

THE Pentecost 2020 OMINICANS

The Magazine of the Dominican Friars in England & Scotland



- Fraternity and Heroism Timothy Radcliffe OP
- Hospital Chaplaincy & Covid-19 Peter Harries & David Rocks OP
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Welcome to our Pentecost issue

At the beginning of March when we entered our extended Passion-tide, a time of suffering and patience and of the desert, Cardinal Vincent Nichols sent several messages to his Diocese. In his first letter, and in subsequent video messages, he appealed to us all to 'dig deep' and so to find the resources deep in our Catholic tradition and history, deep in our Scripture and theology, and deep in our life of prayer to endure this time of unprecedented challenge.

This time of trial is by no means over, and there is much uncertainty in the months to come, many more sacrifices to be made. Therefore, we are all called to continue to 'dig deep', principally through prayer and reflection – reading the Word of God, contemplating the love of God revealed therein; meditating on the mysteries of the Rosary, and thus deepening our faith and joy in what God has done for our salvation; engaging with the spiritual and intellectual tradition of the Church.

It is my hope that this edition of our magazine will be a help in this regard – a spade, if you will, to be used to assist this deepening of faith and contemplation! What do we hope to find, digging in the desert? Moses struck the rock, and water gushed forth. Christ is that Rock (cf. 1 Cor 10:4). He is that firm foundation on which we must stand so that, as the sands shift around us, and



as the wind buffets, and as we wander through a confusing and unfamiliar landscape, we may not be shaken.

Many of us will have seen Pope Francis embracing the Cross in a rainswept St Peter's Square at the end of

Thou who art called the Paraclete, best gift of God above, the living spring, the living fire, sweet unction and true love.

O guide our minds with thy blest light, with love our hearts inflame; and with thy strength, which ne'er decays, confirm our mortal frame.

from 'Veni Creator Spiritus', attrib. Rabanus Maurus (776-856) March. So, let us also dig our heels in, as it were, so that we are planted in faith into the Rock of Christ, embracing him. As the Holy Father said:

The Lord asks us from his Cross to rediscover the life that awaits us, to look towards those who look to us, to strengthen, recognise and foster the grace that lives within us.

For if we dig deep in prayer, in faith, and in hope, then, even in the desert and precisely when we strike the solidity of the Rock, we shall find living water. We shall find the Holy Spirit who refreshes us. Indeed, we shall find the One who is Charity itself. Digging deep, we will then have discovered something – no, Someone – more precious and needful than oil and gold.

During these days, may God deepen our love for him and for our friends and neighbours; for the people round about us. In this dry and lonely landscape, many people will be thirsting for the living waters of Charity. Having dug deep, may the Holy Spirit now well up from within us, and so move us to works of practical love and compassion, to acts that bring healing and refreshment.

- Fr Lawrence Lew OP, Editor

You can send any comments or feedback to me via magazine@english.op.org

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Requiescant in Pace

Remember in your prayers all who have died during this time of pandemic, including our brother David Sanders OP. We ask Our Lady to 'comfort those who are distraught and mourn their loved ones who have died, and at times are buried in a way that grieves them deeply' (Pope Francis).

We also remember with affection and gratitude the recently departed who made bequests to the Friars.

- Elizabeth Nance (Holy Cross Priory, Leicester)
- Brown Hart (Holy Cross Priory, Leicester)

May they and all the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace.



Fraternity and Heroism

Fr Timothy Radcliffe OP reflects on themes brought into sharp relief by the pandemic.

For the last forty years, I have spent most of my life as a friar preacher leaving on trips and returning, packing and unpacking, catching buses, trains and planes. On my return after a month in Jerusalem in mid-March, that stopped abruptly. Since then only once I have gone more than a mile from Blackfriars, to bury my old friend and brother David Sanders OP [see previous issue, published online only at www.english.op.org/magazine].

Recently we have not been able even to leave the Priory. We are vastly blessed compared with most people, living with twenty brethren in a large building with a garden. But this irksome confinement has deepened my awareness of the marvellous blessing of being a brother of the Order, a *frater*, from which we get 'friar'.

Even when I was back home at Blackfriars, I was out half of the evenings, preaching or seeing friends. Now the only people I see in the flesh are my brothers. We are dependent on each other for company, for food and drink, for safety from contagion, for care when we are sick, even for having our hair cut and our computers repaired. Of course if this were to continue indefinitely, it would become oppressive. We are not monks. But it has unveiled a profound depth of our Dominican lives, our fraternity, for which I am newly grateful.

Brother Dominic was not the great founder figure, elevated above his followers. His gift to us was to be our brother. Fittingly his first biography is found in the Vitae Fratrum, 'the Lives of the brethren'. Marie-Dominique Chenu OP argued in an unpublished lecture that every time there is a revival of the faith, the word 'brother' resurfaces. 'The typical word of the first Christian communities finds again its full meaning: people are called brother (or sister) in confrontation with social inequalities, and with all the utopic charge of those words. The head of the Dominican team arriving in Paris for the first time was still called, in accordance with custom, "Abbot". Within

three months, this title was dropped and he was called, "brother prior".' And so it was right that a recent General Chapter of the Order ordained that the proper title for all Dominican friars is 'brother', as our Brother Gerard gently reminds us.

Every morning we livestream the community Mass and people see not just a solitary priest but a community of brethren. At this daily celebration we are in communion with the Dominican Family as well hundreds of other people. We have received emails from Vietnamese Dominican students who are enjoying our homilies. If anyone is missing from the Mass, lay Dominicans will despatch worried emails. It is not worth having a lie-in, these must be answered! Italian sisters tell us that they enjoy our singing! In this time of isolation, we have never felt more deeply connected with the whole Family. 'Brother' and 'sister' are the oldest and most fundamental of all Christian titles. This speaks not just of how we belong to each other in the Order but of how the gospel summons all of humanity into Christ's kinship. Our mutual belonging in the Body of Christ across time and space is far more radical than the global reach of the virus.

Our society, as in the time of Dominic, is in turmoil. Old social hierarchies are crumbling. Never before has there been such vast migrations of people searching for peace and security. Our cities are filled with strangers. Zygmunt Bauman has described our society as one of 'liquid modernity'. In a world which has lost its bearings, a spirituality of fraternity can touch those searching for a home.

How can we preachers share a word of hope in this terrible time? We do so through our liturgy, and through innumerable contributions to periodicals, websites, blogs and podcasts. I was even videoed having my haircut this morning by a young friar, a hair-raising experience for us both. We exercise pastoral care through a vast exchange of emails, phone calls, and Zoomed meetings. But most of us feel a certain lack. We would like to be doing something more daring.

The Pope said recently, 'The stories of different ages all have a common "loom":

the thread of their narrative involves "heroes", including everyday heroes, who in following a dream confront difficult situations and combat evil, driven by a force that makes them courageous, the force of love.'

The heroism of our predecessors touches our imagination, from St Catherine of Siena, to the Spanish friars and lay catechists enduring martyrdom in Japan and Vietnam, to Samuel Mazzuchelli OP, founder of the Church in the Upper Mississippi in the midnineteenth century. How can our preaching be heroic in a pandemic?

Many of us would like to risk our lives by being with the sick in their suffering. But I have accepted, with great difficulty, that at this moment that would only make me a danger to other people, a conduit of death and not life. Some friars have found a way, like fr. Hugh Vincent Dyer OP of New York who has moved out of his community into a hospital for the duration so as to care for the sick. One thinks of the 72-year-old Italian priest, who gave up his ventilator so that a young person could live. A moment may come to any one of us when we are called to such heroism for Christ, but for most it will not.

Pandemics cast 'the shadow of death' (Luke 1.79) over all of humanity, especially in this age of instant global communication. We are confronted not just with the death of individuals, but death's claim to rule: 'the pale green horse! Its rider's name was Death, and Hades followed with him.' (Revelation 6:8).

In this time of fear, we surely preach by looking death in the eye, registering the pain and sorrow it brings, but refusing to fall under its spell. I was in the Sudan when Austin Milner OP died in Blackfriars. When the time was near, he summoned the community into his room, renewed his baptismal promises, and then offered all the brethren a drink. When David Sanders OP knew that death was approaching, he said, 'I have been preaching the resurrection all these years. Now I had better show that I believe in it.' This is a holy and undramatic heroism, refusing Death's claim to sovereignty.

Hospital Chaplaincy and Covid-19

In Britain, Dominicans are involved in providing pastoral care in parishes, schools, universities, prisons and hospitals. All of these have been deeply affected by the pandemic, but perhaps none more so than hospital ministry. Two of our friars relate their experiences.

Fr Peter Harries OP, at St Dominic's Priory, London

uring this pandemic, life in the hospital has certainly been strange. An initial couple of weeks of preparation meant the hospital stopping admissions for routine operations so that wards could be repurposed, and lots of staff were trained and redeployed to different roles to care for patients with Covid-19. The first time I had to don full scrubs in my 31 years as a hospital chaplain, I was assisted by a lovely dental nurse. Almost all out-patients are now seen remotely. Until Easter the hospitals admitted more and more infected patients and attempted to prevent transmission, so the chaplains found themselves attempting to continue their pastoral ministry either remotely or clothed in PPE. Since Easter the number of new admissions has declined, thank God, and a new normality has uneasily set in. Plans for a continued increase in the admission of non-Covid patients are underway, and a slow return to a new normality. Thank God from the depths of our hearts that worst-case scenarios have not so far been proved correct.

The hospital chapel and prayer rooms are closed for infection-control purposes so no daily Mass, no people popping in to pray, no relatives stopping in to have a little cry. The regular routine of supporting patients and visitors has gone with only essential visits to patients allowed. I am trying to work from home as much as possible, keeping the chaplaincy functioning remotely. However, many of the usual possibilities for gentle pastoral support are gone. So is the daily joy of bringing our Lord present under sacramental form to the sick; sustaining and



accompanying them on their pilgrimage in times of illness.

One of the key support areas I miss most is supporting patients towards the end of their lives along with their loved ones. It is such an important time, for families to spend time together, relatives and friends from all over the place coming to say their farewells. Normally, a gentle walk-by from the chaplain, perhaps with a prayer, but asking the relatives how they are is an important, though sad, part of my daily religious and spiritual support - offered by me, but also paradoxically given to me by families and patients. Christ is present at the deathbed, welcoming his faithful (including those who haven't been to church very much recently) preparing them soon, we pray, to enter his garden of paradise; the priest is so often the embodiment of God's mercy.

Normally I can help enable relatives to name and speak about their conflicting thoughts and emotions. As a priest, usually, I am there symbolising our Lord and bearing witness to God's mercy amid the sick, and in those who care for them. In this strange Covid situation, I am allowed one visit. Only one or two relatives (the hospital has been growing a little more relaxed for non-Covid patients recently) are allowed to visit for infection-control reasons. It is often a more lonely death for people, although the staff are as attentive as ever. Sometimes families are

all self-isolating and so no one can be present, a situation which deeply challenges what it means to be human. It is so much more difficult for families currently. Intellectually they accept that they cannot be present, but their ties of love and compassion create an emotional guilt, that I suspect many of us will be listening to for years to come.

The staff need support, and thanks to the great generosity of a neighbouring charity, a large area has been set aside for staff to relax during their breaks. As chaplains we have been privileged to be there and to share so many supportive conversations with people of faith and of no faith. Those of faith have so often told me of how important for their ongoing health and well-being is watching services online, especially over Easter itself. God's people, as staff participating so directly in God's compassion, miss the sacraments so much, and I have heard a few heartfelt confessions.

Tragedies amongst the staff as well: a few have died, others have lost family members. My colleagues and I will need to support the bereaved staff as best we can in the coming months. We try never to forget the diversely skilled non-clinical staff who ensure that the front-line clinical staff can care for patients.

Amid the Covid deaths, the normal sad part of hospital life continues: people die of cancer; babies are still-born; older folks get pneumonia. But the usual balance of healing is missing. No people with new hips or knees able to look forward to dancing (or at least walking without pain) again. No planned but much-needed operations to restore long-term health. Emergency operations happen, perhaps more people are falling off their bicycles rather than getting injured playing football compared to usual, but there are still people who need stitching up. Baby funerals, the saddest part of my normal hospital life, carry on. Social distancing and limited numbers at the cemetery or crematorium make these funerals even more poignant than usual. I joke with the midwives that they may busy later in the

To be a priest in a hospital is to accompany Christ's faithful at a stressful time in their lives as they pick up their cross and follow after him. With patients and families I only have short-term pastoral relationships, helping them meet our Lord and witnessing to God's mercy now. Quite what having the smell of the sheep means currently is a challenge. I carry on, for Christ's redeeming love is ever new, even during the pandemic. Holy martyrs of the plague of Alexandria, pray for us please.

Holy Cross, Leicester: Fr David Rocks OP explains the strains of caring for the flock

Fr Peter's experience is echoed in Leicester, where the Dominican priory ministers to a large flock in the city including many lower-income families.

The emotional demands of attempting to continue to serve them during this time have affected the prior, Fr David Rocks OP (*pictured above*):

I burst into tears today during a post-cremation rendition of 'Danny Boy' with a family I've known for years. I'm not usually that unprofessional.

He is trying nonetheless to see the positives that have come out of this time but, as he says, 'I find it so hard. All the good things we usually do with the parish are gone.'

The friars' pastoral care extends to many patients in the city's hospitals. Administering the sacraments to the sick and caring for their families has become complicated and difficult, often impossible:

I went from the funeral to the Intensive Care Unit in Glenfield hospital, where I was allowed in for anointing. The patient's family had been requesting the visit since 8 days ago. The family liaison nurse, Vicky (who's fabulous), is on to me nearly every day about someone.

Today they helped me into full PPE and we Skyped the family to take part in anointing, absolution and apostolic pardon. I then led prayers on Skype outside the wards of Covid-19-positive patients, whom I was not permitted to attend. We have gone from emergency cover chaplaincy in one hospital to cover in all three. I'm sitting in my room in the priory in the afternoons doing FaceTime and Skype prayers and advice with families who are in the most awful circumstances, and nothing is normal.

The priory community has, all the same, kept up the full daily round of Masses and other liturgies, all relayed to the faithful via Facebook.

I suppose the bright side is the livestream apostolate and all connected with that. We keep the church going by broadcasting everything at the usual time. The community are behind that and taking it in turns to manage the broadcast.

Holy Cross parish normally has a busy social life, which they have tried to continue in some form:

We're meeting for coffee on Zoom as a parish each Sunday morning, and we have a weekly session on scripture on Crowdcast, plus our groups are meeting on Skype conference



call. And we're supporting our fantastic Catholic schools, who are continuing to look after our vulnerable children and those of key workers – we're joining them for virtual assemblies.

Furthermore, they have tried to use this time for consulting with parishioners, recently holding a virtual pastoral planning meeting, to develop a coordinated response to the Coronavirus crisis. A pastoral plan has now been written, which they are returning to every few weeks, to check progress.

Fr David concludes:

Thank God we're all well and able to minister – but it is very challenging.

Further examples of how the friars are responding to the pastoral challenges of 2020 can be found at www.english.op.org/
2020-response



Mater Misericordiae

Fr John Farrell OP considers the 'eyes of mercy' of Our Lady in the Salve Regina.

We catholics think of Our Lady in two ways. Firstly, we refer to that particular, historical, first-century Jewish woman, mother of Jesus and wife of Joseph. In order to focus on her in the journey of her unique human life, I want to return to an old devotion known in my Catholic Yorkshire childhood as the Seven Dollars (Dolours) of Our Lady, Our Lady of the Seven Sorrows. The first three are about the infancy of Jesus; the last four about the Passion of Jesus, in fact focused entirely on Good Friday.

At the Annunciation, Mary gave her graced-filled consent, but it was only at the Presentation in the Temple, as St Luke tells the story, that Simeon alluded to the cost of her commitment: that she, like her son, would be one acquainted with grief and familiar with sorrow. 'He is destined for the rising and falling of many... and a sword shall pierce your own heart also.'

The Flight into Egypt has such contemporary resonances of a refugee family with a young child fleeing mass murder and political tyranny and searching for safety and work in an overwhelmingly alien (pagan) culture. The third sorrow is the intense but more domestic anguish of the loss of her twelve-year-old child for three days. Here there must have been not only dread and anguish but a deep sense of failure as a mother. (The episode ends in a less than courteous response from her adolescent son).

The fourth sorrow correlates with the fourth station of the cross 'Jesus carrying his cross meets his afflicted mother'. Here is a woman who knows suffering and in this face-to-face meeting is utterly powerless to help her child. He has been tortured and weakened and is now surrounded by the triumphant jeering crowd fixed on his degradation. The fifth sorrow is witnessing his crucifixion in all its brutality. She can do nothing for him but be there at the foot of the cross. Her sixth sorrow is captured poignantly in stone by Michelangelo in the Pietà: Jesus's dead body is taken down from the



Known as 'The Advocata', this icon dated to the 1st-century AD is in the custody of the Dominican nuns in Rome. It is believed to have been painted by St Luke, and the 'Salve Regina' was composed in its presence.

cross and placed in his mother's lap and arms. And then, finally, Mary, Mother of the Bereaved, watches the stone rolled against the tomb and is led reluctantly homeward by family and friends.

This is a woman who knew human sorrow. 'To thee do we cry, poor banished children of Eve. To thee do we sigh, mourning and weeping in this Vale of Tears.'

But for us Catholics - and here is our second way of thinking about Our Lady - this same woman is Assumed into Heaven, Assumed into the Resurrection of her Risen and Crucified Son and Lord. She is more alive than we are. We face death but she is alive with the fullness of Eternal Life. In the fourth and fifth glorious mysteries of her rosary, we declare our faith in her Assumption and her Queenship. But what sort of Queen is she? Remote? Aloof? Inactive? Or, as we lovingly proclaim as we add to the title of her Queenship an even greater title, Salve Regina, Mater Misericordiae. Mother of Mercies.

In the ongoing in-breaking of the

Kingdom of her Risen Son, we have faith and hope and joy that she is active – more active than ever – in her unique vocation now confirmed and 'magnified' at Pentecost, as Mother of the Apostolic and Spirit-filled Church. This woman who knew human grief is our active mother of compassion and mercy. This same one.

But we, her children, if we are to be recipients of that powerful compassion must also be channels of it to others. As her son teaches us the basic rhyme and rhythm of the new song of his kingdom in Luke's Gospel, chapter 6.27–38:

Do not judge and you will not be judged; do not condemn and you will not be condemned.

Forgive and you will be forgiven.

Be merciful as your heavenly

Father is merciful.

By a pious coincidence, just as there are seven sorrows, so there are seven bodily works of mercy.

- Feeding the hungry,
- Giving drink to the thirsty,
- · Clothing the naked,
- Sheltering the homeless,
- · Visiting the sick,
- Visiting prisoners,
- · Burying the dead.

And seven spiritual works of mercy:

- · Instructing the ignorant,
- Comforting the sorrowful,
- · Counselling the doubtful.
- · Admonishing sinners,
- · Forgiving offences willingly,
- · Bearing wrongs patiently,
- Praying for all the living & the dead.

In this present situation of our time of the coronavirus dislocation, many are suffering bereavement. There are disorientations, anxieties, broken hopes and broken dreams, anguish, anxiety, distress, and despair. Empowered by that same holy Spirit of Pentecost, we, her children, are confirmed in our faith, hope and joy in the gifts Christ has given his Church and his people, and in the maternal care of Our Lady.

We also are called to have 'eyes of mercy'.

Lessons for Life in Lockdown

Br Thomas Thérèse Mannion OP considers how we may grow in virtue during this time, drawing on the wisdom of a 6th-century monk.

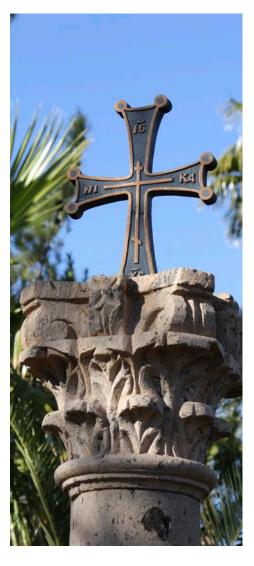
Reflecting on the current pandemic, as devastating as it has been for many, this can be – as all situations in life can be – an opportunity for growth in virtue.

We have all had to practise patience, generosity, self-discipline and prudence. We have been forced to reflect on 'business as usual' and in some cases found it wanting, even if we miss it. As time draws nearer to when I might make my vow until death, Humility and Obedience have been on my mind. This time is a time when we have all had the opportunity to see the difficulties but also benefits of humility and obedience: in social distancing, only going out for essentials and for one period of exercise, and closing our church buildings to the public; in saving lives.

This has not gone unchallenged, of course; there are some who ignore government advice. In America there have been public protests against what many see as the encroachment of the state on civil liberties that they fear will not be restored. Obedience viewed through the lens of suspicion and control. Across the world, bishops have been unfairly accused of acquiescing to the State rather than keeping churches open. These people often claim that the bishops are going against the will of Jesus Christ, as though Jesus did not command charity. In this instance, the State is set up as the antagonist and enemy of Christ and his Church in all things. This is, of course, a false narrative; there are many areas where the Church of Jesus Christ and the State can agree and work together fruitfully. This is an opportunity to grow in humility, obedience and self-control.

One unknown saint who can help us is St Dorotheos of Gaza. St Dorotheos lived a monastic life in the 6th century. The isolation and discipline of his life have many similarities to what many of us are undergoing now.

There are three discourses in particular



I will focus on for some practical tips to help us grow: 'On Humility', 'On Self-Accusation' and 'On Refusal to Judge One's Neighbour'.

Humility is, for St Dorotheos, a readiness to listen to another and to submit.

This is the root of self-discipline, reverence for God (recognising there is a God and I'm not God) and even giving to the poor. In the case of almsgiving, you hear the cry of your brother and you submit yourself in service of their need and in so doing you participate in God's saving love for you.

There are two types of pride which oppose humility: hating one's neighbour and thinking one is better than one's neighbour; likewise two kinds of humility: thinking better of others than oneself and giving thanks to God for all good things. This helps fight gossip amongst other things.

To illustrate this point, people sometimes quote the end of Romans 1 in a way to attack particular groups of people, such as gay people. Focusing on what they perceive to be someone else's sinfulness which can be a way of running from one's own battles. They often take this out of the immediate context: Romans 2 says, 'Therefore you have no excuse, whoever you are, when you judge others; for in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, are doing the very same things...'. This is St Dorotheos' point: do not think you are better than others or your sins less egregious - we all need a loving, merciful saviour. St Paul then goes on to talk about the fidelity of God even when we are not faithful, and how nothing can separate us from the Love of the Merciful God.

This bad-attitude often expresses itself in smaller ways, even in religious life: 'Why isn't Brother Cadfael at office? He must be lazy.' It is an attitude that says, 'We all have to grow in religious life, but Brother Cadfael – he is the real problem.'

I will leave you with three practical tips from St Dorotheos:

- Self-Accusation. Let's return to the practice of examining our consciences. The purpose of this is to make us aware of our need of a saviour and to ask for his mercy not only for us but for others. This helps promote in us an attitude of mercy and thinking well of others.
- Refusing to scrutinise our neighbours' shortcomings: 'love covers a multitude of sins'. This is not ignoring when someone does something wrong. Instead it is practising the spiritual work of mercy 'Bearing with the faults of others'. As St Benedict says, 'Be careful when removing the rust that you don't break the instrument'; and St Francis de Sales says, 'You catch more bees with honey than with vinegar'.
- Asking Pardon of God and others.
 This removes any adversarial relationship or competitiveness. The Devil is the true adversary.

Into the Desert

Fr Nicholas Crowe OP draws on the monastic tradition to show how we can benefit spiritually from times of enforced isolation.

The mantra 'Stay at home' has been fairly well digested by the British public over the course of the lockdown, and no wonder. The message has been clear and seemingly omni-present. It has reminded me of another more ancient counsel that has traditionally been drummed into young monks and nuns from their novitiate: 'Stay in your cell (bedroom)'.

This was the advice of the desert fathers and mothers, the trailblazers of the Christian contemplative tradition, to all who followed them into the harsh wilderness, from the third century onwards, to seek God: 'Stay in your cell and your cell will teach you everything'; 'Keep to your cell and your cell will keep you'.

Why did the desert fathers and mothers think that simply staying in one's room was so foundational to the contemplative life? In short, because one's cell or bedroom was the place where one could be alone with God.

This was, of course, a simpler world: no phone, no radio, no television, no internet, no social media, not even a wellstocked shelf of books. Just the monk or nun, the sacred scriptures, the basket of weaving or some other simple form of manual labour through which the monk or nun would eke out a living, and silence. In that silence, a newly arrived monk or nun embarking on the contemplative life would have nowhere to hide. There would have been no distraction, no diversions, no escape from themselves or from God. In the isolation, most people made a painful discovery: they were much less holy than they imagined.

In most cases these young men and women had gone out into the desert inspired by the ideals of an ascetic and contemplative life. Yet despite these excellent intentions, the long hours of prayer would often become boring very quickly and the meditation tedious. These things which from a distance had



seemed so wonderfully attractive now began to feel unbearable. The young monks and nuns quickly began to long to be somewhere, anywhere, but this crushing silence. They would be tempted to roam around outside of their hermitages searching for something to distract them. Perhaps they were looking for an escape from the memories of the past - both good and bad - which were whirling and churning in their minds. Perhaps they were hoping to be rid of the anxious and worried thoughts about the future which were beginning to spin and spin and spin. Perhaps they simply wanted to flee the terrible boredom. Whatever was happening, the writings of this period testify to a powerful temptation to roam.

The conferences of John Cassian have some amusing sketches and caricatures of all the little excuses that monks and nuns would begin to tell themselves at this point, to justify abandoning the path of contemplation, to justify an escape from the painful purging of the silence. And yet the advice from the desert fathers and mothers to the young monks and nuns locked in this struggle is always the same: persevere, stay in your cell. Why? Because the cleansing silence of the cell forced the monk or nun to face the truth of their own weakness and fragility. The silence forced the monk or nun to drop the masks that we use to hide from ourselves and others and acknowledge instead our utter dependence on God. The silence forced the monk or nun to stop running and start listening to God's Word. Eventually, the desert fathers and mothers testify, after the storms and earthquakes of our internal upheaval, we will hear the still small

voice of God, like Elijah on the mountaintop (1 Kings 19:11–18). At that point, the silence of the cell ceases to represent a frightening isolation and loneliness, and instead becomes the doorway into a new awareness of the warm and personal welcome of the God who is closer to us than we are to ourselves. Our cell or bedroom becomes a place of communion with God.

The world is very different now, of course. The advent of the internet has meant that even when we are physically alone we have the whole world at our fingertips. It is now much easier for all of us to roam around seeking distraction in mind and spirit whilst physically remaining stationary. For many people during this time of social distancing, this has been a lifeline, a way to maintain and nurture relationships, and of course this is an excellent thing. But there is a danger that the continual stream of noise and distraction in which we can so easily become immersed desensitises us to the still small voice of God and the joy of knowing deep in our bones that God-iswith-us even in this time of lockdown.

Amidst the suffering wrought by the coronavirus there is, perhaps, an opportunity: an opportunity to spend a little more time alone with God; an opportunity to spend a little longer in the silent and cleansing fire of his love. It might be hard at first, we might even find frightening the thoughts and memories that emerge when we are silent and still. But if we persevere, our bedrooms and homes will become places of profound encounter with God, and these periods of silence less and less a burden and more and more a gift.

From Lent to Easter

Fr Robert Gay OP tells how the Oxford priory community's response to the virus mirrored the changing liturgical season, moving from the austerity of Lent to the joyful proclamation of Easter.

As many will know, we lost our brother David Sanders to Covid-19 on the 30th March, very shortly after the lockdown started, when all of us in the coun-

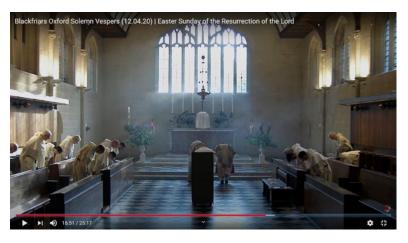
try were trying to get to grips with the new situation and what that meant for our lives. Even the restrictions themselves initially seemed to add a certain something to the austerity of Lent in its latter stages. We as a community had been having silent meals on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, with readings from the Scriptures, the Rule of St Augustine

(on which our lives are built) and additional spiritual reading, so as to shape the season and prepare for the celebration of Holy Week and Easter. But now, in the context of the pandemic, there was the huge change felt most clearly in the absence of the people who usually attend our Masses, and others who interact with us in so many ways: students and staff, doorkeepers, and various people who come for lectures, support and so on.

The climate in the country and across the world seemed to have changed so much in a few weeks, and concern for the developing pandemic, the sickness and loss of life it would bring, especially to the most vulnerable, had a tangible effect on our own community, most of all in the death of one of our own. At a collective and individual level, we became faced, in a more urgent, pressing way, with our own vulnerability, our own mortality. The cycle of the Liturgy of Hours, the words of our familiar prayers, and the pattern of our lives mean that the contingency of life, the reality of suffering and death, and the place of our faith as we navigate these challenges is made clear enough. And yet,

somehow in that latter part of March and into Holy Week, the sharing in Christ's passion seemed more vivid than before.

Having been given permission to celebrate the Triduum as a community, albeit in a slightly modified way, was a wonderful gift to us, as was the ability to share that celebration with others through online streaming. The celebrations and the preaching helped to shape our experience of sharing in Christ's passion, with that journey of Our Lord to the cross



coming alive in our celebration. But the high point of all for me was to sing the first Alleluia of the Easter season, and to proclaim the joyful news of the resurrection, and with it Our Lord's victory over death. Our first Easter Masses brought with them a profound sense of joy in our faith. We have shared in Our Lord's passion, but now we also share in his resurrection. It is that sense of joy, even in the face of the real difficulties brought by these tough times, which can prevail.

Easter has brought not only joy, but also a fresh energy to do more than just try to survive in these times, but to attempt to adapt and innovate - to find different ways to carry out our work and mission as a priory. The live streaming of Mass has continued [see p.11], along with other electronic communication with those who attend Masses here. But we have also noticed that we have been able, through social media and live streaming, to reach a wider 'congregation' than would normally attend on Sundays or weekdays. Our reach has brought us back in contact with friends all across the world, and enabled us to

make new contacts too. Through continuing in online form some of the regular activities, such as the Aquinas Group, or the Thomistic Institute, we have been able to connect with larger audiences. And we have also been able to maintain activities such as the preparations for the first Holy Communion programme, pastoral contact with people who would normally come and visit for support, catechetical input for people being received into the Church. The activity of the Hall

and Studium has continued, with lectures and tutorials given and received via video. All these means are no substitute for proper face-to-face contact, but it has been a blessing to be able to continue to do what we are called to do, even in a reduced form.

There has also been the possibility to learn new skills. What has been learned through the live

streaming has been put to good use in other areas, including exploring how podcasts and other recorded video output might be produced. A recent fruit of this is our production of a video detailing our lives as a community together [p.16]. We saw it as a chance to bring you back inside the building, and to see familiar faces, to share something of our lives with you in a lighthearted way and to ask for your help and support. We are very encouraged that the video has been well received, and are grateful for all the financial support that has come as a result of it.

The difficulties of this pandemic have not gone away. There are still fears and anxieties: for ourselves, for our loved ones, and for those who are in danger at the front line, for jobs, and for the most vulnerable. There are also great uncertainties about how the next few months will be, and what they will bring. But where there is struggle and difficulty, there is also God's grace to help us to endure, but also to help us to grow and find joy in him. Above all, we should stay close to him through our prayers, and to trust that he is at work to help us.

A Saint for a Time of Pandemic



Fr Dermot Morrin OP reflects on the image of a 'plague saint', the painting of St Roch by Carlo Crivelli (c.1480, tempera and oil on limewood, 40cm x 12.1cm, Wallace Collection, London)

ften I have walked past this little panel in the Wallace Collection and not stopped. Now, locked down in Edinburgh, I have it printed it out on paper and have pinned it above my desk. I have even framed it in gold, using wrapping paper left over from Christmas. I had missed its significance – until now.

During the second half of the fifteenth century, Carlo Crivelli (1430-95) painted numerous altarpieces in the Marche region of Italy. This panel must have been part of one of his altarpieces, but nobody knows which one. It is likely that he painted it around 1480, by which time bubonic plague had swept through the whole of Italy, again and again. As children we learned about the Black Death. I took it to be a terrible one-off event in 1347. However, St Roch and the rapid spread of devotion to him after 1470, witness to the fact that the plague continued for centuries. In the world of Crivelli and his patrons, plague was a fact of life and had been for well over a century.

St Roch differs from the other plague saints in one major way: while caring for victims, he caught the plague himself. Accounts of his life vary in their detail, but there is general agreement about the most important facts. He was from Montpellier and went on pilgrimage to Rome sometime in the second half of the fourteenth century. In Crivelli's panel, he has a cloak, a staff, and a hat, and looks a bit travel-worn as would any pilgrim on foot. Unusually for Crivelli, he is set against a blue sky, no doubt because he was a pilgrim. Again, rather unusually for Crivelli, he is rather unkempt, as befits a pilgrim on foot, but as a rule Crivelli's saints are shown in their Sunday best. He must have looked rather odd in their company!

On his way south, St Roch stopped at the town of Acquapendente where plague had broken out. He cared for the victims

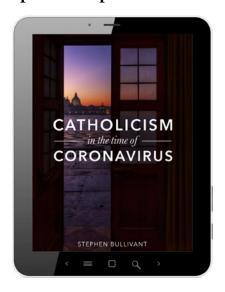
and, by making the sign of the cross over them, he cured them. Notice how in the little panel, he is painted to be seen from below and that as he looks down at us he raises his right hand in blessing. On his way home to France, he himself caught the plague in Piacenza. He was cured miraculously, but not straight away. It must have been hugely important to people that St Roch had experienced the kind of suffering that plague victims endured. However, the accounts all say that he saw his suffering as an opportunity to imitate Christ. Solidarity wasn't the hagiographer's point. St Roch's suffering made him the ideal intercessor. This is why St Roch always shows us the telltale sign of plague. He points towards a swelling in the inner thigh. In fact, the actual swelling was to be found in the victim's groin but artists showed it further down the thigh. Looking again at Crivelli's panel, I notice his remarkable hair. This hairstyle was known as a zazzera. At the time, it was very fashionable in Crivelli's native Venice. In a way, the hair style only serves to accentuate his thinness. Notice his gaunt cheeks and the loose-fitting leggings. In contrast to most of Crivelli's saints, he looks, not just unkempt, but like someone who is recovering from serious illness.

Somewhere on his way home, St Roch was arrested as a spy and thrown in jail. He died in prison, but not before being granted one request from God. His request was that anyone who remembered him in the name of Christ should be delivered from the plague. When they discovered his body, this promise was written miraculously on a tablet under his head. And it came to pass that people in towns and cities, and in the countryside across the face of Europe, began to pray to St Roch for deliverance and protection from plague. This is hard to explain. Although the Franciscans would later claim him as a tertiary, originally his cult seems to have spread simply by word of mouth. In response to the plague, lay people formed confraternities to look after the sick and bury the dead. Very often these groups took Saint Roch as their patron. This was a way both of invoking his aid and

Lockdown Resources



There has been an outpouring of creativity and reflective thinking at this time. The following have been recommended by the Editor to help us think through some of the issues arising during the lockdown and suspension of public Masses.



- Dr Stephen Bullivant, *Catholicism* in the time of Coronavirus, which is dedicated to our brother David Sanders OP:

 www.wordonfire.org/covid/
 - Nathaniel Peters, *On Spiritual Communion*:
 - www.firstthings.com/ article/2020/06/spiritual-communion
- Fr T. J. White OP, *Epidemic Danger* and *Catholic Sacraments*: www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2020/04/epidemic-danger-and-catholic-sacraments
- Fr T. J. White OP, Is it Ethically Defensible for the Church to Suspend Public Masses?: www.thepublicdiscourse. com/2020/04/62877/
- Fr T. J. White OP, Reopening the Sacramental Economy:

- www.firstthings.com/ web-exclusives/2020/04/ reopening-the-sacramental-economy
- Archbishop J. Augustine di Noia OP, In God's Time: https://www.firstthings.com/ web-exclusives/2020/05/in-gods-time
- Fr Nicanor Austriaco OP, a Dominican microbiologist reflects on the science of the pandemic and ethical questions: https://bioethics4believers.org/
- Sir James MacMillan's 5th Symphony, which is a glorious and most moving musical reflection on the Holy Spirit, is also available to purchase online: https://thesixteenshop.com/products/ james-macmillan-symphony-no-5-legrand-inconnu-the-sun-danced

Join the Friars for Sunday Mass

- Cambridge 9.30 (audio) https://radiomariaengland.uk/
- Edinburgh 17.15 www.facebook. com/stalbertsedinburgh/
- Leicester (Vigil, Sat 18.10), 8.00, 10.30, 12.30 (Dominican rite), 19.00 www.facebook.com/holycrossleicester/
- London 16.00 (Dominican rite) www.facebook.com/RosaryShrineUK/
- Oxford 9.30 www.youtube.com/user/Godzdogz

A full listing including live Sunday and Weekday Mass and Daily Devotions, plus online resources, can be found on our website: https://english.op.org/livestream

following his example.

I cannot but think of staff in the NHS and in care homes today and how the story of St Roch resonates with what they are doing. Theirs are stories of generosity, courage and dedication, and not without well-founded anxiety and fear. The fact that St Roch actually had the plague, takes his contemporary significance to a whole new level.

For me at least, this little panel is a

reminder that it has all happened before. In 1348, as plague spread through Europe, Petrarch wrote to his brother, 'When has any such thing been even heard or seen.... cities deserted, the country neglected, the fields too small for the dead and a fearful and universal solitude over the whole earth?' Just think of those views we see of an empty Trafalgar Square, Princes Street or St Peter's. I suppose that inevitably all of this will be folded into our

experience as someday soon we get back to 'normal'. But we must not forget and the lessons must be learned. Our Catholic tradition of the company of the saints is ours to embrace. In it, is a rich seam of wisdom, that is so often forgotten.

My little paper image of St Roch is now up on my wall. He gazes down upon me and upon you. 'St Roch, pray for us all.'

Discovering the Psalms

Br Bede Mullens OP recommends reading the ancient poems that form the Church's liturgy of the hours.

Shortly after announcing his retirement, Pope Benedict XVI remarked that he hoped to spend it becoming acquainted with the Psalms. Odd, no? A trained theologian and a priest who had prayed and studied and pondered on these words over the course of a lifetime, the course of nearly a century – and he was content just to 'make the acquaintance' of these ancient poems. What was

he

this acquaintance hoped to make?

The Psalms have taken up a portion of my own day every day since I entered the Order, not just in the common Office that we sing, but also in my own devotion: in my personal prayer, I use the Psalms more than any other book of the Bible. Lockdown has made no difference in that respect, on the surface of it; the Psalms remain an unchanging feature of my life.

Nevertheless, when I was asked to write about some spiritual reading that had helped me in this time especially, the Psalms came most obviously to mind. If anything makes for a reminder that present circumstances are transitory and will pass, it is these poems which have been upon the lips of men and women day in day out, in war and famine and prosperity, from centuries before our Lord walked upon this earth. 'For a thousand years in your sight are but as yesterday when it is past, or as a watch in the night.' (Ps. 90.4) At the same time, if

there is any prayer book which can speak for us in all the situations that the present crisis might present – sickness, grief, anxiety, boredom, loneliness, longing for things to be back to what they were – the Psalms can do it. 'O Lord my God, I call for help by day; I cry out in the night before you.' (Ps. 88.1)

Sometimes, particularly now, the Psalms can in the very same line speak to the poignancy of our condition and place it in a totally different perspective than we are inclined to view it: 'You sweep men away; they are like a dream, like grass which is renewed in the morning: in the



morning it flourishes and is renewed; in the evening it withers and fades' (Ps. 90.5-6). Those words breathe mortality, and the futility it makes of our lives. And still they resound with assurance: 'Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin. Yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?' (Matt. 6.28-30).

'So teach us to number our days, that we may get a heart of wisdom.' (Ps. 90.12) Maybe more powerfully in the Psalms than in any other book of the Bible, the experience of all humanity is spoken about, prayed about and reflected on by the Holy Spirit of God. It teaches us wisdom by making us speak and pray and reflect as the Holy Spirit himself does - he who intercedes on our behalf with groans ineffable when we know not how to pray. When Pope Benedict said he was happy merely to make the acquaintance of these poems, it was surely like the bleeding woman who was content to touch even the hem of Jesus's garment; even from there, power came out from him.

Power comes out from these poems too, for those who take them up with patience. They aren't always an easy read; sometimes they are quite alien. And yet, whether you feel a deep need for consolation right now, or whether you just have some free time in the lockdown to spend reading and praying, I can think of nothing better to put to you than these songs.

Make us glad as many days as you have afflicted us,

And as many years as we have seen evil.

Let your work be manifest to your servants,

And your glorious power to their children.

Let the favour of the Lord our God be upon us,

And establish the work of our hands upon us,

Yes, establish the work of our hands. (Ps. 90.15–17)

Falling into the Hand of the Lord

What can Scripture tell us about natural calamities and the relationship between God and man? Fr Bruno Clifton OP investigates.

Let us fall into the hand of the Lord, for great is his mercy. (2 Sam 24:14)

At the end of King David's story is a peculiar incident. God is angry with Israel 'and incited David against them' (2 Sam 24:1). David's irritation takes the form of a census of the people, about which there is much discussion over why this constitutes a form of condemnation. Certainly his minister, Joab, understands it like this: 'But my lord the king, why do you desire this thing?' (2 Sam 24:3).

More significant for us in the current times, perhaps, is God's response to David's behaviour. He requires David to choose what action God will take against him – three years of famine; or fleeing before foes for three months; or will it be three days' pestilence? It is then that King David utters a most enigmatic, yet hopeful prayer.

I am in great distress; let us fall into the hand of the Lord, for great is his mercy. But into the hand of man, let me not fall. (2 Sam 24:14)

What makes this prayer so intriguing, is that this is read as David's choice of how God will act and, as such, God's answer is to send the pestilence. We are to understand that pestilence means falling into God's hands.

To some extent this picture reflects ancient speculation about plagues and natural phenomena as the work of deities. Most famously perhaps in this regard are the biblical accounts of Moses in Egypt, fighting Pharaoh by wielding God's power through the sending of plagues and storms (Exod 7–11; Psalm 78; 105). Yet, this is presented less as an exploration of the meaning of illness, distress and death in our world and more as a Contest Narrative, in which the gods of Egypt are bested by the Lord at the typical divine

game of manipulating the material world. Much of God's talk in the Law of sending pestilence reflects this manipulation: God wields disease as a weapon, whether to punish Israel (Lev 26:25; Deut 28:21) or to drive out other nations before them (Num 14:12).

On the other hand, other parts of the Old Testament are more phlegmatic, regarding these phenomena as something that just happens; a consequence of living in the world. The book of Ruth, for example, sets the tale during a famine (Ruth 1:1), but the famine's origin and meaning are not part of the story (also Gen 12:10; 26:1). Even in the Joseph narrative, while the seven years of famine are attributed to God's work (Gen 41:28, 32), nevertheless no speculation is offered as to why: rather, the situation is a vehicle to demonstrate Joseph's visionary and administrative skill.

In giving these examples I am afraid that I am not preparing a comprehensive explanation of why pestilence or hunger ravage our world. Nevertheless, while not wanting to diminish the distress brought by today's emergency, we might note that these crises have many times engulfed humanity and at these times people have questioned the actions of God (e.g. Psalm 22 and 88; Habakkuk 1:2-4 and 3:16 and Isaiah 38:9-15). Lying behind these laments seems to be a clear expectation that God could stop these things happening and yet for some reason has not done. But, returning to David's prayer, the king appears to take a middle way. Plagues are attributable to God in some way, but nevertheless God's mercy makes this preferable to being at the whim of humanity.

While we may want to be more circumspect than the ancients in attributing pandemics to divine manipulation, nevertheless, it is true to say that nothing at all happens distinct from God as the ground and source of all being. But this is so universally true that there seems to me to be little mileage in this as an avenue of reflection and it is more fruitful to concentrate on a different level of cause and effect, which is where we come in. For, in many ways human beings have assumed the role credited to the ancient deities in

manipulating and playing with creation; in exploiting resources; in oppressing our neighbour, rather than nurturing the world around us as God originally commands (Gen 1:26–8). And this interference leads to a rupture in how the world can respond to its natural phenomena, producing famine, pestilence or poverty. In this light, King David's acceptance that God has power over creation brings our own manipulation into relief as something that calls for God's mercy.

But what David's prayer also teaches is that a pandemic should not be used as the occasion to point fingers, whether at God or others, but for admitting that there are consequences to what we do, which is quite a separate dynamic from that of punishment and forgiveness. As Pope Francis has reflected, rather than construing this time as God's judgement, which evades the issue, we should embrace it as a time to judge ourselves how we might rise to the challenge of being made in the image of God. It is a time to acknowledge humanity's fragility and the tenuousness of our dominion over the earth, which is a gift, not a right (Gen 1:28); a time to recognise God's compassion and ask him for wisdom, fortitude and the protection of his merciful hands (2 Sam 24:14).

As we think through these times, there is no better reflection on what it means to fall into the Lord's hands than that of St Paul:

Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? [...] No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom 8:35, 37-39)



The 800th Anniversary of St Dominic's Death



In just under a year, on 24 May 2021, it is hoped that Pope Francis will make a visit to the tomb of St Dominic in Bologna to celebrate a Mass with the Dominican Family. 2021 will be a year of thanksgiving and reflection as the Order observes the 8th Centenary of the 'Dies Natalis', that is to say, the heavenly birthday of St Dominic.

The Master of the Order, Fr Gerard Timoner III, who is the 87th Successor of St Dominic, asked that 'as we prepare for the Jubilee, let us keep in mind that we want to celebrate St Dominic not with an archaeological spirit nor, even less, with a spirit of apologetics and self-glorification, but with thanksgiving, with a spirit of reflection and attention to the signs of the times and the relevance of the life and enduring legacy of St Dominic.'

We invite you to pray with us, and to send in suggestions to magazine@english.op.org on how we might best celebrate this anniversary.

Fr Simon Francis Gaine OP Appointed to New Pinckaers Chair in Rome



The Thomistic Institute at the ■ Pontifical University of St Thomas (Angelicum) is happy to announce that Fr Simon Francis Gaine OP has been named to the new Pinckaers Chair in Theological Anthropology and Ethics, beginning in academic year 2020-2021. Named after Servais Pinckaers, this chair exists for understanding and research pertaining to the human person, grounded in the theological and philosophical wisdom of St Thomas Aguinas. Pinckaers was instrumental in the 20th century for recovering an approach to ethics characterized by the search for happiness, virtue theory and an understanding of human freedom grounded in the notion of teleological flourishing. His research, both historical and thematic, has altered the field of ethics and led to new branches

of study in anthropology and metaphysics, often in conversation with dogmatic theology as well as modern sciences and social theory.

Fr. Simon Francis Gaine completed his doctoral studies at Oxford University on the topic of uncreated and created grace, and has served for many years as a Lector in Fundamental and Dogmatic Theology at Blackfriars, Oxford. He is the author of two monographs, Will There Be Free Will in Heaven? Freedom, Impeccability and Beatitude (London and New York: T & T Clark, 2003) and Did the Saviour See the Father? Christ, Salvation and the Vision of God (London: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2015). His current research is concerned especially with topics of theological anthropology. From 2012-20, he was Regent of Studies of the English province.

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Video: What Do Friars Do in Lockdown?

hat did the Dominican friars in Oxford get up to during the lockdown? Our student brothers got busy in May creating a video message from the whole community, which was used to encourage online giving to support the friars.

The brothers were delighted with the response, which included donations from all over the world, from Slovenia to Sri Lanka!

You can watch the video at www.bfriars.ox.ac.uk/lockdown

A Message to Supporters

Dear Supporter,

During this difficult time for all of us, the friars are truly grateful for any support you can offer when they are confined to their priories and our churches are closed to the public.

If you wish to make a donation to support the friars, it would be most helpful if you could give **via our websites** rather than via cheque, given the restrictions on physical interactions (if you do send a cheque, there may be a small delay in processing it).

Online giving is secure and easy: you can make a single donation, or set up a monthly debit to replace any cash offerings that you would usually make.

Assuring you of our daily prayers,

Fr Martin Ganeri OP, Prior Provincial

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