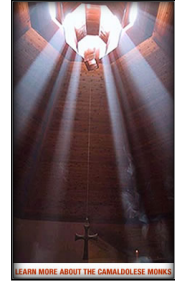


Speak Lord. *Your servant is listening.*

Newsletter of the Benedictine Camaldolese Oblates of
Australia and New Zealand
December 2018



Chaplain's message Fr Michael Mifsud Oblate OSB Cam

Dear friends, as we all journey with Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem we are aware of our own inner journey of faith through life preparing to give birth to this miraculous Child within us. We too have been called to say "Fiat", "Yes", to the invitation to be Christ bearers through the power of the Holy Spirit. In fact, Augustine says that there is no benefit in Christ being born, if he us not born in us.

As St Ambrose said in the early Church, "Mary conceived the Word in her heart long before she conceived him in her body". Paul says, "the whole creation is in one great act of giving birth ... and we too shall with all who possess the first fruits of the Spirit ... share in the glorious freedom of the children of God"

This is why Christ came 'in the flesh' to give us freedom from the limitations of this world, giving us a peace, this world cannot give, passing all understanding. This divine self-emptying, to lift us up from self-absorption and self-termination, humbly asks us to become like Him in receiving our being and its divinization as a gift of grace, by ourselves becoming "the stable in which Christ is born" [Master Eckhart].

This sharing in the new life of the risen Christ is what the Good News of the gospel is all about, and it does not depend on who is Prime Minister, President, Bishop or even Pope, let alone on all the other passing and even dramatic events of this world, especially including our health, sickness, life and death. All things, of course have their relative significance and importance, but only a truly contemplative stance and outlook can give us the right

and hope-filled attitude we need to maintain in the face of everything, life and reality, though up to us for integration and acceptance with faith and love. We cannot be genuine contemplatives, as Merton so correctly saw, without a compassionate and engaged concern for the good world God created and all life on it. As the Desert Tradition taught, "just do the next thing," ... "however small, with great love" [St Therese].

As you probably have noticed, I love to quote the saints and mystics, the authentic teachers and masters of the spiritual life, in our long Christian Tradition. In fact, while

I honour and respect all the great teachers of all the traditions, I believe the celebration of the Incarnation at Christmas particularly points out and emphasises the specific and unique aspects of the Christian revelation of God's loving plan for us all; new life in every way, the basic original goodness of creation restored, good news, real hope in every situation, participation in divine life, lasting freedom and peace and all the heavenly blessings in Christ. What more

could God give? as Paul says, having given us His only Son, in a total self-outpouring of the Holy Spirit in love, into our hearts?

I may ask myself, "Where am I in all this?" but now the question hardly matters as I realize more clearly that I am a mystery to my own self, and 'who I truly am is hidden in Christ and Christ is hidden in God' and will be fully revealed at the appropriate time. So, questions like this



'The Adoration of the Shepherd'
Painting by Gerard van Honthorst, 1622





and others as to where or what stage 'I' am at in the spiritual life barely have any meaning. What matters, as Paul says, is that 'I' am 'in Christ', and an all-together new creature, in Him.

It is good to be free from any "ladder climbing", spiritual or temporal, just "being in the presence of the of The Presence" ... "surrendering to God's love ... trusting ... without a worry in the world" [All quotes from Thomas Keating at end of his Memorial Mass].

We may all be a long way from having those attitudes in full maturity, but even to want them, is to possess them in anticipation as God places these desires in our heart in embryo but intends to bring them to birth. "The work of a lifetime and the fruit of old age" [Keating]—still more poignant here nearby at Tarrawarra Abbey as two old soldier-monks and Keating's fellow Cistercians and fellow Benedictines, Fr Paddy [Carthage] O'Dea, 92 and Br John Pocock, 86, have passed away in the last few weeks.

A book I am enjoying reading as Lectio in the last six months that has really helped me in these areas is Merton's *Palace of Nowhere*, an old book I bought many years ago, picked up briefly and put down again, till my eyes fell on it this year. I am sure many of you have it and maybe read it. There is always a right time for the right book for each of us. It is written by James Finley, a former novice of Thomas Merton and a true spiritual teacher in his own right, as can be glanced, even a little, by listening to a few words of his. (Refer the same email re the links I forwarded to you in relation to Richard Rohr's Contemplative Outreach's Memorial to the Beloved by great spiritual master, Thomas Keating, OCSO, one of the central initiators of the Centring Prayer [Merton's term] Tradition of Contemplation)

So, wishing you all a blessed and peace-filled Christmas and a happy, holy and healthy, safe New Year. Looking forward to seeing a number of you in the New Year.

Reflection Will Day Oblate OSB Cam

A Little Child Shall Lead Them: Notes on Melbourne's Student Climate Rally - 1 /12/2018

'The wolf and the lamb will live together, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together, and a little child shall lead them.' Isaiah 11.6

A series of fortunate diversions took me to the rally outside parliament in Melbourne yesterday. During the event, my eyes kept filling with tears. It was beautiful, inspiring and very moving.

The atmosphere was unlike that of an adult rally; a wide, deep, clear light beamed from amidst the crowd. I did not detect streaks of anger but rather a pervasive sense of joy and confident knowing. In the face of this the bizarrely mid-twentieth century, dismissals from our Prime Minister and his off-siders seemed so comical as to be self-emptying. (My friend Michael Graf hit the nail on the head: 'You cannot argue with the innocence of a child.')

Making my way home from yesterday's event I found myself welling with hope for the first time in many years. (Like many of us, I have missed a lot of sleep.) I recalled Buddhist teacher Pema Chodron's story about a childhood friend who was having a recurrent nightmare in which a terrifying mob of people pursued her through room after room.

The young Pema asked her friend what the pursuers looked like. The dreamer had no idea, she had never turned around to look, she was too terrified. That night the nightmare came again but it was different. Pema's friend stopped running and turned around to see that the mob were all two dimensional cartoon cutouts who simply dissolved when she confronted them.

Is it possible that the chaotic events of recent times, locally and internationally, have been turning the old soil, stirring the nutrients, and now are actually reaching the point where the old is genuinely losing power and the new is beginning its surge into the breach?

Is it too late?
Possibly.

But I find myself remembering a comment made by renowned French palaeontologist and visionary Pierre Teilhard De Chardin. Teilhard held that the evolution of human life on this planet was heading somewhere glorious,





just as the tiny shoot from an acorn is headed toward the splendour of a mature, spreading oak tree. He believed, and celebrated his belief that in the long run humanity would blossom into an harmonious and vital unifying thread in the fullness of the evolutionary weave.

During the brooding apprehensions of the 1960's cold war, Teilhard's vision was challenged by an inter-locuter who asked how the scientist could possibly hold such a fanciful idea of human grandeur when it seemed reasonably likely the planet, and all its lifeforms, may be devastated by a human nuclear war.

Teilhard, who had learnt patience over years of studying evolution and working in the desert, replied that if such a thing should happen, it would simply be a two million year hiccup.

Fanciful?

Possibly.

But we need, and we use, fairy tales. Imaginative symbols can hold truth and immense power; they are inspiring, and motivating, igniting seeds in us, enlivening our energies and potentials.

I slept well last night.

I woke this morning feeling somehow renewed and wondering how I might find new ways to walk in, and work for the simple light I saw beaming in that crowd of young people yesterday.

Plenary Council 2020 Trudy Dantis Oblate OSB Cam



The Australian Catholic Bishops are holding a historic Plenary Council in 2020 to give the Catholic community in Australia time to listen, dialogue and discern with one another (guided by the Holy Spirit) about the future, the role and relevance of the Catholic Church in Australia.

The last time the Catholic Church in Australia held a Plenary Council was in 1937. It has been more than 80 years since then and much has changed.

In preparation for the 2020 Council, the Plenary Council Executive Committee has outlined a three-year plan called "*Journey to Plenary Council 2018-2020*". In the first stage of this journey, all people are invited to engage in Listening and Dialogue encounters.

The Listening and Dialogue Encounter is an opportunity to get together a group of friends, family or colleagues and spend some time thinking and talking about your experiences of faith, life and the Church. You can also reflect and contribute as an individual. Everyone is invited to respond to the question: *What do you think God is asking of us in Australia at this time?*

All contributions are submitted online via the Plenary Council website.

Each person's experience of faith and the Church is unique and it is important that the Plenary Council hear from as many people as possible. This process is open to all people, irrespective of their ethnicity and religious belief.

How do I contribute?

Simply go to the Plenary Council Website: <http://plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/resources/have-your-say/>. You will find a number of resources for a Listening and Dialogue Encounter. To make your submission, click the blue link on the page that reads, "Have your say – submit your response. Click here". There is a wealth of related information that can be found on the website.

I encourage all oblates to engage with this process as part of our contribution to the future of the Catholic Church in Australia.

"Listen to what the Spirit is saying." Rev 2:7



RETREAT REFLECTION

Jim Curtain OSB Cam

The following report first appeared on the Yahoo group page of Camaldolese Oblate Community on 28 October 2018.

From 5-7 October 2018, 22 members of the Australia/New Zealand Camaldolese oblate chapter met for our biennial retreat, led by Fr Thomas Matus OSB Cam and our own beloved chaplain, Fr Michael Mifsud.

The retreat was held at a lovely Anglican religious house, the Community of the Holy Name, in Cheltenham, a southern suburb of Melbourne.

During the retreat Fr Thomas gave a series of wonderful conferences, deeply informed by his learning in the Camaldolese tradition, and the themes of gratefulness, silence and divinization were central to what he had to say.

The retreat was a wonderful (and rare!) opportunity for us to pray the Divine Office in choir, and share times of silent meditation in common - deeply fulfilling experiences.

prayer. Of course we also prayed for all the Camaldolese communities around the world, monks, nuns and oblates, particularly those in the USA who have been such a support to us.

During the retreat we were blessed with a new oblate, Mr Arthur Hallet, and a new novice, Mr George Tzikas. We pray that the Camaldolese path will continue to be a source of grace, delight and comfort for them both.



Below: The group at the retreat.

Riaht L-R: Georae Tzikas, Arthur Hallet, Fr Thomas Matus and Fr Michael Mifsud

