

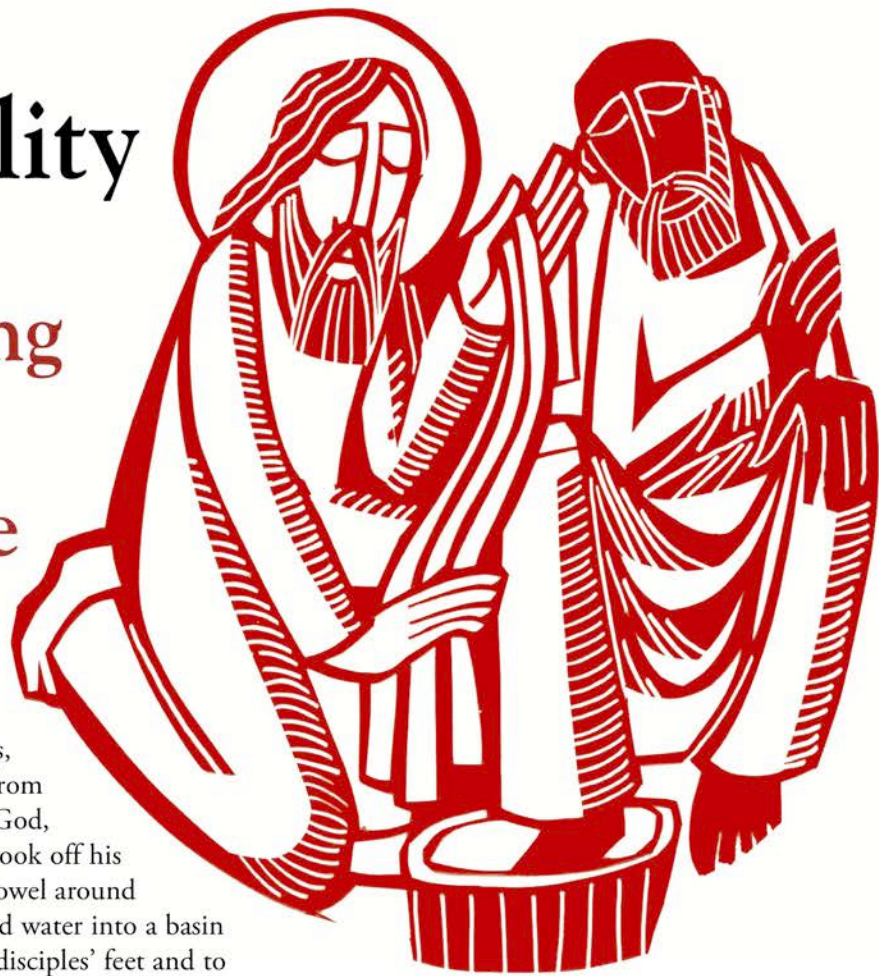
## Humility means following Jesus' example

“During supper, Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him” (John 13:3-5).

Note that this passage from John’s Gospel does not indicate that the foot washing took place at the time of arrival, which would be customary, but “during supper.” We can presume, then, that this act was not part of the ritual used in ancient Middle Eastern cultures as an expression of hospitality. We see this kind of welcome ritual in Genesis when Abraham practiced hospitality by inviting the three visitors to his tent: “Let a little water be brought and wash your feet” (Gen.18:4).

Psalm 60:8 makes a reference to washing of feet: “Moab is my washbasin.” Recall that Moabites are the incestuous descendants of Lot with his firstborn daughter. Foot-washing was among the lowliest types of work performed by slaves, often females.

Jesus washing his disciples’ feet was not something a master did to his servants or students. Rather, those of little or no ranking would humble themselves to wash



the feet of one who was their superior. This act involved an acknowledgment of status and power.

Peter’s initial reaction shows his shock at having his feet washed by his teacher. Peter, missing the intent, attempted to make this into a ritual of cleansing, as seen in the religious rites of the ancient temple priests. Jesus’ focus was on humility and service, not ritual purity. He told his disciples to go and do likewise.

Jesus gave an example of humility by setting aside rank, power and status to serve. We are commanded to do as He did. The culmination of his humility was the crucifixion.

This issue of *Benedictine Oblate Quarterly* will focus on the theme of humility and its need, purpose and challenge to our world and our Church today.

*Kathleen Polansky, oblate  
New Salisbury, IN*

Cover art by Br. Martin Erspamer, OSB.



# A POINT TO PONDER FROM *The Rule*

Accordingly, brothers, if we want to reach the highest summit of humility, if we desire to attain speedily that exaltation in heaven to which we climb by the humility of this present life, then by our ascending actions we must set up that ladder on which Jacob in a dream “saw angels descending and ascending” (Gen. 28:12).

*Rule of St. Benedict 7:5-6*

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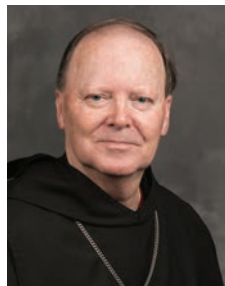
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## You can't win for losing!



*Archabbot Kurt Stasiak, OSB*

Pursuing a virtue is a noble venture, a road to holiness. Embracing a virtue is “putting on Christ.” Take your pick, choose your virtue. Obedience? Compassion? Forgiveness? Good choices! Each one speaks of the imitation of Christ.

If you chose humility, though – well, God help you! I’ve often thought that humility is kind of like the Christian version of a “Catch-22.”

Type “Catch-22” into your browser and you’ll see something like this: “A catch-22 is a paradoxical situation from which an individual cannot escape because of contradictory rules or limitations. The term was coined by Joseph Heller, who used it in his 1961 novel *Catch-22*. An example is: In needing experience to get a job ... [Well], how can I get any experience until I get a job that gives me experience?”

Serving as a spiritual director through the years, I’ve often heard people reflect

upon their spiritual progress with statements such as, “I trust others more than I used to,” or “I’m spending more time in prayer,” or “I have really cleaned up my language at work or been more patient with my kids.”

These statements all make sense: they are measurable, “grade-able” indications of the progress we hope to attain. But what’s poor Theresa going to say when I ask her how she’s doing with humility? “Oh, I’m making progress, Father, I’m getting better at being humble.” You’re proud of your humility, Theresa? *Ouch.*

Maybe therein is one of the keys to becoming truly humble. It’s that challenge to think less about “how I have done” and more about “whom have I helped?” It’s the difference between, after doing a good deed, not taking time to bask in our accomplishment but looking for the next time to do some good simply because “doing good is a good thing to do.”

So, how are you doing with your practice of humility? Please, don’t get sidetracked by keeping score.

*Archabbot Kurt Stasiak, OSB*  
*Saint Meinrad Archabbey*

## Try pairing humility with selflessness



*Janis Dopp*

Humility. It is such a difficult virtue to cultivate, perhaps because we think we have to move away from the posture of humbleness to cultivate strength. Then, recently, I

read a short excerpt from the writings of St. John Vianney, who said, “to make an action pleasing to God ... it should be humble and without selfishness.”

I hadn’t ever put those two ideas together: humility and selfishness. But, with a bit of thought, I realized that selfishness is exactly what impedes my striving to be humble. When I want things my way, or when I am overly concerned with myself and my own life situations, I really don’t have time to bother with being humble. I forget that others are a very significant part of my actions and decisions.

My husband, Jack, has a sweet way of bringing me back to the moment. He calls me the “Sheriff.” When I am home in

Bloomington, he says that the Sheriff is in charge, but when I leave for the hill, “Deputy Dog” takes my place and a lot of the daily routine in the house changes to suit Deputy Dog’s will.

It is humbling to know that my will does not superimpose itself on the

running of our home while I am away! It’s not right. But then I have to realize that the running of our home is not my domain alone. I must share that unselfishly with Jack.

It is just one small example of how easily I can slip into an absence of humility out of selfishness, and how

hard I have to continue to work at being humble each day of my life. I doubt that it will ever come without constant vigilance. And how humbling is that?!

*Janis Dopp  
Oblate Director*

## Admit your gifts, but know they come from God



*Fr. Joseph Cox, OSB*

Humility concerns truth. It is a supernatural virtue by which we attain the correct perception of our relationship with God. St.

Thomas Aquinas said that humility means seeing ourselves as God sees us and knowing that every good that we have comes from Him as pure gift, and that we depend on God for everything.

Humility has as its foundation the sincere acknowledgment of truth perceived clearly by faith. Humility is truth. A humble person can

acknowledge the good in oneself and in other people as it really is – that it comes from our Maker.

Humility is rooted in the truth of reality and a profound sense of total dependence on the Lord. We all have virtues and vices, gifts and limitations. To be humble is to admit both our good points and our bad points, but also to remember that our goodness is from God.

Since humility concerns truth, then the opposite of humility, which is pride, concerns falsehood. Pride is the original sin by which our first parents, Adam and Eve, felt that they could get along just fine without God. In pride, we want to be independent of God and of others. Consequently, we want

to be self-sufficient, self-reliant and self-seeking. Most sins are fundamentally a form of pride and excessive self-love. Pride is falsehood.

Most of St. Benedict’s teaching on humility can be found in Chapter 7 of his *Rule*. He says that the first step of humility is to keep the reverence of God always before our eyes. This first step reminds us of St. Benedict’s insistence on the mindfulness of God’s presence in our lives. As God looks upon us with love and knows everything about us, a response of truthful love is asked of us.

*Fr. Joseph Cox, OSB  
Oblate Chaplain*

## Humility, authenticity and accepting compliments



*Br. Stanley Rother Wagner, OSB*

Sometimes it can be difficult or even embarrassing to accept a compliment that is justified.

“You did an excellent job with that sales

pitch, Methuselah!”

“Wow, Walburga, that was the best cheese dip I’ve ever tasted!”

Many people today think that to be humble, we have to turn away from praise and deny the gifts we have used so well. This is not humility, but false humility.

Humility as authenticity may seem at odds with how Benedict defines humility: “... humility is that a man not only admits with his tongue but is also convinced in his heart that he is inferior to all and of less value, humbling himself” (RB 7:51-52).

Benedict’s seventh step of humility seems blunt, harsh and cold. Let us remind ourselves of the words of Jesus:

When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, do not recline at table in the place of honor. A more distinguished guest than you may have been invited, and the host who invited both of you may approach you and say, ‘Give your place to this man,’ and

*Continued on Page 4*

Continued from Page 3

then you would proceed with embarrassment to take the lowest place. (Luke 14:8-9)

Humility is the ground upon which the Kingdom of God is being built – and it must start with a sure, solid and firm foundation (see Matthew 7:24-27). The origin of the word “humility” is the Latin word *humus* – ground, dirt, earth. Humility is a level playing field.

Humility is meant to ensure that we allow God’s grace to strip away the layers of the false self that we have built up around ourselves. Real humility – or authentic humility – would be to say thank you for a compliment, in keeping with the truth of who we are as children of God.

To state this in another manner: acknowledge the gifts you have been given, but do not take credit for something you do not have.

The next time someone compliments you on your cooking skills or organizational principles, say thank you, always keeping in mind that it is by God’s grace and our effort that we are laying the foundation of the Kingdom of God in humility.

Br. Stanley Rother Wagner, OSB  
Oblate Novice Mentor

## Practice humility by learning a new skill



John Shawler

aggressor, and slowly replaces his sword in its scabbard.

These are the movements of *iaido* (ee-EYE-dough), a traditional martial art that developed in 14th-century feudal Japan. Unlike the brutal warriors of old, however, the modern *iaido* practitioner fights against imaginary opponents, battling his ego and psyche while perfecting his awareness and coordination.

The modern *iaido* curriculum consists of a series of 12 patterns known as the *seitei gata* (say-tay gah-tah). To the casual observer, the *seitei gata* seem incredibly simple. One draws the sword, makes a cut or a stab in the air, and replaces it in its sheath. Sometimes this technique is performed standing or walking, sometimes seated, sometimes kneeling.

Though these movements may look uncomplicated, perfecting them is the

The samurai warrior gazes dispassionately at an oncoming adversary. In one swift motion, he unsheathes his katana, strikes down the approaching

work of a lifetime. Every angle must be precise. The timing of the sword draw and the length of the cut must be exact. The movements of the body must be graceful and smooth.

Studying *iaido* requires a tremendous amount of time spent training in the dojo under the watchful eye of an instructor, in company with fellow practitioners. Class progresses as students move through the 12 *seitei gata*, learning and relearning the movements to gain just a bit of improvement over past attempts.

I’ve been a public-school music teacher for the past 15 years. After being on one side of the podium for that significant amount of time, I slowly observed myself becoming more and more resentful to anyone who dared question my knowledge. I noticed myself beginning to believe that I really did have all the answers, that I was the oracle of knowledge and my students were my ciphers.

Studying *iaido* gives me a chance to experience learning again from the other side, and it has forced me to reassess my humility as an individual and as a teacher. Am I above criticism from my instructors? Am I above criticism from someone who I view is “below me,” whether that is a student

in the class I’m teaching or a fellow *iaido* practitioner of a lower rank? The answer is a resounding “no.” Far from perfecting my character, 15 years of teaching had administered to me a lethal dose of pride.

For this reason, I encourage everyone, teacher or not, to pursue an activity where you become a student again, whether it be through martial arts, academic courses, or an artistic endeavor like music or gardening lessons.

Nothing teaches humility like giving oneself an opportunity to be humble, to accept criticism from teachers and fellow students, and to break down the walls of misplaced self-confidence we have built around ourselves in our adult lives.

John Shawler, oblate novice  
Hurricane, WV



# Surrender yourself to the will of God



Steven Smith

The word “humility” conjures up images of someone who is walked on, used and taken advantage of. The humble person isn’t

strong and isn’t going to be the winner that many in America today want to emulate. Winning at all costs drives our society today.

But for me, as I have traveled the path of my novitiate, I admire those who seem to have what humility really means. Throughout my journey, I have learned to accept God’s reforming aspects of my character that were less than what God would want from me. We all have these, and I think St. Benedict’s chapter on humility provides a practical method for moving in the right path of thought, word and deed.

Surrendering myself to the will of God and fearing Him (being in awe of Him) has helped me struggle less with the day-to-day difficulties. It doesn’t mean that I don’t frequently balk at the course on which God seems to be directing me. I am human, after all, and God knows how fallible we all are.

The question often is, “But what do I do?” I ask myself that question many times. I’m a practical individual and when asked to do something, I like examples so I can see the direction. The book *Humility Rules* by Fr. J. Augustine Wetta, OSB, gave me those modern-day examples and provided me with that guidance.

In reading through the *Rule* and through the examples by Fr. Wetta, I could see how to apply each step to my life. As I’ve continued along the path that I believe God put before me, I see better how applying those steps of humility affected my life.

Through the practice of St. Benedict’s 12 steps (or rungs of the ladder), I have found a contentment, a peace of mind that I’d not previously experienced. I see that the challenges in life are truly a worthwhile adventure and not something to escape. Obedience, perseverance, self-denial and all the other steps in humility are to be embraced.

I see humility as the basis for the love of God and for the love of all God’s creations. Being humble of heart and mind allows us to bring into focus the prime example of one who was truly humble and followed the will of the Father: Jesus Christ. I pray that I can remain always focused on Jesus, who showed us the way of life, and remain open to being molded by God.

St. Benedict, pray for us.

*Steven Smith, oblate novice  
Cincinnati, OH*

## Humility: Easy to pray for and hard to live

“O Jesus, meek and humble of heart, make my heart like unto thine.” Often when I say this old prayer, I wonder what I’m praying for! Of course, I’m praying for the virtue of humility, praying to be humble. But what does that mean?

I know what it doesn’t mean – humility is not willingly being a doormat or seeking humiliation or denigration. Nor is it engaging a phony fawning to look like I’m meek. Humility is knowing who I am, being real, being honest, being in touch with my deepest core – connected to the earth, “*humus*,” from which we derive the word.

It’s so easy to pray for and so hard to live. St. Benedict says that if we want to reach the highest summit of humility, we must ascend a ladder. Paradoxically, to reach that summit, we must descend to the depths of the earth within.

As one of my Jesuit professors continually emphasized, I am a *loved* sinner and my heart is a laboratory that I must faithfully monitor to keep the divine alive, whether it is peacefully bubbling or chaotically exploding. I have much to learn.

*Ellen Godbey, candidate  
Yosemite, KY*

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# Humility: The publican in the temple, ourselves and Christ



Fr. Colman Grabert

St. Benedict's chapter "On Humility" opens with this proclamation: "The divine scripture cries out to us, brothers and sisters, saying:

'Everyone who exalts self will be humbled but whoever humbles self will be exalted.'" The saying (Lk 18:14) concludes Jesus' parable of the Pharisee and the publican who both went up to the temple to pray (Lk 18:9-14).

The figure of the publican, humble and justified by God, appears in the 12th degree of humility. He stands far back from the Holy of Holies, not daring even to look up, beating his breast while praying, "Lord, be merciful to me a sinner" (Lk 18:13). Benedict sets him before us as a figure of humility before the holiness of God.

In sharp contrast, there is the figure of the Pharisee, the exemplar of trusting in *oneself* and in one's observance for his righteousness before God and despising all others. "I thank you that I am not like others ... even like this tax-collector" (Lk 18:9, 11-12). This one's self-exaltation and contempt for the sinner show that he is closed to God's gift of justification.

To aspire to become the publican is to undertake the work of descending by ascending the ladder of one's life in this world to be exalted by God. Out of this work come two intimately related outcomes bestowed by God. First, Benedict promises that, out of the arduous work of humility in this

life, "one will quickly arrive at that perfect love of God which casts out fear" (RB 7:67).

Through this love, all that one once performed with dread, one will now begin to observe without effort, as though naturally, from habit, no longer out of fear of hell, but out of love for Christ, good disposition and delight in virtue. All this the Lord will by the Holy Spirit graciously manifest in his laborer now cleansed of vices and sins. (RB 7:68-70)

Second, this implanting of a new heart – purified, cleansed, inspired by the Holy Spirit – is the pledge and foretaste of the glory God has promised and will bestow in fullness on the faithful servant in the heavenly Jerusalem.

## The Ladder: Our Life in This World

The paradox of an ascending (of the ladder) that is a descending (into a death to self) can seem confounding. That paradox becomes more than a rhetorical conceit when we recognize our own life according to the ascent of the ladder as a participation in the death and resurrection of Christ. For now, three things about the ladder as "our life in this world" are important to attend to.

First, the two sides of the ladder form *one self in one life*. The two sides of the ladder are body/soul (one would today name body, psyche, spirit), one person. Actions in the body, according to a discipline that teaches and forms, are mutually entwined with interior dispositions of one's psyche, heart, spirit, freedom, and understanding.

Behavior without interior conversions is mere compliance and formalism. Spiritual interiority that has no bearing in bodily, concrete life is suspect. For the monastic community, life is structured by the *Rule* and the abbot. That very life is the discipline that teaches, challenges, forms the interior conversions of humility. To every one of the "degrees" of humility there correspond sections of discipline that foster each.

Second, while the work of attaining and deepening humility is a personal work, it is a work completely within the community called together by God for realizing and witnessing the reign of God in the world. The law of this community is the continuation and transformation of the Torah of Israel by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. Its governing spirit is to endure the sufferings of the fallen world, as did Christ, so as with Him to conquer sin and death and spread the reign of God.

The oblate community does not undertake as a totality the renunciations and discipline of the rule-governed monastic community. Oblates may discover an ethos and discipline suggested by the monastic life, but always as members of the community of Word and Sacrament – the local church – at work in the world.

Third, the "rungs/degrees" of humility arise in us (are inserted by God) as a being-drawn (by the Spirit), and the crucible of attaining humility is the community of the reign of God in the world. One cannot make of the texts of the degrees an Ikea manual for constructing a life according to fixed directions.

*Continued on Page 13*

# Humility needs a disposition of dispossession

*Editor's note: This is the first of a four-part series.*



Fr. Adrian Burke

When I decided to try my vocation as a monk at Saint Meinrad, I knew it would be challenging. Perhaps the *most* challenging thing was to

surrender my “right” to personal possessions. I was a young man when I entered the monastic community, but I did collect a fair number of possessions after just a few years of secular living.

I had a car, furniture, and a fair amount of household “stuff” that I couldn’t bring with me into the monastery. So, I had to *dispossess* myself of all that stuff (or most of it). When I did, I felt surprisingly free! I no longer had to worry about “worldly possessions” beyond a suitcase of clothing that I could carry into the monastic cloister when I arrived to begin the novitiate.

Little did I know that material “stuff” is relatively easy to surrender as compared to another kind of “possession” I also had plenty of: my *interior dispositions* – attitudes, opinions, pet theories, biased and prejudicial preconceptions, etc. – the sort of mental infrastructure from which one builds a “sense of self” that often inhibits genuine freedom far more than material possessions can.

St. Benedict, aware of this, addressed interior dispositions when, for example, he describes the first several rungs of the ladder of humility (RB 7) in terms of renunciations of self-will – obedience – which for Benedict is how we build a sense of our true (read: authentic) self.

Chapters 71 and 72 of the *Rule* round out Benedict’s spiritual doctrine and address a particular species of obedience by which we go to God: the obedience shown to those who have no power over us, or who have equal or less status than we do, a “blessing to be shown by all, not only to the abbot but also to one another” (RB 71:1); what Benedict calls mutual obedience.

In the chapter on good zeal, Benedict describes the practice of mutual obedience as “supporting with the greatest patience one another’s weaknesses of body or behavior” (RB 72:5). Through this sort of obedience, we discover and actualize who we really are as “a new creation” in Christ (2 Cor 5:17).

St. Benedict taught that obedience is about listening carefully to the precepts of the Master (RB Prol:1) and striving by grace to put them into practice. Jesus demonstrated mutual obedience when, as recounted in Matthew’s Gospel (15:21-28), He listened carefully to the pleas of a Canaanite woman, a Gentile with (supposedly) no status in a Jewish world.

Jesus’ harsh initial reply to her was likely expected by the crowd; she was a Gentile, a *persona non grata*. What Jesus saw, however, was a desperate mother pleading on behalf of her demon-tormented daughter. He listened, he engaged, and finally he responded with expanded heart by healing her daughter.

Jesus submitted Himself to the needs of his neighbor in a way not unlike the parable He told about a Good Samaritan, another kind of *persona non grata* in the Jewish world (Lk 10:29-37). Thus, Jesus acts out Isaiah’s prophetic description of the messianic servant who does new

things, given as a light to the nations that God’s salvation might reach to the ends of the earth (cf. Isaiah 42, 49, 50 and 52 – the “servant songs”).

Jesus was constantly demonstrating what it means to be humble and obedient, and for Him the two are practically one thing. For St. Benedict, too, humility and obedience are interdependent virtues: obedience is a sign that one is humble (RB 5:1; 7:19; 31; 34; 35). But for obedience and humility to happen, we must renounce the self, which is ultimately what monastic poverty is all about.

True spiritual poverty is anchored by an interior disposition to renounce internalized adverse attitudes and prejudicial beliefs and opinions, especially about other people, which are “possessions” of a spiritual nature. Through them, one can be *possessed* by a vain sense-of-self that suggests, because we have certain gifts or talents – a witty personality or good leadership skills and “competence,” and so forth – that one is always right and never wrong; is “holy” before one really is; perfect and without flaws.

The practice of detachment from things, and a willing dispossession of interior dispositions that thwart humility and obedience, motivated by holy fear (RB 7:10), nourishes a just sense-of-self before God, which is the basis of authentic Christ-like humility.

This Lent, rather than focusing on giving up “things,” consider renouncing some of those interior dispositions to judge and criticize others. It would go a long way to fuel a holy desire for eternal life (RB 4:46), which is what Easter is all about!

Fr. Adrian Burke, OSB, monk  
Saint Meinrad Archabbey

# Considering the Psalms

## Psalm 25: Praying for deliverance from enemies

To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul.

O my God, in you I trust; do not let me be put to shame; do not let my enemies exult over me.

Do not let those who wait for you be put to shame; let them be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous.

Make me to know your ways, O LORD; teach me your paths.

Lead me in your truth, and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all day long.

Be mindful of your mercy, O LORD, and of your steadfast love, for they have been from of old.

Do not remember the sins of my youth or my transgressions; according to your steadfast love remember me, for your goodness' sake, O LORD!

Good and upright is the LORD; therefore he instructs sinners in the way.

He leads the humble in what is right, and teaches the humble his way.

All the paths of the LORD are steadfast love and faithfulness, for those who keep his covenant and his decrees.

For your name's sake, O LORD, pardon my guilt, for it is great.

*The complete text of the psalm can be found at <https://bible.usccb.org/bible/psalms/25>.*

*NRSV Bible with the Apocrypha, eBook, Harper Bibles, HarperCollins Publishers, 2011.*



*Kathleen Polansky*

Pope Francis, in his October 2020 audience, stated, “The Book of Psalms is where Christians can hear the voice of men and women of prayer in flesh

and blood, whose life, like that of us all, is fraught with problems, hardships and uncertainties.

“In the psalms, the pain, suffering and sorrow are not meaningless, without purpose, but instead it becomes a relationship, a cry for help waiting to intercept a listening ear. It communicates ‘knowing how to pray’ through the experience of dialogue with God.” The Book of Psalms, with its many prayers of supplication, teaches Christians how to ask “God to intervene where all human efforts are in vain.”<sup>1</sup>

Psalm 25/24, when written in Hebrew, is an acrostic poem. Each

verse begins with a successive letter of the alphabet. It begins with trust in God and fear of being overcome by forces beyond our control. This is a prayer for deliverance from enemies.

Today’s enemies may take many forms. We pray for deliverance from distress, from all that would defeat us, for forgiveness and guidance.

Humility requires that we relinquish our presumptions of independence and invincibility. I find this psalm helpful in this time of isolation that has consumed much of this past year.

Two things come to mind when I pray this psalm. First is how humbling it is to surrender one’s control and to admit to weakness and needing help. The second is something Fr. Colman Grabert, OSB, mentioned at a retreat: “Only a weak God could help us. Only a God who can take on our weakness. Otherwise, we would hate him as just another power oppressing us.”

My entire family household faced the pandemic of COVID-19. I was the

last to be subjected to its grip. Recognition of my own inadequacies as a caregiver became clear as I had to rely heavily on the aid and support of my friend, Fay Gootee, a nurse. She and I texted dozens of times each day for weeks as she provided me with the medical information I needed to care for my husband and mother-in-law.

Then came the day. We watched my 91-year-old mother-in-law being removed from our home by ambulance. No longer able to do anymore for her, or ride along, or meet her at the hospital was a daunting and heart-wrenching moment. All sense of control was torn away. Standing in complete and utter helplessness, I found only trust in God was left to hold on to. What was happening to my family and myself was out of my hands.

Humility is difficult when one is used to managing affairs. Suddenly being in a situation totally beyond anything expected or known takes the rug out from under our feet. Humility allows



and demands that we remove that protective shield and expose our vulnerability. Humility frees us to seek the help we need and set aside the wall of pride that creates separation, impenetrability and often self-importance and arrogance.

That brings me to what Fr. Colman stated. “Only a weak God could help us. Only a God who can take on our weakness. Otherwise we would hate him as just another power oppressing us.” God’s great *agape* sent his son to be one of us. His love suffered the worst imaginable pain, humiliation and death for us. He gave us a guide that shows love is not power, status or arrogance.

Pope Francis stated recently, “The purpose of crying out to the Lord in prayer is not to get used to suffering, but to remember that God, and not humankind, is the only source of salvation and consolation.”<sup>2</sup>

Prayer is our way of salvation, and the psalms teach us how to ask for God’s intervention, especially where our human efforts are for naught. “The prayer of the psalms is the testimony of this cry: a multiple cry because in life, pain takes a thousand forms and takes the name of sickness, hatred, war, persecution, distrust; until the supreme ‘scandal,’ that of death,”<sup>3</sup> Pope Francis said.

We can turn to God in our weakness and in complete humility, trusting that our faults, our inadequacies, our sins, will not be held against us. But as a mother who comforts her child, we will be soothed. We will be hugged with mercy and the anguish of our heart will be set free from distress.

P.S. My entire family pulled through COVID-19, and all are home and on the mend. Amen.

*Kathleen Polansky, oblate  
New Salisbury, IN*

<sup>1</sup> “Prayer, crying out to God is only source of salvation, pope says,” October 14, 2020, Junno Arocho Esteves, Catholic News Service.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

## The Busy Benedictine: God of Shadows

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



*Edward Castronova*

Some people see the hand of God in the summer sunset, the great mountains, or the whispering breeze. Some people see spirits, see angels. Some have even seen the Blessed Mother. Paul saw Jesus Himself.

Not everyone is blessed with this vision. Pascal, the great mathematician, concluded that God existed and God was hidden. He found that maddening. Why would God exist and yet make Himself difficult to see?

Well, perhaps it is because God has designed a game for us and wants us to have a real victory. If He helped us too much, it would be cheating,

which is not only not fair, but also not fun. God’s mystery is good for us for the same reason that a good puzzle has 500 pieces, not 10.

Not seeing God directly leads to strong faith. God is not equally hidden everywhere. Through the contours of absence, his reality becomes deeply known. Some are blessed to see the statue, but many of us see only the mold into which the bronze was cast. We still know God.

Have you read a horrible story in the paper? A man took an innocent child and killed her in a terrible, terrible way. Aquinas defines evil as the absence of good: The man’s actions were empty of God. We know immediately and deep, deep in our souls what the actions of a God-inspired man would have been: To care for the girl, to keep her safe, to return her to her mother.

Reflect on the evils perpetrated calmly and quietly every day in our advanced society. God inspires none of it; there is no God there. By that absence, we know deeply what would happen were God to appear and take our hands: children would be cared for, families would be saved, the miserable would be given hope.

Reflect on our own sins, inspired by our idols and not the Lord, not at all by the Lord. We know what the Lord looks like when we see his absence in our thoughts and words, our deeds and omissions.

We come to know God through his enemies, by the forces arrayed against Him, even those in our own hearts. Yet the darkness is defined by the light around it. God appears in his shadow.

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

# Workers in the Vineyard

## Obedience begins by listening for God's word



John Brooks

Thomas Aquinas wrote, "I can see, thanks to the sunlight, but if I close my eyes, I cannot see; this is not the fault of the sun, but mine." I think the quote starts

our discussion of Benedictine humility. Sr. Joan Chittister, OSB, writes in her book, *A Spirituality for the Twenty-First Century*, Benedictine humility and our relationship with God are "the sun and its light, the ocean and the wave, the singer and the song. Not one. Not two."

Benedictine humility offers a perspective of living that understands that God provides our opportunities, but it is our choices that determine our direction. The opportunities require work, and embedded in our choices are intended and unintended consequences. Our God is loving. No matter what our choices, through grace, we find ourselves in a sea of endless opportunities.

Opportunity brings challenges. Our opportunities are beginnings that are

multi-dimensional and multi-directional. One choice leads to another and another. One choice leads us in many different and unique directions. The challenges are not to be feared or avoided; they should be embraced and cherished. They are what make us who we are. Two individuals facing the same opportunities will experience different challenges and make different choices.

Living in our choices are human emotions. We find happiness, joy, love, compassion, kindness, humor and understanding. However, we also find greed, selfishness, anger, jealousy, idolatry and competitiveness. It is not the fault of the opportunity when our choices lead us in a wrong direction or when our emotions alter our understanding; it is ours.

Our emotions, evolving over time, are influenced by our previous choices and the choices of others who have impacted our lives. The choices we make define where we find ourselves, and it is only our choices that can move us.

In Benedictine humility, it is union with God that guides our moments

and movements in life. In this union, we find definition of our challenges and guidance in our choices that determine the direction of our journey. We begin on the first step of the ladder of humility "to keep the fear of God always before our eyes" (RB 7:10). This "fear of God," the image of God's essentialness, becomes a candle lighting a world gone dark by a lack of hope, faith and understanding.

Then ascending the ladder, by obedience to our creator, purity and openness of heart, a compassionate and understanding heart listening to and for the voices of others; we find ourselves face to face with "that perfect love of God which casts out fear" (RB 7:67).

Good habits, choices and virtues, painted by the artist in his image, and capturing his true nature, transports the viewer into the "perfect love of God," offering comfort, compassion, understanding and love as inseparable as the sun and its light, the ocean and the wave, the singer and the song.

John Brooks, oblate  
Columbus, IN

## Reflections from the Wilderness

Lots of people think humility means being down on yourself, backing down from a challenge, or being shy, retiring or soft-spoken.

In the Catholic tradition, it means nothing of the sort. We believe that men and women are destined for greatness. Being created in the image of God means that we have incomparable dignity. Even the ancient philosophers, without the

benefit of revelation, knew that humans have an irrepressible desire to accomplish great deeds and become someone. The entire Catholic tradition agrees that the desire for excellence and achievement is natural and good, not sinful and proud.

So it was not wrong for James and John (Mk 10:35) to ask to sit at Jesus' right and left. The problem was that they were clueless about what that

meant. So Jesus told them. It means serving until it hurts, even to death.

Most would agree that you can't get any higher or greater than God. What Jesus comes to reveal to us is a God who is from all eternity a community of love, of three persons whose ceaseless activity, whose joy, consists in giving themselves each to the other in love.

*Continued on Page 11*

When the people chose the captivity of sin, the second person of this Holy Trinity emptied Himself of divine glory and joined Himself to human nature in the womb of a virgin.

The greatness of divine love means that the omnipotent one now allows himself to be helpless. The infinite one now becomes small. The one without need becomes vulnerable. In his 33 years, He does many great deeds, healing the incurable, driving out demons, even raising the dead. His greatest deed, though, was to offer Himself as a ransom (Is 53:11) so that all humanity could be released from its bondage.

Divine love, *agape*, charity, it is in this that true greatness lies. When divine

love encounters human need and suffering, it will stop at nothing to meet that need and relieve that suffering, even to washing feet and dying on a cross.

So attaining greatness for us means not to claw our way to the top, stepping on whoever gets in the way. This is pride and is a sign not of strength, but of weakness. It can drown out the inner voice of self-doubt and insecurity temporarily. That is the hidden motivation of the bully and dictator.

Humility is possible only for the free, for those who are secure as Jesus was in the Father's love. Then there is no need of people fawning over them. They know who they are, where they

come from and where they are going. They can laugh at themselves. The proud cannot.

Humility means having an accurate estimate of oneself. Being human means that I am made in God's image and likeness. Therefore, I am gifted. I have dignity and a great destiny. Being human means that I am creative, but not the creator. I have limits that I need to respect.

"Remember that you are dust ...." Note how the word "humility" resembles the word "humus," that component of the soil that makes it fertile.

*Ron Lewis, oblate  
Greencastle, IN*

## In accepting limits, we learn humility



*Kathy Hurt*

Humility does not come easy for me. As the product of a culture that values self-centeredness and self-promotion and sees the self as unlimited in

every way, as well as being the product of an upbringing that confused humility with humiliation, I struggle to find the sweet spot in my responses and choices that would root me in true humility.

So I am grateful that St. Benedict devoted a long and thoughtful chapter to humility, breaking it down in stages of growth. That gives me a path to follow, hoping to learn to live humbly.

In a strange paradox, humility rarely looks humble, at least in the ways we might typically envision a humble person. Humility is nothing like

groveling, abasement, timidity or fearfulness, descriptions that are associated with stereotyped humility.

Quite the opposite, humility radiates a kind of strength, peace and courage that are possible precisely because one is humble in the sense of knowing one's limits – and accepting those limits rather than resenting them or pushing them aside.

Theologian David Tracy talks about "limit experiences" as encounters with life events that are reminders of our mortality. I am sinful, I am not in control, I can get sick, I frequently make mistakes, I disappoint myself and others, I will die one day.

Whenever a limit experience comes along, it sharpens the boundaries of self, reminds us we can go only so far under our own steam. It invites a look beyond to others who care for me and to the One who is always walking beside me. In accepting limits, we learn humility.

St. Benedict suggests understanding humility as acceptance of limitations. For instance, he notes that "every exaltation is a kind of pride," with exaltation being akin to grasping that impels one to reach "after marvels beyond me" (RB 7:2-3). Further in the same chapter, St. Benedict envisions an acceptance of the painful limits of being human when he speaks approvingly of the humble person as one who "endures [suffering] ... without seeking escape" (RB 7:36).

A humble person, having lived into the fifth step of humility, no longer pretends to be perfect but can honestly acknowledge faults (RB 7:44-48). I may not be happy when an experience humbles me and throws me up against my limits. But as I come to know and accept those limits, thereby growing into humility, I am ever more open to God's grace that, as Paul notes, is sufficient for my weakness.

*Kathy Hurt, oblate novice  
Louisville, KY*

# Meeting the Monks: Br. Raban Bivins



*Br. Raban Bivins, OSB*

A native of Owensboro, Kentucky, Br. Raban Bivins first came to the Archabbey as a high school junior with family friends who were visiting their son. That casual encounter soon developed into something deeper when he and a friend both decided to enter the junior seminary, which was also a boarding school for high school boys.

As time went by, however, the friend left the monastery. He went home, “but I stayed,” Br. Raban says.

One of the first projects he worked on was the construction of the first guest house, mixing and pouring concrete and using an air hammer. Other tasks included driving a truck and loading and unloading construction materials.

Such a large community always needed volunteers for the heavy physical work. “I volunteered every time a sign went up,” he remembers. Whether in searing summer heat and humidity or in frigid winter cold, it didn’t matter.

The Archabbey farm required constant attention. It processed nine

steers and 15 hogs a week in its slaughterhouse. The farm managed thousands of egg-laying hens, and the truck garden yielded abundant harvests for the dinner table.

Of course, this farm-raised kid knew this way of life inside and out, and he fit right in with the assorted farm chores. He also found himself serving in the shoe shop with more brothers and fathers present. He also worked in construction, drove a truck, was a volunteer firefighter, and served as house prefect for the monastery.

Besides helping to raise the food for the community, Br. Raban also helped to cook it.

Imagine making French toast for 1,200 to 1,800 people at one time. Thirty dozen eggs went into the recipe. Br. Raban had a novel way of scrambling so many eggs. If anyone wants to know how it was done, he would be happy to explain. (For this article, however, that’s off the record.)

In 1965, Br. Raban got the chance to volunteer for a challenging assignment: to go to Peru to help with the

Archabbey’s mission there. This work would last 14 years. While there, he helped the local youth in various ways to keep them out of trouble and give them goals to achieve – like raising funds to pave an area with asphalt to create their own basketball court.

When Br. Raban returned to the Archabbey, he found more service opportunities as the community’s locksmith. Developing a reputation for being able to fix anything, he was later chosen to be the monastery subprior from 1996 to 2007, the first brother selected to serve as subprior.

These days, Br. Raban can be found assisting in the monastery infirmary. He also serves as the Archabbey Almoner, an outreach to those needing help with their utility bills. He also remains the go-to man when anything needs fixing.

On July 26, 2020, Br. Raban celebrated his 60th anniversary of monastic profession. For these past six decades, Br. Raban has done what was needed, always with a cheerful heart and a smile. God willing, he’ll keep on doing it.

*Angie McDonald, oblate  
Huntingburg, IN*

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# St. Benedict's Ladder of Humility

## 12 Steps

1. Keep the fear of God always before your eyes.
2. Love not your own will nor take pleasure in the satisfaction of your desires.
3. Submit to your superior in all obedience for the love of God.
4. In this obedience under difficult, unfavorable, or even unjust conditions, your heart quietly embraces suffering and endures it without weakening or seeking escape.
5. Do not conceal any sinful thoughts entering your heart, or any wrongs committed in secret, but rather confess them humbly.
6. A monk is content with the lowest and most menial treatment.
7. Not only admit with your tongue, but also be convinced in your heart, that you're inferior to and of less value.
8. A monk does only what is endorsed by the common rule.
9. A monk controls his tongue.
10. A monk is not given to ready laughter.
11. Speak gently without laughter, seriously with modesty, briefly and reasonably, but without raising your voice.
12. Always manifest humility in your bearing no less than in your heart.

After ascending all these steps of humility, the monk will quickly arrive at that perfect love of God which casts out fear.

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*Continued from Page 6*

### **“He Humbled Himself ...”** **(Phil 2:1-11)**

The exemplar and mystery of humility is Christ Jesus. I have often entertained the thought that the ladder of Jacob on which angels ascend and descend is, in John's Gospel (Jn 1:51), Christ, and that Benedict's text of Chapter 7 implies this.

There is perhaps no more pointed and compelling Gospel of this than the letter to the Philippians cited above. In a very real way, the 12 steps of humility are a participation in the suffering of Christ (death to self, death to the ways of the fallen world, combat against the rulers of this age, the principalities and powers that resist the reign of God).

To become like the publican; to share with others in the life and mission of Christ; to arrive at the love of God that casts out fear: these set up the ladder of your life in this world.

*Fr. Colman Grabert, OSB, monk  
Saint Meinrad Archabbey*



# Humility: The first step to obedience



Thomas J. Rillo

Most dictionaries define humility as the quality of being humble, as the acceptance of a low self-image and a sense of unworthiness. In

a religious context, humility can mean a recognition of self in relation to a deity or deities, and subsequent submission to said deity as a member of that religion.

St. Benedict knew that to be a monk and to prefer nothing to God meant that you needed to have or cultivate a degree of humility. He devoted an entire chapter to humility in his rule for monks. St. Benedict was a student of human nature and behavior.

Much of the *Rule* is based on knowledge of human behavior, thereby setting the time for both prayer and work. This is defined in the Latin terminology as being *ora et labora*, or prayer and work. The *Rule* is what the monks live their lives by.

A time to sleep, a time to get up, a time for prayer and a time for eating.

I found humility to be difficult. I was an athlete, coach, official and university professor. Each of these roles required an aggressive and competitive mentality. If you were otherwise, then success was more difficult to achieve. It wasn't until I attended a Catholic university where I had the privilege to hear Bishop Fulton Sheen's lectures that my *metanoia* (change of heart) began. He was the epitome of a successful individual who was also humble.

St. Benedict knew how his young monks would behave if they didn't have humility and had difficulty with obedience. Where possible, Benedict would assign an elder monk to be among the young monks. In the sleeping quarters, the elder monk would be in a supervisory position. His task was to teach the younger monks to prefer nothing but Christ and God. Then it would be possible to learn humility.

Benedict understood that his monks needed to sublimate their egos. The *Rule* commands we keep the fear of God always before our eyes. Benedict uses Scripture, which tells us to turn away from our desires (Sir 18:30). In Chapter 7 on Humility, Benedict uses a passage from Luke: "For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted" (Luke 14:11; 18; 14). Benedict lays out 12 steps required to develop humility.

Humility can be very difficult. As stated earlier, it can be conceived as weakness. Our world is highly competitive. The quiet, introverted individual is often overlooked. As oblates, we are called to decrease in order to increase. This is interpreted to mean that our self/ego must decrease and allow humility to assist us in developing a spirituality that will bring us closer to God. Humility is a sign of strength.

Thomas J. Rillo, oblate  
Bloomington, IN

## Your Online Oblate Chapter Report



Holly Vaughan

The Online Chapter of the Benedictine Oblates of Saint Meinrad has continued to grow! We have been blessed with a monk speaker at each

monthly chapter meeting (hosted on Zoom), and we continue to implement new ways of growing together as a chapter.

In addition to reflecting on the *Rule* daily via our discussion boards, we have gotten together on Zoom for Scripture study and virtual book studies that help us grow in the Benedictine life. We pray the rosary together weekly and are blessed to be sharing our oblate vocations with each other.

If you would like to join the online chapter (open to any oblate, whether or not you are a member of another

chapter), email chapter coordinator Holly Vaughan at [vaughan0531@gmail.com](mailto:vaughan0531@gmail.com).

Holly Vaughan, oblate  
Bellmont, IL

# Smugmug

For more photos of  
Saint Meinrad events, visit:

<http://saint-meinrad.smugmug.com>

# Create an environment to foster your oblate promises



Marjorie Busch

COVID-19 imposed changes that came without a warning. As oblates, it means that our connection to Saint Meinrad Archabbey is not

in person for now. Yet, we are to remain faithful to our oblate promises of stability, fidelity, and obedience to God.

Watching Saint Meinrad's livestreams, I am affected by how the setting uplifts my spirit. The combination of light, colors, and mindful arrangements creates an atmosphere that inspires me to maintain my oblate promises. These three elements of design are well employed to bring a peaceful and spiritual environment.

This challenges us to create a similar environment in our homes. As Janis Dopp, our oblate director, reminded us: "It is about looking at the place we call home, and realizing that it is our monastery" (*Benedictine Oblate Quarterly*, 26:3, Summer 2020, p. 2).

How can we facilitate this? Is it a matter of featuring a holy picture or object in a room? As a design professional, I see ways to go further. We can transform the actual physical characteristics of each room. There are three basic strategies on which I rely.

## Strategy 1: Reassess

Choose a room to transform. Make notes, take a critical look from differing viewpoints. What should be rearranged? Does the furniture achieve the purpose for the room? Is the seating in good condition, comfortable and of appropriate size?

Are there convenient tables and lamps nearby? Is the lighting adequate?

Note the clutter that can distract. Consider arranging some items, such as pictures or curios, into collections or relegate them to a storage box or trash bag. With budget in mind, make a list of needed changes. Taking steps to improve the harmony and beauty of your environment will return blessings of peace and inspiration.

Bring interest into a room by varying the height of furniture. Decide on one major piece as a focal point.

## Strategy 2: Reinvent

The most powerful tool to transform a room is color. First consider paint. Since painted areas cover much of the room, carefully decide what mood you want to create. Using paint sample pots and color cards can save frustration later.

An area to evaluate is furniture. Simply changing the arrangement may help. Buy new items as your budget allows, but be cautious of investing in the latest trends. Something timeless may be a better choice.

Your home is your monastery, so create a holy area. This can be part of a room or just a shelf. As you gather objects to display, keep in mind that this place will uplift you throughout the day.

## Strategy 3: Rediscover

As the months pass, we hope and pray that soon we will connect again in person at Saint Meinrad Archabbey. Meanwhile, enjoy using some of these design ideas to enhance your oblate life at home.

Marjorie Busch, oblate  
Sumter, SC

## HONOR YOUR INNER MONK PRAYER APP IS BACK

Saint Meinrad Archabbey has launched a new version of its smartphone prayer app. Honor Your Inner Monk is a free app that allows users to pray a different short prayer each morning and evening.

The new version of the prayer app includes morning and afternoon prayers, along with a text-to-speech feature that allows users to hear the prayers. The app keeps track of how many times the user has said the prayers that month. App users can also forward a prayer request to the monastic community.

The app is available from Google Play and the Apple App Store or you can visit [www.honoryourinnermonk.org](http://www.honoryourinnermonk.org). Links are at the bottom of the page.



# Doorways to deeper faith: Solidarity



Beverly Weinhold

Solidarity is a modern word commonly connected with social justice. Coined in *Napoleon's Code Book* in 1804, solidarity is a word weighted

with compassion for the poor, oppressed and disenfranchised. It is a French word that harkens back to the Latin *solidus*, meaning sturdy, firm and undivided. Spiritually speaking, it is oneness.

Solidarity opened a door to deeper faith for me in the late 1980s. Fr. Tom DiLorenzo, a diocesan priest in East Boston, invited me to co-teach a Bible study for nuns in the Archdiocese. A lay woman, I felt small next to a well-known priest. After the presentation, Fr. Tom asked me to stay standing. I thought I must have made a mistake.

Instead, he held my gaze and asked: "Will you forgive me for the ways I have diminished the Protestant faith?" I fell speechless. Disarmed by his candor but caught by the Holy Spirit, I responded: "Fr. Tom, will you forgive me for my ignorance of your faith tradition and the ways I have dismissed the Catholic faith?" The whole classroom cried.

Solidarity may be a modern word, but it is not a new concept. In the Old Testament, Moses expressed solidarity with the Hebrews, leaving the pleasures of Pharaoh for the poverty of God's people (Hebrews 11:25). Ruth

chose solidarity with Naomi when she left her family in Moab and became a stranger in Bethlehem (Ruth 1:17).

But solidarity found its full expression in the death of Christ on the cross: "He who knew no sin became sin, that we might become the righteousness of God" (II Corinthians 5:21).

In our modern world, this ancient meaning is in danger of becoming cliché. Solidarity is more than warm feelings of like-mindedness, marching for a just cause or contributing to a movement. Pope John Paul II, a survivor of both Nazi terror and Communist oppression, makes a clear corrective in his 1987 encyclical *On Social Concern*:<sup>1</sup>

Solidarity is not a feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of so many people near and far. On the contrary, it is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say to the good of all and each individual, because we really are responsible for all.

We belong to one another, because we are brothers and sisters created in God's image: "All of us share the same origin from God and our last end in God."<sup>2</sup> It is in this same spirit that St. Benedict teaches his monks, "A man born free is not to be given a higher rank than a slave who becomes a monk ... because whether slave or free, we are all one in Christ" (RB 2:18-20).

Solidarity in this deeper sense is spiritual seeing that becomes a sacred

stance. It takes a "long loving look at the real"<sup>3</sup> seeing we are one with Christ and one with each other. This mystical union is a sacred stance that is cultivated in contemplative prayer.

When we sit in silence and see God gazing at us, we begin to see others with the same love. "Contemplative prayer," says Fr. Adrian Burke, OSB, "is not only for monks and nuns." It is for all of us who long to come closer to Christ, generating "a grace-illuminated capacity to observe reality more intensely, seeing things as they truly are."<sup>4</sup>

Solidarity is not only a sacred stance, but it is a spiritual practice. When the dust settles and the lens is wiped clear, we experience conversion calling us to action. Accompanied by the Holy Spirit, we are empowered to offer kind words, give gifts, listen to people's stories, share sufferings, bear burdens, forgive our sins and the sin of others, and love our enemies. Fr. John Foley's "One Bread, One Body" sums up solidarity beautifully:

Gentile or Jew, servant or free,  
woman or man, no more.

One bread, one body, one Lord of  
all, one cup of blessing, which we  
bless. And we, though many,  
throughout the earth, we are one  
body in this one Lord.

Fr. Tom DiLorenzo summoned me to solidarity. May the Holy Spirit summon us all.

Beverly Weinhold, oblate novice  
Louisville, KY

<sup>1</sup> St. John Paul II (1987). *Sollicitudo rei Socialis*, no. 39.

<sup>2</sup> Sister Dominic Mary Heath, *Plough*: 59 (2020, Autumn). "Solidarity means giving yourself."

<sup>3</sup> Walter Burghardt, *Church* (1989, Winter). "Contemplation: A long loving look at the real."

<sup>4</sup> Fr. Adrian Burke, OSB (2018). "Contemplative Living." Retreat conference at Saint Meinrad Archabbey, April 27-29.



# History: 'Black Robes' serve Native Americans



Br. Michael Reyes

I am one of the fortunate monks to be assigned as a valet for Fr. Denis Quinkert, OSB. Aside from being twice elected abbot of Saint Meinrad's

daughter house in South Dakota, Blue Cloud Abbey, Fr. Denis is also an alumnus of our high school. I have exciting and fun conversations with Fr. Denis, but what captivated me the most was our conversation about the Native Americans.

This is a story about three Native Americans and Saint Meinrad Abbey. It was a time when the Dakotas were not even a state. It was a time when Native Americans still roamed the plains of North America. It was a time when they resided in tepees and

tracked buffalo herds. It was indeed a different time.

Neighboring tribes tell stories about people teaching them about the Great Spirit. The Native Americans gave a name to these people that aptly suits their description – Black Robes. So the tribes fervently prayed to the Great Spirit to send them a Black Robe.

Their prayers were answered with the arrival of Saint Meinrad's Abbot Martin Marty in the Dakotas. Ta-Ma-Ha-Cha was the name given to him by the Native Americans, which translates to "a tall, thin man." Abbot Martin directed the Native Americans to the Catholic faith and baptized anyone who believes in it.

Abbot Martin stayed in the Dakota Territory for more than three years before becoming bishop of Dakota.

His departure from the Territory had a significant impact on the Native Americans. They longed to have another Black Robe among them.

Because of the 45-year absence of a Black Robe dwelling in the community, the Native American council agreed to dispatch three of their own to bring one home. Their names were Yellowbird, Thunder Horse and Zephier. This was the first time these three had left their territory. With three horses, a limited food supply, and a journey to the unknown, they traveled to St. Meinrad in Indiana.

After traveling by horse for about 950 miles, they showed up at the doors of Saint Meinrad Abbey. It was a surprise for the monks to see them outside the monastery, for their arrival

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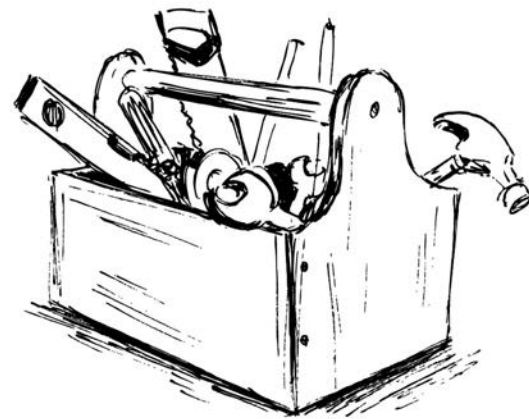


*Clockwise from top left: Abbot Athanasius Schmitt, OSB, Saint Meinrad's third abbot. Fr. Sylvester Eisenman, OSB, who ministered to the Native Americans. Yellowbird, Thunder Horse, and Zephier, who asked for a "Black Robe" to serve their tribe. Fr. Sylvester with some Sioux children during the 1926 Eucharistic Congress in Chicago.*

# The Oblate Toolbox

## St. Benedict ties humility to love

*“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

I have heard it said this way: Humility is not thinking less of yourself; it is thinking of yourself less.

When I get to work in the

morning, I usually park on the margin of our parking lot. To do so, I must make a 90-degree right turn into the parking space. I swing wide and then aim the car straight ahead between the two yellow lines. Last week, I could have sworn that the car was parked straight. It sure looked that way from the driver’s seat.

As I got out and shut the door, however, the truth could not be ignored.

My front wheels were turned sharply to the right, just inside the space. My car’s back end stuck out the other way. The disconnect between my perception and reality could not have been more apparent. No matter how I felt about this – no matter how foolish, embarrassed or just plain irritated – I had to do the whole thing over.

If I had thought less of myself, this minor incident would not have amounted to much. Humility would have produced an attitude of teachability, not irritability. I guess I was not as humble as I thought.

Time to employ the fifth step on the ladder of humility in Chapter 7 of the *Rule*. Here St. Benedict urges us to spill it all to God through our confessor, trusting in God’s goodness, mercy and restoration.

By admitting to my own ineptitude, I make room for God to increase his humility in me. By acknowledging my mistake, I realize again how much I need Him. By accepting my need for correction, I allow God to increase his mercy in me.

Again, God’s logic in my life goes against the grain. His ways are not our ways, and his thoughts are not our thoughts. It all boils down to trusting in the Lord with all our hearts and not leaning on our own understanding (Proverbs 3:5-6).

And in case I forget this lesson, I’m sure that another one will come along.

*Angie McDonald, oblate  
Huntingburg, IN*

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### *Continued from Page 17*

was unexpected. The Native American delegation met Abbot Athanasius Schmitt, OSB, and asked for a Black Robe. The abbot denied their initial request.

So, the three Native Americans decided to build their tepees and camp on the monastic grounds until Abbot Athanasius granted their petition. It took days for the abbot to agree to their request. With the Native American delegation’s steadfast appeal, Abbot Athanasius assigned Fr. Sylvester Eisenman, OSB, to the Dakotas. The delegation left with Fr.

Sylvester and headed back to the Dakota Territory with great success.

Fr. Sylvester’s arrival was welcomed with joy and celebration. Finally, their prayers to the Great Spirit had been answered with the arrival of another Black Robe. Fr. Sylvester’s notoriety for continually searching for building materials provided the name that the Native Americans would use to address him, Tik-a-Dish-Ne, which means “never stays at home.” Also, Fr. Sylvester was given the title of chief.

Time passed and faded away, but it was time that established the legacy of

the three Native Americans and Fr. Sylvester that persists to this day. While Fr. Sylvester served in the Dakotas, he inaugurated schools, opened a larger church, and established other notable structures that still stand today. It is a testament to their success.

This is a story that time might have forgotten, but it is a story worth telling time and again. This is a heroic story that Fr. Denis Quinkert told me that I will never forget.

*Br. Michael Reyes, OSB, monk  
Saint Meinrad Archabbey*

# OBLATE NEWS

## UPCOMING EVENTS

The 2021 tentative dates for the rites of investiture and oblation are March 27, June 5, September 25 and December 4.

The March Oblate Retreat is scheduled for March 19-21, 2021.

*Please note: These dates are tentative and depend on the state of the pandemic and the archabbot's decision of when Saint Meinrad will reopen to the public. ♦*

## DEATHS

**Hubertina "Tina" Searcy**, of Tulsa, OK, died on December 13, 2020

**Delores Pictor**, of Deltona, FL, died on March 9, 2020

**Jessie McCurdy**, of Middleton, PA, died on June 23, 2020

**John Campbell**, of Cincinnati, OH, died on August 15, 2020

**Mary Kay Goffinet**, of Tell City, IN, died on August 18, 2020

**Todd Harman**, of White House, TN, died on August 28, 2020

**June Riedford**, of Evansville, IN, died on September 6, 2020

**Jack Sederstrand**, of Dayton, OH, died on September 23, 2020

**Msgr. Robert Noon**, of Columbus, OH, died on October 15, 2020

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

**Rita Glaser**, of Kettering, OH, died on October 18, 2020

**Mary Lousie Hoehn**, of Georgetown, IN, died on November 5, 2020

**Lawrence Hembree**, of Greenfield, IN, died on November 29, 2020 ♦

## VOLUNTEERS APPRECIATED

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

## WE WANT YOUR ARTICLES!

The *Benedictine Oblate Quarterly* invites novices and oblates to submit news and information about their chapter, write an article about their Benedictine journey, submit a book review for the Reading Room column, or send in photos of their chapter engaged in oblate activities.

All submissions must have your name, city and state, and an explanation of how it connects to the theme.

Submissions will be edited and published as they fit the theme or need of the issue. A maximum 500-word limit is suggested for all submitted articles.

Please send all submissions to Kathleen Polansky at [kpolanskyoblate@yahoo.com](mailto:kpolanskyoblate@yahoo.com).

The upcoming theme for the Spring 2021 issue is "Community." The last day for submission of articles is February 1, 2021. ♦

# Mary the Dawn, Christ the Perfect Day



Charles Thatcher

St. Augustine wrote of the Blessed Virgin Mary that "she is the flower of the field from whom bloomed the precious lily of the valley." While many theologians have written eloquently about Mary and her role in God's plan for salvation, I find poetic language like Augustine's to be most satisfying when contemplating the Blessed Mother.

Recently, when asked to compose music for the choir of a Marian shrine

in Orlando, Florida, I chose as the text an anonymous poem, *Mary the Dawn*. This poem consists of successive pairs of images that get at the heart of the relationship between Mary and Jesus, namely, that the God-bearer always leads to her Divine Son.

In this composition, I grouped together couplets of the poem to form four stanzas. Between these stanzas, I inserted traditional hymns that reflect three key moments in salvation history – the birth of Christ, his passion and death, and his resurrection.

The beloved German Christmas hymn, *Es ist ein Ros entsprungen* (Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming), likens the birth of the Christ Child to a tiny flower,

budding from a tender rose plant.

In the medieval sequence hymn, *Stabat Mater Dolorosa* (At the Cross Her Station Keeping), we contemplate the sorrowful mother weeping at the foot of the cross, keeping watch as her son suffers and dies.

The exuberant Easter carol, *Regina Caeli Jubila* (Be Joyful, Mary), rings out an insistent call to Mary to rejoice at the good news that her son is alive, arisen from the dead.



The QR Code will access a recording of this work.

Charles Thatcher, oblate  
Winter Springs, FL



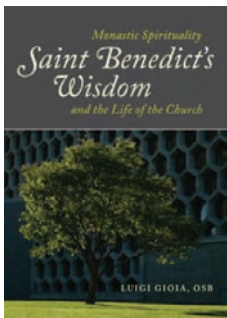
200 Hill Drive  
St. Meinrad, IN 47577

*Return service requested*

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## Reading Room

*Saint Benedict's Wisdom: Monastic Spirituality and the Life of the Church* by Luigi Gioia, OSB, Liturgical Press, 2020.



Luigi Gioia's book serves as an excellent guidebook for all Christians. For those living as oblates, this book offers great insight into the *Rule*. The author was a professor of systematic theology at the Pontifical University of St. Anselm in Rome for many years. He serves as a research associate at the Van Hugel

Institute for Critical Catholic Inquiry at Cambridge University.

In this book, he weaves a tapestry of insights and experiences from his many years as a monk and scholar, using the *Rule of St. Benedict* as an authentic guide for living a life steeped in Christian spirituality. Oblates will gain a deeper understanding of Benedictine spirituality.

The author demonstrates how monastic spirituality is a gift to the entire Church. He points out that monastic

vows are dependent on one's baptismal commitment, and the monastic experience reaches out to all the faithful. Monastic wisdom, sustained over the ages by St. Benedict's *Rule*, offers a way for Christians to integrate spirituality with everyday life.

Even though the work of St. Benedict handed down through generations is called the *Rule*, it should not be defined as a regimentation unable to be adapted through the ages. The chapters that the author included offer many answers to questions about living Benedictine spirituality and provide ways to address issues confronting the modern Church and society.

Chapter titles: Forgiving, Chastity, Simplicity and Prayer, The Way of God and Monasticism, Listening and Monastic Wisdom.

The book is a guide for those who live their faith in community and can help lead the Church in this modern world. *Saint Benedict's Wisdom: Monastic Spirituality and the Life of the Church* is recommended. It offers a freshness in defining the wisdom of St. Benedict.

*Thomas J. Rillo, oblate  
Bloomington, IN*