

# CISTERCIAN ASSOCIATES of SOUTHERN STAR ABBEY KOPUA NEWSLETTER - LENT 2020

**Call; Cistercian Charism; Community; Contemplation**

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## FROM THE COORDINATOR

There is an old monastic saying: "A monk is only truly praying when he does not know he is praying." As I have reflected more deeply for this year's retreats on how Cistercians use the Psalms, I am aware of rediscovering the unconscious praying that happens in the monastery church, the wonder of hearing faithful wise voices through the centuries, the simplicity of Jesus' prayer formation, the call to deeper union with God, and a trusting that the Spirit is doing the praying for us. John of the Cross wrote: "To reach union with the wisdom of God, a person must advance by unknowing rather than by knowing" In this season of Lent, we often commit ourselves to laying down some of the habits that clutter up our lives. In the letting go and simple repetition, we may find ourselves in a new place of uncomplicatedness which allows clearer focus on Christ. Mary Oliver's poem "Yes! No!" is worth a read as we are reminded: "To pay attention, this is our endless and proper work." At the first Associates' Retreat this year we talked together about the power of repetition, what it means to be saying with the monks all 150 psalms each fortnight, so that psalmody becomes a springboard for the deep grace that takes us beyond self-consciousness and pre-occupation. Long ago John Cassian said: "There is a reciprocal and inseparable relationship between the reshaping of one's life and unceasing prayerfulness. Just as the whole archway of the virtues points to its keystone, prayer, so, without this keystone, the archway cannot retain its strength and stability." The simplicity of the Cistercian way of prayer always leads us to find our strength and stability in God.

The more years I have prayed with any kind of awareness, the more my prayer becomes a mystery - perhaps because prayer is not "mine". It is "ours", not only the Spirit within me or joining the communion of saints, but it also the community's prayer, which we know again as we join, however we can, with the monastic prayer of our brothers. During Lent, relationships are intensified, as Jesus' invitation to follow opens up new possibilities. The pilgrimage in which through personal companionship with Jesus we are drawn more deeply into the intimacy of God's act of self-communication also strengthens in a wonderful way our identity as community. In Chapter 49 of his Rule St Benedict mentions joy twice as he writes of Lent. Of course, he advocates additional efforts such as increased giving and additional prayer, and fasting of some form in Lent, but the purpose is increasing joy, not misery. Despite all the human concerns of this life in a broken world, the joy comes as attention to being in God's presence in prayer spills over into daily living. We rejoice in belonging to a community on a journey through this season. May you know joy this Lent.

Jenny

#### **FROM POPE FRANCIS:**

"Lent is a new beginning, a path leading to the certain goal of Easter, Christ's victory over death. This season urgently calls us to conversion. Christians are asked to return to God "with all their hearts" (Joel 2:12), to refuse to settle for mediocrity and to grow in friendship with the Lord. Jesus is the faithful friend who never abandons us. Even when we sin, he patiently awaits our return; by that patient expectation, he shows us his readiness to forgive."

#### **FROM AN ASSOCIATE: ASH WEDNESDAY AND ETERNITY**

Sydney has always put on a spectacular New Year Firework displays. In my opinion it is one of the few things Sydney does better than Melbourne. When the clocks ushered in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Millennium in the year 2000, I remember watching the coverage on television from my home in Somerset. The BBC crossed live to each major city around the world as each welcomed in the New Year. That year Sydney had outdone itself with its firework display on the Harbour Bridge. At the very end of their spectacular display in 2000, millions of viewers around the world beheld a single word fashioned in a style known as copperplate, emblazoned across the Harbour Bridge. That single word was 'Eternity.'

That word 'Eternity,' written in chalk in the same elegant copperplate, is estimated to have appeared on Sydney's footpaths over half a million times between 1930 and 1967. It was written by a man named Arthur Stace. Arthur Stace was born in Sydney's Balmain slum in 1884 and lived a life on the wrong side of the law. But in August 1930, Arthur attended a service at the Burton Street Baptist Church in Darlinghurst. The preacher was a Reverend John Riley, a noted fire and brimstone preacher. Riley shouted from the pulpit, "I wish I could shout 'eternity' through all the streets of Sydney!" Recalling that day many years later, Arthur remembered the Rev'd Mr Riley repeating, "Eternity,

Eternity." "His words were ringing through my brain as I left the Church," Arthur said. "Suddenly I began crying, and I felt a powerful call from the Lord to write "Eternity." I had a piece of chalk in my pocket and I bent down right there and then and wrote it.

From that day onwards, Arthur began his unique ministry. Each day he started early, usually before sunrise, and wandered through the streets of Sydney, bending down and writing on the pavement in large, elegant copperplate, 'Eternity.' He died in 1967 at the age of 83, having written this one word at least 50 times each day for 37 years. His special ministry was to make us think, not just about living in the here and now, but also what lies ahead for us in the future, in eternity.

On Ash Wednesday each year, Christians receive a reminder of their own eternity. Ash is placed on our foreheads and we hear the words: "Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return." It is a reminder that this world, beautiful as it is, is not all that there is. Our life might be controlled and dominated by time, but our destiny exists elsewhere in eternity.

Fr Alan Jones, one-time Dean of San Francisco's Grace Cathedral, says that a friend of his asks his students at the beginning of each academic year, what truth they want to become by the end of their lives. Many of us, Jones says, have been telling a story to ourselves, and to the world, for so long, about what we think is real, that we come to foolishly believe that it is absolutely true (and without question).

Lent calls us into the desert experience, to be probed - to think about ourselves in an intentional way, to think about eternity, and the false story we've been telling ourselves all our lives. To ask the question: 'How far is it a lie?' As Fr Henri Nouwen described Lent: "It is a time to re-focus and re-enter a place of truth." So, the real question we should be asking ourselves this Lent is this: 'Is the kind of life we currently lead, a life that will lead us into eternity?' *From Philip Bewley*

## **NEWS FROM THE MONASTERY**

Fr Nicho is recovering well after his surgery and has enjoyed having his niece visiting from Holland over the last 5 weeks.

## **BENEDICTINE DAY**

On March 21<sup>st</sup>, following up a commitment from our Chapter, the CASSAK Leadership Team will meet at the monastery with representatives from some of the other NZ-based Benedictine groups that have Associates or Oblates. We will have some input from Martin Davies, the first Coordinator of our Associate community and we will look at ways we might work together to support each other in the future.

## ASSOCIATES NEWS

### KURISUMALA ASHRAM

Linda and I recently visited Kurisumala ashram, a Cistercian monastery in Kerala in southern India. Established in the 50s, the monastery, like Southern Star Abbey, is now associated with Tarawarra in Australia. Our former Abbot Brian visited about 7 years ago, is well remembered by the monks.

Reached by a long and beautiful ascending drive on a narrow road, the monastery is situated in isolated majestic high country. There are 17 monks, less than there has been in the past. They support themselves by running a dairy farm and growing tea, both working themselves and also offering employment to local people.

They describe themselves as strict. Certainly their life is simple, exemplary of Cistercian values. They wear a simple saffron robe and go barefoot. Their diet is vegetarian, but that is common among Indian people. Their daily routine is similar to Kopua, though Vigils starts at 4am and lasts over an hour.

They have a number of guest rooms. Conditions are spartan. Hot water is available at 3 PM only to wash yourself, no showers or baths. Beds are boards with a thin mattress. Men and women in separate quarters. My impression is that their retreatants are generally Indian religious. Foreign retreatants are very rare, maybe unprecedented. They specially bought spoons for eating and toilet paper for use by us, neither being used by locals. Throughout our short stay they manifested Benedictine hospitality to us in every way, from cheerfully serving our meals to us, to spending time with us.

The chapel, the heart of the monastery, is simple, intimate. In Eastern style the sanctuary is usually curtained off (with only the tabernacle lamp visible through the fabric) except for the liturgical times. There is no crucifix but a large cross, expressing their spirituality which is focussed on sharing the life of the risen Lord. Their liturgical practice is a hybrid, primarily Syriac (an ancient Indian Christian rite different than the Roman rite almost all Catholics follow), general Indian and also Cistercian. The Offices were based on the psalms, chanted in Syriac. The impact of the Eucharist is difficult to convey in words. The use of flowers, fire, incense and gestures was profoundly devotional. Only the homily was in English (for our benefit). And this was their routine weekday mass, Sunday is apparently quite elaborate in the Syriac rite with special fancy dress. There are many subtle variations in practice, for example the Abbot blessing monks at specific points by touching them on their bowed foreheads. At the end of Compline there is no hymn to Mary, but each monk in turn honoured the Marian icon, by drawing the flame of the lamp before the icon to himself (a common Indian religious practice called arati)

At an evening Satsung (discussion) we shared about personal prayer. The Abbot Ishanand told us their personal practice is Lectio divina. He reflects on a scripture passage for an hour in the early morning, carrying a word, the Word to him that day, in his heart

throughout the day. Spending a short time with the monks who practise in very different way than we are familiar with we nevertheless knew we shared a commonality in spirit. Linda and I would like to go there for a week sometime.  
*From Nick Polaschek*



**WELLINGTON ASSOCIATES** have begun studies from the "Experientia" material put out by the international Cistercian family, which the Ruahine Associates have very useful. Other individuals or groups may choose to work their way through this too.

#### **WHAT IS 'IN PRELIMINARY FORMATION'?**

This Newsletter is being written on the day of the month when we pray in our monthly prayer cycle 'for those in Preliminary Formation'. This stage in the Associate on-going formation journey is not for a defined length of time but focusses on discernment and growth and call. During this period, you will work with the National Coordinator on preparing a personal Rule of Life which is sent to the Superior or Abbot for approval. Perhaps 18 months later you would be recognised as an Associate, receiving a Letter of Recognition and handing over a copy of your Rule of Life. This is usually done by the Superior who officiates at a liturgical welcome/reception of candidate at an Office or Mass usually at Associate Retreats where other Associates can be present. As a person deepens their understanding of Cistercian life until the seeker and the Coordinator and Fr Nicho agree that it is time to be received into the Cistercian Associate community.

The commitment as an Associate is normally life-long and is supported by being part of the community of Associates who pray for each other daily, learn together through a series of studies usually offered every year, meet at Retreats, and seek other ways of sharing together in the task of living the Cistercian charism outside the monastery. Amongst those reading this who are not Associates but who are interested in the monastery and the contemplative life, there may be some who are considering a call to become more deeply committed to the monastic journey. Contact the Coordinator for a conversation about this or related matters.

## 2020 RETREATS

The first retreat at the monastery for Associates and those in Preliminary Formation this year was in January and the other two are 27-31 July and 26-31 October, longer than in recent years. The theme is "A Cistercian/Benedictine view of the Psalms". We will keep Silence (including at meal times) during our retreats for at least 24 hours maybe 48, according to what participants agree on. Each retreat will start and end with the midday meal. Please register as usual with Sybil [kopuabookings@gmail.com](mailto:kopuabookings@gmail.com) (**note new email address**) or phone 068558239.

**KOHA** – you might decide that part of your Lent alms gift go to CASSAK! Two of our Leadership Team will be attending the 2020 International Meeting in Chicago. Their conference fees are being paid for by the monastery and CASSAK but they are paying their own travel etc. Our CASSAK organisation also has other expenses, and those who met in Chapter in 2018 agreed:

(i) That we aim each year for our collective koha goal to be raised to a total of \$1000 so that money is available for the work of the Leadership Team (travel plus other expenses such as stationery and extra meetings to the develop website). It was suggested that Associates be invited to offer a money gift be offered relating to what might be paid for an hour of work and to include this in the Rule of Life.

(2) To make available, with the increased giving, some sponsorship to support any Associates who might not be able to afford travel to, or koha at, the monastery (talk to the Coordinator if you would like this assistance).

Currently in 2020 we have three constant givers and three others who donate occasionally to finance all this. We would love 25 Associates (and maybe others who read this Newsletter?) to give a few dollars each month to assist our life together. You can send a cheque to our Treasurer Dawn Harris at 5 Wrey Jury Lane, Dallington, Christchurch 8061 or (*preferably*) pay direct into our bank account (Name: The Associates of Southern Star Abbey, Kopua. Number: 02-0506-0067608000). A regular, even small, automatic payment is very welcome.

Receipts will be issued 31 March 2021 or sooner if required.

## FOR REFLECTION

Fr Michael Casey: "Contemplation is not something that we achieve or acquire; it is something that happens when we are not doing something else." (in *Balaam's Donkey: Random Ruminations for Every Day of the Year*).

Laurence Freeman OSB, Director, World Community for Christian Meditation  
"[Bringing] contemplative spirituality into the experience of both worship and fellowship ... it is not only the church that benefits from this. The social institutions with which the church works in the world are also challenged to live at a level beyond

outward appearance and to make compassion and wisdom integral to their vision and way of life". (from the website of Benedictus Church <http://benedictus.com.au/>).

**WHY STUDY THEOLOGY? From an article in Welcom** (the newsletter of the Catholic Archdiocese of Wellington and the Diocese of Palmerston North) February 2020

In November 2015 Pope Francis met a Lutheran married to a Catholic who expressed sorrow at 'not being able to partake together in the Lord's Supper' and asked: 'What more can we do to reach communion on this point?' The pope's reply is very interesting: 'Thank you, Ma'am. Regarding the question on sharing the Lord's Supper...I think the Lord gave us [the answer] when he gave us this command: "Do this in memory of me." And when we share in, remember and emulate the Lord's Supper, we do the same thing that the Lord Jesus did. And the Lord's Supper will be, the final banquet will there be in the New Jerusalem, but this will be the last. Instead on the journey, I wonder - and I don't know how to answer, but I am making your question my own - I ask myself: "Is sharing the Lord's Supper the end of a journey or is it the viaticum for walking together?" I leave the question to the theologians, to those who understand. It is true that in a certain sense sharing is saying that there are no differences between us, that we have the same doctrine - I underline the word, a difficult word to understand - but I ask myself: don't we have the same Baptism? And if we have the same Baptism, we have to walk together. You are a witness to an even more profound journey because it is a conjugal journey, truly a family journey, of human love and of shared faith. We have the same Baptism. When you feel you are a sinner - I too feel I am quite a sinner - when your husband feels he is a sinner, you go before the Lord and ask forgiveness; your husband does the same and goes to the priest and requests absolution. They are ways of keeping Baptism alive. When you pray together, that Baptism grows, it becomes strong; when you teach your children who Jesus is, why Jesus came, what Jesus did, you do the same, whether in Lutheran or Catholic terms, but it is the same. The question: and the Supper? There are questions to which only if one is honest with oneself and with the few theological 'lights' that I have, one must respond the same, you see. "This is my Body, this is my Blood", said the Lord, "do this in memory of me", and this is a viaticum which helps us to journey. ... .. I respond to your question only with a question: how can I participate with my husband, so that the Lord's Supper may accompany me on my path? It is a problem to which each person must respond. A pastor friend of mine said to me: "We believe that the Lord is present there. He is present. You believe that the Lord is present. So what is the difference?" - "Well, there are explanations, interpretations...". Life is greater than explanations and interpretations. Always refer to Baptism: "One faith, one baptism, one Lord", as Paul tells us, and take the outcome from there. I would never dare give permission to do this because I do not have the authority. One Baptism, one Lord, one faith. Speak with the Lord and go forward. I do not dare say more. (papa-francesco\_20151115\_chiesa-evangelica-luterana.pdf).

Pope Francis sees theology not as a matter of fixed answers: there are always a variety of explanations and interpretations - and it is the task of theology to find those answers which are most conducive to discipleship.

## RESOURCES

### On Utube:

**"Community and Humility"** with Abbot John from Genesee talking about how life in community helps one grow in self-knowledge

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kXmF3TEAtoc&feature=share&fbclid=IwAR0gq1uALUHLGqAwhTdOg8JbUDnujGYd1naYzlyb9w67dPvfeRX27k\\_cdDo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kXmF3TEAtoc&feature=share&fbclid=IwAR0gq1uALUHLGqAwhTdOg8JbUDnujGYd1naYzlyb9w67dPvfeRX27k_cdDo) 5m25s

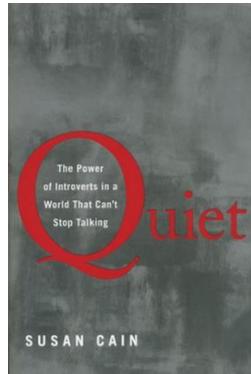
**"Contemplation, Mysticism and the Quest for God"** An experimental, mixed-format documentary, "The Cloud of Unknowing" looks at a Trappist abbey in Spencer, MA and spiritual seekers in the city of Boston: exploring issues of contemplation, mysticism and the quest for God. Winner of the Best NH Short Documentary at the 2018 New Hampshire Film Festival

<https://www.pbs.org/video/the-cloud-of-unknowing-znqkzj/> 17m 49s

**Poet Mary Oliver reading "Wild Geese"**

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lv\\_4xmh\\_WtE&app](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lv_4xmh_WtE&app)

### BOOK REVIEWS:



***Quiet: the power of introverts in a world that can't stop talking, Susan Cain, NY, Crown, 2012***

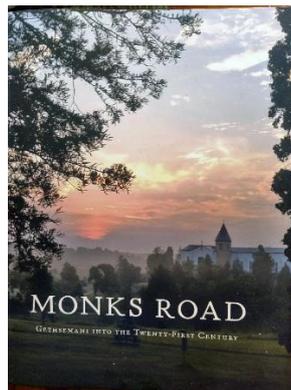
This was the first book I borrowed from the library when I retired from teaching late last year. Coincidence? I think not. I'm hoping it will be a metaphor for this new phase of my life.

Susan Cain traces the rise of extroversion as a western cultural ideal early last century. Now the idea is so ingrained in our culture that every job advert asks for team players. Woe betide anyone going to an interview and saying they do their best work on their own! Most of us have spent a large part of our working lives conforming to extroverted norms. And yet it's not just famous nerds like Steve Wozniak who need quiet to be creative.

This book analyses and celebrates the different ways in which introverts approach decision making, including in the high-pressure world of finance. It contends that introversion is a better predictor of academic success at university level than cognitive ability. It shows parents and teachers how to support introverted 'shy' children and adolescents rather than try to change them 'to fit in'.

Even while I'm trying to write this, my oh-so-smart computer suddenly throws up a coloured page announcing that I can pin my contacts to my task bar! My options are Learn More or Get Started. Go away! Just leave us introverts alone to get on with the job.

As Associates of Southern Star Abbey, finding time and space for quiet, reflection and solitude is important to us all - not just the introverts among us. It is interesting to trace just how far western culture has come along this extreme extroversion route. I enjoyed seeing this in perspective and realising that the sense of misfit lies in the culture rather than in personal deficiency. In closing, a quote from the book's Conclusion: "Spend your free time the way you like, not the way you think you're supposed to." *From Anne Cave*



**"Monks Road, *Gethsemani into the Twenty-first Century*"** published by the monks of the Abbey of Gethsemani, Trappist, Kentucky. 2015

In 2008 my wife and I visited our daughter and son-in-law who were then living near Louisville in Kentucky. At that time, I was an avid reader of Thomas Merton's books and took the opportunity to visit and stay where he had lived. It was a profound experience as I immersed myself in the atmosphere of the Abbey and explored the extensive grounds. I left with a copy of Thomas Merton's *Gethsemani, Landscapes of Paradise*, black & white photographs by Harry L. Hinkle and an essay by Monica Weiss. The book gave a vivid record of the landscapes and natural phenomena that inspired Thomas Merton. (The book is available second-hand on the internet).

Monks Road was published in 2015 but unfortunately then only available in the USA. I was keen to get hold of a copy and Jenny very kindly brought it back for me when she visited Gethsemani last year. A very different, yet complementary book, full of stunning

colour photographs. The book is in two parts with two separate authors. The first part is a history of the Cistercian order by Michael Casey. This gives an overall context for the second part by Clyde F. Crews that focuses on the history of Gethsemani. The text is accompanied by many photographs. A few of these are historical and give an idea of just how much manual work used to be done in the neighbouring fields. Most of the photographs capture the monks in their daily activities and their contemporary surroundings. The book now appears to be available, new and second-hand, through Amazon.

*From Neil Stiles*

## **FOR FURTHER REFLECTION**

As we continue to pray for all those affected by bushfires and flooding in Australia, remember the Aboriginal saying: "Traveller, in the desert there are no paths. Paths are made by walking." Praying faithfully is making a path.

Understand -- through the stillness,

Act -- out of the stillness,

Conquer -- in the stillness.      Dag Hammarskjold in *Markings*.

**NEXT NEWSLETTER:** *will be out for Ascension Day so please send contributions in by the Feast of St Joseph the Worker (May 1)*