

Shrove Tuesday 13/02/2024

Dearest Fr Tony, Fr Paul & Parish of Our Lady Star of the Sea,

I find myself in the Parish of Our Lady Star of the Sea too, but that of Bridlington, Filey & Eastfield. By the time you receive this I will have spent two weeks in community and am slowly finding my way. Oddly, the biggest challenge so far has been to cook meals ready for exactly after prayers. I am used to cooking and eating whenever it is ready.

I'm sorry to say no photos or posh headed paper on this occasion. The heraldry may well change now that we have become a dependent canonry, so the pause button has been hit with such trivial but fun things.

My dog, Bert, has settled in ok. He was a regular visitor with me over the years. He is very popular and I have had to cut his mealtime food due to all the treats he is being given. Yesterday evening we were entertaining a very dear family of the community and he enjoyed a whole evening of fuss and games with a tennis ball in the garden.

On a Thursday each week we welcome Fr Andrew's (RIP) sister and brother-in-law, who have a dear little dog called Bruce and so Bert gets a weekly play date. I have decided that in the draft website design, Bert will appear as guest master in front of St. Norbert's House, though he will not be responsible for changing the sheets!

The room I have been appointed is plenty spacious and has a wonderful view over all the established trees in the Anglican church yard. The church has bells that ring with the hour but they are just at the right volume for me.

Frs Martin & Thomas do regular supply at the local churches and are well regarded by parishioners. The diocesan priest responsible for the churches has a lot on his shoulders, so Fr Thomas is making sure he actually takes his day off and is collecting him for a day out. Although I thought I was coming up here straight onto another organ bench, there is a convert from the CofE who is to play but I am to give him a little steer with Catholic liturgy. For simplicity, I am also to play for the Triduum and Easter because the Norbertine Fathers will be supplying one church in particular throughout.

When I arrived, I queried whether 'community night' AKA recreation still happened once a week (meaning we all stuck around in each other's company for drink or few after dinner). It was something I remember about Storrington days with great nostalgia. Before my time, Cardinal Cormac used to walk down the road from the bishop's house to have a drinkie and a bit of banter. Even Cormac's predecessor did the same. We have done this but another informal gathering is for County File, which we all enjoy (including Bert).

Despite not being an accomplished organist, I would be as bold as to say I had enough facility to get by, I felt comfortable within my limitations. I am very much on my back heal joining in with the status quo. I have had an invaluable start to sacristan duties by watching Frank and asking him questions over the years but now I must do it myself... The training wheels are off! I shall have to let you know in due course how I get on.

Being able to be at daily Mass is a real treat, which I have missed. Every week, elderly from the parish are brought to the priory for Mass too, they are tremendous and powerful witnesses. We keep a candle burning in our chapel for the people of the Ukraine and prayers are said daily for the battle against the corona virus and the conflicts in the Holy Land and Ukraine.

Soon, perhaps before my next letter to you, we begin our first of three Novenas for the year. If this is of interest to anyone then I will include details below. In the future I hope we might be able to stream such occasions.

Solemn Novena of Masses in honour of St. Joseph – for the return of lapsed Catholics.

23rd April – 1st May.

Petitions and offerings to:

(Please make cheques payable to “The Norbertine Order”)

**The Novena Director,
St. Mary’s Priory,
King Street, Muston,
North Yorkshire, YO14 0EW**

St Peter of Alcantara.

Born in the Spanish border town of Alcantara, Peter Garavito was the son of the town’s Governor. After studying law at Salamanca, he joined the Franciscans, choosing the severely penitential branch of the Conventuals known as the Observants. His gift for administration gave him a leadership role in the Order even before his ordination to the priesthood in 1524.

Inspired by the tradition of the Desert Fathers, Peter wanted to live his religious life according to the ancient practice of prayer, hardships, contemplation, fasting and penance. The Observant Franciscans provided him with the monastic setting to live out his vocation. His was a personal way of the Cross – a way of voluntary austerity – and the daily poverty and deprivations soon marked him out as a holy man. He attracted the attention of rich and poor, kings and popes, and his reputation as a spiritual advisor spread beyond his native Spain. He spent some time as a spiritual guide in the court of King John III in Portugal. In 1538 he was elected minister Provincial of the Observants in the Spanish province of Estramadura. The strict observance of the Friaries under his guidance gave them the name ‘Alcantarines’.

St Peter of Alcantara has a special love for the sick who came to him for healing. He was always quick to point out that only God could cure the sick people, but that he would pray with them and for them. In our annual Novena that is all we ask him to do – to pray with us and for us for our own needs and the needs of those dear to us.

In 1560 St Peter met St Theresa of Avila, who was trying to reform the Carmelite ideal: she found in Peter a kindred spirit. Both favoured an austere religious life – no easy options for either of them. St Peter became St Theresa’s spiritual director and about this time wrote his ‘Treatise on Prayer and Meditation’.

St Peter knew that in the Catholic mystical tradition there was a difference between ‘knowing God’ and ‘knowing about God’. Intellectual study, philosophy and theology might help us to know about God, but only a deep, inner personal relationship with the God who reveals himself as the person of Jesus Christ could lead us to know him.

Truly, matters in the world are in a bad state; but if you and I begin in earnest to reform ourselves, a really good beginning will have been made.

St Peter of Alcantara.

Guest accommodation is available. There is a large double/king size bed, en suite, separate toilet, kitchenette and nice little sitting room with a real fireplace. Naturally, there is also wi-fi. Guests can join in with Holy Mass, prayers and meals but they are not expected to. Bookings are currently dealt with by Fr Thomas Swaffer 01723 639 580. Donations towards the upkeep, cleaning and laundry are welcome, even better if they can be Gift-Aided.

If you would like to support me, then I would ask for your prayers for the time being. My formation is currently gentle and costs nothing but in no time at all a lot of money will be invested in me, not only in tuition but also trips to and from Strahov Abbey, Prague. If anyone might consider supporting me in this rather practical way, please make yourselves known to me or wait for further correspondence.

The beautiful icon of St. Theresa is up on my wall and I thank you all for your good wishes, prayers & gifts before I left and since. I had grown accustomed to my place and role within your community and valued being part of it all. I miss you very much. Please be assured of my prayers, especially since that is my day job now! You are so lucky to have Fr Tony and Fr Paul, support them, pray for them and the community will all be blessed.

I have gone on far too long with way too many typos and errors. I will sign off now and wish you a prayerful and meaningful Lenten journey. Feel free to get in touch, my existing Email and phone number are still active (for now) for those that might want to use them but snail mail is always welcome.

Yours in Our Immaculate Mother, Our Holy Fathers St. Augustine & St. Norbert,

James Johnson