

GLENSTAL ABBEY Chronicle

GLENSTAL ABBEY, MURROE, CO. LIMERICK, IRELAND

ISSUE 15 SUMMER 2022 WWW.GLENSTAL.COM PHONE: (061) 621 000

Detail of wall painting in the Gothic Parlour of the castle at Glenstal Abbey.

GLENSTAL ABBEY, MURROE, CO. LIMERICK, IRELAND

Prayer is the foundation of our monastic life and each day in the monastery is centred around times of prayer, together and in private. The backbone of our prayer is the 'Liturgy of Hours' – sometimes called the 'Divine Office' or the 'Work of God' – where the monks gather in the Abbey church at appointed times to chant psalms and sing hymns to God, to listen to the Scriptures and to pray for the needs of the world. This daily round of worship consecrates the course of the day and night as the community gathers in the stillness of the morning, at the setting of the sun, and at the closing of the day.

WEEKDAYS-

6:35am: Matins and Lauds (Morning Prayer) 12:10pm: Conventual Mass 6:00pm: Vespers (Evening Prayer in Latin) 8:35pm: Compline (Tuesday - Friday: Night Prayer) 8:35pm on Saturday Nights: Resurrection Office/Vigils

SUNDAYS -

7:00am: Lauds (Morning Prayer) 10:00am: Conventual Mass 12:35pm: Sext (Midday Prayer) 6:00pm: Vespers (Evening Prayer in Latin) 8:35pm: Compline (Night Prayer)

Liturgies are broadcast each day as per our daily timetable: glenstal.com/abbey/webcam/

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New Season, New Blessings, New Hope in God's Consolation



As we enter into the summer season and a different rhythm takes hold, we have a lot to be thankful for in these last few months. For the first time in three years, we were able to hold the Easter Retreat. It was such a pleasure to welcome back so many familiar faces to Glenstal and a great joy to see some new faces here as well. A large number of resident retreatants joined with us for the Triduum and participated in the liturgies of these special days. One week later, we had the joy of celebrating the ordination to the priesthood of Fr Jarek. Archbishop Kieran O'Reilly SMA joined us for this celebration together with Fr Jarek's family and friends from near and far. Later in the summer, we will have the further joy of celebrating the solemn profession of Br Justin. We are truly blessed to be able to celebrate these moments together as a community. Sadly, our community bade farewell to Fr Brian Murphy OSB, who died suddenly on 16 May. Many will remember Fr Brian in the gardens here in Glenstal. May he rest in peace.

We are also very pleased that the second phase of the castle restoration project is moving ahead. The excellent work done on phase one will now be extended to other areas of the Barrington castle in need of restoration and repair.

As we journey through these summer months let us not forget to keep our brothers and sisters in Ukraine foremost in our thoughts and prayers. Let us together ask the God of all consolation to bless his people with peace, rain down justice and integrity upon the earth and bring us all alike to everlasting life.

> With every blessing, Abbot Brendan Coffey OSB



IN MEMORIAM

Brian Murphy Monk of Glenstal 1990-2022

Devoted to daily work in the terraced garden and the Lady Garden, Fr Brian was a familiar and welcoming face for countless visitors over the years.

Father Brian Murphy, known in his family as Paddy, was born in London to Irish parents, on 28 September 1935. Following his secondary education, he entered Douai Abbey, near Reading in Berkshire. He was professed in October 1955, taking the name Brian, in honour of the seventh-century Bishop of Dorchester, Saint Birinus. He was ordained priest in October 1963.

In 1974, Father Brian, having served as a teacher and Headmaster in the monastery school, discerned that he should leave Douai. He spent an extended period in Glenstal shortly after that, but eventually decided to return to lay life.

Already a graduate of Oxford University, over the next ten years, he qualified as a teacher in Trinity College Dublin, and taught for several years at St Gerard's School in Bray, Co. Wicklow. When St Gerard's opened a secondary school, Father Brian, by then known as Mr Murphy, became Head of the Junior School. He later wrote a

HENRY O'SHEA OSB AND MARTIN BROWNE OSB PHOTOS BY VALERIE O'SULLIVAN



history of that school, St Gerard's School: An Educational Initiative, which was published in 1999.

Brian arrived in Glenstal once again in September 1984, this time for good. Initially a guest, he spent his time on historical research and teaching. He was awarded a PhD in History from UCD in 1987. Sensing a call to return to monastic life, he was permitted to begin a period of probation that same year, and his definitive incorporation into the Glenstal community became effective on 1 August, 1990.

Throughout the decades that followed, Fr Brian had two primary occupations - scholarly historical work and the restoration and care of Glenstal's historic gardens. In the early 1990s he planted Ireland's first Bible Garden on the upper terrace of the restored terraced garden, first laid out in 1679. Father Brian's aim in the garden was to contain as many as possible of the plants mentioned in the Bible.

Fr Brian's 1991 book, Patrick Pearse and the Lost Republican Ideal, offered a notable and somewhat controversial challenge to prevailing 'revisionist' interpretations of the history of the revolutionary and civil war period in Ireland, and he continued writing and lecturing on related topics to the end. Among his subsequent books on themes associated with Irish republican history were: John Chartres, Mystery Man of the Treaty (1995), The Origins and Organisation of British Propaganda in Ireland (2006). These were accompanied by many articles in academic and other journals.

His passion for history and for the gardens at Glenstal were elegantly linked in his book *Glenstal Abbey* Gardens c.1650 to the Present, which was published in 2014. In that book he records how Dáil Éireann, in 1919, proposed that people should plant sixteen trees in memory of the men executed after the Easter Rising. He then recounts how he implemented Saturday 21st May.

this proposal of the Dáil by planting sixteen trees in the Lady Garden at Glenstal.

Less controversial was his 2018 book on the traumatic experiences during this time of the family that built Glenstal castle, The Life and Tragic Death of Winnie Barrington.

Devoted to daily work in the terraced garden and the Lady Garden, Fr Brian was a familiar and welcoming face for countless visitors over the years. He had a loyal band of assistants throughout this time, prominent among them Mrs Irene Fenton and Mr Seamus Hayes, not forgetting many of the 'men of the roads', who had come to stay in our hostel.

Fr Brian became ill on the afternoon of Sunday 15th May, 2022 and was transferred to University Hospital Limerick on Monday 16th May, where he died later that day. His well-attended funeral took place on



Keeping Hearts and Doors Open in Ukraine

ABBESS KLARA SWEDEN OSB Monastery of The Immaculate Conception, Zhytomyr, Ukraine

As I write this reflection, the sirens echo again. Although we should be used to them by now, after eightyfour days of war, my heart still sinks. We no longer run for shelter, we no longer hide, as we did during the first week of the full-scale invasion by Russia, but we continue to do what we have been doing, staying where we are.

On the eighth day of the war, all the nuns from Zhytomyr moved to Lviv to stay with their sisters because Zhytomyr was often bombed and it was very dangerous to stay there. We left the convent and everything we had gained over the years. It was a very hard decision. But nothing is more precious than a human life. The strong feeling of the whole community, that we were together again, gave us inner strength and peace.

Looking up to our founder, Benedict, who did not distance himself, but rather responded to the societal problems and crises of his time, we wanted to emulate him, and to open our hearts and the doors of the monastery to refugees as widely as possible.

As a Benedictine community, we continue to pray here in our own land and despite the constant anxieties, we try to keep the rhythm of the Liturgy of the Hours. The Psalms are now louder than ever, and we pray not only with our lips, mind and heart, but with every bone. With our whole being we cry out for help and for the peace that only God can give.

We do not pray for peace for ourselves, but for those who need it most: the children, the soldiers who stand guard day and night to hold back attacks. We admire their resilience and faith.

The experiences are varied: on the one hand, a fervent and zealous search for God's answer to all this horror. On the other hand, when you are searching for something, you become vulnerable to every word, you catch every word like air for your breath.

And sometimes it feels futile and pointless... but you keep chanting and following the set timetable... prayer seems very tense and not always in tune with your heart because there is too much pain in it.

A family from Mariupol lives above our oratory and the sounds of our singing reach their room. One day they asked if they could come down and listen to the singing, if they could be where the sisters are singing. It gives them a sense of peace. Just Gregorian chant.

We have even somehow stopped fearing for our lives, yet we are deeply concerned that so many lives have been violently cut short, the innocent, the small, the tortured... We see the distraught faces of those who have managed to escape, they are lost in the uncertainty of tomorrow. They don't know how to live after surviving the violence. Through their tears, we offer them a smile, assuring them that everything they have experienced is behind them.

They are surprised that we smile, because they have forgotten how to smile. One woman thanked me for smiling by saying: "I know you smile to support us, but you cry when no one else can see."

All we can do is let them live and smile, or at least moderate their pain



We wanted to be among them, not just reading the terrible news or staying safe, distancing ourselves from the situation, observing from afar...

for what they have lost, and offer them what the invaders have stolen, to accept this new reality. We encourage them to mourn every victim of this war, but at the same time lift themselves up and serve others.

A few days ago seven sisters returned to Zhytomyr. To the 'silence' of the cloistered life. During all these days of being with the displaced, I realized how necessary it is to have space for the Word, to hear His sound. And only then can one go out with Him, to nourish the weary and suffering. Without His word, which every morning He awakens my ear to listen to, it is impossible to comfort others. This is His gift.

A deep understanding of the fragility of this earthly life, encourages us to choose only what is good for eternity.

God is with us, and where the Lord is there is victory.

Students Spurred to Prayerful Acts in Aid of Ukraine

Marius Carney, Glenstal Abbey School Head Master



The dreadful images of the unfolding tragedy in Ukraine have profoundly impacted our students in recent weeks and spurred a great outflowing of anger and sympathy, really focussing our Lenten prayers. Turning up to take assembly the day after war was declared, I found a simple hand-drawn Ukrainian flag hanging from the lectern in the Atrium. Prayers were offered in assembly for all caught up in the war, and afterwards a member of the Fourth Year told me that he and others would organise a special candlelight Vigil for Peace. A few days later our chaplain Fr Denis organised a Coffee Morning with contributions of cakes and treats made and donated by many families across the school, including a large cake for sharing and cup-cakes themed in the colours of the Ukrainian flag. The event was attended by the whole school and monastic community and raised €2,285 for *Trócaire*.



On the Feast of the Annunciation, members of Transition Year, with the help of Brother Colmán and Ms Aungier undertook a twelve-hour Sponsored Fast as part of their Lenten observance to support the relief efforts for refugees in Ukraine raising \in 4,892.

Sister Klara OSB, Abbess of the Benedictine Monastery, Lviv, subsequently sent these words to our students:

"When I read your letter to my sisters, they were all very touched by your generosity. You are so young, but you know how to give up food and money to someone you don't know at all, but love.

We have been looking at your photos with joy. You are all very beautiful and joyful. Thank you very much for your post and for the donation, even if you don't think it's much, it's all for the Lord. Because for some refugees even just a kind word is a lot. We have one young family from Kharkov, with a baby one month old, their house was completely bombed, they managed to escape ... when we brought them to us, they had already forgotten when they last ate something warm ... and being with us, they already thought they were in paradise ... It is very difficult to see and hear what Russia is doing to our peaceful people and children ... and in the name of what? And through this pain we are even more grateful to those who reach out to help us ...

Thank you for letting us know, it gives us strength and hope."

Our prayers continued on Friday 25 March at 5.30 pm when Fr Martin led a group in the Sacro Speco joining with the worldwide prayer led by Pope Francis for Ukraine. Thank you to our young people for turning their anger to action, their frustration to prayer, their despair to others' hope.



Fount of Healing

The Medieval Stone Mortar of Glenstal Abbey

Each evening, at the end of Compline, the abbot blesses the monastic community and the congregation with holy water. This ancient custom invokes God's protection over the monastic household and its guests and visitors and serves as a reminder of the dignity each Christian acquires at baptism. Since the refurbishment of the church in 2016 the water used for this blessing is contained in a medieval stone mortar thought to have originally come from the Cistercian monastery of Abbey Owney at Abington, about four miles from Glenstal. This foundation was established at the end of the twelfth century by the Anglo-Norman

adventurer Theobald Walter, who granted extensive land and property rights to the founding community of monks from Furness in Lancashire. The land on which Glenstal now stands formed part of the original grant. Theobald was the ancestor of the Butler family in Ireland and the abbey was originally planned as a prestigious burial place for its members. Although nothing survives of the original structure apart from a few carved stones in Abington graveyard and at the Mass Rock in Glenstal, a 1681 drawing of the buildings by the English artist Thomas Dineley shows that it was an extensive and well-built structure.

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COLMÁN Ó CLABAIGH OSB PHOTO BY EMMAUS O'HERLIHY OSB



DIVINE THREADS

MARK PATRICK HEDERMAN OSB

PHOTOS BY DENIS HOOPER OSB AND OSCAR MC DERMOTT OSB

HAVING INHERITED ONE OF THE MOST BEAUTIFUL places in the world, the task of the monks is to make audible, tangible, visible, in this location the world which is beyond, the invisible realm of eternity and infinity where the Triune God resides. Francis Thompson describes the transfiguration involved:

O world invisible, we view thee, O world intangible, we touch thee, O world unknowable, we know thee,

Inapprehensible, we clutch thee!

The angels keep their ancient places; —

Turn but a stone and start a wing! 'Tis ye, 'tis your estrangèd faces, That miss the many-splendoured thing.

(In No Strange Land, Francis Thompson)

The way we open this space is by opening our hearts and allowing them to become ventilators to a world outside and beyond. We create a circle of presence penetrating or seeping into the ground of time and space on which we are standing. Our ordinary time/space dimension is a second by second unfolding of each day, each month, each year. Our liturgy places this same momentum up against the cliffside of infinity and eternity which, then and there, can infiltrate and influence the space structure and time droplets of history. The praying monks hold open a ventilating system which allows a draught from elsewhere to invade our world. This is the existential posture of praise which allows the breath of the Spirit to transfigure the world we live in.

Our Opus Dei, our liturgical schedule, is the ritual sanctification of the hours of each day which eventually reach to the ends of the earth. This is our way of continuing the work of incarnation, the word being made flesh, by becoming filters for the whole of creation until all things are imbued with the breath of the Spirit. When we start the day liturgically with an invitatory psalm: 'Cry out with joy to God all the earth,' we do so on earth's behalf. We alone, as human beings, can achieve a balance between the gravity of earth and openness to the Spirit.

Yes the springtime did need you. Many stars demanded that you sense them. A wave long since gone by lifted itself toward you, or when you passed a window that was open, a violin gave itself up. All this was charge. But did you complete it?



Earth, is it not this that you want: invisibly to arise in us? Is it not your dream to become one day invisible? -Earth! Invisible! What do you charge us with if not transformation? Earth, my love, I will. Oh believe me, Further springtimes are not required to win me-On my word, a single one, a single May is too much for my blood. I have been your tongue-tied subject for far too many years. (First Duino Elegy, Rainer Maria Rilke)

Liturgy allows us to filter this 'breath' like a song through our bodies into the world. Liturgy produces honey from the rocks, from the secret places of the earth. Monks are bees of the invisible who make visible and palpable the reality of the other world, secreting itself through our ritual into a luminosity or phosphorescence. People can pick up these traces through the sounds and movements, the intonations and the silences of the ceremonies. Monks should provide for a world

that has become blind, deaf and mute to the language of symbolism, the language of liturgy. This is similar to the 'miracle' which occurred in Tuscumbia in Italy in 1887. Anne Sullivan taught Helen Keller, who was blind, deaf and dumb, how to finger spell. Helen had until now not yet fully understood the meaning of words. When Anne led her to the water pump on 5 April 1887, all that was about to change. As Anne pumped the water over Helen's hand, Anne spelled out the word water on her other hand. Something about this explained the meaning of words within Helen, and Anne could immediately see in her face that she finally understood.

We have overheard fountains all our days. They sound to us almost like time. But so much more closely do they keep pace

with eternity's subtle rhythm. (Rilke)

Monks maintain another kind of space and time within the precincts of the normal history and geography of the world. This involves devising a different calendar (Advent, Lent, Easter, Pentecost etc.) with a

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SIMON SLEEMAN OSB

In a woodland, the dominant tree type 'calls the tune' for the rest of the flora and fauna. The Oak, the dominant tree in Glenstal, with its wide, spreading branches, is a benign competitor, letting lots of light penetrate beneath its canopy.

This allows for a rich biodiversity in the understorey consisting of smaller trees and shrubs such as birch and hazel, laurel and further down, brambles and ferns, and at ground level mosses and small plants such as bluebells. A single oak provides a habitat for some 2,300 species of plant and animal and each layer below supports its own distinctive fauna. And then there is the soil. One teaspoon of healthy soil contains 1-7 billion living organisms, of which 75,000 are bacteria, 25,000 are fungi, 1,000 are protozoa, 100 are nematodes. This number keeps growing as our measuring techniques improve.

Because animals are on the move, they are not as obvious as the lush growth of plant life but there is lots to be seen with patience and keen eye.

Mammals Deer, badgers, foxes, pine martens, red squirrels, bats, voles, mice and shrews, to name a few.

Birds In the canopy you find the sparrow hawk, wood pigeon, the jay, and further down, black-birds, robins and wrens abound. **Insects** Bees, butterflies, moths, hover flies.

And we haven't mentioned the lakes and streams which contribute a whole other area to the rich biodiversity of Glenstal.



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correspondingly appropriate ritual which engenders another kind of space. As an anonymous community who gather in the church four times a day, we are thinning the air of pure human purpose so that the will of God, and thereby 'the kingdom of God,' can enter in. 'O gates, lift high your heads, grow higher ancient doors, let him enter the King of Glory!'

Silent friend of many distances, feel

how your breath enlarges all of space.

Let your presence ring out like a bell into the night.

What feeds upon your face

grows mighty from the nourishment thus offered. Move through transformation, out and in.

What is the deepest loss that you have suffered? If drinking is bitter, change yourself to wine.

In this immeasurable darkness, be the power that rounds your senses in their magic ring, the sense of their mysterious encounter. And if the earthly no longer knows your name, whisper to the silent earth: I'm flowing. To the flashing water say: I am. (Sonnets to Orpheus, II, 29, Rilke)

Every second since Christ rose from the dead is shot through with eternity, and we now have the possibility to live our lives in the moment before the bullet left the gun. There is a vertical dimension to every second. This provides a trapdoor which allows us to escape from the midnight express hurtling through the tunnel on its way towards a cliff.

The question is how do we keep this possibility open at all times. The answer is to live 'liturgically,' so as to aerate the totality with breath from elsewhere. This is achieved by establishing on a daily basis a new language: the language of symbolism, the language of liturgy, the language of the saving mysteries of Jesus Christ, made real for us on a daily basis through the power of the Holy Spirit. Known as the *digitus Dei* [the 'finger of God'], the Holy Spirit spells out 'the word' for us as the water of life is poured on our other

Abbey Updates



hand. The Holy Spirit writes on our hands, as blind deaf and mute people, through the medium of liturgical sound. 'I was dumb, silent and still . . . He put a new song into my mouth' (Psalms 38:3; 39:4).

Gifts of place, time and culture have been given to the community at Glenstal Abbey as providential sources from which to provide for a larger community 'the running streams' for which many, if not every soul is thirsting.

The light of the sun which we cannot see breaks into visible components, which we can see, as it appears on earth. Using a prism to refract or break the invisible light, we can watch its separation into a visible spectrum of violet, blue, green, yellow, orange and red. Our liturgy performs a similar refraction of the life of God on earth by dividing the temporal year we pass through annually into a spectrum of purple, green, pink, white, gold and red as we celebrate the moments of Christ's life from his coming in Advent to his birth at Christmas to his Epiphany and his baptism; then we change to purple for his journey through the desert in Lent, his suffering and death at Passiontide, his rising from the dead at Easter, his ascension into heaven and his sending of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. And the cloth we weave is a cloth of gold because there are divine threads running through it to make up one seamless garment of God's Incarnation on, in, and through, our earth.

ABBEY CELEBRATION WITH COLLEAGUES ON MARCH 21, THE TRANSITUS OF SAINT BENEDICT

The 21st March marks the feast of the *Transitus* of St Benedict, the day of his death and passage into life. This year we chose this day to celebrate with those colleagues who had retired, or moved on in their careers, during the coronavirus pandemic. We were delighted that so many former staff were able to be with us to celebrate their time in Glenstal and receive our grateful thanks for their years of service.

We also used the occasion to mark the retirement of Mr Paddy O'Connor, our Maintenance Manager. Paddy has been in charge of maintenance in Glenstal for well over two decades and has been faithful and diligent in everything. Over the years, he has been a key



member of staff, keeping the operation going and responding to every call on his time with generosity and good humour. It is our good fortune that Paddy will remain as a member of the maintenance team after retiring as manager and so he will continue his connection with Glenstal for many more years. A presentation was made to Paddy as a token of our gratitude.

After these celebrations we all went to the Abbey Church where we celebrated the Eucharist for the *Transitus* of St Benedict.



ORDINATION OF OUR CONFRÈRE, FR JAREK KUREK OSB

On Saturday 23 April 2022 Archbishop Kieran O'Reilly SMA ordained our confrère, Fr Jarek Kurek OSB, to the priesthood. It was a beautiful sunny day in Glenstal and Fr Jarek was joined by his family, members of the monastic community, friends from Poland and around the world, along with his many new Irish friends.

Fr Jarek comes from Katowice in Poland. He studied the violin at the Music Academy of Katowice before later completing post-graduate Business Studies, also in Poland. He began his philosophical and theological studies at the Dominicans' theological faculty in Kraków and later completed these studies at the University of Oxford.

Fr Jarek first came to Glenstal to improve his English many years ago, but returned in 2015 to join our community, making his simple profession on 11 July 2016, the feast of St Benedict. He was solemnly professed here on 24 April 2019 and ordained a deacon on 10 April 2021.

Fr Jarek also spent some time doing missionary work in South America, among the people of Peru, before he entered monastic life in Glenstal. Since returning from his studies in Oxford, Fr Jarek has been involved in the Abbey School, teaching and directing the school choir. We wish him every blessing as he begins his ministry among us as a monk and priest.





For additional updates and for more information about life at Glenstal, visit the Abbey website: glenstal.com/monastery/news



EASTER LITURGY PHOTO ESSAY BY DENIS HOOPER OSB









Fount of Healing

The Medieval Stone Mortar of Glenstal Abbey

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The surviving masonry indicates that the monastery was built in phases throughout the thirteenth century and, like the other Butler Cistercian houses at Holycross, Co. Tipperary, and Kilcooley, Co. Kilkenny, was extensively remodelled in the late fifteenth century.

Mortars were used in monastic and lay households to grind plants and minerals for use as foodstuffs and medicines. Their design is pretty standard with a deep bowl carved from a single block of stone and a rim on which four projections or lugs allowed the user to steady or tilt the bowl during the grinding process. This uniformity makes it difficult to date surviving mortars with certainty but the degree of weathering on the Glenstal example suggests that it dates to at least the late Middle Ages. Recent excavations at Bective Abbey, Co. Meath and Kells Priory, Co. Kilkenny have produced evidence for kitchen and 'physic' gardens and it is highly likely that the monks of Abbey Owney

maintained similar gardens to produce vegetables and medicinal herbs. A late-fifteenth century manuscript from the college of priests at Killeen, Co. Meath contains thirty-three recipes for various ailments and illnesses. These included treatments for headache, fever, toothache, poisoning, burns and scalding, cataracts, urinary tract infections, heart conditions and impacted fractures. It also contains recipes for preparing poultices to treat boils and cancer. The recipes are drawn from a common stock of treatments found in English and Continental sources that would potentially have been available to the Abbey Owney community as well.

While medical treatment has developed significantly since the mortar was first produced, the need for God's healing mercy remains constant and its current use as a holy water vessel seems entirely in keeping with the purpose for which it was first intended.

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A comprehensive study of Martin Luther's theological reform that considers ways in which Luther's sixteenth-century challenges to the Church retain their relevancy today.

Glenstal Abbey Gardens Brian Murphy OSB

Brian Murphy traces the history of the gardens in Glenstal Abbey from the fifteenth century to the present.

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Irish Catholics can hone in on the most precious aspects of our faith and ask where 'God' is to be found in the Ireland of today.

