

For a Broadening of Our Heart

Most of us are probably dealing with the same question: In a world full of dramas, how can our lives just be ordinary? For there is drama everywhere – far more than we can cope with. Daily, our hearts are broken by the news of wars, crimes, acts of unrighteousness. The poor are oppressed. Innocents are killed. The list seems without end.

Not a few people have stopped following the news. They find it too depressing. Even those who keep informed somehow have to forget about what they have learnt in order to keep enough inner peace for the ordinary challenges of daily life. Nevertheless, the question rises in our consciences: Do we have the right to ignore or to forget that so many of our brothers and sisters suffer under sometimes terrible injustice?

To be at peace, we need the extraordinary to remain what it is: extra-ordinary. It is therefore sound to stick to our life and to work at preserving its 'ordo' – its right rhythm and human measure. This could, of course, be just egoistic self-care. But this can also be a humble and realistic answer – resilience as a contribution to world peace, whereas worry and fear lead nowhere.

But what about compassion? There are limits to the sufferings we can identify with, and we should obviously begin with those closer to us for which we can maybe do something. Even so, it does not seem quite right to forget about those innumerable others whom we cannot directly help.

I would argue that the times we are in call for a broadening of our hearts. While remaining faithful to

our ordinary tasks and duties, to be performed as much as possible with peace and in an orderly manner, we should resist the temptation to shut our hearts and to become indifferent to what does not touch us directly.



Picture: Hudson Media

Rather, we are called to realise that Providence might very well be giving us a great opportunity to deepen our love and compassion.

Our world needs compassionate hearts. These are ordinary hearts who have decided to keep all the doors open. There is the outer door through which others and what happens to them become part of our lives. There is, too, the inner door giving access to the depths of our heart. These are very deep indeed and surprisingly apt to enlargement and broadening. There are inner spaces in our hearts which God's love can extend quasi infinitely. Life remains ordinary, simple and reasonably peaceful. But one's heart grows, as it were, from within, from that very point where it meets with a greater heart: God's Heart, embracing each human being and every situation in His mercy and love.

Distressing times do not call for worry and agitation. They invite us to root ourselves and our common human history in the Heart of the Father. There only is to be found the greater love able to overcome the apparent victories of evil by a superabundance of goodness and to draw us into Its infinite generosity and kindness. From that place alone can I welcome my brother and my sister in pain and entrust them lovingly to Our Father in heaven.

Abbot Xavier

Friday June 27, 2025: After-dinner speech for Quarr Abbey charity event

by Rupert Willoughby

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you. What a privilege to speak to you. As you are clearly both learned and pious, I propose to take you on a brief tour of the Island that will suit people of your disposition.

We begin with something quite remarkable, a carved, stone head, near-life-sized, that dates from the late Iron Age or early Roman period. It was discovered at Luccombe Chine, one of the prettiest places on the Island, and no doubt represents one of the Celtic gods who were worshipped there. He has a flat face, a long nose, deep-set eyes and thin lips, and is entirely inscrutable. I wonder how many Islanders among you have seen it. You easily can, if you want to, at Newport, in the small museum attached to the Roman Villa on Cypress Road.

This gem was discovered in 1926, under a suburban villa. It is thought to date from the late 270s, long before the existence of any town on the Isle of Wight. It had glazed windows, brightly-painted interiors and a purpose-built bath-house, complete with underfloor heating. The owners were no doubt indigenous Britons who had flourished under Roman rule. The disturbing face of the Celtic god may have faded from their memory and they would probably have embraced the full Roman pantheon instead. It seems most unlikely that there were any Christians here and, if so, they have left no trace. Within about fifty years, however, that life had gone.

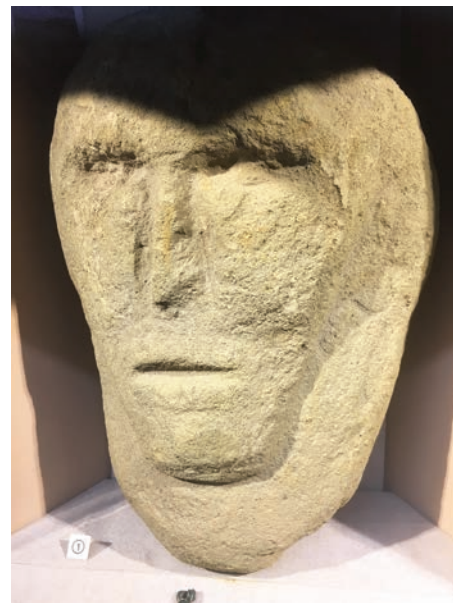


The fine mosaic floors had been taken up, the grandest room of the house turned into a smithy. In the ensuing century, it is perhaps Saxon or Jutish raiders who were, literally, the death of the place, for the skull of a woman in her early thirties, with two huge cracks in it, was found in the corner of one of the rooms, into which her decapitated head had been heartlessly tossed.

The Christian era begins on this Island, rather improbably, with a frying-pan. The copper-alloy 'Shalfleet skillet' was discovered in 2005 by a metal detectorist. Its long handle decorated with a cross, it dates from the late seventh century A.D., and is in remarkably good condition. It is the earliest Christian object to have been found on the Island.

The Shalfleet 'skillet' is thus associated with a particularly dramatic episode in Island history. In A.D. 686, the Jutish kingdom of the Isle of Wight, which was thinly-populated, was invaded and captured by the Saxon King of Wessex, Caedwalla. We used to have Caedmon, Cenred and Cenwulf among our car ferries, but Caedwalla, perhaps rightly, was not so honoured. An uncommitted Christian, to say the least, Caedwalla had, according to Bede, pledged 'the fourth part of the land and of the spoil to the Lord, if he took the Island', which 'till then was given over entirely to idolatry'. Caedwalla was himself wounded in the fierce assault, his aim being 'by merciless slaughter' to destroy the entire population of the Island and to re-colonise it with his own people. If mass slaughter did indeed ensue, this was church-sanctioned genocide. The promised quarter of the spoils was duly handed over to St Wilfred, exiled 'Bishop of the Northumbrian peoples', who is said to have landed at Bembridge and to have set up his first church at Brading. Thus was England's last pagan enclave brought to Christ.

The skillet was no doubt used by the first generation of Christian colonists



in Shalfleet (which to the Saxon meant 'shallow stream'), perhaps in their religious ceremonies. Archaeologists have found the remains of some of them. The skeletons of these eight men and women were in a pitiful condition, in death as in life. Arthritic spines suggest back-breaking working conditions on the land; pitted eye-sockets indicate dietary deficiency; all had suffered injuries of some sort and had rotten teeth. Half had died in their twenties or early thirties and the other four may have made it to forty-five. One of these skeletons has been carbon-dated to the years between 660 and 734 A.D., which fixes it firmly in the period described by Bede. The policy of Caedwalla and Wilfred had been swiftly realised, an unedifying and inauspicious start.

You can see the skillet at Newport, in the Museum of Island History. However, while we are at Shalfleet we should take note of the Tower, the oldest and most remarkable on the Island. Its walls are over five feet thick, and there was originally no means of access from ground level: one had to climb an external ladder and scramble over the parapet. It is a structure that takes one's breath away and has been described as 'practically unique'. It was built between 1070 and 1085 by the Normans, who were the next wave of incomers to the Island. Though few in number, their influence has been enormous. The manor of Shalfleet was given to Gozelin fitz Azur, a knight who had probably

fought at Hastings. Were there not a church attached to it, one would assume that the Tower was a defensive keep. Only later was it connected to a new church on the present site.

Shalfleet, with its flat shore, was indeed vulnerable to raiders from France, but what Frenchman in the 1070s would have dared to invade the newly annexed territory of William the Conqueror, the 'strong man' of northern France, who was notoriously swift in his retribution? How would the frail and elderly have been expected to scramble up the Tower in times of danger? Was it not, rather, an outpost of the lordly control that was now being exercised from Carisbrooke Castle, intended not to shelter the local populace, but to cow them into submission?

The same could be said of the surviving keep and inner curtain wall at Carisbrooke, commissioned by the Reviers or Redvers family from Normandy. Baldwin de Redvers, Earl of Devon, was a figure of national significance, but is best remembered as the founder, in 1131, of this Abbey of Quarr. Baldwin colonised it with Cistercians from the Abbey of Savigny, near Avranches, and endowed it with the manors of Arreton, Haseley, Combley and Newnham. Whilst maintaining his foothold in Normandy, it was Quarr that he chose as his burial-place. His tomb was excavated in 1891, and he seems to have been a giant. One imagines him towering above his followers as they gathered to witness the foundation charter of the Abbey. The clerks who drew it up were very anxious to save his soul. Baldwin was a most unpleasant individual, and Quarr was his best form of insurance.

The construction of the abbey was a collaborative venture that involved the entire Island. Its consecration in 1150 was marked by 'a greate and solemn feast' to which everyone was invited,



so our feasting tonight is part of a long tradition! Baldwin's entourage, the witnesses to the charter, were mainly knights from the Cotentin, men like Robert of Orglandes (only 5 miles from Baldwin's chief lordship at N  hou), Warin of la Halla and Godfrey of Vauville. They were illiterate and prodigiously uncouth, the sons, no doubt, of thuggish participants in the Norman Conquest and perhaps also in the First Crusade. Yet Baldwin encouraged them with grants of land to settle on the Island and their descendants, in the words of the great Dom Hockey, 'will appear constantly in the later story of the abbey, as the local aristocracy during the medieval period'.

Sir John Oglander, the proud descendant of Robert d'Orglandes, writes in the 1600s of his family's proud connection with the Abbey. Blissfully settled at Nunwell, the estate granted to them by the de Redvers family, Sir John was deeply rooted and assimilated, so that even 'in the way he wrote you can hear his Isle of Wight accent and manner. Barns, fields and trees were all "him" and "he", "fallow" fields were "vallow" and ferny grounds "vearnie grounds".' Though educated at Balliol College, Oxford, and at the Middle Temple, he instinctively conversed in the local dialect. To refer to inanimate objects as 'he' is still an Island peculiarity – or was when I was growing up here – where, they used to say, 'everything but a tom-cat is a "he"'.

The Oglanders still hold part of their ancestral estate at Nunwell. Another Norman family that endures here is that of Wavell, the unwitting offspring, I think, of Godfrey of Vauville, also a signatory to the Quarr charter. Whale Chine, where their ancestral lands meet the English Channel, is named after them. Field Marshal Lord Wavell is the best-known descendant but there are plenty of unpretentious Wavells in the Island phone book.

I have mentioned Warin of la Halla as another signatory to the foundation charter. Warin endowed his chapel of St Nicholas in Newport to the Abbey



and made his seat at Yaverland, the family building its fine Norman church as a chapel of ease, alongside their sturdy manor-house of stone. Their name in Latin was 'De Aula', of the Hall, inevitably corrupted into English as Hawles or Hawley. They must have many descendants on the Island.

A branch of the family eventually settled at Hale in the parish of Arreton. As we know, the manor of Arreton was part of Baldwin de Redvers's original endowment to Quarr Abbey, the first monks rebuilding its parish church in the best Norman style. A contingent of them would always be in residence to work the farm, their quarters being in that very attractive stone house on the edge of the churchyard.

It is at Arreton that I worship when I am down here. I am unfailingly moved by the powerful sense of history, by the fine Norman features and by its last remaining brass which is to Harry Hawles. It saddens me that the permanent congregation has been reduced to eight elderly persons, and there is currently no vicar. At Sandown, there has been a vacancy for two years, so I am not holding my breath. Thus we had no service on Easter Day. The Church of England is adrift, having lost its discredited Archbishop. We can surely learn from you Catholics. You locked your 135 electors in a room, got them to pray hard, and of course they made a decision within 24 hours. That is the way to make appointments.

There are some signs of hope. The evangelical churches are flourishing and there is someone I don't know who, every Easter, raises three crosses on the Downs above Arreton, at the very highest point on the Island. The Island was the last place in England to accept Christianity. It cannot be the first to renounce it. It deserves all your prayers. Thank you very much for listening.



Picture: Vatican Media

Chronicle

Pope Francis died just as the last issue of the Quarr Abbey Newsletter was going to press: may he rest in peace. Pope Leo was elected just before it appeared.

The first American Pope came sooner than we expected. It was a Thursday and before we departed on our customary Thursday afternoon walk we checked the Vatican website. There was black smoke coming from the chimney and then a seagull, but nothing else. We enjoyed our walk but had no expectation of white smoke until the morrow at the earliest.

We were in for a surprise. We returned to find the announcement of a new Pope already made. A day of surprises—perhaps a Pope of surprises! May the Lord keep him, give him strength, strengthen him to strengthen us. Amen.

May 15 saw a somewhat unusual event at Quarr, an ecumenical service linking the Abbey with the Island's Mountbatten Hospice. It was a sense of common purpose which brought us together and the service brought this purpose to the fore.

Nigel Hartley, the Chief Executive Officer of the Hospice opened the service with a short address containing the fruit of long experience in caring for the dying. Hymns and readings followed, including the Lord Lieutenant, Mrs Susie Sheldon's rendition of George

Herbert's "Love bade me welcome". Fr. Abbot gave the homily and the monks sang the Paschal chant "Ubi Caritas". After intercessions and a hymn the service ended with the Marian chant "Salve Regina".

Tea concluded the afternoon, with lively conversation among many people who had not met before, and the sun smiled on us all.

On **May 21**, at Solesmes, our monastic congregation commemorated the 150th anniversary of the death of our founder Dom. Prosper Gueranger. Quarr was represented by Father Abbot, Monseigneur Robert Le Gall, Father Nicholas and Brother Matthew. Father Nicholas will give a first hand report of the event, and his first visit to Solesmes, elsewhere in this issue.

June 24 is the Solemnity of Saint John the Baptist and the patronal feast of our noviciate. Two years ago on this day Brother Matthew made his simple vows and became a Benedictine monk. Today he finally left the noviciate and moved along the first floor corridor to his new cell in that part of the house reserved to the community.

He left one novice behind but he too is preparing for changes. On **June 28** Brother John made his petition to Chapter to make his temporary promises

as a Regular Oblate. Two days later the Chapter voted to allow him to proceed. A date was also fixed for the ceremony: **August 15**, the Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Brother John is currently practising his "Suscipe", the chant he must sing at Mass, preparing to write the Chart containing his Promises for signing, and awaiting the arrival of Julia Trahair, our sempstress, who has agreed to make two long scapulars, the sign of his new state in religious life.

There has recently been a significant change in the daily liturgical round at Quarr. For many years now the psalmody of Lauds on ordinary days has been sung in the vernacular; only the last part of the service in Latin. But now the whole is sung in Latin, much improving the integrity of the office. Considerable work was required to produce the new booklet; we even made an accompanying English translation of the Psalms which stayed close to the Nova Vulgata Latin. The whole office is now printed in a smart spiral bound booklet and in use. Unfamiliar Latin Psalm verses and antiphons provide traps for the unwary singer, but we are learning.

Benedictines do not provide the only presence of religious life on the Isle of Wight. In part of the old Dominican

Priory of Carisbrooke, in Rosary Cottage, a small community of the Spanish Congregation of "Verbum Dei" have their home. "Verbum Dei" or "Word of God" have a special vocation for evangelisation and the Congregation brings Priests, Religious and Lay-People together for its mission. For our community day out this year, on **June 26**, Father Abbot arranged a visit to the Sisters at the very heart of the Island.

We were first given a tour of the house and grounds. Apart from the original cottage with its chapel they are quite extensive. A new chapel has been built onto an old barn and guest accommodation provided by two new buildings and a large stationary caravan. After the tour we had the benefit of a Power-Point presentation about the Congregation and the opportunity to ask questions. Lunch followed under the trees, rice and minced meat provided by the Sisters, a large cake by the monks.

The afternoon offered a leisurely walk to and around the walls of the nearby Carisbrooke castle. Tea was succeeded by the rosary in the Chapel, before the taxi took us home to Vespers. The weather was pleasant, the Sisters exceptionally kind and we much hope the fraternal relations of our two communities may continue.

July 11 is an important day in our calendar. As the feast of Saint Benedict which falls outside of Lent it is celebrated as a Solemnity, and it is also the annual day of the Friends of Quarr. This year it was given added splendour by the visit of His Excellency Archbishop Miguel Maury Buendia, the Papal Nuncio, or Ambassador, to Great Britain.

He arrived on **July 10** in the afternoon and went first to Saint Cecilia's Abbey in Ryde for Vespers and a Parlour with the nuns. He came to Quarr for Supper followed by Compline.

On the Solemnity itself the Nuncio presided at Mass and preached on the vocation of Saint Benedict and his continuing relevance to the contemporary world. After Mass he visited the new courtyard gallery which he blessed and then opened the exhibition "Pilgrim of Hope". After nibbles in the sun, a festive lunch followed in the refectory. His visit was concluded by coffee and discussion in the Scriptorium. He answered questions diplomatically but seriously and was interesting on English Catholicism, which he called Conscience Catholicism indicating the large number of English Catholics who have made a personal decision to embrace the faith rather than absorbing an indigenous tradition. He encouraged our Intern Programme and reaching out to the young people of today.

Dr. Dominic Fontana is chairman of the Friends of Quarr. With a background in archaeology and history he is keen to communicate the heritage of Quarr to a wider public. Earlier this year he conceived the idea of an exhibition of reproductions of paintings telling the life of Our Lady, the Patroness of the Abbey. We were fortunate to find in Sir Gabriele Finaldi, Director of the National Gallery in London, an enthusiastic helper. He provided twenty four high definition photographs of works in his collection for Dominic to have printed on A1 size panels of high density foam board.

A major problem was where to display them. A major job of work was the solution. The old garage under the Coach-house was transformed into a multi-purpose room over some two months. A new ceiling was installed, a new floor laid, steel girders and glass doors commissioned. It was completed just in time and the exhibition was opened on Saint Benedict's day, **July 11**, by the His Excellency the Apostolic Nuncio.

"The Pilgrim of Hope" tells the story of Mary, the Mother of Jesus from her Immaculate Conception to her Coronation as Queen of Heaven. It depicts the joys and sorrows of a challenging life lived by a woman of faith and pilgrim of hope to use the title of this Holy Year. The exhibition will remain until **September 30** and our hope and prayer is that our visitors over the Summer months will come to know something of her who is the cause of joy to all mankind.

Br. Duncan



Abbot Xavier with the Papal Nuncio



Fr. Nicholas at the tomb of Dom Gueranger

Pilgrimage to Solesmes

On 12th May I crossed the Solent to catch the overnight Brittany Ferry to St. Malo. My ultimate purpose was a pilgrimage to our Mother House, the Abbey of St. Pierre at Solesmes.

This year is a very special one for our Congregation as it is 150 years since the death of Abbot Prosper Gueranger, the re-founder of the Benedictine Abbey of St. Pierre and the restorer of Benedictine life in France after the French Revolution. Abbot Gueranger actually died on 29th January but as mid winter is not a good time either for travel or a celebration the Congregation decided to celebrate this very important anniversary on 21st May with a big Mass at Solesmes which would be attended by representatives from as many houses of the Congregation as possible. This not only included most of the Abbots and Abbesses, including Mother Abbess Eustochium Lee of St. Cecilia's Abbey Ryde, but also ordinary monks which is how I was privileged to attend.

Pilgrimage is about the journey to somewhere holy. After a very good nights sleep on the ferry it was beautiful entering the harbour at St. Malo in the early morning especially the views of the old walled town. It brought back memories of thirty years

ago when I had last entered St. Malo from the sea. Then as now I was on my way to the Abbey of St. Anne de Kergonan. We now have a very special link with this Community because it was where Fr. Abbot came from. After a good train journey I was picked up by one of the monks and was given a very fraternal welcome The Abbey is in a very beautiful part of southern Brittany. The Office was very prayerful and, as it is almost the same as Solesmes it gave me the chance to get a rough hang of the books before moving on. I spent a lot of the time walking and just being quiet. There were also familiar tasks like peeling apples with the Community, something that made me very much at home.

On the morning of the 21st I joined the eight monks who were going to Solesmes for the big celebration. As we had to be at Solesmes by about 10am for a Mass at 10.30 we set off about 6.00 saying Lauds on the way I had never been to Solesmes before and it was all a bit confusing as everyone was preparing for the big Mass of

thanksgiving.

It was very good that Father Abbot and Brother Matthew had arrived a few days before. Brother Matthew had spent several visits to Solesmes and he helped me a lot. He was there to work and worked very hard.

It was difficult to get a real idea of the Church during such a big Mass. The most obvious impression was the big Choir. The Mass was very beautiful. After Mass we had a very good meal and then the day seemed to be full of liturgy. Of course there was an opportunity to venerate the tomb of Dom Gueranger in the crypt. As there were so many people who wanted to do this I left it till a few days later. After Vespers we had a buffet supper in the cloister designed by Dom Bellot. It is clear to see the resemblance to Quarr.

The Church is very beautiful especially the old Maurist Church with beautiful stone sculptures dating long before the Revolution. On to this Dom Gueranger built his magnificent Choir.

After the great day I stayed a few more days and then it was easier to get a real idea of the buildings which are really in two parts. There is the original Maurist Priory which is very beautiful. The Noviciate is lucky to be there and Brother Matthew gave me a good tour. That was soon too small for the growing Community and Dom Mellet built a big imposing building which looks rather like a fortress. Here is the Refectory and the building also is built around Dom Bellot's cloister. There is also a very pleasant garden. Part of which is a formal

French Garden and the rest is mainly woodland.

When we arrived the Community was very busy entertaining so many guests but they were very friendly and welcoming. When things has quietened down a bit I had a very good talk with Father Abbot President, who speaks excellent English and several monks. Father Michael Bozell who we have known for years and has visited Quarr several times was very friendly and helpful. When it was time to leave I was given a lift to Sable and returned

to St. Malo via Rennes.

It was a great joy to visit both Kergonan and Solesmes. Especially to join in the great celebrations for our Holy Founder. Praying at his tomb was very moving and I think all of us are hoping and praying for his eventual Canonisation. Also to meet my Brethren in the two monasteries and to realise we, as the Solesmes Congregation, are very much a loving family.

Fr. Nicholas

Friends of Quarr: St Benedict's Day July 11th 2025

On a beautiful summer's day Friends of Quarr and Oblates gathered with the community for Mass to celebrate the Feast of St Benedict. We were honoured by the presence of the main concelebrant, the Apostolic Nuncio to Great Britain, Archbishop Miguel Maury Buendia. In his sermon he reminded us of the significance of the mission of Benedictines in a world increasingly in turmoil. He also stressed the values of Benedictine hospitality as an expression of Christ's love for each of us.

After Mass there was a gathering in the courtyard to welcome the Archbishop and to open a newly renovated space which will house a variety of events and exhibitions in the future. Members of the community and

the Abbey staff had put a great deal of hard work into transforming an old garage into a light and airy gallery. The Friends of Quarr were delighted to be able to sponsor the very first exhibition entitled "Pilgrim of Hope - A life of Mary, Mother of Jesus in Pictures". Special permission to use high definition scans of paintings held by the National Gallery had been granted to the Abbey by the Director of the National Gallery, Sir Gabriele Finaldi. This then enabled Br. Duncan Smith to create a sequence depicting the life of the Virgin through masterpieces dating from the fourteenth through to the seventeenth centuries. The resulting exhibition of twenty four paintings is powerfully emotive and strongly evocative of a life lived with

both joy and unutterable sorrow.

The Archbishop blessed the exhibition and the new space with holy water. After words of welcome from Abbot Xavier and Dr Dominic Fontana, the Hon. Patrick Seely, Deputy Lord Lieutenant of the Island, thanked the community on behalf of the Island for all that they do and all that they represent.

The Friends of Quarr were then able to attend Sext with the community and later an excellent lunch was provided by the staff of the Teashop. It was a memorable occasion and if you do get the opportunity to visit the exhibition, please do. It will be in situ until the end of September.

Cheryl Fontana



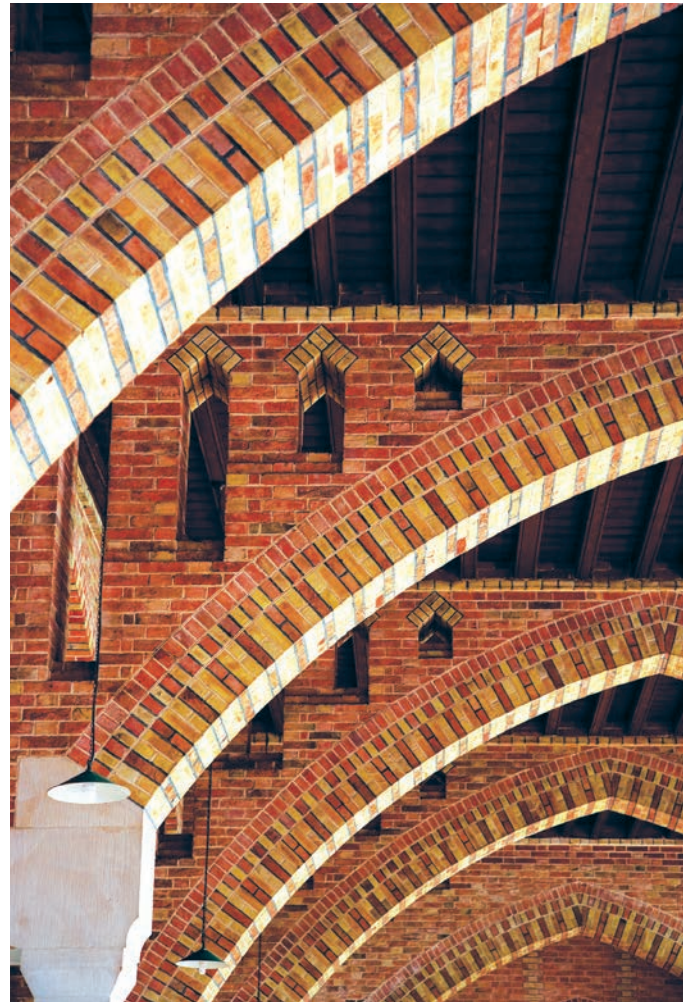
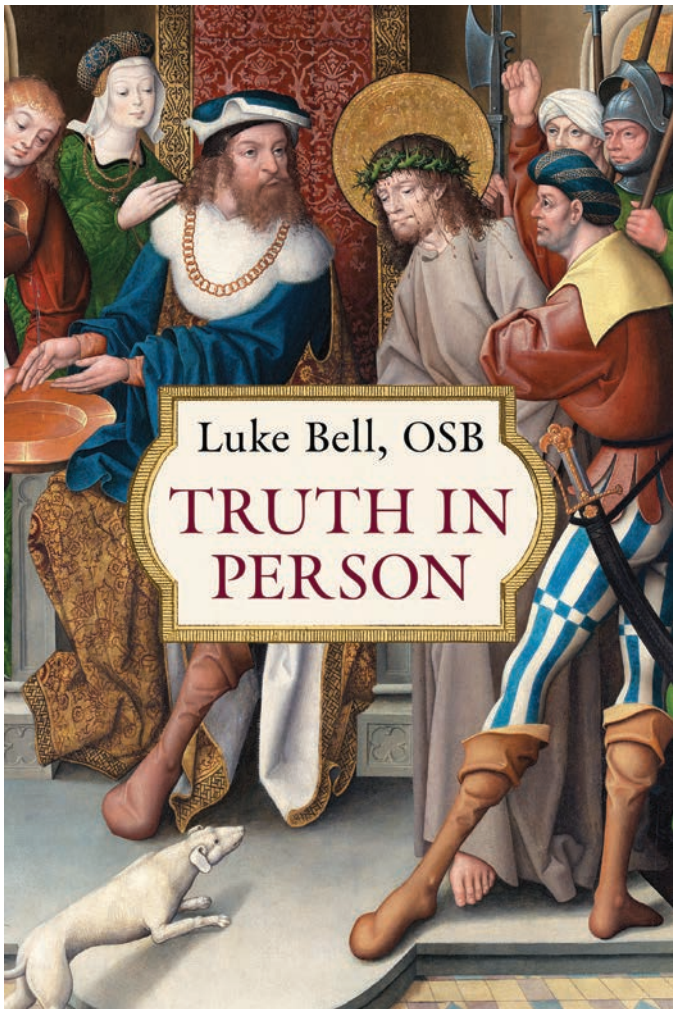
A New Book

Father Luke's latest book bears a striking image on the cover; it shows the dramatic encounter between Pilate and Christ in the Gospels. The cover encapsulates the core message of the text it encloses. Truth stands before us, as before Pilate, as a Person; Christ is the Way and the Truth and the Life to use his own words.

Yet, like Pilate, we are so often deceived by the simulacra of truth, these days, by digitally derived streams of information which distort any life-giving vision of reality. Father Luke writes passionately to purify our gaze, to centre it on Christ. Only in him and through him can we know the Truth and be set free.

"Truth in Person" is published by Angelico Press and is available from Quarr Abbey Monastery Shop and all good bookshops.

Br. Duncan



Picture: Hudson Media

Cor, Quarr

From outside

I have seen the cloisters
where one's gaze can't help
but settle on the thousands of humble
Flemish bricks, each laid by the hand
of an islander following to the letter
Dom Bellot's intricate plan.

All life is contained within the wall
of the heart. Neither hearts
nor bricks are made of stone.
If bricks are hearts sunblessed
in silence the Poet of Bricks
has made these
their home.

Maggie Sawkins