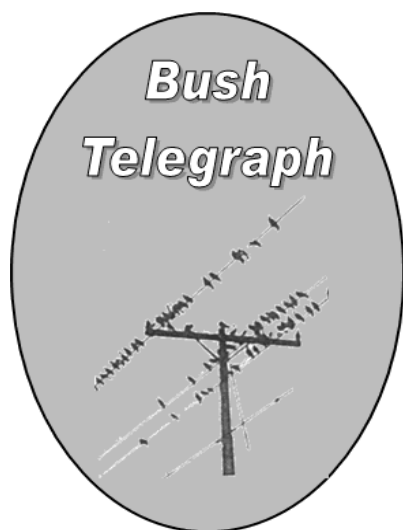


LITTLE BROTHERS OF FRANCIS

An irregular newsletter



2020

ANOTHER COUNTRY, ANOTHER KING

I find myself in a strange kind of divided state in which I live in two countries, going my own way like everyone else, finding enjoyment "before the night cometh"; but at the same time, I feel myself a citizen of another country, hearing the commands and pleadings of another king. That other country and its ruler do not compete well in the noisy market-place of contemporary ideas and values. It calls forth a response and an attitude that is so at variance with the attitude of the world and the responses the world demands, that it is not surprising that it usually goes unheard and unheeded.

(Richard Holloway's book 'Another Country, Another King')

It is **that King** and **that country** St. Francis impresses so earnestly to his brothers living in Hermitages, that they must set their hearts, minds and all their effort to:

*Seek first the Kingdom of God
and His righteousness.*

But it is important to note that this instruction from Francis – to seek, to strive etc – is set in the midst of Francis describing the importance of the faithful rhythm of prayer. Seven times a day the brothers should stop whatever they are doing, and turn to God in prayer and praise in the Liturgy of the Hours.

Either together or alone in our hermitages, we pray the Liturgy of the Hours at

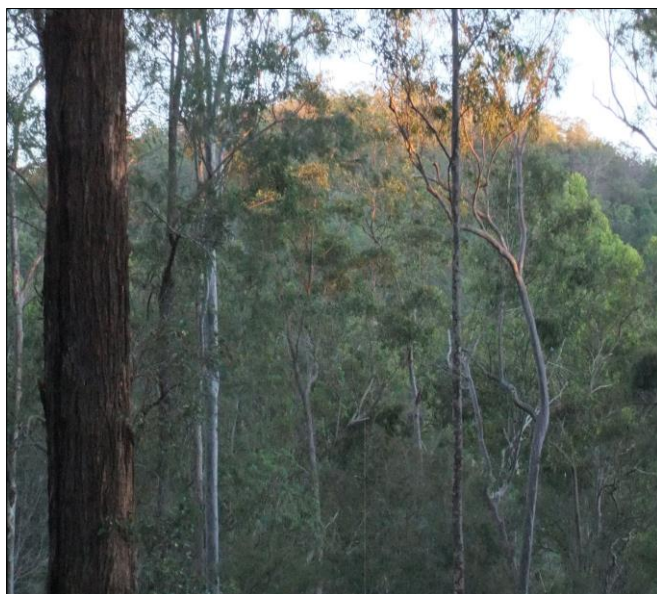


Before Dawn
Sunrise
Mid-morning
Midday
Mid-afternoon
Sunset
At day's end

It is in the Liturgy of the Hours we come deliberately to listen to Jesus. It is here in his presence, particularly in the four Gospels, that we learn from his example and life, and listen with the ears of our heart to his teaching, and learn what it means to be people of the Kingdom of God.

In His presence we will hear words that give us hope, warning, encouragement, perseverance, and forgiveness; all that we would need to shape and guide our lives. He knows our frailty and potential, and loves us dearly. It is a life-long process that is only finished when we take our last breath. The following hymn expresses this spirituality very well.

DAWN AT THE HERMITAGE



A LIGHT UPON THE MOUNTAIN

There is a light upon the mountains, and the day is at the spring when our eyes shall see the beauty and the glory of the King: weary was our heart with waiting,

and the night-watch seemed so long, but His triumph day is breaking, and we hail it with a song.

There's a hush of expectation, and a quiet in the air, and the breath of God is moving in the fervent breath of prayer: for the suffering, dying Jesus is the Christ upon the throne and the travail of our spirits is the travail of his own.

He is breaking down the barriers, he is casting up the way, he is calling for his angels to build up the gates of day: but his angels here are human, not the shining hosts above; for the drum-beats of his army are the heart-beats of our love.

Hark, we hear a distant music, and it comes with fuller swell—the great triumph song of Jesus, of our King, Emmanuel: go you forth to meet him; and, my soul, be swift to bring all your finest and your dearest for the triumph of our King
(Australian Hymn Book)

APIARY

With the last three years of drought and then the devastating bushfire earlier this year, our bee hives have had the lowest population of bees that we have experienced in over thirty years living here. Though our property was burnt out, there remained small pockets of bush which survived, the most important of which is the immediate area around our buildings, animals and apiary. Between the many small beekeepers and larger ones, there were hundreds and hundreds of hives lost with their bees burnt alive in the fire.

However, the honey bee is the most amazing and resilient creature. We look forward to working with them in the future as they slowly recover and build up their numbers.



What a privilege!

SONGS OF SUMMER

A visitor arriving at the front gate of our hermitage was greeted with the rising and falling song of the cicadas. He just stopped and listened to them in their rhythmic singing and it immediately reminded him of the country of his origins and the chanting of the monks in the monasteries. There is a delightful story of St. Francis who, at the entrance to his hermitage, befriended a cicada which he would gently place on his hand and there it would break forth in song.



A bronze statue of Francis and cicada in Assisi

In this country in the southern hemisphere, we call the singing of the cicadas the “Songs of Summer” and it is the time we celebrate the birth of Jesus at Christmas. So we have the rhythmic living music of the cicadas with their song surrounding us in the bush. We have placed a representation of a cicada in our Christmas Crib: a wonderful addition as the Christmas Crib has its origins with Saint Francis.

A BLOODWOOD TREE



A tree, when damaged or cut, will bleed a resin or sap, much in the same way as we bleed when the skin is damaged or broken. The blood-wood tree weeps a very blood-red resin, hence the name “Blood-wood”. It was appropriate to replace our old and weathered wooden cross, which marks the front entrance of our Hermitage, with a dead blood-wood tree.

SISTER WATER

“who is *useful* and *precious*”

In his Canticle of the Sun, two of the four words St Francis uses to describe “Sister Water” are *useful* and *precious*. We have a significant waterhole on our creek which we are totally dependent on for all our living and survival needs. With the recent three-year drought, we faced a shrinking water supply as the waterhole evaporated before our eyes. The words “*precious and pure*” took on a profound meaning for all of us as we did our utmost to conserve what precious water we had.



HEAPS OF MULCH

In the above photo, brothers are unloading bales of cane mulch. This is to protect and preserve “sister water” from evaporating around our fruit trees, vegi-patch and general shelf area. It also has the added benefit of slowly breaking down, and giving back to the soil organic material providing food for the soil and plants.

READY TO GO!

but how and when?

Our main outlets for our home-made jams, marmalade, sauces and pickles are the parishes of northern NSW and southern QLD. It is through the support of the parish priest, the people and the volunteers from within the parish that we sell our produce. All this has come to a standstill because of the consequences of the pandemic. But the time is not wasted! We are still at work in this small cottage industry until we find a way forward.



VOLUNTARY SOLITUDE

Alone with God, but not alone!

Abba Longinus questioned Abba Lucius saying; “I wish to flee from men”. The old man replied, “If you have not first of all lived rightly with others, you will not be able to live rightly in solitude”.

(Wisdom from the Desert Fathers)

The very nature of our life in a Franciscan Hermitage involves voluntary solitude. Solitude is something one must enter quietly, slowly and with deep respect. It makes friends to those who seek with a humble and noble heart a closer relationship with our Lord. We are not all drawn to solitude, but those who wish to embrace it must carry nothing with them but a bare necessity and be heroic enough to offer an unconditional surrender.

If you have no ambition to conquer your solitude (desert), if you do not think you are in charge, if you can calmly wait for things to be done, then your solitude will not consider you an intruder and will reveal its secrets to you.

Are people uncomfortable with solitude because they so rarely experience it? Most of us equate aloneness with loneliness, and company with companionship, despite our lives often showing evidence to the contrary.

Our Franciscan Hermitage, in the way it is set out with individual hermitages scattered about a central community area, speaks to us of the value and spiritual significance of solitude in our daily life. The gift of solitude to one another cannot be overstated. It is a vital and necessary sign to a progressively impoverished spiritual world. It is also a vital and necessary quality to place ourselves before the living and true God—“*We need to know and see with wide eyes who we are before God; and not what people may think of us.*”

We seek voluntary solitude in order to find Him, Jesus, who is our beginning and our

end, living and true. *My soul is a-thirst for God, a-thirst for the living God. (Ps: 42-2) I reach out to you. I thirst for you as parched land thirsts for rain. (Ps:143-6).* Solitude is a necessary place of separation conducive to being attentive and focused on Him speaking to us.



Alone with God, but not alone!

Bush Telegraph

We are dependent on the good will of others to pass it on through internet, photocopying or just hand to hand, and help to support us. We are grateful for those who do this, and wish to thank them and encourage others to join us and them in the distribution of the Bush Telegraph.

Little Brothers of Francis.

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We are a recognised Contemplative Religious Order in the Anglican Church.

