

Dowry

Autumn 2021,
Issue N° 51

“O Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God and our most gentle Queen and Mother, look down in mercy upon England thy Dowry.”



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Rain or shine, happily serving God and souls!
The five FSSP priests serving in England met in November for three days of fraternal recreation, prayer and planning. Sadly, travel restrictions prevented our confreres in Scotland and Ireland from attending this year. Picture above: Excursion in Llandudno, North Wales. (© Ellesmere Port Photographic Society)

Editorial: The Heenan Indult Turns Fifty



The *Feast of the Holy Relics preserved in the Churches of the Diocese* was celebrated across England on 5th November last. We gave thanks for the hallowed remains of our saints offered for veneration in various reliquaries or sealed in the sacred stones of countless altars.

No less precious an inheritance is the traditional Latin Mass which our English saints attended often at their peril. Permission to offer it alongside the new Mass was granted by the Holy See that very same day, 5th November – fifty years ago. The decree was signed by Archbishop Bugnini on behalf of Pope Paul VI. Anyone acquainted with both these prelates will recall their fierce determination in designing and implementing the *Novus Ordo Missae*. How was it possible, then, that an official exception should be made for one entire country, even though for no other?

The year before, on 25th October 1970, Pope Paul VI had canonised the Forty Martyrs of England and Wales. We can safely assume that they interceded for their spiritual progeny in England, asking for such a liturgical treasure to remain accessible for those who wished. From the very beginning then, with papal approval, the traditional missal in Latin was used simultaneously with the new missal in English. Indeed, Paul VI's missal in its typical edition was not available until 1970, and its full English (ICEL) translation came out in 1973. But already from November 1971, English Catholics were allowed to

use the traditional missal further. Liturgical diversity was permitted by the Holy See at the highest level.

The permission sent to Cardinal Heenan of Westminster had been granted in response to a petition by Alfred Marnau and dozens of prominent Catholic and non-Catholic figures in British society, including Agatha Christie, Kenneth Clark, Vladimir Ashkenazy, Nancy Mitford, Robert Graves, F. R.

Liturgical diversity was permitted

Leavis, Cecil Day-Lewis, Iris Murdoch, Yehudi Menuhin, Joan Sutherland and two Anglican bishops. Unlike our modern on-line petitions which instantaneously attract thousands of votes, Marnau's petition was publicised in printed media and collected by post. In addition, it occurred in summertime, when many potential signatories would have been away on holiday and unreachable. Despite this, a mere three weeks sufficed to unite the voices of the intellectual and cultural elites in England at the time, Catholics, Christians and non-Christians alike. This shows that the traditional Latin Mass, far from

alienating non-Catholics, was deeply revered by them and even more so by converts. It was and still is a powerful instrument to display the riches of the true Faith and attract to it men of any creed or none, as the following extract from the petition points out.

“The rite in question, in its magnificent Latin text, has also inspired a host of priceless achievements in the arts – not only mystical works, but works by poets, philosophers, musicians, architects, painters and sculptors in all countries and epochs. Thus, it belongs to universal culture as well as to churchmen and formal Christians... The signatories of this appeal, which is entirely ecumenical and non-political, have been drawn from every branch of modern culture in Europe and elsewhere. They wish to call to the attention of the Holy See, the appalling responsibility it would incur in the history of the human spirit were it to refuse to allow the Traditional Mass to survive, even though this survival took place side by side with other liturgical forms.”

May the saints of England intercede for the signatories of the petition above, all of whom but one have now stood before the divine Judge, and may we be given to make always better use of the traditional Mass. We assure you of our prayer at the altar for a grace-filled Advent and Christmas.

Malleray

Fr Armand de Malleray,
FSSP, Superior of the English FSSP
Apostolate, 5th November 2021. □

Your Young, Loyal, and Traditional Catholics

Reflections by the Bureau of the Juventutem International Federation on the motu proprio Traditionis Custodes

I will go in to the altar of God; to God who gives joy to my youth. The youth evoked here in Psalm 42 is not a matter of age. Rather, it is the spiritual youth of souls rejuvenated by divine grace given by Jesus Christ in the Holy Church. The name *Juventutem* is the Latin for youth.^[1] *Juventutem* is an international Catholic movement for the sanctification of young people through the Roman

traditions of the Church. *Juventutem* was founded in the context of the *Year of the Eucharist* inaugurated by Pope John Paul II in October 2004 and concluded by Pope Benedict XVI in October 2005. The emblem of *Juventutem* is a Eucharistic monstrance. For the past seventeen years, *Juventutem* has illustrated this unexpected combination: one can be an average teenager, a loyal

Catholic, and a lover of Latin traditions.

In his Letter to the Bishops on *Traditionis Custodes* (TC),^[2] Pope Francis refers to the words of Pope Benedict XVI about the *usus antiquior*: “young persons too have discovered this liturgical form, felt its attraction and found in it a form of encounter with the Mystery of the Most Holy Eucharist, particularly

Many young adults from various countries attended the *Summorum Pontificum* traditional pilgrimage in Rome in October 2021. (© Joseph Shaw, Flickr)





Some of the Juventutem pilgrims at World Youth Day in Krakow, 2016. (© JDJP_B, Flickr). Next page: Cardinal George Pell presided at traditional pontifical Vespers for Juventutem at World Youth Day in Dusseldorf, 2005. (© www.lmschairman.org)

cheerful, prayerful, kind, and generous. For many prelates, encountering traditional Catholic young people was a happy surprise. Since WYDs occur only every three years, they called for local initiatives to foster the sanctification of the young all year long. In response, *Juventutem* soon established itself as an international federation^[4] of small youth groups, spread all over the world.^[5] Nearly all chaplains to the *Juventutem* groups are diocesan priests. All activities are supported by the parish or diocese. As an official participant in the 2017 Youth Conference in Rome organized by the new dicastery of the Vatican for the Laity, Family, and Life, and in the 2018 Youth Synod at the Vatican, *Juventutem* reported on the activities and aspirations of young traditional Catholics worldwide.

Even without formal *Juventutem* membership, thousands of young adults have attended traditional Latin liturgies and activities as visitors at *Juventutem* events, or have watched them online. Many adults as well among the clergy and the laity have been interested to see the favourable impact of the traditional liturgy on young people. To all it was clear that the doctrine preached and the spirituality fostered were simply Catholic. *Juventutem* chose St. John Bosco as its special patron. The great apostle of the youths once dreamed of three whitenesses, the Holy Eucharist, the Blessed Virgin Mary, and the Roman Pontiff. The more those three are honoured together, the more *Juventutem* young people feel at home. Like their fellow Catholics all around the world, young traditional Catholics read recent Magisterial documents,

suited to them.”^[3] *Juventutem* recognises itself in this portrayal by the Vicars of Christ. For over seventeen years, *Juventutem* has supported hundreds of young Catholics worldwide in their aspiration to holiness. This goal was sought through the traditional Latin Mass offered always in full communion with the pope and the bishops. Notably, at World Youth Days, dozens of cardinals and bishops offered the traditional Latin Mass for the *Juventutem* young adults and gave catecheses as part of the official WYD schedule, as formally approved by the Pontifical Council for the Laity. World Youth Day is the largest recurrent Catholic event in the world, bringing together one million young adults or more around the Vicar of Christ on various continents every few years. WYDs provide a colourful assessment of the modern Church. Since 2005, having the traditional

Roman liturgy officially included in the WYD schedule has fostered unity in diversity. It has provided inspiration to the younger generation who encountered these beautiful traditions with *Juventutem* in Cologne (2005), Sydney (2008), Madrid (2011), Rio de Janeiro (2013), Krakow (2016), Panama (2019).

By now, the young adults involved with *Juventutem* in its early years have answered God’s call to sanctity in married life and in consecrated life within Holy Church. Many are now spouses, parents, nuns, monks, and priests. In their parishes and dioceses, in their movements and communities, these young Catholics are active members of the Church of today and of tomorrow. The many cardinals, bishops and priests who met them at WYDs and on other occasions have found them to be



including Vatican II. As a lay organisation dedicated to the sanctification of youth, they wholeheartedly support the universal call to holiness stated by the latest council. Since many of them are converts, they praise religious freedom and deplore any prejudice and coercion which would deter God's children from finding Him in Jesus Christ through His Holy Church. They also welcome ecumenism as a genuine invitation to all fellow Christians to avail themselves of the means of salvation appointed by God in His Holy Church. Lastly, they favour the openness of the Church to the modern world – like “A city seated on a mountain [that] cannot be hid” (Matt 5:14) – displaying God's truth and love for the benefit of society at every level. They know that the guidance offered by Holy Church earlier is still valid for today's Catholics, whom Pope Francis called to be made “fully conscious of all the fruits derived from this Council [of Trent], and that they may unite themselves in bringing these fruits to others and in propagating them in every way”.^[6]

We, the young, loyal, and traditional Catholics, pray that our Holy Father Pope Francis and all

our bishops will allow us further to seek sanctification from the liturgical and spiritual traditions of the Church of Rome, in keeping with the encouragements received over the past seventeen years from the Church Hierarchy and in thanksgiving to God for the good fruits bore. May we conclude with this wise statement by Pope Francis at the end of

his *Post-Synodal Exhortation Christus Vincit to Young People and to the Entire People of God* on 25 March 2019:

“229. These and various other opportunities for evangelizing the young should not make us forget that, despite the changing times and sensibilities of young people, there are gifts of God that never grow old, for they contain a power transcending all times and places. There is the word of the Lord, ever living and effective, the nourishing presence of Christ in the Eucharist, and the sacrament of Reconciliation, which brings us freedom and strength. We can also mention the inexhaustible spiritual riches preserved by the Church in the witness of her saints and the teaching of the great spiritual masters. Although we have to respect different stages of growth, and at times need to wait patiently for the right moment, we cannot fail to invite young people to drink from these wellsprings of new life. We have no right to deprive them of this great good.”^[7]

Signed: Bureau of the International *Juventutem* Federation

- Bertalan Kiss, President
- Monica Clarke, Secretary

- Cosimo Damiano Marti, Treasurer
- Rev. Armand de Malleray, FSSP, Chaplain

[1] Here in the accusative form, as a quote from Psalm 42 recited at traditional Holy Masses.

[2] Cf.

https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/letters/2021/documents/20210716-lettera-vescovi-liturgia.html#_ftn5

[3] Letter to the Bishops on Summorum Pontificum:

https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/letters/2007/documents/hf_ben-xvi_let_20070707-lettera-vescovi.html

[4] Cf. <http://juventutem.org/>.

[5] Youth groups normally don't last longer than five years. *Juventutem* chapters are currently active in Austria, Canada, Spain, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, England and America. Formerly active chapters were in Brazil, France, Switzerland, Germany, Kenya, Slovenia, Poland, Argentina, Hong Kong, Lithuania, New Zealand, Nigeria, Chile, Colombia, Scotland and Spain.

[6] Letter to Card. Walter Brandmüller, Special Envoy to the celebrations for the 450th anniversary of the closing of the Ecumenical Council of Trent [Trent, 1st December 2013] (19 November 2013)

cf. https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/la/letters/2013/documents/papa-francesco_20131119_brandmuller-450-chiusura-concilio-trento.html, accessed 29 July 2021.

[7] Cf. https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20190325_christus-vivit.html, accessed 29 July 2021. □

Chant for the Nativity

By Deacon Gwilym Evans, FSSP, about whom the following presentation. He was born and brought up in South Wales. Having been Head Chorister at Llandaff (Anglican) Cathedral, he won a music scholarship to Eton College. While at university in Cambridge, where he studied Oriental Studies (Arabic and Hebrew), he sang with the choirs of St John's, King's and Trinity colleges. Deacon Evans was received into the Catholic Church in his final year of university, after having encountered the Traditional Latin Mass. He then worked for five years in the classical music industry. He is a Companion of the Order of Malta and has been very active with them in helping the poor and the sick. He entered the FSSP Seminary in Wigratzbad in 2015. In May he was ordained deacon and is due to be ordained priest in June 2022. He is currently on pastoral placement at St Mary's, Warrington.

Every year on Christmas Eve, millions worldwide tune in to *A Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols*, broadcast live from King's College, Cambridge. This service, which has become a bastion of the Anglican choral tradition, was held for the first time in 1918. But the format of nine Biblical readings, interspersed by carols, can be traced back to Christmas Eve at Truro Cathedral in 1880. It was conceived by the then Anglican bishop of Truro, Edward White Benson—later Archbishop of Canterbury—whose youngest son was to become the Catholic priest and novelist, Monsignor Robert Hugh Benson. This original service, held at 10 o'clock at night, was inspired by the traditional Night Office of the (pre-Reformation) Church, known as Matins.

Christmas Matins, which immediately precedes Midnight Mass, is divided into three 'Nocturns', each with three psalms and three readings ('lessons'). Between each of the nine lessons is a musical interlude in the form of a Responsory, which Benson replaced with popular carols (festive folksongs that had been banned under the Puritans two centuries prior). Still sung by traditional



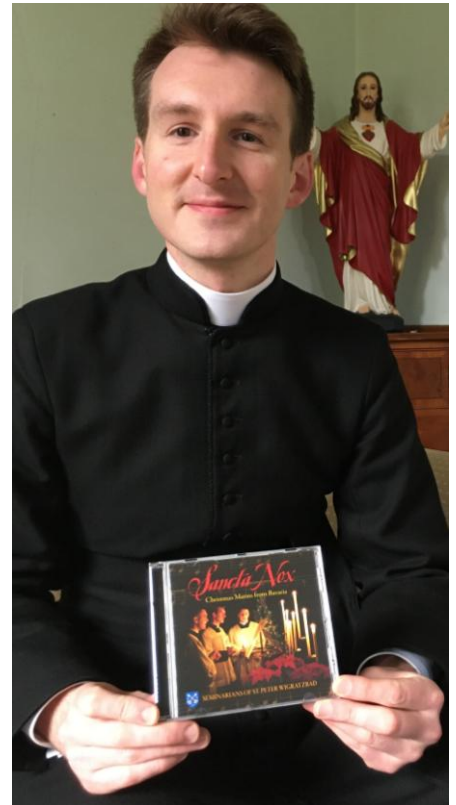
Catholic communities, Christmas Matins is a solemn service of preparation, as the Church keeps watch—just like the shepherds—until the sacred hour when Christ was born.

The FSSP seminarians from Wigratzbad recently released a recording of selections from Christmas Matins, entitled *Sancta Nox: Christmas Matins from Bavaria*, on the De Montfort Music label. The recording is primarily Gregorian chant, with most of the exquisite Responsories in their authentic form, but also contains some 16th-century polyphonic settings. Intended as a liturgical ‘experience’, four of the solo lessons—sung to ornate melodies—are included, which should also offer the listener an opportunity to meditate on the sublime mystery of the Incarnation. The CD ends with something that we sing at the seminary on Christmas night, after the liturgy: the famous German Christmas carol, *Stille Nacht (Silent Night)*. My arrangement of this carol reflects the internationality of our community, with verses in German,

French and English (the three official languages of the Fraternity), then finally in Latin.

I became director of the Schola in Wigratzbad in my second year at seminary. I was very pleased with the progress that we were able to make musically during my four years of direction, thanks to the keen support of the superiors, and having been blessed with some talented singers among our vocations. The time therefore seemed ripe to undertake a major recording project this year. After our American confrères’ success with their *Requiem* CD (released in 2017), we decided to collaborate with the same recording label to produce our own recording, but this time with current seminarians from our European seminary.

Since its release on 28 September, *Sancta Nox* remained at number one in the US classical charts for nearly two months. While it is wonderful to know that our musical message has reached so many people across the world, this



success may also be evidence that there is a strong desire globally for music that is more demanding and profound, over more superficial forms of music. Its success is also due, no doubt, to the excellent professional recording quality, thanks to our distinguished award-winning

producer, Christopher Alder, who has previously worked with household names like Claudio Abbado and Placido Domingo. This recording is a way of reaching people who may not otherwise know the beauty of sacred music, who may never have encountered the traditional liturgy, or even the Catholic faith. Music has a unique power to reach souls, and so we hope that our singing will lead people to reflect on this great mystery: that God was born for us in Bethlehem and is born for us each day in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

Copies of the CD will be available for purchase (in support of our seminary) directly from our Reading and Warrington apostolates, or from the Latin Mass Society’s online shop. □

Trailer: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8a2Qd1xVZmY>

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1 **Sancta Nox: Christmas Matins From Bavaria**
Seminarians Of St. Peter Wigratzbad

STATS SHARE

LAST WEEK	WEEKS AT NO. 1	WEEKS ON CHART
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The God Rush

By Fr Armand de Malleray, FSSP, Chaplain to the Juventutem London Youth Group

Who is left? Looking at the group picture of about twenty young Catholics, my finger points at one face after another while next to me a young friend comments: “Gone. She’s also gone. He’s gone as well. They’re gone too.” The picture was taken on retreat in Berkshire in July 2019, the summer before Covid began. Since then, a dozen of them have disappeared... Where did all these young people go? Are they sick with a virus in some hospital ward? Are they in gaol? Are they dead?

Under arch-tyrant Joseph Stalin, official group pictures underwent regular updating as more and more collaborators in the entourage of the suspicious Communist leader were executed. Long before digital graphic design, technicians in Soviet communication had learnt to delete faces and replace them by credible clouds or trees. The young adults on our group picture were spared such a fate. Their youthful features can still be identified on that photo among their friends still in the world, whether married or single. Meeting them in the flesh, though, has become impossible. Why? Because they have left the world.

Twelve of them have embraced the state of consecrated life. They are now scattered in convents, monasteries, and seminaries. How extraordinary! Could there have been less favourable a time to make such an absolute decision? Remember, the whole world was

gripped by a virus seemingly lethal. No one could travel anywhere, least of all to visit some abbey overseas. One could not even enter a church to pray and ask God for the grace of discernment, as all places of worship were locked up. Spiritual directors and confessors were little able to provide adequate guidance, confined

as they were in their presbyteries and chaplaincies. If anything, they might have suggested to postpone the choice of consecrated celibacy until the end of Covid, whenever it may come. And yet, against formidable odds, a dozen young adults in London and across Britain heard a call, assessed it, and bravely



answered it. They had little more in common, it seemed, than being in their twenties and having come across the traditional Latin Mass. They attended it wherever permitted and met at the monthly *Juventutem* London gathering.

They all joined communities where the same traditional liturgy is offered in full communion with the Church. P. is a Redemptorist in Papa Stronsay, Scotland. R. is a parish nun in Minneapolis, America. V. is a Eucharistic Adorer in Naples, Italy. X. is a novice at the Marian Franciscans' in Gosport, England. D. and L. are seminarians in Tuscany; while D. and H. from Cheshire, C. from Ulster, T. and M. from London and F. from South Wales study for the priesthood in Bavaria and in America. G, from Wales is on pastoral stage in England. E. is a Carmelite in Birkenhead, England. Y. from Wales, and S. are Benedictine nuns in Gower, America. F. is a Franciscan Nun of the Immaculate in San Giovanni Rotundo, Italy. In addition, S. just announced that he will begin with the Gosport Franciscans by Easter. S. is actively discerning with the Naples Adorer Sisters. F. started at the Lanherne Carmel and T. will begin with the Redemptorists in Scotland around Easter.

More have joined some communities a few years before Covid, like at Silverstream Priory in Ireland, or without previous involvement with *Juventutem*, like T. who is trying his vocation with a Thomistic clerical community in America. A few more, at least among those known to me, are in communities where the traditional Latin Mass is offered regularly, if

not exclusively, like the various Oratories in England and Wales, the Norbertines in Chelmsford and the Order of Malta in which an erstwhile parishioner of mine just became a solemnly professed religious. Young people once connected with *Juventutem* or with traditional Mass centres have also joined Novus Ordo communities with use of Latin, like H. from Edinburgh at St Cecilia's on the Isle of Wight, and T. from Basingstoke now at Douai Abbey in Berkshire. I had indication of more, not personally known to me, who have joined other communities.



Left: Becoming Benedictine nuns at Gower, Missouri, America. © benedictinesofmary.org). Above: *Juventutem* weekend at Douai Abbey, Berks in 2019. Next pages: Gower Benedictines in procession, and Marian Franciscans in their evangelisation studio (© themarianfranciscans.org).

If focusing on those whose vocation lead them to traditional communities, one will find that the proportion is very high, since these young people are much fewer than those attending Novus Ordo parishes across the dioceses. In addition, their chances to proceed with discernment are thin, as spiritual directors actively supportive of the traditional

Latin Mass are not many. Even when benefitting from sympathetic direction, these young people have very few places they might join in Great Britain, and not many more abroad, should Covid regulations allow them to travel. Finally, all the traditional communities listed above are young. The Priestly Fraternity of Saint Peter, by far the largest (with 530 members on four continents) and the oldest, was founded only thirty three years ago. Most others are between one and fifteen years old (like the Benedictines Nuns of the Immaculate in Northern Italy), or if older, have adopted the traditional liturgy in the past year or so.

So many uncertainties combined could have deterred our young people. And yet, by the grace of God, they did not. How and why so many, proportionately, have answered the call in the past few years, is a mystery to me. Since my first appointment in England twenty years ago, time and again through retreats, articles and spiritual direction I have urged the importance and beauty of consecrated life. While the response has been rewarding as regards priestly vocations, it had remained practically null for religious life, especially for religious nuns. What a blessing that divine Providence choses to reach out to so many precisely now, when circumstances are most adverse. No doubt this is an answer to the prayers and sacrifices of many, lay and consecrated alike, alive and dead. I know of families who offer up their evening rosary for such a crucial intention. I am sure that religious in dwindling communities also intercede for the torch to be passed on. Nor should our British saints and martyrs in

heaven be forgotten: so many died for the Faith in gruesome torments. Even better than we, they must see how urgently England and the world need a revival of religious life. They must be praying hard to the Master of Harvest to send many, many generous and sacrificial souls to reclaim the land.

Admittedly, these numbers are still small, since what are twenty or even forty young religious compared with the large and well-established monasteries, convents and friaries which have closed over the past fifty years? In addition, the new communities they join are just this: new, with all the risks inherent to a recent beginning, such as little experience, limited resources and very few powerful friends either in the Church hierarchy or in secular society. And yet, it would not be the

first time that the Holy Ghost selected instruments left out of the most professionally designed pastoral plans.

This November fifty young men and women attended a day of conferences and prayer on the vocation to consecrated life organised by Juventutem London. Later this same month, fourteen men between 18 and 29 years of age attended a weekend of vocational discernment at St Mary's Shrine in Warrington. In addition, not a few of these young people are converts or reverts who found their way to Holy Church together with their parents and siblings. This shows that God's invitation reaches every generation, not only the young, as evidenced in the increased attendance at traditional Mass centres across the

country.

We, English Catholics in our bleak or anxious 2020s, are given the grace of witnessing what could be a crucially promising revival. Can there be any doubt that our Isles, across which monasticism grew of old and bore such glorious fruit, from Rievaulx and Jarrow to Glastonbury, and from Iona, Fountains and Bury to Westminster, await a new wave of gentle conquerors, armed not with arrows and chains, but with crosses and beads?

How can one help foster such a timely revival, you may wonder? The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (#2233) teaches that, "*Parents should welcome and respect with joy and thanksgiving the Lord's call to one of their*





children to follow him in virginity for the sake of the Kingdom in the consecrated life or in priestly ministry.” Our readers already settled in a state of life may pray for consecrated vocations to be granted among their own children, nephews and nieces, godsons and goddaughters and young friends. They can also join this 8,000-strong international prayer network for vocations: fssp.org.uk/about-the-confraternity/. Last autumn (2021), a record number of 49 seminarians were admitted in the First Year with the Priestly Fraternity of St Peter (more had applied but we lacked space). As to you, dear young readers, please see whether this balanced portrait of would-be religious offered us by the meek and gentle St Francis de Sales might perhaps strike a chord in your heart:

“...religious orders have been called hospitals in every age and religious are known by a Greek word which means healers because they are in a hospital to heal one another like the lepers of Saint Bridget (n19) (v36). We need not expect that those who enter religious life will be immediately perfect; it is enough for them to tend to perfection, and to embrace the means for growing in perfection. Our community, no more than any other religious community, is not a group of perfect women but rather a group of women who are aiming at and tending toward perfection. It is a school where we come to learn about the means that we must use to become perfect. And in order to do this, it is necessary to have this firm and constant will such as I spoke of, to embrace all the means of growing in perfection that

are proper to the vocation in which one is called.

Therefore, it is not the tearful, sorrowfilled and sighing person who is the best one called; nor those who are consumed mostly with the cross, nor those who will not move from the chapel, nor those who are always in the hospital [i.e. to tend sick patients], nor even those who begin with a burst of fervour. We must not pay any attention to the tears of the weepers, nor listen to the sighs of the sighers, nor look for bearing and deportment to find those who are truly called. But we should look for those who have a good, strong and constant resolve to be healed and who because of that resolve work faithfully to recover their spiritual health.” □

(Above quote cf Conference Seventh, in www.oblates.org/spiritual-conferences/.)

Year of St Joseph: A Carpenter's Son

Young and mature people alike in our modern world are trapped into virtual reality. In these two articles Richard Kornicki presents woodwork as a welcome antidote for all, even if only by way of meditation in this Year of St Joseph. The profession chosen by Jesus Christ (first article) can safely be embraced by modern apprentices (second article).

The Son of God needed a place in the world he had created, just as we all do. He had the choice of everything: the priestly schools, the courts of kings, the homes of scholars, the boats of fishermen. And he would have been at home in any of these, as the scribes found when questioned by a young boy in the Temple, or as St Peter found, when he reluctantly let down his nets after a fruitless night's fishing and nearly sank the boat with the catch. But Our Lord chose none of these. He became incarnate in the home of a carpenter, and learnt His trade at St Joseph's bench.

Whether you call it carpentry, cabinet-making, joinery, woodwork or anything else, it is skilled work, not the job of an untrained labourer. It brings together the trees God made and the ingenuity of man; for the tree has to be felled, sawn into planks, and seasoned before ever a carpenter comes near it. And the first thing the carpenter brings to the wood is another act of creation: an idea, a plan, an image of something which does not yet exist, but which will come to be through his skills of mind, hand and eye.

The hands are important. The tools that will shape the wood are all hand-tools. Nothing else is needed. The most wonderful woodwork the world has ever seen was all

produced *before* the age of machines: Grinling Gibbons, Chippendale, Sheraton used their hands, a small number of simple tools, and cutting edges they refined to perfect sharpness. The human touch is unsurpassable.

What would Our Lord have learned as he and St Joseph bent together over the work-bench? Firstly, patience. The wood needs to be prepared, planed smooth, and squared before the work even begins. Rush through it, and the finished job will be marred at its heart, and no amount of polishing will ever hide its flaws.

Truth comes next. The measurements have to be exactly so. Doubtless St Joseph passed on to Our Lord every carpenter's first lesson: measure twice, cut once. You cannot un-make a cut, but you can measure as often as you like until you are sure the cut will be in the right place, and that the work will be true.

It is the craft of a gentle man. Force the saw through the wood with your weight on it, and the saw bucks and bounces, the cut is rough, and the carpenter exhausted. Step back, let the weight of the saw provide the only downward pressure, move it back and forth with a steady rhythm

and it sings sweetly as it cuts. There is harmony in creation.

There is modesty, too. The most perfect joint will look as though there is nothing holding it together: just two adjacent surfaces, apparently kept together by magic. But unseen is the mortise and tenon joint beneath the surface: so perfectly shaped and fitted that it would hold the weight by friction alone. Only God and the carpenter know how good it is.

And the workshop is a place of order. Every tool in its place, neatly to hand, fettled, sharpened and ready for use. Gerard Manley Hopkins saw the glory of God in "All trades, their gear and tackle and trim." So does every carpenter as he sweeps the day's wood-shavings and leaves the workshop pristine for the next day.

Yet even a craft this honest can be turned awry. It was the simplest piece of crude work, using wood fit for nothing else, neither squared up nor planed smooth, with iron nails banged into it, that was used to kill a carpenter's son. What a cruel irony. Pray God the work of our hands bring only glory to God. St. Joseph, pray for us. □

St Joseph the Carpenter, by Georges de La Tour, circa 1642. Louvre, Paris. Public domain.



A Carpenter Today?

By Richard Kornicki

I took up carpentry a month before my first son was born. The baby would need a cradle. I bought Teach-Yourself-Carpentry, a few hand tools, some wood and set to work; after all, it could not need a university degree, and I had one of those anyway. I would have made a far better job of it today, but as six grandchildren have now slept in the same cradle, it probably counts as a success.

But making something for a living is a different matter. Assuming you have mastered the skills of hand woodwork, can you find clients willing to pay a fair price for something to last for a couple of generations at least? IKEA is temptingly cheap for anyone who will settle for flat-pack chipboard. To bring your prices down you will start investing in more and more machinery. Gone is the harmony of

hand-work, replaced by screaming machines, dust that needs an extractor, and the risk of losing a finger or two in some whirling saw. You have just invented the factory, and as you are the boss, you can be sure that you won't cut yourself any slack.

Can it be done? Aged 15, in the 1960s Paul Sellers was described by his school as 'uneducable'. So he



served a traditional five year apprenticeship in a woodworking shop instead. He learnt his trade from old men who passed on skills handed down over centuries. But by the time he was qualified, machines were taking over everywhere, and he moved to America for 20 years, managing to make a modest living and raise a family predominantly with hand-tool woodwork. His final commission before returning to the UK was a pair of credenzas for the Cabinet Room of the White House. Back in this country he passed on his skills in small classes until YouTube revolutionised the possibilities of remote learning. He now has nearly half a million followers worldwide and provides a free web-site teaching the techniques, and a subscription site for detailed projects. With a blog full of wisdom about work, creativity and life, it is a fascinating story and worth exploring: <https://commonwoodworking.com/about/>.

Paul's original thought was to train people to make a living from woodworking and so preserve the traditional skills of hand woodwork. Most of those who follow his site use what they learn to bring creativity and satisfaction into their own time. They produce the furniture their family needs, word of mouth may bring commissions as a bonus, and for a few it may become a way of earning their whole living.

A university degree has its place, and for many professions it is a necessity. And if there is a subject you are passionate about, university can be a mind-opening experience. But if you find yourself heading off to university just because half the population does, then maybe it is worth pausing for a moment. Maybe it is worth re-thinking the idea of an apprenticeship. Whether it is an informal You-Tube apprenticeship, or something formally structured and paid, there are ways of using your hands and your head together which offer a very different life to the conventional model everyone is

expected to aspire to. It may only partly support you, it may only be something you develop gradually in your own time, but it may well provide the utter fulfilment that comes from creating something where there was nothing.

It can be a risk. Pushing out into the deep takes courage. It comes down to your faith in the potential God has given you. If you are young today, you face some difficult questions, but the answers may lie in your own hands. Take a good look at them. St. Joseph might help you find a way of using them for the best. □

Left: *The Childhood of Christ*, by Gerrit van Honthorst, circa 1620. Hermitage Museum. Public domain. Below: the author's grandson © Richard Kornicki.



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