

Bad Mornings and Good Days

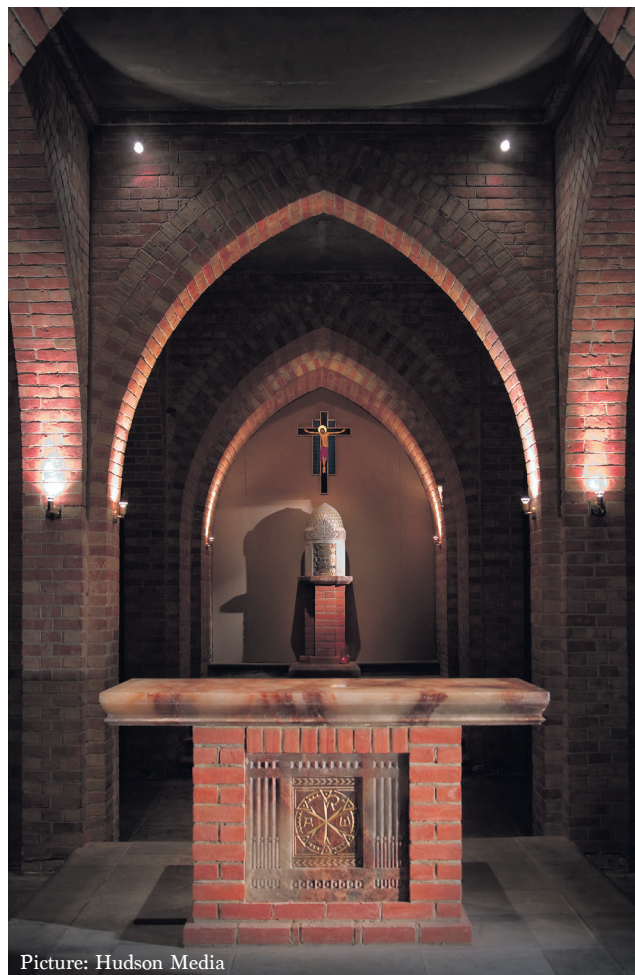
It should not come as a surprise that even a Benedictine monk can have difficult mornings. The sun is shining and birds are singing, but there is war in the world, my friend lies sick in hospital, relationships at the workplace are a bit tense, and my purse empties itself far too quickly. Nothing new, to be sure. Nothing insuperable, either, although it seems to require greater courage and more energy than what is available on that very morning.

A wise friend advises me: "Try to look at things differently". I see his point. It is not wishful thinking. I am not trying to look for light where there is none, or very little. Rather, I am invited to consent, to say Yes to things as they are and to make it my starting point – not the wall against which I kick in despair but the stone on which I build.

An even wiser friend tells me: "Start neither from you as you feel, nor from things as they are, but start from God." "But where is He?", I ask. He immediately rejoins: "Never far from us."

* * *

I suddenly feel a need for silence. I want to take a walk in the wood, to sit for while on the seashore, to enter a cool and shaded crypt, or to let the architecture of a church shelter me with its grandeur. These help open another space in me and relate me to another centre. The great world that seemed about to drown in its whirlwind the little world that I am is now put in perspective. Its greatness and mine have met another greatness, a greater one which silently penetrates and contains all things. This greatness does not crush me or



Picture: Hudson Media

the world. It gives us our space. It creates us. It makes life possible, and even enjoyable.

This is the moment when things begin to look definitely less complicated. Quite simple, in fact. We have a Father and He cares for us. How could we worry excessively?

He is never far from us. We, rather, estrange ourselves from Him, forget about Him, do not know the way back to Him. But He Himself comes to us and gently waits for us to become attentive again, or simply available. The birds sing and I can really listen to them. Even the sufferings in me and around me are bathed in a light of hope. The one in me who is always ready to complain has been silenced, and I am beginning to give thanks. The day, after all, will not be that bad. It could even be very good.

* * *

During the summer season, when Quarr is buzzing with visitors of all ages and all walks of life, I like to observe a man, a woman, or even a child enter our Abbey church and after a quick look at things sit down in silence for a little while. These few minutes can be transformative. A drop of silence in a noisy summer

break can be enough to bring a heart to peace. May our monastery ever be a place where many experience that God is never far from us, turning bad mornings into good days, creating peace and hope in our hearts.

Abbot Xavier

St John Henry Newman – Doctor of the Church

In his address in 2024 to the First Plenary Assembly of the Dicastery for Culture and Education, Pope Francis stated that “we must work together to set humanity free from the encircling gloom of nihilism, which is perhaps the most dangerous malady of contemporary culture, since it threatens to ‘cancel’ hope.”

Following in this line Pope Leo XIV, who has made a key concern for his pontificate the dominance of technology in our modern culture, has highlighted problems of our times where “truth is often distorted in order to serve particular interests”. Similar concerns have been raised by previous popes too, particularly in relation to the understanding of the human person. Pope St John Paul II wrote: “Man conquers space but is unsure about himself; he is confused about the direction in which he is heading. It is tragic that our technological mastery is greater than our wisdom about ourselves.” Here, the “field of education assumes decisive importance”, Pope Leo wrote in his recent encyclical *Magnifica Humanitas*.

On November 1 last year, the Solemnity of All Saints, Pope Leo declared St John Henry Newman a Doctor of the Church, naming him, along with St Thomas Aquinas, as co-Patron of the Church’s educational mission. Beatified by Pope Benedict in 2010, canonized by Pope Francis in 2019, now declared a Doctor of the Church, this relatively rapid advancement for Newman being formally recognized as one who in his writings and the example of his life has significantly contributed to Church’s knowledge of the Faith, may be seen as a mark of the Divine and ‘Kindly Light’ to lead the Church through the present ‘encircling gloom’ in the world. This Doctor has made significant contributions in the fields of theology and philosophy, but it is to his work on education that Pope Leo is especially guiding us towards.

What is a university? It may be described as an institute where various subject disciplines are available for students to come together and learn,

to obtain a degree. But for Newman it is much more than that. In fact, he would put a much greater emphasis on student interaction and the relationship between the tutor and his students than the actual awarding of a degree. Underlying his idea of education was what he called having a ‘philosophical temper’. By this he did not mean having a knowledge of the subject of philosophy. We can see origins of this thinking in the first of his Oxford University Sermons, given in 1826, as a young 25-year-old. He describes this temper of mind as follows: “It is by a tedious discipline that the mind is taught to overcome those baser principles which impede it in philosophical investigation, and to moderate those nobler faculties and feelings which are prejudicial when in excess. To be dispassionate and cautious, to be fair in discussion, to give to each phenomenon which nature successively presents its due weight, candidly to admit those which militate against our own theory, to be willing to be ignorant for a time, to submit to difficulties, and patiently and meekly proceed, waiting for farther light, is a temper (whether difficult or not at this day) little known to the heathen world; yet it is the only temper in which we can hope to become interpreters of nature, and it is the very temper which Christianity sets forth as the perfection of our moral character.”

To develop this philosophical temper of mind, Newman advocates for what he calls a ‘liberal education’. He relates ‘Knowledge’ to ‘Science’ or ‘Philosophy’ when it is ‘impregnated’ by ‘Reason’. Knowledge is a ‘power’ or a ‘good’. It is not only an instrument, but also an end. Knowledge may either terminate in a “mechanical process, in a tangible fruit. But it may also fall



St. John Henry Newman

back upon that Reason which informs it and resolve itself into Philosophy.” The former he calls a ‘Useful Knowledge’, the latter ‘Liberal’. Here again he is not referring to the formal subject of philosophy, but to that temper of mind he described in his Sermon above. As he indicated in a University Sermon preached in 1841 entitled “Wisdom, as contrasted with Faith and Bigotry”, a student who simply loads his mind with literature or science without determining the respective relations between the various parts of knowledge acquired is not going to enlarge his mind or become a ‘philosopher’ in the sense he uses this term for education. Some form of systematizing and gaining insight into the mutual relations of things is necessary. This Philosophy then is “Reason exercised upon Knowledge”. It cannot but be “patient, collected and majestically calm, because it discerns the whole in each part ... it always knows where it is, and how its path lies from one point to another.”

In 1826, Newman was appointed as a tutor at Oriel College, Oxford. At the time, students hired private tutors to supplement the lectures. Newman opposed this practice and felt that it was his responsibility to find time outside the lectures for personal tutoring. For him, the College Tutor had a pastoral role in addition to giving formal lectures. His friends John Keble, R.H. Froude and R.I. Wilberforce were of the same mindset. They cultivated friendship between tutors and students. Many students,

as a result in following Newman received also religious instruction from his sermons. The fostering of relationships in this way, not just between the tutor and his students but also amongst students themselves, by Newman and his colleagues was not encouraged by the College authorities. Consequently, his tutorship was not renewed. But he carried the principles forward when describing his “Idea of a University” in 1852, as a Catholic. In fact he claimed that if he had to choose between a university with no residencies or tutorial system in place but simply granted a degree to students who fulfilled course requirements and examinations, or a university which had no professors or examinations but just brought students together to foster relationships and study-interactions together, he would choose the latter! Of course, Newman’s use of hyperbole does shine forth here. A university, therefore, should be a place where students not only learn from their tutors but also from one another and across disciplines. Education is therefore concerned with the cultivation of the mind which he argues is worth seeking for its own sake. It can involve a great deal of reading, but education is not simply the acquisition of knowledge as a passive reception of ideas. Repeating what he had said as an Anglican, education involves the “mind’s energetic and simultaneous action upon and towards and among those ideas ... There is no enlargement, unless there be a comparison of ideas one with another ... and a systematizing of them”. As the word ‘educate’, to lead out, itself implies, there is a movement onwards, a dynamism in a gradual growth. In being formed in this way, the intellect is enabled to formulate a connected view or grasp of things. Furthermore, for Newman Christianity and nothing short of it “must be made the element and principle of all education ... where it has been laid as the first stone ... it will give a character to literature and science.”

Although Pope Leo makes no mention of St John Henry Newman in *Magna Humanitas*, he does reflect upon the importance of education particularly in the light of the rapid development of AI. Moreover, it

is clear that Newman’s advocacy for a ‘Liberal Education’ in an environment of good communication and relationships amongst students and tutors across disciplines will find its home in the thought of Pope Leo. The importance of discernment in a collective manner appears throughout the document. The digital environment shapes how people perceive the world, informing our desires and choices. Those who control these platforms affect the ‘collective imagination’.



Pope Leo XIV

This power must be influenced by the pursuit of truth and a respect for human dignity. For this, the Pope writes, we must promote an ‘ecology of communication.’ In the field of education this requires a critical use of digital tools.

In the case of universities, the Pope states that “the principal challenge lies in the interpretation of knowledge, cultivating both the capacity to connect and synthesize knowledge in order to grasp complexity, and the skills necessary to verify facts.” This is also fundamental for the development of what Newman called a ‘philosophical temper of mind’. The culture which the digital world fosters is one of ‘immediacy’ and ‘hyperstimulation’, Pope Leo wrote. This only gives rise to apathy and boredom. Discernment requires patience, “to be willing to be ignorant for a time ... waiting for further light”, as Newman wrote. This view is classical. Pope Leo quotes Plato in saying that “the deepest and most important things are learned only after much time and effort, by engaging

with others, striking upon ideas and experiences together like flint until the spark of understanding is kindled within us.”

A favourite phrase for Pope Leo is ‘Disarm AI’. By this he does not mean that we must avoid the use of modern technology. Rather, we must discern, distinguish between a good and a bad use of it. We can be assisted in this discernment processes when we consider the great consistency which has stood the test of time in the teaching of St John Henry Newman on education. His idea of a University remains a classic in this field. Many have absorbed a heavy use of AI, arguing that we cannot avoid it and it is here to stay. Discerning the way forward on this presents a great challenge, given that the designers themselves of this technology do not fully understand AI. The principles of a university system according to Newman can form a vital element of this discernment process in the field of education. The key themes are communication, reason reflecting on knowledge especially when the source of the presumed knowledge is AI based, forming a connected view of things, encouraging students to learn both from their tutors and from one another, developing the ability for critical thinking and exercising the memory, a point that Newman takes for granted. An over reliance on AI can seriously undermine a natural cultivation of the intellect. Its proper cultivation is a vital point, which includes a discerned use of AI, from the perspective of maintaining a respect for human dignity.

What tends to remain in people’s minds is the time saving in labour and ease of work in the short term using AI. But in a proper discernment on its use, we must also consider the question about what we lose in the longer term. How is the dignity of the human person being undermined? As Pope Leo wrote: “We must learn, then how to exercise restraint in the use of AI and to protect our young people from the promise of the perfect machine, from the subtle temptation which renders human thought seemingly superfluous precisely when it is most needed.”

Dom Brian Gerard Kelly

Chronicle

On the eve of Holy Week we welcomed Andrew into the Novitiate as a postulant. Although new to the community he is nevertheless well-known to us all. He has worked in the gardens- latterly as head-gardener indeed- for some fourteen years. We pray he will discover God's will for him with us, and joy in serving the Lord at Quarr.

We are accustomed to an annual visit to our sister house of Saint Cecilia's Abbey in Ryde- usually on the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord or the Solemnity of Saint Scholastica. But this year we undertook a second visit, on the Solemnity of Saint George. The reason was a significant anniversary; not a silver, golden or even diamond jubilee, but a centenary celebration of the Abbatial election and blessing of Reverend Mother Ambrosia Cousin as first Abbess of the Monastery of Pax Cordis Jesu.

Saint Cecilia's Abbey was founded by the exiled community of Sainte Cecile of Solesmes in 1902. When the nuns were able to return to France in 1922 the vacated property was taken over by the community of Pax Cordis Jesu who were living in Ventnor on the south of the Island. Pax Cordis Jesu was a house of Belgian foundation, tracing its origin to the Benedictine reform movement associated with Madame Florence de Werquignoeul in the early seventeenth century. In 1926 the monastery was elevated to the status of an Abbey and the superior, Mother Ambrosia was elected as the first Abbess.

Pax Cordis Jesu had for many years been much influenced by the Solesmes houses on the Island and gradually a desire to be a part of the Solesmes Congregation had grown within the community. It took a while for this desire to come to fruition however. There were members of the Congregation who jealously guarded the family ties holding between the member houses; for them it was unthinkable for a community of

alien growth to be grafted in. But gradually other counsels prevailed; spiritual kinship was given priority over canonical descent, and in 1950 Pax Cordis Jesu was aggregated to the Congregation; a status which is still unique among Solesmes houses.

We arrived at Saint Cecilia's in good time and greeted the Abbots of Douai

he was a humorist; his portraits give nothing away!

After lunch in the Octagon we returned to the great parlour for a concert. The P.C.J. Band entertained us, as did a hastily assembled Quarr Choir. There followed violin music and a Joyce Grenfell monologue recited by Mother Prioress. And the

natural conclusion to these proceedings was a specially composed Laudes Festivae which was sung with enthusiasm on both sides of the grill.

We needed a little time to quieten down after this, but then we went to the movies- or at least a slide show with such a number of slides drawn from Liege, Ryde and Quarr that it seemed to form a moving pageant of a hundred years of history.

A memorable day ended with Vespers and Benediction. We left with the firm conviction that our sister Abbey is well set up for another hundred years. Vivat! Vivat!

Pilgrim of Hope, Quarr's exhibition of reproductions of National Gallery paintings, telling the story of Mary, the Mother of Jesus proved very popular last year when it was shown in our Courtyard Gallery. This year it enjoyed another outing, not at Quarr but at the London Jesuit Church of Farm Street.

And so on May 1 I took the train to Waterloo to prepare for an opening ceremony in the evening. The journey was uneventful, I arrived in good time and had just to await the arrival of Edmund with the panels and Dominic with the expertise in hanging exhibitions. When all were present



and Farnborough who were already there with some of their monks. A splendid Mass followed which was an occasion of great joy, a joy which Fr. Abbot in his homily placed within the joy of Easter. He repeatedly returned to the great Festal cry: This is the Day which the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it!

After Mass there was time for coffee, before the real business of the day continued with a talk in the great parlour given by Sr. Elizabeth. Called "From Ladies of Liege to Sisters of Solesmes" it told the story of the community from its origins in Belgium up to the present time. It was illuminating throughout and drew upon a lively correspondence between the nuns and their chaplains and spiritual directors. I was not surprised to hear that Abbot Tissot of Quarr was a gifted Latin poet; but I was to learn



the work proceeded easily and was completed in two hours.

We had been worried that the corridor would prove too narrow for an exhibition space, but were delighted to find it roomy enough with just enough length to accommodate all the pictures bar one.

The ceremony at 7.30 took place in a large reception room at one end of the corridor, which was soon comfortably full with some seventy friends of Quarr. Fr. Dominic Robinson, Parish Priest of Farm Street gave a cordial speech of welcome, and Fr. Abbot followed by saying something of the story of the exhibition and of the present needs of Quarr. But it was not all speeches. Br. Matthew arrived from Allen Hall Seminary, our friend, Julian Borthwick came down from Sunderland and we could form an impromptu schola to sing a number of Marian chants. These were interspersed with Edmund's poetry, which he read with a strong and yet sensitive voice. He was well able to compete with the Mayfair Porsches which sounded their presence outside. And then, of course, there were the pictures.

It was all quite hectic, but finally, the crowds dispersed and Fr. Abbot and I accompanied Br. Matthew back to Allen Hall where we had rooms for

the night. The Pilgrim of Hope had started on her way again.

On June 30, as part of our Summer events programme we offered a monastic day for any interested visitors. The day started with the conventual Mass in the Abbey Church. It concluded with monastic Vespers; and in between it involved conferences given by the brethren in the large Marquee set up near the walled garden; the offices of Sext and None framed an hour for lunch and a break in the middle of the day.

Br. Subprior gave the first conference on praying with the Psalms. Fr. Nicholas followed with prayer in the tradition of the Desert Fathers. A break from teaching then followed

before Br. Duncan gave the first afternoon conference on Seeking God with Saint Benedict. Fr. Brian concluded the series by speaking on Saint John Henry Newman: Doctor of the Church. The day was well attended and now seems to be an established feature of our Summer programme.

We spend a large part of our daily lives on the move- even Benedictine monks who have taken a vow of stability. Perhaps it is no surprise then, that a number of events in the Summer Programme at Quarr Abbey celebrated mobility.

On August 21 and 22 we hosted traditional sports days as part of the Wight Games Festival. Sacks and eggs and spoons brought joy to children and





Picture: Marie-Line Burguiere

all the family, while raising welcome funds for the Mountbatten Hospice and other Island charities.

For those who wanted something a little less energetic there were guided tours of the Abbey at 11.00 on Wednesdays throughout the Summer. Visitors were taken on the historical journey of Quarr from its beginnings in 1132 when monks of Savigny first established a monastery on the Island to the coming of the monks of Solesmes, who settled here in 1907 when seeking a place of exile from an anti-clerical government at home. A gentle walk between the courtyard and the Church accompanied the mind as it traversed the centuries.

Another journey could be undertaken in the Courtyard Gallery. For a second year we showed an exhibition of reproductions of paintings from the National Gallery in London. Thanks to the generosity of its Director, Sir Gabriele Finaldi, and of Dr. Dominic Fontana, Chairman of the Friends of Quarr, we could tell the story of Holy Week: The Journey of Jesus from this World to the Father.

The exhibition related the last days of Jesus' life on earth, his suffering, death and resurrection from the dead, his Paschal Mystery, which for Christians is the central mystery of their faith.

Eighteen paintings had been chosen to portray the most significant events of these days. They were painted over the course of some three hundred years from the early fourteenth to the mid-seventeenth centuries and represented the more important schools of painting of the time. Most Galleries show their collections in chronological order.

We were doing something unusual in ignoring historical sequence to tell a story.

In some ways it is supremely distressing story. In many paintings we see Jesus suffering intensely. But if we view Jesus with the eyes of faith we can receive consolation. For here is a mystery of love. We read in Saint Paul that love is first patient. Love endures everything before it does anything. And so to suffer patiently out of love for the Father and for us is the most powerful thing in the world. It does not degrade or diminish Jesus' humanity. Rather it leads to its exaltation in eternal life in God. The journey of Jesus holds out hope for the journeys of us all.

If you live on a small island, just off the coast of another island, it is easy to feel a little cut off sometimes. And while the insular mind glories in a certain apartness, connections with the wider world, when they come, are welcome. It was with real pleasure therefore that we received three brothers from the Solesmes Congregation monastery of Clear Creek in the United States of America.

Br. Hugh and Br. Bernard Mary paid only short visits, but long enough

to give us the benefit of their good zeal and good humour, and even their cooking. Br. Stephen stayed for longer, for nearly two months in fact. As a cantor his assistance in choir was welcomed immediately, and he was soon giving regular lessons in singing the chant to our novices.

Another visitor was Dom Francois d'Assise Chereau, the choirmaster of Sainte Anne de Kergonan in Brittany. He came primarily to give a concert as part of our annual series of organ recitals. Helene du Boisbaudry, also from Brittany and Simon Buchanan-Morgan from Portsmouth joined him in providing three successive days of music, focussing on the work of Dietrich Buxtehude. Our Mutin Cavaille-Coll organ co-operated eagerly with three fine organists to delight our many visitors, many of whom came back day after day for the musical feast.

In August the community celebrated a significant anniversary: it is now ten years since Father Abbot received his abbatial blessing. A votive mass in honour of Saint Benedict was sung for the occasion and a festive meal followed. Father Prior offered a fitting and humorous Petit Discours (a translation was provided if needed) and the more musical members of the community made their contributions. The celebration concluded with a hymn to Saint Anne, a melodious reminder of Father Abbot's Breton roots. May he continue to thrive in his vocation!

Br. Duncan



A lesson in hurling

Friends of Quarr

Farm Street

On Friday May 1st, there was an opening event at Farm Street Church in London to celebrate the arrival of the Friends of Quarr “Pilgrim of Hope” exhibition. The pictures, which had been shown at Quarr last summer and then at St Cecilia’s Abbey in Ryde, were now rehung in a new space, hoping to attract fresh audiences during May, the month of Our Lady. The event was attended by 70 people, some of whom were London-based Friends of Quarr and others who had made the journey up from the Island to support the venture. During the evening, a small group from the community sang to the appreciative assembled guests.

Later on, the exhibition was extended through the month of June and on some afternoons, accompanied by poetry readings and explanations from Edmund Matyjaszek, who has been a great support to the project.

Visit to The National Gallery

A gathering from the Quarr community, accompanied by a small group of London friends and some Islanders met at the National Gallery for a private viewing of the Zubaran exhibition led by the Director of the National Gallery, Sir Gabriele Finaldi. He gave a very informative commentary on all the paintings in the exhibition and then led us upstairs to view some of the beautiful early religious paintings. There, it was exciting to view in the flesh, the early fifteenth century painting of St Veronica With the Sudarium, which Brother Duncan had chosen as one of the paintings for the new Friends of Quarr exhibition “Holy Week: The Journey of Jesus from this World to the Father.” (Now on display at Quarr until 7th September 2026).

St Benedict’s Day

The weather continued to swelter as Friends of Quarr gathered to celebrate

St Benedict’s Day with Mass in the Abbey Church. After Mass, we sought the shade of the weeping willow tree in the garden and enjoyed refreshments along with members of the monastic community. Then, emerging from the shade into intense sunlight, we headed to the Courtyard where we were welcomed by Dominic. Fr Abbot blessed the new exhibition, curated by Brother Duncan, who told us about the process of making the decisions

on what to include in the display. The paintings are on show in the Courtyard Gallery until September 7th. The Friends of Quarr are enormously grateful to Sir Gabriele Finaldi for his support and assistance in enabling us to put together both of our recent exhibitions which have brought world renowned copies of masterpieces, often seldom seen, to our Abbey.

Cheryl Fontana



Picture: The National Gallery

Out and about

Every so often, but not very often, the Novitiate are let off the leash as it were - we have a day out. A special opportunity in London inspired the most recent one.

We left Quarr after an early morning Mass and caught the Fishbourne Car Ferry for Portsmouth. A train followed

which brought us to Waterloo Station at 11.26 precisely. It was a splendid day, bright and hot, but tempered by a light breeze which freshened the air.

We left the station and walked westwards along the south bank of the Thames, passing the London Eye before crossing the river by Westminster Bridge. Our way led to the Peers Entrance to the Houses of Parliament.

Here we were met by Lord Goodman, a one-time novice at Quarr and a long-time friend of the community. He guided us through the airport style security checks, showed us where to deposit our unwanted luggage and then took us on an extended tour of the Palace.

The way was labyrinthine and the long winding corridors and open spaces of Charles Barry's design were everywhere overflowing with Pugin's decoration. I confess I loved it. It was riotous in an exultant manner. In the Peers' Lobby for example, the eye was continually moving from the white stone to the brassy doors to the brightly coloured encaustic tiles to the red leather upholstered seats and back again. And yet, such was the overall harmony there was no sense of restlessness.

The House of Lords Chamber was still more splendid, the royal throne a blaze of golden light illuminating one end. And in so many places throughout, as Br. Liam Joseph

indicated, there were images of the Saints, a reminder of times when Christ and his Church were taken a little more seriously by the secular powers.

In total contrast was Westminster Hall, the austere late fourteenth century space, gloriously covered by Hugh Herland's Hammerbeam roof. We stood and prayed where Saint Thomas More stood trial and received his condemnation and then sought out the adjoining chapel of Saint Mary Undercroft. This is another medieval survival of the fire of 1834, but this one was subsequently ornamented in the full Gothic Revival style. Fr. Abbot led us in singing the Salve Regina before Lord Goodman led us to lunch in the River Restaurant and coffee on the Terrace overlooking the Thames. We had time to attend Questions in the Chamber afterwards, but then had to make our farewells and start the second stage of our day trip.

We crossed the road, turned a corner and after a short walk arrived at the west entrance to Westminster Abbey. This time there was no security check and our monastic habits even made entrance easier. Certainly they obtained our access to the elevated platform on which the tomb of Saint Edward the Confessor stands. The shrine bears the marks, alas!, of its despoliation at the time of the Reformation, but it was a quieter place where we could recite the offices of Sext and None surrounded by the



With Lord Goodman



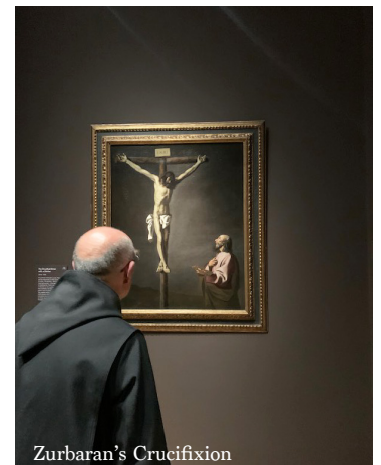
The Lord's Chamber



On the terrace



St. Edward the Confessor



Zurbaran's Crucifixion

tombs of Kings and their consorts.

We then descended and made our way to the chapel of Henry VII, resplendent with its elaborate fan vaulting and intricately carved oaken choir stalls; regimental ensigns gave an additional splash of colour. The double tomb of Queens Mary and Elizabeth was a painful reminder of less happy times but, please God, in such glorious surroundings, even such unhappy sisters will find reconciliation at the last.

We set out for the true goal of our day out next, walking up Whitehall, crossing Trafalgar Square, seeking the Sainsbury Wing entrance to the National Gallery. Having arrived a little early we settled down for a period of waiting. But soon a group started to gather and at 5:45 sharp Sir Gabriele Finaldi, Director of the National Gallery appeared. So began our special guided tour of the Zurbaran exhibition.

As it was after opening hours we had the galleries to ourselves, in addition to the immense privilege of having our expert and most engaging guide.

Zurbaran is not the best known of seventeenth century Spanish artists, but, nevertheless an extremely powerful and expressive painter. His Saint Serapion is a breath-taking symphony in delicate whites, a simple approach perhaps fitting for the clarity of a martyr's vocation; his Saint Francis kneeling in prayer in contrast focuses all its massive spiritual intensity in a dark, shadowy face hidden by a voluminous hood.

We went on to see the famous Agnus Dei, that very precise and almost surreal trussed Lamb of God, ready for the slaughter. Also an intriguing Crucifixion with an artist (Zurbaran himself?) standing to the side. Sir Gabriele stressed the ambiguity of the image; is the artist part of the scene depicted, or has he painted himself painting a picture?

We then saw a whole series of still lifes, in particular one very still, very quiet, a simple cup of water and a flower, common place but still religious objects, speaking eloquently of the Virgin, her purity and spiritual grace.

Our tour ended upstairs in the Renaissance Galleries. We saw the Wilton Diptych and heard tell of some recent research work. This has disclosed the Island of Britain painted within the pennant being presented to King Richard II by the Virgin; another reminder that Church and State were once closer than they are now, for here lies the beginning of England's consecration as Mary's Dowry.

Finally we looked at a very recent acquisition of the National Gallery, a painting of Our Lady accompanied by King Saint Louis IX of France and Saint Margaret of Antioch. The dragon from which Saint Margaret bursts forth quite grips the imagination, its half human head being a masterpiece in the grotesque. Perhaps it inspired fervour in the *Salve Regina* with which we concluded our visit. Certainly the halls of the National Gallery echoed with sound of the chant. We then expressed our gratitude to Sir Gabriele Finaldi and headed back to Waterloo Station, the train, the boat and home. And not one novice lost on the way!

Br. Duncan

Quarr Abbey: A heart of peace for the Island community?

Abbot Xavier's Address to the Annual Quarr Abbey Charity Dinner, 26th June 2026

These days, if you wish to look intelligent in conversation, you just have to mention AI. It is the topic of the day. Everybody is speaking of it. When you begin, you generally find someone telling you, 'It is, true, AI will transform things in the future'. This is the moment you were waiting for. You take a deep breath, adopt a very stern face, you look at the person right in the eyes and you declare solemnly, 'It is already everywhere around us.'

This is absolutely true. AI is everywhere. Even the Pope speaks of AI. (By the way, he has reminded priests that they should not use AI for their sermons.) He himself has just written his first Encyclical – the very first of his pontificate which in Catholic understanding is a sort of programmatic document – precisely on

this matter. When he began writing, Pope Leo turned to an AI platform and asked: 'What should the pope say on AI?' The answer came immediately: 'Pope Francis would say...' He was not impressed. So, he took his pen and paper and began to write a marvellous text, which is very much about AI but even more about a much more marvellous reality: the beauty and dignity of our humanity, and the gratitude we, human beings, can feel precisely at being human beings – not artificially boosted inhuman superbeings.

As those among you are the habit of reading papal Encyclicals have probably already read this one (and those who aren't will not make an exception for it), I thought I would rather share with you the deep impression another text recently

made on me – a text some of you have read or may consider reading. I am speaking of Kazuo Ishiguro's novel *Klara and the Sun*. Ishiguro, born in Japan, raised and living in England, was awarded the Nobel Prize of Literature in 2017. He is famous for many novels and films. You may have seen *The Remains of the Day*, the moving and subtle love story between an English butler and one of the maids.

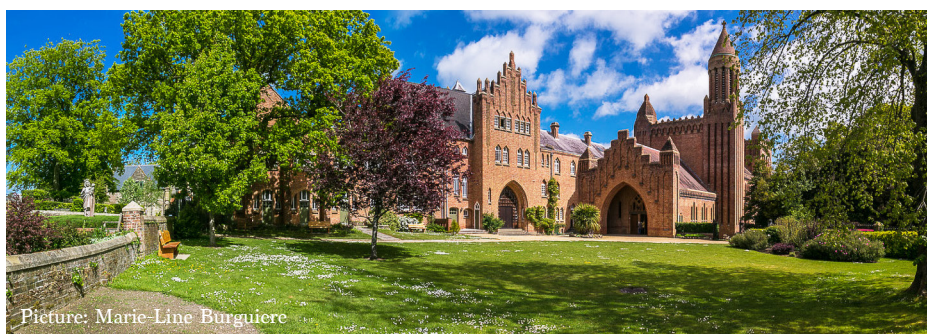
Klara and the Sun is set in a not-too-distant future when robots have become companions of daily life and take the place of senior members of staff who are reduced to surviving on the margins of communities. Children whose parents can afford it are selected to receive brain implants which enhance their capacities and prepare them for high responsibility roles.

Klara is a highly intelligent and sensitive robot. She has been bought by a family to serve as companion and helper (her official title is AF - for Artificial Friend) to a teenage girl, Josie, who is studying at home and preparing for university. Klara is remarkably perceptive, which enables her to act as a quasi-person for most of the time. She is also totally selfless. She does all that she can for Josie without expecting any reward in return.

Human beings have a mixed relationship with her: at times, they treat her as a friend whom they love, whom they hug, and with whom they share their most intimate thoughts; at other times, she is considered just as a machine that will eventually be discarded.

One of the questions at the centre of the book is the question of love. Can a robot love just as a human being does? Can a robot observe and imitate a human being so well that it, too, ends acting as if having a heart? Or is there something in human persons that cannot be translated into algorithms and therefore cannot be reproduced by a machine?

The answer is multilayered. In many ways, Klara proves able to act with great love. She is even able to sacrifice herself secretly for the girl she feels responsible for. However, at the end of the book she herself declares that this is not enough. She is unable to love as the human beings she has been interacting with: the mother, the father, the housekeeper and a young



neighbour. These loved Josie in a different way. Their love was in many ways less perfect than Klara's. But at the end of the day, human beings require a love that no selfless androids can give but that comes from another human heart. Our heart needs other human hearts. AI can imitate the heart; it cannot have a heart. Our heart feeds on other human hearts. We need personal love. Our self needs the interest and the care of another self.

Such is our beauty. Each of us is a heart, able to love and to suffer and to share in someone else's love and suffering, not only by identifying with these feelings, but also by owning them from the perspective of someone else; not as mirror which leaves you alone with yourself, but as a person who affirm you as another person. Human interaction at its most basic and at its best is a contact from heart to heart.

I do not think High Sheriff Nigel [former CEO of the Mountbatten Hospice on the Isle of Wight] will deny this. What makes Mountbatten so precious, is that precisely at the difficult and unknow hour of death,

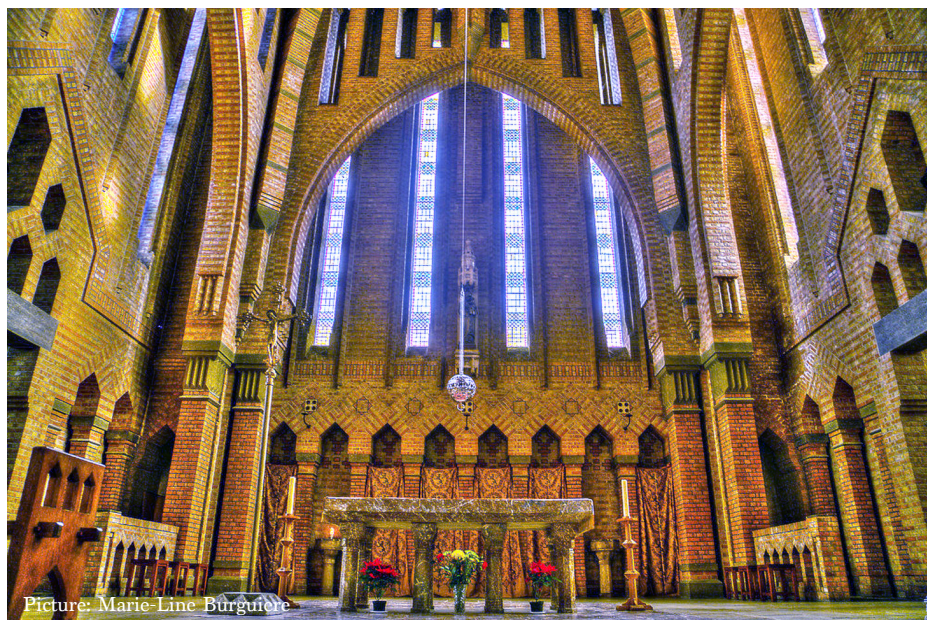
human hearts, whilst remaining in their essential solitude, continue to exist to the end in dialogue with other human hearts. The body can be exhausted, the brain can be very weak, the heart remains alive and responds to another heart. Knowing that a heart is watching by my heart till the end is what makes the beauty, the nobility, the humble greatness of what it is to be a human being. Humanity consists of personal hearts in constant dialogue, not individuals bathed in some sort of anonymous love.

Where does this lead us to this evening? I would like to mention only two areas.

The first, obvious one, is to the whole debate in our Western societies around the end-of-life care and the just definition of this care. Nobody will be surprised with my stand on this question. I firmly believe that a country which invests in supporting palliative care and hospices builds itself up as a community of persons - a communion of hearts. Acting otherwise, to my mind, it destroys itself.

Let me express the second one in the form of a question. If our Island is, can be, and wants to be a community of human persons working at building a communion - that is to say something more than a juxtaposition of individual interests - does it also have a heart - or many hearts? Could Quarr be one of these hearts for our Island community? Could Quarr be a heart of peace for the Island community? I mean, a place where one feels, almost physically, that it is good and beautiful to be a human being, and that hope is possible even with the AI revolution looming large.

Abbot Xavier



Two words

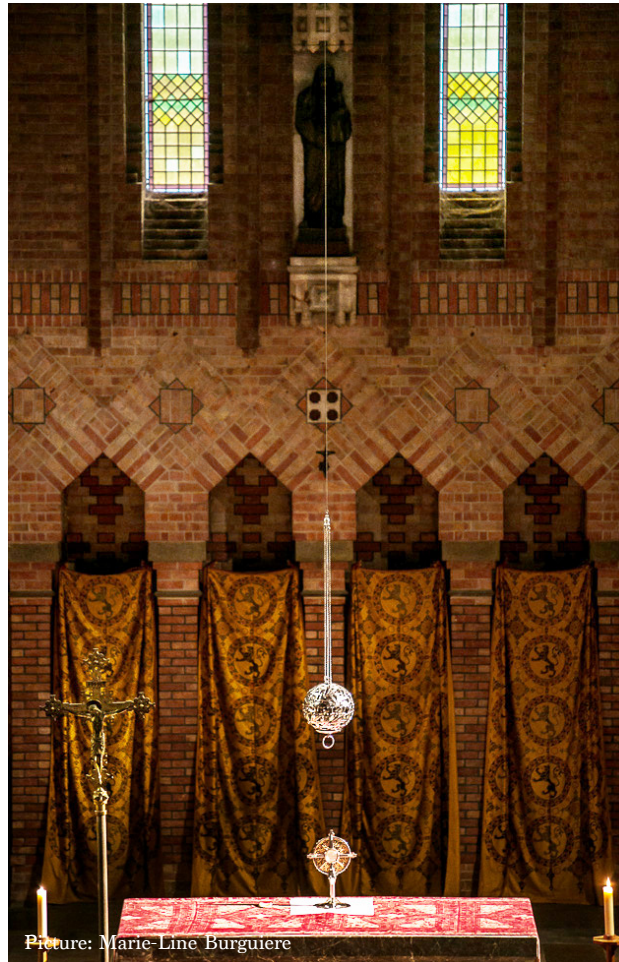
As far back as I recall God was well and truly in that little stone house in Donegal where I was given the privilege of growing up; not so much in the quiet moments, no, because there were none. How could there be, with five sisters?! My brother was yet to be born, but there was a Mum and Dad, a granny and grand auntie, neighbours and friends coming and going all the time, a dog and a clatter of cats and me probably the loudest of them all and possibly the most troublesome.

Yes, I knew there was a God from the start. My parents trusted him with everything. with our protection, putting food in our mouths and clothes on our back, what else was needed? But Ireland was changing. I followed my own will and at 17 I left home to spend some time in Europe and ended up in London for six years working on the roads mostly. My God had become to me nothing more than a guilty conscience, but he never left me.

In the '90s, disillusioned with city life, I returned home to Ireland, got myself a job, built a house, got married and had two beautiful children. We lived in that house for fifteen years. My son and my daughter were the apple of my eye; I loved them and still love them dearly. They had a great childhood and brought so much joy to us. They are God's grace made visible; they helped me find my faith once again.

Then Ireland's economy crashed. We emigrated to New Zealand; a new start in such a beautiful country. The kids grew up with Kiwi accents and after college got jobs and become pretty independent very quickly.

Then through irreparable differences, that I can't or shouldn't elaborate on, my wife and I separated; suffice to say we never fell out at all and are still friends to this day. I became a New Zealand citizen and was eligible to work in Australia where the money was better and I could get my daily mass and fit in a day's work easier. Holy Mother Church granted me an annulment. God had his plans and I made him laugh by telling him mine. At that time I had been talking to God a lot or at least began to be



Picture: Marie-Line Burguiere

aware of it and it felt like a two-way conversation. He was my constant. The Australian plans were now proving problematic so I found myself in adoration one morning in St Thomas More church and not in the best of humour. There was only father Matt and myself. He was praying silently on the far side of the church as usual. I was praying to the Lord in my heart. I remember it word for word.

"Lord why aren't you helping me get to Perth?" "Why do you want to go to Perth?" "You know why! I can get early mass there and work a full shift."

"So you're only giving me a small part of your day?" "What do you want of me?" "I want all of you." I was getting irritated now. "How can I do that?" "I have to make a living. I can't live on fresh air." The next two words

did not come from me and jolted me to the core.

"MONASTIC LIFE."

I looked around. There was nobody there just Father Matt deep in prayer. I had never ever considered monastic life and in fact it took me a little while to register what monastic life was. I looked at the blessed sacrament and said into myself, "if this is from you God, get Father Matt to get up and come straight over to me and I will do what you want." I really was not surprised when he did just that I looked at him and said "Could you see me in monastic life?" "Oh yes", he said.

From that moment there was no longer any doubt. That evening I emailed my brother, now a missionary priest to ask him where to start looking. Without any hesitation he said you can't go wrong with the Benedictines. I googled. Quarr Abbey came up. England! Too far.

But every time I looked at other monasteries I kept coming back to Quarr.

I took the hint and sent the email. Before I heard back I resigned my job, sold the car and booked a one way flight. There was to be no plan B.

I have been at Quarr now for three years and have made simple promises. My cross is the separation from my children but I get to pray for them and the world every day in this holy place.

What a gift!

Please pray for me and I will pray for you. Blessings.

Pax.

Brother John



Picture: Marie-Line Burghiere

Thoughts from the Novitiate

I find here a beauty, one I am not sure I have ever truly seen. Is it the architecture? Perhaps the trees, the flowers, the green?

Is it the morning light, or the song of chanted psalms from dawn until night?

This feeling, this sense, perhaps it is the soul itself: a soul that has long hungered for what it needs, longed for nourishment, and is now, at last, beginning to be fed.

With what, you may ask? With the love of God. With what has always been there, if only you let it in.

It is the most immense beauty, the perception of which I can hardly begin to comprehend. And yet, I feel it. I know it. I see it in all that is good, in all that truly is.

It is so profound that I cannot help but be moved by it, drawn closer by the Holy Spirit. My whole being, my very soul, turning towards its creator, towards the source of life, the source of this emanating beauty, the all-encompassing love that is God.

Andrew

Quarr Abbey is a Catholic Benedictine Community of the Solesmes Congregation

Registered Charity No. 1165957

Visit Us

Quarr Road, Ryde, Isle of Wight,
PO33 4ES

Website: <https://quarrabbey.org/>

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Thank You!