



# GLENSTAL ABBEY CHRONICLE

GLENSTAL ABBEY, MURROE, CO. LIMERICK, IRELAND

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**GLENSTAL ABBEY, MURROE, CO. LIMERICK, IRELAND**


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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 the Hours – sometimes called the 'Divine Office' or the 'Work of God' – where the monks gather in the Abbey church 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.

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**W E E K D A Y S**


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**6:35am: Matins and Lauds (Morning Prayer)**

**12:10pm: Conventual Mass**

**6:00pm: Vespers (Evening Prayer in Latin)**

**8:35pm: Compline (Monday - Friday: Night Prayer)  
Resurrection Office (Saturday)**

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**S U N D A Y S**


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**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)**

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Liturgies are broadcast each day as per our daily timetable:

**[glenstal.com/abbey/webcam/](http://glenstal.com/abbey/webcam/)**

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**COVER IMAGE:** Skt. Nikolaj Kirke, Møgeltønder, Denmark, Mural (detail), 1894-98 (Photo: Wolfgang Sauber, 2010).

**I write these** brief words of introduction to our Winter issue of the *Chronicle* with snow on the ground outside. Whether or not we will have a white Christmas is another question altogether. St Luke says that, at the birth of Jesus, the angels sang of glory to God and peace on earth. It is heart-warming to think that the birth of our Saviour was heralded by music. A musical melody runs through this issue of the *Chronicle*, with various reflections on music and spirituality, music in the liturgy, music at Glenstal.



But it's not all singing and playing. We reflect also on the place of work in our lives. Among the fruits of our labour we draw your attention to two new books: *The People's Celebration of the Eucharist* by Fr Fintan, and *The Glenstal Prayerbook* which comes to us from Fr Simon. They could well accompany you into the New Year and beyond.

As we journey through Advent and Christmas, may the light of Christ shine more brightly in our hearts, and may the New Year bring many blessings.

**Abbot Columba McCann OSB**

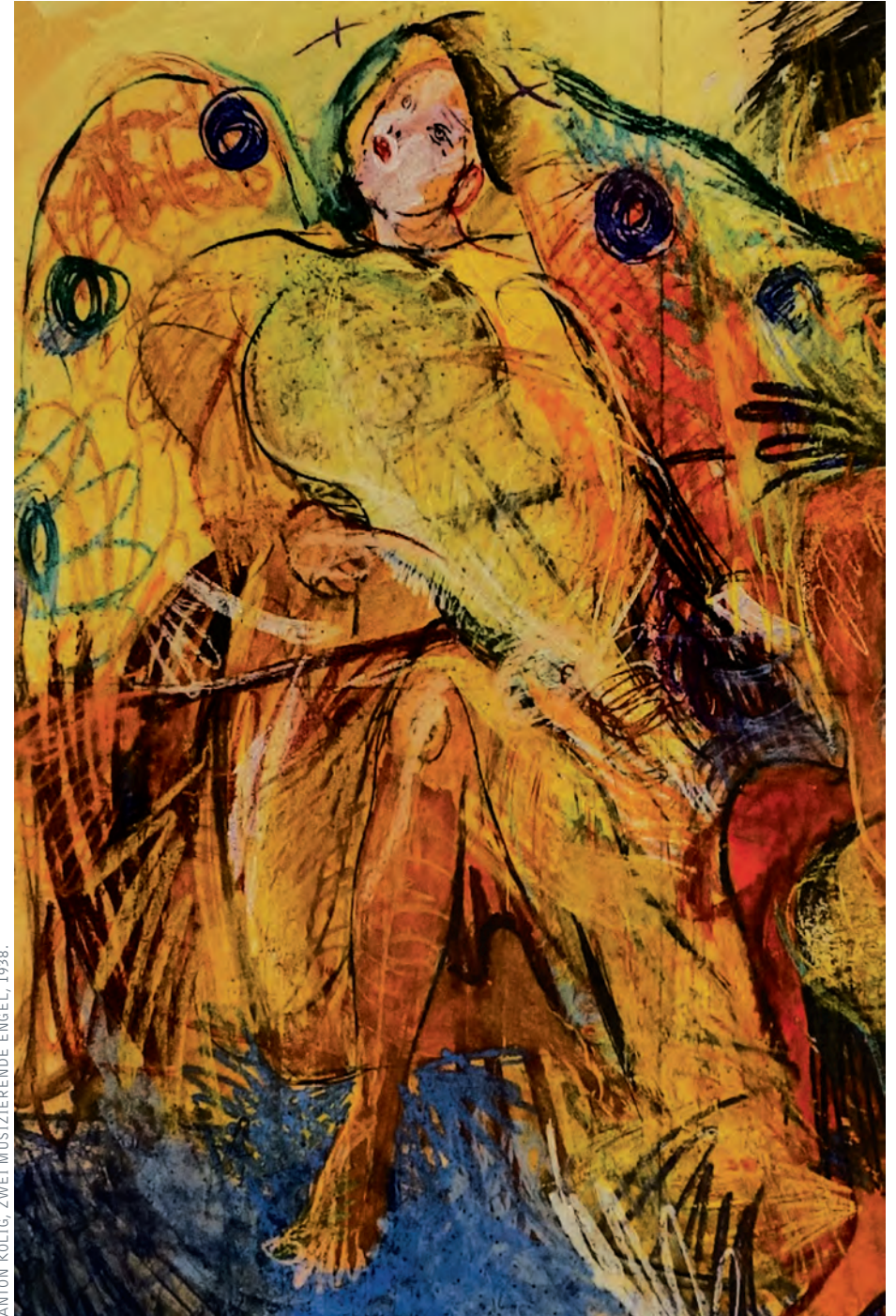


## Seeking a Prayerful Tone

Since moving to Glenstal Abbey I have received many beautiful compliments for my violin playing. However, for some time, these compliments have sat a little uneasily with me. St Augustine, in his *Confessions*, emphatically suggested that one should be careful not to get overwhelmed by music in the church! How do I reconcile the life of a monk and a musician?

I graduated from a conservatoire in Poland and soon joined a Benedictine monastery. Since then, the coexistence of the violin and my spiritual life has often felt at odds. At one point, I was determined to leave the violin behind. Then, however, I met another musician, a Dominican who later became the Rector of the Angelicum University in Rome, who suggested, "Don't abandon it."

**JAREK KUREK OSB**



ANTON KOLIG, ZWEI MUSIZIERENDE ENGEL, 1938.

Instead, make it an instrument of evangelisation". His advice helped me, yet a profound unease remained and my practice waned.

During my studies in Oxford, I was fortunate to meet a brilliant German physicist and pianist who gently encouraged me to practice more. He revived my musical interests and aspirations. However, another spiritual hurdle soon

kept moving expressed your music so much". Many times in the past, my professors had instructed me not to move my body and to focus solely on playing. Should I be more still? These are just some examples of the questions that have lingered in my mind. With the continued encouragement and support of the abbots at Glenstal, I've intensified my violin practice and reflected more deeply on its true purpose and value.

**A Dominican friar who later became the Rector of the Angelicum University in Rome, advised me not to abandon my violin playing but to "make it an instrument of evangelisation".**

emerged. After a performance, someone commented, "You are so passionate when you play". But is it good to be so, given the monastic principle of *apatheia*, that is passionlessness?

Recently, after performing a short Mozart piece at Kylemore Abbey, a distinguished English abbess approached me, saying, "While listening to you, I couldn't help but watch your... feet. The way they

Understanding the violin and its mysteries is no easy task. One of the greatest violinists, Eugène Ysaÿe, said, "The violin is a poet whose enigmatic nature may only be divined by the elect". I don't know whether I am one of those, but I have been striving to divine its nature and purpose.

Violinists often seek their personal tone. Partly, it comes from the instruments they play, but ultimately,

it is the intimate qualities of their souls that they transmit through their beloved instruments. After all these years of contemplating the intersection of music and spirituality, what do I hope to convey to my

role of the body in performance and see it harmoniously integrate into the act of playing the violin. But all of this must be united by the inner tone of my transformed heart — so I dare to believe.



ANNIBALE CARRACCI, AN ANGEL PLAYING THE VIOLIN, STUDY FOR A PAINTING, c. 1575 - 1609, BRITISH MUSEUM.

audience? First, I am ready to embrace passion in playing the violin. I believe we all possess a good kind of passion that deserves expression, whether through music or spirituality. Next, I am content to embrace what some call "the incarnational aspect of Christianity". I want to honour the inextricable

For those who hold faith in the possible divinisation of our humanity, might it not be too bold to suggest that this inner tone could resonate as a divine note, one that touches the listeners' inner sense? Perhaps, then, the violin becomes an instrument to know and experience God. ■



ANGEL PLAYING THE ORGAN, LIMESTONE IN DIRECT SIZE. GILDING AND POLYCHROMY, C. 1401–1500. MUSÉE DES AUGUSTINS DE TOULOUSE, FRANCE.



## Pipelines

**OLIVIER MESSIAEN (1908 – 1992)**

a profoundly religious composer and organist once said,  
 “Music is the bridge between the physical and the spiritual, a  
 vessel through which we can glimpse the transcendent”.

The Latin plainchant sung by the monks was composed without any organ accompaniment in mind. There is a clear, austere beauty about the simplicity of a single melody that is surrounded only by silence. On the other hand, monks, like many singers, have a tendency to go flat when they are singing

over an extended period of time. For example, a psalm of over twenty verses may have dropped enough pitch as to make the antiphon that introduced it almost unsingable when it is repeated at the end. One reason for accompanying chant on the organ is that it keeps the pitch from dropping.

**COLUMBA McCANN OSB**

While purists might object, saying that ‘It wasn’t like this when it was first sung’, a legitimate response is to point out that the singing of chant in Church is a living tradition, evolving from purely oral transmission to a complex manuscript tradition with variants and developments. There is, perhaps, no one ‘correct’ way of singing plainchant. Within an evolving tradition, accompaniment has its place.

Accompanying chant is not an easy matter. Organists are generally classically trained, with modern notation of five-line staves of music. Unless an accompaniment is written out for them in modern notation (and this is rare when it comes to the vast array of antiphons that are sung), the organist has to read the more primitive chant on the old four-line stave system and translate it mentally into a version that is comprehensible for the brain of a modern musician. Furthermore, plainchant has its own peculiar twists and turns in the melody that are quite unlike any songs sung in the last few hundred years. Organists of our own time are conversant with the major and minor keys that have been characteristic

of music in recent centuries, but the older, pre-Renaissance music tends to use different melodic patterns that have been classified into different ‘modes’ according to their characteristics. Learning to accompany medieval chant means getting into quite a different world of modal harmonisation — a very beautiful world, one might add. Another challenge is for the accompanist to be supportive but at the same time unobtrusive. The chant has its own supple flexibility and the organist has to place the harmonies in such a way as to stay out of the way of the melody. Just as a jeweller might display a beautiful necklace on a piece of dark velvet, so too the organ has to provide background so beautiful and well adapted that it is hardly noticed.

In the history of the Catholic liturgy, the organ also sounded on its own. Sometimes it was to introduce a piece of chant, giving a kind of intonation. The chant of our liturgy alternates between two groups: either between two sides of the monastic choir, or between chanters and everyone else. Sometimes the organ replaced one of these groups, producing its own little ‘song’ for

alternative verses. So the organ repertoire contains lots of preludes, verses and postludes that are fitted to the modes of plainchant. For example one comes across pieces or sets of pieces from the Renaissance or early baroque periods with titles like *Suite du Premier Ton* or *Intonatio Primi Toni* or *Obra de 8 tono alto*. Such

the year. This didn’t happen only in relation to plainchant but also in relation to hymns of the Protestant reformation. Some of J. S. Bach’s most eloquent pieces for organ are preludes that were written to introduce the tune of the hymn the congregation was just about to sing. Music of a more abstract nature, for example a prelude and

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**“Often, people expect from me a charming, sweet music, vaguely mystical and above all soporific. Do they think that psalms, for example, speak of sweet and sugary things? A psalm groans, howls, bellows, beseeches, exults, and rejoices in turn.” Olivier Messiaen**

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pieces were designed to mirror something of the sound world of the various plainchant modes, numbered from 1 to 8. The organ can also comment on the liturgical action, prolonging, enveloping, enhancing. Much of the music written by the great organ composers was written for the liturgy, taking up the tunes of hymns and chants from the different times of

fugue, can still provide just the right atmosphere, for example a festive ending to Sunday Mass, or something quieter and reflective for the season of Advent. There is also more modern music written around religious themes, for example the various suites for organ written by Olivier Messiaen with titles like *The Nativity*, *The Ascension*, and *Pentecost Mass*.

Organists don't just rely on the printed score. Like jazz musicians, church organists are among the few musicians who practice improvisation on a regular basis today. Improvisation has many advantages. Sometimes a written piece is too long or too short, or is in the wrong key, given the musical context. On the positive side, a good improviser can catch the

improvisation was always expected of organists in cathedrals and major churches down the centuries, and improvisation on submitted themes was normally part of the assessment of candidates for new posts. The various preludes, intonations, interludes etc. were being improvised by organists long before they were being written down. In the Paris Conservatoire

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**Organists don't just rely on the printed score. Like jazz musicians, church organists are among the few musicians who practice improvisation on a regular basis today.**

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mood of the moment and provide a musical commentary that speaks to the heart. A tune that has just been sung, with all its religious and emotional associations, can be heard once again, this time clothed with new colours, viewed in a new perspective, even transformed so as to intensify the experience. Or a piece of sung plainchant can grow out of a prelude where the organist has improvised something that sets the mood in advance. A well-developed level of skill in

in the twentieth century, more time was given to improvisation than to the preparation of repertoire in order to equip organists to be able to produce music on the spot for any liturgical event. Here at Glenstal we have maintained that tradition. While substantial pieces from the written repertoire are played at the end of Sunday Mass and, sometimes after Sunday Vespers, improvisation plays a large part in the contribution of the organists to our daily liturgy. ■



GENTILE DA FABRIANO, SALA DELLE ARTI LIBERALI E DEI PIANETTI 10.2 MUSICA (DETAIL), 1411-1412. PHOTO: SAILKO



## Abbatial Blessing

**Recently-elected abbot of Glenstal Abbey, Fr Columba McCann, received his abbatial blessing at a ceremony presided over by Kieran O'Reilly, Archbishop of Cashel and Emly, on 1 November.**

Held on the Solemnity of All Saints, the liturgy called for God's blessing, strength and guidance upon the new abbot as he begins his role as father, teacher, and model for the monastic community.

Speaking as his eight-year term of office gets underway, Abbot Columba commented: "the worst days of the pandemic brought home to us just how interconnected we are on our planet, even at a spiritual level. Part of our task as monks today is to keep rediscovering what it is we bring

to the Church and the world, and what God wishes to bring to others through us."

The ceremony was attended by a congregation of more than two hundred guests, with the Mass concelebrated by Brendan Leahy, Bishop of Limerick, in the presence of ecumenical representatives including Michael Burrows, the Church of Ireland's Bishop of Tuam, Limerick and Killaloe; Niall Sloane, Dean of Limerick and Ardfert and Gillian Kingston of the Methodist Church. ■

**PHOTOS BY MIRIAM POWER**





Ora et Labora



Very often, the  
Rule of Saint Benedict  
is summarised as  
**Ora et Labora**  
(Pray and Work).

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**OSCAR MCDERMOTT OSB**

As monks, we pray and chant the Office and go about our work duties — whether teaching in the school, welcoming guests, or engaging in administration or maintenance. St Benedict refers to community prayer as “the work of God”. However, the term “the work of God” is somewhat unclear. Is it work we do for God, or is it God’s work in us? Perhaps it’s both. When we engage in the work of God, we work for God; we offer Him our voices and chant the psalms as beautifully and skilfully as we can. While we sing God’s praises, He is also at work in us. When we leave the sanctuary, the work doesn’t stop there. As we move to the classroom, the office, the kitchen, or the garden, God continues to work in us, calling us more and more to conversion and life. The work of God — what we offer Him and what He works in us — is gentle and rather slow. It is, nonetheless, efficient and truly wonderful. ■



## Giving Worship a More Noble Form

For many people, music is a kind of comprehensive statement about the human condition beyond anything that can be expressed in ideas and language. We all understand how we cannot articulate the 'whole real' in language and ideas, how we cannot circumscribe the infinite complexity of all experience and obtain a whole statement of it. In this sense, reality is always left without a word. Yet in music, many people seem to hear an ultimate 'word'

about existence mysteriously uttered. For Theodore Adorno, "language would say the absolute in a mediated way, yet the absolute escapes it in each of its intentions... Music reaches the absolute immediately, but in the same instant it darkens, as when a strong light blinds the eye, which can no longer see things which are quite visible". Likewise, for George Steiner: "The energy that is music puts us in felt relation to the energy that is life;

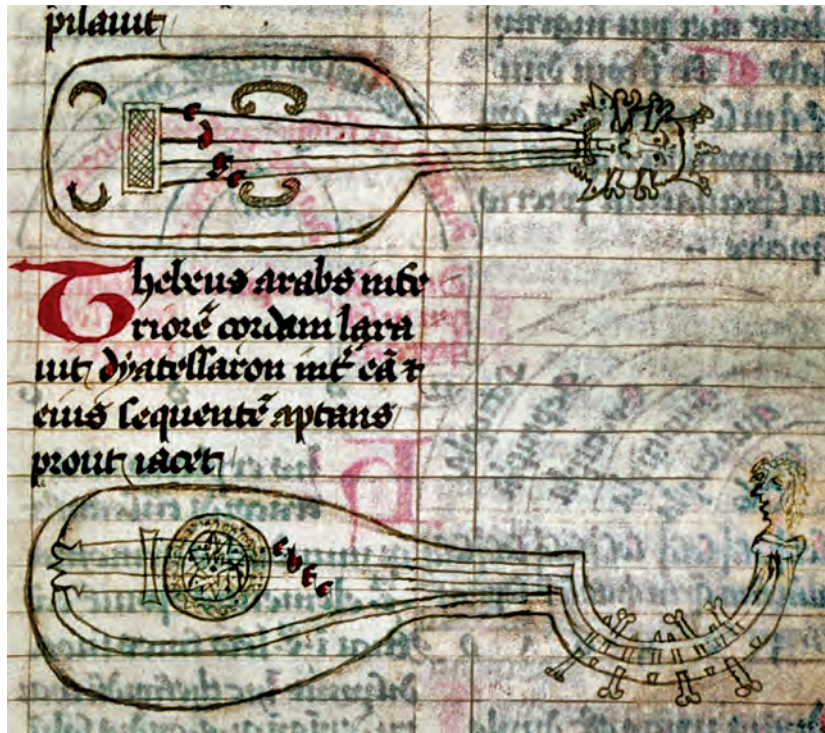
**CYPRIAN LOVE OSB**



ANGEL PLAYING LUTE, 1490. BODE MUSEUM, BERLIN, GERMANY.

it puts us in a relationship of experienced immediacy with the abstractly and verbally inexpressible but wholly palpable, primary fact of being”.

the task of revealing ultimate truth. But religion and music are not competitors. Indeed, examination of the religions of humanity shows that some use of music in religious



THE BERKELEY MANUSCRIPT, c.1360. UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA MUSIC LIBRARY, MS. 744.

A fourteenth-century illumination depicting two musical instruments and the way their strings are tuned: A citole or a vielle or fiddle (top) and a gittern (below).

Music thus makes something like a truth claim in the sphere of ultimate reality. Religion also has

contexts is virtually ubiquitous. It seems that verbal meaning, when aspiring to the expression of the

ultimate mystery of being, needs music, because, at a certain point, words fail.

Not surprisingly, there are numerous ways in which music can support the Christian faith as mystery. Consider, for example how the simultaneous sounding of two musical notes results in our ability to hear those notes simultaneously as blended and separate. This represents a close analogy in human experience with the unconfused conjunction of the two natures in Christ. Two musical notes become here a sonic icon of fusion in distinction, an aural icon of the Incarnation. With three notes, the same principle can be extended to the Trinity.

Music also assists our sense of liturgical community. Singing can fill a room (or a church) in such a way that the addition of more and more voices does not cause the space to feel 'crowded' with sound. Instead of a room crowded with sound, the burgeoning music creates a feeling of abundance as new voices gradually enter the group and harmonise in distinctive

ways. The sound creates a sense of fullness which complements the sublime fullness of the liturgy. Music sings a new space of communal praise into existence.

Music is also widely linked to hope in human experience. A checklist of some common human behaviour reveals this. Whenever music breaks out spontaneously in our heads, this is normally when we are already optimistic. And when we wish to revive our hope we sing. In Lamentations 5:14 we read of the young men with no hope who have given up their music because Mount Zion is desolate. Music, it would appear, provides a natural expression of hope, and this is a clue to its use in the Church's celebrations. In *Musicam Sacram* (Instruction on Music in the Liturgy, 1967), the teaching of Vatican II links music with the mystery of heaven: "Liturgical worship is given a more noble form when it is celebrated in song . . . Indeed, through this form . . . the mystery of the liturgy... is more openly shown...and the whole celebration more clearly prefigures that heavenly liturgy which is enacted in the holy city of Jerusalem". ■



ZANOBI STROZZI, SINGING MONKS (1409), FLORENCE, BIBLIOTECA MEDICEA LAURENZIANA, CORALE 3, FOL. 41V.



## Music at Glenstal

**Music has had an important place in the life of Glenstal Abbey ever since monks arrived here from Belgium in 1927.**

Central to the life of Benedictine monasteries from their very beginnings in the sixth century has been the round of daily prayer, referred to by Saint Benedict as the 'Work of God', and a great portion of this prayer has always been sung. Aside from singing the psalms to very simple tones consisting of only a few notes, monks have been singing more complex melodies of hymns, antiphons, acclamations and responsories drawn from a Latin chant repertoire that developed over many centuries in the Western Church.

With the revision of the liturgy after Vatican II a greater diversity of styles and approaches began to emerge across the Benedictine world. When St Benedict put together his plan for sung offices he never intended it to be imposed as something rigidly uniform from one community to the next, but always gave each monastery the possibility of forming their own version of what was to be done, sung and said. A musical-liturgical tour around Benedictine monasteries today will reveal that contemporary monks have taken Saint Benedict at his

word, and so a variety of solutions is to be found from place to place.

The community at Glenstal gradually developed its own repertoire of English language melodies, drawing not only on external sources but also on music composed within the monastery. The musical settings which the monks use for the morning offices, Midday Prayer and Compline incorporate melodies that find their inspiration in the traditional Latin chant modes, but with melodic idioms adapted to the rhythms of the English language.

The most recent musical development has been the creation of a Saturday night Resurrection Office which draws on an ancient tradition of proclaiming the gospel of the resurrection as Saturday night turns towards Sunday, the day of resurrection. The music for this celebration draws on a variety of styles, including Eastern Orthodox chant, and continues to evolve. Side by side with these innovations the Latin chant has remained as the normal way of singing Vespers each evening. It forms the backbone of music at daily Mass and is also,

to a lesser extent, used at pivotal moments of the other offices.

Mention should also be made of the work of the late Fr Winoc Mertens OSB who did much to promote Gregorian chant in the wider community beyond Glenstal; the connection with the late Seán Ó Riada, whose second Mass setting was written for Glenstal; the many years of musical collaboration with Dr Nóirín Ní Riain, with whom the monks of Glenstal made a number of important recordings incorporating something of the genius of Irish traditional song within the liturgy; the building of a fine organ by Kenneth Jones and the development of organ playing at the Abbey; and the development of a Sunday choir in the Abbey School.

The arrival of monks with musical experience from dioceses around the country, combined with ongoing professional study of chant sources, the continued emergence of new musical compositions from within the community and a commitment to give of our musical best for the liturgy all bode well for the future of music at Glenstal. ■

## Abbey Updates

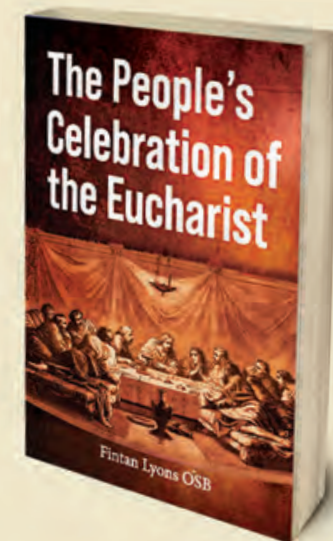
### REIMAGINING PARTICIPATION WHEN CELEBRATING THE LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST

The liturgical celebration of the Eucharistic is more than simply a rite performed by a presiding priest in the presence of a congregation, though for many centuries it was seen by so many to be just that. The truth, however, is that this celebration, when viewed as an activity of the People of God, the Body of Christ, means that there is a fundamental unity incorporating both ordained and non-ordained.



### LOFTY AMBITIONS

Glenstal Abbey School choir sings regularly at Sunday Mass, complementing the singing of the monks. For years, the choir sang from the same space as the monks, in the area behind the altar. Because of Covid-19 concerns, the school choir moved up to the choir loft and has remained there ever since. The choir was accompanied in this location by a modest electronic organ, which had formerly been in use as a practice instrument. With help from a very generous donor, this option has been upgraded with *Hauptwerk* technology, which allows an electronic instrument to download digital samples of famous cathedral organs. Quite a transformation!



From a deeper perspective, the task becomes one of exploring what the togetherness of priest and people implies, and finding a language to express it. Fr Fintan's book, *The People's Celebration of the Eucharist* (Messenger Publications), is about what the Second Vatican Council taught in relation to the Church's worship and in particular about the Mass and how it is to be celebrated.

### IN PRAISE OF BRIGIT: SEMINAR IN HONOUR OF FR SEÁN Ó DUINN, MONK OF GLENSTAL

To mark the 1500th anniversary of the death of Brigit of Kildare, Glenstal held a one-day seminar on 26 October. The day began with Br Colmán who spoke on Medieval female sanctity. Prof Bairbre Ní Fhloinn then gave a comprehensive survey of the vast folklore treasures associated with Brigit, featuring connections with the continent. Dr Tracy Collins explored the archaeology associated with

Standing next to a portrait of Seán Ó Duinn OSB are: Br Colmán, Prof Bairbre Ní Fhloinn, Abbot Columba, Dr Tracy Collins, Fr Luke, Dr Liz Dawson.



St Brigit and Dr Liz Dawson compared the many historical accounts of the life of Brigit and the close association with the Irish saints Patrick and Columba. Fr Luke concluded the seminar with an address on the life and scholarship of an t-Athair Seán Ó Duinn, paying particular attention to the significance of his work on Brigit published in both Irish and English.

### PHOTO ESSAY: GLENSTAL SCHOOL CHOIR IN ACTION

Fr. Denis and Edward Clifton Brown, a 3rd-year student in Glenstal School, snapped these photos (opposite) of the school choir in the Abbey church as they got ready for Mass. In addition, Edward took photos of the choir when they sang during Mass in several different locations throughout Rome when on a school trip there in October: the church of San Silvestro in Capite; the Pontifical Irish College; the Basilica of San Clemente; and the Venerable English College.



PHOTOS: DENIS HOOPER OSB AND EDWARD CLIFTON BROWN

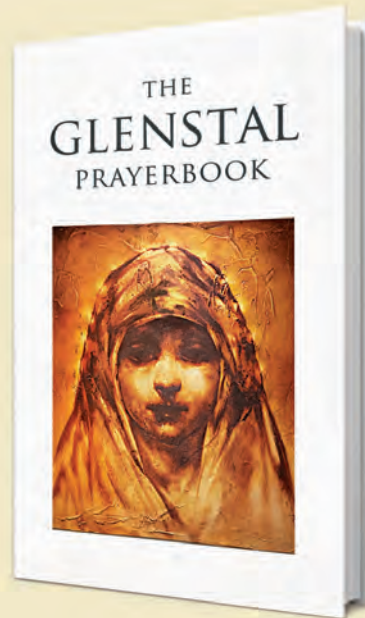
## DOMINICAN CELEBRATIONS

2024 marks the 800th anniversary of the arrival of the Order of Preachers or the Dominican Friars in Ireland. Among the events to commemorate this anniversary was a seminar on Irish Dominican history that took place in Glenstal from 10-11 June. This included presentations by Fr Conor Mc Donough OP, Dr Eleanor Giraud (University of Limerick) and Br Colmán (author of *The Friars in Ireland, 1224–1540*). The seminar also included a well-attended field trip to nearby medieval Dominican sites and the most moving highlights was the singing of the Dominican version of the *Salve Regina* in the ruined Lady Chapel of Killmallock Priory by the student friars. Br Colmán also spoke at Dominican conferences in Youghal and Dublin. Glenstal has a long association with the Irish Dominicans as members of the province taught theology here in the mid-twentieth century.

## THE GLENSTAL PRAYERBOOK

The 2001 *Glenstal Book of Prayer* was an international bestseller. The 2014 *Glenstal Prayerbook* (Red Stripe Press), was to be a reprint of the 2001 edition. Something quite different has emerged. There are more prayers, and the translation of

biblical texts, very different. We have chosen Eugene Peterson's Biblical translation called, *The Message*. Prayer hasn't changed since 2001, but the world has moved on. Life is more hectic, and hope has receded. There seems little time for an extra activity, especially prayer. This book is built on the premise that we are deficient without a connection with the living God. We need a 'maintenance plan' to sustain this connection. *The Glenstal Prayerbook* is intended to be part of that maintenance plan. It provides a traditional approach to prayer, taking its essential form from the monastic prayer life as lived here in Glenstal Abbey. ■



## Glenstal Abbey Garden Cemetery

Glenstal Abbey Garden Cemetery provides a prayerful and peaceful environment for the interment of cremated remains. Each plot can accommodate one or two urns and is marked by a plaque of local grey granite for engraving individuals' names and dates.

Selecting a cemetery and space is an important decision. Advance planning gives you peace of mind and shows care and concern for your family for whom the final arrangements become less of a burden.

If you have questions or would like to arrange a personal tour, please email us at [gardencemetery@glenstal.com](mailto:gardencemetery@glenstal.com) or call the Bursar's Office at 061 621045.







**PRAISE HIM**



**WITH STRINGS**



**AND PIPES**



P S A L M 1 5 0