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Monks' Life

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I first got acquainted with Abbot Gerard Mathijsen of St Adelbert's Abbey (Egmond-Binnen, the Netherlands) in 1995 when I worked on a series for the photo book *Villagers of Egmond*. I made a number of photos of brothers of the abbey during an open air service in Adelbertus Field, a beautiful, quiet place against the dune edge. I returned to the brothers in the abbey more than twenty-five times between 2002 and 2004. Everything was recorded with my analogue camera: prayer services, activities in and around the abbey, and the leisure time. It was peaceful, concentrated working. The end result was brought together in the 2004 photo book *A Quest (Een Zoektocht)*.

In 2016 Brother Gerard invited me back to record the changes within the walls of the abbey. He had written in his foreword to *A Quest*: "Nobody knows whether we are dealing with a final phase or with a new beginning." The incentive to create a new body of work about St Adelbert Abbey was simple and yet also unexpected - the fifteen hundred photo books from *A Quest* had sold out. Additionally, several new brothers had entered the abbey; as Br Gerard emailed me: "The abbey is doing well. Actually above expectations! The house is too small for the aspirants! Who would have thought that?"

On 26th June 2016 at 7 o'clock in the morning I started again with the new photo series on the Adelbertus Field. It was a beautiful day, the rising sun shone on the altar. It was still quiet. A limited number of visitors had come to this service. At the second shift at ten o'clock it was busy. Since then I have worked with my camera in and around the abbey about fifty times: in the greenhouse where Br Adelbert grows vegetables for meals, watching Br Beda painting beautiful icons, in the sacristy with Br Columba, and so on.

I sometimes heard during a visit that I had missed an "Armando moment"! My presence with the camera was becoming a matter of course for the brothers. There have been many beautiful and special moments, such as the festivities on the occasion of the abbot's 80th birthday. Normally only monks would be present, but I had become a familiar face in the abbey - as was also the case during the feast of the 60-year-old profession of Br Frans Melkert. The novices had prepared several gigs and it was clear to see that everyone was having a lot of fun. On this occasion the brothers were permitted to partake of a Westvleteren Twelve, Eight or Blond (an exclusive Belgium beer), a glass of wine, apple juice or homemade liqueur.

A lot has changed over the past twenty years. The smartphone has become commonplace in the abbey, and Br Gerard regularly puts photos of daily life on his Facebook page. There are new faces, with new brothers becoming novices or accepting their perpetual vows. The perpetual

vows of Br Adelbert and Br Columba in the autumn of 2017 made it clear that the community of St Adelbert Abbey will continue with new faces - a development that was not expected back in 2004.

However, much has remained the same. Br Ole is still waiting six times a day in the Claustrum near the wall clock and the rope of the church bell. Originally from Norway, he is sometimes in his place twenty minutes before the ringing of the bell. He keeps an eye on the time and the clock is accurate to the minute. His bells bring the other brothers from the abbey to the church choir.

This second book contains a selection from two years of photography of the daily life of the monks of St Adelbert Abbey - a spiritual life focused on prayer and mutual service: monks' life.

Note. Armando's new photobook will be available from 2nd June 2018. For more information contact armandojongejan@hotmail.com.







