



The Oratory of Saint Philip Neri



Requiem aeternam dona ei Domine

THE MONTHS THAT have passed since our last mailing have been dramatic ones. As most of you will have heard, Fr Jonathan Robinson, the founder of the Toronto Oratory, died peacefully at home in his room on the 3rd of June. His funeral, celebrated by Fr Derek Cross with Fr David Roche preaching, on the 10th of June was a very beautiful event but private, because of the Covid pandemic; it was livestreamed on the internet so that as many people as possible could witness it. We deeply appreciated the flood of support—through social media, email, and cards from around the globe. Masses for the repose of his soul are being offered all over the world. The influence Fr Robinson had on people working to be faithful to the Church, its teachings, and its traditions is impressive, even to those of us who lived with him! The forthcoming volume of essays written in his memory (Justin Press) is a testimony to the widespread impact he had on the Church, in Canada and abroad. We hope to release some of

his previously unpublished writings, perhaps some homilies, in the near future. We as a community are very grateful for your prayers for him. We also ask you to pray for us, as we learn to navigate life without our founder's guidance.

Two days after Fr Robinson's funeral, we held our community elections. As you might guess from the fact that I (Fr Paul Pearson) am writing this newsletter, I was elected as provost. It seems profoundly odd even to write that sentence, let alone to live it. Fr Juvenal Merriell was elected as vicar, and Fathers Martin Hilbert, Thomas Trottier, and Philip Cleevely as the other deputies. As you can see from the rest of this letter, God has been exceptionally generous with us in this fragile time. We have been blessed as a community on many different fronts. It is hard even to know where to begin.

Sunday the 14th of June, the first Sunday after the funeral and election, the churches in Toronto were allowed to open, at least for private prayer. We had been

The Director's-Eye View



livestreaming two masses a day through much of the time of the closure of the churches, one *novus ordo* English mass and one *usus antiquior* Latin mass. The technical expertise and generosity of our brothers made this livestreaming possible, allowing us to stay connected electronically for more than two months. The brothers and Aaron James, the Director of Music, managed to keep some music going during the lockdown. Various fathers were also posting talks and prayers during this time, hoping to provide some spiritual nourishment during these challenging times. Despite all of these attempts to keep connected virtually, it could not replace actually being present with one another. It is difficult to describe the joy of being able to gather, even in reduced numbers, physically in the church again. Later, when masses were permitted to be resumed, because of the outpouring of assistance from parishioners at both parishes (and the organizing of Fr Michael Eades at Holy Family) we were able to open right away, keeping the church both open and safe. That band of volunteers has remained faithfully at the task. I really don't know how we would manage two parishes and all of our scheduled masses without them.

Saint Philip's Seminary was able to complete the spring semester online. Although we were not able to gather for a graduation ceremony, everyone was able to complete his academic year. Over the summer fifteen of our alumni were ordained as priests—all over the world. Eight were here in the Archdiocese of Toronto, four at Saint Michael's Abbey in California, and one each from the Archdiocese of Ottawa, the Diocese of Hamilton, and the Missionaries of the Poor in Kingston, Jamaica. We were blessed, despite the travel restrictions, to have representatives present for the ordinations of ten of the fifteen men. One of them, Fr John Sutka, celebrated his first mass at Holy Family Church! May God continue to bless them in their vocations and provide many more vocations for His Church. We are honoured to have been entrusted with a role in their formation.

This fall the work of the Seminary continues in a hybrid form. Some students are able to meet physically with us for classes, while the majority attend online. Regardless of the general shutdown, twenty-two men are presently being trained here in philosophy and theology. The necessity of putting our courses online in the spring has pushed us to make our instruction more widely available through electronic means. Many of our students would not be able to be pursuing their studies except online. These online classes are no replacement for in-person instruction—both teachers and students realize that. But they are a way of keeping the work of the Church going in the middle of a worldwide crisis. Somehow, the Church has always managed, and always will.

The experience of teaching the spring seminary courses online also suggested to us the possibility of offering the Oratory Theology Summer School electronically. We knew that we wouldn't be able to



Parish Hall as TV Studio

accommodate students in the seminary residence. Even gathering in the parish hall would be strictly limited. By teaching the classes to a few people physically present and livestreaming the classes, we were able to include more than one hundred and ten students this year, more than ever before. And people were able to take part in the classes from around the world—the east and west coasts, and even as far away as Kazakhstan! The last of the sessions of the summer school was a sort of documentary on Fr Jonathan Robinson and the founding of the Oratory here in Canada, overseen by the Oratorian brothers. It is amazing what the Covid virus has pushed us to do. God works through everything, even pandemics.

The Monday after the churches in Toronto were allowed to open, the Monday after Fr Robinson's funeral, construction began on the *Renovatio* project. Two old houses were demolished to make room for a new seminary building, with large classrooms, student facilities, and rooms for sixteen additional seminarians. The day-to-day operations of the construction are being supervised by Fr Hilbert and Brother Jason Flammini. You can follow the progress on the Oratory website. Once begun, the project has been moving on schedule. The plan is to have the building enclosed by Christmas, to allow work to continue throughout the winter. We are extremely grateful to the many generous benefactors who have made this project possible. It is a rare and wonderful

To destroy, and to throw down...



...to build, and to plant

thing for a seminary to be in a position to expand. God has certainly blessed our work. We look forward to all that can be done with these new facilities. The building should be complete in the summer, in time for the beginning of the new academic year! We hope that circumstances will allow us to have a big gathering so that everyone can see the new building in person and rejoice together.

Another blessing of the pandemic was the extended presence of Fr Marco Guillén here in Toronto. Since his election as the Apostolic Delegate (or Visitor) of the Oratory, his responsibilities have taken him all over the world, visiting Oratories and assisting them. The Covid outbreak in Europe forced him to return to Toronto, but not without a fair dose of drama. He was able to get back to Rome from a European trip with various borders closing behind him. His plane leaving Rome for Toronto was one of the last ones allowed to land here. After quarantining, Fr Marco was with us for Holy Week and the whole summer. He has now returned to Rome and to his duties. We are very grateful for the generous work he does for the Oratory around the world, but we miss him when he is away.

The second volume of my commentary on Dante's *Divine Comedy* appeared in July: *Spiritual Direction from Dante: Ascending Mount Purgatory*. Circumstances have not permitted any sort of book launch, but it is available, both here at the Oratory Bookstall

and online at Amazon. The third volume is expected for 2021. Fr Martin Hilbert is working on a book on Darwinism. Since evolution is one of the topics people use regularly against the Church (the Church is against science, they say), a solid book explaining the implications of Darwinism for the Church and the flaws and weaknesses of the theory itself is much desired.

Brother Bruno (Daniel) Hege-
dus completed the first year of his
novitiate on the 6th of October.
On the 9th, the feast of Saint John
Henry Newman of the Oratory,
he was joined in our novitiate by
Brother Jeffrey Sullivan, the new-
est member of our community.
The Oratory website gives some
information about Brother Jeffrey,
as well as pictures of the ceremony

Fr Juvenal, Br Jeffrey,
Fr Paul, Br Bruno



Receiving the Habit:
Sis fortis in bello...
Be strong in Battle



in which he was clothed in the Oratorian habit.

November 2020 will be a time of special celebration here at the Toronto Oratory. The 1st of November, the Solemnity of All Saints, will be the 45th anniversary of the official founding of the Toronto Oratory, originally in Montreal. Forty-one of those years have been spent here in Toronto. The 21st of November, the feast of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, will be the diaconate ordination of Brothers Alexander (Paul) Griffiths and Christopher Huynh. Becoming deacons is the last milestone before priestly ordination. Thomas Cardinal Collins has graciously agreed to come to ordain them himself. Attendance, unfortunately, will be limited. The ceremony, however, will be livestreamed so that all of you can witness, at least electronically, this dramatic moment in their lives and in the life of the Toronto Oratory. Now that their philosophical and theological studies are complete, they are assisting Fr Hilbert and Fr Utrecht in our parishes, visiting the schools, and teaching catechism. After so many years of preparation, it is exciting to watch them begin active ministries. Although the ordination to the priesthood is given more attention, the ordination as deacons is where the candidates commit themselves to praying the breviary, serving the Church in obedience, and living a life of celibacy. The commitment happens here. Please pray for them in these final weeks leading up to their ordinations.

As you can see, these past months have been intense, filled with sorrow and uncertainty, but blessed in an astounding variety of ways. We are very grateful to God for his providential care for us as individuals and as a community. We are also grateful to you. Your support, both spiritual and material, makes our life possible. We are very conscious of the gift we are given. 🍷

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