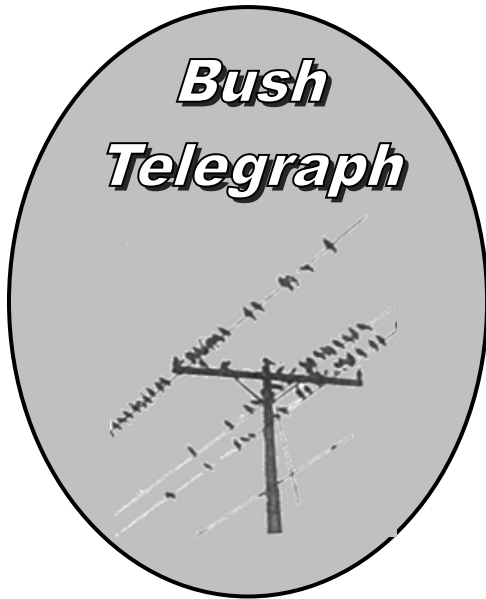


LITTLE BROTHERS OF FRANCIS
An irregular newsletter



2019

THE POPE'S NEW SHOES



Setting out for Rome to elect a new Pope, Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio on his feet was an extremely shabby pair of plain black shoes. He liked their simplicity with no decorations and they were very comfortable. But a priest thought it would be embarrassing if the Cardinal of Argentine turned up in the Vatican in such shoes and persuaded several friends to club together to raise the cash to buy their cardinal a new pair of shoes. Bergoglio was duly grateful but promptly put the new shoes away and set off for the airport wearing his old ones.

To everyone's surprise Cardinal Bergoglio was elected pope, all the speculation by Vatican watchers and the international press didn't even mention him as a possible candidate.

When he was led to robe as the new pope among other vestments were **red shoes**. Red shoes go back to when only the Emperor, Empress and the Pope were allowed to wear red shoes. They were a symbol of monarchy and power, but they had no more chance of him not wearing his old black shoes than the priest back home.

But it's more than black shoes! Like Pope John 23rd who called the Vatican Council, thereby changing the course of the largest Christian Church, Pope Francis has set in motion changes which will not only affect his church but other churches and beyond.

No previous pope had taken the name Francis. By doing this he honoured the *little poor man of Assisi*. **St Francis brought to Christianity an entirely new concept of poverty in the face of luxury, pride and vanity of the civil society and the power of the church of his time.**



Pope Francis' life of simplicity brings new life and encouragement to those who desire the reform of the church and its structures in countries where it is based on power and wealth. Again, they both share a deep love for the poor and marginalised. In the time that St Francis lived lepers were both poor and marginalised. After they had the burial service read over them, they were exiled from the community. In them, St Francis saw the suffering Christ, rather than seeing them as under the judgment of God. Pope Francis was deeply committed to the poor in his home country and now as Pope to those throughout the world.



THE WILDLIFE CREMATORIUM

8,500 hectares were burnt out in the worst bushfire we have experienced in our 32 years at our hermitage in the foothills of the Great Dividing Range west of Tabulam. We have experienced a number of serious bushfires before this one.

This fire broke out in a terrible drought. The wet season has failed to come this summer and we have had no significant rain for 4 months. The bush was extremely dry, with trees losing their leaves or dying. Our creek had stopped running a long time ago and our large water hole has been shrinking before our eyes with no relief in sight.

The fire started when we were sweltering in temperatures over 40° Centigrade (100°F). The fire crossed the Clarence River and the Rocky River and became three separate fires travelling in different directions due to strong and unpredictable winds driving each fire front.

At the time there was only one Brother home as the other two Brothers were in Victoria, representing the community. Twice in three days Brother Howard had to evacuate the hermitage, opening all the gates for access to and from the property, release and provide as best he could for the animals, close the buildings and leave. At one stage when trying to assess the fire front down our road he was confronted by a huge wall of fire that crossed a kilometre down the road and saw two neighbours who were fleeing for their lives. Since then we have learnt that in that stretch of our road five dwellings have been burnt out.

Learning of the bushfire, Brothers Wayne and Geoffrey cut short their trip and caught the first available flight home. Father Mathew Jones, the Anglican priest at Ballina, met them at the airport to inform them that Brother Howard was safe but not at the hermitage and they could not get back as the main highway was closed at Tabulam and our road was definitely closed.

But Matthew's nephew Callum was going to Tabulam that morning and could get them to his parents' place until they were allowed back to the hermitage. *However, if you know anything about the Brothers and their history, you will know there is no such thing in their lexicon as "you cannot"*. To cut a wonderful story short, we were helped to find a way to get home by Richard Jones, the brother of Father Matthew. Richard lives just across the Rocky River bridge at Tabulam.

It's difficult to explain the situation because of the steep terrain, the changeable winds and the complexity of the fire fronts threatening our place. On arriving home Brother Geoffrey and Wayne discovered another fire front, from a different direction was threatening the buildings, the orchard, the beehives and the animals (both domestic and wild). Through a Herculean effort they starting to back burn to try to halt the fire. Later, two volunteer firemen, aerial water-bombing by helicopters and Brother Howard saved the place. The fire came within three metres of one of the hermitages.

People say the Australian Bush is resilient and it is. But after the fire went through for a week or more after, we would hear a loud noise as these wonderful old trees come crashing down to the ground making the earth vibrate with their fall. The land had been cleared before the first World War so there were only a few 150 to 200-year-old trees left. One weeps for these grand old trees home of sugar gliders, possums, nesting places of Kookaburras, parrots and a myriad of other creatures. The bush has taken on an eerie, silent, lunar moonscape like a desert; no birds, no forest floor creatures like quails, lizards or insects.

No human life was lost, including our own, thanks to our own effort and work over many years in preparing for bushfires and the support of the Rural Voluntary Fire Service.

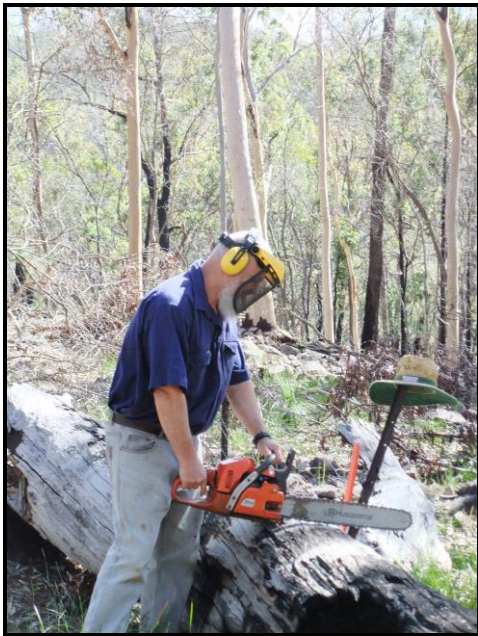
(This article is reprinted from the last Bush Telegraph for new readers and to refresh others readers of events in February this year)

LONG ROAD TO RECOVERY

We made no appeal for money or help so you can imagine our heartfelt thanks, our joy, surprise and tears when people far and near responded to our situation after the devastating bushfire with letters, phone calls, emails, prayerful support, generous financial help and practical support. Our hearts are full of gratitude to them and to God for their generous response.

Rebuilding Fences

However, it has taken us since February this year until now (8 months), just to clear fallen trees, burnt and out fence posts, and to rewire our boundary fence to secure our sheep and goats from predators, both domestic and wild dogs. Though it has been a lot of hard work and expense replacing the wooden posts with steel posts, this has given us a much better boundary fence. To repeat our theme, it's a long road to recovery. When this is completed, we begin work on the internal fences.



The hat is where the fence was, one of many trees that had to be removed before repairing the fence.

Drought

We are in the midst of a severe drought, many of our neighbours have no water. When a local friend of ours had a call from a close friend in Sydney saying he would like to visit he was told only if he brought enough water for showers and other basic necessities to sustain him because they could not. Drought is debilitating. It drains our energy. Each day we spend much time trying to maintain our garden and fruit-trees and provide water for the animals. There is little time or energy to do much else. It is a constant reminder that we should not take our water-supply for granted. It is a precious gift that is essential for all life.



A new metal bridge to replace a wooden bridge burnt out during the fire. Hard to imagine that in a wet season this dry creek is impossible to cross for one Brother to reach his hermitage.

Firebreaks

We live in the foothills of the mountains, with its rugged valleys and hills covered with bushland. It's also rated at the top of the list for bushfires in the state. Over 30 years ago when we came here, we made a commitment that every year we set aside time to establish firebreaks on the property. These firebreaks are organised as a patch work creating checks to a fire sweeping through the whole property. It also means rather than the whole property being burnt, there are unburnt areas where there is always grass and low bush for our animals and the wild life. We have had some very bad bushfires in the past but nothing like this one. In places, combustible material on the forest floor in the form of fallen limbs and trees that came down in the fire, represents a new fire threat.

Our love of this place

We love this place for its native animals, plants and birds, and its rugged beauty, and for the creek supplying water for our livestock, garden and domestic purposes. With hard work and sweat we gathered rocks to construct our buildings. We have improved the poor soil's fertility with manure and organic material to benefit our fruit trees and vegetable garden. The goats and sheep are an integral part of our land management, especially bushfire protection. The honey from the apiary is an important source of income. All this helps to sustain our lives here. The floods, droughts, bushfires and predators have brought us into a real and living relationship with this place.

We give thanks that we were guided to this place by our crucified and risen Lord Jesus Christ to establish a Franciscan Hermitage.

WHY YOU SHOULD NOT BECOME A FRANCISCAN BROTHER AT TABULAM

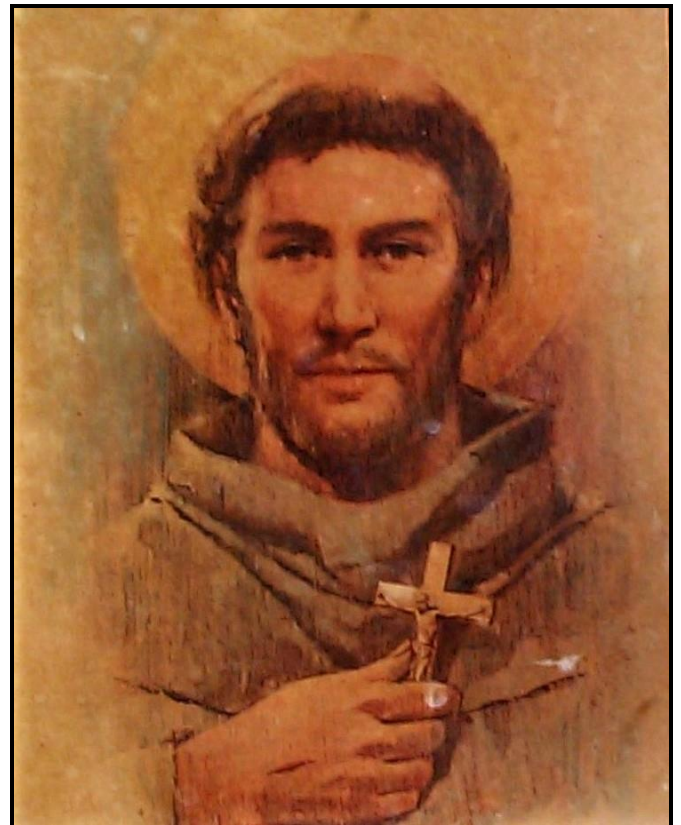
Monastic contemplative life is not only misunderstood in the wider society but also within the church. That is, we are called to witness to, or to point to the first commandment, to love God; for God is to be loved for himself. This love is revealed when God entered human history in the person of Jesus. For any relationship to grow, human or divine, time and attention need to be given to it. For our relationship with God in Christ to grow, we need to spend time with the Gospels; in prayer and meditation; in solitude with Our Lord; in manual work; and in fraternity with our Brothers.

Commitment There often seems to be little commitment in the workplace –sometimes by the employer, sometimes by the employee. In other human relationships, people may not be prepared to commit for all sorts of reasons. In contrast, after at least 7 years of training and preparation, we Brothers make a Life Commitment to God and to each other in community.

Simple Lifestyle. At first it has a great appeal to live simply in the bush away from the busy life in the city. In less than a year the novelty wears off, and the sheer physical effort of living in the bush sets in. To provide for a shower, we have to maintain a pump with petrol and oil and general maintenance, and then pump the water to a holding tank. Then we take a chainsaw with the ute and trailer to harvest dead trees on the property. Then we have to wheelbarrow wood to the bathroom. Light the fire and at last you have a shower! It is quite different to going to the bathroom and turning on the shower with hot and cold water without any effort - except turning on the tap.

Fraternity. In his first interview with his novice-master, a novice in a monastic community was asked how he was finding life in the monastery. His replied that he loved the simple lifestyle. The Brothers had been wonderful in helping him settle in. However, he was not very comfortable with the worship. Wearing his habit for the sevenfold office, or times of worship, he felt was too formal, and he wasn't keen on the use of incense at the reading of the Gospel.

In a much later interview with the Brother responsible for his training, things had changed a bit. He had come to appreciate wearing the habit as it connected him to generations through the centuries who had worn it too. It was not a fashion statement, but rather, put everyone on the same footing before God. He had come to value the importance and history of the use of incense in worship. But what a mixed bag of people to live with, the brothers were turning out to be!



St Francis 1182 - 1228

When I survey the wondrous cross on which the Prince of glory died, my richest gain I count but loss, and pour contempt on all my pride.

Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast save in the death of Christ my God; all the vain things that charm me most; I sacrifice them to his blood.

See from his head, his hands, his feet, sorrow and love flow mingled down; did ever such love and sorrow meet, or thorns compose so rich as crown?

Where the whole realm of nature mine, that were a present far too small: love so amazing, so divine demands my soul, my life, my all.

Little Brothers of Francis is a recognised Contemplative Religious Order in the Anglican Church.