



Dear Friends,

As I mentioned in the spring 2024 edition of the Pilgrims' Newsletter, it is our custom here to send our crib offerings to the Scottish children's charity Mary's Meals. It is shocking to think that in a world of so many technological advancements we have not solved the problems of child poverty and hunger. We know, only too well, that this is due to political and economic issues that are perhaps not solved overnight but it is a tragedy that we must continue to speak out on. Thanks to the generosity of Aylesford's visitors and 'regulars' we were able to send Mary's meals £1,632.93. This means that we have enabled the charity to support eighty-five children for the whole of the academic year, ensuring that they can receive a daily meal in a place of education. The founder of Mary's Meals, Magnus MacFarlane-Barrow, calls us to remember that sometimes it is tempting to store things up for ourselves. In a prayer composed for the charity he writes 'Our Father, give us this day our daily bread and forgive us for the times when we take more than our share of the bread that belongs to all. Let us help you fill the starving with good things, not with scraps from our table. Teach us how to share what is not ours to keep. Clothe us with Your love that we may complete each good work you created us to do. Place in our hearts your compassion for each starving child and use our little acts of love so that they starve no more. Amen.'

Every twenty-five years the Pope inaugurates a Holy Year; each one is a sacred time of renewal, reflection, and grace. With the theme "Pilgrims of Hope," this Jubilee invites us to embark on a journey of faith and transformation. Pope Francis invites us to 'fan the flame of hope that has been given us, and help everyone to gain new strength and certainty by looking to the future with an open spirit, a trusting heart and far-sighted vision.' He goes on to say that we need to recover 'a sense of universal fraternity and refuse to turn a blind eye to the tragedy of rampant poverty that prevents millions of men, women, young people and children from living in a manner worthy of our human dignity.' Admittedly, we can often feel overwhelmed by the sheer scale of the problem but the Pope suggests that we look to the teaching of St Paul, to anchor our faith and love in hope. In his Letter to the Romans Paul declares 'Since we are justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing in the glory of God... Hope does not disappoint, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us' (*Rom* 5:1-2.5). God is our constant companion through life and this is a message which is best lived out by being signs of hope to others—especially those who suffer. Let us hope that our contribution to Mary's Meals will kindle hope.

Aylesford has been designated one of the centres for the Year of Hope and we anticipate that many people will come on pilgrimage to the shrine. Aylesford has long been a special place for countless visitors. We are mindful that for many people pilgrimage is not possible due to any number of factors—

health, family or work commitments, finances, distance. However, as Pope Francis reminds us—we are by faith called to be a pilgrim people: we are journey together through life to our home with God. So if perhaps you are unable to make a pilgrimage to a holy place, always remember that since we are a holy people - carrying within us the Holy Spirit - we can offer our pilgrim prayer wherever we happen to be. Here is the prayer for the Year of Hope, which I invite you to use in your daily prayer.

*May the grace of the Jubilee
reawaken in us, Pilgrims of Hope,
a yearning for the treasures of heaven.
May that same grace spread
the joy and peace of our Redeemer
throughout the earth.
To you our God, eternally blessed,
be glory and praise for ever.
Amen.*



News

In November I went to Fatima for a meeting of the Provincial Bursars of the Carmelite Order. This gathering happens every six years and is an opportunity to share information but also for meeting each other and building a sense of fraternity. I was particularly pleased to meet friars from Kenya and India, whom the British Province have helped over the years. The keynote speech during the gathering was delivered by a Discalced Carmelite friar on the theme of solidarity. The message was a powerful one - we are never alone.

It was my first visit to Fatima and I stayed with the other bursars in the Carmelite house, which is conveniently only a street away from the shrine. Of course, most people know the story of Fatima but few probably have heard about the Carmelite saint who was once the most famous man in Portugal.

Nuno Álvares Pereira was a very successful Portuguese general who had a decisive role in the 1383–1385 Crisis that assured Portugal's independence from Castile. Amazingly, he was only twenty-four when the king appointed him supreme commander of his army. During the war, he showed his compassion by feeding the hungry populations of his Castilian opposition at his own expense. A devout man, he also built a number of churches and monasteries, among which was the Carmelite church in Lisbon. Later, after the death of his wife, he joined the Carmelites in Lisbon, being known for his humility, prayerfulness, and devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary, in whose honour he dedicated himself, taking the name Nuno of Saint Mary. He died at the age of seventy-one. He was beatified by Pope Benedict XV in 1918, and canonized by Pope Benedict XVI in 2009. His memorial is celebrated throughout the Carmelite Order on 6th November.



St Nuno of Saint Mary (Carmelite church, Fatima)



Fr Michael Cox with members of the Rock Choir



Steve Apert the 'Bubble Man' providing entertainment

It was cold and windy during the Christmas Fayre, and it took determination for our staff and volunteers to remain outdoors. Nevertheless, it proved to be a good two days. After expenses we made £17,490.46 which is welcome boost to our funds. We had our usual range of stalls and Lennie the Land Train, which ferried children and their parents to Santa's Grotto. However, we always need some special features to draw members of the public. We are delighted that the Rock Choir continues to perform—whatever the weather and this year we also had entertainer Steve Apert on his amazing bicycle.

We continue to raise funds to maintain our historic priory but all too often when one job finishes another appears. We are currently in the process of re-roofing the Pilgrims' Hall. Thank you for your continued support of our ministry here at Aylesford. Please be assured of the daily prayers of the Carmelite Community



Re-roofing the thirteenth century Pilgrims' Hall (riverside view)

for all our supporters, their families, and friends. Be assured, that through the Holy Spirit, who binds us together in one, we are never truly alone.

And finally we take a moment to offer our sincere thanks to Danny, a volunteer from the Swan Sanctuary in Shepperton, who came to the rescue of one of our black swans, which had become entangled in some wire. As you can see in the photo, she was remarkably calm throughout the whole affair.

In spite of the many problems that plague our world there is still reason for hope. When Christ died upon the cross his disciples were confused, dejected and ready to give up but when he appeared to them in glory, he breathed new life into them and set them on a different path. Let us hope and pray that we are always a force for good, bringing light and love into the lives of others through the Spirit of the Risen Jesus, who dwells within us.

May the peace and love of God reign in your hearts.

Michael Cox, O.Carm.

Prior



The rescue of the black swan

Retreats at *The Friars*

GRIEF IN LOSS, HOPE IN CHRIST

Friday 21st—Sunday 23th March

*Barbara Salamonezyk, Liz Taylor
& Ged Walsh, O.Carm.*

For anyone who has experienced a bereavement, whether recently or some time ago. We grieve, remember, hope and give thanks for our loved ones in the light of the Resurrection of Jesus.

Cost: £260.00 single; £230.00 shared per person

For more information or to book please call 01622 717272

Easter Lily Dedications

Every year, the chapels at Aylesford will be adorned with lilies throughout the Easter season. Many of our friends like to dedicate one of the lilies for either themselves, a friend, a relative or a loved one who has died. The names of all the lily dedications are recorded and displayed in a book in the Carmelite Saints Chapel.

If you would like to do this, please fill in the name of the person for whom each lily is to be dedicated on the enclosed Intentions Leaflet. The suggested donation for each lily is £5. The lilies will be refreshed regularly and extra monies raised from the dedications will go towards the costs of floral displays for feast days throughout the year.





The Friars Aylesford
Christmas Grand Draw Winners

1st Prize - Jeannette Edgar, Guildford
2nd Prize - Maggie Cascioli, Kent
3rd Prize - Karl Crisp, Kent



Summer Draw:

The Summer Draw is taking place at our Summer Fayre on Sunday 22nd June.

We have enclosed draw tickets with this Spring Newsletter. Please support The Friars if you are able, and good luck!

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