of showing Christ to many people and is one of the ways we can evangelise. But we let the monastery speak for itself. Guests are encouraged to attend as many of the monastic services as they wish but there is no obligation.

Full board is provided and male guests eat in the refectory with the community. There is no fixed charge, but donations are accepted. Nevertheless, no-one should feel they cannot come because of financial problems.

We hope that our guests, by sharing our life for a time, can experience the peace and joy of Christ and deepen their knowledge and love of God.

If anyone wants to come, please e-mail [guestmaster@quarr.org](mailto:guestmaster@quarr.org) or write to the Guestmaster at Quarr Abbey, Ryde, Isle of Wight, PO33 4ES.

**If you wish to make a donation to Quarr Abbey please visit our website at [www.quarrabbey.co.uk](http://www.quarrabbey.co.uk) and click on the tab 'support' and 'donations'.**

**Thank you for your help.**

**To contact the Abbey please send an e-mail to [guestmaster@quarr.org](mailto:guestmaster@quarr.org)  
To contact the Friends of Quarr the address is [chair.friends@quarr.org](mailto:chair.friends@quarr.org)**