



GLENSTAL ABBEY CHRONICLE

Issue 9 - Winter 2020



GLENSTAL ABBEY MURROE, CO. LIMERICK

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Christmas Greetings

Dear Friends,

The past year is not a year we are likely to forget in a hurry. COVID has brought our world to a shuddering halt in so many ways. For many of us this has been a very difficult time. There is something deep within each human person that needs physical and human contact and COVID has taken this away from all of us. It is a particularly worrying time for the elderly, those who are ill or vulnerable and those living far from family and friends.

To the young, COVID brings a different set of challenges. Being deprived of contact with friends and colleagues, denied access to sporting and recreational activities, is very difficult. However, all of this pales into insignificance when we think of those who have fallen seriously ill, or lost a loved one because of this dreadful disease. It is for the sake of those who are weak and vulnerable in our society that we make these sacrifices and it is without question the correct thing to do.

Here in the monastery over the past year we have had the joy of welcoming Br Oscar into our community. He made his first profession in the Abbey Church on 3rd October, feast of Bl. Columba Marmion. We have also witnessed an extraordinary growth in our online ministry, with our church webcam, social media posts and videos. Your response to these initiatives has been overwhelming and most encouraging. Our community has been privileged to continue to share our life of prayer and worship with so many of you despite lockdowns and Coronavirus.

I am very pleased as always to be able to have this opportunity to wish you and all your family and friends every grace and blessing this Christmas. May the peace and love which the Saviour brought into the world on Christmas night dwell in your hearts and within your families.

With every Christmas blessing,

Br Brendan Coffey abt



Garden Cemetery

The Garden Cemetery provides for the interment of cremated remains only. Each space can accommodate one or two urns. The internal plot dimensions for both the single and double plots are 7½ inches in diameter. Each space is marked with a plaque of local grey granite for engraving individuals' names and dates.

Selecting a cemetery and purchasing your memorial space is an important decision. Arranging the details in advance gives you peace of mind and shows thoughtfulness and caring concern for your family. With pre-planning the final arrangements become less of a burden.

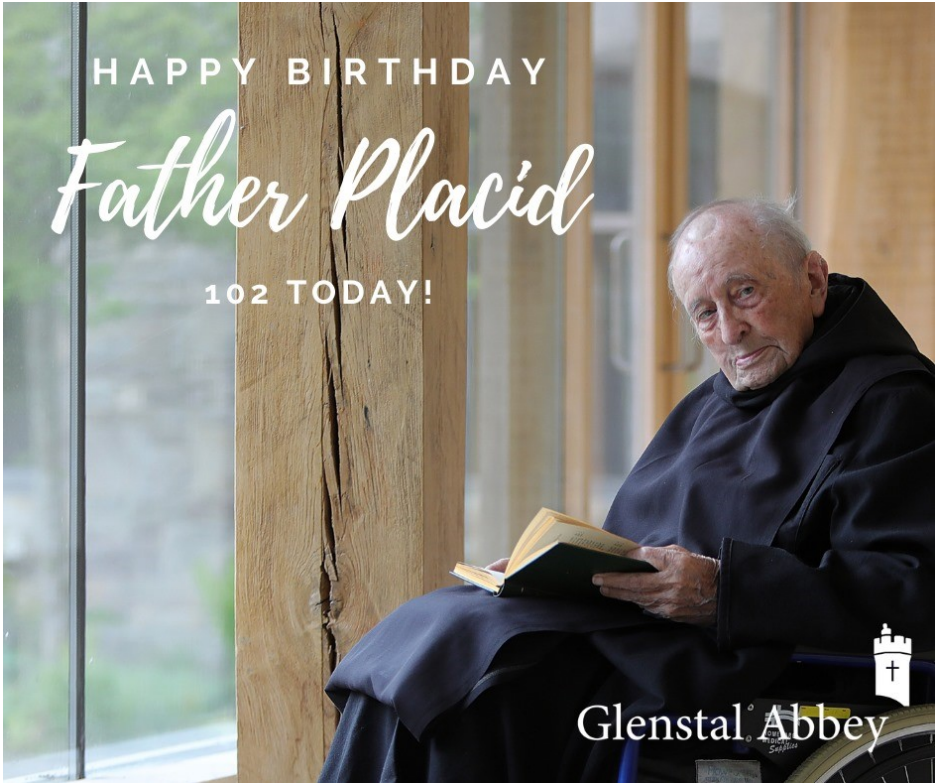
*Please contact the Bursar's Office
at*

061 621045

or email us at

[*gardencemetery@glenstal.com*](mailto:gardencemetery@glenstal.com)





On 7th October last, Fr Placid of our community celebrated his 102nd birthday in Millbrae Lodge Nursing Home, Newport, County Tipperary. Under normal circumstances Fr Placid would have made the short journey to Glenstal for his birthday celebrations, but due to COVID this was not possible.

Fr Placid has lived an extraordinary life. He was born in 1918, which means that he is currently living through his second global pandemic! He witnessed the high and low points of the last century. He came into the world during the final days of World War I, Benedict XV was Pope, Ireland was in the aftermath of the 1916 Rising and Europe was in deep shock at the sheer scale of the slaughter the World War had brought. At that time Glenstal had not yet been founded as a monastery. Over the course of the last century Fr Placid has seen nine different Popes, four English monarchs, all nine Irish Presidents, nineteen US Presidents and the adventure continues...

Illustríssimí

John Coyle was a student in our school from 1959 - 1964. He went on to become a very successful businessman in Galway and has always had a passionate love for the sea and sailing.

John was recognised on 10th October in the Queen's Birthday Honours list. This honour (OBE) is being bestowed for his work with the RNLI and



the Commissioners of Irish Lights, contributing to lifesaving and maritime matters over several decades, as well as to the development of British-Irish relations. John is a Knight of the Sovereign Order of Malta and has also served on many civic bodies in the west of Ireland, including Galway Chamber, Galway Race Committee, and Galway Harbour Company.

We extend our warmest congratulations to John, Sally and the Coyle family for this well deserved recognition. This great honour is also a timely recognition for the RNLI and Irish Lights; organisations doing so much valuable work for seafarers. Our congratulations and thanks also goes to all the volunteers in these organisations.





Ben Healy is remembered by many as captain of the Glenstal Abbey School Senior Cup team that won our first ever Munster Schools Rugby Senior Cup title in 2018.

Since that time Ben has gone on to play for Garryowen, Munster and Ireland under-20s. He has impressed in recent games and won praise from Ronan O’Gara for his performance. We offer our congratulations to Ben on his achievements to date and we look forward to following his promising career as it unfolds in the months and years to come.

In other news, we were very pleased to learn that Alec Gabbett, until recently Chair of our School Board of Management, has been appointed a District Court Judge. We extend our congratulations to Alec and his family and we wish Alec well in his new role.





Glenstal Abbey Artisan Chocolates specialises in the use of liqueurs from monasteries of Europe to flavour the fondants of chocolate truffles, in particular, famous liqueurs such as Chartreuse and Bénédictine. We also use a Mandarin Orange liqueur which we import from the Abbaye de Lérins, on an island off the coast at Nice, where St Patrick is said to have studied in the fifth century, and a walnut liqueur, Nocino, which we source from an Italian Cistercian convent. In addition our range includes an alcohol-free collection derived from desserts for monastic feast days. The boxes are in 260g and 130g sizes. We also have 75g chocolate bars with quotes from the Rule of Benedict in English and the original Latin and a range of fruit-flavoured 75g bars.

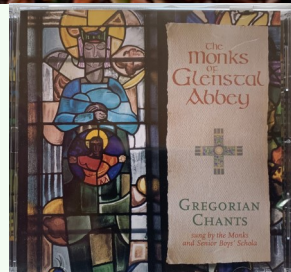
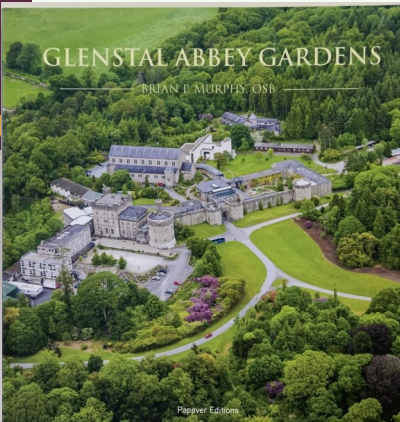
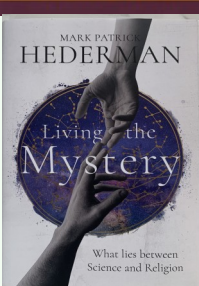
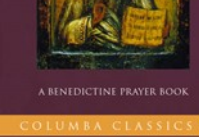
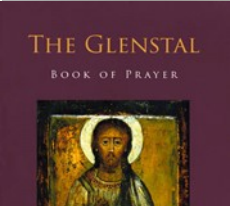
Enquiries welcome at chocolates@glenstal.com



ONLINE SHOPPING

The Perfect Christmas Gift

Simply Glenstal Range
Glenstal Abbey Chocolates
Books by Glenstal Authors
Glenstal Prayer Book
Glenstal through the Seasons
Glenstal Altar Cross



The Glenstal Abbey shop is now online, offering a range of monastic products and gifts.

www.glenstal.org

Stella Caeli

This year we are going to celebrate Christmas with a difference, a COVID Christmas, but is there any meaning to this strange experience we must all share? Many people simply tell us that the mystery of suffering is unanswerable. I'm not sure that's good enough in this instance. Because something is a mystery doesn't mean we can't learn about it. Others maintain that the answer we seek is the person of Jesus,



whose ministry of healing both reveals a loving God and shows us where to find his presence today, among people caring for the grieving, the dying and the sick. While this is certainly true it doesn't answer all of our questions.

The Dominican Thomas White puts it well when he asks, "What does it mean that God has permitted (or willed)

temporary conditions in which our elite lifestyle of international travel is grounded, our consumption is cut to a minimum, our days are occupied with basic responsibilities toward our families and immediate communities, our resources and economic hopes are reduced, and we are made more dependent upon one another? What does it mean that our nation-states suddenly seem less potent and our armies are infected by an invisible contagion they cannot eradicate, and that the most technologically advanced countries face the humility of their limits? ... We might think none of this tells us anything about ourselves, or about God's compassion and justice. But if we simply seek to pass through all this in hasty expectation of a return to normal, perhaps we are missing the fundamental point of the exercise."

So, where do we find meaning in all of this? What story can we tell? The story where I have begun to find some meaning is a very short passage; that of the Tower of Babel. The story of the Tower of Babel comes just after the story of Noah and the Ark in the Book of Genesis. The people

who built this Tower of Babel were rebelling against God. They were attempting to create, by their own hands, an ark of salvation according to their own design. God did not order the construction of this ark, the tower, as he did with Noah and the ark. The tower was an act of disobedience. In essence, these people wanted to become like God.

It is a repetition of the original disobedience of our first parents in the Garden. Adam and Eve wanted to become like God. That is why they ate the apple. These people build the tower, because they wanted to become like God. The people who built the Tower of Babel shake their fist at God saying, “We’ll create a structure so high that even you can’t destroy us.” Furthermore, the people of Babel didn’t follow God’s command to spread throughout the whole earth once they emerged from the ark. They settled in one place, in direct disobedience, and began to build this structure they hoped would last.

This story matters because we see what happens when we try to second guess the acts of God. Salvation only comes through God. We can’t continue to create a societal “Tower of Babel” for ourselves, hoping we’ll craft a structure high enough to avoid all problems. Today we don’t build physical structures as in the biblical story, but we do often try to create our own versions of the Tower of Babel, economically, scientifically and sometimes even religiously. We think, maybe through our good works, maybe through our scientific knowledge, maybe through our attending church, maybe through our community services we can build a structure high enough to save us. Now we have learned that God doesn’t work that way. A tower can’t save us. Everything we do is straw, as St Thomas Aquinas famously said of his own writings. We need to find salvation through Jesus Christ.

When we don’t choose to follow the path laid out for us by God, things have a way of going badly wrong. We see this clearly in the story of Babel; we see it too in other biblical stories, like the story of Jonah. Jonah tried to run away from God and what happened him? A big fish swallowed him and transported him back to Nineveh, the very place he was trying to avoid. These are our stories and there are many of them, but the message is the same and it is loud and clear. The Book of Ecclesiasticus says it well, as it so often does, “The heart of fools is in their mouth, but the mouth of the wise is in their heart” (Si 21:26).

Are we living in an age of Babel? We have consistently ignored warnings about what was going to happen if we continued down a path of unsustainable development, overdependence on science and technology, ignoring the warning signs of stress and strain in the natural world of which we are a part and turning our back on God.

What do these stories tell us and what does our experience thus far of the Coronavirus pandemic say? One thing is clear, I think, COVID has underlined the importance of Time. We need to take time to reflect on the direction life was taking us pre COVID. We need to reflect as well on the importance of time for one another and of kindness towards one another. The lockdown experience has demonstrated how most people have a fundamental goodness and this situation brought that out. It has also shown us that very radical change is possible. It has made us connect once more with the power of nature in new ways and with a new respect. We are not the masters we thought we were. It has also made us turn to the spiritual and to God more directly. It has made us conscious of our vulnerability, our psychology and our limits in all these areas. These are not bad things.

I believe the lesson staring us in the face, the meaning of this global pandemic, is that the things of God are divine and we can only receive them and possess them as a gift. We can't reach out to them or conquer them simply by growing heavenwards in an isolated bubble; whenever we try do so, we build a new Tower of Babel and we go astray and we do not reach to heaven. But how then can we become capable of receiving what God is ready to give? This is the real question we should be asking at this time in my humble opinion.

In the Second letter to the Corinthians, Paul tells us about his thorn in the flesh and he repeats the famous words "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." It is the power and the action of God Himself and not human wisdom, strength and cleverness that makes us capable of receiving what God wants to give. The only way in which we can fulfil our vocation and become what we are meant to be is to become people capable of receiving the grace of God, which is given to us so freely, so generously, but which we receive with such reluctance because our hearts are narrow, and we are closed. We must learn to open up, to become receptive and this is what St Paul meant when he said, in

the words spoken to him by the Lord Himself. “My power is made perfect in weakness”. It is only when we become receptive that the divine power can become active, otherwise we block the way to God’s actions. But it is not only weakness which permits the action of God within us. We all are weak, but we are not always receptive; there is a special way in which we must become weak in order to be receptive.

Spiritual writers have used images to explain how this works and I will finish with an image from Anthony Bloom. Let us take a very common experience, a child getting their very first lessons in writing: a pencil is put into their hand, their mother takes both the little hand and the pencil into hers and moves over the page. So long as the child does not know what the mother intends to do, so long as the hand is flexible in the mother’s hand, how beautiful are the lines and the letters! Straight and free. But then a moment comes when every child imagines that they know what their mother intends to do and so the child decides to become helpful. This is where problems begin, the child pushes and pulls and the lines go wrong, the writing becomes scribble.

We need to understand that this is what we do continuously: the Lord is trying to direct our hand, to make us write the right story of our life in the Book of Life, but we imagine that we know better, that we know exactly what He intends and we are so helpful! So often this results in very ugly writing in the Book of Life. If only we can learn to have our hand directed until we truly understand what God means to do, until we truly understand how to make the lines and what the writing is! But we do not and our helpfulness, our very frail strength, appears to be strong enough to blur what God is writing with His hand. These examples show us that Paul was so right in his letter to the Corinthians. Our power is really greatest in weakness. We need to learn when to be weak and when to be strong, when to use our intelligence, when to keep an open mind, when to be flexible, when to be watchful; and then we will learn first and become creative afterwards. This is the gift of discretion and this is why St Benedict calls it the mother of virtues. Strength and limitation always go together; life and frailty are always associated one to the other.

To end I give you a prayer I came across from the 14th century. The nuns of St Clare in the town of Coimbra (Portugal), which was suffering with a violent pestilence, offered their prayers in the following form and the

contagion ceased. It's a prayer to the Mother of God in time of plague. It plays on the idea of the stars in the heavens. They believed in the 14th century that plague was a result of the stars being out of alignment and battling with one another. They believed that the great Star of the Sea, Mary, could put them back into alignment and bring the plague to an end by making the stars behave. We may laugh at this, but they weren't entirely wrong. Things are out of alignment in the world and this is the result. What the prayer really says is that nature is at war with herself and plague is the result. It really says very beautifully what I've been saying to you in this article and so the prayer is, I believe, a very apt way to end.

Abbot Brendan OSB

The Star of Heaven, that nourished the Lord, has completely uprooted the plague of death which was planted by our first parents. May this same Star now deign to restrain the stars whose wars have slain people with the wound of a horrible death.

O most loving Star of the Sea, preserve us from the pestilence; hear us, O Lady, for your Son denies you nothing because he honours you. Save us, O Jesus, we for whom the Virgin Mother prays to you.



1.

S

tella cæ-li extirpá-vit, * quæ lactá-vit Dó-

minum: Mortis pestem quam plantá-vit primus

pa-rens hóminum. Ipsa stella nunc digné-tur

sí-de-ra compésce-re, Quo-rum bella plebem cædunt

di-ræ mortis úlce-re. O pi-íssima stella ma-ris,

a peste succúrre no-bis. Audi nos, Dómi-na, nam

fi-li-us tu-us ni-hil negans te honó-rat. Sal-va nos

Ie-su, pro qui-bus Virgo Ma-ter te o- rat.

Profession of Br Oscar OSB



Br Oscar hails from Lifford, County Donegal, and began his novitiate here in Glenstal on 12th September 2019. His First Profession took place in the Abbey Church on 3rd October 2020, Feast of Bl. Columba Marmion OSB, the Dublin-born Abbot of Maredsous in Belgium. As was the case up and down the country, Br Oscar's family were unable to be present here with him on the day, but they were present virtually via the webcam. Donegal and Dublin had moved to Level 3 restrictions ahead of the rest of the country. We wish Br Oscar well as he begins his three years of temporary vows in our community.



Advent

In one of C.S. Lewis' Screwtape letters, Screwtape, a senior devil, is instructing his young nephew, Wormwood, how to win souls from God. Screwtape explains that they have a well tried method that works. "All you have to do is create enough noise so that men and women no longer hear the voice of God in their lives".

Screwtape and Wormwood have done their job well - today we face a wall of noise and a constant barrage of data which leave us restless and agitated and makes it very hard to hear the voice of God. Traditionally this noise reaches its crescendo in the weeks before Christmas when frenetic consumer activity is added to the mix. This is the environment of that liturgical season of Advent and it has almost disappeared beneath this noise and activity.

Maybe, just maybe, with the pandemic and its ever changing restrictions and decreased noise and consumer activity, Advent may re-emerge and climb back into its proper place.

I am fortunate to live in a place where Advent happens.

Re-instating Advent has its challenges - it is counter cultural. We are beginning a new Liturgical Year, while "The New Year" is still a month away. Beginning a new year in early December, means we have to try and straddle two calendars and this can induce a schizoid split as we try to balance the two.

It is a time of waiting and preparation - waiting and preparing for the birth of Christ. Waiting is not something we do - we expect things to happen instantly - press a button and get results. But most of us are familiar with waiting for the birth of a child or a grand child - this is something we haven't managed to speed up.

We are preparing for the birth of Christ. It is that simple and that complicated. The Holy One, born in Bethlehem, born in a stable and born in each of us.

Meister Eckhart puts it this way; "What does it avail me that this birth is always happening if it does not happen to me. That is should happen to each of us is what matters". Are we ready for such drama? That this

birth happens in each of us - that is what we are preparing for - the birth of the divine in each of us - preparing to become the mother of God - no small challenge. "Prepare ye the way of the Lord", shouts John the Baptist to us.

It is up to each of us to prepare a space for the birth of the divine in our hearts. How do you prepare, how do I prepare? For me it means clearing away some of the clutter in my life, dialling back the noise and trying to prevent busyness choking my receptivity to the divine - for birth needs calm, quiet and slow receptivity and cannot be speeded up.

Maybe your reaction is, "this is too much to believe" and walk away. The challenge is there. Our culture has a different agenda. It is hard to avoid its influence as it encroaches further and further into our homes, our heads - phones, internet. The consumer culture can engulf us if we let it.

The Church knows that we need help to enter Advent and has a battery of resources to help us celebrate and protect this sacred time.

Advent begins with first Vespers (evening prayer) on Saturday before the first Sunday of Advent. As we enter the church the atmosphere is changed. There is a large green wreath, some purple hangings and these



changes always lift me over the threshold from Ordinary or Green time into Advent. The change of colour from green to purple, the change in readings to texts that are full of expectation, the presence of the wreath all help me enter a new sense of time - a new liturgical year.

But Advent is not just a pleasing liturgical or aesthetic experience - it is meant to make a difference in our lives - it is a time to get ourselves in shape for the birth of the divine in each of us.

Advent is there to support us in our vocation and help us achieve what we are called to become - that is divine. Saint Basil the Great set the trajectory for our lives when he says, “human beings are only creatures but they are creatures who have received the command to become divine.” Not perfect but divine.

“What does it avail me that this birth is always happening if it does not happen to me. That it should happen to each of us is what matters”.

What can you do to celebrate Advent given the restrictions that will be in place for Advent 2020. Your children or grandchildren will have many ideas I suspect - here are some suggestions.



1. Wreath - build your own Advent wreath. Google it for instructions. We use ever green vegetation in a circular wreath to represent God’s ever green love – which does not die. The circle symbolises that His love is eternal.

2. Play Music/Chant/O Antiphons - Advent music (as distinct from Christmas music).

3. Decorations - the purple colour could be used in some part of your home.

4. Create a sacred space set aside for Advent.
5. Read a daily piece of Scripture - learn about the heroes of Advent: John the Baptist, Mary, Isaiah...
6. Advent calendar.
7. Incorporate Advent prayers into your daily prayers.
8. Create an oasis of quiet somewhere in your home where it is possible to dwell on the magnitude of the event we are preparing for at Christmas.



Fr Simon OSB

Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed wife, who was with child. LUKE 2:4-5



Have a Blessed Advent!

Community Diary

Not all of our guests felt the impact of Coronavirus in the same way. Our regular summer guests, the swallows, moved in as usual and their family of four nestlings were all ready to depart for the mammoth journey to their wintering ground thousands of miles away. There are no travel restrictions on these Glenstal guests and they have all now safely departed for their winter homeland.



Work on the new church carpark is complete. The area was levelled, a new drainage system installed and the completed surface was tarmacked



and landscaped. We are very pleased with the result which is thanks to the generosity of our donors. Next time you visit for Mass you will be able to park with ease and make your way across the newly finished surface.

In recent years the generosity of our donors has enabled us to make a lot of improvements here in Glenstal. Our church was renovated and a new heating and sound system installed, a link was built connecting the library to the monastery and a set of church bells were cast. The carpark successfully completes this section of the monastery development plan.



In the coming years we need to focus our efforts on the castle building, which houses both the monastery and the school and is a significant historical building in east Limerick. Over the years, weathering of the sandstone stonework and statuary has taken its toll. The castle is in need of care and restoration to preserve this historic landmark for future generations.

If you would like to assist the monks in their various ministries and in the conservation of the Glenstal Estate you can donate via our website, or by sending a donation directly to *Glenstal Abbey, Murroe, County Limerick*. It is important that we ensure Glenstal will be around for future generations to appreciate and enjoy, just as we are all able to do today.

Monastery Webcam

If you are unable to join with us in person in the coming weeks and months, please do join us via our webcam. All the liturgies are broadcast live and recordings are also available for one week.

www.glenstal.com/abbey

SUNDAYS

- 8.35 pm **Resurrection Office/Vigils** (on the preceding evening)
7.00 am **Lauds** (Morning Prayer)
10.00 am **Conventual Mass**
12.35 pm **Sext** (Midday Prayer)
6.00 pm **Vespers** (Evening Prayer – in Latin)
8.35 pm **Compline** (Night Prayer)

WEEKDAYS

- 6.35 am **Matins and Lauds** (Morning Prayer)
12.10 pm **Conventual Mass**
6.00 pm **Vespers** (Evening Prayer, in Latin)
8.35 pm **Compline** (Night Prayer – Monday excepted)

All services, except Vespers are chanted in English, with some Latin hymns and antiphons. While the Eucharist is celebrated in English, the ordinary and proper chants are sung in Latin. Please note that the timetable may change slightly on certain solemnities and feastdays.

