

JULY 2011

THINGS OF INTEREST

In the last 16 years the three of us have only gone away together twice. This is because of our commitments here at the hermitage; our vocation to the contemplative life, looking after the place, and the animals we share the place with.

We were about to make it a third time.

André Cirino OFM, a Franciscan who belongs to the Order of Friars Minor, was going to give a seminar in Melbourne, Sydney, and Brisbane, on St. Francis's principles or guidelines for those living in hermitages, commonly called St. Francis' Rule for Hermitages.

Father André lectures at the Franciscan International Study Centre, Canterbury, England. He jointly published an anthology on Franciscan Solitude among many other works. He is in touch with a whole range of people interested in this dimension of Franciscan Spirituality and conducts pilgrimages to Assisi, the home of St. Francis in Italy. André is from the U.S.A and lives in New York where, among other things, he lectures in Franciscan Studies at St. Bonaventure University and he was going to be giving a lecture in Brisbane.

Being a long journey from the hermitage to Brisbane, we needed to stay overnight. A long-standing and generous friend, Sandy Siddle, offered us accommodation and a wonderful meal. So we set off and we were not disappointed.



Fr. André, with his breadth of knowledge and experience, confirmed and expanded our understanding of life envisaged by Francis within hermitages. And for those today who are attempting to live and adapt it to our present time.

We had prearranged to have a personal opportunity to talk to André over lunch in a local restaurant.

However, we were in for the most wonderful surprise.

When we met André and were about to set out for lunch, he suggested that lunch in a restaurant would be a distraction so "let's just go and talk".

Talk would be a misnomer; it was a unique opportunity and the most extraordinary time of sharing our journey and vocation with this man of prayer, wisdom and experience.



Our Hermitage is located in the rocky foothills of the mountains, outside a small country town in northern NSW.

SILLY SHEEP - NOT LIKELY!

The popular view is that sheep are silly. We are going to set aside a small space each issue of the Bush Telegraph to present a very different perspective.



One day, one of the ewes called Shine came home in the afternoon alone. She came to the gate near the community building and bleated and bleated and bleated. Brother Howard realised something was wrong and went to investigate. Immediately he went through the gate, Shine headed up the sheep-track into the paddock. About three hundred metres away she stopped, and there was a lamb only five weeks old called Sunny unable to stand. A quick examination revealed she had a tick behind her ear – yes, she had tick paralysis. Brother Howard carried her down to the community building and took mother and daughter into the house-yard. There, over the next few days, we had an anxious wait to see if she would survive. The lamb was so weak that the Brothers had to hold the lamb up to her mother's teat so she could get a drink. Miraculously, after about three days, Sunny was back on her feet, though very wobbly.

What is remarkable is that the ewe knew she could get help for her lamb by coming to look for us. Likewise, after all the years with the sheep, we are learning to 'read' their behaviour, and often can work out what their needs are.

Silly sheep?

CHRISTCHURCH, NZ

The following are excerpts from Fr. David Moore's communication with us. Fr. David is the parish priest of St. Luke's, a member of the Friends of the Little Brothers of Francis, and he spent time with us last year.

Life here is very strange, chaotic at times, day-by-day all the time, occasionally 'normal' - a blur - just as well I kept some journal notes. The whole thing is so bizarre and so enormous that it wouldn't sound believable anyway I suspect.

Two years ago we celebrated the 150th Anniversary of St Luke's. The church is mortally wounded (photo below). At a special parish meeting, we accepted - it's all over for her; demolition/deconstruction is imminent. The decision was necessary, but heart-breaking.

The CBD is functionally dead - the power remains off, the streets empty, demolitions on virtually every city block, some of them relatively new and large buildings, which is all the more shocking. Silent, eerie, deathly. No one knows just how long it will be before the CBD reopens, or even if people will want to return. In fact 1000s of people are now working from home. Other 1000s are already being laid off and leaving town - it's all pretty grim.

It is a very confronting city to be in now, that's for sure, though not without hope. I think we have to take the long view - the authorities are estimating that it could be 5-10 years before the city is back up to speed. The only way of coping is to take each day at a time as we wait for the phoenix to rise from the ashes.



Ian Lothian, the President of the Friends of the Little Brothers of Francis, has informed us that they have been able to have their first meeting recently.

FLOWER IN THE DESERT



There are plants that grow in lonely and barren landscapes like deserts. Their life is sustained by water and nutrients which they don't provide. When they flower, no one sees or appreciates their blooming except God.

This is a powerful image of the hidden life lived in hermitages and contemplative orders and by individuals. Our Lord Jesus said: *When you pray, go away by yourself, shut the door, and pray to your Father secretly. Then your Father, who knows all secrets, will reward you. Take care! Don't do your good deeds publicly, to be admired. Give your gifts secretly.* (Matthew 6: 1-6)

The desert is a difficult environment and the call to love God and the life of prayer is similar. An experienced elder, one of the Desert Fathers, who were the first monks living in Egypt in the fourth century explains:

The brethren also asked Abba Agathon, *Amongst all good works, which is the one that requires the greatest effort?* He answered, *Forgive me, but I think there is no labour greater than that of prayer to God. For every time a man wants to pray, the forces of spiritual darkness want to prevent him, for they know that it is only by turning him from prayer that they can hinder his journey. Whatever good work a man undertakes, if he perseveres in it, he will attain rest. But prayer is warfare to the last breath.*

WHAT A WONDERFUL WAY TO START LENT!

It started over a cup of coffee with Rev'd Elsie Clack and Brother Howard at Toowong Village in Brisbane. Howard had just arrived with a delivery of jam and honey and I wanted to discuss the possibility of the Brothers leading a mission to Toowong. As we were talking, Fr John Cuffe (Rector of Milton) walked past, so the conversation changed to a joint mission to both parishes. The date was set for the first weekend in Lent.

Brothers Wayne and Geoffrey were welcomed at a Mission Dinner on the Friday evening after which Wayne spoke to introduce the theme weekend and then the Brothers led us in Compline. The next morning we gathered at Christ Church Milton where the Brothers led a quiet morning of prayer and reflection. The morning was called 'Stepping Out' and we were encouraged to continue in our prayer life. On Sunday morning Brother Geoffrey preached at Milton and Auchenflower services while Brother Wayne preached at both services at Toowong.

This was a wonderful start to Lent and the enthusiasm continued through our Lenten studies and at Sunday worship. Our Easter celebration was inspiring; large numbers of people gathered and the worship was beautiful and uplifting. The Mission was an important point in the life of our parish. Our sense of community and the quality of our fellowship continues to grow. Following a recent visit from Bishop Geoff Smith he wrote: *"My sense is that the Parish is becoming a more and more positive Christian community"*.

We are truly grateful to the Brothers for their contribution to our spiritual growth. The parish does not wish to lose contact with the Brothers so we have decided to support them in three ways.

1. To commit ourselves to regular prayer for the Brothers,
2. to support them financially by selling jams, honey and in other ways, and
3. to subscribe to the *Bush Telegraph* newsletter.

Tom Sullivan
Rector of Toowong, Brisbane.

NOT TAKEN FOR GRANTED

Fridges, freezers, stoves, washing machines, running water and lights - these are daily necessities and the benefits of living in Australia. We take them for granted until they break down!

As brothers living in a remote part of rural Australia, our situation has never been quite so simple. For a start we do not have 240v mains power which means no lights, freezers, stoves, washing machines, fridges, freezers unless we find alternative sources of energy which we have done, except no washing machine. The hot water for the bathroom comes from a wood fire under a 44 gallon drum, a wood stove. We also have solar panels for lights and bottled gas to run the small fridge/freezer. Wood there is aplenty on the property but it still needs the outlay and maintenance of a chainsaw, a Ute and a trailer, wheelbarrow, time and hard work.

Recently we were able to upgrade our solar system so that we could run a normal size fridge/freezer on 240v. What has prevented us doing this before now is the capital outlay which was very large for us. But with our new solar system, there is no running cost, a big saving in bottled gas and the work involved in getting them.

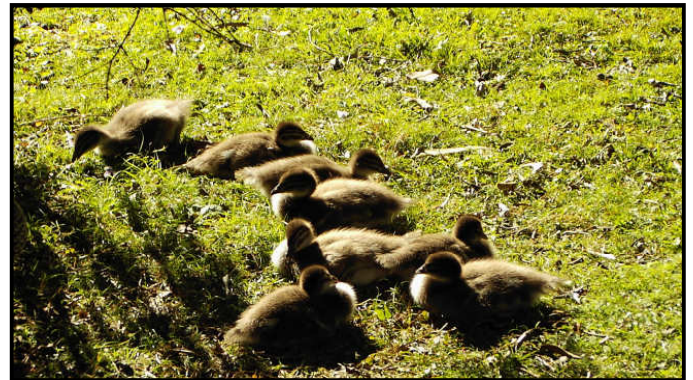
Brother Geoffrey has built a beautiful stone battery room to house the batteries and equipment.



The inside of our new power/battery room.

MAGNET

Enclosed is a fridge magnet, a small link with us as we celebrate God's love and providence on the 24th Anniversary of the foundation of our Hermitage and the Little Brothers of Francis.



Our parents are wood duck, they mate for life and nest in hollows 15 metres from the ground in a big old spotty gum tree. When we were ready to leave the nest our parents called us and we jumped! Just like the Brothers when they left everything and came here.



We are also celebrating with the Brothers their 24th Anniversary. We were born here and, because of their love and commitment to this place, they have provided a home for us and we keep a watchful eye out for them!

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**Little Brothers of Francis
Franciscan Hermitage
Eremophila**

PO Box 162, Tabulam, NSW 2469

www.franciscanhermitage.org

A Religious Order in the Anglican Church in the contemplative tradition.

Protector: Bishop Godfrey Fryar.