Our all-loving Creator passionately wants a relationship with us. The story of Adam and Eve’s disobedience points out how weak human beings deviate from their responsibilities in this relationship. Pride, jealousy and laziness lead us to seek the fulfillment of our own desires, ultimately disobeying God and breaking off the relationship.

But, being all-loving, God never gives up and continues to seek us. We see this throughout the Old Testament. Finally, in a more than monumental moment, the Word, the Son of God, takes on flesh as Jesus of Nazareth and finally provides us a way to restore our relationship with God.

In the above quotation from the Rule, St. Benedict shows us that our response to Christ’s saving action should be to listen to him with the ear of our heart. St. Benedict understood the heart to be that part of ourselves in which our true self dwells, from which we make the decisions that form our lives.

It is the heart that needs to be converted, first of all. It is the heart that needs to listen to the master. A converted heart will lead to converted behavior. We listen to the words of the master through our practice of lectio divina.

Because we want to listen to our master, Jesus, who is the Word of God, it makes sense that the Holy Bible is the preferred place in which to do our lectio. Both the Old and the New Testaments point to Christ and teach us how to follow Him.

The Bible is a big collection of writings, and it can be daunting. A great way to move into reading the Bible is to begin by reading the selections that the Church gives us for Sunday and daily Masses throughout the year. These are usually available in parish bulletins, as well as in various publications.

This frees us from having to make choices about reading literature with which we are unfamiliar. It also provides us with potentially challenging reading. Left to our own choices, some of us would likely prefer a comforting text like Psalm 23, as opposed to a challenging one like Psalm 109. By leaving the choice to the Church, we avoid this pitfall.

Lectio divina is often described in terms of four stages: lectio or reading, meditatio or meditation, oratio or prayer, contemplatio or contemplation. These stages are meant to be more of a description of what happens in prayerful reading than a procedure we must follow. We must read the sacred text. We must try to understand what the sacred author was saying to the people for whom he was writing. This can include reading commentaries about...
Continued from p. 1

the text. We must meditate on the text. This type of meditation might be thought of as pondering what we are reading as one might ponder a letter or photograph from a loved one. We might repeat a word or phrase that is particularly striking to us.

By “chewing” on the text, we are seeking what God has to say to us through it. Prayer may be woven through the lectio experience. It is a good idea to begin with prayer to the Holy Spirit for understanding. Then as we read and meditate, we may continue to pray for understanding. As we ponder the text, we may be moved to prayer of thanksgiving, praise or repentance, depending on our response to the text. A potential outcome of lectio divina is contemplation.

In contemplation we are led, through the action of the Holy Spirit, to let go of words and thoughts and simply direct a loving gaze toward God. We don't necessarily reach the stage of contemplation every time we do lectio.

The effect of our praying the Bible through lectio divina is our closer following of Jesus, our master, and ultimately sharing in God's Kingdom.

Reflection Questions
How might we seek a relationship with God?
What does “listen with the ear of your heart” mean and how may it be used?
What is lectio divina and how is it used?
What are the benefits of prayerful reading? How may the benefits "move” us?

Br. Zachary Wilberding, OSB
Saint Meinrad Archabbey

A POINT TO PONDER FROM THE RULE

“Listen, my son, to the master’s instructions, and attend to them with the ear of your heart.”

Rule of St. Benedict, Prologue 1

This is St. Benedict’s first sentence of the Prologue. He addresses the individual who seeks admission to his monastery. He does this in a challenging way, but kindly. Benedict does not want to cast any false illusions about monastic life, but rather he presents himself in an honest and straightforward manner. He is realistic in his approach to appraise the aspiring candidate. He also makes it clear that he is the master whom the aspirant must obey.

The Brief Rule of St. Romuald

This explanation of lectio divina is by St. Romuald, who founded the Camaldolese Benedictine order of monks and nuns:

Sit in your cell as in Paradise.
Put the whole world behind you and forget it.

Like a skilled angler on the lookout for a catch, keep a careful eye on your thoughts.

The path you must follow is in the Psalms – don’t leave it. If your mind wanders as you read, don’t give up but hurry back and try again.

Above all, realize that you are in God’s presence; hold your heart there in wonder as if before your sovereign.

Empty yourself completely; sit waiting, content with God’s gift, like a little chick tasting and eating nothing but what its mother brings. ♦

How you can help:

• Pray for vocations
• Remember Saint Meinrad in your will
• Request information about life income gifts

For more information, contact Barbara Balka
Director of Planned Giving
Saint Meinrad Archabbey and Seminary and School of Theology
development@saintmeinrad.edu
800-682-0988
www.saintmeinrad.edu

A P O I N T T O P O N D E R F R O M T H E R U L E

“Listen, my son, to the master’s instructions, and attend to them with the ear of your heart.”

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Ohio chapters gather for day of recollection
On Saturday, May 19, 45 oblates from the chapters of Cincinnati, Dayton, Lancaster, Columbus and surrounding areas gathered for an inspiring day of recollection given by Fr. Noël Mueller, OSB. Also in attendance was Oblate Director Fr. Meinrad Brune, OSB.

Fr. Noël spoke with enthusiasm and inspired the group with his instructions and illuminating talks on Jesus, the model of compassion. He referred to passages in the Bible describing instances where Jesus manifested His gentle and loving compassion. Many parables were given a new dimension, with examples of the Lord’s compassion and mercy.

With each conference, the oblates were given pamphlets illustrated with pictures from famous artists depicting the love Jesus showed for the poor, the lame, the prodigal and the forgotten. His greatest compassion was for Mary, His mother, and for sinners when He died on the cross. The faithful continue to see an example of Jesus’ compassionate heart in the Holy Eucharist.

In Fr. Noël’s second conference, he compared the compassion of St. Benedict to the compassion of Christ, giving examples of St. Benedict’s benevolent spirit in handling like circumstances. In the Rule of St. Benedict, St. Benedict instructed his monks how to live life with compassionate concern for others: the poor, the guests, the sick, the old and young, and even delinquent monks. His motto was “All guests are to be received in Christ.” St. Benedict also worked miracles through compassion.

After lunch, confessions were heard in the St. Therese Chapel. Scriptural rosary was prayed and then Fr. Noël celebrated the Mass of the Ascension with Fr. Meinrad and Monsignor Noon.

After group discussions on how to become more compassionate, the day of recollection concluded.

Jim and Rita Merk, oblates
Lancaster, OH

Oblate ordained as permanent deacon
Oblate Richard Cooper was ordained as a permanent deacon for the Archdiocese of Indianapolis at the Cathedral in Indianapolis on June 23. Deacon Richard lives in Corydon, IN. We pray for God’s blessings and graces upon him as he begins his new ministry.

Congratulations on birth of a son
Oblate Chris Topa and his wife, Belinda, were blessed with the birth of a son, Ian Christopher, on July 12. Congratulations to them.

New York oblates gather for Mass and pizza
The oblates of the two New York chapters gathered on July 11 to celebrate the feast of St. Benedict at Corpus Christi Monastery in the Bronx. Their hosts for the feast were the Dominican Sisters of Perpetual Adoration.

Oblate Fr. Tom D’Angelo was the celebrant and homilist for the liturgy. After Mass, the oblates and the sisters dined on pizza donated by Meridian Pizza from the Bronx. There were 18 oblates and guests in attendance, along with 11 sisters.

The Bronx chapter coordinator, Carmen Flores, brought fresh fruits for dessert. Our thanks to Sr. Maria Pia, OP, and the entire community at Corpus Christi Monastery for their genuine Dominican hospitality.

Fr. Thomas P. D’Angelo, oblate
Bronx, NY

Oblate becomes Saint Meinrad novice
Oblate Matthew Sprauer, originally from Centerville, OH, was invested as a novice of Saint Meinrad Archabbey on August 5. God’s blessings and peace be upon him.

Lancaster, Ohio, oblates celebrate St. Benedict feast day
On July 10, the eve of the Feast of St. Benedict, Msgr. Robert Noon helped the Lancaster, OH, Chapter celebrate the vigil by having a Mass in honor of St. Benedict. There were 18 members present. Msgr. Noon spoke about the Rule as a guide to common sense. The way to holiness and holiness itself include common sense.

Rita Merk, oblate
Lancaster, OH

Day of recollection focuses on lectio divina
Forty-three oblates of Saint Meinrad gathered at the Archabbey on July 11 for a day of recollection presented by Br. Zachary Wilberding, OSB. The day began with Mass in the Guest House Chapel celebrated by Fr. Meinrad Brune, OSB. Throughout the day, there were opportunities for the Sacrament of Reconciliation and the Sacrament of the Sick.

The theme was “Lectio Divina: Praying the Bible.” Br. Zachary began his presentation with “The Brief Rule of St. Romuald.” St. Romuald founded the Camaldolese Benedictine monks and nuns, and this short document is his interpretation of the path one must follow to find God.

see Oblate News, p. 4
Oblate News from p. 3

Br. Zachary suggested that the basic skill required for the prayer of lectio divina is pondering (thinking about or considering various aspects of something, leading to praying, and then, by God’s grace, contemplating), just as Mary pondered what she and Joseph were told by the shepherds about the child lying in the manger (Luke 2:19).

According to Br. Zachary, there are four movements to lectio divina. After beginning with a short prayer for the aid of the Holy Spirit, one begins by reading, slowly and reverently, with concentration and attention, remembering that this is a sacred text. One then meditates, pondering a word or text that has caught our attention or touched our heart or mind in some way.

At any time during the process, one may begin to pray, for enlightenment or in thanksgiving, in adoration, perhaps without words or simply whispering the name of Jesus. Finally, one contemplates, sitting quietly, lovingly gazing at the Lord without words, moving from the word of God and our own meditations and prayers to a direct experience of God.

Jean Leclercq argues, in The Love for Learning, that there are four phases of Scripture: discipleship, imitation, likeness and participation. And as one becomes more comfortable with lectio divina, one cannot help but move through all of these phases, effectively entering into relationship with God and thus finding and following the path God has chosen for each of us.

Most importantly, as Br. Zachary said, one must show up and be open to hearing what God has to say to us and to what God is calling us to do. The commitment of the oblates to Saint Meinrad and to each other was clearly evident throughout the day as newcomers entered into community and old timers renewed acquaintances with those they had not seen for a while.

Catherine Byers, oblate Nineveh, IN

Oblate Council discusses projects, community growth

The Oblate Council gathered on the Hill for its 23rd meeting on Saturday, July 14. Present at the meeting were Fr. Meinrad Brune, OSB, Dennis Skelton, Al Kovacs, Pat Phillips, Jennie Latta, Mike Reffett, Gail Chambers and Janis Dopp, chair. Also present was Michele Reffet, who acted as secretary.

We were pleased to learn that Chris Topa was absent due to the impending birth of his second child. The meeting opened with prayer by Fr. Meinrad, which was followed by a reading of the Statement of Purpose of the Oblate Council.

The Council heard a report from Fr. Meinrad on a number of topics of interest. Fr. Meinrad gave special thanks to the work of Mary Jeanne Schumacher, director of communications, for her excellent work in developing the new Archabbey website and the pages devoted to the oblates. Fr. Meinrad made us aware of the hire of Sarah Fisher as the new executive secretary for the Oblate Office.

He reported that the evaluations of the June Oblate Study Days, directed by Fr. Prior Kurt Stasiak, OSB, were overwhelmingly positive. He also provided current statistics for the oblate community, showing that 905 new oblates have joined the community since 1995. There are 1,168 oblates and oblate novices at this time. Father reported with regret the closing of the Madison Chapter, but noted that its remaining members have decided to join with the Louisville Chapter.

Fr. Meinrad said that Novice Anushka Fonseka, who will profess his first vows on August 6, will join the team of oblate directors who make monthly presentations to the various chapters of the oblate community. The current oblate directors are Fr. Meinrad, Fr. Joseph Cox, Br. Francis Wagner, Br. Luke Waugh, Fr. Brendan Moss and Novice Anushka. We are grateful for their tireless work.

The study theme for 2013 will be Lectio Divina. The Council considered various materials that may be distributed to the oblate community on this theme. The presenter for Oblate Study Days next summer, June 10-13, 2013, will be Fr. Eugene Hensell, OSB, who will give conferences on the topic, “Encountering Jesus in the Gospel of Luke.”

Plans are also under way for the Meeting of Chapter Coordinators and Oblate Representatives from the Chapter, June 13-15, 2014, with the theme, “Praying the Psalms,” featuring Fr. Harry Hagan, OSB, and Fr. Jeremy King, OSB.

Each member of the Oblate Council was presented with a copy of the Benedictine Oblate Companion, Second Edition. It is a handsome, loose-leaf notebook that includes articles and information of interest to all oblates. Other publications are in the works. Dr. Ruth Engs is preparing a new history of the oblate program of Saint Meinrad Archabbey, which should be available later this year. Plans are also under way for a revised edition of the Liturgy of the Hours for Benedictine Oblates, as well as a seasonal supplement to include Benedictine feasts.
Work is under way to create an archive of oblate photos to be used in upcoming publications and for various other uses. Oblate chapters are encouraged to submit good-quality digital photos to Fr. Meinrad to be added to the archive.

Oblate pins are available again. Fr. Meinrad was able to find a new vendor. The lapel pins may be obtained from the Oblate Office for $10 each, plus $3 for shipping and handling. And Br. Martin Erspamer, OSB, has created gift plates featuring an icon of St. Benedict that will be presented to new oblates upon their oblation.

Mike Reffett gave an abbreviated financial report, indicating that gift revenue has exceeded expectations and that any variance from his prior report has been positive. Fr. Meinrad expressed great appreciation for the generosity of the oblate community.

The North American Association of Benedictine Oblate Directors will meet July 12-17, 2013, at the Benedictine Sisters of Annunciation Monastery in Bismarck, ND. Fr. Meinrad has asked oblates Al Kovacs and his wife, Irene, to represent our community at that meeting.

Jennie Latta, oblate
Memphis, TN

INVESTITURES & OBLATIONS

May 16, 2012, Investitures-Mr. Ronald DeMarco and Ms. Claudia Reynolds, both of Cincinnati, OH.

May 19, 2012, Oblation-Mr. Charles Joseph Roth of Port Washington, NY.

June 1, 2012, Oblations-Mr. Curtis Bede Hardy and Mrs. Donna Mary Hardy, both of Pittsboro, NC.

June 2, 2012, Oblation-Mr. Robert St. Damien of Molokai Hartenstein of Fort Wayne, IN.

June 13, 2012, Investiture-Mr. Phillip Langenkamp of Cincinnati, OH.

June 13, 2012, Oblations-Mrs. Helen Ann Haggard of Corydon, IN; Mr. Nick Anselm Dellecave of Cincinnati, OH; and Mr. Jerry Clement Gorup of St. Pete Beach, FL.

June 18, 2012, Investiture-Mrs. Rita Kay of Mountlake Terrace, WA.

July 5, 2012, Oblation-Fr. Stephen Paul Cairns of Toledo, OH.

July 6, 2012, Investiture-Dr. P. John Rayapati of Monticello, IL.

July 11, 2012, Investiture-Mrs. Linda Kleeman Bieker of Jasper, IN.

July 11, 2012, Oblation-Mrs. JoAnn Clare Dugan of Louisville, KY.

July 28, 2012, Investiture-Dr. Beverly Martinez of Greenwood, IN.

July 29, 2012, Investitures-Mr. Patrick Mordent of Scott AFB, IL, and Mrs. Julie Ann Watts Stothfang of Pahoa, HI.

August 11, 2012, Investitures-Mr. Jerry Blair of Leitchfield, KY; Mrs. Elaine Zimmer of Columbus, IN; and Mr. Michael Edwards of Albany, NY.

August 11, 2012, Oblation-Ms. Sarah Hildegard Longoria of Bartlett, TN.◆

DEATHS

Mrs. Cledia Bertke of Tell City, IN, died May 16, 2012.


Mrs. Mildred Krapf of Jasper, IN, died June 27, 2012.

Ms. Viola Burger of Jasper, IN, died June 29, 2012.


UPCOMING EVENTS

December 7-9, 2012: The Oblate Retreat is scheduled to have Fr. Eugene Hensell, OSB, as the presenter of “Lectio Divina: Listening to the Scriptures with the Ear of Your Heart.”

March 20-22, 2013: The Oblate Retreat is scheduled to have Fr. Adrian Burke, OSB, as the presenter on “Lectio Divina and Spiritual Work: Praying and Progress.”

April 20, 2013: The Day of Recollection for the Louisville Oblates will have Br. Martin Erspamer, OSB, as the presenter. The theme is “The Silent Gospel: A Visual Lectio.”

May 18, 2013: The Day of Recollection for the Ohio Oblates will have Fr. Columba Kelly, OSB, as the presenter of “Lectio Divina: A Conversation with God.” The Dayton Oblate Chapter is hosting.


VOLUNTEERS APPRECIATED

Recent volunteers in the Oblate Office have included Gail Chambers, Elijah Fisher, Henry Fisher, Melanie Isaacson, Novice Bradley Jensen, OSB, Joe Lamont, Trish Lamont, Tim Mattingly, Tom Rillo, Joan Rillo, Gene Ritter, David Sears, Dennis Skelton, Novice Matthew Sprauer, OSB, George Thompson and Yvonne Weaver.◆

CHECK THE WEBSITE

Past issues of the Benedictine Oblate newsletter are available at www.saintmeinrad.org.◆

ONLINE STORE

Visit the Scholar Shop’s online store http://store.saintmeinrad.edu
Books, Saint Meinrad logo shirts, hats, jackets, hoodies and more.◆
Benedictine authors comment on Rule’s Prologue

This article presents the last two of the nine Benedictine authors who wrote commentaries on the Rule of St. Benedict. The focus has been on the Prologue to the Rule. The dictionary defines the word “prologue” as the lines introducing a discourse or a play, an introductory act or event, or an introduction to a poem.

The definitions seem to fit what Benedict had in mind when he wrote the Prologue. Benedict meant it as an introduction to the monastic life for his monks. He poured his entire character and spirituality into the writing of the Prologue. He wanted his monks to learn that Christ is the way and the teacher. It is in the Prologue that Benedict reveals his warm, nurturing nature.

The final authors or commentators are Esther de Waal and Terrence G. Kardong, OSB. De Waal is the only author of the nine who was not a monk or a nun. She was, of course, deeply affiliated with the Benedictine tradition and an accomplished student of the Rule of St. Benedict.


Esther de Waal has lectured and published widely in monastic and Celtic spirituality. To de Waal, the Prologue is a lyrical piece of writing. She feels that it is a loving and warm opening that addresses each reader personally. It promises that the reader is not going to get lost in the crowd or tied up in judicial structures.

The word “listen” is of paramount importance in the Prologue. The Prologue is an admonition, an exhortation. It is designed to arouse or awaken while, at the same time, challenging and piercing the heart. It is an invitatory call to the spiritual life.

To de Waal, the word “listen” can be a summary of the whole of Benedict’s teaching. Rather than just talking to God, we are invited to listen to His voice. God’s voice, de Waal states, is found throughout the Prologue and we should ask ourselves how we hear God.

De Waal summarizes Benedict’s Prologue by stating that this is a journey and a battle and we must wake up from our lethargy and be ready in heart and body. The main body of the Rule will develop further all that the Prologue outlines. Throughout the Prologue, Benedict speaks of the way or the journey.

The last paragraph of the Prologue introduces the phrase, “school for the Lord’s service.” The word “school” had a different meaning in Benedict’s time. It was more of an assembly room for assorted groups, such as soldiers of a specific company, craftsmen of a specific guild, or a gathering of students and their teachers. Christ is the teacher, in the case of a monastic community. The Prologue teaches that Christ is the way and the teacher.


Fr. Terrence Kardong is a Benedictine monk and author of many publications on Benedictine spirituality. He is a monk of Assumption Abbey in Richardton, ND, and the editor of the American Benedictine Review. He is the foremost scholar of the Rule of St. Benedict in the United States today.

Kardong considers the Prologue to be one of the finest parts of Benedict’s Rule. In the Prologue are features that are inspiring and memorable sayings that have become part of the Benedictine heritage. He defines the Prologue as a dispassionate arrangement of practical cenobitical life. The Prologue is a warm, engaging introduction addressed to an individual. The Prologue seems to be an invitation or initiation to the monastic vocation.

Oblate Nick Dellecave of Cincinnati and oblate novice Phillip Langenkamp enjoy a break during the June Study Days.
In Kardong’s opinion, if there is a master theme in the Prologue, it is the call for action. Throughout the Prologue, the listener is urged to take positive steps to put the Christian doctrine and the monastic doctrine into action.

As for the struggle of obedience, the Prologue describes it as action that can take the form of running and fighting — not in the militaristic sense, but rather to fight for Christ and against Satan and to run to God. Prologue 49 speaks of a joyous race toward God. Elsewhere in the Rule, Benedict is harsher as he describes running as a flight from evil and damnation. To Kardong, running is the action-image employed by the Prologue where the individual answers the call of God.

As with other authors on Prologue commentaries, Kardong also discusses the “school of the Lord’s service.” The word *schola* in Latin can mean many things and has caused considerable debate among scholars of the Rule. The monastery is a specific place where monks live apart from the world. The monastery is also a place of learning, where the monk never ceases to learn about Christ and where spiritual crafts are exercised.

In the Prologue, Benedict sees monasticism not just as hard work and serious prayer, but also how the monk can lead a life that is both joyful and dynamic. The Prologue is, by no means, a stern message, as is evident in the rest of the Rule. Kardong says Benedict does apologize for any strictness or rigidity in subsequent chapters of the Rule, but he did not wish for fear to be a component of the Prologue. Benedict stands by his conviction that monastic life can be joyful and energizing.

Thomas J. Rillo, oblate
Bloomington, IN

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*Oblate Deacon Roger Pry and his wife, Mary, are paying close attention to Fr. Prior Kurt Stasiak, OSB, as he was giving his presentation on the sacraments.*


*Fr. Columba Kelly, OSB, and oblate Ann Morrill from Grove City, OH, pose for a picture at the entrance of the Guest House.*

*Left to right, oblates Nick Dellecave, Helen Haggard and Jerry Gorup hold the plate created by Br. Martin Erspamer, OSB, that was presented to them after they made their oblation in the Archabbey Church.*
In the rite of oblation, the abbot prays especially for all the people who have associated themselves with a monastic community. Often the distinction is made that oblates live in the world and monastics live apart from the world. We all live in the world, of course, but in different neighborhoods.

With many abbeys, the oblates live so far away from the monastery that they are unable to attend monthly meetings or participate in retreats, although a few will make the oblate retreats. Attendance at an annual oblate retreat will enable oblates to bond with one another, regardless of where they are from.

The question arises: “What, if any, significance can monastic spirituality have for people living outside a monastery?” The monastic scholar, Fr. Jean Leclercq, OSB, said: “Monks and nuns are not special sorts of persons, but simply what every person should be.” The number of oblates keeps growing worldwide. With some monasteries in the United States, the numbers are decreasing. In some monasteries, the number of men entering the monastery as monks is growing fewer and fewer.

Ten years ago, Fr. Eugene Hensell, OSB, then-president of the American Benedictine Academy, observed: “In more recent times our membership has begun to shift even further to include many more oblates and other people simply interested in the so-called monastic thing. These members do not live in traditional monastic communities yet they find monasticism and especially monastic spirituality very attractive.”

It is also a fact that many people who are not Roman Catholic are eager to learn from St. Benedict. John McQuiston II, a lawyer from Memphis, TN, and an Episcopalian, has paraphrased the Rule of St. Benedict in a work called Always We Begin Again: The Benedictine Way of Living.

He states: “In the twenty years since I was introduced to the Rule of St. Benedict, I have become convinced that the unstated, central principle of the Rule is that Christianity was intended to be, and should be, a particular way of ‘being in the world.’ It should be a way followed by being a person of loving kindness, a compassionate person, a person in caring relationship with one’s neighbor.”

In the ceremony of oblation, the abbot tells the candidate that, at baptism, he or she was committed in faith to Christ: “Now renew that commitment as you offer yourself up as an oblate.” Becoming Benedictine, either inside or outside the cloister, is a renewal of one’s baptismal commitment.

The Rule of St. Benedict provides us with structures. It reminds us of what is essential. It teaches us to listen for the right things. “Listen…whoever you are, my words are addressed to you.” The Rule teaches us that religion is not practiced only on Sunday. “The Lord is waiting daily for us to respond by our deeds to his holy guidance.”

A Benedictine calling is one of conversion, a response to God who calls us. It is a constant renewal of baptismal vows. The Lord waits for us daily to translate into action, as we should, His holy teachings. Quoting Psalm 33, Benedict asks, “Is there anyone here who yearns for life and desires to see good days?”

Benedict schedules our days, one day at a time. He gives us times for prayer, for work, for reading, for eating, for sleeping. He also gives us times for silence and times for speaking. St. Benedict provides a daily framework for us.

Sr. Joan Chittister, OSB, says, “The spirituality that emerges from the Rule of Benedict is a spirituality charged with living the ordinary life extraordinary well. Here, transforming life rather than transcending it is what counts. St. Benedict did not write a rule for mystics. He wrote a rule for ordinary working people. The Rule of St. Benedict was written for a family of earthbound monks. Because it was written for a family, it speaks well to the natural family, to the parish family, to one’s local community. Balance describes the Benedictine way of life. Not too much of one thing and not an insufficiency of another, whether it be food or drink or work or prayer.”

Sr. Aquinata Boeckmann, OSB, says, “In seeking God, we do not need to look for faraway countries, for heroic actions, or for adventure. God is to be found in the dust and ashes of daily life and service, and our love will increase and enable us to seek God more fervently.”

The Rule of St. Benedict might have as its subtitle: How to Cope with Daily Life. Don’t seek God elsewhere. Benedict says: Seek him now, right here, in the mundane things that have to be done. Find God in the ordinary circumstances of your life.

Sr. Antoinette Purcell, OSB, oblate director at Our Lady of Grace Monastery, Beech Grove, IN, speaking at the American Benedictine Academy meeting, defined our calling as oblates or vowed Benedictines: “Together we can be one voice that speaks of how to be in relation to self, God and others just by being who we are called to be, in the place where we are.”
Faithful Witnesses
Br. Silas Henderson, OSB
Monk of Saint Meinrad Archabbey

St. Lull
Feast: October 16
Lull was born in Wessex, England, and was a Benedictine monk at Malmesbury before joining his cousin, the great missionary St. Boniface, in Germany. Boniface ordained Lull to the priesthood and sent him to Rome to consult with Pope St. Zachary.

In 752, Lull returned to Germany as a consecrated bishop, succeeding St. Boniface as bishop of Mainz in 754. When St. Boniface was martyred a year later, Lull arranged for his remains to be enshrined in the abbey of Fulda.

Although he had a somewhat difficult career as bishop (a good deal of his energies were spent in a dispute with St. Sturmi, abbot of Fulda, who claimed his abbey was exempt from the bishop’s jurisdiction), Lull was a zealous pastor for the people of Mainz and he founded two abbeys that became important centers of learning and culture.

He had a great love of learning and he worked to improve the education of his clergy. Near the end of his life, St. Lull retired to the abbey he founded at Hersfeld, where he died in 786.

In a letter to the archbishop of York, Lull reflected on some of his trials as a missionary. He wrote, “Truly, for the sake of Christ’s name it is necessary for us to glory in insults and tribulations and in the exaltation of his Church, which is daily afflicted, burdened, and harassed… I ask your Excellency with humble prayer to be a continual intercessor for the safety of my soul.”

In Chapter 7 of the Rule, St. Benedict teaches us that the fourth step of humility is that “in obedience under difficult, unfavorable, or even unjust conditions, his heart quietly embraces suffering, and endures it without weakening or seeking escape.”

For many of us, suffering is something we try to avoid at all costs. Faith, however, allows us to understand suffering in another way: “The souls of the just are in the hands of God…. Chastised for a little, they shall be greatly blessed, because God tried them and found them worthy of himself” (Wisdom 3:1, 5).

St. Benedict, St. Lull, and men and women of faith through the centuries have understood that the day-to-day trials of life, as well as times of special suffering, can be times of grace. Pain can purify the heart and make us more human. As Fr. Jack Wintz, OFM, has observed, “Even deep personal losses – if we remain open to God’s loving presence in our lives – can be redemptive and lead us to deeper compassion and richer humanity.”

Reflection Questions

Do I view trials and suffering as opportunities for grace?

How do I support those who, like St. Lull, work for the spread of the Gospel?

Am I humble enough to ask for support and prayers for my own needs?◆
Interview with Father Paul Nord, OSB

Fr. Paul, can you tell us a little bit about your background? Where did you grow up, where was your early schooling and what was your family background?

I grew up in Huntingburg, Indiana, in a family of two parents and a younger brother and sister. I attended elementary school in Holland, Indiana. I went to Southridge Middle School and Southridge High School in Huntingburg. I graduated in 1993. While in high school, I played varsity tennis and varsity golf.


What early influences in your life gave you a spiritual direction?

My paternal grandmother had two sisters and three cousins who were Benedictine sisters at the Monastery Immaculate Conception in Ferdinand, Indiana. Their witness to religious life was very important to my vocation. Also important to my discernment were our parish priests at my home parish of St. Joseph Church in Dale, Indiana.

What was your first year like as a novice monk?

I worked a little in the Oblate Office as a novice. Many men entering the community get this assignment. After my novitiate, Fr. Meinrad asked me to help with the oblate program by giving conference talks to various oblate chapters. In 2006 I made my solemn vows, and in 2007 I was ordained a priest.

Did you have any other assignments?

Yes, from 2005-2008, I worked in the Supervised Ministry Program in our seminary. I was first associate director and then later the acting director of this program. Priesthood candidates receive four types of formation: spiritual formation, human formation, academic formation and pastoral formation. The Supervised Ministry Program is part of the seminarians’ pastoral formation.

What are you doing now?

I am now living in Rome, Italy, at the Benedictine house known as Sant’ Anselmo. I am studying at the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome, pursuing a doctorate in Sacred Scripture. I have already earned the equivalent of a master’s degree from Saint Meinrad. As part of my program in Rome, I have studied Greek, Hebrew, German, Italian and Aramaic.

Do you have any long-range plans for when you return to the monastery?

The abbot and community sent me for studies so that I will be able to teach Scripture in the Seminary and School of Theology. I look forward to contributing to the future prayer and work of our monastic community.

OBLATES: IN THEIR OWN WORDS

“Being an oblate to me is an expressed desire to grow spiritually, to grow in your relationship with Jesus Christ and to be a better person and do a better job in your relationships and interactions with other people so that they can have a better life. Going to Saint Meinrad helps us to strengthen these relationships, for it is a place to experience peace, prayer and relaxation.”

Oblate Theresa Lin
Lafayette, IN

Thomas J. Rillo, oblate
Bloomington, IN
Under a rule and an abbot: The human factor of monastic life

The Saint Meinrad Archabbey Oblate Retreat conferences of December 9-11 were presented by Archabbot Justin DuVall, OSB. This article continues a series on the five conferences.

Each conference’s title was in the form of a question. Does the abbot ever take a nap? Does the abbot have any friends? Does the abbot have a sense of humor? Does the abbot ever get angry? Does the abbot ever get discouraged?

The third conference began with a presentation of how visitors to Saint Meinrad perceive the monks. The casual visitor sees them mainly in the Archabbey Church at prayer. The casual visitor does not have an in-depth of knowledge of the monks. On feast days, the visitor will observe the monks all dressed up and solemn. What they take away is that monks are pretty serious persons.

From Chapter 7 of the Rule on humility come these words: “[T]hat a monk speaks gently and without laughter, seriously and with becoming modesty, briefly and reasonably, but without raising his voice, as it is written: A wise man is known by his few words.” Some monks do laugh and enjoy a good joke.

The question – does the abbot have a sense of humor? – raises the issue of why do we laugh at all. What does a sense of humor tell us about God? Can one be serious and cheerful at the same time? During a monk’s final profession, when he lies face down on the floor, the prayer said includes the phrase, “May he be cheerful and serious.”

Usually, nobody is always cheerful or always serious. Although there are some sourpusses, even in a monastery, it is not a case of being either cheerful or serious, like a hot and cold water faucet. Being both cheerful and serious takes practice. To be both at the same time is to live in the tension between them.

Some people have no sense of humor. We all know someone who is serious all the time. From Chapter 7 on humility: “The Prophet indicates he has shunned by saying, ‘Lord, my heart is not exalted and my eyes are not lifted up, and I have not walked in the ways of the great nor gone after marvels beyond me’,” thus shunning oblivion and not constant mindfulness of God’s presence.

After ascending all 12 steps of humility, the monk will arrive at that perfect love of God that casts out fear. Seriousness includes sadness and excludes depression. Depression is a state and not an emotion. A cheerful person is one of honest emotion. Cheerfulness and laughter are simply the safety valves for sanity. Does the abbot have a sense of humor? He does!

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Thomas J. Rillo, oblate
Bloomington, IN

In Part 3, Nouwen discusses prayer and thought, arguing that “prayer is like breathing.” For Nouwen, “the call to unceasing prayer [is] the conversion of our unceasing thought processes” from a “self-centered monologue to a God-centered dialogue.”

In the final reflection, Nouwen makes the connection between being and doing, between contemplation and ministry. The move from opacity to transparency can be found in three central relationships: our relationship with nature, with time and with people.

In the final analysis, Nouwen maintains that “a contemplative life is the choice of a way of living where all of creation…becomes transparent and speaks to us about God and about God’s love for us.”

Catherine Byers, oblate
Nineveh, IN

Reading Room from p. 12

and voluntary poverty, both of which are countercultural in our utilitarian society. With these elements, however, celibacy allows us to “witness to the beauty of the inner vacancy where we encounter Love, listen to the voice of Love, and celebrate the presence of love in our midst.”

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In this enduring book, originally published in 1979 and reissued in 2000, Henri Nouwen reflects on the time he spent in Rome and those by whom he was most affected: the clowns, those on the periphery who were, for Nouwen, a reminder that we all share the same human weakness. The reflections explore attitudes and lifestyles contrary to the frenetic pace and forced togetherness of contemporary American culture.

For those searching to find themselves in the midst of today’s noise and chaos, the reflections offer thought-provoking and perhaps life-changing ideas, a realization, as Nouwen says, that “our own self-understanding is not necessarily God’s understanding of us.”

Nouwen describes solitude as “the place where we can connect with profound bonds that are deeper than the emergency bonds of fear and anger.” In solitude, we can, perhaps, be open to a deeper intimacy with each other, remembering that we love each other because we have been loved first (1 Jn. 4:19) by a loving God on whom we can learn to depend and with whom we are in relationship. As Nouwen argues, “solitude is not a solution but a direction,” and “in true solitude there is unlimited space for others because we are empty.”

Probably one of the most misunderstood lifestyles today is that of celibacy. For Nouwen, celibacy is “a being empty for God as a visible witness for the life with God in the inner sanctum,” and it involves every part of life.

In addition to sexual abstinence, two of the main supports for a celibate lifestyle are contemplative prayer **Continued on p. 11**