

## Community: We are a gift to each other

*“But wanting to justify himself, the lawyer asked Jesus, ‘And who is my neighbor?’” Luke 10:29*

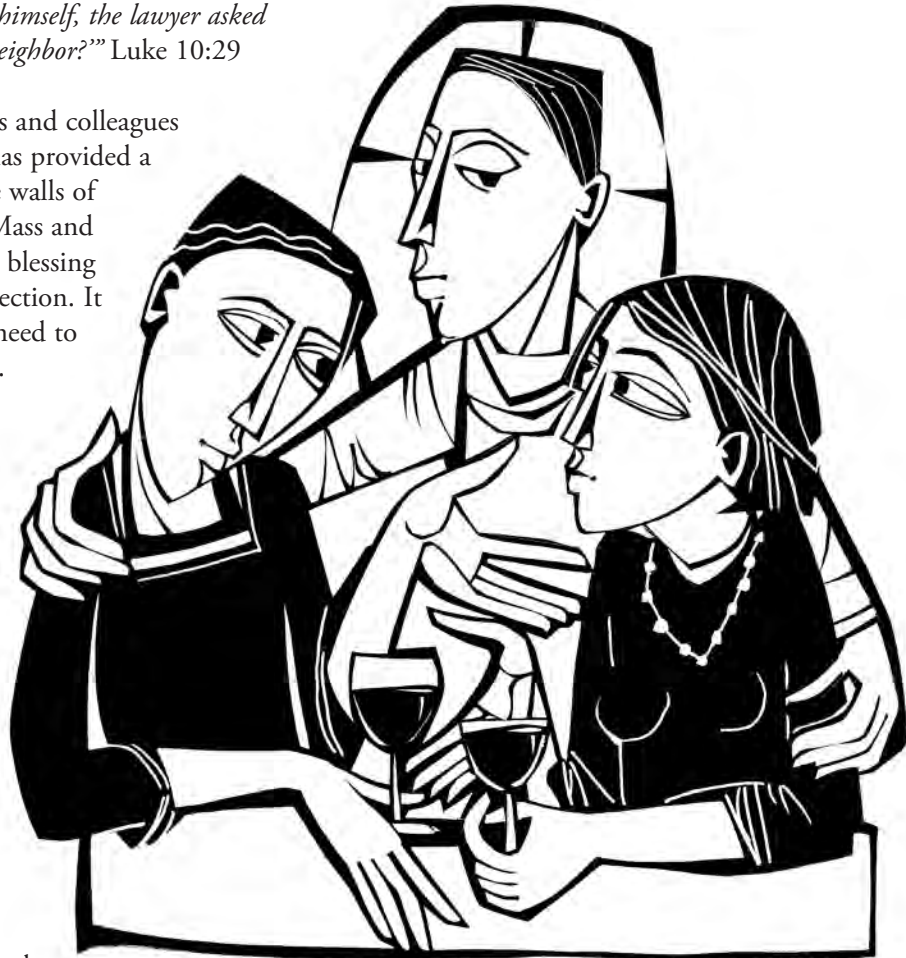
Reaching out to friends and colleagues through social media has provided a connection beyond the walls of home. Livestreaming Mass and Vespers has provided a blessing in this time of disconnection. It is an extension of our need to be connected to others.

Ten months in quarantine: a theme of community seems both curious and yet crucial. Developing a stronger, more honest relationship with those in our homes has been a blessing for many; for others it has been a tough reality of aloneness, isolation, abuse, depression.

Community means people who know each other, who sense belonging, who provide means to make a living. A successful community is a safe, prosperous, happy place. This pandemic forces us to re-form our very foundation of community. We have lived *individualism* far too long.

We need a communal conscience to be truly a community. As St. Paul states in 1Cor 12:14, “The body does not consist of one member but of many.” He emphasized in his letters the corporeal nature of the Church as the Body of Christ.

The toll this pandemic is having on people includes food lines that extend for miles, homelessness, job loss, sickness and death. As a community of Benedictine Oblates, we



*Br. Martin Erspamer, OSB*

must recognize the gift we are to one another.

Pope Francis recently tweeted, “God overcomes the world’s evil by taking it upon himself. This is also how we can lift others up: not by judging, not by suggesting what to do, but by becoming neighbours, empathizing, sharing God’s love.”

St. Benedict calls us to live Gospel values and to ask, as did the lawyer, “And who is my neighbor?”

*Kathleen Polansky, oblate  
New Salisbury, IN*



# A POINT TO PONDER FROM *The Rule*

“Whenever weighty matters are to be transacted in the monastery, let the Abbot call together the whole community, and make known the matter which is to be considered.”

*Chapter 3, verse 1*

At home, we call this a family meeting, which takes place at the kitchen table and discusses important matters of concern.

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## We must ask: *What can I do?*



Archabbot Kurt Stasiak, OSB

“And who is my neighbor?” That’s what the lawyer asks Jesus, as recorded in the 10th chapter of St. Luke’s gospel (v. 29). It’s not as innocent a question as it might seem. It’s a question

designed to “protect” us from doing *too much good*.

St. Peter may have asked with a similar purpose in mind, when he inquired of Jesus, “How many times must I forgive my brother, as many as seven times?” Perhaps Peter thought he was being gracious and generous. After all, he was willing to forgive his brother not just once or twice, but over a half-dozen times.

Of course, Jesus immediately sets him straight. “Not seven times, but seventy times seven” (Matthew 18:21-22). In other words: you don’t measure out your forgiveness like you do flour or salt for a recipe. Forgiveness must come from the heart, not from your calculator.

“So, who is my neighbor?” the lawyer asks. Jesus famously turns the question

around and asks him, “Who was the neighbor in this story?” In other words, who acted accordingly to the one – the man in the ditch – who so desperately needed someone to be a neighbor to him?

It all comes down to how we look at ourselves and our relationship with those around us. We can ask ourselves in any given situation, “What do I have to do? What are my obligations?”

That’s not a bad place to start, but Jesus would have us take those few extra steps until we arrive at that place where we ask ourselves, “In this situation, what *can* I do? What *opportunities* do I have to do what needs to be done?”

St. Benedict does not refer to the parable of the Good Samaritan in his *Rule for Monks*. He does, however, make much the same point of the parable when, in his chapter on the “Tools for Good Works,” he states simply, “Never turn away when someone needs your love” (4:26).

Miracles can happen when people don’t ask, “What *must* I do?” but rather, “What *can* I do?”

Archabbot Kurt Stasiak, OSB  
Saint Meinrad Archabbey

## We cannot find *holiness without community*



Janis Dopp

I have found myself adjusting to so many life changes in the past year. For the most part, I have not found it difficult. However, there is one part of my life that I have missed

terribly – community.

When it was easily found, I took it for granted. I did not treasure it enough when it was unerringly present. Then the pandemic forced us to make hard decisions that have left us isolated and hungry for those easy hugs and spontaneous group gatherings. Technology can get us only so far. We can exchange information with one another, but something has been missing.

What is it that has been so impossible to duplicate? It is what St. Benedict knew we needed – each other. In Chapter 72 of the *Rule*, he explained that good zeal “leads to God and everlasting life.” How is this good zeal to be cultivated? By sharing our daily lives with others.

He says, “*They should each try to be the first to show respect to the others* (Rom 12:10), supporting with the greatest patience one another’s weaknesses of body or behavior, and earnestly competing in obedience to each other. No one is to pursue what he judges better for himself, but instead, what he judges better for someone else.”

Perfection in holiness is to be found by pursuing life in community, in relationships where we are challenged to be more than we can ever dream we can be. We cannot do this alone. We need to cultivate patience, obedience, respect and compassion – virtues that demand that we stretch our hearts in generous love for others.

Pope Francis addresses this need in his most recent encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti*. He says, “Human beings are so made that they cannot live, develop, and find fulfillment except ‘in the sincere gift of self to others’ ... Life exists when there is bonding, communion, fraternity ... there is no life when we

claim to be self-sufficient and live as islands: in these attitudes, death prevails” (*Fratelli Tutti*, 87).

I trust that the day is coming when we will once again have community within our grasp. When it does, we will be able to live life to its fullest and most satisfying extent. May we treasure this gift fully and guard it lovingly, because it is our surest path to wholeness.

*Janis Dopp  
Oblate Director*

## Community: Coming together for common purpose



*Fr. Joseph Cox, OSB*

A dictionary definition of “community” is: A group of people living in the same place or having a particular characteristic in common. A

feeling of fellowship with others, as a result of sharing common attitudes, interests, and goals.

It seems that a common thread attaches members of a community. Members have one or more things in common. The etymology of “community” tells us that it is from an old French word, *communité*. It ultimately derives from classical Latin, *communitas*, meaning “common,” “public.” We derive our word for community from this.

The members of a faith community would meet as a group in the name of the Lord. Jesus said, “Where two or

three are gathered together in my name, I am there in their midst” (Matthew 18:20).

Whether these are meetings of a parish, a religious order, an oblate chapter, or any faith community, the guarantee that God is present is when they meet in the name of the Lord. When the members have Jesus in mind, they are a blessed gathering indeed.

*Fr. Joseph Cox, OSB  
Oblate Chaplain*

## Notes for Novices: Awareness and the blessings of community



*Br. Stanley Rother Wagner, OSB*

God made man and woman to be social creatures, telling them to be fruitful and multiply (see Gen 2:15-25). To put it in more scientific language –

human beings are social beings, hard-

wired to be in community with each other. St. Benedict knew this fact of human nature well (see RB 72:4-7).

By God’s grace, I recently professed my solemn vows as a monk of Saint Meinrad Archabbey. During my four years in formation, I was given many blessings and challenges to help me discern my place in our community. Many of the blessings were also challenges, to be sure, but I may not

have known that at the time.

When my grandfather died in 2017, I was about three months into my year-long novitiate. I was still settling into our community, yet that stopped no one from offering their support for me during such a difficult time.

Of course, many of the challenges also proved to be blessings. I am an

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# Doorways to Deeper Faith: Lament



Beverly Weinhold

Fr. Emmanuel Katongole caught my attention when he wrote that COVID-19 is a “*kairos* moment” and “summons us to live out a new vision of

community.”<sup>1</sup> It is compelling to consider that out of the isolation and pain of a pandemic, God is opening a door to draw us deeper in faith and closer in community.

These thoughts were especially poignant as I caught COVID close to Christmas. Safe at home already, I stepped back from my work on telehealth. Sick and scared, I slowed down and prayed more. I wrestled with the intersection of a virus with racial protest and political unrest. Remembering St. Benedict, I realized he lived in troubling times, too.

The sixth century was fraught with ferment. Heading to school in Rome, Benedict left his native Nursia. Disgusted with the hedonism in the city, he turned heel and headed for the silence of a cave in Subiaco. Catching the attention of monks, he became their abbot. When they plotted to poison him, he took the hint. He was joined by more monks and established 12 monasteries.

With his fame growing fast, Benedict became the envy of area clergy, who chided him to leave his settlement. Unfolding his final call, he moved 80 miles away and founded a monastery on a mountain above Cassino.<sup>2</sup> To

Katongole’s point, Benedict was summoned to “live out new visions of community.” Every barrier he encountered became a bridge to a deeper community.

I don’t know what his secret was, but I suspect he learned from looking at the saints. People on the ancient Way prayed the psalms every day. They learned the language of lament. The Psalter was the centerpiece of worship for the early Church; its songs were sung communally and prayed personally.

About one-third are lament psalms. Lament turns its head and heart directly to God in honest expression of every human emotion. Both Testaments in the Bible are laced with lament.

Some examples are: “Why is my pain continuous, my wound incurable?” (Job 15:18). “How long, O Lord, will I cry out to you and you will not hear?” (Habakkuk 1:2). “Jesus, Son of God, have pity on me” (Mark 10:47). “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46; Psalm 22).

Lament pulls no punches. It’s not stuck in denial. It makes a clear case of complaint: “If the psalm prays, you pray; if it laments, you lament; if it exults, you rejoice; if it hopes, you hope; if it fears, you fear. Everything written here is a mirror for us.”<sup>3</sup>

Four movements are embedded into lament psalms: 1. Turn to God for help. 2. Name your feelings honestly. 3. Ask God to intervene. 4. Trust God and say so. Unlike Elizabeth

Kubler-Ross’ five stages of grief, lament is a ladder that descends in humble speech and ascends into strong faith.

Gordon Wenham, in his book *The Psalter Reclaimed*, makes the case that praying the psalms is more than a tradition; it’s also a tool for spiritual formation. I have experienced that truth in my life and my work.

As a spiritual director and psychotherapist, I find it noteworthy that “*languageing*” feelings isn’t only a spiritual discipline, but an evidence-based practice. Research shows that naming feelings, both in therapy<sup>4</sup> and in journaling,<sup>5</sup> reduces stress and opens space to regulate unruly emotions. Lament is not the absence of faith, but an act of faith.

Summing up, COVID could be a *kairos* moment summoning us to come closer to God and grow deeper in community. A powerful way the ancient Church modeled this spiritual movement was praying the psalms and practicing lament. Though these same structured practices are rarely discussed and seldom seen in contemporary churches, Benedictine monasteries around the world picture this prophetic practice rhythmically in the daily Hours.

Could your constellation of troubles be calling you to “Trust in the Lord at all times my people. Pour out your heart to me. For God is our refuge” (Psalm 62:8)?

Beverly Weinhold, oblate novice  
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<sup>1</sup> Fr. Emmanuel Katongole, *Plough* 21,18. (2020, Autumn). “Deep solidarity.”

<sup>2</sup> Timothy Fry, Ed: (1982). Introduction. *The Rule of St. Benedict in English*, (10). Liturgical: MN.

<sup>3</sup> St. Augustine. *Ennarateonis In Psalmos*, (1).

<sup>4</sup> Matthew Lieberman, et al. *ScienceDaily*. (22 June, 2007). “Putting feelings into words produces therapeutic effects in the brain.” [www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2007/06/070622090727.htm](http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2007/06/070622090727.htm)

<sup>5</sup> Lisa Tams (11 November, 2020). Michigan State University Extension. Journaling to reduce COVID-19 stress. [https://www.canr.msu.edu/news/journaling\\_to\\_reduce\\_stress](https://www.canr.msu.edu/news/journaling_to_reduce_stress)

# Mom's influence affects others in her community



Michelle Blalock

When I reflect on the word “community,” I am reminded of my mother and how she influenced our family community and our greater

community.

My mother was a Benedictine Oblate of Saint Meinrad Archabbey for 70 years. In December 2019, there was a beautiful celebration marking this milestone.

Elizabeth Wollenmann grew up in the town of St. Meinrad, and her father worked for Abbey Press. She and my father were married in the Archabbey Church. Saint Meinrad held a special place in her heart.

Mother passed away on August 29, 2020, at 87 years old. As I reflect on her presence in my life, so many memories flood my mind. When I was very young, I would sit next to her during Mass, noticing that she would whisper quietly during the Mass. As I got older, I realized she was reciting the entire Mass with the priest. I found this fascinating and inspiring.

I remember throughout the day my mother would disappear into her room to pray the Liturgy of the Hours. Though it was something she did in private, she would not exclude those who sought her out to ask a question or who were curious to know where she was.

I prayed the Liturgy of the Hours with her at times; I found it beautiful that she had pictures taped on different pages – pictures of my Dad and each of us eight children. Prayer

cards and death cards were also taped within her weathered prayer book.

Other memories I have include praying the rosary while kneeling as a family around my parents’ bed and Sunday pilgrimages to Monte Cassino Shrine. I share these memories because we sometimes take for granted the moments that matter most and form us.

In school I would face challenges, many of which I shared with my mom. She would reassure me and remind me that your home is your sanctuary, instilling in me the practice of the domestic church.

When my husband and I moved back to southern Indiana, I drove my parents to the oblate meetings. It was a gift to take them to these gatherings, and Fr. Meinrad Brune, OSB, the oblate director at the time, was always so kind and welcoming, patiently and gently inviting me to become an oblate and follow in my parents’ footsteps.

I remember bringing my children to the meetings and they would sit quietly coloring as Fr. Meinrad shared his reflections with the chapter members. His kindness was such a beautiful blessing, and he always made my children and me feel welcome.

The monastic community of Saint Meinrad shaped and formed my mom’s life, and our family was in turn formed by the monks of Saint Meinrad.

Experiences, relationships and examples form us. What you do, how you live and what you say are observed by others. We are examples and evangelists. We are a community showing people Christ through our actions.

As I reflect, my mother was an invaluable influence in my life, a huge inspiration to me, and she affected me more than she ever knew. I share this, hoping people realize their influence is important. Each person affects more people than is ever realized.

Never be afraid to share your faith with those around you, your community. Be who God made you to be and share the gifts that God has given you (1Peter 4:7-11).

Michelle Blalock, oblate  
Ferdinand, IN

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introvert, though I can play the part of an extrovert if I must. The community challenged me not to pretend to be an extrovert, but to remain an introvert and grow in humility as God calls me to be. Though this continues to be a challenge, I see many blessings issuing forth from it.

Community life is something to which we are all called as human beings. Community enables us to become more self-aware of our gifts and talents, which also enables us to realize our neighbors’ gifts and talents. This awareness is nothing without also cultivating an awareness of God in the present moment throughout each day.

Community life can help us be more aware of God, ourselves and our neighbor, which allows us to see God’s blessings and challenges us to be like Christ for the world, for the Church and for our communities.

Br. Stanley Rother Wagner, OSB  
Oblate Novice Mentor

# Monastic poverty and justice: A disposition to love our neighbor

*Editor's note: This is the second article in a four-part series.*



*Fr. Adrian Burke*

In the previous issue of *Benedictine Oblate Quarterly*, I wrote about Benedictine poverty and its relationship to humility and obedience. I

wrote that, “[T]rue *spiritual poverty* is anchored by an interior disposition to renounce internalized adverse attitudes and prejudicial beliefs and opinions, especially about other people, which are ‘possessions’ of a spiritual nature.”

Such attitudes place us in a position of rivalry with others as we compete for what makes us feel secure – things like status, recognition, material possessions, control, etc.

I’d like to reflect now on the relationship between monastic poverty, or Benedictine “simplicity,” and the true nature of divine (Godly) justice revealed by Jesus as a characteristic feature of the reign of God.

Sadly, “worldly” society – in the sense of a “dehumanized,” forced superficiality that alienates us from what is deep and true – reduces justice to a purely *retributive* purpose. The biblical understanding of God’s justice is far richer. In fact, “Godly” justice is not primarily about retribution, but is ordered to sustaining relationships rooted in truth, demanding that we relate to others in ways that respect the dignity of every person.

A truly Christian concept of justice is rooted in who God is (Supreme Goodness and Truth) as reflected in the person of Jesus Christ, who called

Himself “the way and the truth” (John 14:6). And because Jesus is also fully human, He also reveals the character of humankind *made new* in ways corresponding to the “politics of the gospel,” a way of living together described in Matthew 5-7.

God’s ways are not earthly ways (cf. Is 55:8-9) and God’s justice is not reducible to earthly (dehumanized) modes of justice. God’s justice allows *temporal punishment* as the ramifications of sinful behavior, but even God’s wrath is a mode of love, offering ample opportunity to learn through suffering the ramifications of sinful behavior.

This is the *retributive dimension* of God’s justice. It is grounded in our dignity as persons (human freedom) and expresses God’s desire that we grow in maturity and wisdom. Perhaps we focus most on this aspect of divine justice because we fear punishment – and fear is the primary drive of an earthly, “mortal” mentality (fear of diminishment, vulnerability and, ultimately, death). But God calls us to more than a merely mortal existence!

Godly justice is more than simply retributive, but because it flows from God’s supreme goodness it is also a *distributive* justice. God establishes humanity in the divine image and likeness (Gen 1:26-27) – God’s goodness grounds human goodness. The first thing God “sees” when He sees us is something of God mirrored back, and God loves what God sees.

God cares for every person irrespective of the particulars of one’s life, such as cultural and social distinctions. God’s countenance holds every person in the

same loving gaze and distributes the goodness of creation with equanimity. God desires that all have enough. Tragically, human selfishness and fear-driven rivalry have led to competition over what we consider limited resources – food, water, land – and what makes us feel secure.

This rivalrous behavior, sometimes quite violent, is predicated on the false and essentially unjust belief that *we* own the earth and not God (cf. Ps 24:1). Thus, Godly justice demands the humble realization that *all we have is given*, and that all we have *is given to be shared*.

By renouncing personal ownership and embracing a community-based stewardship, Benedictines remove themselves from the cycle of distributive injustice that results from competing over/against others.

This brings me to the third aspect of Godly justice, without which retributive mechanisms in civil law enforcement and corrections cannot be truly just – the *restorative* dimension. Humans are persons-in-representation, and human solidarity images the Creator’s triune fellowship. Sin diminishes or defaces our essential dignity as images of God by violating relationships. Thus, the need for forgiveness; a way of restoring communion by restoring relationships damaged by sin. As we pray in the words Jesus taught us, God forgives us as we forgive others.

Several places in the holy *Rule* address Godly justice in each of its three aspects, but Chapter 72 on “The Good Zeal of Monks” brings it all

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# Br. Michael Reyes, OSB, national semi-finalist



Br. Michael Reyes

Br. Michael Reyes, OSB, who has been an invaluable help with our oblate community, has been named a 2021 semi-finalist for The American Prize,

a national competition in the performing arts.

Currently a seminarian at Saint Meinrad, Br. Michael is one of the eight semi-finalist composers for the vocal chamber music category. His vocal piece was chosen from countless composition entries across the U.S. by a distinguished jury.

Br. Michael earned his Doctor of Musical Arts degree in music composition from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in 2019.

Br. Michael's work earned recognition in various international competitions and concerts. In 2016, he won the

grand prize at the 6th Sond'Ar-te Electric Ensemble Composition Competition, where he bested composers from 18 countries.

His international music achievements include the Ani Ng Dangal National Award for music bestowed by the Philippine government in 2017. Br. Michael is one of five composers from around the world to be invited by the University of London's prestigious School of Oriental and Asian Studies to write a new electroacoustic piece for its annual Composers Conference and Festival.

He also was selected by the University of Kent and the Vienna Acousmonium to diffuse his composition at the institution's Sound-Image-Space Research Center, also known as the Music and Audio Arts Sound Theater, alongside notable electroacoustic composers, including Jonty Harrison and Denis Smalley.

For his academic work in music, Br. Michael received the President's

Research in Diversity Award from the University of Illinois, an award bestowed by the university president to 15 high-performing faculty and graduate students across the three campuses of the university conducting research in their respective fields. Br. Michael presented a paper on current compositional aesthetics and ideas at the University of London.

In collaboration with Saint Meinrad's Fr. Harry Hagan, OSB, Br. Michael recently composed and premiered a song commissioned by Epiphany Catholic Church in Louisville, KY, for its jubilee year celebration.

The American Prize, founded in 2009, is a series of nonprofit competitions in the performing arts that honors performances by ensembles, individuals, and composers at levels ranging from professional to secondary school.

The finalists and winners will be announced later in the year.

## The Busy Benedictine: Communism and the Holy Wall

*The Busy Benedictine is an occasional column about trying to be like a monk when you're working and taking care of kids.*



Edward Castronova

Monks are communists. They give everything to the community. They surrender their freedom. They work without pay. They receive all their goods from the community. The "community" is not even a

democracy; it is a dictatorship under the iron hand of the abbot.

Communism in the monastery is one of those rare examples of a communism that has worked in practice. Monks helped rebuild Europe after the fall of the Roman Empire. Throughout the Middle Ages, their communism was a powerful economic agent. Their communism has sustained itself through wars, depressions, famines, plagues and, lately, the internet.

What accounts for the success of this radical form of community? The Holy Wall.

Monks are very careful about who gets to be a monk. The *Rule* explains the criteria for membership. It is a difficult and relentless life. Monks are enjoined to deny their worldly selves and focus entirely on God. Anyone who is unwilling or incapable of doing

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# Considering the Psalms:

## Psalm 100 summons us to joy and gladness

MAKE a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth.  
Worship the LORD with gladness; come into his presence with singing.  
Know that the LORD is God. It is he that made us, and we are his;  
we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.  
Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise.  
Give thanks to him, bless his name.  
For the LORD is good; his steadfast love endures forever,  
and his faithfulness to all generations.

—NRSV Bible with the Apocrypha, eBook Kindle Edition, by Harper Bibles



Kathleen Polansky

By the time this issue reaches you, the Easter season will be upon us. Psalm 100 summons us to joy and gladness as we come into the presence of God with

singing. I am writing this in the middle of winter as the pandemic numbers are growing out of control and the thought of joining together in singing is a dream longed for greatly.

This past year has called us to care for one another in ways that have expanded our imagination and stretched our normalcy to lengths never considered. We have been challenged to be safe for one another by masking and social distancing. We faced the daunting challenge of responding with justice and compassion to basic needs affirming human dignity.

“Know that the LORD is God. It is he that made us, and we are his...” suggests not only that we have some knowledge about God, but that we, as a people, a community, belong to

God and this is our reason for worshipping. We are God’s people. How we have handled the challenges and needs of this past year is an expression of how we see ourselves as a community and as a people of God.

“Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth” calls us to give thanks and bless the name of God. We are a corporate body. The psalm uses the plural, not the singular. It is the work that we as a community are called to do. In giving thanks and blessing God’s name, we acknowledge our need for God. John Chrysostom said, “God does not need anything of ours, but we stand in need of all things from him. The thanksgiving adds nothing to him, but causes us to be nearer him.”<sup>1</sup>

It is into a community we are baptized into Christ. It is with a community we are formed in faith. It is from a community we are sent forth to live the Word. Community needs constant attention to fulfill the beliefs and intent upon which we have come together. How we give praise and how we live our praise speak to who we are in this journey of faith.

After a year of seemingly unending separation and isolation, I hope that coming together in song and celebration will bring the kind of joy that David experienced when he was leaping and dancing before the ark of the covenant as it was brought into the city of David (2Sam 6:14-16). (Only we should keep our clothes on.)

Kathleen Polansky, oblate  
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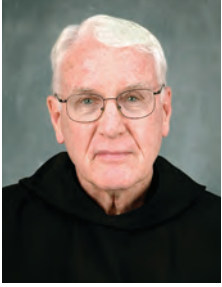
### Limited Edition Christmas Cards

A fundraising project for the memorial shrine of the deceased oblates begins on September 1. Limited edition sets of 12 Christmas cards will be sold at \$25. Visit the oblate website or call the Oblate Office for information and purchases.

<sup>1</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 14 (St. Louis Concordia Publishing House, 1974), p. 257



# Fr. Vincent remembered for his way of life



*Fr. Vincent Tobin, OSB*

Fr. Vincent Tobin's life and ministry touched countless souls, and I cannot possibly express the impact that he has had on so many. What I can do, and am

honored to do, is tell you how he affected my life, and try to give you a glimpse of this great man who truly became a spiritual father to me.

I want to tell so many stories about the interactions I witnessed him have with others, from my family to guests at the monastery, and I will slip in a few of those as we go along. I thought it best, however, to focus on the man, and how the way he lived his life has become a guide in how I want to live my own.

A dear friend of his told me that a person does not meet many men like Fr. Vincent in a lifetime, and the truth of her statement is palpable to me. One of the biggest effects his teaching had on me was through the witness of his life.

Two particular phrases that he often said to me have stuck in my mind, and they are a good example of how he lived an extraordinary life in both ordinary and extraordinary circumstances. He often told me (I am, admittedly, a bit of a perfectionist) that "perfection lies in the perseverance," and he often reminded me that Jesus asks us to love, and that love should be at the core of all we do.

I think it would be fair to say that perseverance is one way Fr. Vincent lived the love to which we are all called. I saw him respond to people

with love. He directed countless souls on their spiritual journey, always striving to be available to anyone who needed him.

His work with the youth at the "One Bread, One Cup" summer conferences was with infectious love and joy. He spent countless hours listening to the confessions of groups visiting Saint Meinrad and pilgrims who found themselves at his always-open office door.

I remember a young woman I encountered. I had seen her at evening prayer and when I wandered out of my room at 10 o'clock that night to go look at the beautiful night view, I ran into her again. She needed some guidance and wanted to speak to a priest. She knew she had waited too long, and it was late, but was looking to mail a letter before she left.

I walked her to the drop box near Fr. Vincent's office, only to find his light on and him finishing up with another soul who needed his attention. Though weary, he welcomed her brightly and gave her the time and care she needed. He was the answer to a prayer, and he gladly said yes to the request for his time. The encounter would, in her words, have a lasting impact on her life.

Fr. Vincent had a hard fall several months ago, right before he was scheduled to be on a Zoom meeting with the online oblate chapter. When a security officer found him and helped him up, he came immediately to his office, apologized for being late, thanked God for bringing us together, and began teaching. His wisdom, love, and especially his faith, were on full display that day in both word and example.

All things he did out of love – love for Christ and the love that Christ directs us to have for one another. In Fr. Vincent's case, especially in recent years, these acts of love required great perseverance. He dealt with significant pain, using a scooter when he had to and walking with a cane.

Through pain, he persevered and spent hours in the confessional, met with many spiritual directees, and climbed into the choir stalls with his brothers to pray faithfully day in and day out. He told me often, and showed me always, that truly loving requires persevering through the obstacles that try to stand in our way. I strive daily to do justice to his example with my own.

Fr. Vincent lived what he taught – a life centered on faith and love. He was always a calm and reassuring presence in both good and troubled times, his advice full of love and wisdom. He was an example of unwavering faith, reminding me in word and deed that "Jesus told us that in this life we will have trouble, but take heart, I have overcome the world' – and so we carry on, in love."

The last time I spoke to him, he told me at the close of the conversation, "We will pray for each other." I am certain he is holding up his end of that bargain. I hope that you also will pray for him and ask his intercession for your needs, confident that he is just as dedicated to the care of souls now as when he walked this earth.

If you knew him, you likely know his prayer for us, which I think is a fitting way to close: "May your love be upon us, O Lord, as we place all our hope in you."

*Holly Vaughan, oblate  
Bellmont, IL*

# Listen and see: *We are one body*



Dale Edwyna Smith

Our call to oblation guides us to “Listen!” with the ear of the heart. And in our daily journey, we also may be opened to *see* with the eyes of the heart.

In 2015, on the Memorial of Our Lady of Fatima, my sister drove me from St. Louis to Saint Meinrad Archabbey, where I made my promises as an oblate of St. Benedict. I had not visited Saint Meinrad before and have not been able to since, but I love Saint Meinrad, and my promise of stability in continuing *conversatio morum* abides.

In the current pandemic of illness and racism, Rev. Dr. King’s words bemoaning the “white moderate” – one who means well but changes nothing – reverberate. King questioned the possibility of being an “unintentional” racist, pointing to the Sunday hour of prayer as the most segregated hour in America.

On May 25, 2020, a man named George Floyd died in Minneapolis as a police officer knelt on his neck for 8 minutes and 46 seconds. Mr. Floyd’s life was shut off intentionally. The

video of the killing of Mr. Floyd replayed on international media. A crucial question in an examination of conscience might ask who we identify with as we watch this video.

Do we feel crushed under the weight of the police officer, or feel pity for someone else crushed under that weight? Do we wonder if perhaps Mr. Floyd had done something “wrong” that merited execution? Do we identify with the police officer? Did we pray as we watched the video? What did we pray? Is it important that George Floyd was Black, or that the police officer was white?

In the glorious culmination of Advent, we behold the brown infant, Emmanuel, God with us, swaddled in borrowed rags, who bore a shocking resemblance to George Floyd. How are we to worship Emmanuel?

How are we to incarnate the Benedictine promise that “the love of Christ must come before” all else? How does the presence of the brown oblate of St. Benedict, who resembles George Floyd and the Christ Child, help us listen with the ear of the heart? And see with the eyes of the heart?

It is possible to adhere “devotedly” to doctrine, to be a “good” Catholic or Protestant, yet fail to follow Christ in

the narrow way. It is possible to technically “keep” the doctrines of a church but be unkind and unseeing (unhearing) in our day-to-day life with our fellow human beings. Am I a monastic “in the world,” or merely in my carefully secluded portion of it?

We of color are in a peculiar and unique position of both instructor and student. Jesus’ query to Peter, “But who do you say that I am?” is meant for each of us as we encounter the stranger who is our neighbor, the stranger who may be an immigrant (“legal” or otherwise), a Muslim or Jew, or even a brother or sister oblate.

I return to the question of how we “picture” Jesus because it is a crucial one. It reveals how we picture Jesus in the stranger, the neighbor, the fellow disciple, or brother or sister oblate. These times, in particular, are a test for faith, for trust. Who do I say you are?

Dale Edwyna Smith, oblate  
Brighton, MA

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together as the climax of Benedict’s spiritual doctrine. Paraphrasing 1Cor 10:24 and 33, Benedict writes that “[n]o one is to pursue what he judges better for himself, but instead, what he judges better for someone else.”

Inspired by St. Paul again, Benedict teaches that by “competing in obedience to one another,” and trying

“to be the first to show respect to the other” (cf. Rom 12:10) we allow grace to channel our competitive nature, motivated by love instead of fear.

As mortals, we are driven by fear and rivalry, but with God’s grace we can renounce our selfish inclinations and, “preferring nothing whatever to Christ,” allow our hearts to be

informed by Godly justice and pursue what is beneficial for others. This “good zeal,” writes our Father Benedict, “leads to God and to everlasting life” (RB 72:2), “that perfect love which casts out fear,” (RB 7:67) and the righteousness of God’s reign.

Fr. Adrian Burke, OSB, monk  
Saint Meinrad Archabbey

# Meeting the Monks: Fr. Eugene Hensell, OSB



*Fr. Eugene Hensell, OSB*

He had been Catholic only a couple of years, but the 17-year-old couldn't help but notice the sour attitude of the priest leading the Lenten devotions that year.

The future Fr. Eugene Hensell thought to himself, "I could do a whole lot better than that!" That weird inkling was the first step on a life-changing journey.

After graduating from a public high school in Logansport, IN, Fr. Eugene was sent by his bishop to St. Lawrence Seminary in Mt. Calvary, WI. Despite a less-than-stellar high school record, Fr. Eugene managed to survive his first year. Then his bishop decided to send him down to Saint Meinrad College to complete his studies. "I didn't like it," he says, "but I had to come."

Then, at class registration, the academic dean flatly told him he would not succeed.

Why stay any longer? "I got left here," he remembers. "I got dropped off that day and had no other transportation. I was stuck."

It was going to be a long, hard slog. How would he make it?

A bookish group of four or five students adopted the new arrival and introduced him to the foundational texts of Western civilization. With their help, he learned to read with discipline and gain a "classical liberal arts education." As he moved through his studies at Saint Meinrad, he knew what he did not want: to be a diocesan priest.

What did he want? "My first wish was actually to be a car mechanic," he says. He nevertheless kept at his studies and was ordained to the priesthood for the Diocese of Lafayette-in-Indiana in 1969. He earned both master's and doctoral degrees at St. Louis University, followed by teaching at two St. Louis-area colleges in the mid-1970s.

At this time, Fr. Eugene reconsidered his long-standing interest in monastic life. After exploring other monastic orders such as the Trappists, he felt the Benedictines were a better fit. Ten years after being ordained, he made

his monastic profession at the Archabbey.

What was the appeal? It was a stable community. It was like a family, with mutual commitment to the same goals. Living here was going to require an open mind and a willingness to change and grow.

Fr. Eugene soon learned that his fellow monks didn't care too much about his head knowledge. "They were more interested in my ability to clean toilets," he says with a twinkle.

As far as his occupation is concerned, over the past 40 years Fr. Eugene has served in the Seminary and School of Theology, both as professor of Biblical studies and from 1987 to 1996 as the president-rector. He has led retreats full time since 1997.

That all changed last year. Early in 2020, the pandemic effectively ended his retreat work overnight. This year, he decided also to retire from teaching.

Now he has a new job: Guest House chaplain, a position previously held by Fr. Vincent Tobin, who passed away on December 20. Fr. Eugene hopes to provide what he calls a "ministry of presence" for guests and visitors through a listening ear and insightful spiritual direction. It just feels right.

"I've been in the monastery longer this past year than any time over the last 40 years," says Fr. Eugene. "I like it. I'm not suffering at all!"

*Angie McDonald, oblate  
Huntingburg, IN*

# Didache and Rule: Wisdom for today's challenges



David W. Miller

We are living in a pandemic that has forced major changes in lifestyle. One of those changes is the reshaping of our daily “community.”

We are spending greater time with immediate family, and nearly none with church, social and work contacts. People we used to see one or two hours per day, we now see 24/7.

Familiarity breeds challenges. The words of Early Church writers provide fresh insight in dealing with these challenges and using them to strengthen faith.

St. Benedict's *Rule* is widely recognized as having important application to ordinary life. In drafting the *Rule*, Benedict drew on sources including *Rule of the Master*, *Saint Basil's Rule*, and the Desert Fathers. However, many of the *Rule's* themes and phraseology are also found in *The Didache*.

*The Didache* is perhaps the oldest extant Christian writing, other than Scriptures. Precise dating is difficult, but scholars place it at the late first century. Frequent reference to *The Didache* was made by Early Church Fathers, including Origen and Sts. Jerome, Athanasius, Clement of Alexandria and Irenaeus. Benedict read these great writers, so it is reasonable to conclude he was familiar with *The Didache*.

Both the *Rule* and *The Didache* make clear the only way to sojourn the road to life is by love of God. *The Didache*

states, “The way of life is this: First, you shalt love the God who made thee” (D I 2). The *Rule* provides: “First love the Lord God with your whole soul...” (RB 4.1).

As Christ admonished, it all comes down to love of God (Matt 22:37). There is no other teaching! Living in close quarters with others can be painful, and showing love is a daily choice, a necessity. No more should need to be said, but being human, we need detail. The *Rule* and *The Didache* provide it.

Realizing the conflicts and offenses that occur in living together, both works remind us of the importance of forgiveness. *The Didache* states that “in congregation thou shalt confess thy transgressions,” which confession must precede prayers, and to “put quarrels to reconcile” before gatherings (D IV 2, 14; VIII 3; XIV 2).

The *Rule* provides “Anyone excommunicated for serious faults ... is (to provide atonement) to prostrate himself in silence at the oratory entrance” (RB 41). Also, communal saying of The Lord's Prayer at the end of each day “to avoid thorns of controversy” is mandated (RB 13.13). The importance of family prayer, common meals and making amends when living in close quarters is apparent.

The destructive force of selfishness is also stressed. The *Rule* strictly forbids an attitude of “mine,” insisting the monk rely on the community for all needs and give away possessions (RB 33; 58.24). *The Didache* reaches the same point, but cast as giving away the gifts the Lord provided as “ransom for thy sins” (D I 5; IV 6).

The import of these points cannot be overstated. When living in close quarters, we are more at peace when no one is squabbling over “my” iPad or the TV remote. We turn from God by coveting “my things.”

Both works express abiding by the Commandments as essential for peace in community (D II 2; IV 13 and RB 4.3-6). Explicitly noted is control of the tongue and limiting talk to maintain tranquility (D III 8 and RB 4.53; 7.26). Using the same phrase, each abhors “grumbling” (D III 6 and RB 34.7). A family in which the members refrain from “grumbling” is more conducive to happiness and a relationship with God.

Welcoming guests is also a point of consistency. Both documents insist guests be received and provided with food and shelter (D IV 8 and RB 53, 61). Each also reminds us that guests may have been sent by God and should be treated as “the Lord visiting” (D XI 4 and RB 53.1).

In our current situation, we are not receiving guests. Nonetheless, many people need financial and social support because they are confined to home or have lost their jobs. With the availability of FaceTime and meal and grocery delivery, we can support those not living with us and let them know they are in our community.

The writings also remind us there will be a day of judgment, each of us called to account for how we matched our words to actions. *The Didache* states it beautifully: “Watch over your life, let your lamps not be quenched and your loins be not ungirded, but be ready...” (D XVI 1).

Similarly, the *Rule* says, “Let us get up then, at long last, for the Scriptures rouse us when they say: It is high time for us to arise from sleep” (RB Prol. 8). Also, “Live in fear of judgement day ... yearn for everlasting life” (RB 4.44-46). We should not hunker down and decay. There is much work to be done in our community.

As we face the challenges of COVID, the wisdom of these ancient teachers instructs us to recall daily that each

member of our “community” is on a journey of faith. We need to live our love of God in our words and actions. We must control our speech, avoid grumbling, freely confess when we err, and pardon – again and again, recognize that showing hospitality includes being charitable to those more affected, and never forget there will be judgment.

“COVID made me do it” is not an acceptable answer. We must “endure”

and “persevere” (D XVI 5 and RB 4.33). *The Didache* was written at a time when Christians were martyred. The *Rule* was drafted when civilization, as it was known, was ending. Our time of trial may not be so severe, but we can certainly take instruction from what was said then to help us live the Way now.

*David W. Miller, oblate  
South Milford, IN*

## The oblate home: *A place of welcome*



*Marjorie Busch*

As regulations ease on social gatherings, let us consider steps to make our home a welcoming place. We joyfully anticipate connecting with our community of family and friends.

Recall as oblates the words of our Holy Father Benedict: “Reception of guests – Proper honor must be shown to all” (RB 53). You will want your home to be inviting and inspiring, a place where guests feel at ease. Here are some practical and edifying ideas for three relevant spaces.

As visitors enter your home, what impression is projected? No matter the size, your entry area should express the stability and graciousness of oblate teachings. The entry gives a subtle, but personal, signature of who you are.

A crucifix or holy picture sends a silent spiritual message to those entering. If space allows, include a table or chest for small items. You may want to keep a supply of St. Benedict medals or holy cards on hand as gifts. The entry area, to some degree, hints at what will follow.

Let us proceed now to your living/family room. Here are some suggestions to foster a place of sociability and relaxation. The room should have one main focus, such as a fireplace or dominant piece of furniture. Seating arrangements should allow for ease of conversation. In a large room, create several small groups of congenial seating. Two sofas facing each other works well.

You can mix furniture styles and fabrics by paying attention to scale and color combinations. Add beautiful touches with plants, flowers and candles. Play inspiring music in the background. You will be creating a serene and enjoyable experience for yourself and your visitors.

Another main area for company is your eating zone. Whether this is a corner of your kitchen, a dining room or an outdoor space, make preparations to encourage geniality. Adjust any awkward spaces to allow for easy circulation. It is welcoming to have some snacks and beverages available. Depending on schedule and budget, create meals as simple as burgers with paper plates or formal sit-down dinners with your best dishes.

Whatever works for your situation, make it a positive and memorable

occasion. Colossians 3:23 reminds us, “Whatever you do, do from the heart as for the Lord and not for others.” Your family and friends will appreciate your sincere efforts and hospitality.

Continuing into 2021, we look forward to more life in community. As the Apostle John wrote, “I hope to visit you and speak face to face so that our joy may be made complete” (2 John 12).

*Marjorie Busch, oblate  
Sumter, SC*

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that – or of trying to do it, earnestly and sincerely – is not permitted in the community.

This Holy Wall ensures that the people who are admitted to the monastic life can trust each other. Not completely, but enough. They can trust each other to work when it is time to work, to accept what they are given, to obey the abbot, and to offer themselves fully to Christ.

Take Christ out of the system? The wall becomes unholy and the community a prison.

*Edward (Ted) Castronova, oblate  
Bloomington, IN*

# Spiritual growth happens in community



Cathey Byers

A community can be defined as 1. a group of people living in the same place or having a particular characteristic in common or 2. a feeling of fellowship with others, as a result of sharing common attitudes, interests and goals.

I live in Bradenton, FL, in a community called Waterlefe, an apt name because of all the water within its boundaries. The Braden River flows through it, and there are myriad small and large ponds where the ducks and geese play, fish swim and beautiful marsh foliage grows.

I belong to Our Lady of the Angels Catholic Church, a community of believers. I also belong to more casually formed communities: the community of walkers who walk early in the morning, many with their dogs; the community of book readers who gather to discuss what they have read

and to share new books and ideas; the community of my neighbors, who have become my friends and with whom I share questions and concerns.

As one can easily see, we all belong to something or to someplace. But, as Richard Rohr says, “It is easier to belong to a group than it is to know that you belong to God.”<sup>1</sup> If that is the case, what does that mean for us oblates of Saint Meinrad in terms of community?

As it says in the Prologue to the *Rule*, “The difference between Benedict and other spiritual masters of his time lay in the fact that Benedict believed that the spiritual life was not an exercise in spiritual gymnastics. It was to be nothing ‘harsh or burdensome.’ And it was not a private process. It was to be done in community with others. It was to be a ‘school’ dedicated to ‘the good of all concerned.’”

It seems so simple, but the reality is much more difficult, particularly while a pandemic rages around us and our lives are in upheaval. We are

isolated from each other and the communities important to each of us.

And yet, the answer is there for us, straight from the mouth of Jesus: “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:34-35).

Clearly, Jesus is calling us to love, although that might not be possible within the parameters of what we normally recognize as community. Somehow, however, we must figure it out – and answer the call.

As Jean-Pierre de Caussade, SJ, said centuries ago, “The present moment holds infinite riches beyond your wildest dreams, but you will only enjoy them to the extent of your faith and love. The more a soul loves, the more it longs, the more it hopes, the more it finds.” Alone – together, and belonging to God.

Cathey Byers, oblate  
Bradenton, FL

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Rohr. *Everything Belongs: The Gift of Contemplating Prayer*, New York: The Crossroad Publishing Co., 2003, p. 22

# Good zeal enhances community



Kathy Hurt

Again and again, we hear the same response when people are asked why they want to join a church, or what church means to them as a member. They talk about the value of being part of community. Pressed to say more, they speak about how the community

provides support during hard times, reassurance, opportunity to work with others to make a more just world, and service to God that is meaningful. Those responses help define the gathering of people that is community.

Life in community, for all its rewards, is also intensely challenging. St. Benedict evidently knew this well, given his thoughtful and detailed rules for how monks are to live in a

community. Those same rules provide useful guidance for any of the communities we join, whether a local parish, a neighborhood group, a club pursuing a hobby, or a volunteer organization.

All communities run into the same obstacles. With our strongly individualized culture, we are constantly encouraged to put our *egos*<sup>o</sup> needs before the needs of others. It is often difficult for Americans to adapt

to being in a community that does not recognize the primacy of individual ideas or may not weigh individual needs against the welfare of the whole in a way that supports one's needs.

St. Benedict grounded his community in what he called "good zeal." He wrote, "Try to be the first to show respect to the other..., supporting with the greatest patience one another's weaknesses" (RB 72.3-5).

That he used the word "zeal" for these interactions in a community suggests that he envisioned showing respect and offering support as actions of passion, not done dutifully, but with energy and desire, with all the intensity we associate with anything borne of passion.

Today's culture offers a multitude of dispiriting images of zeal that are anything but good. Passions are spent

on divisiveness rather than bonding. We desperately need good zeal, where primacy is given to respect, where support is rooted in passion, where all that we desire in a community might actually come to birth among and within us.

*Kathy Hurt, oblate novice  
Louisville, KY*

## Though virtual, annual Advent retreat proves to be a gift



*Patricia O'Malley*

Advent: a beautiful time of expectation, prayer, relationships, and joy. In 23 years of being an oblate of Saint Meinrad, I have missed only two

Advent retreats: one for illness and one for snow. The annual Advent retreat has been a mainstay in my spiritual life – a cherished and sacred time.

But 2020, no Advent retreat this year! Not able to ponder Advent's gifts in such a hard year of social distancing, separation, isolation, loss, illness and death. I'm sure many like me needed the annual Advent retreat to reconnect, reflect and heal drooping spirits. My thought was: How will I get through the holidays and the rest of this year without this holy time?

The news that an online Advent retreat would be available was unanticipated! I admit, my first thought was a virtual retreat would not work. Somehow this was not a "real retreat." Pretty negative thoughts for such great news!

However, after reflection and suspending judgment, I attended and tried this different format. God's voice can be heard online, as well as in a conference room, dining room conversation, Guest House chapel, Abbey Church or walking the beautiful grounds. This time prepared for us was really a gift.

Fr. Mateo Zamora's conferences were powerful and timely. He spoke on the importance of recollection, the treasure of God's action in our lives, works of mercy, and the need for deep listening, especially during this pandemic.

So how was it? The retreat was wonderful. It was well planned, with easy directions for access, and scheduled times for conferences that were also flexible, along with prayer and Mass with the monastic community. Before beginning the retreat, I decided to follow the schedule of prayer and conferences at home as if I was at Saint Meinrad from Friday to Sunday. Other interests, phone calls and TV were set aside. Time outside the conferences and prayer was used to reflect, journal, take walks and even nap. I listened. I heard.

If I had a choice, would I do a virtual or on-site retreat? Of course, I would rather travel to Saint Meinrad and be with the community! However, in this time of pandemic, this virtual retreat provided everything I have ever received from attending retreats at Saint Meinrad.

I was part of the community in prayer, had time to reconnect and reflect, and found healing for an exhausted and grieving spirit. When I finished the retreat on Sunday, I knew I had what I needed to begin again. I was ready to make it through a difficult Christmas holiday separated from my family and begin a new year. I will definitely attend a retreat like this again!

Endless gratitude to all those who made possible this holy time for the oblate community. I believe you brought much peace despite many obstacles. May God richly bless you as you have blessed us.

*Patricia O'Malley, oblate  
Dayton, OH*

# Workers in the Vineyard

## Rule offers guidance for living in community



*John Brooks*

St. Benedict in the *Rule* instructs us that our lives are to be lived in community. We are to live in the light of community where we pray, where we work, and where we form and live in relationship with others. St. Benedict makes no requirement of time or place, but on a way of life based on the life of Jesus Christ.

It does not matter if we live in a monastery with other monastics or in the world with our families. It does not matter if we are teachers, healthcare workers, factory workers, parents or students; we are all part of communities and are connected to one another.

As Benedictine Oblates, at our final oblation we make three promises: fidelity of heart, stability to the spirit of monastic life and obedience to God. We live these promises in the light of community. Guided by the

wisdom of the *Rule*, in our communal lives, three themes emerge: prayer, relationships and work.

St. Benedict places prayer as the center. There are at least 12 chapters in the *Rule* on the *Opus Dei*, the work of God. The psalms are important to St. Benedict as are Scripture readings, writings of the Church Fathers and common prayer. In Chapter 19, “The Discipline of Psalmody,” we see the flexibility taught by Benedict as we are free to rearrange the psalms.

The importance of community in our prayer life is clear; however, our contemplative prayer life, not discussed in depth, helps us to grow in our spiritual progress. Prior to Benedict, religious life was the life of the hermit, who went to the desert and lived alone to seek God.

Benedict understood that each person’s rough edges are best confronted by living side by side with other flawed persons whose faults and failings we can identify with. He teaches that growth comes from accepting people as they are, not as we

would like them to be. Benedict understood that the key to spiritual progress lies in constantly making the effort to see Christ in each person. Everyone is to be loved, respected and honored (RB 4), listened to (RB 3), welcomed as Christ (RB 53), and treated with gentleness and compassion (RB 64).

In *Community of Love*, John Main writes that “the essence of life is to love, to love Christ as you love your neighbor. The basis for our lives is openness to divine mystery. Reverence is being aware of the mystery of others.”

Benedict teaches the importance of a balanced life with specified periods of labor and prayer (RB 64). He calls moderation “the mother of all virtues” (RB 48, 64). We should ask for help when it is needed (RB 31, 53). We should use our talents and gifts for the benefit of our communities. Balance and moderation are not easily achieved in our busy world of today.

*John Brooks, oblate  
Columbus, IN*

## Patience crucial for monastic vocation



*Bill Hamrick*

When I told my wife that I was writing an article on patience, she laughed. She had good reason to. For when we were graduate students at Indiana University in Bloomington, we attended pre-marriage counseling

sessions at the Catholic Student Center.

One evening, the priest directing the sessions asked us to write down our fiancé’s/ée’s most annoying character flaw. I wrote, “She’s never on time.” And her answer was, “He’s impatient.” Yet here we are almost 53 years later, and in the wake of many painful lessons in gaining patience.

St. Benedict knew the value of patience. Although he only mentions it three times in the *Rule*, so far as I can find, I believe it to be an understated virtue that is crucial for a monastic vocation. It is, for example, central to the experience of waiting, which was the subject of Advent reflections distributed to oblates in 2020.

We find patience first mentioned in the Prologue, where it is tied to



perseverance in the face of difficult beginnings. Monks who persevere in following Jesus' "teaching in the monastery until death ... by patience share in the sufferings of Christ" so as to "merit to be partakers of His kingdom."<sup>1</sup>

We find the same line of thought in St. Benedict's description of the fourth degree of humility (RB 7.23). There he writes that a monk, in the face of "hard and contrary things, nay even injuries ... should take hold silently on patience, and, bearing up bravely, grow not weary nor depart, according to that saying of the Scripture: 'He who has persevered to the end shall be saved'" (Matt 10:22).

He also ties patience "in adversities and injuries" to fulfilling Jesus' command not to strike back, but rather to do even more for those who insult, harm and curse us (Matt 5:39-41).

Patience is also implied, but not stated, in St. Benedict's description of how the abbot should govern his monastery. In correcting faults, for example, he must exercise prudence "and not go to excess, lest seeking too vigorously to cleanse off the rust, he may break the vessel" (RB 64.81-82).

That advice also applies to himself, for in the absence of patience, he will risk becoming "turbulent and anxious, over exacting and headstrong, jealous and prone to suspicion ... [and] never have rest" (*Ibid.*, 82). (And neither will the monks.)

For the abbot, patience with other monks and himself is thus closely related to moderation and discretion, and the latter, St. Benedict writes, is "the mother of virtue" (*Ibid.*). For instance, he notes, Jacob was careful not to drive his flock of sheep too far in one day lest they all die (Gen 3:13).

Patience is required, thus, for the interrelated virtues of perseverance, prudence, moderation and discretion. And this is true not only of flourishing, spiritually enriching monasteries, but also of all other successful communities and relationships within them. Yet why is this so? What is there about patience that makes it necessary for developing these virtues?

What links them all is self-restraint, which both produces patience and is produced by it. St. Benedict does not use the expression "self-restraint," but it consists of what he describes in the first three degrees of humility as turning away from one's self-will (RB 7.21).

Self-will consists of the ratification of one's desires and decisions to fulfill them. Small children naturally identify their wills with their desires, but an essential part of the maturation process is learning that they should not always be the same thing.

Desires remain, but they get calibrated and judged according to personal and social norms that urge self-restraint. Patience is called for and goes hand in hand with self-restraint. Patience thus mediates the will and desires through prudence, moderation and discretion.

It follows also that patience is not total passivity. "Patience is a form of action," wrote Rodin, for it consists of an active self-monitoring in seeking some good to acquire or accomplish, and perhaps especially in speech. How many times have we blurted out something that we instantly regretted and that we would give anything to take back!

St. Benedict perhaps knew this as well because Chapter 6 of the *Rule*, "Of Silence," begins this way: "Let us act

in conformity with that saying of the Prophet: 'I said I will guard my ways lest I sin with my tongue; I have put a bridle on my mouth'" (18). This is also why, when I was growing up, my mother used to tell me to count to 10 before speaking.

Patience thus implies some form of resistance or, as above, some type of temptation to be resisted. It involves something with which we have to put up. If all locks opened by themselves, so to speak, there would be no need for patience.

This is certainly true when patience is a way of love and marital commitment, for it is inherently difficult to blend two wills and two sets of desires in a new life together. Hence it was not by chance that St. Paul began his famous remarks about love with patience. Often quoted at weddings, the familiar verse reads, "Love is patient, love is kind" (1Cor 13:4).

However, this verse is more interesting than it appears. The most accurate Biblical translation is *La Bible de Jérusalem* published in French by the Dominican Fathers (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1975). Their translation of St. Paul's verse runs, "La charité est longanime; la charité est serviable." That is, "Charity is long-suffering; charity is ready to help."

This translation better expresses how charity/love (*caritas*) requires patience in the face of resistance and obstacles while being dedicated to the welfare of others (kindness). And that is a large part of what makes good communities good.

*Bill Hamrick, oblate  
St. Louis, MO*

<sup>1</sup> *The Holy Rule of Our Most Holy Father Saint Benedict*, trans. eds. The Monks of St. Meinrad Archabbey. St. Meinrad, IN: Grail Publications, 1956, p. 5. Hereafter referred to as "RB."

# Oblate retreat offers chance for recollection



William H. Wilson

In an online format, Fr. Mateo Zamora, OSB, inspired, challenged, taught, and encouraged oblates about the significance of “recollection”

in one’s life. The Advent retreat was offered in December.

Fr. Mateo’s biblical teaching, personal stories, and gift for preaching offered an opportunity for personal reflection during the holy season of Advent. Included with the retreat was the opportunity to participate in the Liturgy of Hours, recorded by several monks.

The “weekend” retreat examined the meaning of recollection with a design for doing a personal reflection.

Fr. Mateo reminded retreatants that “recollection” means, literally, “to gather again,” “to get it together again.” In the first conference, we were encouraged to use the retreat as a time of reflection on “getting it together in order to be together ... recollection leads us to communion.” Participants were urged to examine what distracts from recollection and what things help enter into a spirit of recollection.

Throughout the next three conference videos, Fr. Mateo outlined a process for participating in “recollection.”

1. Hindsight: Looking back, putting the past in perspective, using eyes of faith. He shared from his Filipino background in his native language an old proverb: “Those who don’t know how to look back to where they have been

cannot reach their destination.” As an illustration of looking back, the understanding of the history of expectation for the Messiah was discussed with Advent scripture stories.

2. Insight: Recollection of the present. “Advent is mystery as much as history.” Fr. Mateo reminded us about *lectio divina*, God speaking to our present moments. He challenged us to be present to others through works of mercy.
3. Foresight: Recollection into the future. Fr. Mateo reminded us of our statement of faith: “Christ has come, Christ is here, Christ will come again.” His challenge for our reflection was, “How long will it take you to get it together for the coming of the Lord?” The year 2020 and the COVID-19 pandemic has been, as he put it, “a year of letting go, asking what or who really matters.”

Fr. Mateo closed the retreat by adding to the Filipino proverb, “Those who keep looking back cannot reach their destination.” The year of the pandemic has taught that what we can live without will change us for the better. Advent prepares us. We can rethink and re-vision what it means. Can we still find the Christ Child in our midst?

Closing the last conference, Fr. Mateo used a homily about Mary as the model of recollection. Just when all seemed wrong – no room, a stable – Mary could have had a tantrum. Rather, she “pondered” (recollected). Mary kept silent into the mystery, trusting everything had been made right. Mary says to us, “Hush now, everything will be alright.”

In summary, one highlight of the virtual December Oblate Retreat was the opportunity to personally reflect (an exercise and discipline of recollection) using questions asked by Fr. Mateo. For your examen and time of recollection, here they are:

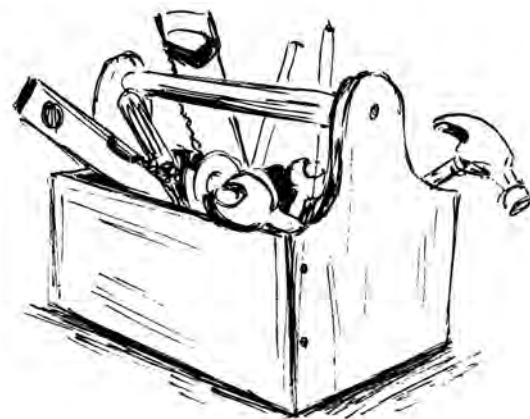
1. What are the things that distract me from being recollected?
2. What are the things that can help me enter into a spirit of recollection?
3. What are my memories of the year 2020 – good/bad?
4. What is God telling me through these memories of 2020 – good/bad?
5. How can I maintain a regular discipline of *lectio divina*?
6. What corporal works of mercy can I do even during the pandemic?
7. How much time do I need to prepare for the coming of the Lord?
8. What have we lived without that has changed us for the better?
9. Cut off from community, what have we done to build community?

William H. Wilson, oblate  
Huntington, WV

# The Oblate Toolbox

## Pandemic need not keep us from connecting

*“These, then, are the tools of the spiritual craft ... the workshop where we are to toil faithfully at all these tasks is the enclosure of the monastery and stability in the community.”* – Rule of St. Benedict 4:75, 78



Angie McDonald

A year ago, the pandemic hit all of us.

Many of us may still be living through extended isolation.

Separation from family and friends, restricted worship services, fear of contracting the virus and many other effects are taking their toll on our faith and joy.

So much for the problem; we need solutions.

This past year, we have been given many resources to sustain us as oblates. The beautiful booklets produced by the Oblate Office, the video conferences and reflections given by different monks for the oblate chapters, chapter meetings held

virtually, livestreaming of Mass and Vespers from the Archabbey Church, the Honor Your Inner Monk and Slack apps available on smartphones and computers, and this quarterly publication are just a few of these.

Within our own chapters, although we could not meet in person, nothing can stop us from picking up the phone to call one another. These days, making a video call is as easy as logging on to Zoom, Instant Messenger or other video platforms. Dropping a note by snail mail is still a great way to connect with others.

With renewed hope, let us realize again our holy calling as members of the larger Archabbey community. Every time we pray the Liturgy of the Hours, we are joining our hearts with our brothers and fathers there. Although we cannot return to the Archabbey in person yet, we continue

to sustain the entire community through our prayers and ongoing commitment to our oblate promises and duties.

St. Benedict urges those brothers who are called away from their community to observe the Work of God no matter where they are. Oblates can do the same. If we feel our resolve weakening, there is nothing to stop us from joining with other oblates to pray the Liturgy of the Hours together more often than the monthly chapter meeting.

Keeping our community going at this time of extended challenge can be the gateway to a deeper walk in the Spirit and dependence on the Lord.

*Angie McDonald, oblate  
Huntingburg, IN*

## OBLATE NEWS

### DEATHS

**Elizabeth Wollenmann**, of Ferdinand, IN, August 29, 2020

**Joyce Efinger**, of Tell City, IN, October 16, 2020

**Lawrence Hembree**, of Greenfield, IN, November 29, 2020

**Mary Louise Hoehn**, of Georgetown, IN, November 5, 2020

**Jessie McCurdy**, of Middletown, PA, June 23, 2020

**Hubertina “Tina” Searcy**, of Tulsa, OK, December 13, 2020

**Isabelle Barnes**, of Madison, IN, August 4, 2020

**Cynthia Wilson-Gomez**, of Brooklyn, NY, February 1, 2012

**William Owens**, of La Mesa, CA, November 14, 2020

**Angelina Cipriani-Guarini**, of Farmingdale, NY, November 2020

**Ellen Pence**, of Farmingdale, NY, July 20, 2020

**Franklin Walsh**, of Scottsdale, AZ, December 6, 2020 ♦

### VOLUNTEERS APPRECIATED

Recent volunteers in the Oblate Office were Br. Stanley Rother Wagner, OSB, Fr. Mateo Zamora, OSB, Br. Michael Reyes, OSB, Nov. Benjamin Ziegler, OSB, Nov. Matthew Morris, OSB, Nov. Connor Zink, OSB. ♦



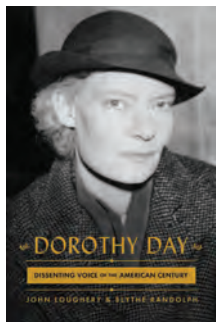
200 Hill Drive  
St. Meinrad, IN 47577

*Return service requested*

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## Reading Room

*Dorothy Day: Dissenting Voice of the American Century* by John Loughery and Blythe Randolph; Simon and Schuster, 2020.



Pope Francis has referred to Dorothy Day (1897-1980) as a great American. Many people are unaware of her complex life and contribution to the faith and history of the American Catholic Church of the 20th century.

This compelling biography is an exhaustive revelation of Day's life, illustrating her selfless courage in proclaiming the Gospel and caring for the poor and marginalized. The authors highlight the justice work that Day did that is even more poignant today in the face of systemic racism, income disparity, poverty, and war in today's socio-religiously politically divided America.

The book is a living testament to Dorothy Day's commitment to Christ and the counter-cultural demands of the Gospel – particularly timely for the Catholic

reader. Day saw the world through the lens of her faith, and for most of those years lived the Gospel message in light of Benedictine charisms, even becoming an oblate of St. Procopius Abbey in Lisle, IL, in 1955.

Day was strong willed and independent. She practiced charity by advocating for justice. Day's emphasis on human dignity for every person and loving the least of these was her way of life. She insisted no one was beyond redemption.

Her sanctity may be questioned by some. As the authors note, "there is enough in ... her dramatic life to alienate anyone," but her devotion to compassion, self-sacrifice, and the Benedictine virtues of simplicity, prayer, work, community, and hospitality all testify to her heroic witness and a life worth emulating as a saint of God.

A skeptic told her she was hard to take. Dorothy replied: "You know, the Gospel is hard to take." Historian David O'Brien called her "the most important, interesting, and influential figure in the history of American Catholicism."

*Deacon John W. McMullen, oblate  
Evansville, IN*