



PORTSMOUTH ABBEY

**February 2016**  
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Dear Oblates and Friends of Portsmouth,

*What about us? We have left everything and followed you, what are we to have?* The apostles who asked this question of Jesus have touched on some of the leading issues of the call to follow in the footsteps of Christ and what the consequences are for those who respond to this call. The first thing to notice is the very human nature of this query; not even the apostles were entirely altruistic: *What's in it for me?* is the usual demand of all of us, and the one that, if we would truly begin to realize the Kingdom of God here on earth, we must learn to suppress, or at least to rephrase if we are keeping the spiritual basis of our commitment to Christ as his disciples. There is an answer to the question, and Jesus gives it. In some ways it is just what Peter and the others wish to hear, but in other respects it is precisely the reverse of what their expectations were. They will receive one hundred-fold in return for all that they have given up: houses, land, relatives, whatever they possess in the here and now, and afterward, eternal life. So far so good, but there is an additional clause: they will also suffer for his Name and undergo persecution.

If we consider what happened in the lives of Jesus' disciples, it behooves us to look more closely at this promise and the commitment that is implied. To some extent, it can be taken literally, but more importantly it must be understood in a figurative, a spiritual sense. The apostles had to come to the knowledge that in responding to the call of Jesus to follow Him, they were gaining all that they could ever desire, since the gift he offers is entry into and possession of the Kingdom of Promise. Acceptance would mean for them not just persecution but violent death, with the exception of

John who died in exile on the island of Patmos, where he composed his gospel. Only after Pentecost could the apostles grasp the true meaning of messiahship, what it entailed, and the kind of Kingdom Jesus had preached: not the tyrannical power of Rome nor the transient culture of Hellenism with their stress on this-worldly values, but a fresh, new, inspired way of relating to others and to their age; a way that was founded on the spirit and rooted in the eternal; a way that eventually would overturn the Roman Empire and introduce a fresh concept of thinking, living and believing, with the emphasis on totally different desiderata for the good life, which were directly opposed to cultivating *humility as a virtue, to showing compassion for the weak and oppressed, to embracing poverty as an ideal, to considering the idea of servile, manual work as good in itself, to offering the other cheek when struck, and so on...*

All of this concerns us too, because by virtue of our baptism, we are involved in the kingdom Jesus came to establish. We are already part of that kingdom and are obliged to abide by its conditions. Our baptism calls us to be disciples of Jesus, although there are many ways of responding to His call. What these ways are depends on the talents we are given, and how they can best be expressed. When the rich man asked Jesus what he had to do to inherit eternal life, in addition to keeping the commandments, he was deeply disappointed in the answer, partly because he failed to interpret Jesus' response correctly and partly because his priorities were at variance with those Jesus preached: *One thing is lacking; go, sell all you have and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then, come, follow me.* Although the call to follow Christ is universal, not all or even, not many, can make the necessary commitment. Obviously, not everyone has to live in a monastery or renounce everything in order to proclaim the Word of the Gospel as **Saint Francis of Assisi** did. What it does mean is that we cannot let the things of this world prevent us from responding to the call we are given to take the place in society that we are best fitted for. Only for some, the very few, is such a call a radical one, requiring the renunciation of material and personal ties. For the vast majority, the call means a heightened awareness of Christ's Way (*I am the Way, the Truth and the Life.*) and a willingness to do whatever is required of us in following that Way according to our means and station in life.



Fig. 3. Detail of ivory throne of Maximianus, 6th century, Archiepiscopal Museum, Ravenna.

JOHN THE BAPTIST.



Unto Thy faithful  
O Lord  
life is changed  
not taken away  
And the abode  
of this earthly sojourn  
being dissolved  
an eternal dwelling  
is prepared for them  
in heaven

## The Observance of Lent

Soon the annual liturgical observance of Lent will commence when it will be possible for us to take advantage of this sacred period to re-examine the depth of our Christian commitment and how seriously we take our fulfillment of the two-fold commandment of Love of God and Love of neighbor. This is what is expected of us during the period of preparation for the great Easter mystery to which the whole liturgical year is directed. We begin the season with an examination of conscience, in response to the call of **John the Baptist** as he urges us to repent of the many ways in which we have failed to heed the call of Jesus to strive for perfection: *Be ye perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.* Concentrate first on eliminating or reducing the defects, and then address the sins of omission when we have a moral obligation to do what is in our power to come to the aid of our neighbor in time of need. This is the way that each of us is expected to proclaim the Gospel to the world about us, and our blindness or indifference

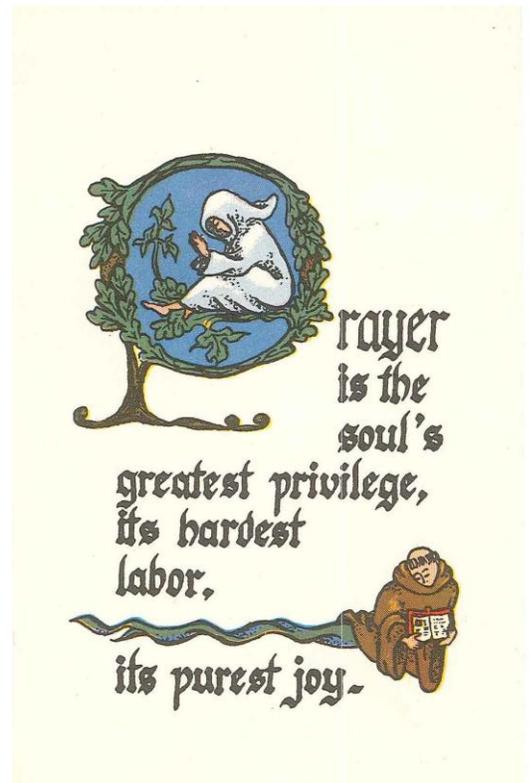
can be a serious defect. This is what is meant by truly following Christ who commands nothing that is impossible for us or so difficult as to be impractical. In the final analysis, it is through prayer that we best demonstrate our dependence on the Lord as our Creator and Jesus as our Redeemer, the Alpha and the Omega of our existence. It is a truism that the most effective prayer is that which is brief and embraces the theological virtues of faith, hope and love. Such a prayer is that of the 12<sup>th</sup> century **Bishop of Chichester, Saint Richard**, one which, like the *Jesus prayer*, can often be invoked and be a constant reminder of Saint Paul's admonition *to pray without ceasing*:

*O most merciful Redeemer, Friend and Brother,  
May we know Thee more clearly, Love Thee more dearly,  
Follow Thee more nearly,  
Forever and ever. Amen*

## LITURGICAL CALENDAR FOR FEBRUARY

31 January    **SUNDAY IV OF THE YEAR**

- 2    Presentation of the Lord
- 3    St. Blaise Bishop and Martyr
- 5    St. Paul Miki and Comp. Martyrs  
*Blessing of throat ailments*
- 6    St. Agatha Virgin & Martyr
- 7    **SUNDAY V OF THE YEAR**  
**Oblate Day of Recollection**
- 10    **ASH WEDNESDAY**
- 11    St. Benedict of Aniane
- 14    **SUNDAY I OF LENT**
- 21    **SUNDAY II OF LENT**
- 22    **Chair of St. Peter**
- 23    **St. Polycarp Martyr**
- 28    **SUNDAY III OF LENT**



## MONASTERY NOTES

Among the recipients of the collection taken at the Midnight Mass at Christmas were **Covenant House** in New York for the homeless and destitute, and the Casa Juan Diego of the Houston Catholic Worker, for the benefit of the poor.

**Dom Julian**, now residing at the **Saint Claire Nursing Home** in Newport, has received word that work on the **Mary Force Stead Park** in Washington, D.C., has been completed after a long period of neglect and is now enjoyed by children in the Dupont Circle area. The work of restoration owes much to the support of **Carroll Carter**, Class of 1946, a long time friend of Dom Julian and the school, of which he is an alumnus and benefactor.

**Abbot Caedmon** and **Dom Gregory** journeyed to Dallas, Texas, to participate in a meeting of an organization called **FOCUS**, Fellowship of Catholic University Students, a group that promotes Catholic thought and action at colleges throughout the United States. Members are called “missionaries” who support the study of Christian teaching and activity on college campuses and encourage vocational interest through annual meetings at which there are speakers from a wide variety of religious groups, including monastic and diocesan representatives.

**The Thomas More Library** at the school is currently displaying an exhibit of different kinds of art with most of the contributions coming from the monks, past and present. It follows a display of original prints of **Hogarth** and **Piranesi**, the former given to the monastery in the mid-twentieth century by **Bishop Cassidy of Fall River** and the latter by **Dom Geoffrey Chase’s family**, collected during their travels in Italy.

The annual monastic retreat was given during the Christmas recess by **Dom Paul Stonham, Abbot of Belmont** in Herefordshire. His conferences were devoted to commenting on those chapters in the **Holy Rule** which deal with community relationships in modern living situations.