

Consider our faults and how to amend them

Chapter 23 of Matthew's Gospel speaks to the woes that counter the Beatitudes from Chapter 5. They are warnings against hypocrisy. Jesus cannot stomach it. Yet how often do we yield to the temptation to "strain out the gnat and swallow the camel ... or clean only the outside of our cup and dish"?

The monks have a cupboard in our recreation room where we can hang a coffee cup that we regularly use on a hook with our names above the hook. When we have a guest, we tell him he can use a cup on the bottom shelf. Some are very fancy and unique. However,

we make sure we tell him to wash it out because inside it can be disgusting. It's what's on the inside that counts.

If we want to be rewarded with blessings and not endure woes, then we must stand firm and hold fast to the traditions that we were taught in the Gospel to cleanse our hearts and the inner workings of our lives, so we not only look clean, but really are.

(Excerpt from Fr. Jeremy's homily on August 23, 2022.) This issue of *Benedictine Oblate Quarterly* takes faults from the *Rule* as its focus.

*Fr. Jeremy King, OSB
Saint Meinrad Archabbey*



A POINT TO PONDER FROM *The Rule*

Therefore we intend to establish a school for God's service. In drawing up its regulations, we hope to set down nothing harsh, nothing burdensome. The good of all concerned, however, may prompt us to a little strictness in order to amend faults and to safeguard love.

Do not be daunted immediately by fear and run away from the road that leads to salvation. It is bound to be narrow at the outset. But as we progress in this way of life and in faith, we shall run on the path of God's commandments, our hearts overflowing with the inexpressible delight of love.

Never swerving from God's instructions, then, but faithfully observing God's teaching in the monastery until death, we shall through patience share in the sufferings of Christ that we may deserve also to share in the eternal presence. Amen.

(Prologue 45-50)

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, Eunice Taylor and Angie McDonald

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

©2023, Saint Meinrad Archabbey

Everyone talks about faults, but...



Archabbot Kurt Stasiak, OSB

"Everyone talks about the weather, but nobody does anything about it."

Usually attributed to Mark Twain, this quote reminds me of a similar complaint common to those living in community:

"Everyone talks about faults, especially the faults of others, but nobody does anything about them."

A guest once approached me after Vespers: "I noticed one monk kneeling in front of the community as you left church. What was that about?"

I explained it is our symbolic way of saying "I'm sorry" for having interrupted (or disrupted) our common prayer. Now, I'm not talking about a monk being distracted from his prayer or singing slightly off key. (Thank God. Otherwise, many of us would be "kneeling out" several times a day!)

The monk kneeling out is usually one who has some special responsibility for our common prayer. He is the reader, or the organist, or a cantor. He may be the sacristan who has forgotten to arrange something or the monk who posted the wrong numbers on the hymn board.

Perhaps "kneeling out" is a practice peculiar to Saint Meinrad. I haven't seen

it in other monasteries, but we did not invent it. In Benedict's Chapter 45, "Monks Making Mistakes in the Oratory," we read:

Should anyone make a mistake in a psalm, responsory, refrain, or reading, he must make satisfaction there before all. If he does not use this occasion to humble himself, he will be subjected to more severe punishment *for failing to correct by humility the wrong committed through negligence....*

Making a mistake in church does not insult God. What is inexcusable for Benedict is a monk's *indifference* to his own mistakes. Or worse, a monk's apparent arrogance in not acknowledging his error and trying to make amends.

"But isn't it humiliating, kneeling out in public like that?" Not really. It's more practicing humility rather than being humiliated. After all, we're all aware of the mistake.

The monk kneeling out is offering an apology. And the rest of us are reminded of how we depend upon each other for the quality of our common prayer.

"Everybody talks about the faults of others, but nobody does anything about them." An apology, an intention to do better: these are good ways to begin.

Archabbot Kurt Stasiak, OSB
Saint Meinrad Archabbey



Seven new oblates and 11 new oblate novices pose for a portrait with Archabbot Kurt Stasiak, OSB, after the oblate rites in the Archabbey Church on October 1, 2022.

On reflection, faults can help us become better people



Janis Dopp

When we think of “faults,” we tend to think about what we have done wrong, how others will view our faults, what those faults say about who we

are, and the possible retribution they can bring into our lives. Through the eyes of reflection, however, we see how they can help us become better people.

Many years ago, my husband was with me at Saint Meinrad. As Noon Prayer concluded, a monk knelt in front of the ambo and the rest of the community filed past him in silence as they headed back into the monastery. My husband asked me what that was all about. I explained the monk had probably made a mistake in choir or had been asked to kneel out by the abbot for some other reason.

Jack thought it was nothing short of archaic. Then I explained to him that once the monks passed him by, they could never bring up that fault to him again. Months later, as I was washing dishes, Jack came and dropped to his knees at my side. In shock, I asked him what that was all about.

He explained that he had done something that would not make me happy, explained what it was, and asked for my forgiveness. I was reluctant to participate in what I thought looked a bit silly, but he wouldn't get up until I said, “I forgive you.” When he rose to his feet, he smiled and said, “Now you can never bring this up again.”

I learned a couple of important lessons that day. First, sometimes what looks archaic is really “of the moment” and completely relevant to the world that we live in! Second, Benedictine spirituality has a lot to teach us about our daily lives. When someone does something that offends us, we tend to hold on to it rather than to move on and let it go.

We tend toward retribution rather than compassion, and that says a lot more about who we are rather than the one who does the offending. Are our hearts big enough to forgive and forget? Do we make the choice to be people who allow their faith to inform their decisions so that we can model a way of life that cultivates community and its well-being?

Do we take seriously St. Benedict's admonition, “Your way of acting

should differ from the world's way, the love of Christ must come before all else. You are not to act in anger or nurse a grudge. Rid your heart of all deceit. Never give a hollow greeting of peace or turn away when someone needs your love” (RB 4:20-26).

To be an oblate is to live a life that reflects the monastery that we call our own. We look to the monks of Saint Meinrad for guidance on how community can be cultivated and maintained. They teach us that what may look archaic to the rest of the world is the embodiment of sound life experiences.

Over the years, Jack has taught me so much about living a loving life. He embodies the *Rule of St. Benedict*. Every day, he helps to keep me true to that promise of oblation I made over 30 years ago: that I would remain faithful to the spirit of the monastic life.

When you have committed a fault, own up to it and ask for forgiveness. When someone asks for forgiveness, give it graciously and let the incident go, leaving you ready to move on with living and loving in the spirit of St. Benedict.

Janis Dopp
Oblate Director

Learn from your mistakes, so you don't repeat them



Fr. Joseph Cox, OSB

In the world's history, only two people were sinless – Jesus Christ and the Blessed Virgin Mary. There is the story of when some Pharisees were

testing Jesus about whether the woman caught in adultery should be

stoned. Jesus said, “Let the one who is without sin cast the first stone.” Someone threw a stone, and Jesus said, “Aw, Mom!”

Faults are mistakes, errors, or weaknesses of character. St. Benedict speaks a good deal about the faults of monks – large faults, minor faults, known faults, hidden faults and more. St. Benedict is not necessarily obsessed with faults, but he understands one

size does not fit all, so he wants discipline to be just and fair. Chapters 23-29 specify a progressive scale of punishments for refusal to obey authority, disobedience, pride and other grave faults.

St. Benedict says that what is needed first is private admonition; next, public reproof; then separation from

Continued on Page 5

Notes for Novices:

Accountability needed to address faults

“...that member must, then and there without delay, fall down on the ground at the other’s feet to make satisfaction, and lie there until the disturbance is calmed by a blessing.” (RB 71:8)



Br. Gregory Morris

I must confess two things; I am incredibly forgetful and prefer not to eat crow. Practicing recollection and humility are excellent habits to mitigate these character traits.

I’ll admit my error to my superior when I commit minor faults and receive a small penance. No one is perfectly consistent. Human action is precarious; my willful forgetfulness and arrogance can lead me astray. Without some accountability, minor faults can lead to moral failings, even actual sins.

Anthony the Great said, “Our life and our death is with our neighbor. If we gain our brother, we have gained God, but if we scandalize our brother, we have sinned against Christ.” As a monk, I know that my life is no longer my own. To quote St. Paul, “for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God” (Col. 3:3). I am accountable to myself, the monastic community, and the wider Church. I serve the Body of Christ, not the other way around.

The Christian life is not a pathway of the elite. When Christians grasp for worldly power, we transform the Tree of Life into the Golden Calf. The Gospel becomes another ideology of human striving after immortality. Are we irredeemable? Far from it!

“By his wounds, we have been healed” (1 Peter 2:24). Our wounds are pathways of grace and redemption. We cannot be apart from Christ Crucified, the stumbling block by which God reveals his infinite mercy and love. Sure, we still have wounds. We still must contend with our thorns.

There is a renunciation, a conversion from that irrationality and stupidity that seeks our enslavement to sin. Instead, we move toward the Love that calls us into fellowship through God’s grace, confessing our faults with humility. Failure is not an end, but always beginning anew.

Br. Gregory Morris, OSB
Oblate Novice Mentor

Notes from Novices:

When you fail, try again with God’s mercy



Ellen Godbey

Some years ago, a spiritual director told me I needed to work on my shadow side and even embrace my shadows. Nope. Not going there. Oh,

I’ll acknowledge my shadows, my faults, but I’m not dealing with them. Better left under the rug. But, like the dust mites and the dirt under the rug, they don’t go away.

Am I stubborn and proud and disobedient (No one’s telling *me* what to do!)? You’d better believe it. Do I murmur and grumble and gossip? Oh boy, don’t get me started.

I must pray with St. Paul, “Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (Romans 7:24-25). I am not fighting God; I am fighting myself. “God, in his mercy, seeks to bring us peace – to reconcile us with ourselves. When we are reconciled to our true selves, we find ourselves one with him” (Thomas Merton, *The New Man*).

When I fall down and fail, I get back up again, mindful of God’s mercy. My faults are with me always, but what is important is that I amend them. I admit my faults and repent of them with acts of humility and honesty. This involves an ongoing conversion of heart and constant prayer. “Teach me wisdom in my secret heart” (Psalm 50:6).

The spiritual warfare of fighting and wrestling with my faults is continual, but so is the power of the Holy Spirit, God’s never-ending patience, and my utter dependence on God’s mercy. “Never lose hope in God’s mercy” (RB 4:74).

Winston Churchill’s famous admonition, “Never give up,” reminds me to continue to reconcile myself to my true self, light and shadows and darkness. I still do not desire to *embrace* my faults but, in my weakness, will steadfastly rely on the strength and love of God, which never fails.

Ellen Godbey, oblate
Yosemite, KY

Seek gratitude for the Lord's blessings

"Every man is sufficiently discontented with some circumstance of his present state, to suffer his imagination to range more or less in quest of future happiness, and to fix upon some point of time, in which, by the removal of the inconvenience which now perplexes him, or acquisition of the advantage which he at present wants, he shall find the condition of his life very much improved." (From Rambler No. 5 by Samuel Johnson)



Mark Plaiss

In other words, we often fall into the thinking that the grass is greener on the other side.

At RB 23:1, St. Benedict writes that six faults, if

not amended, warrant excommunication: stubbornness, disobedience, pride, grumbling, despising the holy rule, defying the orders of the seniors. Terrence Kardong notes that these six faults "have this in common: they are public offenses and they involve bad will" (*Benedict's Rule: A Translation and Commentary*, p. 231).

Many people, oblates or not, suffer from the fault of chronic dissatisfaction. The key word here is chronic. If I could only live somewhere else. If only I had a different job. If only I could be married (or free of marriage). If only..., then I would be happy.

Does chronic dissatisfaction warrant sanction? I don't know, but I agree with Kardong that chronic dissatisfaction is "bad will," or borderline so, anyway. Furthermore, this chronic dissatisfaction affects those persons around the dissatisfied. Spouse, children and co-workers are continually subjected to the dissatisfied person's laments.

Nothing new here. Johnson may have observed it in the 18th century, but Scripture made note of dissatisfaction long before he did. "All things are wearisome, too wearisome for words. The eye is not satisfied by seeing, nor has the ear enough of hearing" (Ecclesiastes 1:8).

The opposite of dissatisfaction is not satisfaction, but gratitude. We Christians, we oblates, must be grateful for what we have, for the gifts God has given us. St. Paul tells us to "Rejoice in the Lord always... Have no anxiety at all" (Philippians 4:4, 6) and "In all circumstances give thanks" (1 Thessalonians 5:18).

So whatever it is you are grateful for, tell God. List them out on paper; speak them aloud in prayer. Thank the Lord for the blessings given to you.

Johnson concludes his essay, advising "to make use at once the spring of the year ... to acquire ... a love of innocent pleasures, an ardor for useful knowledge, and to remember ... that the vernal flowers, however beautiful, are only intended by nature as preparatives to autumnal fruits."

Here's some useful knowledge: our faults do not define us, and our faults are always subject to forgiveness, as Benedict writes in his *Rule*, "in penitential sorrow" (RB 25:3, Kardong's translation). And the "autumnal" fruit of gratitude is everlasting life.

Mark Plaiss, oblate
Fox Lake, IL

Continued from Page 3

the brothers at meals and elsewhere; and finally, excommunication, or in the case of those lacking understanding of what this means, corporal punishment instead. Chapters 43-46 define penalties for minor faults, such as coming late to prayer or meals.

The monastery is to be a school of the Lord's service, so the community should be gradually learning and improving. Concerning monks, nuns, oblates and everyone, if we have not

learned from our faults, our mistakes, then it's likely we will repeat them. But if we can learn from them, then we have used our past mistakes well. We can turn lemons into lemonade.

Hopefully, over time, we develop some wisdom so that we will not make those mistakes again. There is the saying, "There's no fool like an old fool." A foolish old person is especially foolish because an old person should have learned from experience not to make the kind of mistakes a young person makes. And

yet, sometimes we all make repeated mistakes. What's important is that we keep trying to improve.

A fault that all of us have is pointing out others' faults rather than trying to correct our own. We need to put our own house in order before commenting on others, and it will take some time, effort, and God's grace to do that.

Fr. Joseph Cox, OSB
Oblate Chaplain

Oblate Study Days focuses on *Laudato Si'*



Dan Beavers

In early June, I was privileged to attend the Oblate Study Days 2022. Since this was my first time attending a Study Days event, I did not

know what to expect. We gathered to study *Laudato Si'*, the encyclical of Pope Francis published in 2015.

Every day we hear of new ecological disasters or social upheaval, and we feel overwhelmed, fearful and frustrated. What can we as individuals do? What are we being called to do by the Holy Father? How can we find God in all this?

We spent three days hearing presentations by gifted and wise teachers. There were conversations and sharing among the participants, learning from each other. We were challenged to return to our home parishes to share what we had received and become agents for change.

Earth is our common home and God's precious gift to us. We are called to be co-creators with Him in caring for creation. In the introduction, Pope Francis quoted St. Francis: "Praise be to you, my Lord, through our sister, Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us" We began our time together with the admonition to "Wake up!"

The crisis is occurring right now, not in some far-off time. We are being called to work for a more just world and to be faithful stewards of the gifts God has given us.

In the prologue of the *Rule of St. Benedict*, we are called to listen, be aware. In our rapidly changing world,

we need to pause and pay heed to the groaning of all creation. Many of us live in urban settings far removed from the land that sustains us. We go to efficient grocery stores and purchase food from distant lands. We are not aware of how interconnected we are to each other and to creation, which gives us life.

In our fast-paced lives, we need to take time to reconnect to the natural world. What we do and how we live affects people who live far from us. Those who are poor feel most acutely the effects of climate change. In many parts of the world, water is becoming a scarce resource.

We see this in our own country, where municipalities struggle to provide adequate and safe drinking water. In the southwestern part of the United States, many years of serious drought in the Colorado River basin are threatening access to water resources for millions of people across several states.

We are told by scientists that future wars will be fought over access to clean water. This past summer saw extreme heat events around the world. It is easy to feel helpless. However, our faith assures us that God is with us.

The Talmud says: "Do not be daunted by the enormity of the world's grief. Do justly now. Love mercy now. Walk humbly now. You are not obligated to complete the work, but neither are you free to abandon it." This is the call we have received.

Spend time in nature, walk among the trees, let your soul reconnect with the beauty of creation. Sit quietly and listen to the music of nature, the songs of the birds, and the wind in the trees.

Pope Francis says we need an ecological conversion. In chapter 6 paragraph 216, he says: "The rich heritage of Christian spirituality, the fruit of twenty centuries of personal and communal experience, has a precious contribution to make to the renewal of humanity. I would like to offer Christians a few suggestions for ecological spirituality grounded in the convictions of our faith, since the teachings of the Gospel have direct consequences for our way of thinking, feeling and living."

He continues to say that doctrine alone cannot sustain this. We need a spirituality that inspires us and gives us an "interior impulse which encourages, motivates, nourishes and gives meaning to our individual and communal activity." The God of love is with us and sustains us as we journey into the new reality of global climate change. This is not a God removed or separated from creation.

Jesus took on human flesh and walked among us. Scripture says that God so loved the world that He sent his only son to share in our humanity. The triune God is love, love flowing from the Father to the Son to the Holy Spirit and to us, a fiery passionate love that created the universe and loved us into being. This is the love that calls us to care for our common home.

This encyclical has been a great blessing in my life. If you have not yet read it, I urge you to do so. It is a letter of love and hope to the Church and to the world.

Dan Beavers, oblate
Cambria, IL

Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord

Be accountable for your behavior



John Brooks

Talk to parents and most will agree that discipline is the hardest part of parenting. Most times, it is a balancing act between correction and motivation. That

means supporting the weakened branch while pruning it in a way that encourages new growth and builds on an already stable base.

Growing up, my mother was a nurse and my father was a teacher. My mother was compassionate, loving, caring, kind, understanding, nurturing and, at times, very opinionated. She always took time to observe, listen and guide. My mother was artful at employing guilt and sacrifice as a path to correction and motivation.

In the end, the fear of disappointing her led to self-reflection and the realization that life is full of decisions. Sometimes I made the right ones through which I grew; sometimes I

made the wrong ones, and I stumbled and fell. My mother saw her role as a parent was to help me realize my failures and be a source of stability and support when I stumbled, and a helping hand when I fell.

My father was intelligent, logical, kind, caring, nurturing, and opinionated. He believed there was a right way and a wrong way to do everything. It just so happened that my father knew all the right ways.

He was an extraordinary observer, listener and teacher, quick to correct errors, artful at explanations and gifted at wayfinding back to the path. He was so gifted at wayfinding that, logically, you wondered how you ever lost your way.

My father saw his role as a parent similar to that of his occupation. He identified problems, offered explanations for their origin and best practices for the future, and presented the best steppingstones back to the path. It was difficult to argue logically with my father, although I tried. It is now apparent that his only motivation was guiding me to find and live my

true potential, whatever it might be. We find, upon reflection, that others have filled these roles while on our journey of life.

The abbot, in the monastery, takes on a special role. “He holds the place of Christ in the monastery. Anyone who receives the name of abbot is to lead his disciples by a twofold teaching: he must point out to them all that is good and holy more by example than by words” (RB 2:2, 2:12). In his role as father, he must do as a parent must do, mold and shape those in his care. Sometimes he needs to be “threatening and coaxing,” sometimes the “stern task-masker,” and sometimes “devoted and tender as only a father can be” (RB 2:24).

While the abbot, like our parents, has taken on a demanding burden, it does not free us from being accountable for our behavior. St. Benedict, in his *Rule*, offers opportunities to take account of our behavior and, in solitude, support and forgiveness, find the path back to our place in our community.

John Brooks, oblate
Columbus, IN

The testimony we give to our faults



Jenifer Schreiner

Growing in the spiritual life requires us to look inward and walk among the dark realm of our faults. Sometimes sorting out the details of a

situation can be a real puzzle when trying to assess who is at fault. The *Rule of St. Benedict* encourages us to

examine our faults, to acknowledge them, and then, by the grace of God and with perseverance, convert them into virtue.

Early monastic fathers seldom spoke, yet when they did, it was often on matters related to faults. The *Sayings of the Desert Fathers* is packed with lessons about identifying the faults we discover in ourselves and others. But instead of assessing blame, the sayings

teach us how to respond to our faults with wisdom.

“Wisdom comes from God and his Spirit allows us to understand the things freely given us by God. And we speak about them not with words taught by human wisdom, but with words taught by the Spirit” (1Cor. 2:12-13). Whatever our faults may be, the response we give them, and the testimony that follows, is what matters.

Continued on Page 9

Considering the Psalms:

Psalm 73: Let God be your refuge

Truly God is good to the upright, to those who are pure in heart. But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled; my steps had nearly slipped. For I was envious of the arrogant; I saw the prosperity of the wicked. For they have no pain; their bodies are sound and sleek. They are not in trouble as others are; they are not plagued like other people.

Therefore pride is their necklace; violence covers them like a garment. Their eyes swell out with fatness; their hearts overflow with follies. They scoff and speak with malice; loftily they threaten oppression. They set their mouths against heaven, and their tongues range over the earth.

Therefore the people turn and praise them, and find no fault in them. And they say, "How can God know? Is there knowledge in the Most High?" Such are the wicked; always at ease, they increase in riches.

All in vain I have kept my heart clean and washed my hands in innocence. For all day long I have been plagued, and am punished every morning. If I had said, "I will talk on in this way," I would have been untrue to the circle of your children. But when I thought how to understand this, it seemed to me a wearisome task, until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I perceived their end.

Truly you set them in slippery places; you make them fall to ruin. How they are destroyed in a moment, swept away utterly by terrors! They are like a dream when one awakes; on awaking you despise their phantoms.

When my soul was embittered, when I was pricked in heart, I was stupid and ignorant; I was like a brute beast toward you. Nevertheless I am continually with you; you hold my right hand. You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will receive me with honor.

Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire other than you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. Indeed, those who are far from you will perish; you put an end to those who are false to you. But for me it is good to be near God; I have made the Lord God my refuge, to tell of all your works.

—Psalm 73:1-28 NRSV



Kathleen Polansky

Spending a semester of Biblical studies in Israel, I found that my experience afforded me a different view of one conflict going on in the world. I lived in Palestinian territory during some volatile times. (When is it not?) During my studies and travel to biblical locations, we had opportunities to speak with both Jewish and Palestinian folks about life in that country.

We also had the experience of fear and violence, when we were forced at gunpoint and tear gas into house arrest for seven days. I admit, there were moments I wondered if getting home safely would be possible.

Conflicts that are generations old are complicated beyond simple solutions. Hearing stories from differing backgrounds accentuated the complexity of the issues and the degrees of harm involved. On both sides were family generational histories of loss, death, anger, resentment and revenge.

Current solutions have only increased the tensions between each other, and finding a common point of mediation toward peace has been elusive. Arguments about who has access to what go all the way back to the Garden of Eden and Adam and Eve wanting something that is not theirs to have.

Often the means by which we look at issues become complicated by history, tradition, misinformation, prejudices, anger and envy. Our own involvement, fear and prejudice are masked; meanwhile, pride, selfishness and resentment overwhelm.

The dilemma between fear and faith divides and muddles solutions to issues in ways that betray love, compassion, forgiveness and justice.

In Psalm 73, the psalmist finds an issue with the prosperity of the wicked, emphasizing the pretentious and oppressive lifestyle that is lived with impunity. Verse 10 (“Therefore the people turn and praise them and find no fault in them”) appears to suggest that even some of God’s people are converting to this unclean life of depravity.¹ Where are the rewards and punishments? In verse 3 (“For I was envious of the arrogant; I saw the prosperity of the wicked”), the psalmist is even moved to envy the arrogant and their affluence.

If envy over the opulence of the wicked consumes me, who actually suffers? Why do I think their goods are so important? If the wicked should lose it all, why would that bring me satisfaction? And what does that say about my values? Is my value system placing importance on stuff? How does my definition of prosperity connect with things and possessions?

Does my way of living control my reaction to someone who finds access to a benefit/blessing in a different way? How does my need or desire for comfort and security have an impact on others? Perhaps our examination of faults must include a recognition of our attitudes and the motives that lie behind them.

“Our society, in its dominant forms, is now committed to the rat race of self-sufficiency and self-enhancement, the pace of which is set by greed, celebrity, and violence that contradicts the depth of human life. In that lethal rat race, the refocus of faith is the (re)discovery that such a set of priorities has no staying power. What lasts is a life of communion in obedience that is preoccupied, not with love of self, but with love of God and love of neighbor.”²

As Christians, have we bought into the mindset of prosperity as the proof of God’s favor (verse 1)? Or are we challenged by Christ to believe, “There is nothing on earth that I desire other than you” (verse 25b)?

What the psalmist comes to realize is that genuine goodness and peace comprise a different kind of reward. Not a reward earned to demonstrate God’s favor, but nearness to God that expresses and comes from the power and presence of God in our lives, both individually and corporately.

In verse 16 (“But when I thought how to understand this, it seemed to me a wearisome task”), the psalmist finds it a wearisome task to understand until entering the sanctuary of God. Through prayer, God holds the hand that reaches out and guides with counsel. “God is the strength of my heart, and my portion forever” (verse 26).

St. Paul states it in this manner: “Whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord” (Philippians 3:7-8a).

*Kathleen Polansky, oblate
New Salisbury, IN*

¹ New Interpreters Bible, Commentary, Book III, Volume 4, Psalm 73, 966.

² Walter Brueggemann, *From Whom No Secrets are Hid: Introducing the Psalms*. (Louisville, KY: WKJ, 2014), 131.

Continued from Page 7

The apostles chosen by Jesus were riddled with faults. Peter had his denial, Thomas his doubtful faith, and James and John their arguing to be first in the kingdom. Yet, by faith and an enduring commitment to follow Jesus, their faults are surpassed by the testimony of their discipleship.

Focusing on my own faults, I share this story. A family member of mine engages people in conversation and then constantly interrupts them with his perspective. I have called him out on this behavior and asked him several times to please let people finish their thoughts. This person’s faults have

irritated me, and I allowed it to affect my mood for hours, or even days.

Now I was at fault for bearing this anger. Over the last year, I have been studying the *Rule* as an oblate novice and I took to heart the call to consider the wisdom the *Rule* offers: be patient with one another, do not hold anger against another, silence your tongue, and practice listening.

I will try. That was all I could say. Here is what happened next. The next time this happened, I remained silent. Inside, I grumbled over it repeatedly. When it occurred again, I remained

silent. I listened. Upon reflection, I realized I did not even grumble about it. When it happened again, I remained silent and listened.

Before leaving my house that day, the person said to me, “Thanks for listening to me. Sometimes I just need to vent.” The testimony I gave to my fault, and theirs, at the beginning of this story differs from the testimony I gave at the end, and it bore good fruit. I surmise that even from the grave, the Desert Fathers offered a solemn smile of approval.

*Jenifer Schreiner, oblate
Valparaiso, IN*

Spiritual Direction:

He looked beyond my fault and saw my need*



Beverly Weinhold

Clint Pulver had a fault that was annoying everybody and had to stop. At 10 years old, he couldn't sit still in school. "I struggled to stay still so I would just start tapping."¹ His tapping irritated teachers and drew catcalls from classmates. Finally, he was sent to the principal, who told him to "just sit on your hands!" That didn't work.

The problem grew worse and prompted the attention of long-time teacher Mr. Jensen: "Stay after class!" Ringing from the rebuke, Clint Pulver hit rock bottom. "I've done it now. I'm finished." Facing a fault, have you ever felt finished? I know I have.

In 15 books of the Bible, the King James Bible mentions faults 18 times. The Hebrew Dictionary defines a fault as an error or mistake leading to impiety or injury to another.² The Greek New Testament fleshes it out further as a trespass that derails us from a path, causing us to slip, stumble and fall off following the right way.³

St. Benedict's *Rule* gets even more granular in addressing faults in the monastery, distinguishing Mistakes (45), from Serious Faults (25), and Faults Committed In Other Matters (46). He knew faults can go underground to sabotage holy, living and healthy communities.

Some faults are intentional. Others are not, like Clint Pulver's tapping. Circumstances, experiences, and

influences beyond our control can cause harm and great hurt, creating core wounds. Without realizing it, we can create a self-narrative that negates our ability to see ourselves and negatively affects our personality and our relationships with others. A psychology course in college introduced me to a screen that showed how little we see the true self.⁴ Psychologists John Luft and Harry Ingham developed the Johari Window in 1955. It opened four frames to understand ourselves and others better.

The first frame was labeled Known. Here we wrote about what we and others could see plainly. The second frame was called Blind Spots. This referred to what others saw in us, but we did not. The third was named Façade. This frame asked us to consider what we knew but hid from others. Finally, the last frame was named Unknown, indicating what neither we nor others knew.

Since the Bible and St. Benedict say the best way to heal a fault is to confess it (James 5:16), it's important to know our faults. Some people are brave enough or love us enough to tell us the truth about ourselves. Most of us are conflict avoidant and stay silent. Gratefully, God knows and lovingly shows us our faults when we pay attention.

"For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword dividing soul and spirit ... it judges the thoughts and intents of the heart. Nothing is hidden from God's sight" (Hebrews 4:12-13). God's seeing penetrates ego, intent, history and hurts. He looks beyond our fault

and sees our need.

The magnificent thing about this movement of humble confessions is that it brings us face to face with a God who not only knows but forgives, giving freedom. But God's love goes beyond finding our faults and forgiving to healing our faults: "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but ... has been tempted in every way that we are yet without sinning. Let us therefore approach God's throne of grace with confidence to find grace and help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:14-16).

If anybody ever needed someone to see beyond a fault and see his need, it was Clint Pulver. There on that fateful day with Mr. Jensen, he knew he was well past forgiveness and facing a firing squad. After class, sitting at the table face to face with his teacher, Clint was flummoxed. Mr. Jensen's shout softened to a whisper. "You're not in trouble. But I do have a question. Have you ever thought about playing the drums?"

Reaching into his desk drawer, Mr. Jensen pulled out a pair of drumsticks, passing them to Clint. From that day forward, Clint played the drums around the world, putting himself through college. Recalling the impact of that memory on his life, Clint concluded: "Mr. Jensen saw something in me that I couldn't see in myself. I learned that there's a difference between being the best in the world and being the best for the world."

Beverly Weinhold, oblate novice
Louisville, KY

*Dottie Rambo (1970), <https://www.lyrics.com/lyric/6424662/dottie+rambo/he+looked+beyond+my+faults>

¹ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4p5286T_kn0

² Strong's Concordance.

³ Ibid.

⁴ The Johari Window, <https://www.communicationtheory.org/the-johari-window-model/>

Meet A Monk: Br. Francis Wagner, OSB



Br. Francis Wagner, OSB

“It’s what I want to do; it’s what I want to be.” With those words, a monastic vocation sprang to life for Br. Francis Wagner, OSB.

He had just come to Saint Meinrad Archabbey on retreat, to feel out this place and see if this was the direction he should seek for his life.

After almost 20 years in the news business as a reporter and journalist, Br. Francis was searching. His father’s death in 2003, about 15 years after he had graduated from Bowling Green State University with a degree in journalism, had him asking the deep questions: Who am I? Why am I doing this?

Although he had grown up in the Catholic faith, he really hadn’t owned it himself. College and career had consumed most of his attention until this life-changing event altered his trajectory.

Over the next three or four years, he reconnected to the faith of his youth. He started going back to church and

experienced a major conversion. “I had great friends and spiritual directors,” he recalls, and they helped him in his search for the next stage: a religious vocation.

More questions: How could a man in his early 40s possibly join a religious order? Was it too late for him? The age-related cutoff made him nervous. That was when his spiritual director suggested that Br. Francis come to Saint Meinrad Archabbey for two or three days on a personal retreat. Never having heard of the Archabbey before, Br. Francis plunged right in.

It didn’t take long for the plot to thicken.

“I was just wowed by the place,” he says. The monks, the liturgy, Vespers in the Archabbey Church – it all came together. After that pivotal retreat, Br. Francis returned to begin his process of monastic commitment. “I’ve been here since 2006,” he says. The process is long on purpose in order to discern the vocation. “We don’t decide this overnight; we take our time.”

Br. Francis currently serves as secretary to Archabbot Kurt Stasiak, as well as several other concerns at the Archabbey. His writing career as a monk includes several CareNotes booklets, magazine articles, Franciscan Media’s “Sunday Homily Helps” for pastors, and his blog.

He holds a Master of Arts degree in pastoral theology and a graduate certificate in spiritual direction and has served the Saint Meinrad Benedictine Oblate Community as dean of oblates for Ohio. He is a spiritual director and has presented talks at oblate retreats and other spiritual conferences.

God isn’t looking for perfect faith, but faithfulness, insists Br. Francis. No one will be perfect; we rely on God’s mercy. Chapter 4 of the *Rule of St. Benedict* lists 70 tools for good works, the last one being this: Never despair of God’s mercy. “We must remain engaged in the struggle,” he says.

“The entire life here is a beginning. Each day I begin again.”

*Angie McDonald, oblate
Huntingburg, IN*

Abbey Caskets
A Work of Saint Meinrad Archabbey

Contact us to receive a FREE
“Catholic Funeral Guide”

800.987.7380
www.abbeycaskets.com

The *Didache*: Lessons for today on community, personal growth

This is the last of four articles exploring the Didache. Though authored 20 centuries ago, it, like the Rule of St. Benedict, holds many teachings of value for today's oblate community. We can place its guidance into two groupings: community building and personal growth.



David Miller

Community Building

The great “binding” principle holding the early followers of Jesus together was the belief that salvation

was won as a community, not individually. Everyone in the house church was saved, or no one was. We see the same teaching in the *Rule*, which focuses on keeping the community free of sin (RB 28). From this concept of group salvation flowed many practices that built oneness among the faithful.

The novice/master relationship was the first step. Consider if today we paired each novice oblate with a mentor, who by her oral instruction and life conveyed the *Rule*. A one-on-one relationship within the community, where the journey person taught, and the apprentice learned “the trade” of being a lay Benedictine.

Sharing a meal, sometimes with just the mentor and regularly with the entire community, builds unity. *Didache* community meals included sharing a single loaf of blessed bread, symbolizing unity. Consider planting a group vegetable garden as food for the common meal. Read the *Rule* and discuss its interpretation. Perhaps include a short reading from a text explaining the *Rule* (RB 169).

The first-century converts found these practices not only formed, but

educated and bound. Are we forming, binding and educating? Thus the mentor and entire oblate community become responsible for training new members and enriching each other.

An interesting requirement of early gatherings was open confession. In the Russian Church, they still practice this with penitents standing before the priest and confessing transgressions, with neighbors in listening range. Of course, that type of confession is far different from reconciliation.

But if someone has offended, apologizing openly before the meal may heal a rift. Some fraternities practice this “open” confession to avoid ill feelings. Benedict keeps this requirement, as a monk committing an infraction must humble himself before the community (RB 3).

The early Church faith groups were small, such that homes were their churches. Many oblate communities are too large for home meetings. Church basements or classrooms can be impersonal, sterile. A house gathering is warm and uniting as people learn about one another’s faith journey through the study of a book or scripture.

Jesus’ followers served, helping widows and orphans. The Saint Meinrad Day of Service is a well-practiced, community-building effort. Perhaps another might be taken up, such as sponsoring a family at Christmas, supporting a child at the parish school, or transporting parishioners to Mass.

Community outreach not only raises oblate visibility and binds hospitality to those not in the community; it is another hallmark of both the *Didache* and *Rule* (RB 53). Perhaps inviting new parishioners or RCIA candidates to attend the oblate chapter meeting and meal would create interest and be welcoming.

Practices to avoid division play a significant role in community building. Both the *Rule* and the *Didache* warn against grumbling. RB 5 on keeping comments positive and avoiding wounds is no simple task. But daily awareness of the need to guard the mouth is a step (RB 6).

Personal Growth

Personal development is vital to building the community. We each promised to participate in Liturgy of the Hours, and it is often said that knowing others are making the prayers at the same time builds community.

One of the most stunning attributes of the *Didache* is the memorization of the Way of Life and Death! St. Benedict envisioned monks memorizing Psalms and other writings (RB 10). Consider asking chapter members to memorize a short section of a Psalm each month for group recitation.

Community fasting is another *Didache* and *Rule* trait (RB 4). Perhaps on the day of the monthly chapter meeting, or some other agreed meal, the group could fast.

The word “walk” appears over 300 times in the Bible. Our Lord was constantly walking. There seems to be a message – we need to “walk” to grow. Consider a monthly community walk in the woods or a park. Recite Psalms, sing a hymn, recite the Creed. Make the walk a

community-building effort as you contemplate God’s creation.

An underlying theme of the *Rule* and *Didache* is gaining self-knowledge. How can one pursue growth on the journey to God without growth in knowing self? The *Rule* and *Didache*

foster self-knowledge by prayer, fasting, reading, teaching, group actions and support. *The Didache* gave life to early Jesus communities. Our presence testifies to that. Let us continue that tradition.

David W. Miller, oblate
South Milford, IL

Reflecting on prayer and the burden of guilt



Bill Wilson

In my experience of the Benedictine oblate life and wrestling with the situations of our day, I have become more aware of the meaning of prayer and feel less guilt over the “shoulds” in our lives. On October 20, the daily Benedictine reading from the *Rule of St. Benedict* is about the guidance of experiencing the presence of God in our daily lives – “pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17). How often we burden ourselves with guilt – “I just can’t pray” or “I should pray more” or “I don’t pray like I should.”

Without adding guilt, our Judeo-Christian heritage (like our Muslim sisters and brothers) is based on times

in the day to pray. “Seven times a day have I praised you” (Psalm 119:164). This has been the basis through the centuries for daily times of prayer. For the monastic tradition (especially the Benedictine life), these times are known as the “hours of prayer” or Divine Office. For those who are Wesleyan or Methodist in tradition, it is following a “method” and being disciplined in a relationship with God and others.

My experience the past 22 years with a chronic heart condition, my life situations, and my promise to live the Benedictine oblate life has taught me a genuine experience of prayer. Concentrate with every breath and experience and action. “Praying without ceasing” is an awareness of God’s presence in everything!

Yes, the attempts to be faithful and disciplined in regular praying of the

Hours helps, but it is all about knowing God is present with us every moment of our lives – in all of our experiences.

I like what Sr. Joan Chittister writes in her commentary on the *Rule of St. Benedict*: “There is to be no time, no thing, that absorbs us so much that we lose contact with the God of life; no stress so tension-producing, no burden so complex, no work so exhausting that God is not our greatest agenda, our constant companion, our rest and refuge” (*Insight for the Ages*).

John Wesley, founder of Methodism, said it best when he was dying: “The best of all, God is with us.” May it be so in our daily lives with its struggles and joys.

William (Bill) H. Wilson, oblate
Huntington, WV

Oblate Study Days topic: Contributing to a Depolarized World

The Oblate Study Days, scheduled for June 19-21, 2023, will focus on the theme, “Contributing to a Depolarized World: A Benedictine Project.”

Extreme polarization can be understood as one of the social evils of our current times, leading to deep

divisions in our country, our Church, and even our families. Br. John Mark Falkenhain, OSB, will explore how the main tenets of Benedictine spirituality provide many of the antidotes to what the research suggests are the primary drivers of polarization in our society.

An emphasis will be placed on practical disciplines and strategies for depolarizing the communities in which we live. Details on registration will be forthcoming.

Two parables offer us the same lesson



Fr. Adrian Burke

I'll be frank. When I sat down to look at the readings that were up for Sunday, I thought, "Luke's Parable of the Dishonest Steward? Great,

just great! This is one of the most difficult parables in all the Gospels. Thanks, Lectionary!"

I was tempted to ignore it, focus on the other readings and pretend like this passage from Luke didn't happen. But no, the Gospel demands to be acknowledged and demands our full attention.

The Parable of the Dishonest Steward has been difficult for many generations of preachers – a lot of ink has been spilled trying to clean up the dishonest steward and make him look like a hero, or at least something more of what a disciple is meant to be. But there is no fully satisfying solution to the problem – he is dishonest, he is scheming, he is self-driven.

Some commentators have tried to say that the amounts the steward decreased the debts by was the "interest" being charged by the rich man, and since the debtors were fellow Jews, it was unlawful to charge them interest, according to Leviticus 25:36. And in Psalm 15, we read: "Whoever walks without blame, doing what is right ... lends no money at interest."

The problem is the parable doesn't mention "interest" and says nothing about who the debtors are. We can assume these things perhaps, but they aren't part of the story, so it doesn't sit well with me as a solution.

I was always told by my scripture professors in the seminary to take

seriously the context of any part of a Gospel you are trying to understand. It seems apparent, to me anyway, that this parable is related to the one immediately preceding it, the Parable of the Prodigal Son. Like that story, the Parable of the Dishonest Steward is found only in Luke.

Furthermore, there is a key word that seems to link the Dishonest Steward with the Prodigal Son. In Greek, that word is *diaskorpizo* (dee-as-kor-pid'-zō), and it means to squander (sometimes it's translated into English as "dissipate" or "waste").

Remember what the younger son did with his inheritance? He squandered it in dissolute living. And in this parable, the word appears again: the dishonest steward squandered his employer's property.

Let's take a hard look at these two characters: the so-called prodigal son, a "wastrel," an irresponsible cad, and the shrewd but "dishonest" steward or business manager.

Shrewd, Jesus calls the dishonest manager. Some translations have "prudent" or "wise," but I think those translations are already attempts to clean up the character of this rather willful man.

The Prodigal Son demonstrates shrewdness as well. Look, that parable was not about repentance. The Prodigal Son repented of nothing! Rather, he devised a plan to save his sorry derriere from dying of starvation and the abject penury he'd plunged himself into by squandering his inheritance.

He schemed to get back, not into his father's good graces exactly – that would have been unrealistic to expect, but to find employment as a hired hand on his father's farm, which he would do by exploiting his father's

gentle and compassionate heart. The very heart he stomped on by taking his inheritance and going off to a foreign land.

It would have been more realistic for the Prodigal Son to ask to be received back as a slave, not an employee, but perhaps it would be unrealistic for us to expect a character so demonstrably arrogant and proud to allow himself to even entertain the thought of being a slave. I won't go into how his plans unraveled due to his father's reckless generosity. That is for another time.

The shrewdness of the Dishonest Steward is exercised differently than that of the Prodigal Son, but shrewdness is something Jesus admires in worldly people, and He declares it is a trait He wishes his disciples had more of.

Frankly, I think the steward was brilliant. By wasting even more of his employer's assets, diminishing the "accounts receivable" line of his balance sheet, the steward put his employer into a position of having to commend him for it. After all, what the steward did in reducing the debts of the rich man's debtors was to establish for the rich man a reputation for generosity!

So, while squandering even more of the rich man's assets, the steward may very well have secured his position in the rich man's employment. Think about it. How could the rich man get away with dismissing his steward now that his debtors believed he was kind-hearted and generous? He could hardly fire him and preserve his own reputation for generosity!

Well, maybe. Typical of parables, it remains open-ended. We never know if the Prodigal Son's elder brother goes into the party at the end of the parable, do we? Nor do we know if the dishonest but shrewd steward

finally gets fired or not.

Just like parables, our lives remain open-ended as well. It remains to be seen how, in the end, we will have ultimately patterned our lives: in the image of Christ or of the world?

The Prodigal Son and the Dishonest Steward deal with different situations, but within a common system of “dishonest wealth.” Jesus calls it *mammon*, an Aramaic word for “riches.” We call it money, and the punchline for both parables is this: You can’t serve two masters.

You can’t live your life according to the patterns of worldly desire and pattern your life on Godly desire. They are mutually exclusive.

The Prodigal Son’s attachment to wealth led him away from the security of his father’s farm and his rightful place as a son. The only reason he returns to his father is because he lost it all. He’s still living by worldly patterns of desire up to the point of his father’s kiss welcoming him home.

The parable is open-ended, so we don’t know how the Prodigal Son may have changed as a result of experiencing his father’s “reckless mercy.” I’d like to think he was at least as shocked by his father’s mercy as his older brother was, a shock that may indeed have prompted a genuine conversion.

The rich man’s attachment to his wealth led him into a trap. Every penny, every drachma, of his financial accounts had to be reconciled. The rich man was so attached to his money that he was willing to strip his steward of his livelihood in retribution for indiscrete spending, dumping yet another family into poverty.

Luke’s Gospel is especially tough on the rich. Economic justice is a special concern for Luke, for whom worldly

patterns of justice are never to be confused with the righteousness of God.

Justice is rooted in what one is owed, but righteousness goes beyond mere justice. Righteousness is rooted in a love that has no bounds, the infinite goodness and generosity of God. St. Paul, reflecting on the righteousness of God, wrote that “[God] made him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that, in Christ, we might become the righteousness of God”: self-renunciation and taking up the cross on behalf of others.

Society suffers from systemically unjust economies, where the rich accumulate more, and poor and working-class families are left behind by ever-increasing income gaps.

Let’s give up the blame game! Stop scapegoating the other for society’s problems. Look within and ask the Lord to help you see how you, too, may contribute to the problem, and how you, too, can contribute to God’s solution.

Jesus sees the problem clearly: “For what is prized by human beings is an abomination in the sight of God.” You cannot serve both *mammon* and God; one cannot pursue worldly wealth as one’s greatest value and, at the same time, claim to be a disciple of Jesus!

“Hear this, you who trample upon the needy and destroy the poor of the land.” Amos aims his prophetic diatribe at the rich elite of his own day who were shrewd at dispossessing desperate landowners of their property by loaning them money to tide over their hungry families after crop failure. Loans that were made at exorbitant rates of interest to add to their ever-accruing, ill-gotten wealth.

Wealth was being concentrated in the hands of a mostly urban elite, and the number of landless peasants was

increasing each year. Those who had much were accruing more; those with little were losing what little they had! What were they to do, dig ditches and beg? What else could they do?

God’s mercy is radically selfless and prodigiously reckless, having nothing at all to do with our systemic patterns of greed and wealth accumulation. Seeking wealth as our supreme value strips us of our humanity as images of God.

But when we strive to stand with the vulnerable and the poor, the marginalized, the ostracized, we are standing with the Forgiving Victim who died that we might have life.

When we identify with the least among us, we are standing with those with whom Christ identifies. “Who raises up the lowly from the dust, who from the dung heap lifts up the poor, making them to sit with princes, the powerful of his own people” (Ps. 11:7-8).

Trusting in God’s infinite generosity and reckless love for all people, we can be bold and confident that by spending ourselves out of love for others, squandering our “*mammon*” on behalf of those in need, we are contributing to a system of righteousness, a politics of mercy and generosity, compassion and love.

This is a stance contrary to the politics of worldly ambition. Let us not squander opportunities to live our lives fully and freely in Christ. This would truly be imprudent and foolish, given our faith in Jesus.

Be bold and take courage. God’s Kingdom is within you. It is among us, so let us be shrewd, prudent and confident as we collaborate with his Spirit to get it done!

*Fr. Adrian Burke, OSB
Saint Meinrad Archabbey*

With our blindness, what can we not see?



Fr. Harry Hagan

Philemon's slave, Onesimus, has come to Paul, perhaps with a gift from his master. Or perhaps the slave has run away. We don't know. In any case,

Onesimus hasn't returned, and so Paul is sending the slave back to his master.

Paul appeals to Philemon as "my brother," and says that he has become as a "father" to this slave: "I am sending him, that is, my own heart, back to you." Paul doesn't want to, but feels he has no choice. We hear: "I should have liked to retain him for myself, so that he might serve me on your behalf in my imprisonment for the gospel" (verse 13).

Still, Paul doesn't want to do this, as he says, "without your consent." So, Paul is sending the slave back and asks Philemon to receive Onesimus "no longer as a slave but more than a slave, a brother, beloved especially to me, but even more so to you, as a man and in the Lord" (verse 16).

Still, Paul is sending the slave back to his master.

You could not do that today! Today you could not in good conscience send a slave back to the so-called owner or master. Surely, Paul himself would not do it today, given even the little that he says in this letter. But at that time, Paul feels compelled to send the slave back with an appeal to Philemon to receive him as a brother. Whether Philemon did or not, we do not know.

Commentators generally note that Christians were unable in Paul's day to overthrow the social order, and so he had no choice. It was the way the world worked.

The world worked like that for a long time. The Benedictine, Pope Gregory XVI, issued an encyclical in 1839 banning Catholic participation in any part of the slave trade. It took a while; still the encyclical was 20 years before our own civil war over slavery. Despite the encyclical and the civil war, slavery of various kinds continues to exist in the world that we live in.

This past week at Morning Prayer in the monastery, we have been reading the strange ending of the Book of Judges. It tells of a Levite who had a concubine, and the concubine ran away and went back to her father in Bethlehem. After four months, the Levite goes to Bethlehem, as the text literally says, "to speak to her heart" and bring her back.

Her father gladly receives the Levite and throws a kind of second wedding feast that goes on for several days. Finally, they get away, but get only as far as Gibeah, where an old man offers them hospitality. That night, the young men demand that the old man turn over the Levite so that, as the text says, "we may get intimate with him" (19:22).

The old man objects to this as a terrible crime and offers instead his virgin daughter and the Levite's concubine. The crime is against hospitality, but evidently it is not a crime to offer the woman to the mob. The Levite himself "seized his concubine and thrust her outside to them" (19:25).

They rape and abuse her the whole night, and the next morning, the Levite finds her at the door, dead. He cuts her body in 12 pieces, sends the pieces to the 12 tribes who wage war against Gibeah for this crime and completely wipe out the town as retribution. However, the text says nothing about handing over the woman to the townsmen. Was not

that a crime? In her book *Texts of Terror*, Phyllis Tribble shows that such violence toward women appears not just here in the Bible.

When I tell people I teach Old Testament, they often ask about all the war and the killing. Deuteronomy 7 calls for the destruction of all who worshipped other deities lest those people become a snare to Israel. Today, this would be a war crime.

St. Augustine says: "If you seem to understand the divine Scriptures or some part of them but by that understanding do not build upon the twofold love of God and neighbor, then you have not yet understood them" (*De doctrina Christiana* I.40 = XXII 20).

St. Augustine recognizes that sometimes the Bible does not always tell us literally what we must do.

At our evening meal in the monastery, we have been reading *Subversive Habits: Black Catholic Nuns in the Long African American Freedom Struggle* by Shannen Dee Williams. She records incident after incident of the blindness of white American Catholic leaders and people to the racism in their Church.

Though some prejudice is blatant even by earlier standards, other people were sincere but caught in the blindness of systematic racism. Williams allows no excuse for sincerity. I don't want to excuse it either, but I am more sympathetic because I am sure that I am as blind as they were – and surely not just about racism.

Are we better than Paul, or the Levite, or the Deuteronomist, or the Church of the 20th century coming to grips with racism? Surely, I hope we see better and more clearly than they did,

Continued on Page 18

Oblate Hobbies

Creating greeting cards

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 kpolskyoblate@yahoo.com.

I create greetings cards to send to family and friends on special occasions. Each one is unique. I began doing this activity about a dozen years ago when I took a class in card making. I have made dozens over the years, using card stock both large and small.

I cut up abstract paintings I have done on paper. Usually I cut squares or triangles as the base on which I glue a variety of petals from dried flowers and leaves. Also added are pieces of ribbon, buttons, and further

embellishment of glitter so they sparkle.

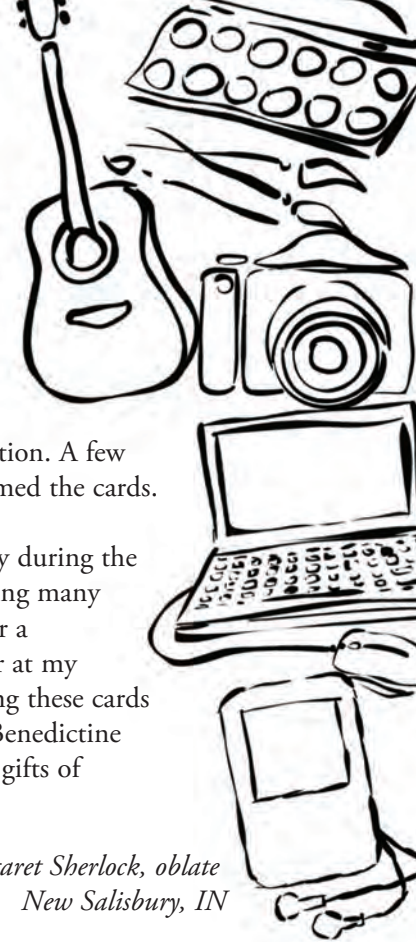
I discovered I had this artistic talent after I retired as a hospital chaplain. This creativity was passed down from my father and his father, my grandfather, whom I never met but heard much about his artistic gift.

It has been a pleasure for me to create these cards. I enjoy using my talent and enriching the lives of others with a greeting! So many have expressed

their appreciation. A few have even framed the cards.

I get very busy during the holidays making many more cards for a Christmas fair at my parish. Sending these cards enriches my Benedictine spirituality as gifts of “hospitality”!

*Margaret Sherlock, oblate
New Salisbury, IN*



Saint Meinrad hosted NAABOD conference in August

“Weaving St. Benedict’s Way of Life into the Future” was the theme of the biennial conference of the North American Association of Benedictine Oblate Directors (NAABOD), which was held August 4-9, 2022, at Saint Meinrad Archabbey. The 47 conference attendees included oblate directors, associate oblate directors, an oblate chaplain, and invited oblates from 20 of the 48 member monasteries.

In his welcome letter to participants, Archabbot Kurt Stasiak, OSB, of Saint Meinrad Archabbey, expressed his hope that this event would “inspire and encourage more people to practice their oblation promises and to be a witness to others.”

Keynote addresses were delivered by Fr. Thomas Gricoski, OSB, of Saint Meinrad Archabbey; Sr. Judith Sutera, OSB, of Mount St. Scholastica Monastery in Atchison, KS; and Sr. Kathryn Huber, OSB, of Monastery Immaculate Conception in Ferdinand, IN. Sr. Kathryn delivered the address originally prepared by Sr. Anita Louise Lowe, OSB, also of Monastery Immaculate Conception, who was unable to attend the conference due to illness.

During the business meeting, Sr. Priscilla Cohen, OSB, oblate director of Sacred Heart Monastery in Cullman, AL, was re-elected president of NAABOD, and Fr. Meinrad Miller, OSB, oblate director of St. Benedict’s Abbey in Atchison, was elected vice-

president. Linda Gilmartin, associate oblate director of Our Lady of Grace Monastery in Beech Grove, IN, was appointed secretary.

Attending from Saint Meinrad were Janis Dopp, oblate director, and Fr. Joseph Cox, OSB, oblate chaplain. At the conclusion of the conference, Janis expressed her deep gratitude to Br. Michael Reyes, OSB, of Saint Meinrad for his exceptional leadership of the conference. Others assisting with the conference were Brenda Black, executive secretary of the Oblate Office; and Saint Meinrad oblates Bill Wilson, Marie Kobos, Michelle Blalock, and Paul and Maureen Reichardt.

*Maureen and Paul Reichardt, oblates
Indianapolis, IN*

The Oblate Toolbox

Faults: Admit them, then give them to God

“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

Faults, a word that makes me think of cracks in the earth’s crust. Or offenses. Or places to lay blame.

Or this prayer:

Through my fault, through my fault,
through my most grievous fault.
Heck, I just prayed this a few days ago during Mass.

Even still, I could do with praying it again. And again. And again. Because, face it, my faults just don’t seem to leave me alone for long. They’re always with me. Sigh.

I am told that these flaws, these imperfections, these irritating defects, are all part of the deal. Just when I think I have conquered them, there they are again.

A verse from Psalm 19 comes to mind, one of my touchstones: “Who can detect trespasses? Cleanse me from my inadvertent sins” (Psalm 19:13).

With my perfectionism, this knowledge of those persistent “inadvertent sins” can really depress me if I let it. Aren’t I supposed to be making progress in conquering these strongholds? How can I claim to be getting anywhere if I keep running up against the same things I was battling 10 years ago? I cannot presume to have vanquished these enemies of my sanctification; I had to take them to the confessional again recently.

Yet the Lord is merciful to the contrite in heart and to the broken in spirit. I have to return again to the place of realizing the simple truth: I’m not there yet.

That day of ultimate victory lies in the future. In the meantime, all I have is today, and all I have is the grace of God, and the love of God, and the mercy of God poured out super-abundantly for my sake, and for the sake of all those who realize they are sinners in need, dire need, of his mercy.

The remedy for faults hasn’t changed in thousands of years: Admit them, own them, and then give them to God, who is the only one who can change them from lead into gold – into the agents of change that will purify you and get you ready for eternity with Him.

*Angie McDonald, oblate
Huntingburg, IN*

Continued from Page 16

but I think it would be a mistake for us to look down our righteous noses and think that we are better than them.

While it may seem easy to condemn Paul and the rest, I wonder what people in a hundred years will say about us. What blindness will be obvious to them that we cannot see?

Today there are lots of righteous discussions about transgendered people on every side. I have lived such a sheltered life that I only know of meeting a transgendered person once.

She was the sacristan at the Sunday morning Mass at a parish where I had a Saint Meinrad Sunday. The sacristan at the Saturday evening Mass had told me about her – I am not sure why. I don’t know that I would have noticed otherwise.

She seemed very nice. I knew the pastor, and I was not particularly surprised that he had done this. He is not as you might expect. He is a canon lawyer and not someone who does just anything. Still, he saw in this person a person baptized in Christ. He treated her as a Christian.

Someone else told me the story about meeting a trans woman in a church. She had come half an hour early to pray. When she went up for Communion, the priest refused her Communion. The first priest had given a trans woman a place in the Church so that she could prepare for the celebration of this mystery. I would like to think that this happens often, and more and more all the time. Pray God that it be so.

*Fr. Harry Hagan, OSB
Saint Meinrad Archabbey*

OBLATE NEWS

Oblate researches writings of St. Columban

Professor Thomas Ryba, the St. Thomas Aquinas Center theologian in residence at Purdue University, and Saint Meinrad oblate Michael Seretny have begun a multi-semester investigation into the writings of St. Columban. Their research project is housed in the Religious Studies Department at Purdue.

The fall semester has been focused on assembling primary and secondary sources of his broader context within the customs of the Celtic Catholic Church and his *peregrinatio* and austere formation at Bangor Abbey. ♦

DEATHS

Irene Rose Wolfe, of Haubstadt, IN, died on August 16, 2022.

John Robert Cox, of Millington, TN, died on May 25, 2021.

Wayne Moore, of Lexington, KY, died on August 26, 2022.

Jo Ann Moeller, of Versailles, KY, died on January 10, 2021.

Norma Johnson, of Galva, IL, died on August 29, 2022.

Mary Elizabeth Ferguson, of St. Meinrad, IN, died on September 16, 2022.

Richard Toumey, of Indianapolis, IN, died on December 15, 2021.

Eloise P. Linden, of Flushing, NY, died on September 1, 2022.

Albert "Al" Cassady, of Columbus, OH, died on September 21, 2022.

Irene Cassady, of Columbus, OH, died on September 22, 2022.

Elizabeth Ann Lomont-Howard, of Fort Wayne, IN, died on September 19, 2022.

Lorna Fae Kathman, of Florence, KY, died on October 3, 2022. ♦

INVESTITURES

The following took part in the investiture ceremony on October 1, 2022: Tiffany Aquino, Fishers, IN; Jennifer Bezy, Columbus, IN; Deacon Daniel Connell, Morehead, KY; Randall Frankart, Springboro, OH; Alec Jewell, Cincinnati, OH; Walter Mace, Hebron, KY; Fr. Michael Maples, Knoxville, TN; Sharon Montieth, Indianapolis, IN; Michael Struble, Syracuse, OH; Haley Todd, Denver, CO; Dr. Claire Wilson, Stow, OH. ♦

FINAL OBLATION

These oblates took part in the oblation ceremony on October 1, 2022: Ronald Johnson, Lizton, IN; Craig Mortell, Carmel, IN; Jenifer Schreiner, Valparaiso, IN; Richard Schubert, Elbert, CO; Theresa Schubert, Elbert, CO; Charlotte Thomas, Kalamazoo, MI; Rev. Christopher Wise, Harrisburg, IL. ♦

UPCOMING EVENTS

Investiture and Oblation Rites: March 11, June 3, September 9, December 16

Oblate Retreats: March 19-21, June 19-21 (Study Days), July 28-30 (Novices Only Retreat), December 8-10

Oblate Council and Finance Commission Meetings: April 21-22, June 30-July 2 (council meeting), October 13-15 ♦

VOLUNTEERS APPRECIATED

Recent volunteers in the Oblate Office were Benedictine monks Br. Michael Reyes, Br. Gregory Morris, Archabbot Kurt Stasiak, Fr. Joseph Cox, Fr. Mateo Zamora, Fr. Colman Grabert, Br. Francis de Sales Wagner, Br. John Mark Falkenhain and Br. Zachary Wilberding. Oblates who volunteered were Dr. Bill Wilson, Marie Kobos, Michelle Blalock, Mary Campanelli, Teresa Lynn, Joanna Harris, Kathleen Polansky, Angie McDonald, and Allen Graziadei, vocation candidate. ♦

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. Send all submissions to Kathleen Polansky at kpolanskyoblate@yahoo.com and include your name, city and state.

Upcoming themes and submission dates:

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

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

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

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

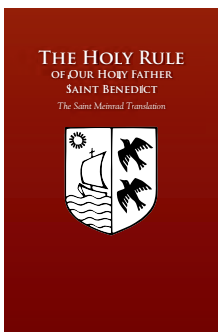


**Benedictine
Oblate** QUARTERLY

**Non-Profit
Organization
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
Permit #3
St. Meinrad, IN**

200 Hill Drive
St. Meinrad, IN 47577

Reading Room



*The Holy Rule of Our Holy Father
Saint Benedict: The Saint Meinrad
Translation, Saint Meinrad
Archabbey, Saint Meinrad, Indiana,
2022.*

“The *Rule* is essential to a monastic community’s – and an individual monastic’s – understanding of their vocation.” (*Foreword*) “It is called a

rule because it directs the ways of those who obey it.”
(*Note found in Sangallensis 914*)

“Not only has the *Rule*, as noted, been translated into virtually every language Indeed, probably not too many years pass without another scholar, commentator, or linguist attempting in different words and phrasings to express the latest finds in monastic research. This is most appropriate since there are many who consult the *Rule* as the primary guide or as a supplement to their vocation as

monastics, oblates, clergy, and ‘ordinary’ lay men and women.” (*Foreword by Rt. Rev. Kurt Stasiak, OSB, Abbot of Saint Meinrad Archabbey*)

Oblates know that the *Rule* is essential to direct those attempting to live the monastic spirit. Abbot Kurt recognizes that we, as oblates, are women and men representing a variety of life choices. This guide provides a clearly written and easy-to-understand version of the *Rule*. Many translations use inclusive language; unfortunately, this one did not.

If one follows a schedule of reading through the *Rule* three times throughout the year, the layout of the book makes it effortless to find each chapter, and the dates when each section is to be read.

*Kathleen Polansky, oblate
New Salisbury, IN*