

MOTHERS' UNION ANNUAL PROVINCIAL RETREAT  
25TH - 27TH APRIL 2017  
St Mary's Monastery, Kinnoull, Perth

"Our Celtic Heritage, a pattern for Faith in Action"  
Led by

Revd. Sr. Ann-Marie Stuart F.J., MA

Let me begin where our first day began. Margaret Murray, Pam Dench and Florence Cal-Anglia were collected by Ian Dench who drove us to our destination at St Mary's Monastery Kinnoull, Perth. The journey was in typical Scottish weather beginning dry then rain followed by sleet, changing to sunshine when we finally reached our destination first stopping for an unexpected financial gain at "Pension Day Price" delightful pensioner yet fulsome lunch at Glendoick Garden Centre.

When we arrived we saw that St Mary's Monastery is set in tranquil grounds surrounded by trees high up in the hill overseeing the houses of Kinnoull, Perth in the distance. The rooms are all similarly furnished with a bed, bedside table, set of drawers, wardrobe and a desk, kettle and refreshments and WiFi for free. The shower/bathroom facilities are great. On our arrival we were welcomed and all were given a lanyard holding our key card adorned with our room number and an identity card which we were advised to pin on to the front of the lanyard which we did preventing any forgetfulness of either key or identity.

All we had to do to enter any personal room or to open an outside door was to hold the key card against the door knob turn the handle and that was it, no fiddling around trying to slide a card through the side of a door. There was also a lift to all floors, ground to attic. Two of us were in the first floor while the one in the second floor found it very convenient as this was where the Chapel was situated for all our services.

The ground floor contained the Office/Receptionist who was always helpful whatever the query, the dining room and the Monastery shop which was next to one of the entrances to the Church. We could go and see the interior of the Church if we so wished but as I said earlier our services were always held in the chapel. There was a quiet room, where one could sit to meditate or read and also for those desperate to talk an aptly addressed "talking room",

which mistakenly I thought would be always crowded but no I was mistaken, well that time I looked in for my companions anyway.

In the surrounding grounds, garden and parking area which I took the opportunity to walk along on our two hours free time on the Wednesday that was now smaller than originally. This was due to the necessity to sell grounds to finance the renovation of St Mary's hence the high standard of ensuite Bedrooms, a lift and other amenities. Walking along I came across on one of the high mounds a quiet resting place beside a life size symbolism of The Crucified Christ between the other two crosses painted in white with two dedicated plaques near to it. Further along in complete contrast were chickens in an outside pen, obviously giving fresh eggs to the community.

And now to the main reason for our visit to St Mary's Monastery, a Silent Retreat for all "to take time and make space to pay attention to God"<sup>1</sup> based on Celtic Spirituality.

The Celtic belief was a devotion to the Light or the Brilliance of Christ with the Trinity being absolute, the "Persons of Trinity were each equally important even as their oneness was also important". They saw the Trinity as:-

1. "A safe place. 2. A place of encounter and intimacy and lastly 3. As a place of transformation. For them Trinity surrounded them, above and below, behind and in front"

According to the Celtic belief the Godhead was a surrounding presence urging them to spread the news of the Gospel acting in His Name. Their Christian Community was not based on hierarchy. It "would be made up of married, single, lay and clergy, monks and nuns each with their particular role to play but not even their Bishop always took precedence. Each person was valued for the particular role they offered to the community and neither gender nor status was valued more highly than another".

After our welcome we were given an afternoon tea before attending the evening service and Intersessions with members of the congregation asked or chosen to be one of the service readers not in the sense of reading a few verses from the Holy Bible to the exclusion of other persons but either a sentence or paragraph each read individually by five readers on this occasion. The same format was followed when Compline was read. Then came dinner where the cooking was excellent and the meal could be supplemented as much or as little as one wanted.

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<sup>1</sup> All quotes unless otherwise stated are from the booklet "Mothers' Union Annual Provincial Retreat April 2017, "Our Celtic Heritage, a pattern for Faith in Action"

The talks were presented by: The Revd. Sister. Ann-Marie Stuart F.J., MA,  
Chaplain Sherborne Abbey Benefice

Talk 1, Honing our Capacity for Rapture.

Talk 2. Trinity a Place of Safety

Talk 3. Trinity a place of mystery and intimacy

Talk 4. Trinity a place for transformation and a basis for faith in action

**Talk 1: "Honing our Capacity for Rapture"**

In this talk, we were introduced to the writings of the Scottish Franciscan and Theologian John Dun Scotus based on the Celtic preoccupation with the<sup>2</sup> Light in Scripture, in nature and in the Trinity. Ann-Marie as she preferred to be called spoke of the Celtic roundness - "gather us all in, not just a place at the table but right into the middle of the table".

She then demonstrated a Celtic prayer beginning with holding in her case two fingers out in front of her to point and moving to form a full circle around herself to form a circle of light. That is important in Celtic beliefs for they saw the wonder of God in the wonder of Light, Light from every Creation. The Gospel of St John was so important to them for example:

"In him was life, and that life was the Light of men" "The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world" John 1:4 and 9.

Ann-Marie went on to say "Rapture your hearts to be drawn into the Brilliance of God" another name used to explain God in Celtic beliefs "He who runs through all things, through all of us, always being inside the Light, being inside relationships, inside the Trinity. In Genesis chapter one Light is the first creation by God making it very important to Celtic beliefs probably also its association with Christ who is God being the Light of the world. After the talk questions were asked for to some this was a different way of looking at the Spiritual life.

The evening ended with Compline in the same format as before concerning readers with the reading itself written in Genesis chapter 3:3-5, 31. Led by Ann-Marie the service began

"Let the light fade and the work be done,  
Let the flowers and the desk tops close,  
Let the sun go down and the world become still,  
And let the Son of God draw near."

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Compline ended with "Let us rest in God this night. And awake in the newness of life."

Whatever was our inclination for the rest of the evening before repose was up to ourselves either visit the Gerrard Room the Douglas Room or bed. The first evening I returned to my room to think over what I had seen and heard reading a little before going to sleep. May I mention of course here there were no television sets in the bedrooms yet with free Wi-Fi again the choice was according to our own needs whether it be mobile, iPad, Laptop or silent meditation to finish the day.

Next day, Wednesday 26th April, began at 8.30 a.m with breakfast, cereal, fresh fruit, juice, tea or coffee and toast. At 9.30 a.m we returned to the chapel for Morning Prayer and Intercessions:

"God of life, you summon the day to dawn. And call us to create with you"

"You are the Rock from which all earth is fashioned. You are Food from which all souls are fed. You are the Force from which all power lines travel. You are the Source who is creation's head." The readings were based on Psalm 104: 'He wraps himself in light as with a garment: he stretches the heavens like a tent' verse 2.

**Talk 2:** "Trinity a Place of Safety".

According to John Scottus the meaning of Trinity as a place of Safety enfolds Power, knowledge or wisdom and goodness, with goodness and mercy belonging to the Holy Spirit whereas it is a 'question of asking Jesus to share His knowledge and wisdom with us. Still on his writings the secret name of the Trinity in Celtic beliefs was Alpha and Omega. Celtic faith uses pictures to show their faith always showing a round in circles unending. And he suggests without "encountering the Book of Creation we will not be able to interpret the Book of Scripture adequately." There was so much more to absorb in this talk. One deep thought was saying that we suffer from the soul's forgetfulness that you should remember who you are and you will see more clearly yourself and others.

We had a break for coffee/tea then returned at 11.30 a.m for an Iona Eucharist with a short Reflection and the Gospel written in The Gospel of John 3:16-21.

"... 'This is the verdict. Light has come into the world but men loved darkness instead of light, because their deeds were evil,' verse 19.

Lunch was at 13.00 p.m with an afternoon free that is for two hours 14.00 to 16.00 p.m when I took the opportunity, as aforementioned, to walk in the surrounding grounds and take some photographs. Or if we wished at this time there was the opportunity for private discussion with the Retreat Leader.

On return a refreshing cup of tea before Evening Prayer followed by:

**Talk 3:** "Trinity a place of mystery and intimacy"

Again the emphasis on the Circle of Light. "Circle me, O God keep faith within, keep doubt without"

This is one talk I was too unwell to attend I can only go by the summary in the booklet issued to us, "Our Celtic Heritage" where mention of the "Trinity demands that rather than try to master the truth we allow truth to master us". The emphasis in this talk seems to be on the Light of God with the divine 'brilliance' at the centre and I quote "Not just stepping inside, not just wearing Trinity like a Golden cloak but we are woven into the very fabric of Trinity". The day ending with Compline.

On Thursday the day of our departure after Morning Prayer and before Iona Eucharist with the Gospel Reading written in the Gospel of John 3:31, "The one who comes from above is above all; the one who is of the earth belongs to the earth and speaks about earthly things. The one who comes from heaven is above all,,,: then came:

**Talk 4:** "Trinity a place for transformation and a basis for faith in action" John Scottus calls Jesus the Medicine of Grace and reflects on the Celtic acknowledgment of our loss of innocence yet the soul's forgetfulness is the good in people that we can cure ourselves by turning to the Light. Another belief of theirs is that we are not created out of nothing, we are Created out of Light, the essence of the Living God, out of God's endless Glory. Whereas we think of our heart feeling love, joy or pain, in Celtic belief the solar plexus is the heart of being. We need self-love to recognise love, reflecting the Spirit within, using the circle of Light to surround ourselves with the Trinity, "woven into the very fabric of Trinity"

Finally after Eucharist we had our final lunch the ending of silence to say our farewells and disperse to our various destinations. We were given a different view to contemplate the importance of Light, the emphases more on the Trinity, Three in One, rather than the individualism of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit although individualism also important.

