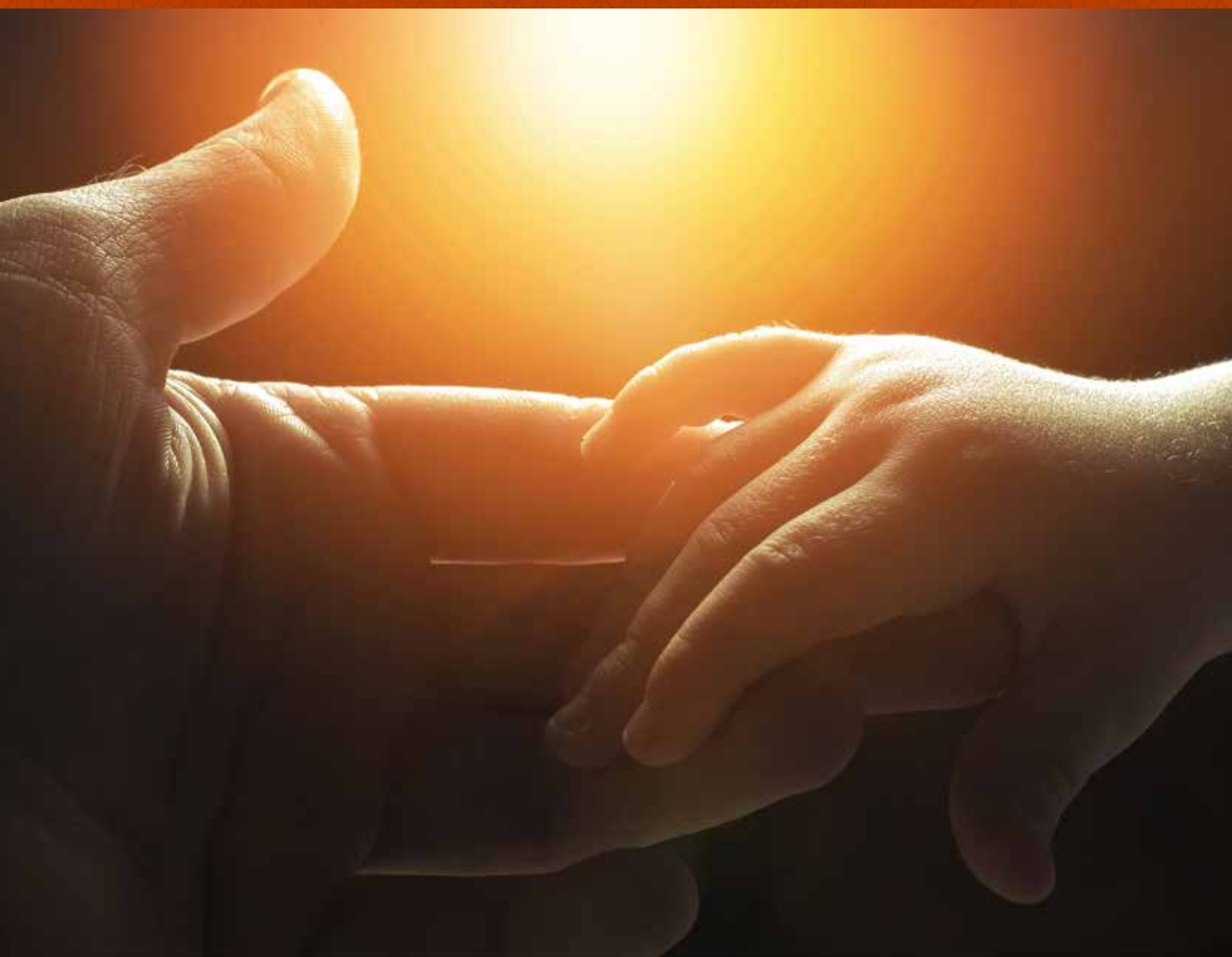




THE BENEDICTINE COMMUNITY OF NEW NORCIA

Humilitas



Welcome! Our inaugural issue of Pax is here to inspire you with themes central to the spiritual life. The articles span a broad spectrum, with a particular focus on the Benedictine tradition within Christianity.

Pax, Latin for ‘peace’, has a long history at New Norcia, not just in the ambience that permeates this 160-year-old Benedictine monastery in Western Australia and a 1500 year tradition of prayers. ‘Pax’ was originally published by the monks as a newsheet for the Abbey Nullius of New Norcia on the 6th of June 1954. The weekly bulletin grew and thrived for fourteen years providing the local parish and surrounding communities with news and views of the diocese, plus some wholesome Sunday Gospel reflection.

More than half a century later, the Benedictine Community of New Norcia is reviving its publishing past by revving up its digital Abbey Press. This new version of Pax will be published bi-annually, each edition covering a particular theme relevant to the spiritual life. We will also include more in-depth reporting on the arts and culture, history and happenings of New Norcia than we are able to present in our monthly Chimes newsletter. If you would like to be part of this new venture, we encourage you to contact us with your ideas. We accept submissions of articles, book reviews, poetry, photography and personal stories of life as a modern Christian pilgrim.

This issue we look deeply into that hallmark of Benedictine practice: humility. Abbot John leads us into the topic with a fresh look at Basil Hume’s understanding of what it takes to be humble. We hear from Benedictine oblates on their personal experiences of applying St Benedict’s instructions on humility to their daily practice in modern life. And we introduce you to a selection of new “departments”, with book reviews, poetry, the lives of saints, slices of New Norcia’s colourful history, and a final teaser from our very popular “Abbot’s Table”—Fr John offers one of his most treasured and delectable dinnertime recipes.

Rich content. Thoughtful ideas. We hope you enjoy our first (re)issue of Pax.

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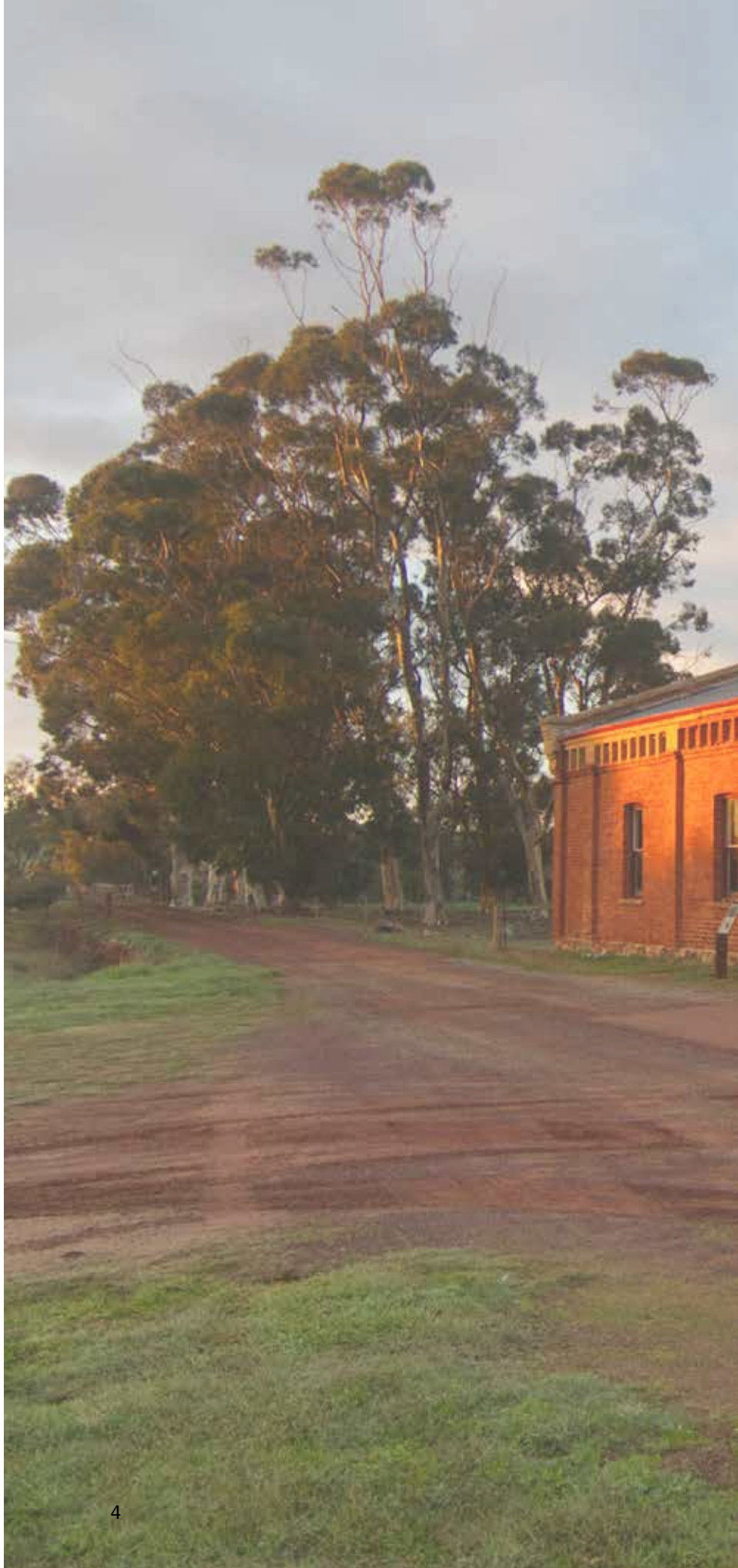
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"Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven".

- Matthew 18:3-4

CONTENTS

8 HUMILITY: GROUNDED IN TRUTH

Our world, it seems, has little sympathy for the virtue of humility. Abbot John Herbert, OSB

8 SYLVIA STORY

Theologian Sylvia Grevel, Obl.OSB

12 MODERN HUMILITY

What's so great about being lowly? Reflections on our modern discomfort with being humble by Sui Oakland, Obl.OSB

18 FINDING THE ELIXIR

A lesson in humility with Virginia Jealous, Obl.OSB

20 HUMILITY: A LIFE REFLECTION

Theologian Jim Longbottom reflects on the movements in his life that led him towards recouping pride.

22 IMPERATRIX AETERNA: MAGICAL STORIES OF THE QUEEN OF HEAVEN

Three stories from a newly translated collection of Marian Miracles, by Fr Robert Nixon, OSB

26 DEPARTMENTS

HUMILITY

GROUNDING IN TRUTH

*Our world, it seems, has
little sympathy for the
virtue of humility.*

Abbot John Herbert, OSB

When he was the abbot of the Benedictine community at Ampleforth Abbey in England, Basil Hume gave a conference in which he set out three human qualities that he felt were essential in the lives of Christians if they were to respond to God's loving initiative in seeking to satisfy the yearnings of the human heart. The qualities were humanity, humour, and humility. All three words come from the Latin humus, which means 'earth'. To be humble is to be grounded. In keeping with the seventh chapter of the Rule of St Benedict, Basil Hume put special emphasis on humility. He knew well that the only way to obtain any sense of holiness in our lives is to climb down the ladder of humility. He also knew that the higher we climb the ladder of social success the harder we fall when we are brought low by our own weaknesses, and the weaknesses of others.

It is sometimes suggested that the only way to humility is by way of humiliations. I think it is important, however, when talking about humility, not to get it too confused with humiliation. This whole idea of humility in the Rule particularly in Benedict's seventh degree, that one should consider oneself lower and baser than all others, is a difficult

one for most of us to grasp, particularly in these modern times in which individualism, self-absorption, and the obsessive upholding of 'my rights—my needs' reign supreme. On the other hand, humility is not about being a door-mat, self-deprecation, or low self-esteem. Rather, humility is about truth, being grounded in the truth of the complexity of who we are in the midst of the community, and part of this reality is that in God's eyes we are all equal.

Humility then, requires truth about oneself. And it is out of this truth that, as St Benedict reminds us in chapter seventy-two of the Rule ('On the Good Zeal of Monks'), we are more able (in fact we are instructed) to accept the contradictions, insults, humiliations (i.e. the weaknesses of body and behaviour of others) which is part of the reality of human beings attempting to live and work and worship together. The basis of this humility, this truth, is grace, a gift from God, and a gift which is often made manifest through others.

For St Benedict, listening is an essential tool of navigation in our journey towards God, and humility is a fundamental instrument for fine-tuning our listening. Such a dynamism allows us to learn in the school of love and service.

Such humble love and service provide the ability to reduce the tendency to compare ourselves with others; thus we learn from them. Humility is obviously the opposite of pride and because humility helps to avoid comparison with others, envy is a sure sign of its absence. Humility can rejoice in the gifts of all, because it recognizes the fundamental oneness of all people in their humanity and in Christ. Envy thinks of gifts as private property, humility reminds us that they are to be shared.

Humility is the truth about our selves, the whole truth—about our weakness, our failures, our history, our virtues, and

Right: A view of
Mount Grace priory, a
monastery in the parish
of East Harlsey, North
Yorkshire, England

Photo: Alexey Fedorenko





our gifts. One of the most transforming experiences I've ever had in my monastic journey is five weeks spent in St Hugh's Charterhouse, a Carthusian monastery in Parkminster, England. I thought I was pretty well in touch with who I was—all those relationships in which people tried to tell me who I was, all that therapy, all those personal and professional development courses, the seminars and community retreats—but the experience of total silence and solitude in that Carthusian cell provided me with the opportunity to see, I believe, for the first time, who I really was, at least at that particular moment. It was for me a simultaneous experience of great pain and great joy. Once we are truthful about ourselves before God, we are more able to reach out to others, a reaching out in true compassion because of the level of self-awareness attained—as they say: one must learn to love oneself in order to love others.

Our capacity for humility comes from many sources. One of these, in my experience, is by our ability to forget. In that Carthusian cell I read these words:

The power to forget is very important. It allows us to get rid of resentments and marks of honour, defilements and exterior burdens from our past, so that we only keep what is inscribed on the substance of our being, by which we are that which we are in the present moment. Thus, casting everything aside, we can run ahead, buoyant and responsive, everything straining for the goal which lies ahead, in a perpetual going beyond everything already attained, never pausing in this life. 'Draw me after you, let us make haste', the Song of Songs says (Canticle 1:4). Christ is always ahead. Union with God presents itself as perpetual newness, a continual beginning to begin again.



These words, and that cell, encouraged me to think about the forgetting which was (and continues to be) necessary in my life, and I realized it was time to really let go of those things that had burdened me in my life to that point. Such deep reflection can reveal hidden, eternal wounds, but I believe listening and humility provide the courage to take the slow but sure steps into the journey of transformation. Eventually, by means of this process, wounds are transformed into scars, in which we become less concerned with 'closure' and are more enabled to embrace the continuity of our humanity, to accept that everything indeed does belong...the humus of our very lives, our very existence.

Another monk, the late Kevin Seasoltz of Collegeville (USA), who once gave us a retreat shared these words of wisdom:

Our world, it seems, has little sympathy for the virtue of humility. It rather champions power, prestige, and praise. But we all know from experience that we are transformed as Christians not when we receive the accolades of praise, prestige, and power but rather when we experience our human diminishments and limitations. As St Paul says, 'it is in my weakness that I am made powerful'. It is then that we become like beggars standing before the Lord with empty bowls in our hands. And in God's good time and in God's mysterious ways, God fills those bowls with God's own gifts, which not only bring us closer to God but closer to each other.

The bright sun,
sunset, white dove,
and holy cross
symbolize death
- the ultimate
letting go.

*“For St Benedict, listening is
an essential tool of navigation
in our journey towards God,
and humility is a fundamental
instrument for fine-tuning our
listening.”*

We have come to understand after many years living in community that, together with others, we will regularly disappoint and hurt one another because we are members of a broken body. We also come to realize the profound truth that we are brought together in religious community by faith in the Lord Jesus, by someone who is other and infinitely greater than we are. We simply acknowledge that we are desperately in need of a Saviour who will deliver us from our weakness and fears, from our suffering and disappointments, and who will deliver us into the hands of a loving God who empowers us to know, accept, and love ourselves—and know, accept, and love one another all in Jesus Christ and through the power of the Spirit. But the most awesome lesson we learn is that even though our hearts are broken vessels, we nonetheless are gifted with the mysterious presence of a loving and faithful God.

MODERN HUMILITY

What's so great about being lowly?

Sui Oakland, Obl.OSB

We're gathered at a typical friends' dinner night, low lights gleam off half-filled wine glasses, tranquil music drifting through the background of our stimulating conversations. We typically talk of politics and current events, family and our work lives. At one point, out of the blue, someone drops a bombshell topic: humility.

A hush follows. No one quite knows what to say, how to continue the lively conversation. There's a sense of suppressed embarrassment, as though the mere mention of the word strikes a chord of unworthiness. Why? What is so unfamiliar about this concept in modern, secular life?

"It doesn't square well with my view of life", someone offers. "It feels humiliating, like I'm supposed to be someone's door mat. That doesn't go down very well where I work, let alone life with my spouse". Everyone chuckles.

True. The modern corporate world, our meritocratic education system, even our self-help industries all centre around climbing ladders of success, competing with others, feeling the swell of pride and achievement with every promotion, good grade, or sense of progress on the spiritual/personal growth path.

Humility suggests the opposite: "the feeling or attitude that you have no special importance that makes you better than others"¹ "freedom from pride or arrogance".² Even if you have a spiritual path, words like "meek" and "lowly"³ mostly make you want to squirm. A billion-dollar self-help industry has resurrected us from such old-world views, advises us the way to achieve a healthy self-esteem is through loving ourselves, pampering our bodies with chic attire, expensive retreats, fad diets, and affirmations of self-love. It's a big focus on Me, the "self" I think I am...or, er, at least want to be.

How are we to grapple with this word in the 21st century then? And is it really all that important?

Our conversation turns rather abruptly—and with a palpable sense of relief—to other topics. We've avoided the hard task of wrestling with these questions. Even my own inclination towards a spiritual worldview remains hushed in light of my friends' resistance. A lifetime of deep spiritual practice, it seems, should equip me with the right response here, the words to "enlighten" my peers out of their secular ignorance.

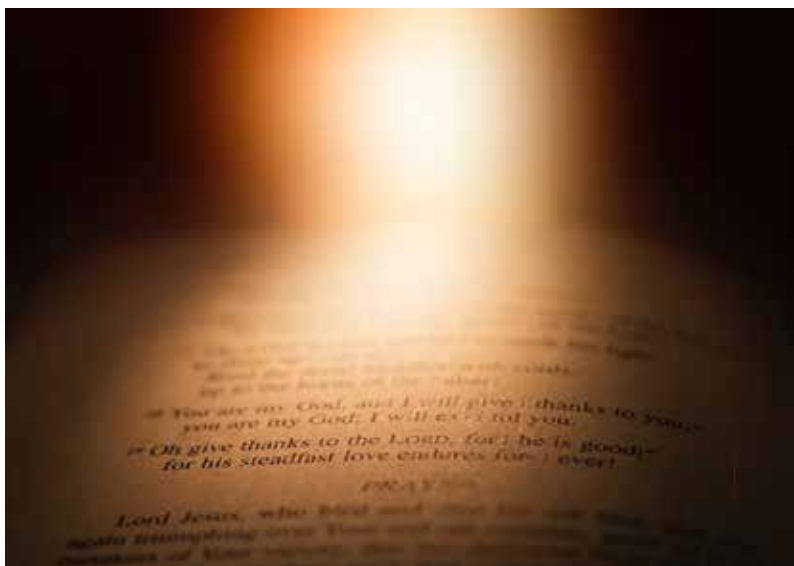
But that's just it. My "spiritual knowing" sounds arrogant, not just to my friends' ears, but to my own. So I stay quiet. Plus I'm uncomfortable with the disputational nature of our conversations, always friendly, but with a subtle sideshow of one-upmanship: I know more than you do, I'm better read than you, etc. Maybe I sound the same when I try to speak of spiritual matters?

Was it fear or humility that kept me silent then? Maybe it was a hidden, denied sort of arrogance: I know more than you and I know I know more than you but I'm not going to put you in that uncomfortable position where you have to feel less than. Hmm.

¹ <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/humility>

² <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/humility>

³ Matthew 11:29






I ponder this dilemma over the following days. As a Benedictine oblate for over 20 years, it's sensible that I'd turn to the ancient sage himself for advice on how to handle my own grappling with humility. Indeed, in his Rule, St Benedict put forth twelve steps towards achieving what he saw as the "blueprint" for the life of the monk. Certainly his opening statement to this missive can be understood by modern ears: "Every one that exalts himself shall be humbled; and he that humbles himself shall be exalted." We've seen examples in world history of these two extremes: Hitler on the one hand, Mahatma Gandhi on the other.

But it's hard to hold forth other of Benedict's edicts to my modern secular friends. "For the love of God a man subjects himself to a Superior in all obedience" doesn't sit well with responsible adults in an egalitarian, post-feminist society. Neither does the directive

to declare, "with his tongue, but also in his inmost soul believeth, that he is the lowest and vilest of men, humbling himself and saying with the Prophet: 'But I am a worm and no man, the reproach of men and the outcast of the people'". Images of scourging monks of old, whipping themselves with reeds or sleeping on beds of nails does not endear the modern sceptic to the faith of their forebears.

Times have changed. And ours is a particularly telling one in terms of its rejection of quaint old-world values. Who can we look to in the modern age that might rescue the notion of humility from the dustbins of anachronistic old-world charm?

Mother Teresa, now St Teresa of Calcutta, popped onto my screen one afternoon as I was searching on this topic. She offered a list of fifteen tips for how to stay humble:

- 
1. Speak as little as possible about yourself.
 2. Keep busy with your own affairs and not those of others.
 3. Avoid curiosity.
 4. Do not interfere in the affairs of others.
 5. Accept small irritations with good humor.
 6. Do not dwell on the faults of others.
 7. Accept censures even if unmerited.
 8. Give in to the will of others.
 9. Accept insults and injuries.
 10. Accept contempt, being forgotten and disregarded.
 11. Be courteous and delicate even when provoked by someone.
 12. Do not seek to be admired and loved.
 13. Do not protect yourself behind your own dignity.
 14. Give in, in discussions, even when you are right.
 15. Choose always the more difficult task.

Cultivate Humility

St Teresa of Calcutta

Admittedly, some of these may still push buttons of liberated women and progressive thinkers. But they do seem more palatable than the advice of ancient saints, worthy as those are.

When I think of the most common problems I and my peers have in relationships—work, love, family, community—it seems most of Mother Teresa’s missives would hold value in helping us steer clear of conflict and hurting others—or merely getting bored or irritated with each other. If these are practiced from a place of “neutrality”, which Mother Teresa so often championed, we avoid any tendency to render ourselves small or feeling humiliated. On the contrary, practiced well (when we can) these attributes elicit another quality that’s lost favour with postmodern humans: personal nobility. A sense of deep self-respect arising from the respect shown to others. “If you are humble, nothing will

touch you”, Mother Teresa says, “neither praise nor disgrace, because you know what you are”.

You know what you are. Not the “You” of your job title, credentials or social standing, or images of perfect people imposed upon us by an aggressive advertising and personal growth industry—a self-identity which we too often and too easily accept as who we are, that is, less than perfect and in need of some serious help.

I think what Mother Teresa meant by “know who you are” goes much deeper. It’s a felt sense of being real, who you really are deep down in the core of our being. Not perfect; just real. Personal authority naturally arising from personal authenticity.

“Neither praise nor blame moves the wise man”, said the Buddha. I don’t know if

Mother Teresa ever encountered the Buddhist teachings, though living in India perhaps she did. But it’s remarkable that their messages share such common wisdom. Don’t sweat the small stuff, we might say in modern life, particularly all the barbs and arrows coming at us from other people who suffer as much as we do from deficiencies in self-respect and core-identity.

It’s hard to be human. But it’s not really that hard to be humble. And somehow, surprisingly, when we get it right—when we let go of the fight to be someone we think we should be but never quite measure up to—when we just let be, let go, and let God (or whatever inner divinity makes sense to your modern ears) run the show—it makes being human a whole lot easier. It also makes being humble a whole lot more sensible.

THE GREAT ADVENTURE

excerpt from Letters of the
Scattered Brotherhood, ca. 1940

A little known spiritual gem from the 1940s offers an opportunity to look beneath the cultural overlay on the Christian teachings, in this case the language and religious sensibilities of the early 20th century. This excerpt from Letters of the Scattered Brotherhood, an anthology of writings from anonymous sources published in the Anglican Churchman from the late 1930s to the mid-1940s, shows a depth of insight into Christian practice that even today seems “outside the box” of conventional thinking. The language is both polished and highly sensitive to the nuances of the more spiritual side of Christian faith. Let’s listen...

The outer you, in its foolishness and rebellion and suffering, bends to the arrows that fly, to the perils and the dangers. But when it surrenders to the inner you whose instinct is for divine reality you are instantly released from the law of sin and death. Therefore when you have to meet the challenge of the world, come—humble, sore, bewildered—and lay thyself aside, this outer self of instant fears, sadness and temptation, and step into thy inner self who welcomes you and leads you to the high altar where all things are renewed, transcended. Here you are released. Have no fear, it is a sacrament indeed.

You have undertaken the great adventure of becoming holy children, sons of God, and you have to go through a sort of untangling to reach this place of communion and awareness. Be assured that your sole duty is to go within and dissolve by releasing the outer entanglements, to surrender appetites and forebodings. As I have to remind you again the question of appetites is different for each one, both physical and mental; nor must there be resentment and the old sense of duty in the surrender; it is rather permitting a joyful conviction to grow that there is something infinitely more satisfying. Of course there will be conflicts! Who is not familiar with the reasonable—oh very reasonable!—arguments that come rushing to justify the very human desires of mind and body? They must be met with as much gentleness toward yourself as you would meet them when trying to help another, otherwise your instant rebellion will obstruct and delay you. But in the true spirit of surrender, the giving up of everything that has become a burden, is little effort and the reward is instant; all things in this state work for thy good. And not the old idea of good which was a scourge; but the “goodness which is a rapture”.

“In the true spirit of surrender, the giving up of everything that has become a burden, is little effort and the reward is instant; all things in this state work for thy good. And not the old idea of good which was a scourge; but the ‘goodness which is a rapture’.”

Let thy troubled hearts be at peace in this serene and healing place, for here the Lord Christ will refresh you, here he will lift the heavy burden from your minds and in thy hearts he will breathe renewed joy and quietude. Have faith in practice.

What does this mean to you? What does it mean to “surrender to the inner you” and how can that “release one from the law of sin and death”?

The journey to the high altar of the “inner self” is portrayed as a “great adventure”, a sacrament even, where “communion” and “awareness” work to release us from the tangles of this world, the desires and fears of mind and body. A perilous journey it seems as our minds go into rebellion against entering this sacred place, where joy and goodness prevail over our habitual tendencies to argue and assert false ideas.

The writer affirms the benefits of making this “adventure” a daily practice. It doesn’t require rigid discipline, self-criticism or relentless pleading for forgiveness from a distant God. The way is to be met with gentleness and a sincere willingness to surrender our preferences and wish to stay in control. By practicing letting go and tenderly tending to our troubled hearts, we are brought back to our original nature, as God intended: peace, joy and wakefulness.

St Benedict

The twelve steps to Humility:

1. A man keeps the fear of God always before his eyes and never forgets it.
2. A man loves not his own will nor takes pleasure in the satisfaction of his desires; rather he shall imitate by his actions that saying of the Lord: I have come not to my own will, but the will of him who sent me (John 6:38).
3. A man submits to his superior in all obedience for the love of God.
4. Under difficult, unfavorable, or even unjust conditions, his heart quietly embraces suffering and endures it without weakening or seeking escape.
5. A man does not conceal from his abbot any sinful thoughts entering his heart or any wrongs committed in secret but rather confesses them humbly.
6. A monk is content with the lowest and most menial treatment and regard himself as a poor and worthless workman in whatever task he is given.
7. A man not only admits with his tongue but is also convinced in his heart that he is inferior to all and of less value.
8. A monk does only what is endorsed by the common rule of the monastery and the example set by his superiors.
9. A monk controls his tongue and remains silent, not speaking unless asked a question.
10. A monk is not given to ready laughter.
11. A monk speaks gently and without laughter, seriously and with becoming modesty, briefly and reasonably, but without raising his voice.
12. A monk always manifests humility in his bearing no less than in his heart.

writings from St Benedict
and the Buddha

Ecumenical Teachings

THE PATH OF HUMILITY

The Buddha

This is to be done by one skilled in aims who wants to break through to the state of peace: Be capable, upright and straightforward, easy to instruct, gentle and not conceited, content and easy to support, with few duties, living lightly, with peaceful faculties, masterful, modest and not greedy for supporters. Do not do the slightest thing that the wise would later censure.

Sutta Nipāta 1.143, 1.144, 1.145

FINDING THE ELIXIR

A Lesson in Humility

Virginia Jealous, Obl.OSB

Working in the guesthouse kitchen feels something like being a blank slate. It's as if my own back-story has 'been disappeared' to some extent by this very specific task and place. For the guests to whom we offer hospitality I'm 'Virginia who works in the kitchen' – no more, no less – and I'm grateful for the freedom this gives me.

And yet and yet...I notice how, as I write this and when I speak with guests, I want to add adjectives that reference my other/inner/more complete self. It can be a struggle to avoid the (prideful? insecure?) urge that wants to explain more of what and who I am. I think of this as the 'not only but also' syndrome: 'Yes, I'm the kitchen worker! But I'm also committed to being Benedictine, to recognising and drawing on the extraordinary life experiences that by the grace of God have brought me here! Lucky me!' That would feel a lot like boasting during what's often simply a short exchange of pleasantries – and there's little time for the one-to-one conversations that often range wider and deeper.

By coincidence I'm writing this during the week or so of daily readings from chapter seven of the Rule. It's the chapter on humility which

is, for me, a tricky series of...well, what exactly? Statements? Directions? Definitions? Perhaps any and all of these, depending on my frame of mind at the time. Benedict's comments embed the spiritual in the secular in a way I find both helpful and extremely challenging. It's one thing, in the first of his eleven steps to humility, to be asked to 'cherish the sense of the awe of God at all times'; it's quite another to accept the suggestion that I am 'inferior to all and of less value'.

So I go back to the word itself. Humility. It suffers, perhaps, from being too closely associated with 'humiliation'. I remember that humility is to do with my inner life; humiliation with what comes in from the outer. I take comfort from its Latin root word *humus*, meaning *earth*. This helps me be grounded, literally – to try to embed and live into the truth that we are all of the same human rootstock, that we are all equal under God's heaven and on God's earth. And, although a contemporary version might alter a few words, George Herbert's poem cheers me on in the kitchen:

*“Teach me my God and King,
In all things Thee to see,
And what I do in anything
To do it as for Thee...
A servant with this clause
Makes drudgery divine:
Who sweeps a room as for Thy
laws,
Makes that and th’ action fine.”*

From 'The Elixir', by George Herbert



HUMILITY

A LIFE REFLECTION

The Rule of Benedict leaves me even more aware of my considerable shortcomings in my often feeble attempts at putting on this unfamiliar and ill fitting coat of humility.

Jim Longbottom, B.Theol

The invitation to write a life reflection for the first edition of Pax was unexpected, and the theme was daunting.

It seems to me that humility has been a scarce commodity in nearly my whole of life journey (I am 74) where, from the age of 17 for nearly forty years, I carefully learned, crafted, and wore various personas. These personas related to being in senior management in BHP and RTZ, then a theological student at age 40, a parish minister in an evangelical tradition, and lastly a CEO in a para church ministry.

Over twenty-five years ago I encountered the writings of Richard Rohr, Franciscan monk and co-author of [The Wild Man's Journey: Reflections on Male Spirituality](#). This book has been released under different titles, but the original book contained a line drawing of an “ideal” male spirituality life journey, with brief summaries of each “stage”. I have used that summary over and over again to help me, and help others, to signpost what is always a unique spiritual journey.

I didn't encounter Rohr and Martos' book as a manual to follow, so much as a surprisingly accurate and helpful description of my life journey.

They described (and drew) the early stages of male development as growing, increasing, conquering the world; then ideally (but some never do) levelling out and taking stock of what matters in life; then a process of slowing, settling, accepting the unknowns of life, diminishing: In the best sense of the word—casting off what no longer works. Similar to the levelling-off phase, one doesn't have to take the journey of diminishment, but can become increasingly bitter and feel that life, and the world (and maybe even God) “owe me”.

For me, I flip-flop between bitter old man and gentle wise old grandfather. It requires discipline and self-talk to stay on the diminishment path, particularly if still involved in working life and married life. I could, naively, believe that this process would be easier in monastic life, without those distractions, but I know that is not true, and that if anything the monks can be all the more laid bare before God, more deserted, more bereft.

Chapter 7 of the Rule of Benedict leaves me even more aware of my considerable shortcomings in my often feeble attempts at putting on this unfamiliar and ill fitting coat of humility (c.f. diminishment). I am by nature an apophatic, so my picture of Benedict's ladder of humility is not one of getting on the first rung and climbing up, but, rather, getting on the first rung and climbing down. A process of reduction, of diminishment, releasing the encrustations of life that are “collected” (perhaps like a virtual security blanket), but that no longer serve any useful purpose on any particular stage of the journey.

When I was younger, I was far more arrogant. I knew things that I now realise I never knew at all. I knew how to read and interpret



St Benedictin of
Nursia, New Norcia
monastery interior
courtyard.

Photo: Jim Longbottom



scripture, I knew how to pray, I knew how to be reflective. Thankfully along my journey:

- I experienced scripture as reading and interpreting me;
- I discovered apophatic mysticism. Encountering God in growing darkness rather than growing light... my apophatic guide has been Elijah in 1 Kings 19. (and it's good to remind myself of that) That was an epiphany for me, validating my innate way of engaging with God, that for so long seemed to be opposite to how most people engaged, and therefore in my mind – wrong!
- I allowed people to pray for me, with me, in meaningful ways;
- I made genuine effort at being an answer to prayer, instead of a simple sender of shopping lists;

- I was attracted to silence (sometimes, usually when I visited New Norcia), resulting in encounters with Pax (with God?);
- On occasion when I desperately wanted to let go of God, there was a knowing that the almighty simply wouldn't let go of me;
- I had wonderful, female spiritual directors who “blocked” my attempted spiritual escapes;
- I had an awareness, patience, and willingness to admit to my growing sense of unknowing.

I recall a sermon illustration related to the first circus aerialist to achieve a mid air triple somersault. If she held on to the swing she just went backwards and forwards, backwards and forwards. To throw the somersault, she had to let go of the swing.



“My current spiritual pathway involves lots of letting go. Lots of saying ‘I don’t know’ (anymore)”.

My current spiritual pathway involves lots of letting go. Lots of saying “I don’t know” (anymore).

More doubts than assurances. (Still) no guaranteed safe landing place. Making peace with the unknowing.

This, it seems to me, is a journey of reducing ego, arrogance, and the increase of humility.

My younger evangelical, fervent and well meaning friends will try and “buck me up”, give me platitudinous phrases or even scripture quotes to feed and sustain me.

They mean well. They don’t understand (yet).... But they will! This is an old man’s pathway.

My hope is they will discover the threads of it sooner than did I.





A Newly Translated Collection
of Marian Miracles

IMPERATRIX AETERNA

*Magical Stories of the
Queen of Heaven*

Fr Robert Nixon, OSB

One of the most remarkable and fascinating genres of literature which was popular in the Middle Ages were collections of miracles stories. Innumerable compilations of such stories, which are often strange and fantastical, were in circulation. Some sets pertain to particular saints (such as St Benedict), while others relate to some particular sacred location or period of time. Typically, they present a plethora of marvelous and astonishing anecdotes, derived from written chronicles, oral traditions, and the evidence of first-hand witnesses. Among these collections of miracle stories, many of the most beautiful are those concerning the Blessed Virgin Mary, who was central to the devotional and imaginative life of most people during the Middle Ages.

Despite the intrinsic interest and charm of these miracle stories, very few have yet been translated into English. The reasons for this lacuna in the literature are perhaps not hard to perceive, once some of the tales have been read. In most cases, they are not overtly concerned with presenting theological or doctrinal instruction, or even moral edification. Rather, their purpose was simply to record striking and memorable traditions and narratives as they existed and had been passed on. In an era when works of fiction were extremely rare, these compilations served to provide entertainment, as well as inspiration. Sometimes, the events which they relate may seem theologically or ethically problematic to modern readers, while others are surprising simply because of the curious and strange events which they relate.

As an enthusiast and scholar of the more obscure aspects of Medieval monastic literature lore, I have recently produced a translation of such works which I am very happy to be able to share with contemporary readers. It is published under the title of *Imperatrix Aeterna: Magical Stories of the Queen of Heaven*, by Hadean Press, a well-respected English academic publisher which specialises in folklore, mythology and spiritual traditions. The volume includes translations of two important collections of Marian miracles—the first (dating from the 13th century) is by Pope St Celestine IV, and the second (dating about 400 years later) is by Ippolito Marracci. In the present edition of Pax, three stories from Celestine’s collection will be included, while in the next edition, some of the more ornately Baroque stories of Marracci will be offered.

The astonishing character of the life of St Celestine, or Pietro da Morrone, (1215-1296) is widely recognized. He was firmly dedicated to the contemplative solitude of the eremitic life, yet evidently possessed both great sanctity and compelling personal charisma. He founded the Celestine Congregation of the Order of St Benedict, and was popularly revered amongst the common people of Italy as a potent thaumaturge and sage. At the age of almost eighty he was elected pope under bizarre and bewildering circumstances, and then ‘retired’, or was (more likely) forcibly deposed just five months later. The remainder of his life, which was only about a year, was spent in a form of ‘ecclesiastical custody’.

Central to the simple and emphatically incarnational spirituality typical of Celestine was an ardent devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary. It is therefore not surprising that one of the most significant literary productions of the saint was his collection of miracle stories of the Blessed Virgin. This set of aphoristic tales, entitled *De Miraculis Beatae Virginis Mariae*, was included in the compilation of the Celestine’s opuscula, edited by Celestino Telera and published in Naples in 1640. Some of these

“The Mother of God appears as a figure of an idealised femininity, of a more-than-perfect woman of astonishing beauty and bewitching graciousness, who inspires not only devotion and piety, but passionate and irresistible infatuation”.

are variants of stories found in other collections (notably the 6th-century *Liber Miraculorum* of St Gregory of Tours and the 12th-century *Liber de Miraculis S. Mariae* of Botho of Prum), but others seem to be entirely original. It is pertinent to acknowledge that many of Celestine’s miracle stories present a Mariology with which most modern Christians will be slightly uncomfortable. In his writing, the Mother of God appears as a figure of an idealized femininity, of a more-than-perfect woman of astonishing beauty and bewitching graciousness, who inspires not only devotion and piety, but passionate and irresistible infatuation. She is capable of being jealous of human rivals, and even of using her maternal authority to sway the judgement of her divine Son.

In the majority of cases, the narrations provide a bare minimum (if any) context as to details of place or time, yet they are always infused with vivid color, dream-like vibrancy and crystalline succinctness. There is a poignant romantic beauty in many of the tales, which perhaps points to a mystical and human truth which is deeper and more eternal than any rational questions of theology or doctrine.

The glorious Mother of Christ suddenly appeared to him, bathed in ineffable splendor and surrounded with all the glowing radiance of Divine beauty.

STORY #1

The Blessed Virgin transfers one of her devotees to a remote region to do penance

There was once a very rich young man who had pledged his devotion to Holy Mary, and every day prayed her Office with the greatest of ardor and sincerity. However, eventually the day came for him to be married, and on that day he forgot to say his customary prayers to the glorious Mother of God.

But as he sat at the table after the wedding with his new bride and his friends and relatives, he had barely raised his hand to his mouth three times when he recalled the prayers he had neglected to say that day. Immediately he arose from the table and hastily asked the guests to excuse him for a while, and then rushed to a nearby church dedicated to the Blessed Virgin. There he said his customary prayers and devotions, and then was about to leave, to return to his wedding feast.

But the Queen of Heaven appeared before him, with downcast, melancholy eyes, as if shaded over with some heartbreaking sorrow and disappointment. The youth, struck with a feeling of guilt at his betrayal of his true Love, extended his hands and, with tears, begged for mercy from his Mistress. However, blessed Mary, her voice filled with gentle reproach, said: 'Depart from me, you wretched man, and go and enjoy the embraces of your new spouse, whom you have married in such cruel contempt of me!'

At these reproachful words he was overcome with regret and overwhelmed by the passion of his first love for Mary. 'Far be it from me', he said, 'that I should do anything contrary to your will! I am willing to sacrifice not only my wife but my very self, for the sake of your Heavenly sweetness and your perfect and incomparable beauty. Just command me and I shall do whatever you say. Just instruct me and I shall obey!' And she replied to him softly, 'Follow me...'

And immediately, he was taken to a distant, unknown region, where he lived out the rest of his days in abstinence and prayer—an example to all of the most perfect chastity, silence and solitude.

I am willing to sacrifice not only my wife but my very self, for the sake of your Heavenly sweetness and your perfect and incomparable beauty.

STORY #2

There was once a young soldier who ardently desired to take a certain attractive girl as his wife. She, however, could by no means be induced to consent to his proposals. So the soldier went to consult the local abbot, a wise and holy man. The soldier earnestly besought that the abbot should use his influence and persuasion to encourage the girl to accept his suit, which was entirely honorable, worthy and respectable.

The abbot advised the young soldier; "My son, for the space of one year try to maintain your fleshly chastity. And each day, recite the 'Hail Mary' one hundred times, while exerting yourself in any other good works that you can. I promise that it shall bring about a good result for you!" This the soldier did with devotion and fidelity, and the time of a year quickly passed.

On the final day of that year, he knelt before the statue of Our Lady and saluted her with his customary 'Hail Mary'. But now he experienced a devotion that was strangely more profound and a desire that was more ardent than any he had ever felt before.

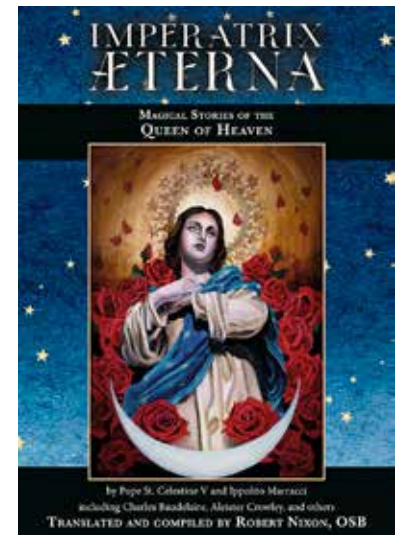
Then the glorious Mother of Christ suddenly appeared to him, bathed in ineffable splendor and surrounded with all the glowing radiance of Divine beauty. The soldier vaguely recalled the girl he had loved, but she now seemed as nothing to him...

The Blessed Virgin spoke to him thus, "O my friend, why do you look upon me thus, with those eyes of such longing? Do you not still desire the girl you loved?" Filled with awe, the soldier answered, "My most blessed Mistress, maiden beautiful above all others! I confess that in the past I loved foolishly. But no longer! Just permit me, I beg you, to gaze on the radiance of your face for all my days!"

A soldier, ardently desiring to take a certain girl as his wife, is diverted from this purpose by a vision of the Blessed Virgin

Then holy Mary gently laughed at him. "My friend," she said, "you have spent the past year in prayer and good works for the sake of a desire that was merely earthly and carnal. If you now spend the next year in the same way for the sake of my Heavenly graces, I promise you that you shall be then united forever to my perfect beauty, and be dissolved in the endless bliss of the most perfect love—the love which is immortality!"

And thus the next year passed, with the soldier continuing his devotions, prayers and pious works with fidelity. As the last day of that year dawned, the soldier began suddenly to weaken in body and to lose vitality. Again, the Blessed Virgin appeared to him, even more glorious and beautiful than before. Gazing upon her, he said, "That which I have yearned for, I now behold! That which I have hoped for, I now possess." And saying this, he breathed his last....



These sample stories are included with the kind permission of the publisher. For those who wish to read further, *Imperatrix Aeterna: Magical Stories of the Queen of Heaven* is available through the New Norcia giftshop and webshop, and also through the usual online sources.

*Blessed Mary, by
interceding with her
infant Son, saves the soul
of a certain impoverished
nobleman*

STORY #3

There was once a very illustrious nobleman who, due to ill fortune and unfavorable circumstances, was reduced to the most extreme depths of poverty. In desperation, he came at last to complain against God, and to blaspheme against His Providence. Now his servant (who was thoroughly wicked) said to him, 'If you follow my advice, you will soon be rich again'!

His master agreed to do so, and the servant summoned the devil himself. The devil said to the nobleman, 'Deny Christ!' This, alas, the nobleman did without any hesitation or compunction. Then the devil said, 'Deny the Mother of Christ!' At this point, the nobleman—despite his desperation and abandonment of the Faith—refused to do so under any circumstances. Upon hearing this unshakable refusal, the frustrated devil vanished contemptuously.

The nobleman, conscious of his great sin and blasphemy, rushed into the nearest church to beg for mercy. There, he saw a statue of the Virgin Mary holding in her arms her Son, Jesus Christ.

To his amazement, the images of both Christ and his Mother seemed to him to become animate. Mary said to her Child, 'Son, please forgive this wretch for denying you. For, though he denied you, he refused to deny me'!

But the Divine Infant replied, I am willing to sacrifice not only my wife but my very self, for the sake of your Heavenly sweetness and your perfect and incomparable beauty. Mary then took the baby Jesus, and placed him upon the altar. 'Son', she said sternly, 'unless you forgive him at once, I shall not take you back into my embrace!' The Savior replied, 'My blessed Mother, be it done unto him according to thy word! He is forgiven everything!' And immediately, with the greatest love and tenderness, the Queen of Heaven took the Infant God into her arms once more.

The impoverished noblemen, upon seeing this, was overcome by immense gratitude and overwhelming love towards both Mary and her immortal Son. That very night he departed from his home, and spent the rest of his life as a monk of the Cistercian order.

I am willing to sacrifice not
only my wife but my very self,
for the sake of your Heavenly
sweetness and your perfect and
incomparable beauty.





If you plan to build a tall house of virtues, you must first lay deep foundations of humlilty.

- Augustine

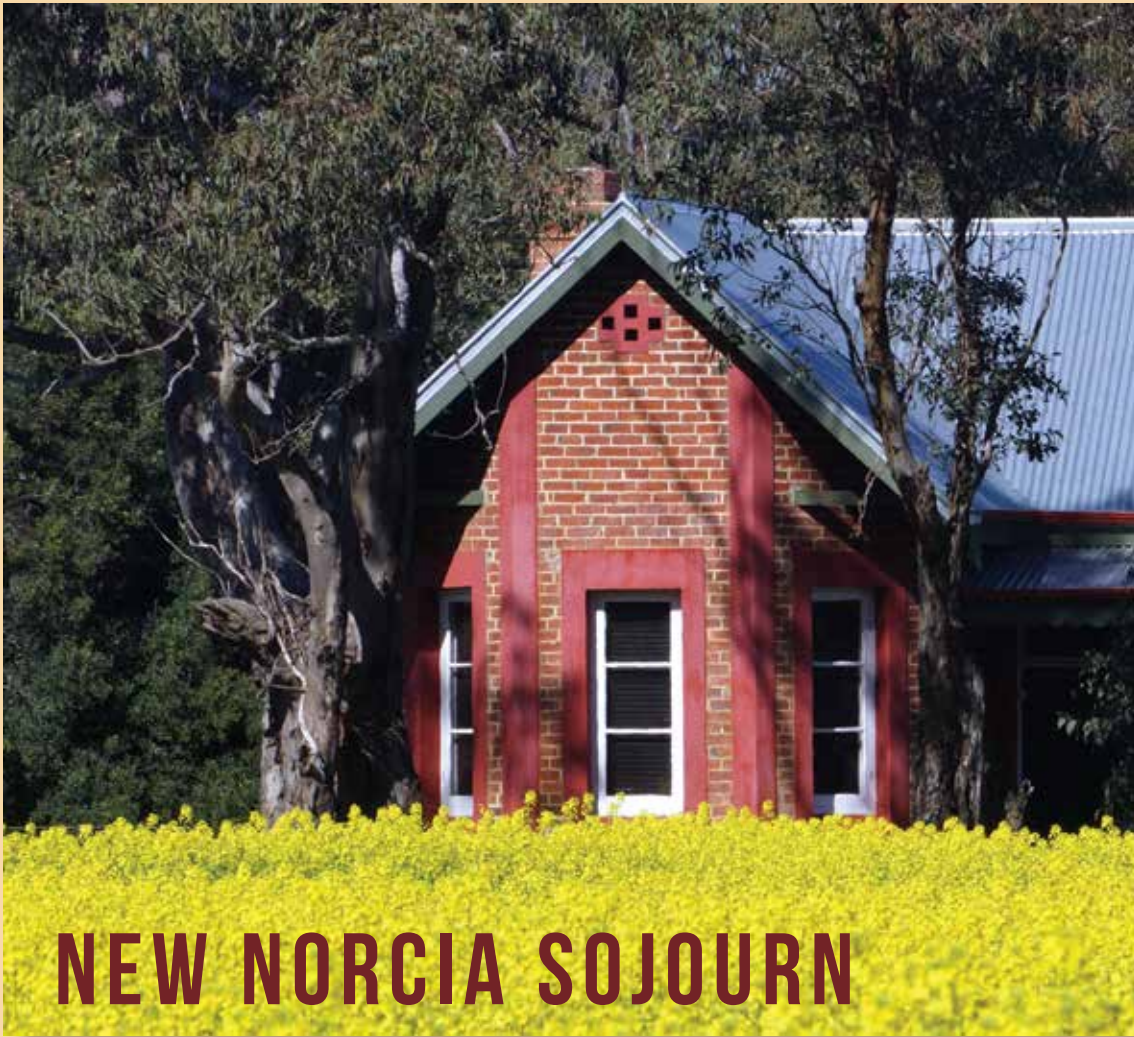
The Abbey Church, New Norcia.
Built ??, renovated in 2009.



"Humility and patience are the surest proofs of the increase of love."

- John Wesley

The Old Blacksmiths Shop, New
Norcia. Renovated in 2009.



NEW NORCIA SOJOURN

Silent acres minutes held
on my breath, father's blanket
spread. I lean elbows, breathe
golden heads, follow footprints—
the Abbey walk, hear Dom Paulino's
footsteps in soft grass; here he is
baking bread, tending olives, cold press.

Leaves turn silver-grey in yellow light
long before trucks storm the highway.

Now the highway swings north
Dom Paulino passed on
peace rolls winter into mist.

I take the Moore River walk
pass the old piggery, the corn—
reflect on time re-imagined—
paperbarks generous in their unfolding.

Solitude knows father's love of this place
the olives, the old vines, corn heads sheath the
wind
paddocks spread flour like blanket another slice—
nut cake sweet as serenity.

I try to leave take you with me
but no matter how hard, the wind draws me back
reminds me only time knows
the hallow of this place.

The only hardship of
coming here is leaving.

—
Pico Iyer

PRIVILEGE OF POVERTY

St Clare (1194–1253) Foundress of the Poor Clares

Born of a wealthy family in 13th century Assisi, Clare was an early follower of the famous mendicant monk, Francis. But while he gave her the initial vision, her ultimate goal was to be a reflection of Christ, to define a life apart from the options offered by her society.

This required a fair amount of pluck. Medieval Europe did not abide by women with independent ambitions, let alone those that involved abandoning the confines of a respectable family to assume the poverty of a beggar.

But this was exactly Clare's vision. Her famous rendezvous with Francis in the dark fields outside the gates of Assisi might elicit fantasies of romance, but Clare's only amour was Christ. She took Jesus' directive to 'sell what you possess and give to the poor' quite literally, even to the point of cutting off her long hair and abandoning a long trail of suitors.

With Francis' help, Clare founded a women's community at San Damiano, which included a number of her relatives, including her sister and widowed mother. The 'Poor Ladies' as they were originally known practiced 'literal poverty and insecurity', refusing gifts and endowments as many other convents accepted. She even refused absolution from her vow of poverty from the pope with her terse comment, 'Absolve me from my sins, Holy Father, but not from my wish to follow Christ'.



Her fierce resolution to defend her rule of the 'privilege of poverty' required continuous struggle against solicitous prelates ever intent on mitigating her austerity. Her example inspired women across the continent. In her lifetime, additional communities of Poor Ladies were established in Italy, France and Germany. Her determination won out. Two days before her death, she received a copy of her rule, embellished with the approving seal of Pope Innocent IV.

“Absolve me from my sins, Holy Father, but not from my wish to follow Christ”

1. Humility: The Quiet Virtue by Everett L Worthington
2. Chasing Humility: 8 Ways to Shape a Christian Heart by Joel Stepanek
3. Silent Compassion: Finding God in Contemplation by Richard Rohr
4. The Virtues: Humility by Jennifer Cole Wright (Editor)
5. The Road to Character by David Brooks
6. Humilitas: A Lost Key to Life, Love, and Leadership by John Dickson

“Humility is the awareness that there’s a lot you don’t know and that a lot of what you think you know is distorted or wrong.”

– David Brooks, [The Road to Character](#)

FROM THE LIBRARY

Good Books on Humility



Despite what may not be the most popular topic in our modern world, there are many books on the topic of humility. We’ve included a few favourites:

Humility: The Quiet Virtue draws on notable examples of humility in our age, including Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr and Mother Teresa to demonstrate how this unassuming virtue can shape a life. Chasing Humility: 8 Ways to Shape a Christian Heart puts this in the context of our Christian vocation, using an ancient Litany of Humility prayer that proved transformative for the author.

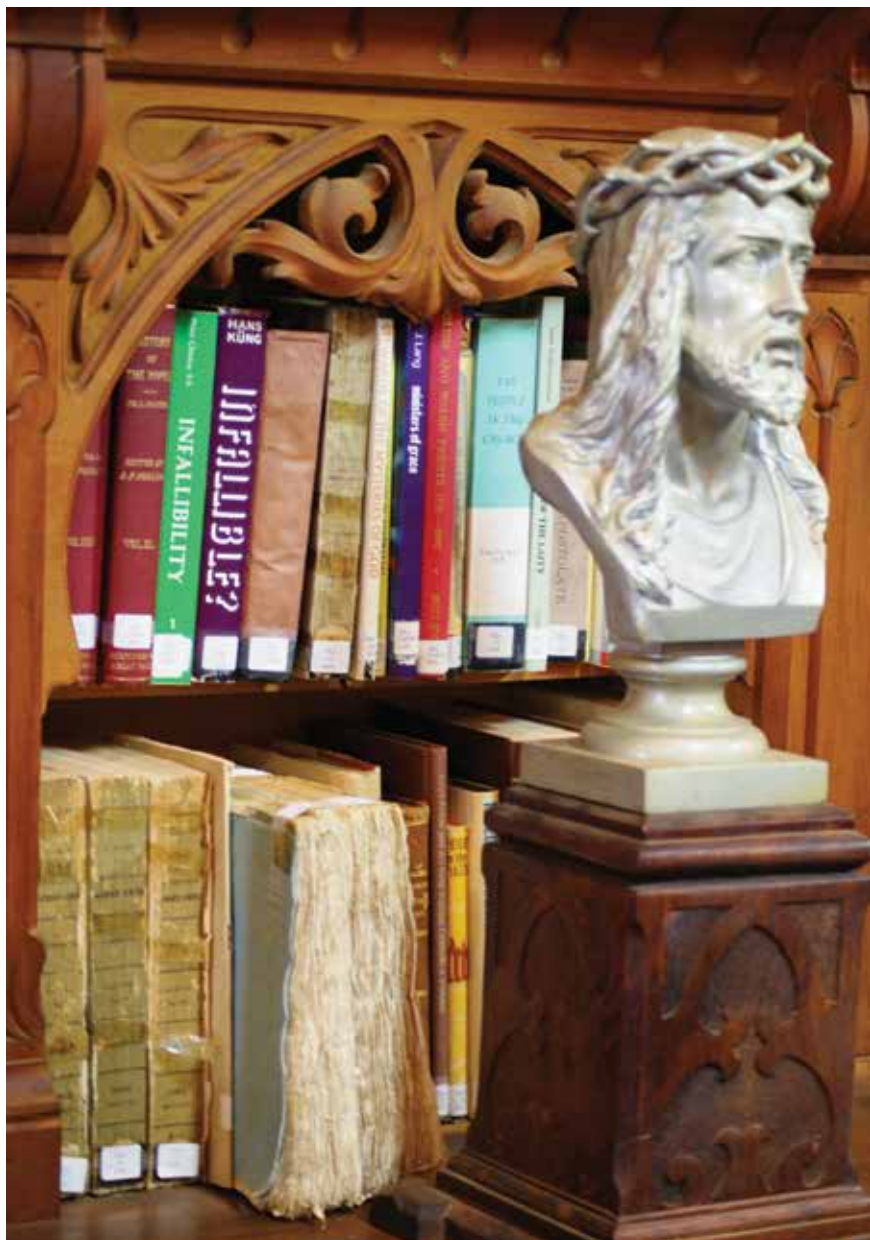
Renowned Franciscan monk Richard Rohr offers guidance in Silent Compassion: Finding God in Contemplation on how contemplative silence can draw us into an inner world of

simplicity and grace, hallmarks of humility. Jennifer Cole Wright’s multidisciplinary anthology of essays draws on Christianity, Judaism and Islam, as well as secular institutions to suggest how the humble virtue of humility has the power to heal and transform ourselves and our world into a more peaceful and cooperative place.

New York Times journalist David Brooks delivers his most personal and philosophical treatise in The Road to Character, exploring the value of the inner life, and particularly our weaknesses to, paradoxically, cultivate greater personal authority, manifested through kindness, bravery, honesty and faith. John Dickson takes up this theme in Humilitas, suggesting that authentic humility makes for great leaders, who work in service to others.

THE REF REVIEW

*What are the monks
reading?*



"No man can be called friendless who has
God and the companionship of good books."

~ Elizabeth Barrett Browning

THE MONASTERY CHRONICLE

Excerpts from Lent 1907

February

13 Wednesday: Ash Wednesday. Fr Altimira blessed and distributed the ashes in the church. Then he sang the Mass without assistants. At night a general absolution according to the concession given by Leo XIII (because Fr Prior could not give it, he had passed on the responsibility to Fr Altimira) and, following that, the act of penance.

14 Thursday: Yesterday the gate was finished which gives entry to the new path that starts from the highway and, passing by the monastery, finishes at the river bank.

15 Friday: At night the act of penance.

16 Saturday: At night the Chapter and the distribution of the books which are to be read during this holy season of Lent according to a very ancient customs of the Order. An argument between a priest and Br Melito [Basterrechea].

17 Sunday: First of Lent. There was no sermon during the Conventual [Mass] because Fr Carroll who was supposed to give it had to leave to attend to a sick lady. She is the mother of the woman they buried the day before yesterday, who died a victim of breast cancer. Mass was sung for the deceased with the body present.

18 Monday: The stonemasons have begun laying the foundations for the new bell tower.

19 Tuesday: The well known Emily Williams, who gave the Superiors a lot of trouble, left the mission with her husband. They went as far as Mogumber in our trap, seeing she was pregnant. Not long ago the doctor in Moora charged her £14 sterling for the two visits he made to her when she was sick.

20 Wednesday: Br Mauro has set off on a horse for Wyening where he will begin the grape harvest. Fr O'Carroll from Berkshire Valley has come down to the mission; he is leaving for Perth for some days. The Superiors are not entirely satisfied with him. At the end of Compline the act of penance.

21 Thursday: It has been two days since the horizon became overcast with smoke, to the extent that the sun was almost unable to send its rays to us. Its light is reddish, and it seems that the air is not moving, except spasmodically, and then it is very hot. It feels like we are stuck in an oven. The maximum reading on the thermometer was 106 [Fahrenheit].

22 Friday: The manager (Chitty) of Wyening has brought a cartload of grapes. They arrive in a zinc chest, large, purpose-built, which takes up the entire cart. Penance rite at night. Mr Lang and another person came to buy some oxen and the latter some sheep skins. We have had dealings with both of them.

23 Saturday: At night the Chapter of Faults.

24 Sunday: Second of Lent. Everything is as per normal for feast days in Lent.

25 Monday: [Feast of] St Matthias Apostle. Fr Procurator and Br Ramiro have gone to Berkshire Valley and Marah for the sale of cows to Mr Lang.

26 Tuesday: We began the grape harvest in the mission. From Wyening another cartload of grapes arrived. Fr Abbot telegraphed from Naples 'Well' which means a good trip and no health news. A storm at 6.30 pm and rain at 7.00.

Excerpts taken
from:
The Chronicles of
New Norcia, Volume
2: 1907-1910, Abbey
Press, New Norcia,
2022. Available at
the Museum and Art
Gallery Gift Shop

27 Wednesday: Fr Meagher is not well and it seems that Fr Hoyne is somewhat to blame for this sickness. At 2.30 pm a storm and a strong downpour.

28 Thursday: Fr Planas and Br Ramiro returned from Marah after having sold eighteen cows from that place and twenty pigs from Berkshire Valley. Fr Abbot cabled from Rome that 1,000 masses should be said for his intentions.

March

1 Friday: Sixty-first anniversary of the founding of this Mission of New Norcia; it was with this theme in mind that we sang the Conventual Mass in the church. It was without assistants. A day of discipline.

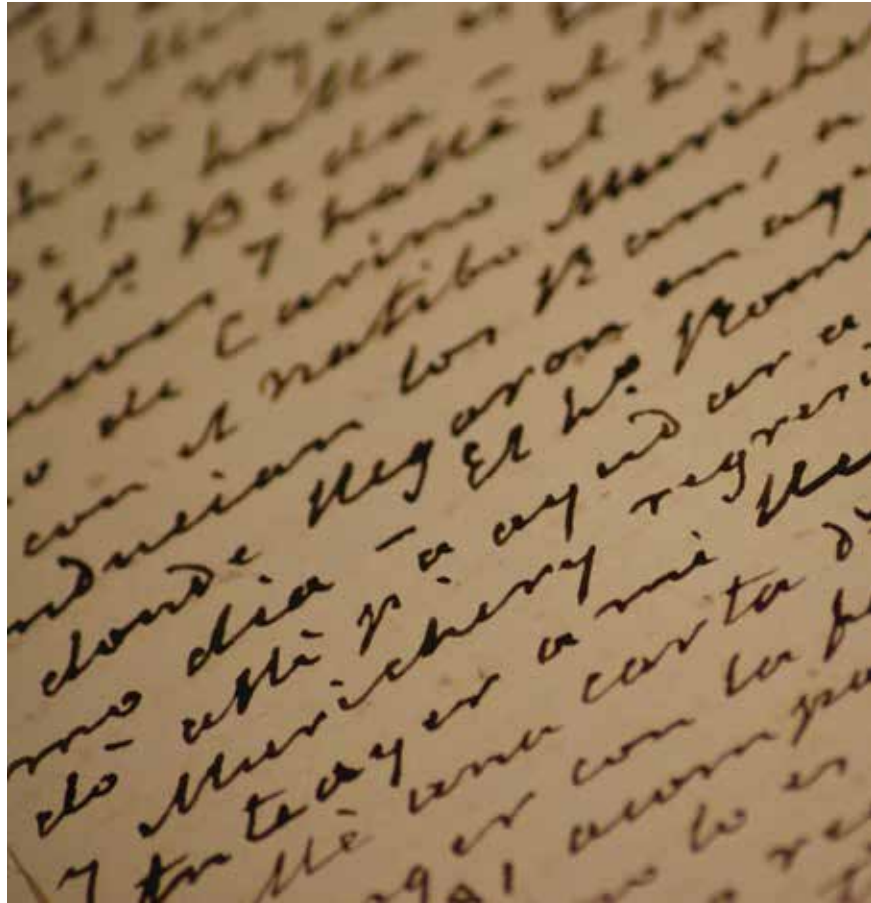
2 Saturday: In the afternoon Fr Russell, a priest of the diocese of Geraldton, arrived. He came at the command of his bishop to have eight days of spiritual exercises. He brought photos (four of them) of the Aborigines of Broome and Beagle Bay!!! Chapter of Faults.

3 Sunday: Third Sunday in Lent. Retreat for the Community. Fr Meagher continues in his illness and Fr Procurator has indicated that there is no more hope of a recovery unless he leaves the mission to recoup. The Community acts, both in the oratory and in the church, were the same as on other retreat days.

4 Monday: Today, after the gutters had been fixed and painted, scaffolding was removed from the back part of the monastery that opens out to the garden and the courtyards, revealing the monastery's paintings which, having been newly painted, however simply, give it a very nice appearance.

5 Tuesday: Another cartload of grapes arrived from Wyening. A Scotsman visited the mission who had lived in Spain for more than twenty years. He came to assess properties with a view to buying them. Fr Abbot wrote to Fr Planas, our Fr Procurator and the writer of these lines. He wrote from somewhere around Aden.

6 Wednesday: Rt Rev Fr Abbot sent a cablegram saying 'Certain' which means the buying of weakened cattle to agist them and then sell



them is in accordance with the canons [laws].

7 Thursday: A thunderstorm in the west. After a lot of thunder and lightning it rained a little bit. Fr Planas went to the Davidsons' homestead to see the result of lighting with acetylene, which they finished installing today. Lightning continued all night.

8 Friday: Fr Meagher, in person on his knees and by letter, has asked forgiveness and mercy so that he will not be dismissed from the mission. He received compassion and will submit himself to some public reparation. The Ministry for Agriculture has asked for fruit, grapes etc. so that some experiments in conservation might be made with freezing rooms, the government undertaking to defray the costs of transport. Today three cases were sent, two with varieties of apples and pomegranates, another one with grapes, containing three species of those.

9 Saturday: The day started off with the horizon covered in fog.

"It has been two days since the horizon became overcast with smoke, to the extent that the sun was almost unable to send its rays to us... It feels like we are stuck in an oven."

NEW NORCIA'S SACRED OIL

History of Olive Production at the Benedictine Community of New Norcia

New Norcia's reputation as a leader in Western Australian olive oil production spans a 150+ year history. Missionary and visionary Rosendo Salvado, who co-founded New Norcia in 1846, was keen to introduce agricultural skills to both the newly migrated Spanish monks and the local Aboriginal people. Though lacking formal training in farming, Salvado's dynamism propelled the nascent mission into establishing an agricultural industry that would last well beyond a century-and-a-half of growth and commercial production.

Domesticated olives reach deep into 8000 years of Asia Minor history, mingling with many of the early Hebrew stories that made their way into the Bible. Perhaps this explains a certain propensity to mythologising the quality and benefits of New Norcia oil. Legend has it that the peace and prayers that waft across the land from the nearby monastery oratory add a distinct texture and flavour to the oil, giving it its trademark excellence.

Olive groves were not an unfamiliar site to the Spanish monks, so it made sense to bring the industry to their new home in Western Australia. However, despite a commonly held belief, the Benedictines did not bring the first

olives into the state. (Captain James Mangles, retired naval officer, respected naturalist, and well-travelled in the Mediterranean region, is credited with introducing four types of olives from Lebrija, near Cadiz, Spain.) Still, it made sense for the Spanish monks to farm a familiar crop, and the New Norcia olive groves came into being.

The majority of New Norcia's trees were planted in the 1860s, primarily with WA Mission varieties, with possibly some from Captain Mangles' contributions. Additional trees were planted in the 1990s, bringing the total to over 500 trees planted in two groves and around the site today. Dom Paulino Gutierrez, the last Spanish monk before he died in 2010, was a driving force in running and caring for the olive grove and oil production through the 1990s, along with long-time resident Lester Jacobs.



*“Legend has it that
the peace and prayers
that waft across the
land from the nearby
monastery oratory
add a distinct texture
and flavour to the oil,
giving it its trademark
excellence”.*



Historically, olives have been harvested by the monks, including Fr Garrido and Brothers Milito, Geraldo, Alberto, James Donna Maria, Alfonsus and Joseph. Other residents of New Norcia helped, including Aboriginal children and the boys and girls from St Joseph's and St Mary's Orphanages. Later, volunteer groups assisted with harvesting, including the Dianella Catenians, University of Washington history students, the Subiaco Historical Society, and from 2009 to 2019, the Old Boys of St Ildephonsus' College, led by Laurie Watson. Guests staying at the monastery guesthouse have also been known to make impromptu visits to the orchards during harvest time. Today, Mercy Care of Perth partners with New Norcia in employing refugees to help with harvesting.

From 1933, olive oil making took place onsite with the old stone olive press located in the olive shed to the north of the monastery compound. This involved feeding the cleaned olives into a circular cement vessel holding about 300 kg, an apparatus designed and built by Fr Urbano. Two motorised revolving, vertically placed circular wheels covered with a steel plate crushed the fruit, pit and seed in a process that took 30 minutes to an hour.

The crushed olives were then placed into sixteen sacks, each containing 20 kg of olive paste. A large wooden screw press applied pressure and the olive oil was collected in a tiled chamber and removed for flotation. After clarification, the oil was allowed to stand in the monastery cellar for several months and then passed through a filter before bottling.

In 2010 New Norcia retired its vintage press and outsourced the production of its olive oil to the York Olive Oil Company. Once pressed, the oil returns to its home in New Norcia and is stored in the monastery cellar in stainless steel cylinders to cure before being bottled and sold through the Museum Gift Shop.

Whether it's the 'peace and prayers' of the monks or the addition of industry-standard equipment, New Norcia's olive trees are making their mark on the Australian olive industry. In recent years, New Norcia Extra Virgin Olive Oil has achieved great results in regional and national awards:

- 2017 Australian Olive Association: 'Silver'
- 2018 Perth Royal Show: 'Gold', 'Best Oil in Show', 'Best WA Oil'
- 2019 Australian Olive Association: 'Silver'
- 2019 West Australian Olive Award: 'Gold', 'Best in Show', 'Best WA Oil'
- 2021 West Australian Olive Award: 'Gold'
- 2022 Australian Olive Association: 'Gold', 'Best WA Oil'
- 2022 West Australian Olive Awards: 'Premium Gold', 'Best in Show', 'Best WA Oil'

Bishop Salvado and the Benedictines would have been aware of the uses and benefits of olive oil, gleaned from both their heritage in Spain and the multiple references to the 'good fruit' and the 'oil of anointing' in the Bible. New Norcia has always had olive oil on the table at mealtimes to dip their signature bread in. Those privileged to partake of food with the monks in their refectory or guesthouse can participate in this age-old tradition today.

TIMELINE OF EARLY OLIVE PRODUCTION AT NEW NORCIA

5 July 1866: holes are being dug in the land for planting 400 cuttings of olive trees brought from the Swan River area (Fr Venancio Garrido's Diary)

14 July 1866: majority of cuttings have been planted (Fr Garrido's Diary)

25 January 1867: Fr Alfredo, responsible for watering the olive trees, notes that most of the olive trees have taken (Fr Garrido's Diary)

1873: olive trees 6-7 years old, starting to produce small quantities of olives

1880: olive trees 13-14 years old, producing substantial amounts of olives (3-5 tons)

25 June 1880: first olive oil made as a trial using an existing press; however, without the required equipment to break the pits, the result was not considered usable

30 October 1886: reference made to 1,629 grape vines in the olive grove (Salvado's Diary); although these vines are no longer there, the spacing between the rows of olive trees suggests that grape vines could have been accommodated easily

27 June 1890: olive oil was successfully produced from olives crushed with the stone mill (presumably the flour mill), laid on its side and driven by a horse (the traditional method for crushing olives in Spain, Italy and Greece at the time); 18 gallons of oil is produced from 19 bushels.

1895: '30 gallons of good oil produced and some bad oil to make soap' (Salvado's Diary)

1896: 40 gallons of good oil produced, 8 'second', and 6 'bad' for soap for a total of 54 gallons. 'The rain in March was very good for the growth of the olives and has contributed to the best oil compared to past years' (Salvado's Diary)

1897: Br Benito is recommended to continue to make olive oil because Br Augustine has a sore eye (31 July); Br Augustine's eye is still sore so Br Benito finishes making the olive oil (4 August) (Salvado's Diary)

1898: 'We picked olives to eat raw, make olive oil, and pickle' (Salvado's Diary).

1899: Three bottles of 1898 olive oil and two bottles of preserved olives are sent along with other monastery produce to the Coolgardie exhibition; olive trees are pruned (Salvado's Diary)

1890: Salvado travels to Europe and visits the Monastery of San Jose near Montserrat where, 'in the cellar I saw the system to crush the olives'; possible evidence that Salvado's intention was to improve the New Norcia olive groves and learn more about the technique of olive oil production.

1900: Salvado dies in Rome.





Mousseline de poisson

THE ABBOT'S TABLE

serves four



In a food processor, make a smooth paste with the fish, onion, egg white, and herbes de Provence. Using the pulse setting, add cream in stages, till blended through, but be careful not to overmix. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Cover with cling film and place in refrigerator to cool.

Finely chop mango, capsicum, onion and mint. Place in a bowl and mix with lime juice and cider vinegar. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Cover with cling film and allow to macerate.

In a medium saucepan, reduce white wine by half, then add stock and reduce by half again.

Add tomato sauce, cream and Pernod, turn heat to lowest setting and allow to simmer till required intensity and consistency.

Liberal brush small ramekins with the melted butter and fill to $\frac{3}{4}$ with chilled mousseline mixture.

Place the filled ramekins in a baking dish with water to $\frac{3}{4}$ depth, cover with foil, and bake in preheated 140-150 C oven for 15-20 minutes till just firm in the centre. N.B. Overcooking will turn this delicate silky dish into a rubbery eggy mess!

Peel the prawns, removing legs and vein, leaving head and tail – (the shells can go into the simmering broth for extra flavour). Place on flat grilling tray, drizzle with olive oil and lime syrup, and sprinkle with garlic granules and salt. Grill at high heat till crisp and just cooked (the flesh should be slightly opaque).

To plate: spread watercress across entree plates, making a space in the centre to allow the mousselines to sit flat. Place three teaspoons of salsa around the edge of the watercress. Run a small spatula (or knife) around the sides of the ramekins and carefully turn mousselines onto the plates – (the mousselines should wobble!). Spoon over the strained hot broth, place the prawn on top of the mousseline, and garnish with fresh sprigs of dill.

Mousseline:

125 g fresh (white fleshed) WA schnapper
1 small white onion
White of one large free-range egg
1 teaspoon herbes de Provence
250 ml fresh cream
Salt & pepper
10 g melted butter for moulds

Fish Broth:

1 cup dry white wine
1lt fish (or vegetable) stock
1 cup Italian tomato sauce
1 cup fresh double cream
Splash Pernod

Mango Salsa:

1 large ripe mango
1 yellow capsicum
 $\frac{1}{2}$ red onion
Small bunch of fresh mint
Juice of one lime
Splash of cider vinegar
Salt and Pepper

Garnish:

1 bunch watercress
4 Tiger Prawns
Kaffir lime Syrup
Olive oil
Dried garlic granules
Pink Himalayan salt
Fresh sprigs of dill

