



# My Vocation

by Br Cedd Mannion OSB

Since I joined the monastery at Ampleforth in September 2006, 'why did you become a monk?' is probably the question that has been put to me most often, by friends and family, by visitors, by people thinking of embracing the monastic life themselves, by students in the College and at St Benet's Hall. This has frequently been the cause of not a little frustration – not, for once, for me, but rather for those who have put the question – as I do not always feel able quite to put my finger on what precisely it was that drew me to the monastic life! Maybe this is not so surprising. I am not sure that any genuine vocation can ever really be a question of the head alone. It is not for nothing that we so often speak of giving ourselves 'wholeheartedly' to things, and I think that whenever we are called to give our whole self to something, the way in which the heart is drawn is of great significance. Unfortunately, for those of us who like to submit things to painstaking rational analysis, the ways of the heart can be maddeningly inscrutable and quite elusive. I think the closest I have been able to come to finding an answer to the question has been in looking back over my life so far to see the ways in which God has been at work, and in giving thanks for the many (usually small) ways in which he has drawn me to where I am now.

I suppose I was something of a 'late developer' when it comes to faith. Whilst I was not brought up in an anti-religious environment, my family was not one where there was any obvious expression of religious belief. As a result, although I had been baptised as an infant, it was not until I was an undergraduate that I began to embrace Christianity in a concrete way as an Anglican. I went to watch a friend sing at Evensong in York Minster, was

intrigued by it and never stopped going. After that, I began to attend more services, and theology became a major new interest for me.

The next stage came during a year as an ERASMUS student in France, where Anglican Churches were of course something of a rarity. This meant that I had to attend a Catholic Church if I wanted to attend Church at all. As well as daily Mass, the parish I chose to attend (in the centre of Grenoble) also had the practice of chanting Vespers. Of course the music was a far cry from the Minster, but something about the experience of a group of people celebrating the Office together gripped me. For the first time, it was not simply about music and aesthetics – there was something deeper. That experience awoke in me a love of the Office which has never since faded, and made me curious to know more about what Catholics believed and to visit monasteries, where I knew the Office was celebrated.

On my return to the UK, I visited several monasteries, and various conversations during these visits made me think again about what I really believed about key doctrines such as the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist, and the Communion of Saints. As a result, I became convinced that I would have to ask to be received into full communion with the Catholic Church.

This happened whilst I was a graduate student at University College London. At that time, I was fortunate to be able to live in the Catholic Chaplaincy in Gower Street, and it was here that I had my first experience of what it was to live in a Catholic community. The way in which the

students were able to be deeply committed to their Catholic faith and yet at the same time deeply normal was something which left a lasting impression upon me. It was this experience of living out my faith in a community setting, together with a continued attraction to monastic life and communal prayer, that led me to ask to enter Ampleforth as a novice, some three years after I had been received into the Church.

At the time of joining the community, I was still very unsure about why I was joining. This 'unknowing' was something I found deeply troubling until sometime after Solemn Profession, when – quite suddenly – something clicked, and, although I still didn't know why I had joined the monastery, I realised that the fact that I was where I should be was beyond question.

Looking back over the past eight years or so of monastic life, I can suddenly see quite clearly the many ways in which God has been active in my life, patiently drawing me along the path he has marked out for me. Aside from the many rich blessings of living in a supportive and prayerful community, my monastic vocation has – quite apart from any intentions I had – turned out to be the place where all of the more or less weird and wonderful parts of my life fit together and make sense of each other in ways I could never have foreseen or expected. I have come to realise the truth of what the Lord says to the disciples in the Gospel: 'You did not choose me; no, I chose you.' I thank God for this and for the many other blessings he has bestowed upon me so far in life, and pray that he will continue to help me to be faithful to his will.