

Oblates of St Gregory the Great and St Frances of Rome
Retreat at Buckfast Abbey with the Oblates of Buckfast Abbey
Thursday 26th September to Saturday 28th.

From Thursday 26th September to Saturday 28th, the oblates of St Gregory joined the oblates of Buckfast for their annual retreat at Buckfast Abbey. We were small in number: Tim Chambers, Duncan Ferguson, Anthony Speaight, Tina Quinn, Edward Leigh and Andrew Worsnop, but entered fully into the opportunity to take time out and reflect and pray with our fellow oblates. This year we all stayed and ate in Grangehurst (retreat accommodation) and the Buckfast oblates joined us for meals.

Fr. Gabriel Arnold had invited Fr. Gregory Corcoran of Quarr Abbey to give the retreat, but he came down with Covid at the last hour, so Br. Daniel, Guest Master and Prior of Buckfast Abbey, asked Fr. James of St. Gregory's, currently residing in the grounds at Southgate, to fill the breach which he did very ably.

We began with the opening conference on the Thursday at 4 pm. Fr James reminded us of the depth of God's love and that it is He who invites us into prayer and relationship and all we're all called to respond to that love. We're invited, in the words of St Benedict, 'to listen' and to focus on intentional listening as we approach a new liturgical year with the introduction of a new translation of the lectionary.

We joined the community in the Abbey Church for Conventual Mass, which was sung and accompanied by the Buckfast Abbey choir. This was followed with vespers at 6.30 pm and supper in Grangehurst. Fr. James very skilfully managed to bi-locate on several occasions, joining his community at Southgate for the offices and back to us for supper.

The final office of the day was Compline, held in the Abbey Church at 8 pm. Fr James joined us for coffee, and we discussed the possibility of an oblate retreat to Rome next year. Our conferences, lectio and midday prayer were held in St. Michael's Chapel.

On Friday the morning conference and lectio focussed on the Ecclesiastes reading for the following Sunday. 'There is a time to be born and a time to die.' Fr James spoke about the mystery of God and the mystery of oblates: allowing God to get inside us. We focussed on prayer: the 'cloud of forgetting' and the mystery of silence and were reminded of the three stages of prayer: to read, to meditate, and to let go and 'let God- the Holy Spirit' to fill one's heart as we look for the 'living Christ', having

contact with the 'living word.' Reading of God's word is not just an intellectual exercise.

Between lunch and the second conference there was free time for people to walk, sleep or read and enjoy the gardens and attractions of Buckfast Abbey. We were blessed with fine weather, even though the mornings and evenings had a distinct chill in the air.

The afternoon conference looked at the monastic/oblato day and dividing it into three: prayer, work and lectio. The small book *Prefer Nothing to Christ* is divided into three sections: Consecration, communion and commission. Fr James spoke powerfully about our responsibility to the community. We were reminded of Christ's example at the last supper: the washing of feet: the supreme act of service. Service is about giving, giving right from the heart. Seeing Christ in others, being Christ to others. Fr James reminded us of the importance of hospitality and shared an example he had experienced of humility from the *Manquehue Apostolic Movement* 'to serve and not to count the cost' On Friday evening there was the opportunity to attend the healing Mass celebrated by Fr. Leo, with reconciliation and the laying on of hands.

On Saturday morning after vigils, lauds, and breakfast we had another period of lectio, reflecting on the gospel for the following Sunday from St Mark (9: 38-43, 45,47-48). It is a challenging passage with Jesus remonstrating with his disciples as they seek to reject someone not in their fold even though he is working miracles in the name of Jesus. It reminds us that we have a responsibility not to judge: To look at our own inadequacies first. Are we using our feet to walk in His way? using our hands in His service and our eyes to focus on His will and the truth: and not to be critical of those outside the group.

The final conference was a tribute to Fr Gabriel, the late Oblate Master of Buckfast. Fr James read some reflections from his diary before an annual retreat. It was a full of humour, insight and wit and entertained us all. We could sense what a blessing and support Fr Gabriel had been to his oblate community. We concluded the session with the recitation of the *De Profundis*. May he rest in peace.

After a substantial lunch we were invited to join the Oblates of St Gregory for coffee and chocolates. The whole community were present, and we spent an engaging hour with the brethren; we carry back good wishes and prayers for our fellow oblates.

We departed in the afternoon although Andrew stayed on and enjoyed the company of the Buckfast Oblates and departed on the Sunday morning. It was a very blessed and fraternal time.

Andrew Worsnop & Tina Quinn – Oblates