

What it means to be perfect

“An eye for an eye” is retaliation without escalation. It is proportional. This was a step forward in moral thinking from that of primitive people whose behavior relied heavily on escalating retribution and revenge.

However, Matthew’s Gospel teaches, “But I say to you, Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also; and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well... Be perfect, as your Heavenly Father is perfect” (Mt. 5:38ff).

Later, Jewish thought developed the Silver Rule. “Do not do unto others what you would not have them do unto you.” This was hinted at in Tobit and taught by the Jewish teacher Hillel. Jesus adapted this teaching, adding a positive

approach, “In everything do to others as you would have them do to you,” (Mt. 7:12) called the Golden Rule.

Jesus did not stop there. His next step, “You have heard it said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But, I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.” Jesus raised the level of conscience and holiness. This is what it means to be perfect.

How do we do that?

Luke’s Gospel points us toward this holiness through mercy, restoration, reconciliation and love. “But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return... Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. Do not judge, and

you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be



Artwork by Br. Martin Eispenner, OSB

condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; give and it will be given to you” (Luke 6:35-38a).

In this issue of the *Benedictine Oblate Quarterly*, we explore Jesus’ call to perfection. “Be perfect therefore, as your Heavenly Father is perfect” (Mt. 5:48).

*Kathleen Polansky, oblate
New Salisbury, IN*

A POINT TO PONDER FROM *The Rule*

Live by God's commandments every day; treasure chastity, harbor neither hatred nor jealousy of anyone, and do nothing out of envy. Do not love quarreling; shun arrogance. Respect the elders and love the young. Pray for your enemies out of love for Christ. If you have a dispute with someone, make peace with him before the sun goes down. And finally, never lose hope in God's mercy.

*Rule of St. Benedict,
Chapter 4:63-74*

Benedictine Oblate Quarterly 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, Angie McDonald and Eunice Taylor

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
www.saintmeinrad.org

©2022, Saint Meinrad Archabbey

What are we imperfect Christians to do?



*Archabbot Kurt
Stasiak, OSB*

then there's every fifth-grader's dream: running home after school, waving the arithmetic test high so Mother can see that "100%" written in red.

The problem, of course, is that those moments don't last forever. A 300 game comes to an end, and you have to start all over. That perfect pitcher most likely will get clobbered at least once that season. And to be honest, I can't remember getting a 100 in arithmetic even once!

Yet, we not only want to be perfect, but we're well aware that Jesus tells us to be so! Twice in St. Matthew's Gospel we hear those words. The chapter that contains the beatitudes concludes with this command, "So be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect" (5:48).

Bowlers achieve a perfect game when they register 12 consecutive strikes from frames 1 through 10. Baseball pitchers throw a perfect game when they retire every batter from inning 1 through 9. And

And later on, when a rich young man approaches Jesus asking what he has to do to gain eternal life, Jesus instructs him, "If you wish to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor" (19:21).

So, what are we imperfect Christians to do?

The Jesus who encourages us to be perfect is the same Jesus who knows we aren't. After all, Jesus took on our human flesh to save and redeem us in our weakness, not to reward us for flawless behavior. As He never tires of reminding those who blame Him for shunning the boastful and sharing a table with the humble, He "did not come to call the righteous but sinners" (Mark 2:17).

We call Jesus the Divine Physician. The prescription He gives to those of us who are imperfect? (All of his patients are.) "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness. I will rather boast most gladly of my weaknesses, in order that the power of Christ may dwell with me" (2 Corinthians 12:9). That's why, thanks to Him, we can "pick up our mat and walk" (John 5:8).

*Archabbot Kurt Stasiak, OSB
Saint Meinrad Archabbey*

Admitting to imperfection can be humbling



Janis Dopp

good work, you must pray to him most

St. Benedict doesn't waste any time letting us know just how important perfection should be in our lives. In Verse 4 of the Prologue he says, "First of all, every time you begin a

earnestly to bring it to perfection." There is a lot packed into that one sentence, but what is important for us here is to note the "every time" – not just occasionally – and the recognition that we cannot do this on our own. We will need to "pray ... most earnestly."

Perfection is one of those qualities that pulls us toward it and pushes us away. There is the desire to be recognized as

someone who strives for it and there is the fear that if we achieve it, it will continue to be demanded of us in the future. It is quite humbling to recognize and admit to our imperfection. It is even more humbling to have life throw us a curve ball we hadn't planned on – and then to pray most earnestly that God will bring that to perfection as well.

It has always been easy for me to tell someone who is suffering that I will pray for them. That is an honorable intention. It is how we connect as a community, remaining in solidarity with one another through thick and thin. Over this past year, I have depended on the prayers of others to help get me through a regimen of chemotherapy that was not part of my life plan. I have had to ask myself if this is a “good work” that I have begun and must see through. Could this actually be part of God's plan for

me? And what am I supposed to learn through it all?

Perfection is about attaining a state in life where we totally depend on God from one moment to the next to see us through our pain, our uncertainties, our deepest fears. We have to pray most earnestly that we will keep Him by our side when the going gets really tough. And it is recognizing that He shows us his love through the people He has put into our lives who are his tangible presence for us.

I want to take this opportunity to thank the Oblate Community for their unflagging support as I have faced the challenges of a cancer diagnosis that changed the course of my life in ways that I could never have imagined. I thought that I knew what my days were going to look like. I was wrong.

I thought I would always be able to run up and down the stairs of my

home without thinking. I was wrong. I thought my pastimes of baking and gardening were there for the taking. I was wrong. But, because of your love and commitment to our community, I have awakened every morning understanding that I do not face the day alone.

If I had only a head knowledge of community until now, I face the future with a much more perfect understanding of how community works, and of how utterly beautiful and necessary it is to live a life that is focused on being exactly what God wants us to be. I am utterly imperfect, and utterly grateful for each one of you. You have helped to bring the *Rule of St. Benedict* to life for me in ways that I never could have expected. You are my best teachers as I face the future.

*Janis Dopp
Oblate Director*

Gospel use of ‘perfect’ is abstract



Fr. Joseph Cox, OSB

context and to realize the limits of translating Greek into English.

In the Gospels, the word “perfect” occurs only in Matthew 5:48 and 19:12. In Luke's parallel to this passage, Luke 6:36, the word “merciful” is used instead of “perfect.” Scholars tell us that the term “perfect” translated from Greek into English is closer to “finished” or “lacking nothing to be complete.”

Some scholars link the Gospel's use of this term with its use by the Greek

philosophers, who felt that if something were perfect, then it had fully fulfilled its intended function. Some scholars believe Jesus is speaking of a kind of excellence that would identify his followers and manifest the Kingdom of God. Other scholars believe Jesus is setting a goal that is definitely impossible, so that we will realize its impossibility and, therefore, help us to be more humble. In other words, the meaning of “perfect” is abstract.

When we try to be perfectionists, it can be tempting to place impossible demands on ourselves and others. This can result in negative thinking, impatience, and a feeling of superiority. To think that we can be perfect tends to over-build our ego and our individualism. It may make us believe that, by our own efforts, we can achieve accomplishments without God or anyone else.

The only one who is perfect is God. This does not mean we cannot set our goals high and attempt to be like God. In the context of Matthew 5:48, the high goal God is asking of us is the love of others. Matthew 5:48 comes at the end of a section (5:21-48) in which Jesus gives examples of the conduct demanded of Christian disciples. In this section, he teaches about anger, adultery, taking oaths, retaliation, and love of enemies. Jesus says his disciples should not be satisfied with society's usual standards of conduct. They are to surpass them.

“Perfect” refers to the “wholeness” of God. Jesus calls us to the “wholeness,” the “completeness” of God who cares for and loves not just some, but all people.

*Fr. Joseph Cox, OSB
Oblate Chaplain*

Notes for Novices: Baked to perfection



Br. Michael Reyes,
OSB

Dessert aficionados love to search for the perfect pie. I remember going out of my way to attend pie contests in search of the perfect pie. For a pie to be

considered perfect, it must have the right texture, color, design and flavor. A panel of judges carefully examines each pie to see which ones measure up. This rigorous and highly competitive contest reveals the perfect winning pie.

But what if the recipe for perfecting our lives is as easy as pie? Too good to be true, right? What if the formula for having a perfect life is already written in the scriptures? You only need to follow two rules: Loving God and loving your neighbor as yourself.

Christ rearticulated this in the New Testament and said, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets” (Mt. 22:37-40).

It is not surprising that the prophets of the old and new testaments speak of these two rules with passion and perseverance because of their significance.

The *Rule of St. Benedict* amplifies these two rules. The practices enumerated in the holy *Rule* can be categorized into loving God and loving your neighbor. There are items in the *Rule* that strengthen and make our relationship with God more

profound, and there are methods that transform us into better and benevolent neighbors.

But wait, there is more. What if Christ adds a twist that makes it really perfect? Christ augments these two crucial rules with a new instruction. Christ states, “If you wish to be perfect, go, sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me” (Mt. 19:21).

Too difficult to follow, right? Even the rich man in the scripture who obeyed the two rules left after hearing this. Perfection is indeed tricky. It is not an easy road to travel, but it is the only way to go.

St. Benedict proposes in the *Rule* that the denial of worldly possessions and desires is key to holiness – perfect. Countless articles of the *Rule* teach the emptying of oneself of worldly pleasures. The *Rule of St. Benedict* does not only instruct a person how to be good or to live a pious life, but it is also the recipe to achieve perfection.

Is it even worth it to undergo the procedure to perfection? Yes! It is the definitive way to be like our creator, and it prepares us for the coming of Christ. As Christ says, “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Mt. 5:48).

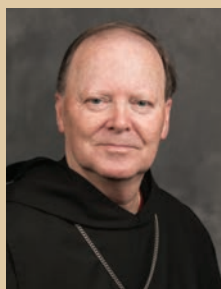
But let this not worry you because Christ knows that it is difficult for us to be perfect. He asserts that our loving, merciful Father is always there for us. “For mortals it is impossible, but for God all things are possible” (Mt. 19:26). We need to surrender ourselves to the loving mercy of God. He will not leave our side in our journey to perfection. We are drawn to God, and He desires all of us. Not bad at all, right?

We are whisked to perfection in our life on earth while we wait for the second coming of Christ. When the timer of life rings, God takes us out with his own hands and says, “You are now done to perfection.” Can’t wait, right?! Let us abide by the recipe containing the two rules and persevere to be perfect. Voila! We will surely come out perfect.

Br. Michael Reyes, OSB
Oblate Novice Mentor

Oblate March Retreat

Join us on the Hill for
the annual Oblate March Retreat!



“The Passions of Christ”

March 20-22, 2022,
Saint Meinrad Archabbey

Archabbot Kurt Stasiak, OSB, speaker

Notes from Novices:

Perfection: It's not about being free of mistakes



Mark Plaiss

The first thing to note about perfection is a key word in Jesus' admonition to the rich man: "If you wish to be perfect..." (Mt. 19:21). We have to desire perfection; we must choose it.

The second thing about perfection is understanding what it is not. Perfection, at least in the biblical sense, is not about being free of mistakes. Nor is perfection about never committing a sin. Rather, perfection is getting rid of everything in your life that separates, distracts or impedes love of, and union with, God.

For the rich young man, that which separates, distracts or impedes his relationship with Jesus is his wealth; the rich young man loves wealth more than Jesus.

Another component of perfection is the act of following. "Then, come and follow me" (Matthew 19:21). In other

words, perfection is based on being in close association with Jesus. True perfection cannot be had otherwise.

Very few passages in the Bible cause more consternation to my students than this admonition of Jesus (the top prize for consternation goes to the Ban of the Old Testament, but that's another story). "How can we be perfect?" they ask. "We're only human," they plead. When I explain the above, they are dubious. "But," I counter, "nothing will be impossible for God" (Luke 1:37).

Which implores the question: how do I go about eliminating that which separates, distracts or impedes love of, and union with, God?

For oblates, the answer lies in the three promises and five duties of the oblate. Other means are available (the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius, for example, or cultivation of Carmelite spirituality), but we oblates choose the method of the Benedictines.

And though the Benedictines are our model, the Benedictines always point

us to that perfect evening sacrifice: the Paschal Mystery of Jesus of Nazareth. The Paschal Mystery is the core of perfection; it is the Gospel: when you die; you don't stay dead.

Perfection is not gained immediately. A lifetime is required to attain it, because it takes a lifetime to weed out self-will and plant good seed. Patience is the order of the day in spiritual combat. Anyone desiring perfection should heed Scripture: "You need endurance to do the will of God and receive what he has promised" (Hebrew 10:36). Be prepared for battle.

The payoff, of course, is becoming the human being God created: to be in union with God; life everlasting. We usually call that heaven.

Perfection is nothing other than polishing up the image and likeness of God in us. Self-will tarnishes that image and likeness. With God's help, and only with God's help, we can brighten that image.

Mark Plaiss, oblate novice
Fox Lake, IL

Look to the Trinity as a model of community

Certainly, we imperfect humans cannot contemplate perfection. Of course, God's act of creation is a perfect action. Free will has allowed us to exist in a non-perfect reality.

Christ, when He became human, brought the perfection of heaven to earth in his very self. Thus, He offers us his life of perfection for us to model.

In terms of St. Benedict, we grasp the notions of stability and persistence. The *Rule* developed by St. Benedict concerns itself with community. As oblates, we too focus on community. We can see no better example than the Trinity. As a triune community of Church, we are the living Body of Christ. That immediately implies community.

Submission to the abbot, submission to God, and Jesus during the Eucharist keep the community alive.

Two thousand-plus years of Christianity, of celebrating the Eucharist, has guided the community to stability, and its persistence will lead us to permanence.

Jim Graham, oblate
Bluffton, SC

Tribute to Fr. Justin DuVall

Editor's note: Fr. Justin DuVall, OSB, former archabbot of Saint Meinrad, died on October 5.



Fr. Justin DuVall, OSB

Sr. Jane Becker, OSB, a sister of Monastery Immaculate Conception in Ferdinand, IN, wrote to me saying, “He was a peaceful man.” Anyone who knew him would recognize how true this statement is.

Fr. Justin DuVall, OSB, who passed away peacefully on the morning of October 5, 2021, brought a sense of peace into every encounter, inviting others to try seeing difficult situations through a different lens or sparking humor or compassion where appropriate. He once told me that the monastic community elects their abbots based on what the community needs at any given time. He brought a sense of peace and well-being that was palpable during his time as abbot.

To learn about Benedictine spirituality, I didn’t have to look further than Fr. Justin. He embodied the *Rule of St. Benedict* in every decision that he made, in the way he prayed, in his love for his community, and in the calm and even way he approached every dilemma.

He understood human nature and its many foibles and always stressed the importance of St. Benedict’s admonishment to his abbots that they should “strive to be loved rather than feared... he should be discerning and moderate... he must so arrange everything that the strong have something to yearn for and the weak nothing to run from” (RB 64). As an administrator, I would quietly look to him as my first and best example of decision-making. And I learned a lot that was humbling and professional.

To say that he will be missed by the monastic community is quite an understatement. He was just embarking on his most recently assigned post as the new novice and junior master. This role is crucial in the development of novices for life in a community that revolves around others rather than just yourself.

It is a life that requires letting go of the cultural imperative to count yourself as the center of the universe. Letting go of having what we want, when we want it, and loving the decision to live a communal existence centered on God and prayer takes a firm formation approach and a loving touch. Fr. Justin had the capacity for both.

He also will be missed because he brought to the monastery a subtle sense of humor that could not be denied. Sometimes we laughed and we weren’t even sure what he said that made us feel that way. As a friend of 30 years, he will be missed in ways that cannot be explained in words. I also know that he will continue to be a guiding light for me and for the Oblate Community as the years go by.

He was a peaceful man. And he was so much more than that. He was the type of leader that St. Benedict knew was necessary for the life of a monastic community. Saint Meinrad Archabbey will always be enriched because of what he gave through his life as a monk and as a man.

*Janis Dopp
Oblate Director*

“Saint Meinrad Archabbey will always be enriched because of what he gave through his life as a monk and as a man.”

—Janis Dopp

Seeking perfection?

Take up your cross and follow Christ



Fr. Adrian Burke, OSB

(Deuteronomy 4:1).

Knowing the scriptures as He did, Jesus would have been very familiar with the text from Deuteronomy. He also would have known well the biblical stories of his ancestors and how hard it was for Israel to remember the Lord. Their history was filled with murder and mayhem – just read the books of Judges, Kings and Chronicles. The people of God had lapsed into being no different from the surrounding kingdoms.

In Mark's Gospel, Jesus takes a rather firm position with his Jewish brothers, the Pharisees and scribes, with respect to what is essential versus what is merely "human precept" or custom. He insists that what is essential is what matters, that being true to who we are as God's people is a matter of the heart. This is what leads to perfection.

The Pharisees accuse Jesus of having been negligent in his adherence to the accepted customs of the Jews. But their accusation highlights precisely what Jesus judges as unjust about their position, insofar as it reveals a disproportionate devotion to religious customs – an attitude that pits them against the very people the Law is intended to serve.

The Jesuit retreat master Anthony DeMello would sometimes offer little

"Learn to observe my decrees, says the Lord, that you may live and enter in and possess the land that I, the God of your fathers, is giving you ..."

vignettes intended to awaken his retreatants to the need to stay attentive to what is most essential. One such vignette is:

It scandalized the disciples that their teacher had such little use for worship. "Find yourself an object of veneration," he used to say, "and you piously distract yourself from what is *essential* – the awareness that leads to love." And, in self-defense, he would cite Jesus' own scorn of those who cried, "Lord, Lord!" and were quite unaware of the evil they were doing. [from *Awakening: Conversations with the Master*, p. 46]

Deuteronomy instructs that the Lord's commandments and ordinances are not to be subtracted from or added to – they are to be observed as given! It would seem that over the centuries much was added, like the washing of hands before eating; how food purchased from the market was to be purified; and the meticulous way of washing cups, bowls and kettles.

These kinds of additions are normal for any culture. But how do these prescriptions and proscriptions measure up as compared to the commandment to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength? How do rules and human customs compare to the commandment to honor your parents, keep sacred your marriage bond, and respect your neighbor by refraining from stealing, cheating and lying; or the one in Leviticus (19:18) that instructs us to love our neighbor as ourselves?

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites!" (Mt. 23) Jesus

accuses the Pharisees of hypocrisy. You pay tithes of mint, dill and cumin, but you have disregarded the weightier matters of the Law: justice, mercy and faithfulness.

But Jesus is reminding the Pharisees and scribes of something far more important than belonging to a tribe, even a religious one. As in Matthew 23, where Jesus accuses the Pharisees of being blind guides, Mark's Gospel reminds us that when we act as if our customs and rules are absolutes, as if that makes us holy and perfect, we fashion a new idol and establish a new form of "worship," a *false* one. We place rules over/against the people whom God's commandments serve.

How often we forget the God who became our brother, and who brought us to birth as God's children by his passion, death and resurrection. When our religion does not support us in becoming better at being God's children, it is not true religion at all – it is false. It is not the Gospel.

Humbly receive this Word from above and act on it that its power may save you, writes St. James. Act on the Word by doing what Christ did, from the heart. By imitating Jesus, we express our desire to identify with Him, to love what He loved by assuming his priorities as our own. By the grace of his Spirit dwelling in us, we can channel our innate instincts in a way that makes us different from the world. By doing so, we collaborate with God's Spirit to build up by means of love a distinctly different culture, a culture rooted in a new way of being human, a way of perfection!

My brothers and sisters, be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to

Continued on Page 18

Meet A Monk: Fr. Cyprian Davis, OSB



Fr. Cyprian Davis, OSB

It's my pleasure to introduce one of the most outstanding monks in my community, who passed away in 2015, Fr. Cyprian Davis. He was not only known locally as an outstanding teacher, a mentor for many, but he had an international reputation as both a medievalist and, probably most significantly, as an American historian of black Catholicism.

By that reputation, I believe he will be remembered. But we will always remember him, and I will always remember him, as a beloved confrere, a dear spiritual guide, and confessor and teacher.

Q. *What was his personality like?*

I experienced him as a humorous person with a deep, deep love of God and the Church. He saw the comic side of life, but was also intensely interested in cultivating his spirituality, and the spirituality of other people. He was a very devout person.

Fr. Cyprian also was extremely devoted to social justice. Those two things are rarely put together in the life of others. Often, people choose one or the other. He was devoted to

the liturgy, for instance, and thought of that as a hallmark of his life and of the monastic life.

He loved the monastic life and was never absent from choir or the Eucharist. And we know his devotion to the Civil Rights Movement. He really came of age as a person who devoted himself to social justice because of the emergence of the Civil Rights Movement, and he marched on several famous occasions in the 1960s.

Q. *Do you have any favorite memories or stories about him?*

One thing I could say about him as a historian and as a teacher was that his students had his full attention because he almost always drew you into the narrative of history through personal portraits of the people he was speaking about.

His class on the Church and Black Catholics was his signature class. He would go through history talking about people in history as if he had met them. It was almost as if he was introducing us to some friends that he knew and would talk about each person. That was especially true with

pioneering Black Catholics of America and their significance.

Q. *What was his work here at Saint Meinrad?*

He became famous for his long stint at the University of Leuven in Belgium. He was writing an extensive dissertation associated with medieval monasticism. It was his intention to make it his life work. He stayed at a monastery in Leuven, so they have a couple of archival papers on him. When I was visiting, the archivist showed me some of those works.

Over the course of the 1960s and '70s, he realized that what was going on in his heart was, if not in conflict with what was going on in his head and his training, in need of integration with these things. He was classically trained, and his personality fit what you would think of as a classically trained monk who was studying medieval texts.

However, when the radical injustices that were becoming well known during the 1950s and '60s began to surface, he felt himself drawn more and more to the Civil Rights Movement. He was drawn to the role that African American Catholics played, and he wanted to do a history of the role of black Catholics.

His most famous book really begins with a survey of the origins of black Catholicism as far back as Egypt, remembering the patristics and the many folks that we tend not to think of as people of color. He was reminding us that, yes, there was a very important reality in realizing and including the early Church folks as people of color.

A bit of anomaly in all this was that the medieval historian was an identity that fit his shy personality. But when he found himself drawn more to social

justice – an extroverted activity that involved the marches, the various demonstrations, the call for justice – I think that was a side of him he wished he had by human temperament. There was this kind of emerging intelligence and emotion in him that didn't quite fit this new role as activist, if you will. You wouldn't look at him and say, "Now, this is your classic activist."

Q. *For what is Father Cyprian remembered?*

It depends on what community you're asking that question to. I think from the point of view of a monastic community, he will always be known as a beloved confrere, a person who was loyal to Saint Meinrad, a person who was a wonderful teacher, guide, mentor, somebody who was very compatible to young people, to old people. He had a sense of the history of this place and could talk about it readily.

I think if you asked other folks not associated with this community, they would recognize him as an outstanding historian who was devoted to the ongoing discovery of the role of Black Catholics. For many years, he made sure that the archives at Saint Meinrad included a lot of information on Black Catholicism.

I think if you asked colleagues in the Catholic Historical Society, for instance, they would say he was a household name in their profession. From that perspective, whether he was teaching over the summer at Xavier University in New Orleans, or teaching here, or giving a paper somewhere, he had many facets that made him well known. I think the essential personality was always there, a very dear person who was committed to his work and committed to his prayer, and really committed to the people of God.

Q. *What were his contributions to the Catholic Church?*

His contributions were enormous insofar as his publications go. Besides

his history of Black Catholics in the United States, he also wrote six other books, dozens of articles, chapters in books, encyclopedias, and so on. His focus was mostly on the role of Black Catholics, but also on the people who made that picture a reality. He also went to various communities that had connections with women of color who were religious women that would trace their origins of their community by serving the poor.

It's really hard to tell how much he affected people. His identity was helping people claim themselves as African Americans, because in his mind, this is a community that was very much alive, but had really not been acknowledged. Bringing our attention, raising our consciousness, to that reality, I think he would say that was going hand in glove with the Civil Rights Movement, that it was all about dignity.

It was about recognizing dignity, and it was about letting people know their full dignity, whether it had to do with human, religious identity, or some other facet of their personhood. He was the one who was a pioneer in reminding us that yes, every human person has dignity, and every human person not only has the right to life but also has the right to true freedom, freedom of expression. I can't remember a serious conversation with him when he would not talk about contemporary issues that were very much on his mind when it came to people who are even now enslaved.

When I remember his teaching style, what I saw was someone who was not really interested in abstractions, and was not interested in dates, only insofar as they impacted the human person. There is where the monk and the priest and the historian all came together because history was, for him, not just a series of dates and not a sweeping abstraction.

In some sense, his book on Black Catholics was a rewriting of all the stuff that we were doing wrong over the years, and presuming that African American Catholics had no role in the development of Catholic history, and their mention was minimal until fairly recently.

As we became more conscious of the civil rights of all human beings and their essential right to pursue their own happiness without the segregation that taunted this country and harassed them over the years, he became crucially aware of his own identity as a black man. He claimed that identity while writing about the African American experience and its religious identity.

Titles and accolades were not important to him. He was interested in the impact he was making in the lives of students, because he thought his students would then pass on their information and their knowledge to other students, and that would help to change the culture we live in for the better.

He was passionate about the liturgy. You could sense his devotion to the scriptures that would come alive when he was at the ambo preaching, and at the altar celebrating the Eucharist. I think the monks and the students in the school knew that.

If you didn't know him as a teacher and as a monk from here, you might not realize it, especially because he seemed very quiet. And he was quiet. But when he got that preaching moment, it was as if somebody ignited him on fire, because he was just captivating. I never heard him preach a bad homily.

*Fr. Gueric DeBona, OSB
Saint Meinrad Archabbey*

Spiritual Direction 101 for seekers



Beverly Weinhold

Deep within each of us is a desire to seek God. It's a perpetual longing seldom spoken about. St. Augustine summed it up in his *Confessions*:

“Thou has made us for Thyself, O God, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in Thee.” A practice that quells our restlessness and bridges the gap in our quest for God is spiritual direction.

Spiritual direction is a contemplative practice with a guide who helps us hear, see and discern the Divine day to day. It often leads to deeper intimacy with God, keener insight into self and clarity for vocational service in the world. A spiritual director is a privileged witness in the spiritual unfolding of another's story.

The focus is on the relationship between the directee and God, rather than on the relationship between the director and directee. Thomas Merton says, “A spiritual director is one who helps another to recognize and to follow the inspirations of grace in his life, in order to arrive at the end to which God is leading him.”

Spiritual direction isn't new. Beginning in the third century, it has a long history in the Catholic tradition. More recently, multiple faiths have sought spiritual direction, moving it into the mainstream of post-modern life.

While it's true that Jesus directed his disciples and the apostles guided God-seekers, the first spiritual directors

named were the Desert Fathers and Mothers who fled a corrupt empire for the stillness of the Egyptian desert. Esteemed for their holiness, these early pilgrims were sought out by city dwellers, hoping to hear a word from God. Seeking prayerful guides who invite us to listen to God in silence is as important today as it was then. Maybe more so.

Notably, more is written about becoming a spiritual director than finding one. Don't let that deter you from finding a good fit. Ask for the Holy Spirit's guidance. Consult a trusted church leader for a referral. Or do an Internet search for a monastery with a spirituality center. There you will often find spiritual direction offered and spiritual directors listed.¹

While the Church considers spiritual direction a charism, most receive certificates as trained spiritual directors. However, they are neither licensed nor certified, with no standardized oversight from a governing board. Seasoned directors sometimes offer a written covenant clarifying the relationship and usually abide by a nationally recognized code of ethics² respecting other religious backgrounds, maintaining confidentiality and practicing healthy boundaries.

I was fortunate to be in direction for 13 years with a Catholic nun. Her joy for life, fidelity to God and courage to keep calling me back to scripture and asking, “Did you talk with Jesus about that?” was formative in my life. Her example led me to see my calling as a spiritual director. Already a licensed counselor, I quickly saw the difference between the two processes. Unlike counseling, spiritual direction

doesn't diagnose, offer advice or treat problems. Instead, both director and directee listen deeply to the Divine and take a “long, loving look at the real.”³

Stepping back and witnessing another's story through the presence of the Holy Spirit unveils a “big sky” perspective that connects the dots and creates patterns coalescing into discernment for more faithful choices. While we can bring anything to the table in spiritual direction, savvy directors know when they are beyond the scope of their practice and can refer to a mental health professional.

One-on-one (and group) spiritual direction usually meets once a month for an hour. Meetings take place in an office, on Zoom and sometimes at a home. Using Zoom for spiritual direction is simple and satisfying, often opening opportunities for those who find it hard to find a director. Finally, just as we invest monetarily in our physical health, we also invest in our spiritual well-being. Most directors charge fees on a sliding scale. Payment is by check, credit card or health savings account (HSA) to a director's PayPal account.

Summarily created in the image of God, all of us have a longing for God. Beyond the longing is the lifelong calling to spiritual formation for a Christian: “be holy even as I am holy” (1 Peter 1:15). Practicing a daily devotional life, keeping the *Rule*, attending a faith community and seeing a spiritual director are solid ways to be stable, stay the course and sustain strength in serious times.

Beverly Weinhold, oblate novice
Louisville, KY

¹ www.sdcompanions.org/find-a-spiritual-director-companion/ or www.thedome.org/how-we-serve/spiritual-direction/.

² https://www.sdcompanions.org/docs/guidelines/Flip/guidelines_ethical_conduct.html

³ Burghart, Walter.

Considering the Psalms: *A digression*

“To be called to follow Jesus is to be invited to a process of personal transformation. We must put away our anger and impatience to achieve our own agendas and instead harness ourselves to Jesus. We imitate him as he emerges in our imaginations shaped by the Scriptures and our own experience of life. We learn what works and doesn’t work to make us better persons, more loving and forgiving. Jesus is both teacher and textbook, example and exercise under the guidance of the Spirit who moves through our moods and thoughts like a breath of discernment. Follow me, this way, that way, stop, go forward, speak, be silent, learn from everything, find God in all things. Like the beautiful image from Zechariah 8:23, we take Jesus ‘by the sleeve,’ and he leads us to God.”

—“Follow me,” *Pencil Preaching*, Tuesday, September 28, 2021, by Pat Marrin



Kathleen Polansky

If you are familiar with the Enneagram, then you know there are nine personality types, and each person falls into one of the types. Your type is based upon your compulsion. I fall under Type One, which is “the reformer,” aka the perfectionist.



Tom Causey

As this issue focuses on

perfection, I am caught in a loop. Perfection has been a negative compulsion of looking at what is missing, out of place, incorrect or down-right wrong. It is a never-ending loop of seeing imperfection and wanting to put it right.

Type One finds anger and impatience easy to slide into when seeing so much division and chaos being promulgated in society. Health for the Type One personality is to move toward the Type Seven, “the enthusiast.” Health is to let the actions and words of Jesus be the goal and the model for our thoughts, words and actions.

With that in mind, I would like to meander off the Psalms for this issue. (A perfectionist who is not sticking to

the rules! Oh my! That is unexpected. Except that Psalm 146 is an excellent complement to this essay.)

Tom (my husband) and I had a discussion after Mass. Abraham and the rich man converse in the Gospel of Luke 16:19-31.

This Gospel is often called the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. It could also be called the dialogue of two rich men. There is the unnamed wealthy man of the story and the figure of Abraham whom God made wealthy. On the surface, these rich men are discussing the fate of the unnamed character compared to the fate of a beggar, who is named. We are told he is Lazarus. On another level, they are discussing the role of wealth in relation to the Kingdom of God.

Abraham as a rich man was the model for hospitality. In the Genesis account, he serves the strangers a feast when they pass by his dwelling in the heat of the day. When Abraham’s family wealth becomes too large, he decides to part ways with his nephew Lot, but allows Lot to choose the land he wants, for no division should exist between them.

God makes a covenant with Abraham and promises to bless him. God’s blessing is not just for the wealth and comfort of Abraham and his family, but to make them a blessing to others.

In contrast, the rich man of our story shows no sign of caring about God’s

righteousness and justice or being a blessing to others. Rather, he clothes himself in the finest purple garments and consumes the finest food and drink. He views his blessing of wealth as being for his own benefit, and that his indulgence is without dire consequence to himself and others. It is wealth he earned, so it is deserved.

Lazarus is suffering and starving at his door. He is identified as a poor man who is in desperate need. His healthcare came from the “dogs who came to lick his sores.”

The one thing the rich and poor always have in common is that they both eventually die. It is here that our dialogue with Abraham begins.

Lazarus is now enjoying the feasting and hospitality of Father Abraham, whereas the rich man is separated and in torment. Even in this setting, the rich man still demands that Lazarus serve him by bringing him a drop of water to cool his tongue.

Next, the rich man demands that Lazarus be sent to his father’s house to warn his five brothers of their fate if they fail to change their ways. Again, it is the poor man Lazarus who is expected to serve him.

There is no indication that the rich man ever recognizes the opportunity he had to be a blessing to Lazarus. Rather, even in death, he sees Lazarus

Continued on Page 12

Different religious orders and charisms can get along and live in harmony



Angelo Musone

Many jokes have been told about which religious order God really favors.

In 2008, my wife celebrated her 50th anniversary as a Franciscan

tertiary. At that time, I was contemplating plans for my 50th the following year, as a Benedictine oblate.

Throughout our marriage, we would always happily share each other's special religious prayer group gatherings and religious social gatherings. There were never any limits or boundaries set in the hospitality shown to us, or the fraternal spirit displayed by their asceticism.

By our example, we always demonstrated the absence of conflicts between the perceived differences of the religious orders in their spiritualities. We would live, love and work together in communal hospitality.

Planning ahead, I inquired if there was any special prayer or procedure for a 50-year anniversary ceremony. I was kindly obliged and given a two-page Renewal of Oblation Anniversary from the *Rituals for Benedictine Oblate* book.

Armed with that special prayer and knowing there also was a special plenary indulgence attached to one's 50th oblation anniversary, I pondered where I would be on that day.

Amazingly, that night we would be on a cruise ship leaving Athens, Greece, arriving in the morning at Izmir, Turkey, where we reserved a semi-private, full-day tour with four other pilgrims to see Mary's House and attend Mass in Ephesus.

Bursting with joy at the God-incidence, I explained the situation to our tour guide and my desire to renew my oblation. I gave her a copy of the Renewal of Oblation prayer. She agreed to see what she could do. Mass was to be held in a pilgrim house next to Mary's House. Upon arrival, our tour guide spoke to the sister-in-charge. She assured me that a request would be made.

After our lengthy visit to Mary's House and grounds, we were to proceed to Mass. Before Mass, to my surprise, the priest inquired as to whom was the person making their renewal. After responding, he requested that my wife and I sit in the first pew. I thought it was an honor that he would do that and waited for him to begin the renewal before Mass. He went to the Vesting Room and, after a short while, returned fully vested. I could tell he was wearing a Franciscan habit under his chasuble.

Mass began, and before the Offertory, he requested I rise and come to the center aisle before the altar. There he had me recite the two-page Renewal of Oblation with him presiding.

At that Mass, we stood in lofty company. Jesus and Our Blessed Mother, alongside St. Benedict and St. Francis, must have been smiling upon us.

In 2009, our 47 years of married life between a Franciscan tertiary and Benedictine oblate, presided over by a Franciscan priest, placed us in a privileged position to foster God's true sense of humor.

Yes, different religious orders with their different charisms can get along and live in harmony with each other!

Angelo Musone, oblate
Lady Lake, FL

Continued from Page 11

as one who must serve his desires. He never approaches the hospitality of Abraham and Abraham's nephew Lot, which is described in Genesis.

Ezekiel and Amos remind us that pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease, along with not aiding the poor and needy, bring destruction (Ezekiel 16:49, Amos 6:1-7). By refusing to be a blessing, the rich man is now divided from God's blessing.

Perfection can be a blessing when it is lived through the moral lens of Jesus and his teaching. Perfection is the means by which we think, speak and act to be a blessing to others. It can also become a condemnation when it is used to berate, abuse, obfuscate and denigrate others. We must be mindful of those who will be affected by our pursuit of perfection.

"Praise the Lord ... the Lord watches over the strangers; he upholds the orphan and the widow, but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin"
(Psalm 146).

Kathleen Polansky
and Tom Causey, oblates
New Salisbury, IN

Reflections on Ravens: *Pointless quests*



Edward Castronova

The theme is perfection, and the *Quarterly* is filled with thoughts about how imperfect we are, how perfection is the enemy of the good, and how we all must keep trying. All true. But let's go off in a different direction and talk about impossibility.

What do you say about a person who keeps trying to do something that will never happen? Well, you could call them stupid. Or mindless, enslaved, addicted or fanatic.

Kafka has a story about a man who sits by the door of Law for years, waiting to be admitted. It never happens. As the man is dying, the guard closes the door. It is not needed anymore, he says, because the door was for the waiting man and him alone. It is bitter to wait here for the perfection of Law and Justice, only to age and see that they will never come. It makes no sense to look for such things around here.

Yet literature abounds with characters on hopeless quests, and we do not actually call them stupid. There's something noble in the way people can detach themselves from probabilities and likelihoods and do

something just because it is to be done. In the Titanic movie, the ship's designer adjusts a clock even as the water flows in. It is his duty to make sure the clocks are accurate. He does what is to be done.

I am on a sinking ship, too. I adjust the tiny clock of my behavior. It is to be done; it is all that I can do. I hope it is enough; I hope it gets me past my time and into something better. I have to hope, because I believe, I believe, in the Savior of the world, who saves me and you and everybody, who will make all things perfect in his time, in his time.

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

Real perfection: *Put on the mind and heart of Christ*



Ellen Godbey

In the collect at Mass, we prayed: "O God, who through your Spirit raised up Saint Teresa of Jesus to show the Church the way to seek perfection, grant that we may always be nourished by the food of her heavenly teaching and fired with longing for true holiness."

There it is, that word: perfection. "I look to the faithful in the land that they may dwell with me. He who walks in the way of perfection shall be my friend" (Psalm 100:6). Again,

perfection. Jesus preached, "Be perfect as your heavenly father is perfect" (Mt. 5:48). I feel as if I am assailed by that word.

My quest for perfection seems to be one of pride's most obvious and dangerous forms, blooming in wicked delight and piercing in irritable frequency, like a noxious weed that resists all herbicides – a veritable thorn in the flesh. Perfection according to my standards.

But it's not about me, although I'd certainly like to pretend it is. It's not about my striving, although I like to be in control of that, too. I want to put on the mind and heart of Christ and prefer nothing to the love of

God, but that thorn of "me" keeps sticking its point into my soul.

I have begged the Lord about this, but He keeps saying, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power (perfection) is made perfect in weakness ... for when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Cor. 12:7-10).

Perfection in love. God's kind of love. Doing little things with great love. Being aware of God's presence and guidance everywhere and in everything. "Prefer nothing whatever to Christ" (RB 72:11). That's a perfection worth striving for.

*Ellen Godbey, oblate novice
Yosemite, KY*

Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord

Pain of loss can be a struggle to understand



John Brooks

I met Tom at the homeless shelter. Tom was a guest, and I a volunteer. He was intelligent, funny, kind and caring, but he also had a dark side. He was an addict.

Tom and I talked a lot and became “friends.” We had similar interests. Our talks included spirituality, family, children, grandchildren, history and current events. He was a father to three and grandfather to one.

He was a hard worker, but when he had money and a weekend off, his

dark side emerged, and he would reappear Sunday night a mess. When he returned, he was often loud, mean and confrontational.

During COVID, we lost touch. On Tuesday, June 8, while I was volunteering at the hospital front desk, Tom walked up to drop off a patient for an appointment. Having been clean for eight months, he had a good job, was living on his own and had reconnected with his family. He looked well and was positive and hopeful for the future.

On June 9, he died of an overdose alone in his apartment. It is very sad. I accept that death is a part of life and that each person we meet carries a steppingstone for our path. I

understand that we are a small piece in God’s beautiful puzzle. But the pain and sorrow of our losses sit heavily on our hearts.

We all experience loss and life goes on. We manage the pain of our losses, remembering our loved ones and friends as happy moments in our lives. When we experience a new loss, it draws us back into the pain of the past as we struggle to understand. Over time, we discover that loss, while painful, is a gift: a gift of insight, wisdom, knowledge, friendship and love. Over time, our hearts mend, but never fully heal. Life goes on!

*John Brooks, oblate
Columbus, IN*

Perfection relies on growth and patience



Janet B. Edwards

Matthew 5:48: “Be perfect, therefore, as your Heavenly Father is perfect.”

Whenever I read or heard these words, I used to wonder how in the world that could be possible. I can’t be perfect! I am only human. Only God is perfect.

But then I remember someone explaining that perfection can be seen as completeness, or maturity. Maturity takes time and patience. It involves growth and change.

One of my favorite things about summer is enjoying the ripe fruits and vegetables. We wait for the local peaches and corn to ripen because nothing we can buy in the store compares to the fruit that is picked at the peak of ripeness and sold at the stand beside the road. The taste and smell indicate how fresh the peach or ear of corn is. It takes patience to wait and not pick it too soon.

Growth toward this perfection also requires support and pruning. Our backyard blueberry bushes need to be pruned and supported on a trellis and nourished with acidic fertilizer, water and sunshine.

Our *Rule of St. Benedict* is like a trellis for growth as oblates. We need structure and support for a life of faith to grow toward spiritual maturity. We do not need to compare ourselves to others, because an ear of corn doesn’t grow into a peach, or a blueberry into a rose.

Just as the fruits of the garden change and grow over time, so can we. It takes time, but God is ever with us and has given us a community to support us in reflecting more and more the perfect love and light of Christ. And like the fruits of the garden, the fruit of the Spirit in our lives can be a blessing to others.

*Janet B. Edwards, oblate
Mills River, NC*

Imitating perfection begins with imitating Christ



Zac Karanovich

The call to perfection is not new. A couple millennia ago, Jesus commanded, “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect”

(Mt. 5:48). For those of us who consider ourselves Christ’s disciples, we tend to think that striving toward perfection is accomplished by “imitating” Jesus. But what constitutes imitation?

Jon Sobrino, the Jesuit theologian, helps us understand imitation through his framework of spirituality. For him, spirituality is “the following of Jesus” that occurs “by reproducing the whole of that life in terms of the option for the poor.”¹ (“Poor” can be interpreted broadly to include all those marginalized in our society.)

Further, spirituality “is not only regional or pastoral, but comprehensive, all-embracing ... [and] is an option involving the totality of the human being in his or her confrontation with reality.”² In other words, spirituality – and our quest toward perfection through it – engages the whole person and the concrete reality in which we find ourselves. Imitation, then, as our path toward perfection, is the emulation of certain constant principles (e.g., concern for those on the margins) while not drifting into an ahistorical, spiritualized form of discipleship.

The saints provide us models of this imitation-toward-perfection (which might be better thought of as

“discipleship”) by giving us certain constant principles. As oblates, we have chosen to take up certain constant principles in St. Benedict’s *Rule* to be applied in the contexts of our lives (e.g., stability of heart, fidelity to the spirit of monastic life, and obedience to God’s will in academic, corporate, or healthcare settings).

Through our prayer, our contemplative *lectio*, our attentiveness to God, and the application of the *Rule* in our daily lives, we embody a particular spirituality, committing our whole selves to this journey toward perfection. But as Benedict says, the *Rule* and the committed following of it by oblates is just “the beginning” (RB 73:1). For those looking to perfect monastic (or oblate) life (read: to perfect Christian discipleship), he refers his monks to further reading: “the teachings of the holy Fathers,” sacred scripture, the *Conferences*, the *Institutes*, the *Lives* (of the saints), and St. Basil’s rule (RB 73:2-3, 5).

Benedict’s humility is revealed in this final chapter. He does not claim perfection for himself or his *Rule*. Instead, he acknowledges the limitations of his work and commends to his monks the wisdom of the tradition to supplement it. And while the accumulated tradition in the sixth century was certainly rich, we now have the benefit of 1,500 additional years of tradition.

Countless saints – canonized or not – have witnessed to the discipleship of imitation-toward-perfection, and they have done so in contexts (or “realities”) much closer to our own. Just think of the imitation witnessed to by Servant of God Dorothy Day, herself an oblate.

Or consider the life and writings of Thomas Merton, who provided us with a wealth of knowledge about both prayer and social activism.

Think, too, of the monks and oblates of Saint Meinrad, who offer their wisdom to us in our quarterly newsletter. We must remember that we are not the first to respond to the realities we face daily (war, polarization, hunger, poverty, family estrangement, etc.), so we must not waste the resources of our traditions in helping us live out a contextual, Benedictine imitation of Christ as we seek perfection.

Our task as oblates, then, is to respond to Jesus’ call to perfection by recommitting ourselves daily – and until death – to our oblate vocation and our Benedictine spirituality. We must give our whole selves to emulating Christ through the duties and promises of oblate life. And we must do so while avoiding the trap of a spiritualized spirituality – a spirituality that ignores the world around us. Instead, it must be a monastic practice in the world, one enriched by a “mysticism of open eyes,”³ that learns, understands and responds to the realities around us.

Like Benedict, however, doing this is merely a start, a “beginning.” In our striving, we must also learn from the richness of our traditions and those who have imitated Christ before us – and there is much to learn! In doing this, may we be strengthened in our journey toward perfection. And “under God’s protection” may we reach it (RB 73:9).

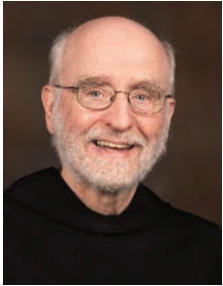
Zac Karanovich, oblate
Chestnut Hill, MA

¹ Jon Sobrino, “Spirituality and the Following of Jesus,” in *Mysterium Liberationis: Fundamental Concepts of Liberation Theology*, edited by Ignacio Ellacuría and Jon Sobrino (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), 687.

² Sobrino, 687.

³ Johann Baptist Metz, *A Passion for God*, J. Matthew Ashley, trans., (New York: Paulist Press, 1998), 69.

The problems with perfection(ism)



Fr. Bede Cisco, OSB

Meeting with people for spiritual direction, I have encountered different levels of perfectionism. Often, people recognize the problem, but something about it is set deep within them. The basic view of those who tend toward perfectionism is, “I need to do everything correctly in order to please God and earn God’s love.”

There are two spiritual and theological problems with perfectionism. The first is an assumption that God does not love the person. Stated clearly, a perfectionist may say they believe God loves them, but that God demands that they overcome their sins and live more faithfully.

The perfectionist now must face their image of God. Does God demand that they overcome their sins? How we state our beliefs is important. Perfectionists are dealing with a demanding God. A more compassionate God would say that the perfectionist is given divine mercy and forgiveness, enabling them to live more freely and joyfully.

Changing one’s image of God can be a complicated process. Our image of God is often rooted in experiences of human relationships, which we often unreflectively transfer to our relationship with God. If someone has been treated harshly and critically, has experienced little kindness and care, they likely will view God as harsh and critical. They would benefit from a friend who accepts them unconditionally and offers selfless support.

The second spiritual and theological problem with perfectionism is the assumption that we can bring about change and growth by our own efforts, using only our own resources. The perfectionist sees the problems and failures in his or her life and is determined to root them out. While such resolve may seem admirable, it is self-centered – there is no room for God’s help.

The perfectionist ignores the truth that it is God’s grace that enables us to do almost everything we do. One might note that the grace of God moves the perfectionist to want to change, but then often tries to accomplish the change on their own. We cannot change ourselves by ourselves – we need helpful friends, wise guidance and God’s grace.

By now, it has become clear that perfectionism contradicts Christian faith. The loose ends in these assumptions can be pointed to and pulled on to unravel the view. What seems to be at the core of perfectionism is a poor self-image, a problem with both psychological and spiritual dimensions. A poor self-image is consistent with a demanding image of God and a determination to change oneself based on the demands of a God who does not help.

To overcome perfectionism, positive steps need to be taken. The person needs to accept that they are good and lovable, deserving respect and care. Counseling may be helpful in developing these convictions. The person also needs to deepen their acceptance that God loves me as I am and will help me bring the divine image in me to full expression.

Getting out of the grasp of perfectionism takes time. The first

steps involve patience and acceptance of one’s faults and weaknesses. An openness to God’s grace will move the process forward. Admitting weaknesses can reverse the perfectionist’s view that they can change themselves.

St. Paul heard the Lord say to him, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor. 12:9). With God’s grace, a genuine sense of self will emerge, and the person will enjoy relating with the God of love.

Fr. Bede Cisco, OSB
Saint Meinrad Archabbey

Abbey Caskets

A Work of Saint Meinrad Archabbey

Contact us to receive a FREE
“Catholic Funeral Guide”



800.987.7380

www.abbeycaskets.com

Saint Meinrad
Archabbey
Gift Shop

**ONLINE DISCOUNT
FOR OBLATES**

Use Promo Code **SMA10** to
receive 10% off all online purchases



Spiritual gifts,
books, puzzles,
Saint Meinrad-
imprinted items,
Peanut Brother
and more!

www.smagiftshop.com

Greek verb tenses: Imperfect



Fr. Harry Hagan, OSB

When teaching Greek to students, it is important to make a point of distinguishing between the imperfect and aorist¹ tenses of the verb.

“Aorist” is an unfamiliar word for them, and it refers to an action taking place at a specific moment.

In English, we mostly call it the past tense. Greek grammarians would want to be more precise – still, usually it would be “sat down” or “went” and the like. The imperfect verb, of course, refers to an action that is continuing in the past. In English, we make the imperfect with the verb “to be”: was going, was sitting, were running.

The difference between the two in Greek can be subtle. You add an ‘e’ to the beginning of the root for each. The first aorist then adds an ‘s’ at the end of the root, which can change into something else. So it is easy to miss, and the second aorist looks like the imperfect.

Anyway, there is a difference.

Our translation of the Gospel of Luke 6:19 says: “Everyone in the crowd sought to touch him because power came forth from him and healed them all.”

The people doing the translation surely knew what they were doing, but their translation does not make clear the imperfect verbs to a Greek teacher. Literally, the Greek says, “Everyone in the crowd, not sought but was seeking to touch him because

power not came but was coming forth from him and it/he was healing them.”

It is not that the people sought one time to touch him. It was ongoing; they were seeking. Moreover, it was not just that power came forth at a single moment from Jesus; it was coming forth over and over, and it was healing them.

In English, we use the word “imperfect” mostly not to describe verbs, but to describe ourselves. We are imperfect. The Gospel invites us not to touch Jesus once, but continually to reach out and to keep touching Him because his power is continually coming forth from Him, and He is always healing us.

Fr. Harry Hagan, OSB
Saint Meinrad Archabbey

¹ aorist: a verb tense in some languages (classical Greek and Sanskrit) expressing action (especially past action) without indicating its completion or continuation. Tense: a grammatical category of verbs used to express distinctions of time.

Why am I so imperfect?



Deepak Frank

The theme of “perfection” can be approached in both the spiritual and worldly domain. In the worldly life, there are so many things to do. Striving for

perfection is a recipe for stress, as we have limited time and a mile-long list of things to do. Are we looking at what’s important, of what can be let go, of what can be done imperfectly to help meet our goals? We can never do all things perfectly. So, it’s a never-ending tradeoff of choices that we must make frequently.

On the spiritual side, the approach is different. Matthew’s Gospel (5:48) explains that Jesus expects us to be perfect like God, which is a high standard. Jesus had to suffer on the cross to exemplify perfection. Abraham modeled perfect obedience by being ready to give away what he yearned for and loved dearly.

While our thoughts are not in our control and our first response usually less than perfect, we are gifted with a great mind and conscience to make amends and strive for perfection. The sacrament of Reconciliation helps us experience God’s perfect love, though we may feel that we do not fully deserve it.

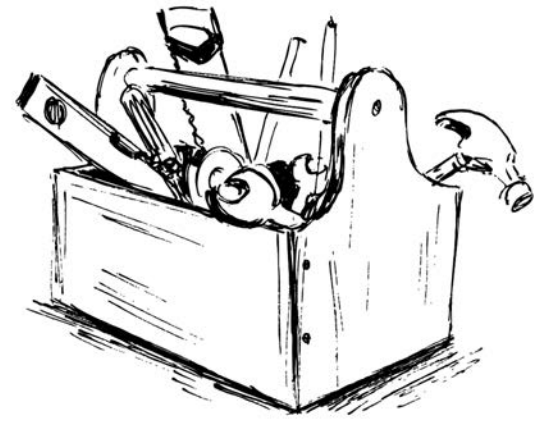
How can we be perfect while being imperfect human beings? We make so many mistakes. Imperfection, through the virtue of humility, calls us to depend on God. God chose apostles who were not perfect, who made mistakes. We have an opportunity to make it right till our last breath, like the good thief on the cross!

The parable of the Good Samaritan shows a model of God’s perfect love. This is quite difficult with our fast pace of life, uncertainty, anxieties, etc. A homily by Fr. Zachary Griffith mentioned that “humans reach their limits even with the best of their

Continued on Page 19

The Oblate Toolbox

With God, we can find our perfect nature



“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

Jesus tells us we are to be perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect. I ask myself: How is that possible?

Like so many things, I often

turn to nature for an answer. What could be more perfect than a wave breaking on the sand? A Monarch butterfly on a butterfly bush? A doe and her two fawns gliding through the morning mist? These encounters all proclaim one thing to me: Creation is true to its God-given nature.

So, back to Our Lord’s admonition to be perfect as God is perfect. Does this

mean, perhaps, to be the self that is true to its nature?

From conception, my nature was infected with a fatal disease called original sin, thanks to our first parents and their disobedience in the Garden. Then baptism offered a new nature that is capable of obeying and loving God. So now, I’ve got two natures at work.

If Jesus is telling us to be perfect as God is perfect, then I realize I owe absolutely nothing to my old nature. I must allow my new nature to guide my life. And if Jesus tells us to do this, then it must be possible.

As Benedictine oblates, we have been graced with many tools to achieve this goal. These tools are nothing new to us; they are right at our fingertips:

Praying Lauds, Vespers and Compline keeps us centered on God’s presence throughout our day.

Practicing *lectio divina* quiets our spirits and minds, allowing the Holy Spirit continually to renew our hearts. Daily exposure to the *Rule of St. Benedict* continues to orient us toward our vocation in community.

Our oblate promises of obedience, stability of heart, and fidelity to the monastic way of life, practiced daily with diligence, keep us moving in the right direction toward the goal of perfection and being true to who we are in Christ. With God, all things are possible!

Angie McDonald, oblate
Huntingburg, IN

Continued from Page 7

become angry, for our anger will not bring about the righteousness God desires for us Do not merely listen to the Word and so deceive yourselves – act on it (James 1:19)!

So, let’s care for one another – especially the most innocent and vulnerable – and let’s not be blind to those impoverished by society’s greed, to families left without homes by mental illness, addiction, and unemployment, left to fend for themselves by the indifference of a worldly society that respects the rights of wealth and capital above all else.

To stand with Christ Crucified demands we acknowledge the ways

our privileged status has undermined the human dignity of the underprivileged. We must stand with our marginalized brothers and sisters, and identify with them because, as He taught, Christ comes to us as the most vulnerable among us, dressed up as those in need.

As we’ve forcefully been reminded in recent days, people who feel driven to protect their own “personal rights” as absolute also will tend to neglect their responsibilities to respect the needs of others. We must wake up to the good of the entire community and be attentive to the needs of the vulnerable in our society, because nothing says more clearly who we are

than how we treat others, especially the least among us.

So, if we want the way of perfection, we’ll need to renounce ourselves and take up our cross every day, for only by following the Crucified Lord will we demonstrate, as He did, that rising demands dying and that when the old passes away, a new creation is raised up by God. But though we often forget, it’s a good thing that God does not, so we have the Eucharist! Let us do this to remember Him and let us do this to remember who we are as those made new in Christ!

Fr. Adrian Burke, OSB
Saint Meinrad Archabbey

OBLATE NEWS

INVESTITURES

The following took part in the investiture ceremony on September 25, 2021: Jeffrey Blue, South Bend, IN; Marguerite Blue, South Bend, IN; Ellen Godbey, Yosemite, KY; Mary Hennessy, Raleigh, NC; Thomas Hennessy, Raleigh, NC; Ronald Johnson, Lizton, IN; Fr. Bill Keebler Jr., Chenoa, IL; James Kelly, Pickerington, OH; Marlene Knapp, Sycamore, IL; Terry Knapp, Sycamore, IL; Thomas Konechnik, Sycamore, IL; Nancy Owen, Bloomington, IN; James Andy Schaber, West Lafayette, IN; Richard Schubert, Elbert, CO; Theresa Schubert, Elbert, CO; David Tate, West Lafayette, IN; Charlotte Thomas, Kalamazoo, MI. ♦

OBLATIONS

These oblates took part in the oblation ceremony on September 25, 2021: Michal Beck, Carmel, IL; Rev. Cynthia Campbell, Masonic Home, KY; Patricia DeLuca, Versailles, KY; Karen Dwyer, South Bend, IN; Craig Galbraith, Kure Beach, NC; Carol Herzog, Jasper, IN; Christine Johnson, Versailles, KY; Kenneth Kosovich, Kirtland, OH; Bette Niedbalski, Columbus, IN; Dr. Kristi Nord, Jasper, IN; Debra Ryan, Versailles, KY; John Shawler, Hurricane, WV; Steven Smith, Cincinnati, OH; Dr. Jonathan Stotts, Nashville, TN; Jan van Schaik, Portage, MI; Joyce Voegerl, Jasper, IN. ♦

DEATHS

Bernard Sens of Oxford, OH, died on December 27, 2019.

Mary Ellen Ziliak of Haubstadt, IN, died on October 1, 2019.

Joseph M. Scheidler of Chicago, IL, died on January 18, 2021.

Mary Ann Verkamp of Indianapolis, IN, died on August 23, 2021.

Charles H. Eckel of Columbus, OH, died on September 5, 2021.

James (Jim) Durham of Evansville, IN, died on September 15, 2021.

Betty Lux of Beech Grove, IN, died on September 30, 2021.

Carol Work of Bloomington, IN, died on October 6, 2021.

Dr. William George Schmidt of Evansville, IN, died on October 8, 2021.

Carol Murdock of Anaheim, CA, died on November 9, 2021.

Charles Roth of Port Washington, NY, died on November 10, 2021.

Clyde Dorn of Cincinnati, OH, died on November 12, 2021. ♦

VOLUNTEERS APPRECIATED

Recent volunteers in the Oblate Office were Fr. Mateo Zamora, OSB, Br. Michael Reyes, OSB, Nov. Matthew Morris, OSB, oblate novice Joanna Harris, Kathleen Polansky and Angie McDonald. ♦

UPCOMING EVENTS

Investiture and Oblation Rites for 2022: March 5, June 4, October 1, December 3

Oblate Retreat: March 20-22

Oblate Study Days: June 7-10

Oblate Council and Finance Committee meetings: April 24-26

ARTICLES WANTED

Benedictine Oblate Quarterly invites oblates and oblate novices to submit news and information about your chapter, write an article about your Benedictine journey, submit a book review for the Reading Room column, or write an article based upon our issue's theme.

All submissions must include your name, city and state. Submissions will be edited and published as they fit the theme or need of the publication. A maximum 500-word limit is suggested for all submitted articles. If choosing to add sources, please use endnotes and not footnotes.

Please send all submissions to Kathleen Polansky at kpolanskyoblate@yahoo.com.

Upcoming themes and dates:

Spring – Private Ownership, final due date of February 1, 2022

Summer – Restraint of Speech, final due date of May 1, 2022

Fall – Reverence in Prayer, final due date of August 1, 2022

Winter – Faults, final due date of November 1, 2022 ♦

Continued from Page 17

abilities. Spiritual virtues of hope, faith and love help us go further.”

Perfection is through God. Pride believes I am perfect. We will fall continually in our journey and frequently be frustrated with our limitations, yet we can continue to come closer to what God expects us to be. May the Lord help all of us navigate our imperfect lives and bless us with his peace that surpasses all understanding (Philippians 4:7).

Suggested reading on “never giving up”: www.archindy.org/CRITERION/local/2021/10-08/evans.html

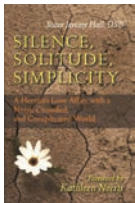
*Deepak Frank, oblate
Columbus, IN*



200 Hill Drive
St. Meinrad, IN 47577

Reading Room

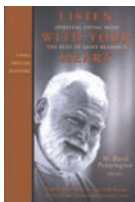
In this issue's column, we have assembled a list of Lenten reading suggestions for oblates.



Silence, Solitude, Simplicity: A Hermit's Love Affair with a Noisy, Crowded, and Complicated World by Jeremy Hall, Liturgical Press, 2007.



Benedict Backwards: Reading the Rule in the 21st Century by Terrence Kardong, Liturgical Press, 2017.



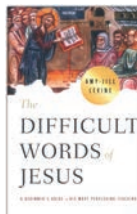
Listen with Your Heart: Spiritual Living with the Rule of Saint Benedict by Basil Pennington, Paraclete Press, 2007.



A Way Other Than Our Own: Devotions For Lent, by Walter Brueggemann, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, KY, 2017.



Seeking Life: The Baptismal Invitation of the Rule of St. Benedict by Esther De Waal, Liturgical Press, 2009.



The Difficult Words of Jesus, by Amy Jill Levine, Abingdon Press, Nashville, TN, 2021.



From the Tools of Good Works to the Heart of Humility: A Commentary on Chapters 4-7 of Benedict's Rule, by Aquinata Böckmann, Liturgical Press, 2017.