Humility and obedience: Does Benedict ask for suffering?

Suffering comes to us in many forms. There is “the heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to” that Shakespeare’s Hamlet ponders in his famous soliloquy (Act 3 Scene 1), and which come to us through disease, injuries and the debilities of old age, among other things.

There are also various kinds of sufferings caused by “the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune” (Ibid.): poverty, hunger, homelessness, racism, sexism, crime, unjust laws, abusive parents and spouses, and on and on. All of these are involuntary and generally destructive sufferings.

By contrast, some instances of suffering are voluntary and, at least potentially, constructive. Some obvious examples are those of the artist, the poet, the writer, missionaries and social reformers. Perhaps less obviously, but no less importantly, voluntary, constructive suffering also plays a quieter, but crucially important, role in daily Benedictine life.

As far as I can tell, St. Benedict never uses the word “suffering” in his Rule, though he certainly presupposes it. This is clear from the fact that he stresses the efforts that must be made to become “cenobites, who are the most steadfast kind of monks” (RB 1:2). In other words, the monk’s suffering is rule-bound and directed.

Toward what end? The Prologue states the objective clearly: after “beginnings which are difficult,” after progressing “in this manner of life and faith,” the monk “shall run with his heart enlarged and with an unspeakable sweetness of love on the way of God’s commandments.”

So where does the suffering come in? In modern parlance, “What’s not to like?” The answer consists of two requirements that could not be more opposed to our cultural values and the concept of self-esteem they foster: humility and obedience.

“Only for one reason we are distinguished in His [God’s] sight: namely, if we are found to be eminent in good works and in humility” (RB 2:21). Chapter 7 of the Rule lays out no fewer than 12 degrees of humility, of which the first one consists of obedience without delay, forsaking your own will, walking according to the judgment of another (Chapter 5).

(I’m inclined to think that I would have struck out right there – not because all of the engines of social persuasion urge us relentlessly to satisfy our own desires, which they do, but because for me it is really irritating to be interrupted before finishing a project.)

St. Benedict goes on to say that the ladder we erect to heaven we ascend through humility, and that this ladder consists of “diverse rounds of humility and discipline” (RB 7:9). The next one “is, that a person, loving not his own will, delight not in gratifying his own desires.”

The purpose of this second degree is to turn the will from what we want to what God wants (quoting John 6:38). It is not “self-will” that “wins the crown,” but rather “self-constraint” (Ibid.), a quality that doesn’t seem to be much in evidence these days.

The third and fourth degrees of humility focus on our obedience to superiors: “…that a person for the love of God submit himself to his superior in all obedience” and that patience and courage are required if obedience entails “hard and contrary things, nay even injuries” (referencing Mt 5:39-41).

FROM THE RULE:

“First of all, every time you begin a good work, you must pray to Him most earnestly to bring it to perfection.”

Prologue, Verse 4

see Humility and obedience, p. 2
Humility and obedience from p. 1

In other words, success in bearing the sufferings entailed in becoming humble is not instantaneous. Constancy, not “instancy,” is what is necessary, and that again flies in the face of our culture that is geared to expect instant solutions to everything (“just add water”).

As if those degrees were not difficult enough, the fifth one demands that the monk confess to his abbot not only sins committed, but also all evil thoughts. Think about that requirement the next time that, say, rude drivers cut you off in traffic or, rather than waiting patiently in line, storm ahead to barge into a single lane when their lane is closed by construction, or when people do any number of other offensive things that act like sand thrown into the gears of modern life.

The eighth degree of humility requires the monk to regulate his behavior completely to “the common rule of the monastery or the example of the seniors,” and the ninth through the eleventh degrees impose rigid self-constraint on the voice. In any other context, such an elimination of self-will and expression could well add up to tyrannical repression. But what redeems the suffering entailed in succeeding at all levels of humility is its rule-directed purpose of “arriving at that love of God which, when perfect, casts out fear.”

As the last paragraph of Chapter 7 notes, such spiritual discipline amounts to a cleansing through love, and that returns us to the statement in the Prologue noted above. The monk, emptied of a certain sense of self, becomes a loving instrument of a loving God.

For those of us who are not monks, there are also crucial moral lessons in St. Benedict’s wise plan for emptying the self to bring souls closer to God. Deliberately setting aside our own desires by becoming attuned to the needs of those around us is a useful corrective for corrosive narcissism (“It’s all about me”) and for living the Gospel by orienting ourselves to the needs of others before our own.

Another way to say this is that, although Western ethical traditions stress obligations or duties to others, Judeo-Christian religious values stress our obligations for others. This duty of care is expressed in the Old Testament in terms of tending to the needs of widows, strangers and orphans. In the New Testament, it is the essential lesson of the Good Samaritan and, Jesus makes clear, the standard by which we will ultimately be judged.

William Hamrick, oblate
St. Louis, MO

A POINT TO PONDER FROM THE RULE

“First of all, every time you begin a good work, you must pray to Him most earnestly to bring it to perfection.”

Rule of St. Benedict, Prologue, Verse 4

When you prepare to do some good work, you should beg God with earnest prayer to bring it to a successful completion. St. Benedict, writing in the Prologue to the Rule, was referring to the monk’s obligation for doing good work. As oblates, we are asked to pray when doing even menial tasks, such as washing the dishes, doing the laundry, preparing a meal, vacuuming the rugs or taking the children to a party.

Each may be considered a good work, especially in a familial sense. Making the sign of the cross or saying a blessing in a public restaurant is a demonstration of our faith, and it, too, can be said to be a good work. There are myriad opportunities to pray before undertaking a good work. We should do this without hesitation and with free will, for in doing good works we grow ever closer to God.
Oblates visit Benedictine places
In March 2012, Fr. Eric Augenstein from Our Lady of Perpetual Help Parish in New Albany, IN, led a pilgrimage to Italy. On March 22, the group of 50 pilgrims traveled to Subiaco, on the path of St. Benedict, to the monastery built over the cave where St. Benedict lived.

Quiet, peace and holiness permeated the mountainous region. The travelers stopped at the Sacro Speco and read from the Rule of St. Benedict. In a small chapel near the cave, the group celebrated Mass in the place where St. Benedict lived. After Communion, Fr. Eric witnessed the renewal of oblation of Saint Meinrad oblates Tom Yost, Richard and Sandy Bierly, and me – truly a special moment in a special place!

Dan White, oblate
New Albany, IN

March retreat focuses on importance of time apart
Nearly 70 Saint Meinrad oblates followed St. Mark’s advice to “Come away by yourselves to a deserted place and rest awhile” by attending the March 20-22 oblate retreat with retreat master Fr. Timothy Sweeney, OSB. Retreats can be a time of spiritual and even physical healing. We’re so used to doing that we may think that relaxing isn’t “worthwhile.” But time apart is important, as it allows us to live in “God’s time.”

Fr. Timothy talked about the negative effects of worry by reminding us that a recent study determined that 92% of all worrying is worthless. He suggested that we usually worry because we are afraid to take risks. Parables like the prodigal son, the lost sheep, and the woman and her lost coin tell us that God is always willing to take a risk to save us. They point out that God is “young at heart.”

He is willing to take the risk of going after us when we are “lost.” St. Benedict tells us the same thing in his Rule. If we want to live a life of inner wholeness, we must be willing to take risks and to let go of possessions, destructive relationships, worry and anything else that we hold on to too tightly.

As we strive toward wholeness, we let go of whatever separates us from God and cling to that which draws us closer to Him. Pope Benedict XVI reminds us that all religious traditions consider silence and solitude important in spiritual development. God speaks to us in the silence of our hearts, in the silence of the cross. Even God rested – on the seventh day.

Some of us strive to make things better by doing, yet never take time to enjoy the “Sacrament of Now.” Fr. Timothy reminded us that our lives will be far richer if we take time apart to simply be in the present moment.

Marianna Neal, oblate
Fairborn, OH

Oblate publishes guide to prayer
Will Hine, an oblate of Saint Meinrad Archabbey, has written a book titled Show: Four Guides for a Journey to Joy & Peace Through Prayer. The author has been a professor in higher education for 25 years and is an ordained minister in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

Hine also serves on the Board of Trustees of the Christian Theological Seminary in Indianapolis, IN. He designed the book as a workbook, and it is divided into three major sections.

Section 1 is based upon the principles of SHOW (Surrender, Humility, Obedience and Wonder/Awe). Section 2 explains how an ongoing, disciplined prayer life is necessary for finding Christian peace and joy. Section 3 provides a series of reflections and exercises for the reader. Short poems follow each chapter.

Laughter, joy are topics of Bloomington conference
Fr. Meinrad Brune, OSB, director of Benedictine Oblates, presented a conference at the Bloomington (IN) Oblate Chapter meeting on April 12. His topic was “Laugh and be Joyful from the Rule of St. Benedict.”

Fr. Meinrad began by quoting Archabbot Justin DuVall, OSB, in a message to his monks that described Lent as a time to examine Lenten practices for the bona opera. Fr. Meinrad said that, for many individuals, Lent has negative connotations. We do penance, sacrifice and give up things we enjoy.

Fr. Meinrad said the word “Lent” is derived from a Middle English word meaning “spring,” and that spring is symbolic of a new season of life. The only time St. Benedict mentions joy in his Rule appears in Chapter 49. St. Benedict reminds his monks that the whole purpose of fasting from food, sleeping or talking is to increase the joy of spiritual longing and anticipating the holy time of Easter.

Lent reminds us to remain joyful in the face of the terrible sufferings confronting the human family. Lent is important because it relies on Easter for its meaning and focus. Fr. Meinrad said Lent is a way of living in the power and mystery of the paschal mystery. In St. Paul’s letter to the Thessalonians, he exhorts his Christian converts to rejoice always: “Be always joyful, pray continually, and give thanks in all circumstances for this is the will of God for you” (1Thessalonians 5:16-18).

Fr. Meinrad pointed out that if these commands are indeed the will of God, then it behooves us to strive to live in great joy. He defined “joy” as containing feelings of the highest pleasure, delight, happiness and gladness.

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

One principle in our daily lives is the joy of sharing and serving. Fr. Meinrad said the joy of sharing and serving moves us from being overly concerned about ourselves to being concerned about the welfare of others. Followers of St. Benedict are to be joyful people.

Fr. Meinrad then described 15 tools that St. Benedict offers so that we may experience more joy. Some of the tools are: develop a short memory, overlook a flaw, count your blessings and deepen your faith. St. Benedict does not love immoderate or boisterous laughter. In Chapter 49:7 on Lent he says: “Let each one deny himself some food, drink, sleep, needless talking and idle jesting.”

Joy is the feeling of a smile inside us. Laugh a little more. Laughter animates the spirit. A keen sense of humor helps us to overlook the unbecoming, understand the unconventional, tolerate the unpleasant, overcome the unexpected and outlast the unbearable. Joy, humor and laughter are necessary and healthy. They have a long tradition in the Church.

Fr. Meinrad explained that we are the only creatures God endowed with the gift of laughter. An interesting fact is that children laugh about 120 times per day, while adults laugh about five to 10 times a day. We have lost that keen sense of humor we had in childhood. Fr. Meinrad concluded that a healthy sense of humor is a gift from God and that it is safe to assume that God has a sense of humor.

Thomas Rillo
Bloomington, IN

Oblate gives faculty lecture
Dr. Linda Swindell, chair of the Psychology Department at Anderson University in Anderson, IN, presented the Omega Lecture Series to the faculty on April 17. She is an oblate of Indianapolis, IN.

New book features saintly wisdom
From Season to Season: A Book of Saintly Wisdom is the title of a new book by Br. Silas Henderson, OSB, a monk of Saint Meinrad Archabbey. The book combines words of wisdom from a variety of saintly men and women across six continents, representing nearly 2,000 years of Christian thought and prayer.

With an entry for every day of the year, Br. Silas provides inspiration and understanding to serve as a starting point for one’s journey of faith, following in the footsteps of saints. The book, published by Abbey Press, can be purchased at the Saint Meinrad Archabbey Gift Shop and the Scholar Shop bookstore and online at www.pathoflifebooks.com/season.

Why I Became a Benedictine Oblate
When asked why I became an oblate, I always give the same answers. First and foremost, I wanted individuals who have dedicated their lives to grow closer to God to pray for me. Secondly, I wanted to be a part of a monastic community in which I could grow spiritually. Third, I wanted to share with my wife, also an oblate, our prayer life, such as praying the Liturgy of the Hours, and to do church ministry together.

I have been an oblate for 16 years (17 years for my wife). We both have worked in the Oblate Office for Fr. Meinrad Brune, OSB. My wife does the computer work for the Benedictine Oblate newsletter that is published quarterly. I write various articles, book reviews and the “A Point to Ponder from the Rule” column.

In addition to being at the monastery four times a year, we also participate in retreats and other conferences. Being affiliated with a monastic community affords a place of stability and promises of obedience, silence and humility. I realized that being a university professor – and all that was entailed to maintain that status – actually worked in opposition to an enlivened and deeply developed spirituality.

Such things as self-ego, excessive competitiveness, aggressive behavior, lack of humility (a perceived sign of weakness), lack of silence and listening, and pride, while necessary for academic tenure, worked against an enlivened spirituality. Benedictine oblation was the vehicle to combat these undesirable traits and to develop a Benedictine spirituality and prayer life.

Association with the monks of Saint Meinrad Archabbey and having many of them as friends have made me a better Christian. Knowing individuals who have dedicated their lives to Christian service and finding God has been a definite asset to my spiritual development. My wife often says that the Cursillo movement is my passion and Benedictine oblation is my love. I sincerely endorse that and accept it as my spiritual posture.

Working for Fr. Meinrad has required extensive reading that has added considerably to my spiritual knowledge treasure chest, and I have the opportunity to never stop learning. All of this has made me a more contributive and active parishioner of my local church.

Tom Rillo, oblate
Bloomington, IN

New website launched for Archabbey
A stunning new website has been launched for Saint Meinrad Archabbey. The new site, with the address www.saintmeinrad.org, went live on May 3. Mary Jeanne Schumacher, director of communications for the Archabbey, gave Fr. Meinrad and the members of the Oblate Council a sneak preview of the redesigned web pages.

Of special interest to the oblates is the addition of a tab on the first page that
leads directly to content concerning the oblates. There you will find a beautiful picture of the volunteers who helped to host the North American Association of Benedictine Oblate Directors conference on the Hill last summer. The volunteers are wearing matching red Saint Meinrad polo shirts and are photographed with the lush green grounds of the monastery and Archabbey Church in the background.

Also on the front page of the oblate section are links to information concerning Oblate History, Becoming an Oblate, Spirituality, Events, Resources, Chapters, and a link to contact the Oblate Director. There is also a link to the oblate DVD.

The Chapters page provides the possibility for each chapter to provide a link to its own web page. The Cincinnati Chapter is the first to launch its own page, and the Council hopes other chapters will elect to develop their own pages as well.

Under Resources, oblates can find reviews of books found in the Oblate Library, as well as a link to a page describing the books that have been developed by the Saint Meinrad Oblate Community and to the archived copies of the Benedictine Oblate newsletter. A link to the current edition appears on the front page.

The Events tab contains updates on upcoming oblate retreats and days of recollection on the Hill and for individual chapters.

The main page of the abbey website contains a wealth of information, including columns for News, Events and Retreats, as well as an introductory video, a link for prayer requests, and a link to the Saint Meinrad blog, “About the House.”

The revision of the Archabbey website will be followed by a similar update for the Seminary and School of Theology website. Both sites will take advantage of the latest in content management technology as well as dedicated staff support to ensure that the sites remain fresh and up to date.

The oblate community is pleased to have its own technology committee, consisting of Al Kovacs, chairman, Chris Topa, Dennis Skelton and Jennie Latta. Al was responsible for refreshing much of the content for the oblate pages, and the committee plans to add additional content and features in the coming months. We again express our appreciation to Mary Jeanne and her staff for an outstanding update to the Archabbey website.

New secretary begins work in Oblate Office
Brenda Blackgrove, executive secretary to Fr. Meinrad Brune, OSB, in the Oblate Office, has resigned her position to enjoy retirement with her husband, Jim, and to spend more time with her 10 grandchildren.

“I have enjoyed my job here in the Oblate Office so much,” she said. “I have never worked in a setting where there has been such peace, harmony and joy. Even though the position was part-time, I always looked forward to every working day.”

Sarah Fisher was hired as the new secretary, and she began work on May 16. Brenda spent several days helping her learn the office procedures. We welcome Sarah and thank Brenda for her service in the Oblate Office.

Finance Committee reports on fiscal year
The Oblate Finance Committee met April 20 to review financial results for the six months ending December 31, 2011. Renewal and miscellaneous gift-giving continued their healthy pattern. Also, the December retreat attendance and revenue were higher than in recent years.

Expenses to be covered by revenue include office staff, printing, travel, and retreat room and meal expenses. Sales of the recently published Benedictine Spirituality for Oblates have been active with nearly 400 sold in six months.

Oblate Director Fr. Meinrad Brune, OSB, mentioned how touched he is by the generosity of the oblate community.

Oblate Council reviews new website
The Oblate Council gathered on the Hill on April 21 for its 22nd meeting. The meeting was opened with prayer by Pat Phillips followed by a reading of the Oblate Council Purpose. The reading of the Oblate Council Purpose has become a regular part of the Council meetings, helping members to focus on their role as an advisory council to Fr. Meinrad Brune, OSB, the oblate director.

Our first order of business was a demonstration of the new Archabbey website by Mary Jeanne Schumacher, Saint Meinrad’s director of communications. She was proud to

Mike Reffett, oblate
Evansville, IN

Oblate News, p. 8
Commentaries offer insights on Prologue to the Rule

We continue with the third in a series on commentaries on the Prologue to the Rule of St. Benedict. Five commentaries have appeared in previous newsletters: Paul DeLatte, OSB, Columba Marmion, OSB, Hubert Van Zeller, OSB, Adalbert de Vogue, OSB, and Benet Tvedten, OSB.

This article looks at commentary authors Sr. Joan Chittister, OSB, and George Holzherr, OSB.

The Prologue is considered the most insightful part of the Rule because of its legislative nature and that it is a key to St. Benedict’s character and spirituality. Benedict is a master of the psychology of human behavior. He exhibits this skill in the Prologue, where he addresses contemporary times in the monastery and in the secular world.

Sr. Joan Chittister, OSB

Sr. Joan Chittister is a well-known author and speaker on spirituality and women’s issues. She is a member of the Benedictine Sisters of Erie, PA. She has written many books on Benedictine spirituality and is known for her insights into the Rule of St. Benedict.

Her commentary begins with the statement that the Prologue to the Rule “is its cornerstone and its gauntlet.” According to Sr. Chittister, the Rule of St. Benedict is wisdom literature that resounds with the universal truths of life. Benedict answers the major questions raised about the human condition. She says that they are answers for the presence of God, the foundation of relationships, the nature of self-development and the place of purpose.

She says that life is a way of “walking through the universe whole and holy.” The first paragraph of the Rule of St. Benedict brings into immediate focus the foundation for doing this. Benedict says, “Listen” and “Pay attention to the instructions in this rule and attend to the important things in life.”

In the first paragraph of the Rule, Benedict insists that the Prologue is written for ordinary people. It is not harsh, but rather, it tells us that we will not be bullied or asked to do something in a forceful manner. The Prologue is an invitation to the monastic spiritual life.

Sr. Chittister takes individual parts of the Prologue and places them in the order that they should be read. The Prologue sets the stage for seeking God in community. The community is the school for the Lord’s service and is dedicated to the good of all concerned.

The message in the Prologue, she says, is clear: “Life is very short and to get the most of it we must attend to its spiritual dimensions.” All we have to do is listen to the voice of God and incline the ear of our hearts. We need to open our eyes and see the things around us and ascertain what is good and what is not.

We must see Christ in those we see or interact with. The Rule is the blueprint for living a holy and spiritual life and for seeking God anywhere, everywhere and at all times. The Prologue is the precursory step to reading the blueprint.

Abbot George Holzherr, OSB

In 1982, the translation from Latin to German was accomplished by the monks of Einsiedeln Abbey in...
Switzerland. Holzherr was the abbot of Einsiedeln Abbey and authorized this commentary on the Rule of St. Benedict. He wrote the original version in German, and he approved the English translation.

In Benedict’s introductory words in the Prologue, the fundamental attitude of humility is broached, according to Holzherr. To Holzherr, it becomes evident that the Rule directs itself to the whole individual, body and soul.

The Prologue sets the stage for a spirituality of the heart. Benedict is not satisfied with just feelings, but he urges us on to deeds. The seed of the Word must bear fruit. The monk ought to live by the Word of God, and he should implement this Word in an intensive physical manner.

In the first sentences of the Prologue, Benedict, in a terse and meaningful way, sums up the Prologue of the Rule of the Master. Here Benedict speaks in a concrete way of the “return” out of estrangement from God. Listening and obeying are taken literally. Obedience is, at first, the ascetical labor for man.

The last paragraph of the Prologue is a formal presentation of the monastery. In the Master’s baptismal catechesis are the words: “Learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden light.” To learn from the Lord is essentially to first become His student.

In the last sentence of the Prologue, there is the longing of believing Christians for the union with Christ and the gifts of the Spirit. Like the Church, the monastery is a school of the Lord, in which a war of the heart is carried on. This is not an external struggle with persecutors. This school mediates fellowship with the Lord.

“We intend therefore to found a school for the Lord’s service. In its structures we hope to arrange nothing harsh, nothing oppressive. But if for some good reason the requirements exacted be a trifle austere in order to rectify faults and safeguard love, you should not be disconcerted by sudden fright, shrink back from the way of salvation, which cannot be narrow at its opening” (RB Prol. 45-48).

The essence of the Prologue is summed up in these words: “So let us never let go of his instructions, but rather hold fast to his teachings in the monastery until death and share patience in Christ’s suffering so that we may also merit a share in His kingdom” (RB Prol. 50).

Thomas J. Rillo, oblate Bloomington, IN

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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 Archabbe
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of Theology
development@saintmeinrad.edu
(800) 682-0988
www.saintmeinrad.edu

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Brothers Patrick Berger, left, and Thomas Berger, right, served their first Mass together on May 12 at the Indianapolis Oblate Chapter meeting. Fr. Meinrad Brune, OSB, was the celebrant. They are the nephews of oblate Bob Miskell.

Oblate Stephen Bailey of Bloomington, IN, reflects on the paintings on the wall of the Chapter Room.
Oblate News from p. 5

show us the results of months of work that has resulted in a site that is visually stunning, as well more interactive and adaptable than the prior website had been. Al Kovacs took a leading role in collaborating with Mary Jeanne on behalf of the oblate community. Much more is possible and planned in light of the ease with which changes can be made to the new website.

The Council then heard a report from Fr. Meinrad. He reported that the media library is being converted from cassettes to CDs, which should make these rich resources available to more people. Fr. Meinrad reported that some of the smaller chapters have enjoyed visits of newcomers, which is encouraging.

Fr. Meinrad also reported on oblate publications. The second edition of the Benedictine Oblate Companion is expected to be ready in July, and a new book on the recent history of the oblate community will be sent with the renewals in November. The Liturgy of the Hours for Benedictine Oblates has proved quite popular, not only with Saint Meinrad oblates, but with other communities as well.

Plans for a second edition of that book are under way. Prayers and Rituals for Benedictine Oblates and Benedictine Spirituality for Oblates have also sold quite well. Copies of these books are available from the Oblate Office.

The Oblate Finance Committee made its report, which was quite strong. The members of the oblate community continue to be generous in supporting its work, and the sale of books to those outside the Saint Meinrad community has added additional income.

There are a number of upcoming events of interest to the oblate community. Oblate Study Days will occur June 11-14. This year’s theme will be “The Sacraments: Means of Grace,” and the presenter will be Fr. Prior Kurt Stasiak, OSB.

The Third Oblate World Congress will be October 4-12, 2013, in Rome, Italy. Representatives from the Saint Meinrad Oblate Community will be Chris Topa and Mike and Michelle Reffert. There will be a meeting of Saint Meinrad Oblate Chapter Coordinators in 2014 on the theme, “Praying the Psalms,” led by Fr. Harry Hagan, OSB, and Fr. Jeremy King, OSB.

Jennie Latta, oblate
Memphis, TN

Madison, IN, Oblate Chapter closes
On May 11, 2012, Fr. Meinrad Brune, OSB, made the decision to close the Madison Oblate Chapter. This was done after discussion during the previous year where it was decided that a monk would attend chapter meetings twice a year and the chapter would meet on two other times. However, only four or five oblates were present at the meetings. A letter was sent to eight oblates in the chapter to inform them of the closure. One oblate suggested that the oblates from the Madison area could carpool to Louisville to attend that chapter’s meetings. The Louisville Oblate Chapter is open to having the Madison oblates attend the chapter meetings. Closing the chapter was a hard decision to make, as the Madison chapter had been in existence since the 1940s. We thank the oblates of the Madison chapter for their faithfulness to the oblate community and the monks of the monastery.

Deacon Burns honored for his service
During the Indianapolis Oblate Chapter meeting on May 12, Fr. Meinrad Brune, OSB, presented a certificate of appreciation to Deacon Michael Burns for his service as co-coordinator of the Evansville Oblate Chapter from September 2006 through May 2011.

Mike and his wife, Jeanne, moved from the Evansville area to the Indianapolis area. We are grateful for his service and many years of

Oblate Stephen Bailey of Bloomington, IN, signs his oblation chart. The signing is witnessed by, l. to r., Fr. Joseph Cox, OSB, associate oblate director, and Fr. Meinrad Brune, OSB, oblate director.
attending the Evansville chapter meetings. He now attends the Indianapolis chapter meetings. ◆

INVESTITURES & OBLATIONS

February 10, 2012, Oblation—Mr. Thomas St. Dominic of Silos Trotter III of Riegelsville, PA.

February 19, 2012, Oblation—Mrs. Frances Marie Catherine Holmes of Granger, IN.

February 26, 2012, Investiture—Mr. Scott Swiontek of Avon, IN.


March 6, 2012, Oblation—Mrs. Ellen Naylor of Bullhead City, AZ.

March 7, 2012, Oblations—Mr. John Manzo of New Albany, IN.

March 9, 2012, Investiture—Mr. Joseph Anselm Manninen of Evansville, IN.

March 10, 2012, Investiture—Mr. David Augustine of Muncie, IN.

March 21, 2012, Investitures—Mrs. Martha Green-Couper, both of Bloomington, IN; Mrs. Patsy Mary Magdalene Butler of Muncie, IN; Mr. Robert John Baptist de la Salle Gideon of Gallatin, TN; Mr. David Augustine Maloney and Mrs. Mary Gianna Maloney, both of Port Charlotte, FL; and Ms. Ramona Agatha Renebbeck of Jasper, IN.

March 24, 2012, Investiture—Mr. Gysbert Quaadman of Staten Island, NY.

March 26, 2012, Investiture—Mr. Scott Swiontek of Avon, IN.

April 3, 2012, Investiture—Mr. Christopher Elam of Bloomington, IN.

April 5, 2012, Investiture—Dr. Julie Wilberding of Greensdale, PA.

April 11, 2012, Investiture—Mr. Thomas Bayer of Hillsdale, MI.

May 6, 2012, Investitures—Mr. James Durham and Mrs. Jane Durham, both of Evansville, IN.

May 9, 2012, Investiture—Mr. Mainerd Sorensen of Cincinnati, OH.

May 10, 2012, Investiture—Rev. Dr. John Manzo of New Albany, IN.


May 12, 2012, Oblation—Mr. Peter Joseph Anselm Manninen of Brownsburg, IN. ◆

ANNIVERSARIES

25 Years as an Oblate
Ms. Pamela Mary Deveary of Madison, IN; Mr. Robert Dale Meinrad Hess of Louisville, KY; Mr. Gerard Gregory Kassman, Mrs. Betty Benedicta Redden and Mr. George Meinrad Schauer, all of Kettering, OH.

50 Years as an Oblate
Mr. James Joseph Riedford Sr. of Evansville, IN. ◆

DEATHS

Mrs. Bernadette Tempel of Ferdinand, IN, died February 29, 2012.

Mrs. Alice Schnellenberger of Huntingburg, IN, died March 6, 2012, at the age of 103; she was our oldest oblate.


Mr. Gysbert Quaadman of Staten Island, NY, died March 20, 2012.

Miss Mildred Bersch of Madison, IN, died April 23, 2012. She was the chapter coordinator of the Madison Oblate Chapter for more than 30 years. She was dedicated to the oblates of the chapter and had a great love of the monks of Saint Meinrad Archabbey.

Mrs. Barbara Sullivan of Evansville, IN, died May 6, 2012. ◆

UPCOMING EVENTS

September 8, 2012—The Lancaster, PA, Day of Recollection in the Amish Country will have Fr. Joseph Cox, OSB, presenting “Keeping God in our Everyday Life through Lectio Divina.”

October 13-20, 2012—California Missions Pilgrimage hosted by Br. Maurus Zoeller, OSB. For details, email mzoeller@saintmeinrad.edu or call (812) 357-6674. This pilgrimage has been organized by Saint Meinrad oblates.

November 25, 2012—The Day of Recollection for New York oblates will have Br. Zachary Wilberding, OSB, as the presenter on the theme of “Lectio Divina: Praying the Word of God.”

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

VOLUNTEERS APPRECIATED

Among the recent volunteers in the Oblate Office were Monina Abrera, Fr. Thomas D’Angelo, Ruth Engs, Mary Maillet, Marianna Neal, Pat Reckelhoff, Mike and Michele Reffett, Tom and Joan Rillo, Laura Roberts and Dennis Skelton. ◆

CHECK THE WEBSITE

Past issues of the Benedictine Oblate newsletter are available at www.saintmeinrad.org. ◆
Oblate conference asks: Does the abbot have any friends?

The conferences of the December 2011 Advent Oblate Retreat, at Saint Meinrad Archabbbey, were presented by Archabbot Justin DuVall, OSB. About 100 oblates attended the retreat. There were five conferences, and the archabbot gave each conference a title in the form of a question.

Does the abbot have friends? I will fill in the blanks to the question. How do we choose our friends and how do we deal with our loneliness? St. Benedict does not mention friends specifically, although in Chapter 72 on “The Good Zeal of Monks,” he mentions fraternal love.

In 72:8, it says, “To their fellow monks, they show the pure love of brothers; to God loving fear, to their abbot unfeigned and humble love. Let us prefer nothing whatever to Christ, and may He bring us all together in everlasting life.” This is the triad of relationships: the love of others, the love of God, the love of abbot.

In Chapter 2 of the Rule, on the qualities of the abbot, St. Benedict writes, “The abbot should avoid all favoritism in the monastery. He is not to love one more than another unless he finds someone better in good actions and obedience.” The abbot is human, and he may find someone more congenial than someone else.

The conferences were: 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 second conference commenced with a presentation of the complexities of a large monastic community. About 95 monks make up the community. This figure is never static. Younger monks come in as novices, and older monks move on – some permanently through death. The community is quite diversified. There are quiet monks and noisy monks. This is a community of different personalities. Yet they are all friends despite the differences.

Oblate Carney Strange
Bowling Green, OH

OBLATES: IN THEIR OWN WORDS

“The Rule of St. Benedict was written for lay people. It is a way to think about life, a way to think about the ordinary things from day to day. It has made me more conscious of the ordinary in my life – of everything from what you do when you get up in the morning and how you think about your day.”

Oblate Carney Strange
Bowling Green, OH

How do we deal with loneliness? By practicing true loyalty to friends. Jesus knew the stab of a disloyal friend in Judas. Loneliness is the other side of human relationships. When we move from loneliness to relationship, we learn who we really are. Does the abbot ever have friends? Yes, he does.

Thomas J. Rillo, oblate
Bloomington, IN

Ms. Pamela Mary Devey of Madison, IN, renews her oblation promises on her 25th anniversary of oblation.

Teresa Martha Green-Couper recites her oblation promises on March 21.
Faithful Witnesses
Br. Silas Henderson, OSB
Monk of Saint Meinrad Archabbey
St. Mildred
Feast: July 13

Mildred was the daughter of the king of Mercia and a Kentish princess. Educated at Chelles, near Paris, she became a nun at Minster-in-Thanet (in England), a community that had been founded by her mother. Although we know nothing of her rule, it is recorded that Mildred became abbess sometime before 694. St. Mildred died around the year 700.

She was buried in the abbey church at Minster-in-Thanet and her grave became a popular place of pilgrimage. In 1035, her relics (which were eventually lost) were enshrined at St. Augustine’s Abbey at Canterbury.

Today, the Benedictine nuns of Minster Court, a monastery built on the site of Mildred’s original abbey, possess a small relic of the holy abbess. Although St. Mildred is virtually unknown outside France and her native England, devotion to her was widespread throughout the Middle Ages.

An early biography records that Mildred was “merciful to widows and orphans, and a comforter to all the poor and afflicted, and in all respects of easy temper and tranquil.” These virtues remind us of the “Tools for Good Works” outlined in Chapter 4 of the Rule.

Because monastic life is essentially a way of discipleship, of following Jesus Christ, acts of kindness and charity are at the heart of what it means to be a daughter or son of St. Benedict: “You must relieve the lot of the poor, clothe the naked, visit the sick, and bury the dead. Go to help the troubled and console the sorrowing. Your way of acting should be different from the world’s way; the love of Christ must come before all else” (RB 4:14-21).

The life and witness of St. Mildred remind us that charity and hospitality must always be an obvious part of our Christian life.

Reflection Questions
How have I made charity and hospitality a part of my day-to-day life?
How do I show kindness to those closest to me?
What does “the love of Christ must come before all else” mean?◆
Humility is a virtue that makes the modern world uncomfortable. Our culture values self-esteem, not self-abnegation, and encourages us to seek first place, not last. What does such a world have to say to someone who, as St. Benedict says of those on the way to perfect humility, “believes with the deepest feeling of his heart that he is inferior to all and more worthless”?

Fr. Michael Casey, a Cistercian monk of Tarrawarra Abbey, has written A Guide to Living in the Truth (2001, Triumph Books), which takes a look at St. Benedict’s teaching on humility in light of modern psychology and does so in a way that respects the integrity of both traditions.

Fr. Casey digs deeply into the holy Rule, particularly Chapter 7, to show that what the modern world rejects in the notion of humility isn’t what St. Benedict and the monastic tradition have in mind when they describe the truly humble person. To make his point, the author turns to St. Bernard of Clairvaux, who interprets humility as recognition of the simple truth about ourselves and God.

This more positive approach sees humility not as neurotic self-abasement, but as honest acceptance of ourselves and others as flawed and limited beings who nevertheless reflect the image of God. Our humanity isn’t debased but, rather, enhanced by humility, which allows us to live without pretense, self-deception or inauthenticity. In a sense, humility frees us to become what we already are, so that we see ourselves and others as Christ sees us.

Fr. Casey acknowledges that St. Benedict’s language falls awkwardly on modern ears, but invites readers to take the Rule’s message seriously because it flows from practical experience of the spiritual life. He makes the case that humility is understood in the monastic tradition as nothing more (or less) than living out the Gospel.

He proposes that we think of it as “Christlikeness” and that we regard growth in humility as becoming more like Christ. Fr. Casey’s book sheds fresh light on St. Benedict’s concept of humility and, uncomfortable language notwithstanding, reveals the inner consistency between the Rule and modern insights. A Guide to Living in the Truth has practical relevance not only for monks, but for all who seek a deeper Christian life.

John Swales, oblate
Parkersburg, WV