

The Colwich Chronicle

Advent 2010



A New Abbess!

Mother Abbess Gertrude told us in January that she was going to retire on Easter Monday, after 16 years in office. The Abbatial Election took place on Easter Saturday 10th April. We elected Sister Davina Sharp, the youngest in the community. She was blessed by our Archbishop at Mass on the Vigil of Pentecost. For a full report, see inside, page 2.



Papal Visit: Cofton Park, we were there!
See the eye witness account on page 7.

The Abbatial Blessing

We wish to express our gratitude as a community to Mother Gertrude for her sixteen years of faithful and devoted service. As is our custom, she remains at Colwich, continuing her life of prayer and service in peace and joy.

On the Vigil of Pentecost, the new Abbess, Mother Davina, was blessed by the Most Rev. Bernard Longley, Archbishop of Birmingham.



Here is Mother Davina's own account:

To begin with it is in pure tradition that every time you prepare for a BIG EVENT that it takes a lot of preparation, so as you can imagine this took lots! After a big build up to the Election and then the Blessing, it always takes about a week to prepare the food and sort out seating arrangements, booklets, who's coming etc. and a month to get everything back in order!

I'll let your imagination run wild at the thought of me making doughnuts on the Monday, only to put them in the freezer, to get them out again on Friday morning to put cream in the middle. One of the Sisters did the meringues, the kitchen Sister busy all week with cooking various meats, fish, doing the celebration cakes and the like. The Refectory had to be 're-organised' on Saturday. And in true family fashion we all muck in together and have loads of fun!

Everything started with the Holy Spirit and it ended with the Holy Spirit in a big way with the Feast of Pentecost. After a somewhat hectic week the big day came and people started to arrive from 4pm to make sure that they had the best seats in the house - hope no fighting took place! Except for a dozen or so places being reserved it was first come, first served. Time was drawing nearer. Everyone was happy, relaxed, at ease and what glorious weather. We had a terrible week just before with the weather as it did nothing but rain, so we ended up praying for a glorious day and that's exactly what happened and the Lord excelled himself providing a real scorcher!

Our organist friend Peter arrived the night before so there was a practice in true Colwich fashion. The Archbishop of Birmingham was to perform the blessing and there were over 100 people who came to enjoy the happy occasion and wish me well, including about twelve Abbots and Priests who concelebrated the Mass with Archbishop Bernard Longley.

Well as time went on and 5pm drew nearer and nearer there was a real sense of expectation and happiness of what was coming up. As people were settling into their places, WE the community were gathering outside of the workroom with lighted candles. The clergy vested in the workroom and the community led the procession with the clergy following behind.

I slipped into my procession place, in front of the Archbishop (of all things) and His Grace the Archbishop was the last.

Peter on the organ excelled himself once more with the music, opening up with a fanfare followed by the hymn I chose: *I the Lord of Sea and Sky*. This meant a great deal to me for various reasons: it was one we learnt off by heart when I first came into the church and we had a youth meeting at our Cathedral in Nottingham; and we sang it in Lourdes on one visit and I was then discerning a vocation and it stuck in me like anything!

Well I then slid into the prepared prie-dieu in the middle of the choir (with all eyes on me - centre stage). We then had four Old Testament readings and sung responsorial psalms, followed by the New Testament reading and Gospel. I had nuns from other Benedictine houses doing two of the readings, and one Oblate of ours also. Our own community had various parts to play. After all this the Archbishop gave his Homily:

Tonight we keep Vigil in a liturgy that is reminiscent of the Easter Vigil we celebrated on Holy Saturday seven weeks ago. Then we were at the beginning of Eastertide and now we are approaching not so much its end as its fulfilment. In our Vigil at Easter we reflected on our journey with Christ through baptism into his death and resurrection. On the Eve of Pentecost the Church once more offers us an itinerary of faith accompanying the People of God through specially chosen scripture readings...

St Mary's Abbey has never been hidden away or remote from the needs of the Church and the world, but the concerns of Church and world have been at the heart of its daily life of prayer. That is why the diocesan family is united with you at

this time of blessing in gratitude for all that has been achieved through your prayers. We realise that you are united with the Church in her mission to bring God's Holy Spirit to all the peoples...

Pentecost Eve is a most appropriate occasion for an Abbatial Blessing... The presence of the Holy Spirit makes the blessing of the Church the blessing of God. The readings of this Vigil give us some significant insights into the nature and the fruitfulness of the blessing which we will call upon Mother Davina and her Sisters tonight.

Then I was presented to the Archbishop and had to answer some short questions before receiving the Holy Rule of St. Benedict, the Abbatial ring, and the Crozier. After this the Archbishop then led me back to my Choir Stall and Mass continued as usual. The hymn during communion which I chose was: *Be still for the Presence of the Lord.*

At the end of Mass all the community went to the front of the choir with their lighted candles (yet again), and little me had to go with the Crozier, and the community led the clergy out in procession, followed by me and then the Archbishop! The last hymn was another old time favourite. Due to Lourdes and everything that meant to me, it had to be none other than the Lourdes Hymn: *IMMACULATE MARY!* Then a sigh of relief! But all in all I wasn't that nervous, Solemn Profession was more nerve wracking than this (well you do have to know your words off by heart and sing them all).

The sun shone to such a degree we couldn't get cool, but by the time 5pm came at least it was beginning to get a little cooler. The Buffet Supper took place outside in the Cloister Garth. So that meant that the refectory and cloister were

available for people to sit and enjoy the wonderful feast we had worked so hard to prepare.



Archbishop Bernard & Mother Gertrude

One of our great friends who is also an Oblate came and did the flowers and they were absolutely superb: my colour scheme worked out well (pink, white and red) even flowers that were delivered were of that colour - can you believe it!!!!

Many prayers to you all - God bless and many, many thanks for everything.

Catholic Today

Mother Abbess now writes a regular monthly column in Catholic Today, the Archdiocese of Birmingham Catholic newspaper.

Visits to Belmont Abbey

Our chaplain, Father Luke Waring, is a monk of Belmont Abbey near Hereford. In the summer he organised a day pilgrimage by coach to his Abbey, and four of the nuns joined the group.

In September Mother Abbess went to Belmont again with Father Luke, to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the consecration of the Abbey Church.

Papal Visit: Cofton Park

Mother Abbess, Sister Theresa Mary, Sister Benedict and Ann our oblate went with the local parishes to Cofton Park, Birmingham for the Mass of Beatification of Blessed John Henry Newman. We left the house before 2.30 in the morning.

This account is by Mother Abbess:

If anyone had asked me a year ago if I had ever been to a Papal Mass or will I ever get a chance to go to one I would have said NO to both these questions, but as things turned out I did have the privilege to go to the Beatification Mass at Cofton Park. So it wasn't just a Papal Mass it was a Beatification too. Truly amazing!

Pilgrimages are an ancient tradition of the Church and one in which is usually associated with a person going to a holy place or a place where a holy person (saint) lived and grew up. We were known as 'pilgrims' as we made this historic journey to Cofton Park to celebrate this special Mass with

someone who is very special to all the Catholic world, the Holy Father himself, Pope Benedict XVI.

For me and many others that day (and of course the previous three days) meant having a very early start and this is how things developed. At 11.45pm on Saturday night of the 18th September, at what could be described as an ungodly time of day if you're not used to it and also as what could be described as a cold, dark and wet morning. I am looking forward to Pope Benedict's visit to Cofton Park, and I think that the body is running on adrenalin at the moment and I don't want to fall into deep slumbers.

Our coach is due to leave Stafford at 3.15am so there is time to have something to eat and go through a quick 'check list' of what to bring and what not to bring. Up to this point the message I am receiving from Pope Benedict's homilies is one of a call to holiness, following on to what John Paul II said about building a civilisation of love, not being afraid to be saints of the 3rd millennium. It is a reminder of what we are called to, that each one of us is called to be a saint, to be holy and it is not something which is impossible, it is possible with God's grace.

After gathering all our food and chairs and anything else we needed as a precaution such as torch, camera etc we set off on our journey to Blessed William Howard School in Stafford which was our pick up point – it was a short journey of 20 mins or so. Once in Stafford we soon saw a line of cars and said to each other, 'I bet this is the queue for the pilgrims?' and it was. However, we had a while to wait and soon the coaches came, six in total. We finally boarded a coach, received our 'orange wrist band' and set off at 4am. The journey took us an hour to get there and we wondered why we

had to leave so early but soon found out why. There were already about 50 or so coaches in the park.

We took a short walk of about half a mile or so to the entrance and there was a buzz in the air. When we got there, as expected there was an entrance check and a bag check. We made our way down to the main park area and promptly found a place to set up our chairs, our position ended up being just perfect. We were not near the front but were in the bottom half of the crowds, perched on a hill and had a direct view of the altar (maybe about 100 yards or so) away from us. The time passed by so quickly and although it was raining slowly it didn't matter – and most of us I guess were praying that the weather would change and it did about quarter of an hour before Mass was due to start.

For those of you who watched it via BBC2 or EWTN you would have noticed the awe etc, and the atmosphere was really quite something. People were so happy and calm, and to see so many from different parts of the country and from abroad was truly something.

There were three things which stood out for me in particular in what our Holy Father said and they were:

1) *I thank you for your presence at this celebration, in which we give glory and praise to God for the heroic virtue of a saintly Englishman. It is fitting that we should recognise the holiness of a confessor who bore witness in the priestly ministry.*

2) *The logo chosen as the theme for this papal visit 'Heart speaks unto heart' gives an insight into his understanding of the Christian life as a call to holiness, with a desire for the human heart to enter into intimate communion*

with the Heart of God, and that faithfulness to prayer gradually transforms us into the divine likeness.

3) *Quoting Blessed Newman, Pope Benedict said, 'I have my mission, I am a link in a chain, I shall do good, I shall do his work, I shall be an angel of peace, keep his commandments and serve him in my calling'.*



Sister Theresa Mary, Mother Abbess, Sister Benedict and a friend

It reminds me that the call to holiness is not out of our reach, it can be achieved even today in our society if we cooperate with God's grace and allow him to work in us, it is after all God's heart speaking to our heart, and we all have our mission in life no matter what that may be, and I also do get the impression that an awful lot of good will have come from Pope Benedict's visit and will create an atmosphere to follow God's call more generously in the Priesthood and the Religious Life. I really felt honoured and uplifted by his presence among us and you also got the impression that he did indeed confirm us all in our faith!

After a long day and a quick bite to eat we went home mid-afternoon but not before a walk round the park and it was absolutely amazing to see how many people I knew who I had bumped into both 'old and new' friends, but apart from that we all went home happy and united!

Vocations

In August our second Come & See Weekend took place, intended to give those attracted to monastic life a little experience of it. Three women took part this year, joining us for Mass and Office, spending time in prayer, receiving ideas on monastic life from the talks. They also joined us inside the enclosure one morning for outdoor work with almost the whole community on a recreation day. This gave an opportunity for chatting, and was enjoyed by all. We have also had some individual aspirants inside the enclosure, experiencing monastic life at close quarters with a serious idea of becoming nuns.

We ask you to keep all these women in your prayers.

Oblates Retreat

We held our first residential weekend retreat in September for our oblates. There were nine taking part, not including the children also present! It was great to have them all in choir with us. At Mass they renewed their promise as oblates.

Remembering Graham Sharratt

Graham Sharratt, who helped his brother in our garden for many years, died this June. May he rest in peace. Our sympathy is with Roy, his brother.

Goodbye Chelsea, Hello Coco & Skippy!

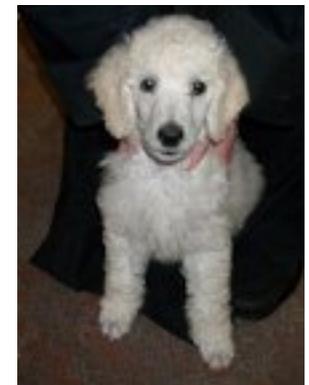
Chelsea our well-loved standard poodle died in July. She was nearly twelve years old, and had been with us for nine years.

We received Coco in August. She is a black poodle, now aged seven, going a bit grey but very lively. Then in October came our white poodle puppy, Skippy.

Also this year, Father Luke's young cat Diana had four kittens, all now gone to good homes.



Coco



Skippy

St Mary's Abbey Colwich Stafford ST18 0UF

Tel: 01889 881282

Email: vocations@colwichabbey.org.uk

Web: www.colwichabbey.org.uk

Blog: colwichnov.wordpress.com/