

Artwork by Br. Martin Esparner, OSB



Approach prayer with reverence

“If, when we want to ask a favor of someone powerful, we approach with humility and reverence, how much more important that we petition the God of the universe with all humility and purity of devotion.” RB 20

“Then Abraham came near and said, (to God) ‘Will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked?... Far be it from you to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from you! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?’... Abraham answered, ‘Let me take it upon myself to speak to the Lord, I who am but dust and ashes. Suppose five of the fifty righteous are lacking?’”
(Genesis 18:23, 25, 27, 28)

Abraham continued the countdown, asking what if there were but 40, 30, 20, 10, until God leaves the conversation. Looking at Abraham, we see a man of humility and reverence as he approached God regarding the proposed destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.

His conversation with God not only reflected his respect, but also an understanding of the importance of what he asks God to do. Abraham remains subject to God’s authority, yet his persistence continues to call God to truly be the judge of righteousness by being righteous. In the end, God saves Lot and his two daughters. Finding fewer than 10 righteous people in the city, God rescues those willing to be rescued.

St. Benedict reminds us of the importance of our approach to prayer. Abraham reminds us that prayer makes a difference. This issue of the *Benedictine Oblate Quarterly* focuses on reverence at prayer.

*Kathleen Polansky, oblate
New Salisbury, IN*



A POINT TO PONDER FROM *The Rule*

Rule of St. Benedict, Chapter 20

“If, when we want to ask a favor of someone powerful, we approach with humility and reverence. How much more important that we petition the God of the universe with all humility and purity of devotion.

We must be assured that it is not in many words but in purity of heart and tears of compunction that we are heard.

For this reason, prayer ought to be short and pure, unless perhaps it is prolonged by the inspiration of divine grace.

In community, however, prayer should always be brief; and when the superior gives the sign, all rise together.”

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Pray always. But *why*?



Archabbot Kurt Stasiak, OSB

St. Benedict takes it for granted that monks will pray—often. He dedicates 11 chapters of his *Rule* (8-18) to specify precisely which psalms are to be said and when. And his Chapter 20, “Reverence in

Prayer,” reminds us that “God regards our purity of heart and tears of compunction, not our many words” (v. 3). There’s no doubt prayer is important. But we might still ask, “Why? Why do we pray?”

I look at it this way.

When two teams play each other, they know one will win and the other will lose. But what if one team prays before the game? Well, the same thing will happen! One will win, the other will lose. So what, then, is the “power of prayer”? Why do we pray?

When our prayers *are* answered, it’s not because we’ve prayed longer or better or used just the right words. As Jesus said, “The Gentiles heap up empty phrases, for they think that because they use

many words, they will be heard. Don’t be like them.”

And when our prayers *are* answered, it’s not because they have jogged God’s memory, calling his attention to something God would have otherwise forgotten. Our Father knows what we need before we ask Him. So, again, why do we pray? What does our prayer do?

We do not pray to tell God what to do, nor to better the odds that what we want to happen will happen. We pray to remind ourselves that it is God’s will that will be done. In other words, we do not pray to change God’s mind; we pray to change our hearts.

We pray to change the way *we* look at things. We pray, sometimes, even to change the things we ask for – because, over time, we’ve gotten a better idea of what it is we really need.

Thy will be done. It is you who give us this day, every day, our daily bread.

We don’t pray because God forgets. We pray that we might remember.

Archabbot Kurt Stasiak, OSB
Saint Meinrad Archabbey

Reverence in the *Rule*: It begins with listening



Janis Dopp

listening was at the heart of what he

If we want to understand how St. Benedict understood “reverence,” we need to look no further than the first word of the Prologue: Listen. For Benedict,

wanted his monks to understand and learn.

They needed to stop talking and grumbling and, instead, learn to listen with a silent and receptive heart to whatever God was saying to them. “Listen carefully, my son, to the master’s instructions, and attend to them with the ear of your heart” (*Prologue, v. 1*).

Then, in Chapter 20, he addresses

reverence in prayer and explains what that is all about. It is about coming before the Lord with humility and respect, using as few words as possible in our petitions. Reverence is a state of mind where we diminish and allow God to accept our humble petitions and attend to them. It is about peace and quiet. It is about listening.

What does God say to us in our prayer time? Fr. Cajetan White, OSB, once said that if we realize that God is speaking to us in a phrase or psalm, we should stop there and let that phrase or psalm speak to us—and leave it at that. Prayer, then, is not just something that

we need to finish so that we can get on with the rest of our day. It is about listening to the prayer and realizing how God is breaking through the noise and busyness of our lives. We need to let God do the talking. We need to allow God to change the course of our day—and perhaps the direction of our life.

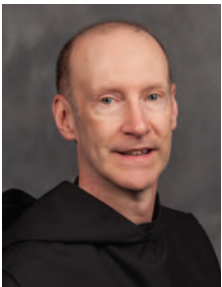
We can tend to relegate reverence to a particular posture that we assume when we pray. It is much more demanding than folded hands and bowed heads. All of that has a place as part of our ritual attentiveness, but reverence is so much more than that. It is the life-

changing opportunity that we are present to receive each time we come to prayer.

Let God form your heart and mind in surprising ways as you begin your prayer tomorrow. As Benedict tells us, “Prayer should ... be short and pure” (*Rule 20:4*). We need to stop trying to impress God with our eloquence and be humbled by God’s simplicity.

*Janis Dopp
Oblate Director*

Prayer is conversation with God



Fr. Joseph Cox, OSB

When we have a conversation with someone, it is a good idea to take the other person into consideration rather than thinking only of ourselves. In good conversation, we show our respect for others by making eye contact with them, paying attention to them, listening to them, and not dominating the conversation.

We must allow the other person to speak. We reverence, revere and honor others by engaging in respectful conversations with them. This is in line with our faith as Christians because the Bible tells us that all people are made in the image and likeness of God and have inherent dignity. How we converse with others reflects to what extent we honor them.

Similar elements of respectful

conversations compose the structure of our conversations with God. These elements include attempting to pay attention rather than allowing our mind to wander; not dominating the conversation but occasionally allowing the Lord to speak to us in quiet; and making eye contact when we are at the exposition of the Blessed Sacrament. In prayer, we speak to God and, if we quiet down, God speaks to us. Prayer is conversation with God.

In prayer, we lift our minds and hearts to God and talk to God. One of the great things about doing this is that the Lord is always there to listen. When we try to talk to the Lord, we don’t get voicemail that says, “This is God. I’m not home right now, but if you leave your name and number, I’ll get back to you.”

God is always there for us and is waiting to hear from us. Once when I was travelling, I saw a billboard that said, “Prayer is to be online with God.” That’s right. It is instant

communication with God. I saw another billboard that said, “We need to talk. -God.”

In Chapter 20 of the *Rule of St. Benedict*, we are reminded that when we pray, we are speaking with God! What a great and awesome experience! As soon as we begin to pray, the Lord turns and listens to us! This can help us call to mind how we are to behave and think when we speak with God.

Prayer is to be heartfelt and succinct. Not with a wandering mind or with verbosity do we speak to God. Better short and from the heart. It should be prolonged only under the inspiration of divine grace.

Let us strive to pray with all our heart and soul and being.

*Fr. Joseph Cox, OSB
Oblate Chaplain*

Are you willing to be part of the answer?



Thomas Causey

A short story: Jesus looked out on the crowds who had listened to Him teach all day and realized that it was getting late and that they were hungry. So He asked his

disciples, those who claimed to believe in Him and claimed to follow Him, to give the crowds something to eat. “We can’t afford that. Why should money come out of my pocket?” was their reply.

Peter continued, “We have worked hard all our lives for the little we have. If these people want to eat, they can go and do the same. If they have to be hungry, they will learn their lesson and stop being so lazy.”

Jesus, a little disappointed, asked, “Do we not have any food here at all? Go look.” The disciples reluctantly searched until they found a boy with five pieces of bread and two fish. Jesus asked the young man if he would be willing to share.

The boy was outraged. “That would not be fair! I was smart enough to save

and think ahead to make sure I had something to eat. These other people can do the same thing. Why should they eat for free when I had to buy my lunch? If I give them my food, they will never learn responsibility or the value of hard work.” Jesus wept and dismissed the hungry crowds to fend for themselves. No miracle could occur that day.

Thankfully, we know that is not how the real story, the only miracle told in all four gospels, goes. The difference between the gospels’ telling and my reversal centers on prayer. Not the type of prayer that requests God to act on our behalf, but the prayer that makes us able to see possibilities with new eyes and to act accordingly to accomplish God’s will.

The crowd followed Jesus because they had been praying for someone to deliver them from the oppression of illness, poverty and hopelessness. In Jesus, the healer and prophet, they hoped their prayers were being answered.

In Mark 6:35, the disciples offer a plea (a prayer?) to Jesus on behalf of the crowd, but not the kind of prayer that we might expect. They do not ask

Jesus to have compassion and to feed the hungry. They ask Him to send the crowd away so that they can take care of themselves. In answering this “prayer,” Jesus reverses what seems to be a reasonable and realistic plan with the simple command, “You give them something to eat.”

The miracle at the end of the story results from a threefold prayer of action, offering and thanksgiving. The disciples had to do something. They went out among the people to find the gifts and resources that they had assumed were not available.

The young person who had meager provisions somehow found the hope and faith to offer his gifts into Jesus’ hands. Jesus’ prayer was one of thanksgiving to God, who always provides more than enough to share.

When we pray, how often do we ask God to bless what we consider our own “practical and reasonable” solution to a problem? Are we willing to be a part of the answer to our own prayer by venturing into crowds and deserted places with eyes of faith to see gifts where we thought there would be none?

Are we willing to offer the little we may have into Jesus’ hands to serve the greater good, realizing that means abandoning our own carefully prepared security? Are we truly willing to join Jesus’ Eucharistic prayer and realize from the loaves and fishes of Mark 6 to the broken bread in Mark 14:22 that, when we pray with a willingness to act and to offer, there is always enough and we are meant to share?

*Thomas Causey, oblate
New Salisbury, IN*

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Reverence in prayer begins with humility



Mark Plaiss

A sad little vignette, but true.

It was noon Mass at St. Paphnutius Parish, with Fr. Tom (not the real parish nor the pastor's name) presiding. The assembly files forward up the middle aisle in two parallel lines to receive Holy Communion. I'm in the left line, when the man in front of me reaches Father and kneels on the marble floor.

Fr. Tom looks down at the man and says to him, "Stand up." The man does not. Again, Fr. Tom says, "Stand up." The man remains kneeling. One more time, "Stand up." The man maintains his posture.

So Fr. Tom resumes distributing Communion to the folks in the right line. When the last person in the right line moves past me, I slip into the right line. I receive Communion and step to my right a few feet and stop; I want to see how this little drama is going to play out.

"Stand up," says Fr. Tom. The man, who has remained kneeling in place the entire time Father distributed Communion to the folks in the right line, doesn't budge. Fr. Tom whirls around, returns the ciborium to the tabernacle, approaches the altar, and says, "Let us pray." The man who was kneeling stands and returns to the pews.

This little episode, which I dub "The Stand Up Mass," pitted two hard-headed individuals against one another. The bottom line is that Fr. Tom should have given the kneeling

man Holy Communion. You must wonder, though, how badly the kneeling man wanted to consume Our Lord, which obviously wasn't too bad.

Both men believed they were acting out of reverence. Fr. Tom felt he was being true to the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (or at least to a portion of it), and the kneeling man believed he was being reverent toward Our Lord. Yet, in their bullheadedness, neither man, ironically, exhibited reverence.

Terrence Kardong, in his commentary on the *Rule*, notes that "The word 'reverence' is usually for God in the RB" (p. 175, commenting on RB 9:7). At RB 20:3, Benedict notes that "we shall be heard ... in purity of heart."

In the above vignette, both men lack purity of heart, and their reverence was actually aimed at themselves. Reverence in prayer is an interior disposition that bows to the Lord as opposed to the self or to the rubric.

At the Ash Wednesday Mass, we hear Jesus warn his disciples about praying for purposes of display. The ideal, rather, is to "go to your inner room ... and pray to your Father in secret" (*Matthew 6:6*).

The heart of reverence in prayer is humility. The importance Benedict places on this virtue is clear by the long Chapter 7 in the *Rule*. Of special note in that chapter is that second step: "... a man loves not his own will nor takes pleasure in the satisfaction of his desires" (*RB 7:31*).

All of us need to heed that admonition, whether priest or parishioner.

Mark Plaiss, oblate
Fox Lake, IL

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Notes for Novices:

Prayer: Rooted in humility, fear of God



Br. Gregory Morris

A common descriptor used by guests and pilgrims witnessing monastic life is “reverence.” The word signifies the worshipful adoration the creature owes to

the Creator of the Universe. Our way of life, structured on moderation, liturgy and fellowship, fosters an ongoing purification from all disturbances, which continuously offers all to God, rising step by step to the high point of love, the purity of heart. This is a fundamental principle in monastic spirituality.

This movement toward God includes moments of guilt and sorrow, recognizing when and how our selfishness impeded our ability to love. This recognition of our sinful creaturehood is the tears of compunction. Remorse, spurred on by a desire for conversion, leads us to seek

forgiveness and mercy. Weeping out of love for God allows our hearts to soften and see God’s grace in our human frailties.

Anyone who perseveres in this way of life quickly finds that, as one grows into awareness, our prayer life becomes a struggle. Inclined to “listen with the ear of the heart,” we eventually discover something we merely glimpsed from afar: a hidden land often described as a swamp, a wilderness or desert. This inward movement to seek God inevitably stumbles across this hidden depth of ourselves. Upon discovery, we often ask this question: Who is this?

We can avoid this journey, seeking a return to safer pastures through comfortable prayers, devotions and chatter. However, we cannot unsee what we have glimpsed. Eventually, our restlessness leads us back to this place. Thus, we return to that unspoken space

that scares and haunts us. Why? Because this “hidden land” has an alluring beauty, reflected in the seemingly wounded harshness and incomplete image of ourselves. However, this swamp, a secret garden, is adored and loved by God. It is this “wilderness” we are to abide in, for “from a wilderness, God will make springs of water” (*Is 41:18*). This “desert” is where God intends for us to be, for the Master of the Universe cannot be absent from that which He loves.

Our prayer, rooted in humility and fear of the Lord, will always be enough for God. God delights in our humanity as a parent rejoices at an infant’s first smile or a toddler’s first inchoate steps. Our language, limited as it is, can never plumb the depths of this mystery: our feeble love is enough for Love itself.

Br. Gregory Morris, OSB
Oblate Novice Mentor

Notes from Novices:

Worship God: In spirit and truth



Jenifer Schreiner

From the very beginning of creation, Scripture provides us with the story of how humanity is called to live with highest regard for God, who is our Father, our Creator, and the source of all truth.

When we place God above all other desires, we revere Him in our worship and in our good deeds, and we live with a desire to follow the precepts of the Lord in every moment of our day (*RB 4:63*).

Each day we strive to grow closer to

God by following the commandments, keeping our hearts focused on what is pure in God’s sight, and caring for our neighbor. “God is Spirit, and those who worship him must worship him in Spirit and truth” (*John 4:24*).

Those who revere God seek to magnify the fruits of the Spirit, which are realized in love, joy, peace, gentleness, goodness and faith. When we profess God as the giver of all good gifts and we let this Word take life in us, the result is a faith that gives witness to God’s Spirit and truth.

Jesus had reverence for the Father. He desired to follow the will of the Father in his passion above his own needs. In

Chapter 4 of John’s Gospel, the woman at the well demonstrated reverence for the Father and for Jesus when she recognized his identity as the Messiah. She then went and proclaimed to the townspeople the good news of his message. She became a living witness of God’s truth.

As Scripture reveals many stories about the faithfulness and unfaithfulness of the people, we find that those who revere God are blessed in the end. It is God’s promise to his people that those who seek to worship God in Spirit and truth shall be rewarded for their reverence with the greatest gift of all: the gift of the living water that leads to eternal life.

Jenifer Schreiner, oblate novice
Valparaiso, IN

Workers in the Vineyard Trust in God's help



John Brooks

The last 12 years have been filled with some of the biggest challenges, sadness and happiness I have experienced in my life. In 2010, I suffered from

shingles that traveled to my spinal fluid and into my brain, causing several medical issues, including seizures and awakening a dormant kidney disease that I am still struggling with today.

In 2015, my wife of 35 years died unexpectedly. Toward the end of 2015 and into 2016, I underwent lung surgery and open-heart surgery. In 2018 and 2021, I said goodbye to both of my beloved Basset hounds. In 2021, I needed a pacemaker implanted to regulate my heart.

After receiving all the vaccines and boosters that were available for COVID, I have contracted COVID three times. The third exposure, in May 2022, has been the most complicated and has involved numerous emergency

room visits and hospital stays.

During those same years, I have been blessed with six adorable grandchildren. I began volunteering at our local hospital, local homeless shelter and local food pantry. In 2017, I began my journey to become an oblate of Saint Meinrad.

In 2017, I began my novitiate. I was struggling with my relationship with God, confused, wandering without a direction, sad and grieving. I was suffering and had lost my way. My focus was on myself and what I had lost.

Struggling for purpose and a path out of the despair, I thought that if I prayed enough, God would shine a light on the path I was to take. I was looking for an easy out. I wanted God to do all the work. I wanted to give all my problems, worries and challenges over to God and let God deal with them.

What I found was that when I turned them over to God at night, my mind was freed and allowed to rest. In the

morning, when faced with the challenges of the day, while still overwhelming, I felt stronger, more in control, and able to see more clearly what needed to be done.

My relationship with God changed. I no longer looked to God to take away the challenges. I sought the wisdom and strength that allowed me to see the solutions I needed to deal with my challenges. Rather than looking at what I had lost, appreciation of the wonderful gifts I had grown in me.

I saw God the way I saw my father: always willing to listen. My father always asked questions, but seldom offered solutions. He offered wisdom, yet often it was hidden within stories of his childhood. He taught me that, through trust and faith, solutions could be found. Over time, I realized that, even though I did not understand my path, the light was brighter and the more trust I placed in God, there was wisdom that came only through faith.

*John Brooks, oblate
Columbus, IN*

Reverence: More than mental activity



Don Coffman

Although an important part of prayer is formal, audible and shared, at its deepest level, prayer is far more than these approaches.

Reverence in prayer is more than a mental activity. It involves our person at the deepest level of personality, that part of our being seen only by God. It calls for a radical openness to that ground of reality that the late theologian Paul Tillich called the Ground of all Being.

It calls us beyond elementary views of a God "out there" to a more adult understanding of God, to the ultimate mystery I call God. My spiritual life is a relentless journey into the great mystery I call God and what Tillich called "Being Itself is, the search for my identity as I, in the words of Scripture ... live and move and have [my] being in God" (*Acts 17:28*).

As I approach the end of a long life, I affirm that I do continue to try to be reverent in prayer, but I often fail. However, it is obviously more than a posture or a set of words! My reverence in prayer is an attempt to surrender my innermost being to that reality beyond

words. Yet, when I try to communicate this, I must use words, for that is all we humans have!

I like the prayer of St. Anselm as one guide to reverence in prayer: "Teach my heart where and how to seek you, where and how to find you. O God, you are my God and I have never seen you. You have made me and remade me, and you have bestowed on me the good things I possess, and still I do not know you ... Let me seek you in my desire. Let me desire you in my seeking. Let me find you by loving you. Let me love you when I find you."

*Don Coffman, oblate
Liberty, KY*

Considering the Psalms:

Psalm 8: We have a place in God's creation

O LORD, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

You have set your glory above the heavens. Out of the mouths of babes and infants you have founded a bulwark because of your foes, to silence the enemy and the avenger.

When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established; what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?

Yet you have made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honor. You have given them dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under their feet, all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas.

O LORD, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

—(NRSV Bible with Apocrypha)



Kathleen Polansky

I am a Star Trek fan. I watched the Rover on Mars and the amazing images it sent back to earth. On December 21, 2020, for the first time in nearly 800 years, there

was an alignment of Jupiter and Saturn to create one bright light. On this night, my husband and I, along with my godson, stood shivering in the cold, with our telescope directed toward the event awaiting the moment.

Some were calling it the Christmas Star. We camped on the side of the road near our house, where the opening and the hill gave us a magnificent view of the sky. Neighbors driving by stopped to chat about what we were watching. It was fun to take a break from the pandemic to enjoy the wonders of the universe with one another.

To quote Nicolaus Copernicus, “To know the mighty works of God, to comprehend His wisdom and majesty and power; to appreciate, in degree, the wonderful workings of His laws, surely all this must be a pleasing and acceptable mode of worship to the Most High, to whom ignorance cannot be more grateful than knowledge.”

This week the James Webb telescope began sending back images of deep space with a clarity never seen before. I marvel at the time in which we are living. No one has seen the wonders of the universe as we are seeing them today. The more I look into these images, the more I am in awe of the vastness of creation and the Creator of this universe.

Psalm 8 is the first hymn of praise in the psalter. It is a hymn that reminds us of our place in God's creation. As we extend our view into the immensity of this creation, the awesome majesty of it all overwhelms and brings us to our knees in prayer. We are told that God's name is reflected in the glory that is creation (*Psalm 8:1*).

God has given us a place in this magnificence. It is one of exceptional relationship. Prayer brings us deeper into that relationship. “(W)hat are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them? Yet you have made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honor” (*Psalm 8:5*). Being honest about who we are and who God is brings deep respect and reverence to that relationship.

Relationships carry responsibilities. In Psalm 8, we are reminded, as in

Genesis 1, that we are the caretakers of this God-given creation. Walter Brueggemann suggests that failing to take seriously our role in God's plan as caretakers is a rejection of our responsibility to be in relationship with God and care for the earth.



Photos were taken by the James Webb telescope and are courtesy of NASA and the Space Telescope Science Institute.



It is also necessary to recognize that human dominion is bounded, structurally and theologically, by the declaration of God's sovereignty. It is necessary to remember that human sovereignty is secondary. To bypass that importance is to sever our relationship.

Separated from God's will, our dominion is in danger of becoming nothing more than selfishness, greed and opportunism. To live outside our relationship with God is the core of sin. Dominion, without the recognition of

God's claim on us and on the earth, leaves God out of the partnership and invites disaster.

Frightening signs of misappropriated dominion are being witnessed in ecological disasters all around us: eroding soil, polluted streams, fires, crippling drought, global warming, dangerous weather changes, etc.

Psalm 8 is a reminder that praising God is a recognition of the reverence we owe to God. It is a reminder of the trust that God has placed in us. It is a

reminder of the immensity of God. And it is a reminder that we are not the sole creation of God.

The psalm ends as it began, with the poetic affirmation that all of creation displays God's majesty. Now we are charged with caring for that majesty and not selfishly abusing and destroying it. In doing so, we show reverence in our relationship with God.

*Kathleen Polansky, oblate
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Oblate Hobbies: Working with wood

Got a hobby? Tell us about it. We'd love to share it.

How long has this been a hobby? What got you interested? How is it challenging? Why do you enjoy it? Does this hobby enhance your life as an oblate? Send articles to kpolanskyoblate@yahoo.com.



William Busch

I've always been somewhat of a packrat. Not the kind that hoards all kinds of yard sale fodder. My packrat-ness began when working in the Pacific

Northwest redwoods on my first stop of a nomadic career in infrastructure real estate. I was gifted with a three-foot-square, 2.5-foot-thick redwood slab from a friend who knew I tinkered with wood.

I had no idea what I was going to make, yet I knew it had to be something special. The enormous slab of redwood was unique. It traveled with my wife and me as we trekked from northern California to Oregon by way of Alaska. It was a challenge to pack, heavy to move, and a nuisance to store.

In Kentucky, I went to a mom-and-pop sawmill for some project materials and became enamored by three 1"x10" gorgeous 10-foot-long clear walnut boards

leaning in a corner. I had to add them to my "I must do something with these" collection, and they found their way into a corner of the garage.

On another occasion, some old, stately, ornamental cherry trees were being felled to make room for a renovation of St. Joseph Proto-Cathedral in Bardstown, Kentucky. These trees were a part of history, as they dated back to the construction of that historic first proto-cathedral west of the Alleghenies. A three-foot log from one tree was added to the hoard, which we lugged all the way to South Carolina.

It is fascinating how our spiritual life becomes intertwined with activities we never imagine could be connected. Working with wood has always been a joyful pastime, but I do not think it



elevated to the level of a hobby until the challenge began of transfiguring some of the hoard into meaningful objects. I needed a sense of purpose for each item, something that would connect each to the historical and spiritual legacy of my wife and me.

The redwood slab was a reflection that our life together began with us living in northwest California. It was a foundational piece of wood with unique dimensions. The Lord drew us into a church that launched our faith on a sturdy foundation. I crafted a coffee table that symbolized a strong faith foundation.

The slab was irregular in thickness, reminiscent of our early erratic faith. It required my building a frame that my router could rest on and make passes back and forth across the surface until the slab had a uniform thickness. I trimmed it into an oval, symbolizing God's eternal grace.

I cut a second oval out of the middle to create the base. Legs were formed to reach up like arms lifted to the Lord in praise, connecting the base to the tabletop. I inserted a specially cut oval glass top to complete the piece.

The walnut boards were a rich find that prompted me to recall the miracle of my wife and I finding each other in a remote corner of the world. I decided on a bed that would showcase the magnificent grain that was obscured in the wood until it could be sanded and polished to perfection.

That was also reminiscent of our life's faith journey, which has been refined by the Lord through the polishing trials and blessings of life. As I worked, hour upon hour, sanding and applying coats of stain and finish, I could not help but think of the Lord persisting in sanding and polishing us.

The cherry tree was a grand old symbol of the mature treasure rooted in the proto-



cathedral, completed in 1823, that served as a launching point for the priests who planted Christianity throughout the Northwest Territory.

Spiritually, it was a metaphor of our maturing as oblates at Saint Meinrad and the value of holy devotion. Our chosen saints for oblation were, for Marjorie, Fr. Alfonso Mazurek, a Polish WWII martyr and distant relative; and for me, Sir Richard of Lucca, father of multiple saints, who died on a pilgrimage while in Italy.

After much prayer, I decided on crafting an altar that we could use on our back porch, coupled with a wood carving of our respective saints. This project was a daunting task, complicated by the fact that I had no woodcarving experience. The

altar needed to be easily portable, as it would likely be moved from place to place.

As my hands moved, the images emerged from a log of wood. It was as if my hands were disengaged from my brain and reconnected to St. Joseph, the carpenter, who took over control of crafting the ultimate pieces. Both the altar and woodcarvings helped preserve an important link to Christian history.

Praise God for his guidance and provision, even in helping us with crafts and hobbies.

*William Busch, oblate
Sumter, SC*

Meet A Monk: Fr. Bede Cisco, OSB



Fr. Bede Cisco, OSB

On one hand, he handles the day-to-day running of the Saint Meinrad Archabbey monastic community. On the other hand, his life revolves around prayer.

Up at 4 a.m., Fr. Bede Cisco, Archabbey prior (second in leadership), devotes an hour to private prayer every morning. He then heads over to the church for Lauds (5:30 a.m., Monday through Saturday and 7 a.m. on Sunday). Additional prayer takes place at morning Mass, noon prayer, Vespers at 5 p.m., and Compline at 7 p.m. After Compline, it's lights out in Fr. Bede's cell.

Throughout the day, he sees to all the mundane details that allow the community to operate smoothly.

Take parking, for instance. With some monks using electric carts to get around, finding a suitable place for them during the daily prayer times can pose somewhat of a challenge.

Sometimes he needs to help the monks clear the way for guests or keep the

path open at one or another end of the choir rows in the church. And that's just one detail.

Born and raised in Indianapolis at one of the first parishes to be placed under the patronage of the Little Flower, St. Therese of Lisieux (canonized in 1925), Fr. Bede witnessed an abundance of vocations of both men and women from his home parish throughout the 1950s and 1960s. This included a couple of boys a year ahead of him in grade school, as well as a couple more coming up behind him.

This rich seedbed of vocations laid a firm foundation for Fr. Bede to also respond to God's call to the priesthood, as well as the monastic life.

Like so many others, Fr. Bede's close encounter with the daily life of the Archabbey drew him with its common prayer and community life during his undergraduate years at Saint Meinrad College. After spending the summer after his sophomore year in a parish setting, he settled on the monastic life as a firm direction.

Professing his monastic vows on August 24, 1974, Fr. Bede was on his way with a bachelor's degree from Saint Meinrad College and a Master of Divinity from Saint Meinrad School of Theology.

More graduate degrees followed in the education field – a second master's degree and a doctorate from Columbia University.

He also earned a certificate in spiritual direction from the St. Louis-based Aquinas Institute of Theology. Fr. Bede's passion for education includes the wider dimension of spiritual formation, along with academics.

During his time at the Archabbey, Fr. Bede has served in a wide variety of ways. Before teaching courses in Scripture and serving as associate and academic dean, he first managed the School of Theology's Scholar Shop for four years.

While serving in the Archdiocese of Indianapolis, he worked in deacon formation. From 2013 to 2021, he was director of spiritual formation at the Seminary and School of Theology before being appointed prior of the Archabbey.

It is this vital inclusion of prayer that remains the heart of Fr. Bede's ministry. How important is prayer for seminarians, in Fr. Bede's opinion? On a scale of 1 to 10? "Eleven," he states flatly. "If you don't pray, you don't stay."

The same could be said for any of us.

*Angie McDonald, oblate
Huntingburg, IN*

Spiritual Direction: We learn to pray by praying



Beverly Weinhold

My neighbor's window sign read: Prayer Changes Things! I knew that to be true. Prayer changes things and prayer transforms people. I needed that reminder,

because when I saw that sign seven years ago, my faith felt paper thin. Learning to live prayerfully has changed my life. It has given me joy and strength in impossible circumstances. No wonder Jesus' disciples made only this request for teaching from their mentor: "Lord, teach us to pray" (*Luke 11:1*).

Jesus responded concretely, offering a template and not techniques: "Pray like this," straightforwardly followed by the Lord's Prayer (*Matthew 6:9-13*). It was simple, sincere and succinct, focusing on "us," not "I." While the Lord's Prayer is reverent, hallowing God's name, it is also intimate, addressing God as Father. Jesus taught a humble posture, not a puffed-up performance. It wasn't a play script, but a life stance.

No. The Our Father and Benedict's *Rule (20:1-5)* are not a one and done. It's a routine showing up in reverential practice over a lifespan. We start small one step at a time. The Night Stair at Hexham Abbey in northern England is an iconic image of prayer's priority. It's a well-worn stone staircase from the Middle Ages that still stands today.

Before dawn each day, the priory bell would summon monks to Matins. They would descend from their dormitory straight down the Night Stair, on their way to prayer in the

choir. Benedictines have done a similar thing since the sixth century, knowing that "the secret of prayer, is by and large, showing up."¹

Showing up is one thing. Knowing how to pray is another. Like Jesus, St. Benedict doesn't offer techniques. He gives guidelines: Be reverent and respectful, ask and never assume, lead with a pure heart, and be brief (*Chapter 7*). A spiritual director friend of mine (who is also an oblate), likes to say "we learn to pray by praying," and that living prayerfully affects "the way we live and act once it's over."² He names three ways to pray that I find helpful: "praying with your own words, praying with other people's words and praying without words."³

My first sincere attempt at leading a prayerful life started at age 16. In the privacy of my room, I prayed with my own words, reverently addressing God as Father. I lost my earthly father at age 7 and it was comforting to turn to the Divine Parent for help. My prayer was self-centered. I make no apologies for that, because it was all I knew. But there was no doubt in my mind that I needed a power greater than myself to live life.

I set aside a special place and started the same time every morning. Over time, I noticed God gathered my scattered fragments, strengthened my true identity and clarified my vocational call. Hungry to grow, I read the saints, Scriptures and other spiritual reading. Reading these prayers inspired me to grow and mature.

Joining the Church taught me to pray other people's words. I prayed the Psalms, the Lord's Prayer and the

liturgy on Sunday mornings. In my private prayer time, I prayed the Scriptures and prayers written by seasoned Christians. Prayer using other people's words humbled me, leaving a sweet aroma surrounding me with a cloud of witnesses who had gone before. This emboldened and empowered my personal prayer, stretching it from an isolated act in a closet to a way of living life in community.

Reading Basil Pennington's *The Cloud of Unknowing* gave me language for praying without words. Contemplation had already begun to bud in my prayer life. Sitting with a cup of coffee and reflecting on Scripture early every morning segued into substantive silence. Ignatius' invitation to "consider how God our Lord beholds me"⁴ introduced God's gaze. Here, I rest in my baptism as beloved in the Beloved Christ. This divine acceptance is an interior hold that centers my soul and calms my spirit to listen to the Spirit.

Summing up, my neighbor's sign has it right: Prayer Changes Things. Prayer converts people. In this apocalyptic moment in our world, country and church are at a tipping point. It is a prophetic stance to see the monks at Saint Meinrad live prayerfully and faithfully fulfill the daily hours. Like the Night Stair, the monks beckon us to show up, stay the course and hope against hope. Lord, help us all as you know and will. Amen.

Beverly Weinhold, oblate
Louisville, KY

¹ Benson, Richard: (2010), *In Constant Prayer*, p 32.

² Harris, Daniel Ethan: (2017), *Live Prayerfully. How ordinary lives become prayerful*, (22-23).

³ *Ibid.*, (29-63).

⁴ Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius of Loyola, 75:3; as quoted in *The Prayer of Examen*, Brotherhood of Hope, West Somerville, MA (2005).

The *Didache*: Seeking God by building community

This is the third of four articles exploring the Didache (“Didakay”), the pre-Gospels writing by Jesus community leaders instructing how to live, worship and gather Gentiles into the group. This article discusses the Didache’s community-building aspects.



David Miller

The *Didache* likely was written for small, rural, Mediterranean Jewish communities. These followers of Jesus included Jews who

believed He was God’s messenger and Gentiles who abandoned Greco-Roman polytheistic practices. (The title “Messiah” would not be applied for many years.)

Melding these groups into a unified community, while facing hostility in the village, must have been a daunting challenge. That the *Didache* artfully addressed this tension is proven by the outcome. The Jesus groups flourished.

For a new ideology to survive, it must build its own group identity, both to unite the followers and to make it distinct. The *Didache* is a window by which we, 2,000 years later, can see those practices as they actually operated.

The new traditions included weekly worship and other frequent gatherings at homes. These small groups, both families and individuals, came to know each other well as they ate and worshipped together, and brought in new members. Houses were small, so the gatherings were intimate. Sharing a meal is a natural method to create bonds.

Each gathering started with praising God, likely singing, and recitation of The Way, as set out in the *Didache*.

They recited Psalms from memory. Then, each person openly acknowledged their transgressions and asked their brothers and sisters to forgive them. This was “open confession”!

The *Didache* reflects that seeking God was not an individual undertaking, but rather a group effort, as entry to God’s Kingdom was by community. Prescribed prayers asked the entire “gathering” to be received by God. The *Didache*’s version of “Our Father” speaks of sin as a single transgression—this community’s—not an individual’s sins.

Group morality was the standard. Sin was seen as having a social dimension that affected the entire community. The whole gathering changes for the good. In short, either all make it to the Kingdom, or none do. It was the group’s responsibility to train new followers and collectively nurture the flock. Such theology creates powerful community bonds.

Rules for fasting twice weekly, and thrice daily prayer, also created bonds and group distinction. Followers likely worked together. The workplace was a common recruitment site. So fasting and praying with one’s co-workers created unity. There was an admonition to “seek the company of saints (others in community) often” and avoid outsiders.

The memorization of The Way created a shared common knowledge. The followers were “insiders”; they “belonged” and knew the secrets. It was a way of life, not simply assenting

to dry teachings. The baptism ritual was a community cornerstone. They baptized all members. The dramatic process involved two days of fasting, then the group witnessed the immersion, letting the followers know they were now brothers and sisters.

The *Didache* espoused communal property. The group held everything in common for mutual use: “no one was to claim anything as their own.” If a member was in need, she could expect to be provided for: “don’t let alms sweat in your hand.” Contrary, if one was without need, he was forbidden to accept generosity.

Many rules existed to lessen group-destroying tensions that would routinely occur in a small community. The Way prohibited grumbling, laziness, speaking ill of others, and arrogance. It required calmness, gentleness, generosity, prayers for those you dislike, suffering for others, and mercy to all.

There were no class or gender distinctions. Leaders were inclusively referred to as “persons.” The pronouns used were “my child,” never “son” or “daughter.” Slaves and the poor were as welcome as masters and the wealthy. The Way was modified from traditional Jewish teachings concerning diet, working on the Sabbath, and handling graven image money to accommodate Gentiles.

They created a new community and family. New members were assigned a mentor to become their parent, as the aspirant likely had lost family connections.

Continued on next page

Continued from page 13

The requirement of hospitality was also a community-building device. Gatherings were hosted in homes, meals communally prepared. They warmly received wandering prophets and pilgrims. Meals and lodging were provided, and no compensation was accepted.

Through frequent gatherings, shared meals, common worship, memorized rules, mutual responsibility, and prescribed practices, these early Jesus followers became the “in” graced group seeking God’s Kingdom, while separating themselves from the “out”

group of non-believers. Community identity was the result.

In the next article, we will consider how today the *Didache* remains a guide to a robust life with Christ.

David W. Miller, oblate
South Milford, IL

The Oblate Toolbox

It’s hard to be reverent on your own

“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

If you want to know what reverence in prayer is, don’t ask me. I am too distracted to be reverent.

My mind wanders at Mass.

Often I am tempted to skip out on my Lauds, Vespers or Compline. After 17 years as a Benedictine Oblate, I still struggle with *lectio divina*. I can always find something else to do rather than pray the rosary or the Chaplet of Divine Mercy. Study the Bible now? Later, dude.

And yet, I make the sign of the cross with holy water as I enter the sanctuary. I place the veil over my head in holy submission. I kneel at the entrance to the pew as I make the sign of the cross again. I kneel to offer my prayer to God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit before Mass begins.

During the Mass, I participate as directed. We sing praises to the Lord. We pray. We confess. We listen. We respond. We affirm our most holy faith. We stand, sit and kneel. We prepare our hearts to receive Our Lord in the Eucharist.

I can’t be reverent all by myself: I need others. I need their prayers, their presence, their spiritual poverty that equals my own.

I need their humanity, their lack, their vulnerability. Because ... I’m right there with them. I must offer my poverty to God, knowing how much I don’t measure up.

Psalm 94 really hit me recently during my Lauds for Saturday of Week One (in the *Benedictine Oblates Liturgy of the Hours* book) with its strong message.

God is the Creator; we are his creatures. We approach Him in humility. We bow and bend low, entering his courts with songs of joy and praise. We acclaim Him as the Great King over all authority. He owns us because He made us.

When I acknowledge who God is, and who I am in relation to Him, I feel the reverence rise up from my heart. I know this to be his gift to me. How can anyone truly say they worship God out of their own strength?

Not I.

Angie McDonald, oblate
Huntingburg, IN

Memphis Chapter enjoys fellowship

The Memphis Chapter gathered for prayer and fellowship on Saturday, June 25. The meeting included several persons who traveled to be with us: Anne Kahn from Wilmington, DE; Paul Starr from Crossville, TN, cousin and brother of oblate Terry Starr; and Mallory and Kwame Frimpong, inquirers from Clarksville, TN.

Also attending was Matt Erickson, long-time inquirer who left to earn a master’s degree from the Catholic University in Leuven, Belgium, and now teaches at Jesuit Prep School in Dallas. After Mass and Morning Prayer, we enjoyed a potluck breakfast at the home of oblate Janet McDonnell. We continue to pray together daily by Zoom.

Jennie Latta, oblate
Memphis, TN



OBLATE NEWS

INVESTITURES

The following took part in the investiture ceremony on June 4, 2022: Amy Berger, Hermitage, TN; Dr. Cheryl Bergin, Columbus, IN; Brian Draper, Jackson, MI; Rev. Jonas Hamilton, Vincennes, IN; Seaira Kowalski, Brookhaven, MI; Deacon Daniel Lowery, Crown Point, IN; Donald L. Middleton, Centerville, IN; Fr. Cyril Nnadi, Rancho Cucamonga, CA; Casey Vanderberg, Lansing, MI. ♦

FINAL OBLATION

These oblates took part in the oblation ceremony on June 4, 2022: Amy Balcam, Bloomington, IN; Jeff Davenport, Indianapolis, IN; Joanna Harris, Lexington, KY; Brandon Kraft, Austin, TX; Deacon Mark Plaiss, Fox Lake, IL. ♦

TRANSFER OF OBLATION

Susan Balling, Oakwood, OH; Mary Burford, Muncie, IN; Teresa Lynn, St. Meinrad, IN. ♦

DEATHS

Francis “Fran” Shivone, of Fort Worth, TX, died on March 30, 2022.

Shirley J. Carius, of Canal Winchester, OH, died on February 1, 2022.

Gail Chambers, of Memphis, TN, died on May 12, 2022.

Margaret Jean Cash, of Carbondale, IL, died on May 20, 2022.

Rosemary Geiss, of Evansville, IN, died on June 1, 2022.

John J. “Jack” Burke, of Indianapolis, IN, died on June 1, 2022.

Sharon Apple, of Jasper, IN, died on July 19, 2022.

Deacon Marc Kellams, of Bargersville, IN, died on July 29, 2022. ♦

VOLUNTEERS APPRECIATED

Recent volunteers in the Oblate Office were Benedictine monks Br. Michael Reyes, Br. Gregory Morris, Archabbot Kurt Stasiak, Fr. Eugene Hensell, Fr. Joseph Cox, Fr. Mateo Zamora, Fr. Meinrad Brune, Fr. Denis Quinkert, Fr. Colman Grabert, Fr. Jeremy King, Fr. Gueric DeBona, Fr. Harry Hagan, Br. Martin Erspamer, and Candidate Angel Romero.

Oblates who volunteered were Joanna Harris, Kathleen Polansky, Angie McDonald, Dr. Bill Wilson, Marie Kobos, Michelle Blalock, Maureen and Paul Reichardt, and Ann Smith. Also helping were Dr. Daniela Abraham and Dr. Keith Lemna. ♦

UPCOMING EVENTS

Investiture and Oblation Rites: December 3, 2022; March 11, 2023; June 3, 2023

Oblate Retreats: December 9-11, 2022; March 19-21, 2023; June 19-21, 2023 (Study Days)

Oblate Council and Finance Meetings: October 21, 2022; April 21-22, 2023; June 30-July 2, 2023 (Council meeting only) ♦

We REALLY want you and your articles!

The *Benedictine Oblate Quarterly* invites oblates and oblate novices to submit news and information about your chapter or write an article about your Benedictine journey.

We also have a theme for each upcoming issue that we welcome you to reflect on and submit an article. Finally, please submit a book review for the Reading Room column.

All submissions must include your name, city and state. A maximum 700-word limit is suggested. 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 submission dates:

Winter Faults (final due date November 1)

Spring How the *Rule* governs the lives of oblates (final due date February 1, 2023)

Summer Self-awareness (final due date May 1, 2023)

Fall Distribution of goods (final due date August 1, 2023)

Winter Listening/attentiveness (final due date November 1, 2023)

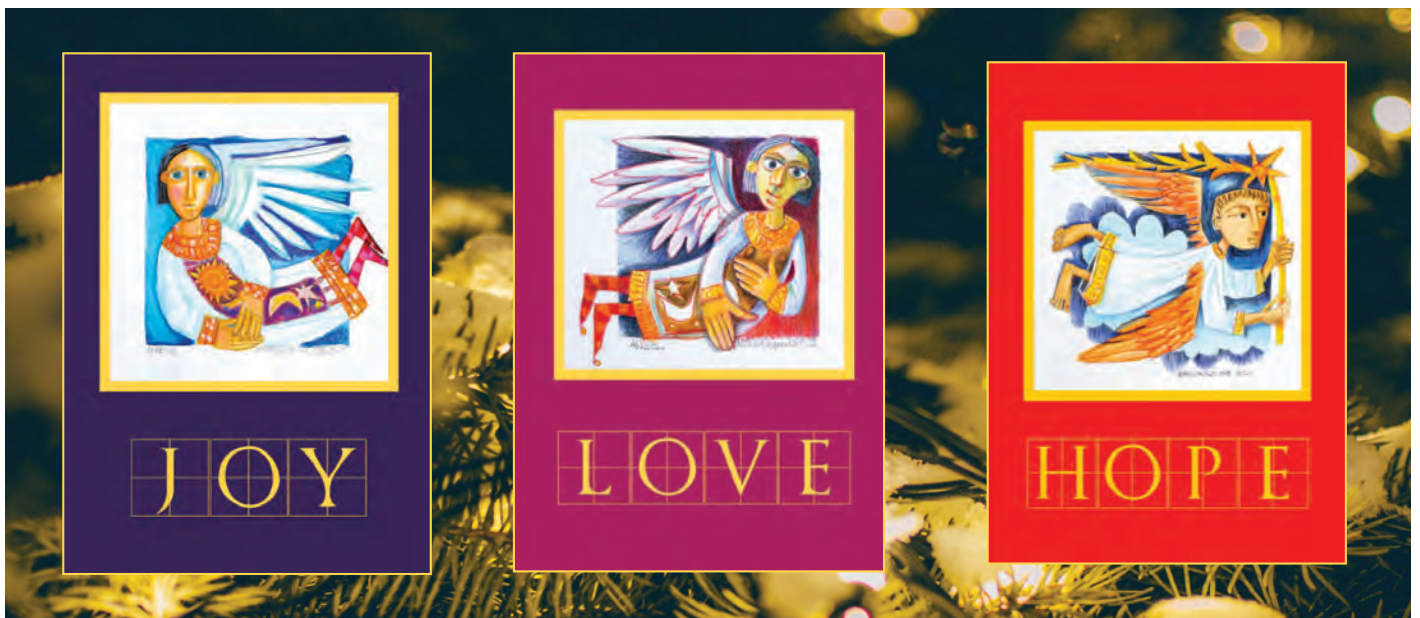


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In Honor of our Deceased Oblates

The Saint Meinrad Oblate Office has wanted to find a way to honor our deceased oblates here at Saint Meinrad. Just as the memory of the deceased monks of the monastery continues to influence the lives of the monastic community, the oblates will always hold a place of honor on this Holy Hill.

Br. Martin Erspamer, OSB, is designing a shrine for the sanctuary of the Saint Meinrad Guest House Chapel, which will house a book listing the names of all deceased oblates of Saint Meinrad. Each year, in a special ritual, we will add to the book the names of oblates who have died in the past year.

We invite you to participate in making this tribute of love and respect a reality. To raise funds for the shrine, we are selling a limited edition set of Christmas cards. Each set of 12 quality cards features three different angels from the artwork collection of Br. Martin. Only 250 sets will be printed. Each set will cost \$25, plus \$9 for shipping and handling.

Please visit www.tinyurl.com/oblatecards or call the oblate office at (812) 357-6817 to purchase your set and be part of this important project for our Oblate Community. Additional donations for this project are also welcomed.