

ABBATIAL BLESSING OF DOM XAVIER PERRIN

*Jesus took with Him Peter, John and James and went up the mountain to pray.* One of the things in Portsmouth I sometimes do with visitors is to take them up the Spinnaker Tower. I don't make them stand on the see-thru glass floor if they don't want to, but from the top there's an awesome view over the harbour, the Isle of Wight, the south coast. Like glimpsing waves on the seashore or a beautiful panorama, heights inspire a sense of detachment, wonder and awe, the transcendent. As you contemplate the view, you ask: Who created all this? Who am I? Where's my life going? Today's Feast is about the Mystery of God, the Transcendent. The Liturgy takes us up Mount Tabor and in the Bible, mountains are holy, nature's altars, places to encounter God. *As He was praying, the appearance of His countenance was altered and His raiment became dazzlingly white.* By His Transfiguration, St. Leo notes, Jesus helped the apostles to cope with His death, when He would climb the hill of Calvary to die *for us and for our salvation.* To strengthen their faith, He was transfigured. He revealed His splendour as God the Son. The Holy Spirit descended as a cloud and the Father spoke: *This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to Him.* No wonder St. Peter exclaimed: *Domine, bonum est nos hic esse – Master, it is well that we are here!*

Those words of St. Peter are surely our own now, as we gather within the transcendent architecture of this abbey for the Blessing of Dom Xavier Perrin as the fifth Abbot of Quarr. I know many of us here have personal associations with Quarr. I first came as a teenager on retreat, to discern a vocation to the priesthood. Just as Dom Xavier would never have dreamt he'd one day be here as Abbot, so too I would never have dreamt I'd be here one day to bless him. An abbot's role is like a bishop's. At times, it's thankless! The Prayer of Blessing captures this: *Lord, let him realise how demanding is the task to which he now sets his hand, how heavy the responsibility of guiding the souls of others, and of ministering to the many varied needs of a community.* No-one in their right mind would choose this. But God has chosen it, in the mystery of His love. As the Prayer goes on beautifully to say: *May his manner of life show clearly that he is what he is called, a father.* Today, we pray Abbot Xavier will be just that, a good father.

*Master, it is well that we are here.* The Transfiguration of Jesus has much to say to today's secular culture. For in that meeting of heaven on earth, high up on Tabor, Jesus revealed not only His Divinity but His future glorified humanity. He shewed us what you and I are one day called to become. That's also the witness and service of a monastery: to foster human yearning, to be a place of encounter, a holy mountain where people can meet God and glimpse their transcendent destiny. Our Diocese of Portsmouth, as well as the local community of the Isle of Wight, are truly blessed to host Our Lady of Quarr. Part of the Congregation of Solesmes, which has contributed so much this last century to the Church's liturgical renewal, we pray that under Abbot Xavier, Quarr will help us all, through prayer, holiness, Gregorian chant and the beauty of its liturgy, to encounter the transcendent Mystery of God. For without a relationship with God, human beings can never be happy. Like a compass, prayer and ritual re-orientate us to the vertical, saving us from sinking into the horizontal. This is why liturgy is essential for our psychological health and well-being, let alone for our eternal salvation: a message secular culture needs urgently to hear.

*Master, it is well that we are here.* Abbot Xavier, we are full of joy today! We thank God for your election and we ask Him to help you be for this community truly a father. Imitate Christ the Good Shepherd, *who lays down his life for his sheep*. Pray every day for the gifts of the Holy Spirit, especially wisdom and prudence. But as you stand in the monastery parlour, gazing across the busy waters of the Solent to the Spinnaker Tower, please pray for us. Jesus Christ is the only way for humans to find TGLHH&F. So pray for all those who do not know Him. Pray for the vast numbers of people in our society who do not have a personal friendship with Him. Pray that everyone will hear the Voice of the Father saying to them: *This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to Him*. Indeed, in this Mass, in which we adore the majesty of God, *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*, let us ask the prayers of Our Lady and St. Benedict, that the Holy Spirit will touch the hearts of every child, woman and man across the Diocese, indeed to the ends of the earth.