



Dear Pilgrims,

A couple of months ago the crucifix made by Adam Kossowski that is set above the arch in the Choir Chapel came crashing down much to the surprise of one of our regular worshippers, who was in the chapel praying quietly. It happened at three o'clock on a Friday afternoon, so I suppose some people might attribute some significance to both day and time. What was significant for the community was that the corpus, which is made from ceramic, was not damaged, despite falling some twenty or so feet. The following day someone came to the sacristy after Mass to ask why the crucifix was missing — its outline can be seen quite clearly on the wall. That prompted me to think about our experiences of presences and absences. People who are significant to us, seem to fill our lives; and when they are gone, we feel their absence keenly.

It has been a year since I notified you of the death of my predecessor, Fr Francis Kemsley. In some ways it seems only a short time ago—as the saying goes “time flies”. Life, with its many demands, carries us ever onwards. As many of us know from experience, no matter how much time passes, coping with bereavement can be very difficult indeed. Sometimes others—perhaps from kindly motives—try to help us move on; sometimes we tell ourselves that ‘time is a great healer’ and that surely we should be reconciled to our loss. Grief and bereavement, though they are linked, are two separate things. How we grief can change over time—it is probably healthier for us if it does but bereavement is a state: When we lose someone they go from this world and do not return—we remain bereaved.

However, we set our losses within the broader context of our Christian faith—faith in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, whose own death promises us a share in his risen life. Saint Paul, throughout his writings, is at pains to assert the resurrection as the foundation of faith, the reason for our hope as believers, and the courage behind our conviction and proclamation of the gospel. Paul does have some major headaches with the various communities in his pastoral oversight, as a range of false beliefs began to gain popularity and circulate which threatened the clear and consistent message he had proclaimed since his conversion on the road to Damascus. To the Corinthians he resorts to simple logic to demolish their ill-formed idea: ‘For if the dead are not raised, then Christ himself has not been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then your faith is in vain and you are still in your sins and all those who have ‘fallen asleep in Christ’ have perished’ (1 Cor 15:16–18). However, Paul continues with the faith-filled conviction that carried him through every



Choir Chapel Crucifix
by Adam Kossowski



Polish Catholic Association Pilgrimage



Polish Scouts and Guides Pilgrimage

adversity he has faced in his service of the Gospel: ‘But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. [...] The dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. [...] When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: “Death is swallowed up in victory”; “O Death, where is your victory? O Death, where is your sting?”’ (1 Cor 15:20, 52, 54-55).

Despite the Church’s proclamation of the sure hope of the resurrection to eternal life, we are still affected by our bereavements and from the earliest times believers have prayed for the dead, that they may rest in peace and rise in glory. It was with such thoughts that Saint Monica said “Lay this body anywhere, let not the care for it trouble you at all. This only I ask, that you will remember me at the Lord’s altar, wherever you be” (Confessions, Bk IX. 11,27). Although liturgies for the dead have been variously attributed to Origen (d. 254), Saint Ambrose (d. 397), Saint Augustine (d. 430), and Saint Isidore of Seville (d. 636), the Mass for the Dead and the accompanying Office of the Dead were only formalized in the 8th or 9th centuries. Nevertheless, even informally the Church was still praying for the dead and for the bereaved from its earliest days. It is part of the rhythm of the Community’s own daily prayer. There is also spiritual support offered. On the weekend of the 4th-6th October, Fr Ged Walsh, Liz Taylor and Barbara Salamonczyk, ran the ‘Grief in Loss, Hope in Christ’ Retreat. This is a retreat tailored for the needs of the bereaved, who were invited to grieve, remember, hope, and give thanks for their loved ones, in the light of resurrection faith. The retreat



Fr Michael Cox and Fr Ged Walsh with some of the pilgrims who attended the Little Flower Pilgrimage

was well attended, to capacity, with twelve participants and the three directors journeying together. We look forward to running the retreat again in March and October 2025. If you are interested in attending this please contact reception.

A few weeks ago we were given notice that a painting of The Friars was due to go to auction. It was helpful that an electronic image was sent attached to the email. Titled The Convent Boat, it was painted in 1874 by the British artist Arthur Hughes (1832-1915). Although it bears a strong resemblance to the riverside view of the priory, the artist has exercised some artistic license: The dock is in the wrong place, a small bell tower is atop the Water Gate roof and through its open door, one can see cloisters in the background. In the foreground, on the riverbank, is a prosperous family in Tudor dress; alongside them in a small boat are some nuns. The nuns are Benedictines! From its foundation in 1242 until its dissolution in 1538, the priory was home to Carmelite friars; it never housed enclosed Carmelite nuns—and certainly not Benedictines. In fact, there were no monasteries of Carmelite nuns in England before 1794, when a small group from Antwerp settled in the northeast. The artistic license stretches further still. In searching for more information about the artist, I discovered that he had produced another painting of The Friars. Titled The Ferry, It maintains the same prospect—the south bank view of the Pilgrims' Hall, this time, however, there is a Daughter of Charity gazing across at the buildings! Needless to say, I had no intention of purchasing either picture (I cannot show you either one due to copyright reasons). We have numerous pictures of The Friars—some painted by people who lived here in the period before our return in 1949. Mostly sketches with a basic colour wash applied, they do not match Hughes' artistic skill but are a much-valued insight into life here in Aylesford's recent past. I think my favourite image is the one showing henhouses along the wall of what is now the reception office. History has a habit of repeating itself—this is often the place where the receptionists put out grain for the Canada Geese and ducks. But I digress.

I return briefly to Arthur Hughes., wondering why he produced two historically inaccurate pictures of The Friars. There is no direct answer to be found from the artist himself but one can be at least partly deduced from his background. He was associated with the famous seven-member group of English artists known as the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, who valued the use of vivid detail in their compositions and imaginative self-expression. One of the founders of the movement—William Holman Hunt (1827-1910) - will be known to many for his depiction of Christ in The Light of the World, which was inspired by the words “Behold, I stand at the door and knock” (Rev 3:20). The image has often appeared on prayer cards. Religion and art have always gone together, so just as Holman Hunt sought to use art to inspire devotion, so Hughes sought to uplift the senses. It is our hope that Aylesford, with its array of Christian art will do both.



Br Matt Janvier and Br Laurentiu Francu



**Adela Caguimbal, Pilgrimage Organizer
for the Filipino Community with
Fr Michael Cox and Br Richard Green**

In August we welcomed Br Laurentiu Francu, a Romanian Carmelite, who is a member of the Italian Province. He was in the international novitiate in Salamanca, Spain, with our own Br Matthew Janvier (2021-22). Laur came to improve his English and certainly has a good command of the language. Laur and Matt are currently studying theology - please pray for them both as they enter the new academic year.

The Pilgrimage of the Sick took place on 13th August - it is one of our more important occasions to support the sick and those who care for them. The season continued with the usual schedule of pilgrimages of the Divine Mercy Apostolate, Caribbean, Tamils, Keralan, Goan, and Polish communities as well as the Polish Scouts and Guides. The Little Flower Pilgrimage was well-supported with pilgrims from a number of prayer groups from London and further afield. It is always encouraging to hear how so many people are inspired by the message of St Thérèse and share it with others. The Filipino Pilgrimage brings the pilgrimage season to an end; thankfully, although it was cold, it did not rain. Adela Caguimbal, who organizes the day, reminded me that we first met at Aylesford when I was a novice - that was thirty-two years ago. I noted that in those days I had brown hair. How things change. Thinking of change and back to those days, I have the pleasure of telling you that we have a new member in our community. Fr Richard Copsey moved here in September. Fr Richard was the Prior Provincial when I joined the Carmelites and so I think I can say we know each other quite well. He has been a tireless researcher into the Order's history for decades and I have found him to be a great source of information on many points.

I thought it appropriate to end with the news that Alan Ashfield has retired as Shrine Secretary. Alan took up his post in March 2020, just before the first Coronavirus lockdown. He spent most of that first month cancelling forthcoming pilgrimages. Thankfully, he was not demoralized. Thankfully, since then we have seen the return of pilgrims and the many school that visit during term time. We ask God's blessing on Alan.

Thank you for your continued support. Please be reassured of our daily prayers for all our supporters, their families, and friends. May the peace and love of God reign in your hearts this Christmas.

Michael Cox, O.Carm.

Prior



The Friars Christmas Prayer Tree

If you would like an 'Angel of Aylesford' decoration placed on our Christmas Prayer Tree, please write your special intention or the name(s) of your loved one(s) on the back of the enclosed decoration and return it to The Friars with your donation. The Carmelite community will be praying throughout the Christmas Season for all those whose names are placed on the tree, which is placed in the Choir Chapel.



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