

Pluscarden Benedictines

No. 178 News and Notes for our Friends Pentecost 2017

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Cover: Fr Abbot at the Paschal Vigil

FR ABBOT'S LETTER

Dear Friends,

As I write this we have just begun to listen at supper to the reading of *Letters to My Brothers and Sisters*, by Abbot Denis Huerre. This is a published series of letters that Abbot Denis wrote to all the monks and nuns of the monastic Congregation to which Pluscarden belongs. This now bears the title "Subiaco Cassinese Congregation". Until a few years ago it was called the "Subiaco Congregation". Abbot Denis was Abbot President of the Subiaco Congregation from 1980 until 1988. A monk and former Abbot of the Abbey of La Pierre qui Vire, he died only last year, in his hundred and first year and his seventy-first year of monastic life. His teaching, contained in these letters, has become part of the spiritual patrimony of our Congregation.

Abbot Denis begins his first letter with a reflection on the name of the Congregation, "Subiaco". Subiaco is of course the place where St Benedict began his monastic life. He started as a hermit in a cave at Subiaco. After three years in the cave, he emerged to become first the leader of a monastic community, then the founder of twelve monasteries around Subiaco, before leaving Subiaco for Monte Cassino, where his monastic life and teaching reached full maturity and where he wrote the Holy Rule that still guides our life as Benedictines today.

Today at Subiaco there are two monasteries under a single abbot: the Abbey of Saint Scholastica, that traces its history back to St Benedict and bears the proud title *Protocenobium*, "the First Monastery"; and the *Sacro Speco* or "Sacred Cave", built around the cave in which St Benedict had lived as a young hermit during the closing years of the fifth century. St Benedict's cave at Subiaco remains a spiritual point of reference for all Benedictines, and particularly for those of our Congregation, named after the place.

As I write this I am about to travel to Subiaco, for the twice yearly meeting of the Visitors of our Congregation with our Abbot President. The Visitors represent the eight different Provinces of

the Congregation, and we meet to discuss the needs of the monasteries of the different Provinces and how we can help one another. The meetings are held in various monasteries, so that over time the Visitors get to meet as many communities as possible, but from time to time the meeting is held at Subiaco. Subiaco is chosen especially at important moments in the Congregation's history. This meeting marks such a moment: it is the first meeting with our new Abbot President, Abbot Guillermo Arboleda. He is the first non-European Abbot President of our international Congregation. Like Pope Francis he is from Latin America, Colombia.

Our returning to the cave at Subiaco at moments like this represents our aspiration not to let ourselves be overwhelmed by the many difficulties and the experiences of human limitation that characterise life in monasteries as they do all human life. Abbot Denis says that Subiaco is the place where St Benedict returned to God. St Benedict was then a very young man, and had never been immersed in the ways of the world, but for him who was very young as for us who are older the way to God is through conversion to love of God and love of neighbour. This happened for him at Subiaco. That our monasteries make Subiaco a point of orientation signifies our desire for conversion to this love.

In his Rule, St Benedict says that he is writing for "coenobites", for monks living in community. He allows the validity of the hermit life, and envisions the possibility that a special grace verified by obedience might lead the monk who has long lived in community out into solitude, but historically this has been exceptional. St Benedict believes that the full flowering of charity in the heart of the monk will be in the life he shares with the brothers in community, as it was for him. Even when in the cave, we are told, he would go out to a place just outside that formed a natural pulpit in the mountainside, from which he would preach to the local shepherds, a scene surely reminiscent of the shepherds gathering round the new born child in Bethlehem.

Perhaps we might say in conclusion that Subiaco, the place of St Benedict's youth, represents the newness of the Gospel, to

which we constantly turn and return so that our youth “is renewed like the eagle’s” (Ps. 103:5).

Yours devotedly in Christ,

+ Fr Anselm

The Carthusian Martyrs

On April 20, 1535, Henry VIII’s enforcers arrested John Houghton, Augustine Webster, and Robert Lawrence, the Priors of the Charterhouses in London, Beauvale (Notts), and Axhome (Lincs.), along with Richard Reynolds, a Bridgettine monk from Syon Abbey. They were imprisoned in the Tower of London, refusing to take the oath recognising Henry VIII as the “Supreme Head of the Church in England.” Their consciences would not allow them to renounce the Universal Church of God.

Under interrogation by Thomas Cromwell, John Houghton and his companions said that they were ready to consent to *all that the law of God would permit*. Cromwell, however, demanded total submission, declaring: “I admit no exception. Whether the law of God permits it or no, you shall take the oath without any reserve whatsoever, and you shall observe it too.”

When the Carthusians pointed out that the Act was contrary to what the Catholic Church taught, Cromwell replied; “I care nothing for what the Church has held or taught. I will that you testify by solemn oath that you believe and firmly hold what we propose to you to profess: that the king is Head of the English Church.” This they could not do.

FROM THE ANNALS

MARCH 2017

15th: Tony Brodrick arrived this evening; he is to look after Br Adrian while Br Cyprian is on a three month course in Rome.

19th: **THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT.** We greeted Br Joseph for his name day tomorrow.

21st: Fr Abbot told us of his visit to St Mary's, Petersham, and of his clothing of Tim de Courcy, their postulant. He is now Br Luke.

29th: Today was the clergy day. There was a large turnout. Rita Sim cooked the meal.

APRIL 2017

3rd: Jai Lama, a retired Gurkha officer, arrived to take charge of part of the 1230 pilgrimage walk. A group of students from Glasgow University arrived with Fr Ross Campbell and a priest from Opus Dei. Ronan McDaniel arrived to spend a month as a nibbler

9th: **PALM SUNDAY OF THE PASSION.** Fr Abbot presided at Conventual Mass. This was preceded by the blessing of palms, the Gospel of the Entry into Jerusalem and a procession along the nave up to the car park and then through the north door into the transepts. At the Mass Frs Martin, Giles and Mark read the Gospel. Br Michael led the community in the parts spoken by the crowd.

12th: Fr Benedict and Bros Joseph, Michael and Thomas went to Aberdeen to take part in a concert to raise funds for the 1230 pilgrimage.

13th: **MAUNDY THURSDAY.** Many were involved in preparing for the Liturgy of the next few days: Fr Benedict and Br Joseph were rehearsing guests and community members who were to play a part in the Liturgy, while others were cleaning and polishing. There was a festal talking supper at 5.15, cooked by Rita Sim. The Liturgy began at 7.00. After Mass the Blessed Sacrament was taken to the altar of repose in the Lady Chapel. The community returned to the main church, the sacristans stripped the altar, and we sang Compline with the lights on.

14th: GOOD FRIDAY. Good Friday is a Recollection Day. The Good Friday Liturgy began at 3.00. The Passion according to John was sung in Latin. Br Michael took the part of the narrator, Fr Benedict the part of Christ and Peirce Yip, a guest, took the part of the other speakers and the crowd. Male guests played a part in the Liturgy as acolytes. Before Compline there was veneration of the relic of the true cross.

16th: EASTER SUNDAY 2017. Br Daniel was responsible for the Easter fire outside. The service began at 11.00 with the blessing of the Paschal Candle by Fr Abbot. Br Cyprian Prosper carried the Paschal Candle and sang the *Lumen Christi!* Br Michael sang the *Exultet*. Guests took many of the roles as acolytes. They also provided the readers who read before the Mass began. After the Gospel, Homily and renewal of Baptismal vows Fr Abbot received Grace Tseng from Taiwan and Ethan Kim of Korean origin into the Catholic Church and conferred on them the Sacrament of Confirmation. The Mass finished at 2.15 am.

The call for Lauds was at 6.00. Three brethren rang the *Regina Coeli* for ten minutes at 6.15 according to custom. Lauds was at 6.30. At the end of Lauds Fr Abbot blessed the bread and eggs for the Easter Breakfast.

22nd: EASTER SATURDAY. After None, Fr Abbot and the community gathered around the new president's chair for the sanctuary. Br Daniel explained that the chair was made from our own elm, cut down when Dutch elm disease hit the elm trees in this area. It was milled into planks and over the past few months Br Daniel and Robin MacDonald-Johnstone have been making this chair from it. The back of the chair is surmounted by a large circle with a Chi-Rho and the lower panel of the back is made from an elm burr. The arms are strips of elm, shaped, laminated and joined to the chair. Fr Abbot blessed and incensed the chair before sitting in it and being incensed himself.

27th: We have bought a wooden shed which the sellers erected this afternoon, quite quickly. This is to be for displaying information about the south range.

NEWS FROM ST MARY'S MONASTERY

On November 2nd, All Souls Day, we made our annual visit to the town cemetery. We do this every year to visit the graves of the deceased members of our communities: Fr Cyril, Br Stanislaus, Mother Mary Herbert, and Mother Mary Clare. However, in the near future we will no longer have to go all the way into town to visit their graves. On December 12th the town of Petersham voted to allow us to have our own cemetery on our property. So by All Souls Day 2017, we should have our own cemetery, located near to where our original church stood.

As readers of Pluscarden Benedictines might know, in 2009 the sisters of Our Lady Queen Monastery in Tickfaw, Louisiana relocated to Petersham to join the nuns of St Scholastica Priory. When our cemetery is all ready the bodies of the Tickfaw nuns will be exhumed from their current resting place in Louisiana and transported to Petersham for burial in our new cemetery. Likewise the bodies of our brothers and sisters in the town cemetery will be re-interred in the monastic cemetery. We are very pleased about this since it is the normal monastic custom to have a cemetery on the grounds of the actual monastery.

From November 3rd to 5th we held our third Monastic Experience Weekend. Once again the number of participants doubled. The first time we had one participant, the second time two, and this time we had four young men taking part. Three of them were students at Christendom College in Virginia, and the fourth participant was a young man from New Jersey. As usual they sat in choir with us, lived in the enclosure for the weekend, did some work and attended all of the community exercises including recreation. We also added a time slot for anyone who wanted to have a chat with one of the monks. Once again it was an enriching experience, both for us and the young men who came. As a result of making contact with Christendom College, Fr Dunstan will be attending their annual Discernment Weekend for vocations in February.

Also in November we were pleased to have Fr Abbot visit us. This time he arrived along with Abbot Friedhelm of Kornelimünster. They flew in from Chicago where they were conducting a Visitation at the Monastery of the Holy Cross. They arrived here on Sunday, November 20th, late in the evening. The next day after Vespers, the Sisters invited us over to their Priory for a light, festive meal, so that we could all welcome Fr Abbot and Abbot Friedhelm together. After the meal, Abbot Friedhelm gave a talk about Kornelimünster. The following day Abbot Friedhelm flew back to Germany but Fr Abbot stayed on a week longer. Since his visit coincided with the American holiday of Thanksgiving, he was able to enjoy another festive meal with us and the sisters.

DIC

The Carthusian Martyrs

On May 5, the condemned monks, dressed in their habits, were dragged to their place of execution in Tyburn (4 miles from the Tower) on hurdles pulled by horses. John Houghton was the first to suffer, the proto-martyr of the Reformation. He was asked one last time to submit to the King's will but responded: "I call on Almighty God to witness, and I beseech all here present to attest for me on the dreadful danger of judgement, that, being about to die in public, I declare that I have refused to comply with the will of His Majesty the King, not from obstinacy, malice, or a rebellious spirit, but solely for fear of offending the Supreme Majesty of God. Our Holy Mother the Church has decreed and enjoined otherwise than the king and Parliament have decreed. I am therefore bound in conscience, and am ready and willing to suffer every kind of torture, rather than deny a doctrine of the Church. Pray for me, and have mercy on my brethren, of whom I have been the unworthy Prior."

HOLY WEEK WITH PLUSCARDEN BENEDICTINES

The journey was long, travelling to Pluscarden Abbey from Durham. The decision to spend Holy Week here had required some consideration when it should have been a very easy one. Spending a week in a remote part of northern Scotland with no internet, especially with final exams due and a pile of work to complete, was the only daunting factor that might have stopped me. But an opportunity to experience beautiful liturgy, an insight into monastic life and to support a dear friend's reception into the Catholic Church were a few reasons out of many that easily swayed me to make the journey.

I had made a conscious decision to have a good Lent this year and after all the sacrifice of the 40 days, I wanted a joyful celebration of Easter. I immediately knew that there could not be a better place than Pluscarden. I had visited and stayed at several monasteries and convents before. The transforming nature of such experiences usually stays with me long after I leave and perhaps this is partly what I was seeking here. Upon arrival, I immediately noted the word "Pax" on the gates. This was only a hint of what I'd remember Pluscarden by forever. Silence was never so obvious. The ecstatic melodies of the birds were the loudest sounds; they were probably praising Him too. The beautiful surroundings and the peace permeated throughout helped me to discover and move more deeply into myself.

It was really a big relief when I realised that Vigils had been moved a little later to 5.30 am. But what a joy it was to be in a beautiful medieval church in the early hours, to hear the pure sound of Gregorian chant and to realise the first word pronounced at the start of the day is in praise of God! Never have I ever spent so much time in a church each day in my life before and never was there a moment in the week when I wished it was otherwise.

The exact moment every day, during the Gospel proclamation, the sun would streak through the clear windows and incense would fill the radiant space; I was immediately reminded of "let my prayers rise up before you like incense" in the psalms. The true

glory and majesty of God was so easy to imagine during these moments.

The Holy Triduum was quite something. The atmosphere changed. The solemn and holy nature of these days was so easily felt. The sorrowful chants of Good Friday, Br Michael's perfect singing of the Passion, the silence of Holy Saturday, the glorious and exulting liturgy of the Paschal Vigil, the never-ending Alleluias and the ringing of the bells were most moving. One is truly spoilt as a Catholic after spending Holy Week here; the following years, anywhere else, will no doubt disappoint.

The Paschal Vigil was even more special as we witnessed the reception of our friends Grace and Ethan into the Catholic Church. No one could mistake who they were, dressed all in white; one almost thought they were being married! How inspiring was it to see our companions take such a monumental step; it was a joy to witness them utter their profession of faith and receive our Blessed Lord for the first time. The whole event, I have no doubt, affected everyone present in one way or another. There were congratulations and hugs all around afterwards.

At St Scholastica's (the women's guesthouse), the atmosphere was equally serene. I am always thrilled to find other young people sharing their faith and fundamental values. It is almost as if the place transforms one and only the good is seen in one's neighbour. The unlikeliest people become friends; conversing with older women was very enriching. I was not at all surprised to find many have been coming here for decades; the effect these visits have had on them was very evident. I have no doubt that everyone wishes they could do the same.

The monks are special. Only very unique humans can live such a life. Everything about each of them is impressive. The ageless appearance, serenity, simplicity, holiness, whether it was Fr Benedict's kind words, Br Thomas's hospitality, Br Michael's singing, Fr Giles's eccentricity or Br Joseph's work ethic, it was a privilege to witness. I wish I could encounter more people like them in the outside world.

Every day, I felt more blessed. It is an understatement to say that I have thoroughly enjoyed my week. It will take me a very long time to process the changes that I have undergone in this place. I will surely think of Pluscarden at the moments of stress and sadness I may face in the future – it is no surprise that many from all parts of the world visit this remote corner of Scotland. God’s work is truly being carried out here and this influx of people is only one of the examples that support this.

I leave full of joy but also with slight anxiety as much effort will be needed to feel and be as close to God as I have felt here. But I have no doubt the good God who led me here will continue to provide for me. I feel truly transformed, filled with the peace of the Risen Lord. I hope to visit again very soon, God willing.

Visitation Lesterpearson

The Carthusian Martyrs

Before his execution, St John Houghton was allowed a few moments of prayer, during which he recited Psalm 30:

In you, O Lord, I take refuge,
Let me never be put to shame.
In your justice, set me free,
hear me and speedily rescue me...
Into your hands I commend my spirit.
It is you who will redeem me, Lord.

The barbaric sentence prescribed for treason – hanging, disembowelling and quartering – was then carried out, first on John, then on the others in turn. Parts of their bodies were sent all over the country, to be displayed as a deterrent to those who would put God’s will above the King’s. One of John’s arms was nailed above the London Charterhouse door until it rotted and fell off.

ST JOHN FISHER, 1469 - 1535

St John Fisher the Bishop will ever be associated with St Thomas More the layman, lawyer, politician, controversialist, Chancellor of England, martyr. They died at the same place, in the same year, for the same cause. They share the same feast day, 22 June: the day of Fisher's death. They were both outstanding scholars, men of the Renaissance in the vanguard of the new learning of their day. Both were friends of Erasmus, the famous Dutch Scholar and leading humanist of his age. Both also were men of the Court, familiar with the company of Kings, ambassadors, and Churchmen of the first rank. They were both imprisoned in the Tower of London for refusing King Henry VIII's Oath of Royal Supremacy, and both were beheaded on Tower Hill: Fisher first; More a couple of weeks later. How strange it is, then, that while books and articles about St Thomas More continue to pour forth in apparently never ending flood, his companion seems nowadays to be largely forgotten. Yet John Fisher was a very great Saint, whose relevance for us does not diminish with the passage of time. He was also truly one of the intellectual giants of English history. In character and temperament, he was utterly unlike More. While a great deal in More was dark and tangled, Fisher was translucent. More loved wit and repartee, and was not above indulging in occasional bawdy or scatological remarks. Fisher by contrast was unremittingly serious, and high-minded. His spirituality reflected what we read in *The Imitation of Christ*. Whenever free from immediate concerns, his thoughts would return his preferred subjects: the vanity of this world, the seriousness of the Judgement, the imminence of death. He liked to place a skull on his Altar during Mass, and on his table during meals. While Thomas More would usually be found at the centre of a lively group of family or friends, Fisher preferred to cultivate a certain distance and reserve. Of course the two men knew each other, and were allies in the common cause, but they were by no means intimate friends.

St John Fisher was born in Beverly, Yorkshire, in 1469: nine years before St Thomas More. His father was a merchant, who

died when John was just nine years old. The family nevertheless remained wealthy enough for his mother to send the young boy off for an education at Cambridge University. There John took his Bachelor's degree at the age of nineteen, and his Master's at the age of twenty one. In the same year he was also ordained Priest, with a special Papal dispensation from the normal minimum age. He then remained in the University, pursuing his brilliant academic career. A doctorate in theology followed, and then a series of University appointments, culminating in his election in 1504 as Chancellor of Cambridge University. Later this post would be confirmed as a life-appointment, and he held it until his death on the scaffold.

The young Priest soon acquired a reputation not only for scholarship but also for integrity and holiness of life. His private life was austere in the extreme. He ate sparingly, fasted regularly, slept little, prayed much, wore a hair shirt, used the discipline. His only self indulgence was books. His personal collection became one of the finest in the whole of Europe. Before long he was brought into contact with the Lady Margaret Beaufort, Countess of Richmond and Derby, Mother of King Henry VII. This formidable lady was a direct descendent of King Edward III via John of Gaunt, and therefore possessed in her own right a legitimate claim, in the Lancastrian succession, to the English Throne. She appointed Fisher her confessor, spiritual director, and official chaplain. It was through her munificence, directed by himself, that he was able to found St John's College and Christ College Cambridge, and also to establish the Lady Margaret Chairs of Divinity at both Cambridge and Oxford. With her money he also endowed various scholarships, and introduced the teaching of Greek and Hebrew, unavailable when he was an undergraduate. Fisher himself learned Greek when already in his 40s, and Hebrew in his 50s.

When still only 35, Fisher was nominated by King Henry VII to the Bishopric of Rochester. In those days all Bishoprics were Royal appointments, with tacit Papal acquiescence. And all the appointees were expected to take their place as Lords of the

Realm, with seats in Parliament, and many other State duties and Court functions to perform. So it was quite normal for a Bishop to spend little time, or even none at all, in his own diocese. He was certainly expected, though, to draw fully upon its revenues and properties. As a matter of fact, Rochester at the time was the smallest and poorest diocese in England. Anyone else might have been expected to use it as a stepping stone to promotion: passing, by stages, to larger, richer and more important Sees. Not Fisher. From the outset he was a devoted and energetic pastor. His commitment to regular public preaching, to the administration of the Sacraments, to first hand care of his clergy, and of the poor, was most unusual for the time. He was to remain Rochester's Bishop for over thirty years. In 1512 Erasmus wrote of him to a friend:

“Unless I am sadly mistaken, John Fisher is the one man at this time who is incomparable for uprightness of life, for learning, and for greatness of soul.”

Various homiletic works of Fisher were printed in his life time, and so have come down to us. None of them fit our genre of the typical seven-minute homily. When Fisher got up into the pulpit, he stayed there for at least an hour, or maybe two. Typical of his style is his series of Commentaries on the Seven Penitential Psalms; also his funeral orations following the deaths of King Henry VII and of Lady Margaret Beaufort. In other circumstances he would have asked nothing more than to remain peacefully, following both his inclination and his duty: leading the people of Rochester in the understanding and practice of their faith, and forming their pastors with a first class theological education at Cambridge University. But the atmosphere of sharp theological controversy emanating from the continent could not be ignored. Fisher felt personally obliged to take up the task of countering the false doctrines of Martin Luther and his associates. So a considerable proportion of his energies came to be poured into a Latin language pamphlet war against the Reformers. An early

work in this cause was his vigorous defence of the Latin Patristic tradition, which identified Mary Magdalene with Mary of Bethany, sister of Martha, and also with the unnamed sinful woman of Luke Chapter 7, who anointed the Lord's feet and wiped them with her hair. Fisher went on to list all of Luther's errors, and to refute them, in great detail, one by one. He wrote separately in defence of the Catholic understanding of the Priesthood. He defended the seven Sacraments, the real presence of Christ in the Holy Eucharist, the Sacrifice of the Mass, and the primacy of the Roman Pontiff. On one occasion a Carthusian monk congratulated him on these voluminous controversial works. Fisher's response was only to regret all that valuable lost time, which could, in his opinion, much better have been devoted to prayer. That, he thought, would have been both more meritorious for himself, and also more powerful in the battle, than raging, for the soul of the Church.

St John Fisher never enjoyed much favour with King Henry VIII; far less with his chief Minister Cardinal Wolsey, to whose worldly way of life his own life was a constant rebuke. At first though, Henry stood firmly with his Bishop on the side of the Catholic Faith. His anti-Lutheranism famously earned him from the Pope the title *Fidei defensor*. But by 1527 Henry was besotted with Anne Boleyn. Her sister Mary had spent some years previously as the King's mistress. But Anne would not have him unless he would make her Queen of England. Also: Anne was sympathetic to the Lutheran cause. As far as Henry was concerned, the dissolution of his marriage to Catherine of Aragon became a matter of pressing urgency: more important than any other in all his Kingdom. Probably at this stage he had no clear plans to separate from Rome. But he needed the Pope to give him the desired annulment, and he was prepared to go to any lengths to get it.

Well aware of Fisher's high reputation, and profound learning, Henry needed him on side. So he asked him to study the question and to give his opinion. The King presented himself as a man of delicate conscience, afflicted with a scruple about the validity of his marriage. Catherine had first been married to Henry's elder

brother Arthur. A Papal dispensation, after Arthur's death, allowed her then to marry Henry, in spite of Lev. 20:21, and Mt. 14:4 (but see also Deut. 25:5 and Mt. 22:24). Naturally the King expected Fisher to commit all the resources at his disposal in favour of the predetermined outcome. Fisher did commit all his resources. He said he never in his life studied any question in such depth. But from the beginning he was perfectly clear about his conclusion. The alleged Scriptural objections presented no real obstacle. Or if they did, the Pope certainly had power to dispense them. And in case of any doubt, investigation demonstrated that the dispensation the Pope did actually give in this case was both valid and sound. So Henry should freely put aside his scruple, rest his conscience, and take Catherine back as his lawful wife.

At the same time, in 1527, the King also asked the opinion of his Chancellor, Sir Thomas More. And More, from that moment on, took refuge in silence. Here he notably parted company with Fisher, who believed his duty as a Bishop could not allow him to remain silent. When Cardinal Campeggio came from the Pope to hear the case in England, Fisher stood as adviser to Catherine. Catherine's own noble and tragic speech of defence at that session was recorded by Cavendish, and put into wonderful verse by William Shakespeare in his co-authored play King Henry VIII, Act II scene iv. Thenceforth the case proceeded in tortuous stages through the various legislative assemblies. And each time any public discussion was held, however blatant the intimidation from the King, Fisher was there to speak strongly on behalf of the Queen. He wrote no fewer than seven books in defence of her marriage. He had to do so, he said, "in order not to procure the damnation of my soul, and in order not to be unfaithful to the King, or to fail in the duty I owe to the Truth, in a matter of such great importance".

When Henry decided to proclaim himself Supreme Head of the Church in England, Fisher publicly protested, and resisted. When the capitulation of Parliament became inevitable, it was through his advocacy that the title was amended to include the clause: "as far as is allowed by the law of Christ". Fisher had made

himself the most prominent and effective thorn in Henry's side, and everyone knew what must be the outcome of that. In the first place, two assassination attempts were made on him. Then, in January 1533, Henry secretly married the pregnant Anne Boleyn. He appointed Thomas Cranmer Archbishop of Canterbury, and declared all appeals to the Pope to be illegal, invalid and treasonable. In June of that year Anne was crowned Queen of England in Westminster Abbey.

Fisher here took extreme action. He invited the Emperor Charles V to invade England. Had More heard of this, he would have been horrified, and would certainly have repudiated it. But as far as Fisher was concerned, Henry was instituting a schism, and putting himself above the law of God, as well as above the law of the Church, and of the land. He should therefore be resisted by any means. Fisher thought that the King's religious legislation, and his casting off of Queen Catherine were so generally resented, that given appropriate leadership, a popular uprising could be counted upon. But Charles was not interested, the negotiation came to nothing, and no news of it reached the ears of Henry, or of his new Secretary Thomas Cromwell.

The arrest for treason came in March 1534. The charge, rather bizarrely, was Fisher's very slight association with Elizabeth Barton, the "Holy Maid of Kent". This young nun claimed to have received revelations from God. She boldly communicated them to the King, to his face. She adjured Henry, in the name of God, to put away Anne, and return to Catherine, his true wife, on pain of divine punishment. Fisher had met Elizabeth, and was inclined to think her truly holy, and her revelations authentic. She, with four Priests who had been her spiritual directors, was found guilty of treasonable fraud, and so suffered at Tyburn in April of that year. Fisher was deposed from his office of Bishop, deprived of all his property, and confined in the Tower. He was 66; by the standards of the time an old man, and in very poor health: emaciated, ill, barely able to stand, apparently close to death.

Henry then pushed through Parliament a series of Acts, which sealed the break with Rome, and his own absolute authority over

the Church in England. An Oath of Succession was drafted, refusal of which was defined as High Treason. With More, Fisher would have been ready to accept a law changing the Royal Succession, but he could not accept what went with it: agreement to the invalidity of Henry's first marriage, and denial of the powers and primacy of the Pope. So he refused to sign. He wrote to Thomas Cromwell: "I do not condemn any other men's conscience. Their conscience may save them, and mine must save me."

At around the same time, after long prevarication, Pope Clement VII finally published his decision about Henry's marriage to Catherine. He pronounced it to be certainly valid. Commentators often observe that Clement was at the time in the power of the Emperor Charles, who was Catherine of Aragon's nephew. The Papal decision, they conclude, was motivated by political expediency. But while it is true that few of the Renaissance Popes were noted for personal holiness, or for their example of selfless Christian virtue, still we can be grateful that this Medici Pope very properly stood by not only his authority, but also his lack of authority. He knew that a valid, sacramental, consummated marriage is blessed by Christ, and can be dissolved by no power on earth; not even by the Pope himself. For this truth of the Catholic religion, Fisher was prepared to die.

The conditions of Fisher's fourteen month imprisonment were harsh. His cell was dank and draughty. He had inadequate food and clothing. He was allowed no medicine, no books, and no visit from a Priest. He was not allowed to communicate with Sir Thomas More, confined in another part of the Tower. The presumption must have been that under these conditions he would either submit or die, without having to be executed, and popularly regarded as a martyr. But in spite of extreme physical frailty, Fisher endured. Some of his time he used to compose meditations for his sister, a Dominican nun. He recommended she take the following "considerations" at the rate of one per day:

O blessed Jesu, make me to love thee entirely.

O blessed Jesu, I would fain, but without thy help I cannot.

O blessed Jesu, let me deeply consider the greatness of thy love towards me.

O blessed Jesu, give me grace heartily to thank thee for thy benefits.

O blessed Jesu, give me good will to serve thee, and to suffer.

O sweet Jesu, give me a natural remembrance of thy passion.

O sweet Jesu, possess my heart, hold it and keep it only to thee.

New laws rushed through Parliament at this time made any expression of opinion against the Royal Supremacy to be treasonable. While steadfastly refusing the Oath, Fisher now took care to say nothing to incriminate himself. Eventually the King had recourse to a secret message, sent to Fisher in the Tower via Sir Richard Rich. Henry protested that his delicate conscience was once again afflicted. He was gravely in need of spiritual counsel. On his honour as a Christian Prince, he gave his word that nothing would be made of Fisher's response. But he begged him to say, as a man outstanding in both learning and holiness of life, in perfect secrecy, what was his true opinion about the Supremacy. Trusting in this solemn oath, the guileless Fisher responded at once that it was plain from Holy Scripture, and from the whole faith and practice of the Church, as well as from all the laws of Christendom, that Henry indeed was not, nor ever could be, supreme head of the Church of England. This was enough. Rich testified against Fisher in Court, and on his evidence alone, the twelve men of the jury were instructed what verdict to return. By his words to Rich, Fisher stood guilty of High Treason.

Meanwhile, in May 1535, the new Pope Paul III created Fisher a Cardinal. "Let the Pope send him a hat" cried Henry. "I will so provide that whensoever it cometh he shall wear it on his shoulders, for head he shall have none to set it on."

Henry was afraid, with reason, that Fisher would die before he got to Tyburn, if he were to travel the four mile journey from the Tower after the manner of the Carthusians, dragged upside down on a hurdle. So he commuted the sentence from disembowelling

while still alive, followed by quartering, to mere beheading. He was anxious this be carried out before June 24th, the feast of St. John the Baptist. Few at the time can have failed to note that Fisher's patron Saint was himself beheaded for rebuking a King about a marriage contrary to the laws of God. June 22nd was the date chosen. As a matter of fact, that was the feast of St Alban, proto-martyr of England.

Fisher's conduct of himself on his last day is well known. He was woken at 5 a.m. by the Lieutenant of the Tower, with the information that he must die that morning. Fisher asked what time he would have to leave for his execution. "About ten of the clock". "Well then, I pray you, let me sleep on an hour or twain." On dressing, he insisted on taking his fur tippet, "to keep me warm for the while until the very time of execution. For I will not hinder my health in the mean time; not a minute of an hour."

Before he left his cell, he took up a New Testament, and opened it at random, asking that his eye might fall on some comforting words. There he read the words of Jesus, spoken immediately before his Passion: *This is eternal life: that they may know you, the one true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. I have glorified you on earth. I have completed the work you gave me to do. Now, Father, glorify me, with that glory I had with you before the world was made* (John 17:3-5). "Here," cried Fisher, "is even learning enough for me to my life's end."

Such was his state of weakness that he had to be carried to Tower Hill, but he insisted on climbing up the scaffold unaided. When they stripped him, the crowd were shocked to see him so reduced to skin and bones. The Bishop addressed them. "Christian people" he said, "I am come hither to die for the faith of Christ's Catholic Church. I desire you to assist me with your prayers, that I faint not in any point of the Catholic faith for any fear. And I pray God save the King and the Realm, and hold his holy hand over it, and send the King a good counsel." Then he knelt, and recited the Te Deum, and other prayers, and so lay down for the headsman's axe.

His naked corpse was subjected to indignities for the rest of

the day, then tossed into a hole in the ground without covering or ceremony or prayer. His head was set on a spike on London Bridge, but the effect it had on the crowds was the opposite of what was intended, so after some days it was thrown into the river. Later the body was moved to the Chapel in the Tower, where it was placed beside that of Thomas More. When Erasmus heard the news of their deaths, he wrote in a letter dated August 1535: "Thomas More and the Bishop of Rochester were the wisest and most saintly men that England ever had."

The two of them were beatified, with other English martyrs, by Pope Leo XIII in 1886, particular prominence being given then to Fisher. Pope Pius XI canonised Saints John Fisher and Thomas More together on their fourth centenary, in 1935. They retain a place in the General Roman Calendar of Saints.

DBH

Martyr at Tyburn

St Richard Reynolds, monk of Syon Abbey, martyred on the same day as the first Carthusian martyrs, gave this testimony:

"I had indeed determined, in imitation of our Lord Jesus when he was before the court of Herod, to return no answer; but since you press me, and that I may satisfy my own conscience and the consciences of those here present, I say that our belief is of greater weight and has far more abundant testimony in its behalf than yours. For instead of the few whom you bring forward out of the Parliament of this one kingdom, I have on my side the whole Christian world - except those of this kingdom; nay, I do not say of all this kingdom, for only the lesser part is with you. And were even the greater part of the kingdom to declare against me, it would not be because they so believe, but only by outwardly feigning it, for fear of loss of dignity and honour or for the hope of winning the royal favour."

ST HILDEGARD OF BINGEN

In 1988, on the occasion of the Marian Year, Venerable John Paul II wrote an Apostolic Letter entitled *Mulieris Dignitatem* on the precious role that women have played and play in the life of the Church. “The Church,” we read in it, “gives thanks for all the manifestations of the feminine ‘genius’ which have appeared in the course of history, in the midst of all peoples and nations; she gives thanks for all the charisms that the Holy Spirit distributes to women in the history of the People of God, for all the victories which she owes to their faith, hope and charity; she gives thanks for all the fruits of feminine holiness” (n. 31).

Various female figures stand out for the holiness of their lives and the wealth of their teaching, even in those centuries of history that we usually call the Middle Ages. Today I would like to begin to present one of them to you: St Hildegard of Bingen, who lived in Germany in the 12th century. She was born in 1098, probably at Bermersheim, Rhineland, not far from Alzey, and died in 1179 at the age of 81, in spite of having always been in poor health. Hildegard belonged to a large noble family and her parents dedicated her to God from birth for his service. At the age of 8 she was offered for the religious state (in accordance with the Rule of St Benedict, ch. 59). To ensure that she received an appropriate human and Christian formation, she was entrusted to the care of the consecrated widow Uda of Gölklheim and then to Jutta of Spanheim who had taken the veil at the Benedictine Monastery of St Disibodenberg. A small cloistered women’s monastery was developing there that followed the Rule of St Benedict.

Hildegard was clothed by Bishop Otto of Bamberg and in 1136, upon the death of Mother Jutta who had become the community *magistra* (Prioress), the sisters chose Hildegard to succeed her. She fulfilled this office making the most of her gifts as a woman of culture and of lofty spirituality, capable of dealing competently with the organisational aspects of cloistered life. A few years later, partly because of the increasing number of young women who were knocking at the monastery door, Hildegard

broke away from the dominating male monastery of St Disibodenburg with her community, taking it to Bingen, calling it after St Rupert; and here she spent the rest of her days. Her manner of exercising the ministry of authority is an example for every religious community: she inspired holy emulation in the practice of good to such an extent that, as time was to tell, both the mother and her daughters competed in mutual esteem and in serving each other.

During the years when she was superior of the Monastery of St Disibodenberg, Hildegard began to dictate the mystical visions, that she had been receiving for some time, to the monk Volmar, her spiritual director, and to Richardis di Strade, her secretary, a sister of whom she was very fond. As always happens in the life of true mystics, Hildegard too wanted to put herself under the authority of wise people to discern the origin of her visions, fearing that they were the product of illusions and did not come from God. She thus turned to a person who was most highly esteemed in the Church in those times: St Bernard of Clairvaux. He calmed and encouraged Hildegard.

However, in 1147, she received a further, very important approval. Pope Eugene III, who was presiding at a Synod in Trier, read a text, dictated by Hildegard, presented to him by Archbishop Henry of Mainz. The Pope authorised the mystic to write down her visions and to speak in public. From that moment Hildegard's spiritual prestige continued to grow, so that her contemporaries called her the "Teutonic prophetess". This, dear friends, is the seal of an authentic experience of the Holy Spirit, the source of every charism: the person endowed with supernatural gifts never boasts of them, never flaunts them and, above all, shows complete obedience to the ecclesial authority. Every gift bestowed by the Holy Spirit, is in fact intended for the edification of the Church and the Church, through her Pastors, recognises its authenticity.

Hildegard's mystical visions resemble those of the Old Testament prophets: expressing herself in the cultural and religious categories of her time, she interpreted the Sacred Scriptures in the light of God, applying them to the various circumstances of life.

Thus all those who heard her felt the need to live a consistent and committed Christian lifestyle. In a letter to St Bernard, the mystic from the Rhineland confesses: “The vision fascinates my whole being: I do not see with the eyes of the body but it appears to me in the spirit of the mysteries... I recognise the deep meaning of what is expounded on in the Psalter, in the Gospels and in other books, which have been shown to me in the vision. This vision burns like a flame in my breast and in my soul and teaches me to understand the text profoundly” (*Epistolarium pars prima* I-XC: CCCM 91).

Hildegard’s mystical visions have a rich theological content. They refer to the principal events of salvation history, and use a language for the most part poetic and symbolic. For example, in her best known work entitled *Scivias*, that is, “You know the ways”, she sums up in 35 visions the events of the history of salvation from the creation of the world to the end of time. With the characteristic traits of feminine sensitivity, Hildegard develops, at the very heart of her work, the theme of the mysterious marriage between God and humanity that is brought about in the Incarnation. On the tree of the Cross take place the nuptials of the Son of God with the Church, his Bride, filled with grace and the ability to give new children to God, in the love of the Holy Spirit (cf. *Visio tertia*: PL 197, 453c).

The Rhenish mystic is also the author of other writings, two of which are particularly important since, like *Scivias*, they record her mystical visions: they are the *Liber vitae meritorum* (Book of the merits of life) and the *Liber divinorum operum* (*Book of the Divine Works*), also called *De operatione Dei*. In the former, she describes a unique and powerful vision of God who gives life to the cosmos with his power and his light. Hildegard stresses the deep relationship that exists between man and God and reminds us that the whole creation, of which man is the summit, receives life from the Trinity. The work is centred on the relationship between virtue and vice, which is why human beings must face the daily challenge of vice that distances them on their way towards God, and of virtue that benefits them. The invitation is to distance themselves from evil in order to glorify God and, after a virtuous

existence, enter the life that consists “wholly of joy”. In her second work, that many consider her masterpiece, she once again describes creation in its relationship with God and the centrality of the human being, expressing a strong Christo-centrism with a biblical-Patristic flavour. The Saint, who presents five visions inspired by the Prologue of the Gospel according to St John, cites the words of the Son to the Father: “The whole task that you wanted and entrusted to me I have carried out successfully, and so here I am in you and you in me and we are one” (*Pars III, Visio X: PL 197, 1025a*).

Finally, in other writings Hildegard manifests the versatility of interests and cultural vivacity of the female monasteries of the Middle Ages, in a manner contrary to the prejudices which still weighed on that period. Hildegard took an interest in medicine and in the natural sciences as well as in music, since she was endowed with artistic talent. Thus she composed hymns, antiphons and songs, gathered under the title *Symphonia Harmoniae Caelestium Revelationum* (*Symphony of the Harmony of Heavenly Revelations*), that were performed joyously in her monasteries, spreading an atmosphere of tranquillity, and that have also come down to us. For her, the entire creation is a symphony of the Holy Spirit who is in himself joy and jubilation.

The popularity that surrounded Hildegard impelled many people to seek her advice. It is for this reason that we have so many of her letters at our disposal. Many male and female monastic communities turned to her, as well as Bishops and Abbots. And many of her answers still apply for us. For instance, Hildegard wrote these words to a community of women religious: “The spiritual life must be tended with great dedication. At first the effort is burdensome because it demands the renunciation of caprices of the pleasures of the flesh and of other such things. But if she lets herself be enthralled by holiness a holy soul will find even contempt for the world sweet and lovable. All that is needed is to take care that the soul does not shrivel” (E. Gronau, *Hildegard. Vita di una donna profetica alle origini dell'età moderna*, Milan 1996, p. 402). And when the Emperor Frederic

Barbarossa caused a schism in the Church by supporting at least three anti-popes against Alexander III, the legitimate Pope, Hildegard did not hesitate, inspired by her visions, to remind him that even he, the Emperor, was subject to God's judgement. With fearlessness, a feature of every prophet, she wrote to the Emperor these words as spoken by God: "You will be sorry for this wicked conduct of the godless who despise me! Listen, O King, if you wish to live! Otherwise my sword will pierce you!" (ibid. p. 412).

With the spiritual authority with which she was endowed, in the last years of her life Hildegard set out on journeys, despite her advanced age and the uncomfortable conditions of travel, in order to speak to the people of God. They all listened willingly, even when she spoke severely; they considered her a messenger sent by God. She called above all the monastic communities and the clergy to a life in conformity with their vocation. In a special way Hildegard countered the movement of German *cátari* (Cathars). They – *cátari* means literally "pure" – advocated a radical reform of the Church, especially to combat the abuses of the clergy. She harshly reprimanded them for seeking to subvert the very nature of the Church, reminding them that a true renewal of the ecclesial community is obtained with a sincere spirit of repentance and a demanding process of conversion, rather than with a change of structures. This is a message that we should never forget. Let us always invoke the Holy Spirit, so that he may inspire in the Church holy and courageous women, like St Hildegard of Bingen, who, developing the gifts they have received from God, make their own special and valuable contribution to the spiritual development of our communities and of the Church in our time.

Pope Benedict XVI, General Audiences, 1 & 8 September 2010

St Hildegard of Bingen was declared a Doctor of the Church on 7 October 2012.

BOOKS RECEIVED

Psalm 19 – Hymn of Unification by T. A. Perry; Hendrickson Publishers, Massachusetts 2016; PB; 177 Pages.

T.A. Perry is a Hebrew scholar and academic, exegete, author and teacher. A graduate of Yale University, he has taught at Williams College, Smith College, the University of Connecticut, Loyola University, Hebrew University, and Ben Gurion University. This latest book of his is an exploration of Psalm 19 (to us, Psalm 18, “*Caeli enarrant gloriam Dei*”, “The heavens are telling the glory of God”).

Perry combines a detailed exegesis of this Psalm with a philosophical meditation on its value and meaning. According to C. S. Lewis, this Psalm is “the greatest poem in the Psalter, and one of the greatest lyrics in the world”. The Psalm begins with “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament proclaims the work of his hands.” It goes on to tell how all of Creation speaks in praise of God, and then meditates on the beauty and perfection of the law of Yahweh, Israel's Covenant Lord.

Perry suggests that the Psalm presents a vision of “universal unification” for the entire creation, one that is not restricted to Jews, but embraces all people and, indeed, all of nature. Like the first Chapter of Genesis, the Psalm tells a story of the origins, structures, and directions of the Universe that God has made, and over which he rules: thus providing a statement of monotheism as a religious system. It invites us also to reflect on the tensions inherent in monotheism, especially the struggle between love and justice that we see in Israel's God.

The book starts with a Preface on Jewish Philosophical Monotheism, and then presents both the Hebrew text and Perry's own English translation. Four main sections follow; sections one and two being the major part of the text. Section one is a thorough, word by word detailed exegesis of the Psalm, from a Jewish perspective. Section two goes on to present the “Conceptual World of the Psalm”. The final two sections are much briefer, dealing

with King David (“David the Conductor”) and God (“Impersonating God: Monotheism’s Constraints from within the Divine Psyche”).

The book would be a most useful resource for someone wanting to study this Psalm from an exegetical-philosophical context, and from a Jewish perspective. It does not, nor does it claim to, offer spiritual *lectio divina* for a Christian wanting to deepen knowledge and love of the Psalms that are recited day by day. A major part of our daily life here is spent in Choir, singing or chanting the Psalms. It is our main work. It is what monks do. The view of the author is stated quite clearly at the start of section 3: “Liturgical performance of the Psalter reached its repetitive apex, of course, in the Christian daily recitation of the entire book, the Hours. Like mantras perhaps, such repetitive re-enactments or representations of prayers to God seem spiritually uninteresting to modern sensibilities.”

DGP

Come into the Light: Church Interiors for the Celebration of the Liturgy, by Daniel McCarthy OSB and James Leachman OSB; Canterbury Press, Norwich, in association with The Tablet; 2016; PB; 137 pp.; incl. Bibliography & Indices; B&W photograph illustrations.

This book is a collection of articles that first appeared as a series in the Tablet in 2014. The authors are liturgists who have taught at Sant’ Anselmo in Rome, and under its aegis have founded their own liturgical Institute in Britain. They have been much involved in the design of new Churches, and the re-arrangement of old ones. A particular interest of theirs is the effect of light as it streams into Church interiors, in different ways, of course, according to the time of day and season of the year. The language used throughout this book will be very familiar to readers of modern liturgical literature, very much rooted in the Principles of the 1970’s. Loyal Tablet readers, and surely others too, will be enthused and inspired by the approach of our authors. Others, especially non-Tablet

readers, may perhaps be less so. Those more attracted to the idea of a “reform of the Reform”, or, for example, to Robert Cardinal Sarah’s recent appeal for a re-orientation and re-sacralisation of the liturgy, may well find themselves seeking elsewhere for their liturgical nourishment.

Old Testament Parallels: Laws and Stories from the Ancient Near East (revised and expanded 4th edition) by Victor Matthews and Don Benjamin; Paulist Press, NJ, 2016, PB, 469pp; \$34.95

The aim of this book is to provide a “readable, affordable and portable” anthology of Ancient Near Eastern laws and stories with a clear relation to texts in the Hebrew Bible. Drawing also on quite recent discoveries, the authors have selected from sixty five different sources, drawn from Mesopotamia, Asia Minor, Syria-Palestine and Egypt, in the era from around 2900 B.C. to A.D. 125. Their texts are very clearly set out, and helpfully organised in Chapters according to the Biblical books. Each quotation is headed by a brief paragraph of introduction, and references to our own scriptures are given, either within the text itself or in margins. Most pages are supplied with line drawings, and occasional photographic illustrations. The language of translation consistently used throughout is modern American-English, deliberately fashioned to evade accusations of sexism or racism, beyond what is demanded by the texts themselves. There are excellent indices, in a series of different formats. The target audience, then, is the beginner in Old Testament studies, or the generally interested reader. And the subject matter is certainly most interesting. Serious scholarly work would certainly need recourse to more substantial reference works: their titles and sources are given in appended bibliographies.

Literary parallels to our Biblical text from the ANE may be according to genre, or to topic, or historical period. Parallels are also offered according to social institution, or motif, or plot, or vocabulary. Thus we have various Creation stories, widely

separated by date or region of origin, to accompany our reading of Genesis Chapter 1. The Babylonian Story of Gilgamesh clearly evokes our Flood story. We have narratives also echoing Abraham's sojourn at Pharaoh's Court, or the placing of baby Moses in a basket in the River, or David's encounter with Goliath, or Daniel's prediction of coming evils to a King who has just favoured him. Extant Annals of Mesha King of Moab (cf. 1 Kings 3:4) recount war with Israel in around 830 B.C.; many Egyptian texts parallel other events recounted in the Book of the Kings. The lamentation of Ningal over destroyed Ur (c. 2020 B.C.) are very close in spirit to the lamentations of Jeremiah over Jerusalem. Psalm texts in Ugaritic express the worship given to Ba'al in Syria from around 1400 B.C.

Various legal codes survive from the Ancient Near East. The Code of Hammurabi (c. 1180 B.C.) is surely the best known. Here is one brief example: "If an elite male blinds the eye of another, then his eye is to be blinded... If an elite male breaks a bone of another, then his bone is to be broken". Or another example from Assyrian laws written in Akkadian cuneiform script: "If an elite male forces an elite female to let him kiss her, then his lower lip is to be cut off using the blade of an ax". From the Egyptian "Book of the Dead", preserved in different recensions as wall paintings or carvings inside tombs, we have this: "I have done no evil thing. I have not robbed. I have not coveted. I have not stolen. I have not murdered. I have not paid less than the full ration of grain. I have not cheated. I have not told lies. I have not committed perjury. I have not committed adultery. I have not cursed the divine assembly. I have not been boastful. I have not been arrogant. I have not blasphemed the divine patron of my city..."

Many Egyptian proverbs strikingly parallel similar proverbs in the Wisdom literature of the Bible. Here, for example, is Amen-em-ope (from c.1550 B.C.): "Listen to what I say. Keep my words within your heart. Prosperity comes to those who keep my words in their hearts. Poverty comes to those who discard them. Enshrine my words in your souls; lock them away in your hearts. When the words of fools blow like a storm, the words of the wise will hold

your tongue like an anchor. Live your lives with my words in your hearts, and your life will be a success. My words are a handbook for your life on earth: they will bring life to your body... Stop and think before you speak. It is a quality pleasing to the divine assembly. Never quarrel with fools, nor insult them. Stay patient when confronted by enemies. Bend like the wind when attacked. Sleep before answering their accusations. Anger explodes in fools, as fire breaks out in straw. Stay out of the way of angry fools: let the divine assembly judge them.”

Let an Egyptian love song, written on papyrus dating to around 1350 B.C., conclude this review: “My lover is a marsh; my lover is lush with growth. Her mouth is a lotus bud, her arms are vines, her eyes are shaded like berries. Her head is a trap built from branches, and I am the goose. Her hair is the bait in the trap to ensnare me” (cf. Ps 90/91:3; Prov 7:23; Song of Songs 7:5-6).

Martyr at Tyburn

St Richard Reynolds’ testimony continued: “As for the witness of the ancient Fathers, I have on my side the General Councils, and all the Fathers and Doctors of the Church for 1500 years, and especially Saints Jerome, Ambrose, Augustine, Gregory. And I am well assured that when his most Serene Majesty shall have known the truth of this, he will be offended beyond measure with certain bishops who have given him this counsel ... if I were here arraigned before God’s own tribunal, it would be made clear that never to living man have I declared an opinion of my own maliciously, against the king or anyone (in authority); save when to clear my conscience I spoke of it in confession, being compelled thereto. I was indeed grieved to learn that his Majesty had fallen into so grave an error, but I said so to none, except as I have declared. I would say it openly now, seeing that I am bound to it by God and my conscience.”

HYMN TO RESPECT

Respect values the other like another self. It never seeks to dominate or control, but respects the other's rights and feelings.

It has no airs, because it has no desire to prevail.

Respect treats everyone as equals;

it is indifferent to no one and never ignores anyone.

Respect knows when to efface itself and when to step forward: it sees the good in everyone and seeks to bring it out, so that all may see it too.

Respect finds the other pleasing. It never disdains or makes fun of another in word or in heart. It is interested in everyone, admires everyone,

never looks bored or hurried in company. It shows pleasure in encountering others: greets Christ in the other.

It is never abrupt, nor peremptory in tone, nor over-familiar, nor cold.

Respect has refinement of heart. It makes life easier for the other: it is thoughtful and discreet.

Respect keeps the rules, but does not fuss about the observance of others.

It understands and is tolerant of the failings of others, because it knows their real worth. It never discomfits another or reveals her faults.

It saves her face and does not cast her behaviour back at her.

It will not correct her without a mandate: yet, if it does have one, it will not shrink from pointing out, in a spirit of love and humility, what makes her less than her true self.

Respect knows how to take advice without pride or annoyance or answering back. It knows how to listen and is loath to interrupt; it gives full attention to another's opinions, even if they are different from its own.

Respect does not make others wait nor fails to apologise when apology is due.

Respect knows that the other's first relationship is with God in Christ.

It knows that she is deeply respected by God.

In honouring others, it honours God.

St Cecilia's Abbey, Ryde