

# Oblate Benedictine



*Saint Meinrad*



*Votive candles flicker in the quiet Monte Cassino Shrine Chapel.*

## Mourning: A time to relinquish control

I have always found it interesting that “mourning” and “morning” are homophones. Two words intricately connected in sound, yet so seemingly different in practice.

For me, morning is the beginning of something to behold. It is a newness that is filled with possibility and hope. Whereas mourning seems to shadow sorrow, suffering and the closing of something that one has treasured.

The challenge of these two words for us as Christians is to hold them together as sides of the same reality. We believe in the Triune God who so often is revealed to us during our times of loss. It is then that our vulnerability breaks apart the façade of stoicism and pride that we often rely upon to face each new day.

In mourning, we let down our defenses and relinquish our need for control. We turn and embrace the teaching of Jesus in the

Beatitudes, reminding us that those who mourn are blessed. In our suffering, God is not silent. In our grieving, the Holy Spirit comforts us.

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted” (Matthew 5:4). We, as Church, must be the ones who do as Christ did. In and through prayer, in our actions and words, we stand in the place where the world is suffering and mourning and, as Christ did on the cross, we present it to God.

We embrace the mourning as something to behold for the comfort and redemption it affords the world in God through our Lord Christ Jesus. Our mourning brings with it God’s comfort and the promised new creation. Just as the women who in mourning arrived to find the tomb empty discovered that morning a new reality.

Good “mourning” to you.

*Kathleen Polansky, oblate  
New Salisbury, IN*

# A POINT TO PONDER FROM *The Rule*

The *Rule of St. Benedict's* second step of humility calls us to stop loving our own desires. Learn to imitate our Lord: "I have come not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me."

*John 6:38*

Humility is the process of dying to self and letting go of my will and taking on the will of God. The opposite, self-will, self-centeredness, is the insistence that I know better. It is a justification of power protecting my thoughts, attitudes, words, actions and insecurities.

God calls us to humility. We don't choose it willingly. It is the way to live. Luke 14:11: "For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."

Look at whatever captivates you – habits, addictions, desires, passions, fears – and say, "You are not God." Only God satisfies! Knowing that only in God we find completeness demands denial of the attitude that I have that power.

*Benedictine Oblate* is published four times a year by Saint Meinrad Archabbey.

**Editor:** Mary Jeanne Schumacher

**Designer:** Tammy Schuetter

**Oblate Director:** Janis Dopp

**Oblate Chaplain:** Fr. Joseph Cox, OSB

**Editorial Staff:** Kathleen Polansky, Brenda Black and Becky Boyle

Send changes of address and comments to  
The Editor, Development Office,  
Saint Meinrad Archabbey,

200 Hill Dr., St. Meinrad, IN 47577,  
(812) 357-6817, fax (812) 357-6325

or email [oblates@saintmeinrad.org](mailto:oblates@saintmeinrad.org)  
[www.saintmeinrad.org](http://www.saintmeinrad.org)

©2019, Saint Meinrad Archabbey

## Are we dying to be like Him?



Archabbot Kurt Stasiak, OSB

How quickly things can change. A good day begins, but turns sour before noon. A fender-bender in the parking lot. Third notice of a bill in the mail. Or, ... "Jill, this is Mom. Your father was in a bad accident. He didn't make it ...."

I'm reminded of Psalm 30:

*I said to myself in my good fortune:  
"I shall never be shaken."*

*... then you hid your face, and I was  
put to confusion.*

Yes, how quickly things can change. When morning joy turns into tearful mourning, it does seem as though the Lord has hidden his face from us. We wonder how long this will last. (Forever, we think.) We feel we're all alone. (Even when others are all around us.) We fear life will never be the same. (And it won't, not exactly.)

When we're mourning, we wonder if the Lord is there. He is. Just as the sun does

not cease to exist when it is night, so the Lord does not desert us, even when we may have an especially difficult time finding Him – or even believing in Him.

We human beings have always wrestled with this. Things change. For better and for worse. And then they change again. The best reflection I know concerning this is the third chapter in the Old Testament Book of Ecclesiastes (Qoheleth): "There is a season for everything, a time for every occupation under heaven; a time for giving birth, a time for dying ...."

Times change. Mourning will always hurt, but that mourning will change, eventually, into grateful remembrance. Then we will continue with Psalm 30 ...

*O Lord my God, I cried to you for  
help*

*And you have healed me.*

*... You have changed my mourning  
into dancing.*

Archabbot Kurt Stasiak, OSB  
Saint Meinrad Archabbey

## From the desk of the director: Fixing our sights on a joy that is eternal



Janis Dopp

As I move more solidly into this new time in my life, I am reminded daily that life is short and needs to be treasured and lived well. I try to make regular visits to the cemetery at

Saint Meinrad to think about the many monks I have known – men who made a remarkable difference in my life and now rest silently in that sacred space.

I can still hear their voices and sense their guidance. I mourn not seeing them in this world, but I am profoundly grateful that they lived and that I knew them.

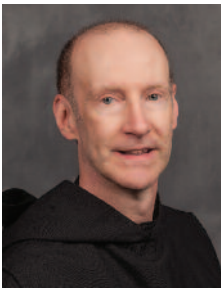
I have always been fascinated by the thoughts of my ancestors. Who were they? What horizon did they look upon each day? What were the family recipes that they treasured most? Their faces in the photographs in my prayer space look back at me as a reminder that their lives and mine are inextricably bound together like the pages of a book.

Our lives tell a story that is ongoing. I mourn those whom I never knew and even more those whom I knew and loved. And I am profoundly grateful that they lived and breathed and made a difference in this world.

There are people who make up my community and listen to my story, giving weight to my memories. When I express loss and diminishment within community, those who love me help me to bear my burdens and see them in the light of resurrection and transformation.

Telling the story is the positive side of the mourning process because it is in the remembering that I begin to reflect on the undeniable value of lives well lived that gave rise to my own and propel me into the future.

## Musings from the Chaplain



*Fr. Joseph Cox, OSB*

In the season of fall, some people may feel a bit “down.” Perhaps it is due to loss, especially loss of sunlight as the days gradually shorten. We may be mourning the loss of summer, and we are reminded that cold weather is on the way.

Mourning is a normal psychological process that follows the loss of people or things. It is a reaction that occurs when we lose relatives, loved ones, friends, or even our health or our jobs.

When mourning, we may feel as if there is a void, an emptiness, because someone or something is no longer with us and the emptiness cannot be filled. Some people may attempt to fill it with busyness, material possessions, alcohol or other substitutes. That can be helpful for a while, but eventually the void

We see the past in the light of the present and with the hope of the future. The past, the present and the future are seamlessly connected to one another. In the *Rule* we read, “Day by day remind yourself that you are going to die” (Chapter 4:47).

St. Benedict is not asking us to be morbid. He is, instead, helping us to fashion a life that is well lived so that we can have every hope for eternal life.

There will be others in days to come who will tell our stories and remember our voices, keeping our memories alive while they mourn.

*Janis Dopp  
Oblate Director*

resurfaces. The only thing that can fill it completely is God’s love.

When St. Benedict says, “Prefer nothing to the love of Christ,” he really means “nothing.” If we have nothing in the world but Christ, we have everything, and if we have everything in the world except for Christ, we have nothing.

As followers of the Lord, we are called to mediate the love of Christ to those in need. We are to help fill some of the voids in people’s lives through our kindness and care for them. When we do this, some of our own emptiness is lessened. Not only do they experience the love of Christ, but so do we.

*Fr. Joseph Cox, OSB  
Oblate Chaplain*

# Smugmug

*For more photos of  
Saint Meinrad events, visit:*

<http://saintmeinrad.smugmug.com>

## OBLATES *In their own words*



*Oblate Clayton Cook  
Columbus, OH*

“The depth of the spirit opens one up and quiets one down, so that becoming aware of God’s love unfolding is realized. It is very powerful and deep and opens us into an ongoing process that takes a lifetime to unfold.”



# Notes from Novices: Preferring nothing to Christ



Mark Plaiss

When we hear the word “mourning,” most of us flash to those times of lost loved ones: wife, husband, parent, child, friend. The overriding

emotions at this time are sadness, anger, regret and depression.

Depending on the depth of the relationship with the lost loved one, such sorrow may last days, weeks, months, perhaps years, or maybe the rest of life.

Mourning, I think, has another nuance as well: grieving over a way of life left behind. In Chapter 72 of the *Rule*, Benedict writes that we are to “prefer nothing whatever to Christ.” Now think about that for a minute.

Nothing.

We must prefer Christ to spouse, children and parents. We must prefer Christ even to our dreams, hopes and desires. Benedict is only echoing Jesus’ words, “Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me” (Matthew 10:37).

Jesus is even more blunt at Luke 14:26: “If anyone comes to me without hating his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.” All Benedict is doing is restating the Biblical dictum in fewer words and softer language.

Still, the lesson is there, and it this giving up that causes the mourning. Yeah, like giving up what? A way of life centered on the desires and whims of both our passions and our will. In

the euphoria of a recent conversion, say at the Easter Vigil, such renunciations are easy.

However, by the time the Assumption rolls around (August 15), those same renunciations are frequently being reconsidered. In other words, giving up a way of life we lived long and with gusto is hard, and we mourn that loss.

Note, though, that in those two Biblical passages above, Jesus says nothing about doing all that alone. And with Benedict’s aphorism in Chapter 72, he assumes preferring nothing to Christ will all be worked out among the members of the monastery.

Enter oblation. As oblates or oblate novices of Saint Meinrad Archabbey, we are not alone in our battle to prefer nothing to Christ. Our sister and brother oblates and oblate novices, the

monks at the Archabbey and all the oblate chapters scattered hither and yon help us in our daily battle to prefer nothing to Christ.

Nor is this battle a one-shot deal. It’s not as though we say at the end of the day, “Hey, I preferred nothing to Christ today, and so it shall be forevermore!” No, the battle to prefer nothing to Christ is a marathon, not a sprint; it is ongoing, not short lived; it is a process, not a method.

It takes time, folks. Recall Holy Writ: “You need endurance to do the will of God” (Hebrews 10:36).

At the conclusion of that passage in Chapter 72 about preferring nothing to Christ, Benedict writes, “... and may he bring us all together to everlasting life.” All of us. Together.

Mark Plaiss, oblate novice  
Fox Lake, IL

## Notes for Novices: An invitation to something better



Br. Stanley Rother Wagner

What if Benedict’s call for us to die to ourselves each day (see: RB 4:47) is not an opportunity for mourning, but an invitation for something better?

Sometimes when we are faced with giving up a bad habit or avoiding the opportunity to indulge, we mourn not being able to control what we want in life; we mourn that we must die to ourselves. Did not Jesus tell Peter: “...

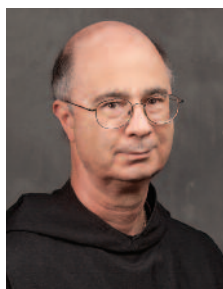
when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go” (John 21:18b).

For Benedict, this tool of good work is not meant to be morbid, but it is meant to be an invitation to climb up on the cross with Jesus, die to our self-wills, and live for something bigger, something better.

To do that, though, we must release control of our wills to God. Mourn if we must for now, but something better is in store for us.

Br. Stanley Rother Wagner, OSB  
Oblate Novice Mentor

# Vigilance: Introducing a four-part series



Fr. Justin DuVall, OSB

In the course of the coming year, the oblate community will be looking at the theme of vigilance – not exactly a household word.

It is, however, a good monastic word that still has a relevance to our way of life, and one which will hopefully become more familiar to oblates as the year progresses. It is a wonderful adventure to explore something unfamiliar and make a home for it within the familiar patterns of one's life.

In this brief introduction, I want to set out a few remarks about vigilance and then unfold the map for the next three installments, which will appear in successive newsletters. It is helpful to know where we are going from the start, although as in any journey, maps cannot disclose every new discovery.

The journey itself brings surprises, and the traveler has to be open to what he or she may learn along the way. Only at the end can we have an annotated map of where we have been and how we came to arrive at our destination.

If we were to describe someone as vigilant, we might have the impression that the person is cautious, even overly cautious. We might get the picture of someone always looking around, expecting the unexpected, hesitant about moving forward, and waiting for the next event to happen.

Today we read about people with FOMO – “fear of missing out.” They

are never where they are because they are too concerned that something may be happening elsewhere and they won't be there to share in it! But FOMO is not vigilance. In a paradoxical way, vigilance roots us in the present moment and makes us wakeful, but not fearful.

Let's be clear. Vigilance in the monastic life is a value, but it is not a virtue; it is a discipline. Like other disciplines in monastic life, vigilance serves a purpose. It is a tool, and the *Rule* includes it with the other “Tools for Good Works” in Chapter 4. “Hour by hour keep careful watch over all you do, aware that God's gaze is upon you, wherever you may be” (RB 4:48-49).

The discipline of vigilance helps us to avoid forgetfulness, not the sort that plagues those who suffer from Alzheimer's, but the spiritual forgetfulness by which we drift away

from God. Vigilance is a tool of hope by which we open our minds and hearts to the meaning of God's presence and his plan for our salvation. As a discipline, it is the hard work that combats that forgetfulness that woos us into illusion about God and about ourselves.

So now for the map. From this brief introduction, I want to move on in the second article to look at how vigilance is valued in the monastic life. The third article will focus on how discipline embeds the value of vigilance in monastic life. Lastly, I would like to reflect a bit on how this discipline might be adapted to present-day life for oblates so that, in the spirit of St. Benedict, they can avoid forgetfulness and remember God.

I hope that you will be my companion on this journey.

Fr. Justin DuVall, OSB, monk  
Saint Meinrad Archabbey



Fr. Mateo Zamora, OSB, right, gives instruction to Robert Mortenson, from left, Deacon Steve O'Connell and Virginia White before the oblation and investiture rites on June 8.

# Workers in the Vineyard

## Our job as oblates: engage the world



John Brooks

God told Abraham to leave the land of your ancestors and go to a land I will show you. All we are guaranteed in this life is an adventure. It is a

wonderful thing to be guaranteed. When you were born, God said I am going to put you in a place where you do not know what is coming and you have the freedom and capacity to make choices to change your community and the world to make them better.

Our adventure as oblates began at our investiture, where we were planted as seeds in the vineyard of Saint Meinrad. During our novice year, we were nurtured and cultivated by the monks and fed by the lessons of our Holy Father, St. Benedict. Through our oblation, our promises of stability of heart, fidelity to the spirit of the monastic life, and obedience to the will of God, we were transplanted to our communities and the world.

In our communities and our world, we plant the seeds of compassion, understanding, forgiveness, kindness, happiness, joy and love. The seeds we plant are not just passive words, but rather are our acts of sacrifice and service to others, putting others' needs before our own. They are the example of the life we live: "Our way of acting should be different from the world's way" (RB 4:20).

Fed by prayer, service, study and self-care, we engage our communities and the world. Sometimes we are met by a

world filled with pain, suffering and misery. We are called to engage with it in compassion, comfort and kindness. Sometimes we are met by a world filled with anger, confusion and violence. We are to engage with understanding, knowledge and forgiveness. Sometimes we are met by a world filled with happiness, joy and love. Treasure it, encourage it and thank God for it.

Joan Chittister, in her book *A Spirituality for the 21st Century*, tells the tale of the old master and his student. The old master says God loves sinners. The student questions, "How can that be?" The master replies, God in heaven holds each of us by a string. When we sin, we cut the string. God gathers the ends and ties a knot, bringing us a little nearer.

Again and again, we cut the string.  
Again and again, God reties the string

bringing us closer and closer to Him. It is a wonderful teaching about our loving and forgiving God who only wants us to be closer to Him. It is also a wonderful teaching about engaging our world.

Each time we reach out to a neighbor in need and offer help, each time we reach out to a neighbor who is suffering or in pain and offer comfort, each time we reach out to a neighbor who has wronged us and offer forgiveness, each time we find a neighbor who is lost and help them to find their way, and each time we welcome a stranger, we knot the string that binds us.

Each act draws us a little closer and encourages us with the hope that strengthens our communities and our world.

John Brooks, oblate  
Columbus, IN

## Reflections from the Wilderness

### I Came Home Alone That Day

I came home alone that day. There had certainly been a lot of people – doing things – some really good things – some not so good.

Friends had given their gentle touches and best wishes, and had gone away, and the children and all their families had gone home.

I came home alone that day. Silence, from the farthest corners of the room, greeted me, pressed its way around me, and my breath stopped for a moment!

I sat down in the big chair, the unfamiliar one, and touched my little dog's head. She looked up at me, as if to say, "Well, what do we do now?"

Then the realization hit me! I was a widower!

And the tears came! And they still do!

Ron Lewis, oblate  
Putnamville Correctional Facility  
Greencastle, IN

# Considering the Psalms

## Psalm 88: An insight into mourning



Kathleen Polansky

*Psalm 88 NRSV,  
NAB, 88/87  
Grail*

I remember a day when I was asked to visit a friend to give him very sad news in person so that it would not be relayed over the phone. As I spoke gently of the passing of his friend, I watched as the stages of grief unfolded before me. His initial reaction was shock. This news was not unexpected. Even so, the reality still produced a vacant stare and mouth agape in absolute silence.

As he composed himself, the first thing he said to me was that I was mistaken. I had heard incorrectly. Obviously, I was wrong. His denial almost immediately switched as he lashed out in anger at my coming over to give him such news. Why would I say such a horrible thing? It was a terrible thing to say. How could I come to his home to say such things? His anger was real and intense.

Then we faced the bargaining. If he made a phone call, maybe we would find that my information was not complete and there was still a possibility that his friend was going to pull through. If he could follow up on the information, then there could be a different outcome.

We sat for a long while. I listened as my friend argued, bellowed and bargained through a pain so deep from the loss he was grappling to comprehend. Ultimately, with a complete sigh of surrender, came the acceptance and tears.

Psalm 88 gives us an insight into this process of mourning before it actually reaches acceptance. Stages of grief – shock, denial, anger, bargaining and acceptance – do not always follow in neat succession nor must one move forward without also turning back to previous stages.

In this psalm, the psalmist appears to begin with a bargaining attempt that treads lightly on formulas of obeisance: “let my prayer come before you ....” Verse 2 then decidedly disintegrates into anger and blame. It is God who gets the blame in this psalm. “You have put me in the depths of the Pit, in the regions dark and deep” (verse 6).

Throughout, the psalmist is very adamant that it is God who is not remembering and coming to his aid. Every day he prays, but God has cast him off. There is no resolution, no acceptance and praise at the end.

This is the only psalm that leaves us without a word of hope and confidence in God’s answer. It is wrenching and angry, blaming and dark. In the midst of great mourning, Psalm 88 expresses the raw and festering pain that is soul crushing without candy coating it before our hearts are ready to accept full dependence and trust in God’s goodness and love.

Walter Brueggemann, in his book *Praying the Psalms*, states that, “The Psalms, with a few exceptions, are not the voice of God addressing us. They are rather the voice of our own common humanity – gathered over a long period of time, but a voice that continues to have amazing

authenticity and contemporaneity. It speaks about life the way it really is, for in those deeply human dimensions the same issues and possibilities persist. And so, when we turn to the Psalms, it means we enter into the midst of that voice of humanity and decide to take our stand with that voice.”

Psalm 88 allows us to vent and bellow, badger and bargain, without guilt or fear that the love and compassion of God will be lost to us. Our mourning is without a time limit or a gauge of required platitudes that must be upheld in order to pray. Our prayer must be honest and real.

Mourning for each of us is felt and expressed in many differing ways and must not become yet another case of grief because our anger stage is being vented against God. God is always listening. We are being heard. And, as I was always taught, and with which the Psalmist seems to be in agreement, God can take it.

*Kathleen Polansky, oblate  
New Salisbury, IN*

*Saint Meinrad*  
**DAY OF SERVICE**  
*has been set for*  
**March 14, 2020**  
*alumni.saintmeinrad.edu/DOS*

# The Busy Benedictine: Encountering the truth of death

*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*

When my mother-in-law passed away, there was a lot of noise. My wife's family is Sicilian, and they do not rein in their emotions very

much. Nina and her sisters weren't exactly wailing, but they were making noise. It was such a contrast to my family, where death is greeted with silence.

We all approach mourning differently, just as we all approach death differently. We approach death differently in youth than in old age; a person can change attitudes toward death 1,000 times. What does it mean to lose something forever?

My children experienced a lot of death early in their lives. By the time my oldest was 12, he had buried all four of his grandparents. Permanent loss like that is a hard blow. At the end of Shakespeare's *King Lear*, the king is carrying his dead daughter and says, "Thou'lt come no more – never never never never never." That's five nevers. Never means never. Whatever was there is gone, gone for good. We will not experience it again.

When loss is permanent, there's nothing to do but mourn. There is nothing else. Every way we turn, the loss is there, and there is nothing we can do about it. It can't be fixed, despite the dreams our culture has about fixing everything. The loss can't be turned into a not-loss. It is a loss, plain and simple.

It leaves a hole that can never be patched. Because of that hole, we will never be filled up the same way again. There will always be an emptiness. Mourning involves coming to understand what that feels like. It is living with a new nothing, a hug that embraces only thin air.

When my son hugs a grandmother who is not there, a pain comes that reminds him, and all of us, who we really are. We are beings that have no fix. Our world has a rip in it, a tear that can't be repaired.

Mourning is what it feels like to be fallen. Mourning is the moment – increasingly rare in our world – where we directly encounter a truth, maybe a great truth, maybe the great truth:

things are broken and cannot be made better.

The direct encounter with our fallen nature: a precious experience, an experience that alters lives. Mourning pushes our expectations from here to there, to the afterlife. This world is broken, but that is wrong: It should not be that way. We were not meant to live like this.

We were built for something better. Therefore, this place cannot be our home; we belong in another plane of reality. We can sense it if we try, but in mourning we do not have to try: the loss hits us right in the face and says: Not here. There.

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



*Becky Boyle prepares Chapter Coordinators for their small group session during their planning meeting this summer.*



# Meeting the Monks

## A visit with Fr. Vincent Tobin, OSB



Fr. Vincent Tobin, OSB

The first time I saw Fr. Vincent was several years ago when my husband and I attended our first couples retreat weekend. It was our first time to visit Saint Meinrad and, upon entering the Retreat Center, Fr. Vincent was at the door to his office speaking with someone. I remember thinking, childishly, “Wow. A real, live monk.”

It came as such a blessing that, some 10 years later, after my oblation, Fr. Meinrad Brune, OSB, suggested that Fr. Vincent work with me as my spiritual director. It is an absolute treasure for me to get to know this kind, intelligent person, who also has a delightful sense of humor. He has helped me immensely to develop a deeper understanding of Benedictine spirituality and how that applies to my real and sometimes crazy life.

These are some questions Fr. Vincent answered that might help you get to know him a little better.

**Q.** *Let's begin at the beginning. Where are you from and what brought you to Saint Meinrad?*

I was born and grew up in Pittsburgh (with an h). Fr. Hannon, a parish priest, asked me, fresh out of grade school, and three other high school grads to come on a visit to a place I never heard of called St. Meinrad in Indiana. Where's Indiana?

**Q.** *I know that you lived in Italy for about 20 years. Can you share a particular story from that time in your life that might help oblates connect their lives to Benedictine spirituality, perhaps a lesson learned?*

I went *tabula rasa*, meaning clean slate, with little Italian language study and no preparation whatsoever for the full-time job I was to take on: Segretario Generale del Pontificio Ateneo S. Anselmo, the Benedictine university on the Aventine Hill in Rome. No one, absolutely no one, was able to give me a job description (there was none), and so I made a deal with God: if you want me here, you have to give me 24/7 help.

St. Benedict in the *Rule* speaks of taking on seemingly impossible jobs. In surprising, and often painful, ways,

the help came. I had faith but it had to – and did – grow into personal trust.

Along with the principal job, I taught Greek at the Gregorian and Greek and Latin at S. Anselmo and served the American Cassinese, Swiss American and Brazilian Benedictine congregations as procurator general (their man in Rome). During most of the summers, I drove to northern England and did parish work in the Diocese of Shrewsbury.

**Q.** *At first you served as the Archabbey Guest House and Retreat Center manager. You could say you are the “face of Benedictine spirituality” to the weary pilgrim. How does your Benedictine spirituality inform what you do in this position?*

After 16 years at St. Anselm and three years as homiletics director at the North American College, the American seminary in Rome, I came back home to Saint Meinrad in 2005. Abbot Justin asked me to take on the job as manager of the newly opened Guest House and Retreat Center, with St. Benedict's admonition, “Let all guests be received as Christ,” as the job description.

I held that position for some years, but with the renovation of older buildings into modern guest accommodations, the job needed professional personnel. That's when I became full-time chaplain to Guest Services.

**Q.** *You have been, and continue to be, a spiritual director to so many searching souls. If there was one piece of advice on God's love and walking life's journey with Christ as St. Benedict did, what would that be?*

*Continued on p. 11*

# Commentaries can help oblates better understand the *Rule*



Ann Smith

When you are invested as a novice, you receive a copy of *RB1980*, the standard American translation of the *Rule of St. Benedict*, along

with a reading schedule that takes you through the *Rule* three times each year.

“The *Rule* is comparable to an old heavy red wine that is enjoyed in small sips. The one who exceeds the correct portion or consumes the wine without a feel for its qualities is to be pitied,” writes Georg Holzherr, former abbot of Einsiedeln Abbey, in the introduction to his commentary on the *Rule*.

As a novice oblate, I did not have Holzherr’s feel for the qualities of the *Rule*. My reading was superficial. I did not have enough background knowledge to understand how a rule written 1,500 years ago for monks living in community could relate to me, today, in my life as wife and mother. I started off on my commentary journey and it made all the difference.

A commentary is a collection of comments on a particular text, written to deepen the understanding of that text. There are different types of commentaries on the *Rule*, and staring at the shelves full of them in the Alcuin Oblate Library can be confusing. To help start on a commentary journey, here are three types of commentaries with two of my favorites from each type, plus two more that are too good to miss.

**Reflective commentaries**, my term, are written to help modern readers, mostly laypeople, understand how we can incorporate the *Rule* into our lives. Reflective commentaries are an excellent introduction to the *Rule*. They can also be used as refresher courses. Two examples are:

*A Life-Giving Way: a Commentary on the Rule of St. Benedict* by Esther de Waal (1995, Liturgical Press). De Waal bases her commentary on the *RB1980* translation of the *Rule*, and her commentary is written chapter by chapter. (I think de Waal’s commentary on chapters 8-18, concerning the Liturgy of the Hours, should be required reading for all oblates.)

*The Rule of Benedict: A Spirituality for the 21st Century* by Joan Chittister, OSB (2010, Liturgical Press, previously published as *The Rule of Benedict: Insights for the Ages*). Chittister is a Benedictine Sister of Erie. For her commentary, she uses *A Reader’s Version of the Rule of Saint Benedict in Inclusive Language*, which is based on *RB1980*. Her commentary is divided into the dated sections that we all use in our daily reading of the *Rule*.

**Scholarly Commentaries** are not for the faint of heart. They presuppose a basic familiarity with not only the *Rule of Benedict*, but with other early monastic rules, writings and Latin. These commentaries are concerned with Benedict’s intent at the time he wrote his *Rule*, and where his *Rule* agrees with or differs from other early rules and writers. These include the *Rule* both in translation and in Latin and comment on the *Rule* line by line. Two of my favorites are:

*Benedict’s Rule: A Translation and Commentary* by Terrence Kardong

OSB (1996, Liturgical Press). Kardong was a monk at Assumption Abbey. He says in his preface that he thought he could use *RB1980* for his commentary but spent all his time arguing with it, so he uses his own translation, which he says emphasizes accuracy over elegance. He is very interested in why Benedict used specific words and phrases in his *Rule* and how that gives us insight into the meaning. He also points out where other commentaries may agree or disagree with his interpretations.

*The Rule of Benedict: An Invitation to the Christian Life* by Georg Holzherr, OSB (2016, Liturgical Press). This newest edition of Holzherr’s commentary is based on *RB1980*. Holzherr is a former abbot of Einsiedeln Abbey. In his introduction, he says, “In our times the *Rule* should be accessible to all engaged Christians. For this reason, this commentary is focused mainly on the spirituality of the *Rule*.” His inspiring commentary, at over 650 pages, is detailed, full of footnotes and stories from the Desert Fathers, and is wonderfully readable.

**Topical Commentaries** are commentaries on a specific topic or group of topics in the *Rule*. They are excellent choices for our Lenten reading. Two topical commentaries are:

*Seventy-Four Tools For Good Living: Reflections on the Fourth Chapter of Benedict’s Rule* by Michael Casey, OCSO (2014, Liturgical Press). This is meant to be read slowly, one section at a time. He points out that if every day we ponder one of the first 73 items on Benedict’s tool list, “we should traverse the whole list five times in a year. The final point, ‘never to despair in God’s mercy,’ is worth

recalling every day.” Casey is pithy and excellent for bringing oneself to account each day.

*The Rule of Benedict: Christian Monastic Wisdom for Daily Living* by The Rev. Dr. Jane Tomaine (2016, Skylight Paths Publishing). Tomaine is an Episcopalian priest who has lived with and taught the *Rule of Benedict* for many years. She uses the universal language version of the *Rule* used by Sr. Joan Chittister. From the *Rule* she pulls out Benedict’s teachings on 10 topics, such as turning to God, cultivating love, choosing truth, crafting a meaningful life. This is an excellent choice for readers new to the *Rule*.

And finally, two commentaries that are simply too good to miss:

*A Share in the Kingdom: A Commentary on the Rule of St. Benedict for Oblates* by Benet Tvedten, OSB (1989, Liturgical Press). Br. Benet began his journey as an oblate, became a monk at Blue Cloud Abbey, and then the oblate director. In his introduction he says, “If the monastery is the school of the Lord’s service, Oblates are students in its extension program. The *Rule* is their textbook.”

*Preferring Christ: A Devotional Commentary on the Rule of St. Benedict* by Norvene Vest (2004, Morehouse Publishing). Vest is a spiritual director, wife of an Episcopal priest, and an oblate at St. Andrew’s Abbey. She uses a translation made by Fr. Luke Dysinger, OSB. She encourages her readers to use the *Rule* for *lectio divina*. Each section of her commentary follows the basic structure of *lectio*, which is text, comment, reflection, prayer/response.

Ann Smith, oblate  
Gahanna, OH



Fr. Justin DuVall, OSB, presents the keynote address to the Chapter Coordinators at their planning meeting this summer.



The Bloomington Chapter celebrated summer with a social gathering and pitch-in meal on July 11. The food was delicious, the music merry and the fellowship heartwarming. We look forward to hosting this each year. Thank you to all who made this possible.

*continued from p. 9*

By way of answer, I began to wonder why all kinds of people began coming to me for spiritual direction. I understood that listening, respect for the individual, total confidentiality and dependence on the Spirit in a one-to-one relationship in time led two people to discover how the Holy Spirit moves. I did a summer course in counseling at New York U. that pulled many basic ideas together. I see the New Testament as the essential source of pastoral theology and therefore of spiritual direction.

**Q.** Please tell me about one of your fondest moments of living on the Hill with your brothers in Christ.

As frater novices, one weekly job was cleaning the cells of the professed fraters. Cleaning rooms in the wilting summer heat in full habit tested the spirits. Several of the brethren would leave one piece of candy as a thank you. That said it all.

And there was a knee operation, which kept me from joining the others in the daily walk. My classmate Frater Augustine walked with me “in ways that were level and smooth” for weeks. “Bear one another’s burdens, and thus you will fulfill the law of Christ.”

*Note: In May, Fr. Vincent celebrated his 60th jubilee of ordination. I was fortunate to be at Saint Meinrad as witness to that. We are grateful to all he gives the community. He cares for us. So the next time you visit the Retreat Center and you see Fr. Vincent touring the halls on his “Rascal Scooter,” stop and say hello. You’ll be glad you did.*

Becky Boyle, oblate  
Bloomington, IN



**Like us on  
Facebook**

# Oblate Study Days

## focus on chant and liturgical music



*Br. John Mark Falkenhain, OSB, teaches a conference on singing the psalm tones during the Oblate Study Days on June 12.*

Sixty-five oblates of Saint Meinrad Archabbey gathered for Oblate Study Days June 10-13. The theme was chant, an important aspect of our oblate experience. We were led to a better understanding of what chant is and why it is an integral part of our worship by Br. John Mark Falkenhain, OSB, and Novice Dennis Reyes, OSB.

The goals of the conferences were, according to Br. John Mark, appreciation, understanding, better singing, better participation, and connecting to other dimensions of the Benedictine charism.

Chant is witness and has a missionary dimension because we are called to love God with our whole minds, hearts and souls – and our neighbors as ourselves. Through chant, we can prefigure the Kingdom, creating a slice of heaven in the world as we strive to live together in harmony and show people that heaven is possible right here.

Novice Dennis reminded us that chant is a song, but not a fixed rhythm. It has more form and more control than

a hymn. The community of Saint Meinrad chants in the Gregorian tradition, creating harmony as they pray together and are united in faith.

The text always comes first in chant, and the cultural affect reflects our mood and feelings. There are a variety of modes, with the chant beginning and ending on different notes and including specific notes, but a mode is not a scale: it is simply a mode.

Novice Dennis distributed various sheets of chant that are used at Saint Meinrad, so we could see the notes and understand the various modes. He led us in chanting these, helping us to see exactly what happens as the notes go up and down.

The dimensions of music are melody, harmony, rhythm (meter) and text. Most chant is melody without harmony and rhythm but not meter. Chant comes from the text, with the melody always second. Chant is all about the Word of God. It is sung speech (sung Word). It is most often in unison (melody), with no harmony.

It is used primarily in liturgical settings. It is modal. It is not metrical (rhythm). Different types of chant are used for different liturgies. In the Liturgy of the Hours, there are hymns and antiphons. In the Mass, there is the introit, gradual and alleluia.

English and Latin chant sound very different, but it is wise to remember that it is the texts that are sacred, not the melodies. Much of the Office that we use was composed by Fr. Columba Kelly, OSB, as there was a realization that 16th- and 17th-century melody sometimes took over the text.

Originally, pitches were not notated. Singers relied on oral memory, because there were no notations above the text to indicate the importance or interpretation of a note. Eventually, however, the practice of notations evolved to clarify meaning and indicate the importance of a note.

This information about chant became more real to us during Fr. Harry Hagan's visual presentation of some manuscripts and his explanation of their importance. In 816, all monks were under the *Rule of Benedict* and these manuscripts were created in monastic communities by monks and others who contributed to the development of chant. Fr. Harry then took us to the library to look at manuscripts from centuries ago that were on display.

On Wednesday morning, Novice Dennis gave each of us a copy of "Salve Regina" to help us understand the development of a particular hymn or chant. He underscored the importance of the text, with the music drawing out the meaning. Questions that writers and composers asked

themselves, not only in medieval times, but also today include: Is this by and for an amateur or professional? Is it for a congregation or a particular person?

Clearly, liturgical music is specifically tailored for a particular moment or celebration, and the charism of chant is particularly Benedictine. It is participatory, and it accommodates the needs of everyone. There is repetition – to stress an idea – but also because it makes memorization easy, and recitation draws you to the text.

Chant also underpins our theology. We sing our beliefs – over and over again – and in that practice we

become more aware who we are and what we believe. During the Study Days, we enjoyed two musical presentations.

A program of sacred music was presented by Nov. Christian Lumsden, OSB, playing the organ; Br. Joel Blaize, OSB, playing the fipple flute and singing baritone; Br. John Mark Falkenhain, OSB, playing the quadrazith and singing tenor; and Sr. Jeana Visel, OSB, singing soprano.

Their selections included “Lucis Creator optime” by Marcel Dupre, which seeks to preserve the ambience or ethos of mode eight, and “Ubi

Caritas” by Jeanne Demessieux, composed in the post-Romantic style, a piece meant to preserve the ambience of mode six – a thing still heard in jazz today.

A chant program was presented by the Saint Meinrad Chant Schola and included “Domine Jesu” (Offertory for the Mass for the Dead) and “Visionem” (Communio for Transfiguration and Second Sunday of Lent). As Aldous Huxley said, “Music comes next to silence to express the inexpressible.” So Benedictine.

*Cathey Byers, oblate  
Bradenton, FL*

# Day of Recollection:

## Fr. Adrian Burke, OSB, shares wisdom on being accountable

The Feast of St. Benedict offers an opportunity for oblates to gather and share stories, an activity that also happens on other special oblate retreats.

This year the one-day retreat led by Fr. Adrian Burke, OSB, called the oblates to examine themselves in the light of “Being an Accountable Person.”

The beginning session called on oblates to re-center, to be Christ for others. To reach this, oblates must be what God desires them to be. Oblates must develop a relationship with God that seeks to love one another by seeing the good in others. This must be a daily part of the oblate’s life.

Oblates are called to love in the *agape* sense, i.e., love originating from God, the covenant love of God. We are to turn away from *eros*, which focuses only on love for the sake of the self or ego. We need to identify Satan as our rival, so as to transcend the ordinary

and move to a true *metanoia*. We then can become Christ in the world. The second session focused on resonance with an emphasis on obedience to God. Oblates remember that they are Christ for others and should listen and hear Christ and respond with obedience and humility. Scripture helps us to resonate, to respond in oneness, reverberating with God’s will.

Session three brought the issue of discipline and the ability to connect all the points of the retreat. Oblates train through the Word, meditation and contemplation. A good oblate serves God through work, spiritual reading and self-care. Fr. Adrian made it perfectly clear that to do God’s work, self-care is crucial: rest, sleep, diet.

A retreat with Fr. Adrian is a joy as he mentions so many writers who can lead to better understanding of spirituality and Scripture. He brings to the front words that connect to

understanding the Scriptures and to helping listeners know how to become better oblates, better people, better Christians. Most significantly, he assists, encourages, coaxes and urges those attending to be better Christians.

Someone serious about the retreat and growing closer to God receives so much information to use to become a better person, a better Christian, an oblate being drawn closer to God, a person that God wants us to be.

Oblation is a special gift that Fr. Adrian brought to light, reminding us of our opportunities to grow closer to God through *lectio divina* and Scripture study.

*Donna Waller Harper, oblate  
Antioch, TN*

# Dear Abbey:

## Have questions? We have answers!

*Do you have questions for Abbey? If so, submit them to [boylex3@hotmail.com](mailto:boylex3@hotmail.com).*

Dear Abbey,

I was recently sharing my Investiture Day with a friend of mine who should be preparing for investiture later this year. We both live in Florida. I explained how special each and every moment was for me. My preparation began with the flight reservation and the realization that soon I would be taking the first step of making a lifelong promise of oblation to the Benedictine community at Saint Meinrad.

My plans included staying four nights on the Hill: I arrived Thursday; spent Friday praying with the monks in the Archabbey Church, touring the campus and finding space to meditate; Saturday was a full day with the investitures of the novices and those making their final oblations; Sunday was another day filled with prayer and fellowship; and then I departed on Monday.

I knew my friend could see how special these moments were for me, and yet she had tears in her eyes. I asked her what was wrong and she told me how much meeting the oblates of our chapter meant to her and that she truly wanted to take the next step, but that she really didn't have the finances to pay for such a trip, which included airfare, ground transportation to Saint Meinrad, plus the cost of staying on the Hill. She said she was very sad by all of this and didn't know what to do.

Abbey, I want to help and support my friend. I do have a little money that I would most certainly give her, but it is not enough to help her with all of the expenses. Do you have any ideas or suggestions?

Please, we're needing an angel.

New Novice in Florida

---

Dear NNF,

First, let Abbey congratulate you on making your investiture and spending time at Saint Meinrad walking the path that will lead you ever closer to Christ. It sounds like you had a wonderful experience.

Next, we do indeed have angels in the Oblate Office, so you've requested the right source of support. In fact, there is money set aside in the Angel Fund just for this sort of extenuating circumstance. The Oblate Office does provide some assistance to those candidates and novices who are in financial need to cover their expenses on the Hill while they are there for the Rites of Investiture and Oblation.

Please encourage your friend to contact the Oblate Office and they will help guide her through the process. In addition, any oblate may donate specifically toward this fund in order that other candidates and novices may benefit from the opportunity of investiture and oblation with the monks and oblates of Saint Meinrad in the Archabbey Church. Just write a check to the Oblate Office noting that it is for the Angel Fund.

Abbey thanks you for your care of your friend.

In Benedict,  
Abbey

## A hospital chaplain reflects on mourning



*Edward Huff*

As a hospital chaplain, I witnessed mourning and grieving on a daily basis. Struggling to be present in someone else's moments of

mourning and loss was an ongoing act of employing my Benedictine oblate training and values.

Juxtapose this with the reality of people who are often non-Catholic or non-believers. Still, sitting with them in some of their deepest moments of emotional expression, vulnerability, and pain was a grace of presence.

Chapter 36 of the *Rule of St. Benedict* states, "... sick brothers must be patiently borne with because serving them leads to a greater reward." My reward was not always realized to me then, but now those moments of shared mourning – moments of anguish, despair and intense pain – help to always keep before me these loftier summits of the teachings.

Under God's guidance and protection, "you can set out for the loftier summits of the teaching and virtues ..., and under God's protection you will reach them. Amen." (RB 73)

*Chaplain Edward Huff, oblate  
Henderson, KY*

## Lexington oblats celebrate feast day

On July 11, the feast of St. Benedict, oblats in and around Lexington, KY, gathered for Mass, a potluck, and some prayer and discussion. Seven oblats and their families were in attendance.

We are interested in gathering monthly to continue building a small community here. All oblats and oblate novices in Lexington or surrounding areas are welcome to join us. We plan to meet on the fourth Saturday of the month at the Cathedral of Christ the King at 3 p.m. For more information, contact Kerri Baunach at [kasclar@gmail.com](mailto:kasclar@gmail.com). Join us for our upcoming gathering on October 26.

## Recent deaths of Archabbey co-workers

It is with much sadness that the Oblate Office announces the death of two dedicated employees of the Archabbey, Mike Ziemianski, vice president of the Development Office, and Barbara Balka, who also worked in the Development Office.

## INVESTITURES

June 8, 2019 – Todd Berry of Marshall, IL; Patricia DeLuca, Christine Johnson and Debra Ryan, all of Versailles, KY; Joy Foster of Indianapolis, IN; Laurie Gessner of Cincinnati, OH; Rev. Kathy Hurt of Louisville, KY; Kevin Hinkle of Brownsburg, IN; Mark Plaiss of Fox Lake, IL ♦

## OBLATIONS

June 8, 2019 – Dan Beavers of Cambria, IL; Laura Bridge of Beavercreek, OH; Robert Mortenson Jr. of Fort Wayne, IN; Stephen O'Connell of Salem, VA; Virginia White of Cannelton, IN

May 15, 2019 – Stuart Noffsinger of Putnamville Correctional Facility, Greencastle, IN ♦

## DEATHS

Dr. John Wallhausser, Berea, KY, July 18, 2019 ♦

## UPCOMING EVENTS

December 7, 2019: Investitures & Oblations

December 13-15, 2019: Saint Meinrad December Retreat

January 3-5, 2020: Novices Only Retreat ♦

## VOLUNTEERS APPRECIATED

Recent volunteers in the Oblate Office were Br. Stanley Rother Wagner, OSB, Ann Smith, Mary Campanelli, Fr. Mateo Zamora, OSB, Ted Castronova, Novice Dennis Reyes, OSB, Becky Boyle, Marie Kobos and David Miller. ♦

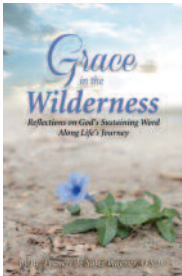


*The oblats of the Columbus/Lancaster (OH) Chapter celebrated the feast of St. Benedict on July 11 at St. Therese Shrine in Columbus. Mass was offered by Msgr. Robert Noon.*

---

## Reading Room

*Grace in the Wilderness – Reflections on God’s Sustaining Word Along Life’s Journey* by Br. Francis de Sales Wagner, OSB (2013, Saint Meinrad Archabbey, 235 pages)



This year our *Bona Opera* came with a twist. We were encouraged to select a book and read it for Lent, for as St. Benedict instructed, “During this time of Lent each one is to receive a book from the library, and is to read the whole of it straight through.”

As I sat in my prayer space and looked over the many titles that my bookshelf held, I immediately identified the one I would read: *Grace in the Wilderness – Reflections on God’s Sustaining Word Along Life’s Journey*, authored by one of Saint Meinrad’s very own, Br. Francis de Sales Wagner, OSB.

Not only was the book written by a monk of Saint Meinrad whom I had met, but each chapter was just sufficient enough in length to be read during my morning prayer time and the number of chapters numbered enough to get me through Lent and the whole of Easter season. I was excited.

Br. Francis pens his own introduction to the book beginning with Jeremiah 31, “Thus says the Lord: The people who survived the sword found grace in the wilderness; when my people sought for rest, the Lord appeared to them from far away. I will turn their mourning into joy.”

I was captured in the very beginning. Right now, and especially this past Lent 2019, my life is a challenge; nothing tragic, but a challenge. Each day, I am being called up for work that I feel oftentimes ill prepared to manage. As one who often found herself lost as in the wilderness, I knew this book was for me.

The entries in the book are a collection of meditations from Br. Francis’ own prayer, study and reflection primarily gathered from posts on his personal blog. He explains that while “most were written with a view toward the liturgical year in the Roman Catholic Church and its cycle of readings for Mass, they (the meditations) have been adapted and arranged thematically” under topics such as Grace, Prayer, Christian Life, Faith and Hope.

I’m not exaggerating when I say that each meditation provided me some opportunity for pause and thought, helped direct my heart toward a more meaningful conversation with God through prayer and fed me for the day. This book is a beautiful source for daily prayer and meditation, no matter what season you may find yourself.

“You are not alone. Whatever the circumstances may be and no matter how you may feel at any given moment, no matter what you may have done or failed to do, no matter how painful or hopeless things may seem, one thing is certain: God is with you. There is hope for your future.”  
(Wagner)

Becky Boyle, oblate  
Bloomington, IN