



Pilgrims' Newsletter

Summer
2025



Dear Friends,

As I write, the Easter season is in full swing and our pilgrimage season is underway. Lent, therefore, seems now like a faded memory. This Lent we took a break from the usual practice of offering a talk each Saturday morning and instead celebrated the familiar seasonal devotion Stations of the Cross. Although there remains a fondness among many for the Stations composed by St Alphonsus Liguori, these days one is offered so much more choice, since the world is awash with all manner of reflections to accompany the traditional framework of prayers. We could quite easily have taken a different set of meditations for each of the Saturdays but decided instead to collate some suitable reflections culled from writings of some of the Carmelite saints, blessed, and venerables. Whenever we can, we like to be able to share with our pilgrims something from the writings of our saints, who have so many wise words to offer on a range of aspects of our lives of faith. They are a treasure we hold dear and are eager to share. For example, St Titus Brandsma wrote:

“Mary, who kept all God’s words in her heart, in the fulness of grace granted her, understood the great value of suffering. While the apostles fled, she went out to meet the Saviour on the way to Calvary and stood beneath the cross, in order to share his grief and shame to the end. And she carried him to the grave, firmly trusting that he would rise” (Introduction, *Het lijden vergoddelijkt*).

Mary is the one who had the clarity of vision to recognize the nature of discipleship and enter fully into the journey of faith. Her example invites us to believe that we too can make a wholehearted commitment to God



Jesus meets his Mother, Relic Chapel and Our Lady & St Simon Stock, Rosary Way by Adam Kossowski



Ducklings with Mum



Above:
**L to R. Fr Patrick Prashanth, OMI,
 Bishop Paul McAleenan, Fr Elmo Jeyarasa.**
Below:
Remembering Pope Francis, RIP



and being inspired by her compassion, courage and wisdom, to walk along what can often be a challenging road - trusting that the way of the Cross is transformed into the way of glory.

The word 'Lent' is derived from langatīn, meaning 'long-days', as we move from winter into springtime. Signs of new life began to appear here at Aylesford with the arrival of a number of ducklings, which certainly received a lot of attention from visitors and staff members alike, often accompanied by oohs and ahhs. Of course, the assorted birds of Aylesford are not the only draw to the place. Adam Kossowski's impressive array of ceramics is a wonderful resource for meditation. The image of Our Lady and St Simon Stock, which stands at the end of the Rosary Way, was recently restored. It had been damaged quite badly by frost - in spite of being covered carefully each winter. We are mindful that we are custodians of a legacy of Christian art which will outlast us all.

The pilgrimage season began well on Palm Sunday with the Tamil Catholic Association. Bishop Paul McAleenan, the bishop with oversight for the ethnic chaplaincies, presided. The weather was good and it was pleasing to see the shrine full of visitors. We try to be aware of the different devotions of our broad range of pilgrims, so, since early last year, we have made available candles bearing the image of Our Lady of Good Health of Vailankanni. This devotion has proved popular not just among the Tamil community but for many who see Mary as a faithful helper, especially of the sick.

The origin of the devotion goes back to the first apparition of Our Lady at Vailankanni, Tamil Nadu in the 16th century. A young boy was undertaking a long journey to deliver milk. He stopped to rest under a banyan tree and there he met a woman who asked him for some milk to feed her child. The boy agreed and then continued his journey. When he reached his delivery stop he apologized both for the delay and that there would be less milk in his pot. However, when the lid was opened, the container was brimming with milk. The second apparition occurred a few years later, when the Virgin appeared to a lame boy and asked him to go to the regional town of Nagapattinam, and tell the Catholics there to build a chapel at the site of the apparition. The boy was cured instantly and got up and ran to tell the people, who built a shrine to Our Lady.



**Millie Fernandez, Pilgrimage Organizer,
with Fr Łukasz Mazurek MIC,
Director of the Divine Mercy Apostolate, UK.**



**Bishop Paul Hendricks with Fr Anthony Plummer
(Chaplain) and members of the Legion of Mary.**



**Fr Michael Cox, O.Carm. with the members of the
Central Council of the Guild of St Stephen for Altar
Servers: Catherine Burns (Vice-President), Nicola
Christmas, Fr Keith Stoakes (Diocesan Director,
Westminster), Paul Briers, KCHS (President), and
Michael O'Leary.**

A century later some Portuguese sailors were caught in a severe storm and were in danger of death. They promised Our Lady that if she brought them into safe harbour, they would build a chapel in her honour. They landed near Vailankanni on the 8th September, which is the feast of Our Lady's Nativity. When they came ashore they found the humble thatched shrine, which they set themselves to rebuild as a stone chapel in fulfilment of their vow. Described as the 'Lourdes of the East', the shrine, which is now a large basilica, attracts thousands of pilgrims each year. The story of Vailankanni—like that of Lourdes, Fatima, and Aylesford itself, assures us that whoever we are, wherever we are, Mary cares for each of us. Our Lady, Health of the sick, pray for us.

It was with great sadness that we heard the news on Easter Monday of the death of Pope Francis. Jorge Mario Bergoglio was born in Argentina to an Italian immigrant father and a Argentine mother of Italian heritage. At the age of 21 he entered the Jesuits and initially taught literature and psychology at a high school in Santa Fe, before becoming the novice master for his province. He became a bishop in 1992 and five years later Archbishop of Buenos Aires, where he was diligent in providing increased pastoral support for the people in the shanty towns. He was elected Pope on 13th March 2013 taking the name 'Francis' in imitation of St Francis of Assisi, who was especially close to the poor of the world. No one will ever forget the Pope washing the feet of prisoners at the Casal del Marmo detention centre, one of whom was a Muslim man and another a Muslim woman—a sign of his inclusive approach. He will be remembered for his commitment to the care for creation, advocacy for the poor and refugees. Mercy was the bedrock of his pontificate. May he rest in peace and rise in glory.

On Saturday of the Easter Octave we hosted the Divine Mercy Apostolate for the first of its yearly pilgrimages (the other is in August, close to the date of St Faustina's feastday). I meet many visitors throughout the year who tell me how much the devotion means to them, as they seek to trust in Jesus, often in the face of many personal difficulties. Their courage and determination is inspiring.

One of the longstanding pilgrimages we host is held by the Legion of Mary. The members see their lives of prayer and the service of the sick, elderly and housebound as a mirror of Our Lady's own cooperation with God's plan for the world. The pilgrimage is an opportunity for the Legion to renew itself spiritually for its many good works.

On Bank Holiday Monday we celebrated the Guild of St Stephen's annual Mass for Altar Servers. The enrolment ceremony for new servers into the Guild attracted 560 attendees. A hundred servers received their Guild medal to mark the completion of their probationary year and fifteen received their silver medal for ten years of faithful service. Thankfully, this year we did not have to contend with rain, as we did last year and were able to celebrate Mass outside. The Chairman, Mr John Bonnici, asked me to preside - my first time, in fact. I reminded the servers that although it can be nice to be given a job to do - e.g. acolyte, cross-bearer, thurifer - the most important thing a server does is pray the Mass, and thereby show how much they love God.

Some of you may be wondering what happens to the stamps from all the letters that we receive. It has been a long-standing practice here at The Friars that we donate them to Kent Association for the Blind. This year we helped raise £1,806.00. The Association works with over 12,000 visually impaired people in Kent and the surrounding area, helping them to live with greater independence. It is also works to educate people on eye health.

A gentle reminder to address all newsletter correspondence to Mrs Kelly Dawes, the Newsletter Administrator. Please also note that all cheques should be made payable to The Friars Aylesford. Sincere thanks for your assistance.

And finally, I am happy to announce that we have a new addition to the Carmelite Community. Fr Kuba Walczak, a member of the Polish Province, will be staying with us for the coming months. Gaining his PhD on the works of St John of the Cross, he has been serving in the Carmelite Institute, Rome for the last sixteen years. He has that valuable ability of explaining difficult concepts in an accessible an interest way.

Be assured of the continued prayers of the Carmelite Community for all our pilgrims and correspondents. May our loving God bless you and all whom you love.

Michael Cox, O.Carm.

Prior of Aylesford



Fr Jakub 'Kuba' Walczak, O.Carm.



SUMMER STILLNESS

Monday 11th—Friday 15th August

Angela Black & Fr Ged Walsh, O.Carm.

A time to listen to the voice of God in silence. This is a personally guided retreat, which involves a daily meeting with a director who has experience in spiritual accompaniment.

Cost: £507.20 single; £477.60 shared. (the cost includes stipends for the directors) Contact Reception to book your Retreat.

****Support The Friars** Monthly Draw (100+ Club)**

New members are welcome to join the new season which begins in August, and this is a fun way to help raise much needed funds for The Friars. Each number costs just £12. The draw takes place every month after the 10.15 am Sunday Mass. Each winning number receives £50 prize with a special prize of £100 in December. Renewal emails/letters will be sent to existing members in July requesting payment prior to 1 st August. Please kindly provide your email address if possible. This helps us to save on expensive postage costs. Your details will not be used for any other purpose. Payments by card may be made by phoning Reception on 01622 717272. If you wish to pay by cheque, please make it payable to "The Friars". Cash and cheque payments may be left in Reception. Please put in an envelope clearly marked "The Monthly Draw". THANK YOU



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