

# Quarr Abbey Newsletter

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*The Cloister garden this summer*

## **A Fifth Abbot for Quarr**

On 11<sup>th</sup> May, the Community of Quarr elected a new abbot. After the resignation of Dom Cuthbert Johnson in 2008, times and circumstances did not allow the election of an abbot, which requires a two-third majority. It was the task of Dom Finbar Kealy, appointed Prior Administrator by the Abbot of Solesmes in 2008, to reinforce the unity of the community and to lead to completion a wide range of excellent projects inherited from Abbot Cuthbert's leadership. When I took over as Administrator in 2013, this goal had been largely achieved. The last three years have been a time of consolidation when the community could reduce the tempo of changes and works, develop their network of friends and supporters, and focus on their own dynamism and spiritual life.

The election of a new abbot comes as a fitting conclusion to this period of eight years. It is essentially a community event. It says a lot for the unity and the sense of purpose and direction which characterises the present group of monks. Whilst rooted in the monastic tradition of St Benedict and the special spiritual legacy of Solesmes, Quarr has its own balance and character.

The monks cherish their life of silence and prayer through which they intend to witness to God's transcendent mystery of love revealed in

Christ. They intercede for the world and praise God for His mercies. Their works and their community life are bathed in a climate of contemplative desire for God and for the communion with Him which is the final end of human life.

At the same time, the community are happy to open themselves to a wider public through the different types of hospitality they offer. Oblates and Friends, staff and volunteers, guests and visitors: all share in the peaceful activity of the abbey, and contribute to making it a place of spiritual refreshment for many.

As I am beginning my service as abbot, I feel very grateful for the rich tradition and the unique character of Quarr. My presence will probably contribute to nourish the 'French flavour' inherited from a long history of connection with Solesmes and French Catholic life. At the same time, it seems that the Brethren thought my British inculturation was satisfactory enough to ensure that I would respect and promote what gives to Quarr its unique place within our international Congregation.

As we thank God for the sign of hope which He has given us in allowing us to take this new step on our Community path, we entrust to Our Lady of Quarr the future of our Community and the welfare of all our friends, benefactors and visitors. **Fr Abbot**

## **Quarr Abbey Chronicle**

### **Recent events in the life of the Abbey**

**11 May** The day chosen for our abbatial election was a propitious one for it was the commemoration of **Saints Odo, Maiolus, Odilo and Hugh, abbots of the great mediaeval Abbey of Cluny**. According to our Declarations and Constitutions, our Congregation takes the place of the Congregation of Cluny, enjoying and inheriting all its privileges. Nevertheless, the Conventual Mass of the day was a votive Mass of the Holy Spirit, in which we implored the help of the Creator Spirit to enlighten our minds and hearts as to God's choice in the election before us.

At Midday, **Abbot Philippe Dupont, Abbot of Solesmes, and Abbot President of our Congregation** arrived to preside over the proceedings. For several weeks we had been preparing the house for this day. Kevin., our postulant had, this morning, finished a splendid job in polishing the parquet floor of the Chapter House (described in the last issue of QAN) where we were to gather to vote.

At 3:00pm. With the chapter bell ringing, the chapter members assembled. Proceedings started with the reading of chapter 64 of the Rule of St Benedict, the chapter entitled, "The Election of an Abbot". The Abbot President then spoke briefly on the qualities we should look for in a candidate, and reminded us of our obligation to secrecy.

This was followed by the hymn "Veni Creator Spiritus", sung as a petition for the light of the Holy Spirit to direct the election. Next, all had to swear on the Gospels, that they would vote for him whom they had chosen according to God.

The scrutineers then handed out slips of paper on which names were written, and then, in conventual order, all placed their votes in the urn.

Together with the Abbot President the scrutineers then counted the ballot papers, seeking a two thirds majority before announcing the name of a newly elected abbot.

And so **Fr. Xavier Perrin, our Prior Administrator was elected fifth Abbot of Quarr**.

After Vespers, on the day of the election, the whole community met in the Chapter House for the installation of the new Abbot. The hymn, "Veni Creator Spiritus" was sung again, and the Abbot of Solesmes read the confirmation of the election on behalf of the Holy See. Abbot Xavier then made an act of faith and an oath of fidelity as required by law before being led to his abbatial seat and invested with the abbatial cross.

After this the whole community processed to the church singing the "Benedictus". Once the Abbot was seated in the abbatial chair in choir, the "Te Deum" was sung, and then each of the monks approached their new Father Abbot, one by one, to offer their obedience. This is expressed by kneeling before the abbatial chair and placing joined hands within the two hands of the Abbot- a gesture of mediaeval, feudal origin.

An antiphon to Our Lady, patroness of the Abbey, was sung before retiring from the Abbey Church, and starting preparations for the blessing of Abbot Xavier at some time to be arranged.

**17 May** Today was an occasion of nostalgia, the farewell Mass for the Sisters of Christ at the Convent of the Cross in East Cowes. Fr Abbot, Fr Prior, Fr Nicholas, Fr Yves-Marie and the Chronicler went from Quarr and joined with Fr Bruce Barnes, the Diocesan Vicar for Religious and many other friends in demonstrating our prayerful solidarity with the Sisters who came from all three of their English Houses.

Fr Bruce gave a much admired homily, which expressed and directed the feelings of us all perfectly. A sense of nostalgia for what was passing certainly, but all infused, above all, with thanksgiving to God, for all He has done

in this place and with these people. The departure of the Sisters did not mean that their work was finished but rather, brought to completion.

And so, at the end of the Mass everyone moved from the chapel to the dining room where, once again, Springhill Convent's reputation for generous hospitality was amply proved in the eating.

Quarr was delighted to receive two gifts from the Sisters. The first (**shown below**) is a carved, wooden statue of **St Anne teaching the Blessed Virgin to read**. This is especially appreciated by Fr Abbot, who comes from Brittany a region devoted to St Anne and under her protection.



The second gift is a fine painting of the Virgin and Child, possibly Spanish in origin and probably rather old. We are seeking a place for both these gifts at Quarr and both will ensure that the Sisters of Christ are kept in our prayers wherever the providence of God may lead them.

**27 May** After Vespers today, the whole community processed to the Chapter House for the clothing of our postulant, Kevin, in the monastic habit. This was the first postulant Br. Duncan, the novicemaster, had presented to Fr

Abbot for clothing, and the first postulant Fr. Abbot had received, so it was a first for everyone. Kevin prostrated on the ground before his Superior, and rose to profess his desire to seek the mercy of God and fellowship with the Community.

As the Brethren sang the antiphon, “Qui Sequitur me” and Psalm 23, Fr. Abbot, assisted by the Novicemaster, clothed Kevin in the tunic, belt and scapular of a novice of the Solesmes Congregation. He is now Brother Kevin, porter of our Community, and he needs the prayers of us all.

## THE FRIENDS OF QUARR

The Friends of Quarr celebrated their third anniversary on 18 May. They have grown in number and continue to fulfil their aims of raising the profile, promoting the Abbey in general and, in particular, fundraising for projects within the Abbey.

The total raised for the Walled Garden Project is now £ 28,600.

The Sale of fabric remnants, donated by Anne Ginger, on 30 April raised £ 1,210 towards the Walled Garden Project and drew 100 people within 2 hours of the opening of the sale.

**The Concert of Sacred Music by Orpheus Singers**, conducted by Philip Fryer, on 14 May raised a retiring collection of £ 1,153 also in aid of the Walled Garden Project.

The Abbey Church was packed, with people standing at the back and sitting in the choir stalls.

If you would like to join the Friends of Quarr please email the chairman (Dr Rebecca Ashton): [chair.friends@quarr.org](mailto:chair.friends@quarr.org) Telephone no: 01983-882420 ext. 209 and leave a message.

## Abbot Xavier by a monk



*Quarr's new abbot with the Abbot of Solesmes*

The Rule of Saint Benedict says that a community should choose an abbot “for the merit of his life and his enlightened wisdom”. Saint Benedict knew, however, that democracy doesn’t always work to put the noblest people in positions of leadership: he realised that the electorate can collude to select someone who will indulge their depravity and warned that “the local bishop and neighbouring abbot or Christians” should intervene if this happens. I don’t think such an intervention will be needed in our case. Let me explain why.

Saint Benedict says that it behoves the abbot to be merciful, adding, “Let him always set mercy above judgement”. We are encouraged to think we have made the right choice by Father Xavier’s choice of abbatial motto: *Recordatus Misericordiae* (Remembering mercy). This is very apt for the Year of Mercy proclaimed by Pope Francis. It is also apt for the time and the place that we are living in. It is apt for the time, because the world is becoming increasingly judgemental especially about those who come from afar.

It is apt for Quarr Abbey because its special charism has always been as a place where people are accepted and welcomed as who they are. Ultimately this acceptance and welcome comes from God and indeed often it is enough for someone simply to come into our church to be aware of such divine love. It is given a special form, however, in the hospitality offered to guests, a hospitality I remember with glad gratitude from the years before I became a monk. Guests of all sorts and conditions are welcomed as they are. And although it is not possible for us to speak with them all individually the same welcome is offered to our many different visitors.

Most centrally people who become monks here are allowed to be who they are. Perhaps it is more accurate to say, they are allowed to become who they are. For that is the purpose of the spiritual life: that we become just who we are in the sight of God, which is to say who we really are – set free in Christ to enjoy the glorious liberty of the children of God. For that to happen it is important the abbot is not in our face and on our case all the time or – as Saint Benedict puts it – not “turbulent or anxious, overbearing or obstinate, jealous or too suspicious” but rather “discreet and moderate”. Our new abbot fits this bill.

Abbot Xavier is cool, in other words. He is also French, which means he is stylish: witness, for example, the elegant habit-matching scarf he tosses around his neck when it is chilly. He is bright, too, having studied at the Sorbonne. And if he still doesn’t quite understand the importance of places like Trafalgar Square and Waterloo Station or occasionally struggles to find the right preposition in English, he need, as Saint Benedict teaches, never despair of God’s mercy.

## The Abbatial Motto

### A conversation between Br Duncan and Fr Abbot

**Br. D.** Father Abbot, the motto you have chosen for your ministry as abbot is: Recordatus misericordiae. How did you come to choose it?

**Fr. X.** These two Latin words come from the Magnificat of Mary. Towards the end, Mary declares that God “has helped his servant Israel in remembrance of his mercy”. More precisely, we could translate: “He has helped his servant Israel, having remembered his mercy”. Mary speaks of God who is merciful and never forgets his mercy.

I thought this might be a good motto as I was elected during the 'Year of Mercy' launched by Pope Francis in order to remind us of the importance of mercy.



*Maria Mater Misericordiae*

**Br. D.** Could you explain to us the meaning of these two words?

**Fr. X.** The first word, Recordatus, evokes memory. Our memory is a stock of images coming from our previous experience of the world: people, things, impressions, feelings, etc.. Primarily, our memory tells us who we

have been, what we have done, and who we are. So God's memory tells Him, as it were, who He is. And Mary says that this memory is full of mercy. God remembers His mercy. He acknowledges Himself and wants us to acknowledge Him mainly as the Merciful One. As He said to Moses in chapter 34 of Exodus, He is: “The Lord, The Lord, a God merciful and gracious”.

**Br. D.** What is the place of mercy in the abbot's ministry?

**Fr. X.** In the Rule, St Benedict asks the abbot to be merciful. He must “extol mercy over justice”. The misericors – the merciful one – is someone who has developed a special sensitivity to the miseria – misery, sufferings, weaknesses and limitations of all kinds – of those around him. He is moved by compassion and he wants to help. He considers the weakness and he is happy to excuse and to forgive. The monks are entitled to expect from their abbot that he will be merciful. Ideally, the abbot should be a “man of mercy”. You become a man or a woman of mercy in the exact measure you get humbler, less self-centred and proud. It is a work of conversion. The abbot is on a way of conversion. He needs the merciful prayers of many to achieve it.

**Br. D.** How do you see the place of mercy in a monastery?

**Fr. X.** There is no community life without mercy, be it in the family, in the monastery, in the parish, or in the Church as a whole. It is a consequence of our frailties and our sinfulness. Mercy plays a key role because it is the only way to learn how to love one another. We are beings of misery and need, from our childhood to our old age, even if sometimes we forget it when all seems to be OK and we have the impression we do not need help. In fact, we are always in need of mercy. God never forgets that. The abbot should never forget it either. It applies, I think, to all who want to love in truth. I hope Quarr is and will become ever more a place where many can meet God's mercy.

## Celebrating Shakespeare

The editor of QAN has asked your Shakespeare correspondent for some reflections to mark the latter's four hundredth anniversary. It seems appropriate to respond by focusing on how Shakespeare's writing transmits spiritual values. In these days in which people often do not follow a religious tradition, or if they do may be antagonistic to those not following the same one, the Bard can bring together all sorts and conditions of people to witness the presentation through his incomparable art of the life of the spirit.

The last plays, commonly called the Late Romances, are the most direct, the most mellow and the most glorious such presentation.

The first of these, *Pericles*, was his most popular play in the decades immediately following his passing. Consciously archaic, it follows the pattern of medieval plays about saints and their miracles. The ancient narrator, Gower, says the song he has come to sing – the tale of the play – is “to make men glorious”, that is to get them to share the glory of the saints. The setting of the play is theologically pagan, so avoiding the question of Christian denominational allegiance.

In the course of its action *Pericles* is shown the key virtue of patience. Thinking both his wife and daughter to be dead, he has retreated into a refusal to speak. A young woman of radiant virtue is brought to him to bring him out of his catatonic depression. Unknown to him, this is his daughter, Marina, named for her birth at sea. In the deeply moving recognition scene that follows, Marina challenges him with the assertion that she has known a grief equal to his. She wins his belief for she seems to him “a palace/ For the crowned Truth to dwell in”. He

comes to see in her one who looks “Like Patience gazing on kings' graves, and smiling/ Extremity out of act”. It is as though she is his immortal soul, reflecting eternity like the sea, the place where he touches the truth of God and can rise above the troubles of the world. His awakening to her is rewarded by the resurrection of her life and that of her mother, his beloved wife Thaisa.

*Cymbeline* presents another character who aptly represents the immortal soul, Imogen, wife of Posthumous. When she is reunited with him after he has supposed her dead, he says simply as she throws her arms around him, “Hang there like fruit, my soul/ Till the tree die!”

Again it is a question of awakening belief, for he has been deceived into thinking her false to him and given instruction for her to be killed. She has escaped this by taking refuge in being disguised as a boy, Fidele. This boy, whose name evokes the idea of faith, has appeared to have died and the exiled courtier and his two sons who adopted him have sung a poignant elegy for him, reflecting that “Golden lads and girls all must,/ As chimney-sweepers come to dust”. It is as though faith itself died when her husband rejected “That sweet rosy lad/ Who died and was Fidele”. Imogen's restoration to her husband enacts the miracle of the play: the resurrection of faith. Posthumous forgives the man who deceived him about his wife's fidelity and King Cymbeline, learning from him, announces, “Pardon's the word to all.”

Faith and resurrection are also themes in *The Winter's Tale*. Leonatus doubts the fidelity of his wife Hermione. She is vindicated by an oracle, but he does not believe it. He comes to his senses when their young son, troubled by the treatment of his mother, suddenly dies, but

before he can be reconciled with Hermione Paulina, the wife of one of his lords, brings news that she too has died. He does penance for sixteen years. Paulina then takes him to see a miraculously life-like statue of Hermione. She announces, “It is requir’d/ You do awake your faith” and calls for music. The statue moves: it is Hermione, alive. Such is the power of faith.

The theme of forgiveness is picked up again in *The Tempest*. Prospero, magician and deposed Duke of Milan, forgives his enemies, saying

:  
Though with their high wrongs I am strook to th’ quick,  
Yet, with nobler reason, `gainst my fury  
Do I take part. The rarer action is  
In virtue than in vengeance. They being penitent,  
The sole drift of my purpose doth extend  
Not a frown further.

The play ends with him asking the audience, “As you from crimes would pardon’d be,/ Let your indulgence set me free.” This request for forgiveness to be given as it is wished for evokes that of the Lord’s prayer, “Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us” and the oneness in the Spirit towards which religion guides us.

These final lines of Shakespeare’s final play give to his whole oeuvre the import of an urging towards atonement and reconciliation which is the goal of every authentic spiritual tradition. Only this matters, the world for all its show passes and our life is short. The point is made by the sudden disappearance of a magical dance staged by Prospero, on which he comments:

The cloud-capped tow’rs, the gorgeous palaces,  
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,  
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,  
And like this insubstantial pageant faded  
Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff  
As dreams are made on; and our little life  
Is rounded with a sleep.

Theatres, like monasteries, attract people who might not ordinarily frequent churches. As we celebrate the peerless gift to our nation and to the world of Shakespeare’s enactment of the drama of the human spirit, let us hope and pray that it will inspire many to seek the peace which the world cannot give. We also have this hope and prayer for our monastery here on the Isle of Wight. May they both inspire you.

*Below is Quarr’s Prospero in a recent production here*



## The Parts of Quarr: the Abbatiale



St Benedict does not envisage abbots having separate accommodation from the community. On the contrary, he talks about the abbot ‘coaxing, reproving, and encouraging’ his flock which implies living in the midst of the brethren. But he does suggest that the abbot’s table should always be with guests and perhaps with some other senior monks. Upon this basis, both real and fragile, many abbeys in the later Middle Ages and beyond often had substantial separate houses for their abbots. When monastic life was restored after the Europe-wide closures consequent upon the French

Revolution, this custom was, almost everywhere, abandoned. This was so at

Solesmes and its daughter here at Quarr.

Nevertheless, it is usual for modern abbots to have a designated room rather larger than most which is both their locus in the abbey and a place of interaction of many kinds. The abbatial quarters at Quarr consist of a handsome room . The picture of the chimney piece (opposite), designed by Dom Bellot in the Abbey’s characteristic style, gives some idea of its character. This room is on the first floor. Abbot Delatte wanted a window in it overlooking the choir but this was impossible. The main window looks out over the Solent. It was here that Delatte wrote his major works but he also had a parlour on the ground floor where he could meet visitors and transact necessary business. This is now part of the guesthouse.

In recent years, the ‘Abbatiale’ (the word used in the abbey) has not been used as such. There is an office in the

old house which is used as an interface between monastery and world.

In a previous article in this series on the Parts of Quarr, I noted that the Chapter House was now not generally used but, in fact, it played a central role in the election and installation of Abbot Xavier. Who knows what will happen to the Abbatiale in the future? [BB]

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