



Dear Br Patrick,

Today the homily is addressed to you rather than to everyone else, not because you are the centre of attention, Our Lord and his Blessed Mother are, but because you are about to commit your life, your whole life, to the service of God in this monastery and among the monks of this community, following the example of Christ himself and Our Lady, who offered their lives that we might have life and have it in abundance. St Benedict, in the Prologue to the Rule, quoting

Psalm 33, sees the Lord calling you to the monastic life. "Is there anyone here who yearns for life and desires to see good days?" If your response is affirmative, then, says St Benedict, "what is more delightful than this voice calling us? See how the Lord in his love shows us the way of life. Clothed with faith and the performance of good works, let us set out on this way, with the Gospel as our guide, that we may deserve to see him who has called us to his kingdom."

Dear Patrick, it is now six years since you arrived at Belmont as a postulant and you have journeyed faithfully, though not without difficulty at times, through the various stages of monastic formation. You have also spent three years living at St Paul outside the Walls and studying at the Beda. In all this time, you have not wavered from your response to the Lord's call. Together with Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane and with Mary at the Annunciation, your reply continues to be, "Fiat - let it be done unto me according to thy word; Father, not my will but yours be done." Each time you say the Lord's Prayer, those words that Jesus taught us, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven," are an affirmation that your deepest yearning is to do the will of God in the monastic life as a monk of Belmont.

In a few moments, you will make three vows, the traditional Benedictine vows of stability, conversatio morum and obedience, "in the presence of God and his saints," as St Benedict insists, reminding you that vows are made to God and his Church and should never be broken, for they are sacred. By stability, you will unite yourself to one specific monastic community, just as a man unites himself to his wife, symbolised by



your place in choir, in the refectory and in the order of the community. Wherever you are, you will stand in the presence of God, ever mindful that he is with you as you are with him. Your whole life should become one of continuous prayer. By conversatio morum, you promise to live faithfully each and every aspect of the Benedictine charism according to the Constitutions of the English Congregation and the traditions we hold dear at Belmont. This includes our life of prayer, the Divine Office, Lectio Divina and Mental Prayer, and work, whether it's manual, pastoral or one of the many facets of hospitality. By obedience, you commit yourself to seek God and love him in your brethren, the abbot, the sick, our guests and all those with

whom we work and pray. You will listen carefully with the ear of your heart to the voice of God and come, by the ladder of humility, to that perfect love that casts out fear. It is a wonderful life and a beautiful vocation. God must love you very much to have called you here today.

The Rite of Solemn Profession does have the aspect of a Requiem Mass, in that you will lie on the funeral pall while the Paschal Candle burns beside you. You have been asked by Christ to "lose your life in this world" and to "lay down your life for your friends." You are to enter fully into the mystery of Christ's Death and Resurrection by dying with him in order to rise with him to new life: the old man must die, the new man must live. To fully understand this dying for Christ's sake, you will remain with him for three days in the tomb, practising complete silence and withdrawal from the world, even from your own brethren. I hope you have shut down your computer and disconnected your phone. Nothing must get in the way of total communion with Christ and conformity to his death. You alone can make this work, for you will never again get the opportunity to be alone with God in this very special way in the silence of your heart.

God is good and he has allowed you to make your Profession on the feast day of the Nativity of his Virgin Mother, the Queen of Heaven. Today's feast doesn't have the theological magnitude of the Immaculate Conception or the Assumption, nor the shared joy of the Annunciation, but it is an ancient feast which we celebrate together with the Eastern Churches, many of them suffering tragically from persecution and exile: we keep them in our prayers. The Byzantine liturgy today contains this lovely Kontakion:

*In your holy birth, O Immaculate One, Joachim and Anna were rid of the shame of childlessness; Adam and Eve of the corruption of death. And so your people, free of the guilt of their sins, celebrate by crying out, "The barren one gives birth to the Theotokos, who nourishes our life."*

May the Mother of God, the Theotokos, nourish your life, your faith, your joy and your love as you live each day of your monastic life with humility and total self-giving. May she, the Mother of this Community, bless and protect you and may you always remember the feast of her glorious Nativity as the day on which you, like her, said a final and binding "Yes" to God, that his will be done in your life as it was in hers. Amen.