Lectio Divina: Devotion to the Word of God

While all the monks at Saint Meinrad are expected to take advantage of the times set aside in the daily horarium for this form of prayer, as novices we are given special direction for developing and fine-tuning our “sense” for Scripture.

In my own case, the foundations for my practice of lectio were laid through an indirect and unexpected way. During my novitiate, I was encouraged to take up the hobby of photography. Having been outfitted with a fancy new camera and several sophisticated lenses, I eagerly crawled the campus of Saint Meinrad hunting for just the right shot.

Within a couple of weeks, I had photographed all the obvious landmarks of the monastery and had produced several pictures that I was quite proud of. But now I found myself bored. What next? Being a novice, I was bound to the grounds of Saint Meinrad; taking a trip elsewhere was not an option.

My novice master began to ask me why I had stopped taking pictures. Had I already given up on my new hobby? The solution to my boredom, I was told, was not to look elsewhere, but to look deeper. Might there be something below the surface that I had missed at first glance?

Suddenly re-inspired, I spent the rest of my novitiate combing over, sometimes again and again, all the things in my environment that I had initially passed over – things I had written off as too ordinary, too uninteresting or even too ugly to be photographed. I also discovered new angles, new points of view, new ways of looking at the old familiar landmarks.

Not only did my very best photography come from this period of rediscovery, but I also gained a deeper appreciation for the hidden beauty of the place where I live.

This experience was not only a powerful lesson for me in the wisdom of stability, but it also taught me a great deal about how I should approach my study of Scripture through lectio divina. Here are a few of the lessons I learned from my hobby that I was able to apply to my practice of lectio:

1. Commit yourself wholly and completely to the Bible. Make it your primary, if not your only, source of spiritual reading. St. Ignatius of Loyola once vowed that he would never read another book the rest of his life apart from Scripture. This might not be practical for most of us today, but it illustrates powerfully the commitment that an intimate relationship with God demands.

Benedictine spirituality is grounded in an intimate familiarity with the Scriptures and an understanding of the Word that is cultivated, above all, through the practice of lectio divina (literally, “divine” or “sacred reading”).

FROM THE RULE:

“Reading will always accompany the meals of the brothers…. Let there be complete silence. No whispering, no speaking – only the reader’s voice should be heard there.”

Chapter 38, Verse 1, 5

Continued on p. 5
The secret to \textit{lectio divina} is listening

More than 90 oblates made the Advent journey to Saint Meinrad to pray together, gather at meals and socials, and attend the conferences at which Fr. Eugene Hensell, OSB, shared his knowledge of the monastic practice of \textit{lectio divina}. The retreat on “\textit{Lectio Divina: Listening with the Ear of the Heart}” was held December 7-9.

According to Fr. Eugene, \textit{lectio divina} originated in the context of the monastery. It is the practice of using Scripture not to acquire content, but rather as a vehicle by which the reader is prepared to listen in case God decides to talk.

There is, however, a presupposition that one knows how to listen, a fact not assured in our culture of 30-second sound bites. That being the case, we need to understand the science of listening. This skill is particularly important for oblates, as Benedict, in the prologue to the \textit{Rule}, calls us to “listen with the ear of [our] heart,” the heart being, for the ancients, the center of all things.

In our fast-paced, materialistic society, the obstacles to listening in this way are many and varied. To begin with, Fr. Eugene maintains, most of us think we already know what is being said. We are listening for the same old stuff and live out of that internal model.

Thus, to truly hear, we must suspend our mental models and listen on a much deeper level, with our hearts, because the only place God really speaks to us is our hearts. The sad reality is, as Fr. Eugene said, God speaks all the time, but we are simply not open to what He is saying.

Even our accustomed way of praying – using words – limits us, according to Fr. Eugene. We try to talk about God with words, praying by saying, and our prayer becomes petition. Yet there is also apophatic prayer, prayer without words, a method practiced by the ancients because they realized how inadequate words are.

To practice this type of prayer, one must choose to be silent, find a quiet place to be and then listen. This is what Thomas Keating referred to in \textit{The Cloud of Unknowing} as centering prayer, prayer in which what is important is the experience. In centering prayer, one can have union with God without a lot of high-powered verbiage.

\textit{Lectio} is an ancient practice that was set aside when Scholasticism, which essentially believed that everything could be explained, became prevalent. Beginning with Thomas Merton, however, the idea of prayer based on listening and experience began to reappear, and more people began to simply spend time in the presence of God.

Fr. Eugene suggested an easy way to start is to take a short phrase from Scripture and repeat it as a background to your day. This will stop the mental tapes that play in our heads, which distract us from the ability to sit with God. At this point, we can do as Jesus said in the Gospel of Mark: “Listen!” (Mark 4:3). It is through this radical form of listening that we can be obedient to God’s will for us.

To further explain the practice of \textit{lectio}, Fr. Eugene reread some familiar parables, those short stories told by Jesus to make a point: the Parable of the Sower (Mark 4:3-9) and the Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14-30), and other stories: the Baptism of Jesus (Matthew 3:13-17)
60th anniversary observed
Oblate Barbara Miller and her husband, Richard, of Louisville, KY, celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary during the week of November 16, 2012. May God's many blessings be upon them.

Oblate writes gratitude booklet
Oblate Nancy Stout of Wilmington, DE, has written a booklet in the CareNotes series for Abbey Press on “Enriching Your Life Through Gratitude.”

Oblate’s new book focuses on media
Oblate Dr. Audrey Borschel has written a new book, Sleuthing the Truth in the Media, which offers insights into the newsgathering and publication process. Readers will learn how a story or advertisement is constructed and produced. They will also be able to ascertain whether a report is fully transparent, biased or false.

The author is a minister, musician and writer. In 2003, she was ordained as a minister in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and has served in several Indiana congregations. Her first book was published in 2009, When the News Disturbs: Interpreting the Media.

Oblates celebrate wedding anniversary
Oblates Oliver and Sharon Ogden of Lancaster, PA, celebrated their 25th wedding anniversary on December 12, 2012. They are the co-coordinators of the Lancaster Oblate Chapter. May the graces of God be upon them.

Oblate comments on video
Oblate Betty Lux of Beech Grove, IN, recently commented on the video about the Saint Meinrad oblate community, “Seeking God in Everyday Life”:

“This morning I discovered this video on my iPad. It affected me in various ways. First, it made me very nostalgic as I recognized some of my old friends. I actually shed a few tears when I saw Rose Ranno. Needless to say, it made me homesick for the Hill, you and your community’s liturgies. The quality of oblates, their character, their ability to absorb and then relate what being an oblate is all about reflects leadership in the oblate community and the wonderful people who are assisting the oblate director in all his endeavors.”

Oblate reflects on death of Rose Ranno
On January 22, 2013, oblate Karen Quirk from Anchorage, AK, wrote this reflection after reading about the death of oblate Rose Ranno: “Rose was the person who reached out at St. Meinrad at my first retreat and gave me a brochure, asking if I may be interested in becoming an oblate. That sort of evangelism is so touching and – in my case – I listened and responded. Rose gave me a special enamel St. Benedict pendant at my oblation. I cherish it and my love of Rose.”

Oblate Joan Rillo completes 10 years of newsletter work
Joan Rillo and her husband, Tom, of Bloomington, IN, volunteered in October 2002 to help in the Oblate Office. Oblate Director Fr. Meinrad Brune, OSB, accepted their help, and they began working on the preparation of the Winter issue of The Benedictine Oblate newsletter.

Since that time, Joan has edited and assembled the draft copy for the newsletter. In January, she notified Fr. Meinrad that she is “retiring” from this volunteer work. He expressed his sincere appreciation for all her help in the past 10+ years.

Joan recommended oblate Catherine (Cathey) Byers, of Nineveh, IN, as her replacement. On February 1, Cathey accepted Fr. Meinrad’s offer to edit and assemble the copy for the newsletter. We are grateful that Cathey was willing to take over the work. Oblate Tom Rillo will continue to write for the newsletter.

2013 national meeting will be in North Dakota
The North American Association of Benedictine Oblate Directors (NAABOD) will meet July 12-17, 2013, in Bismarck, ND. The meeting will be held on the campus of the University of Mary and staffed by the Benedictine sisters of Annunciation Monastery in Bismarck.

The theme is “Living in the Benedictine Charism: Faithfully in the World.” Speakers will be Fr. Terrence Kordong, OSB, Assumption Abbey, Richardton, ND; Sr. Coleen McGrane, OSB, Benedictine Sisters of Perpetual Adoration, Clyde, MO; and Sr. Thomas Welder, OSB, Annunciation Monastery.

Representing Saint Meinrad Archabbey at the meeting will be Fr. Meinrad Brune, OSB, director of Benedictine Oblates, and Irene and Albert Kovacs, oblates from Indianapolis, IN. In addition, they will visit three monasteries: Sacred Heart Monastery and Assumption Abbey, both in Richardton, and Annunciation Monastery, Bismarck.

Oblate World Congress planned for October
The Oblate World Congress will meet in Rome, Italy, on October 4-10, 2013. The meeting was announced by the abbot primate’s office. Representing the Saint Meinrad Archabbey oblate community will be Michele and Mike Reffett, co-coordinators of the Evansville, IN, oblate chapter, and Chris Topa of Howell, MI.

The Saint Meinrad Archabbey oblate community was chosen by lottery to

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send three oblates to the World Congress. The North American Association of Benedictine Oblate Directors was allotted only 50 spaces for Benedictine oblate representatives. This meeting is for Benedictine oblates from throughout the world.

2014 meeting planned for chapter coordinators

A meeting of chapter coordinators and representatives (MCR) has been set for June 13-15, 2014, at Saint Meinrad Archabbey. The title of the meeting is “Praying and Singing the Psalms.” The presenters are Fr. Harry Hagan, OSB, and Fr. Jeremy King, OSB.

Fr. Harry will do the praying sections and Fr. Jeremy will do the singing sections of the conferences. Oblate Director Fr. Meinrad Brune, OSB, has invited the members of the Oblate Council and the Oblate Finance Committee to attend the MCR meeting.◆

INVESTITURES & OBLATIONS

August 7, 2012, Oblation—Mr. Edward Anselm Andercheck of Franklin, TN.

October 28, 2012, Investiture—Deacon Gregory Clodi of Kankakee, IL.

November 9, 2012, Oblation—Mr. Edwin George Wells of New Carlisle, OH.

November 12, 2012, Oblation—Mr. Duane Levi Carver of New Castle, IN.

November 19, 2012, Oblation—Mr. Brian Nicholas Goodwin of Franklin, TN.

December 8, 2012, Investitures—Ms. Kathleen Polansky and Mr. Thomas Causey, both of New Salisbury, IN.

December 8, 2012, Oblations—Mrs. Frances Terese Brown of Louisville, KY; Mrs. Mary Faustina Drake of Madison, IN; Mr. Bernard Bernard Kenney of Georgetown, OH; Mrs. Ann Therese of Liseux Tully of Indianapolis, IN.

December 11, 2012, Oulation—Deacon Jim Brendan Graham of Bluffton, SC.

December 15, 2012, Oblation—Ms. Maria Therese Russell of Louisville, KY.

December 21, 2012, Investitures—Mr. Craig Farmer and Mrs. Meg Farmer of Johnson City, TN; Mr. David Butz of Milligan College, TN.

January 2, 2013, Investiture—Mr. Jon Jones of Jackson, TN.

January 5, 2013, Investiture—Rev. Peter Barnes-Davies of Jeffersonville, IN.

January 9, 2013, Investiture—Dr. Ginny Brinhaupt of Murfreesboro, TN.

January 10, 2013, Investitures—Miss Teresa Ippoliti of St. Meinrad, IN; Ms. Kimberly Hile of Santa Claus, IN.

January 12, 2013, Investiture—Dr. Jeffrey Oelker of Fishers, IN.

January 16, 2013, Investiture—Mr. Michael Johnson of Edgewood, KY.

January 25, 2013, Investitures—Dr. Gary Ryan and Mrs. Sally Ryan of Gettysburg, PA; Ms. Audra Douglas of Evansville, IN.

February 1, 2013, Oblations—Mr. Patrick Lawrence Openlander and Mrs. Mary Brigid Openlander, both of Kirkwood, MO.◆

DEATHS

Ms. Constance Billington of Helena, MT, died on August 31, 2012.

Mrs. Mary Carr of Flushing, NY, died on December 11, 2012.

Mr. William Dieckman of Pensacola, FL, died on December 20, 2012. He was the coordinator of the Pensacola (FL) Oblate Chapter from October 6, 2002, to June 26, 2007. He started the chapter, but had to give up the work due to health problems. No one was ready to take on the responsibility at the time.

Mrs. Renilda Kissel of Haubstadt, IN, died on January 7, 2013.◆

UPCOMING EVENTS

April 20, 2013 – The Day of Recollection for the Louisville Oblates will have Br. Martin Erspamer, OSB, as the presenter on “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 on “Lectio Divina: A Conversation with God.” The Dayton chapter is hosting.


July 11, 2013 – Oblate James O’Connell will be the presenter for the Day of Recollection at Saint Meinrad. The title is: “A Little Bit of Something and a Lot of Nothing” on how listening is enhanced by the sacraments and our faith traditions.

August 30-September 2, 2013 – The New York oblates will hold the annual Labor Day weekend retreat with Fr. Raymond Studzinski, OSB. The theme will be “Sacraments and the Oblates.”

September 7, 2013 – The Lancaster, PA, Day of Recollection in the Amish country will feature Br. Martin Erspamer, OSB, presenting on “The Sacraments.”

November 11-21, 2013 – Benedictine pilgrimage to Italy hosted
by Br. Maurus Zoeller. For details, call Br. Maurus at (812) 357-6674 or email mzoeller@saintmeinrad.edu. Pilgrims will visit Venice, Florence, Assisi, Norcia, Subiaco and Rome.

December 1, 2013 – The Day of Recollection for New York oblates will have Fr. Noël Mueller, OSB, as the presenter on the theme of “The Sacraments.”

December 13-15, 2013 – The Oblate Retreat at Saint Meinrad Archabbey is scheduled to have Fr. Eugene Hensell, OSB, as the presenter of “The Birth of Jesus According the Gospels of Matthew and Luke.”

Continued from p. 1

2. Become familiar with the whole Bible, not just the most well-known passages such as the Gospels or the popular stories from Genesis and Exodus. For most Christians, the larger story of Israel’s wanderings in the desert followed by their rise, fall, exile and return in the land of Canaan is generally hazy at best.

Yet knowing this history, recounted in the so-called “historical” books of the Old Testament, difficult though it may be, is the key to understanding many of the themes taken up in the books of the prophets, the wisdom literature, the psalms, the Pauline epistles, and especially the Gospels themselves. Doing so will enrich your lectio experience.

3. Pick a book of the Bible and stay with it for an extended period of time. During my novitiate, parallel to my endeavors into photography, I chose the Book of Genesis and read it over and over again. After several readings, of course, this became tedious, and my first reaction was to set it aside and move on.

But I stuck with it and, by the end of the year, not only did I know this important book quite thoroughly, but I had also discovered insights into my understanding of God’s Word that I felt to be profound.

So much of the popular literature on lectio divina today presents this form of prayer as a process or a technique. It lays out various steps one should progress through, and often implies that the highest forms of contemplation can be achieved in a 30-minute session of Scripture reading.

The fact is, lectio, like all meaningful prayer, is difficult and often laborious. It demands a long-term commitment and perseverance. But the rewards are manifold: a new way of seeing, not only the Bible itself, but the world around us in a beauty revealed by the light of God’s face.

Br. Matthew Mattingly, OSB
Saint Meinrad Archabbey

Reflection Questions

What is Benedictine spirituality grounded in?

How can we overcome boredom in the practice of lectio divina?

Why does lectio divina demand a long-term commitment and perseverance?

Can you give a one-sentence description of the three lessons applied to the practice of lectio divina?

Oblate life: Annual personal evaluation

To see how well you are fulfilling your vocation as an oblate of Saint Meinrad Archabbey, reflect on and ask yourself the following questions. These questions are for your personal consideration and evaluation, so that you may see how you are growing as an oblate. The oblate directors are convinced that if you sincerely reflect on these questions, you can only deepen your relationship with God. And in doing so, you are truly growing in Benedictine spirituality as an oblate.

1. What have I done during the past year to continue ongoing formation as an oblate?

2. What do I plan to do during the coming year?

3. How well do I see myself living the oblate promises:
   (Rate yourself on a scale of 1–5, with 1 as “needing improvement” and 5 as “doing well.”)
   • Stability of heart? 1 2 3 4 5
   • Fidelity to the spirit of the monastic life? 1 2 3 4 5
   • Obedience to the will of God? 1 2 3 4 5

4. How well do I see myself fulfilling the oblate duties:
   • Praying the Liturgy of the Hours? 1 2 3 4 5
   • Reading from the Rule of St. Benedict? 1 2 3 4 5
   • Daily practice of lectio divina? 1 2 3 4 5
   • Participating in the Sacraments of the Eucharist and Reconciliation or in my own faith tradition of church and prayer? 1 2 3 4 5
   • Attentiveness to God’s presence in my ordinary, daily life? 1 2 3 4 5

5. In what ways can I offer my time, talent and treasure to the services of the Oblate Community of Saint Meinrad Archabbey?

6. If I need to improve in any of these areas, what do I plan to do?
Can you tell us about your background?

I was born in 1964 in the town of Weston, West Virginia. It was founded as the county seat for Lewis County, Virginia (before the Civil War). Stonewall Jackson was born and raised in Lewis County. His father died when Jackson was young, and his mother sent him to live with his uncle, who operated a grist mill. The site is now owned by the state and is known as Jackson’s Mill. The state cooperative extension operates a 4-H camp on the site.

My father worked in the glass industry. The factories he worked for made hand-blown crystal products, mostly stemware like brandy sniffers, wine glasses and punch bowls. I have a few pieces my father made, two swans and a little crystal bell. My mother was an elementary school teacher and she loved children. Both parents have died since I entered Saint Meinrad.

The oblates have been especially kind to me during my parents’ illnesses and deaths. I have an older sister and a younger brother. I grew up in a Protestant household. I attended public schools, both at the elementary level and at the secondary level in Weston, graduating high school in 1983.

After high school, I moved to the Roanoke Valley in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia. During my time in Virginia, I attended Radford University majoring in computer science, graduating at the ripe old age of 36. I also had almost enough credits for a physics degree. In Roanoke, I worked for a company that manufactured night vision equipment.

What were some earlier influences that influenced your conversion to Catholicism?

My conversion began in 2003. One Saturday morning at work, I was listening to the news on NPR. They had a segment about New Melleray Abbey near Dubuque, Iowa. New Melleray supports itself by making and selling coffins. The news program really intrigued me and it piqued my interest in monasticism.

I searched the website to learn more about their way of life. I then decided that I would like to make a retreat at New Melleray. Since I hadn’t been to a Catholic liturgy, I wanted to learn more about what to expect. So I went to a neighboring parish. It was suggested that an RCIA (Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults) class would answer my questions, so I started attending the RCIA class.

Needless to say, I fell in love with the Catholic Church and, during the Easter Vigil, I made up my mind to enter the Church. I was confirmed and took my First Communion on Pentecost Sunday. I became a serious Catholic, becoming active in a variety of ministries. I worked as a catechist with the Confirmation class, helped with children’s Liturgy of the Word and served as a Eucharistic minister to two nursing homes.

I did a Cursillo retreat and worked with Kairos (the prison version of the Cursillo ministry) at Wallen’s Ridge State Prison. Wallen’s Ridge is such a violent prison that Human Rights Watch has expressed concern over the treatment of inmates. Very few prisoners at Wallen’s Ridge will ever be released.

Walking into the prison for the first time is something I will never forget. The ministry was held in the gym. We (the volunteers) arrived at a courtyard in front of the gym a little too early. The officers were still searching the inmates as they were letting them into the gym.

A corrections officer in the guard tower was showing them he had a shotgun and wasn’t afraid to use it. An attack dog was barking and pulling on the leash. And yet it was one of the most powerful experiences in my life. God’s love really showed through the weekend.

How did you initially learn about Saint Meinrad Archabbey?

My spiritual director at that time was a permanent deacon, Steve O’Connell. Steve is a product of the Permanent Deacon Program at Saint Meinrad, and he suggested that I visit Saint Meinrad. Fr. Anthony Vinson, OSB, was vocation director at that time. I attended a Come and See weekend three weeks later. I entered the monastery in October 2008.

As a novice, I was assigned to work in the Oblate Office for Fr. Meinrad Brune, OSB, the oblate director, and I continue to work there. I do oblate chapter conferences in such places as St. Meinrad, Evansville, Jasper, Tell City, Bloomington and Merrillville, all located in Indiana. Because I am studying for the priesthood, it limits how far afield I can go. However, I do enjoy working in the oblate program with Fr. Meinrad and find it spiritually rewarding.

Thomas J. Rillo, oblate
Bloomington, IN

VOLUNTEERS APPRECIATED

Recent volunteers in the Oblate Office were Novice Bradley Jensen, OSB, Novice Matthew Sprauer, OSB, Rev. Larry Jackson, Brenda Blackgrove, Ruth Engs, Tim Mattingly, Pat Reckelhoff, Mike Reffett and Michele Reffett, Tom Rillo and Joan Rillo, and Laura Roberts.
Advice on tackling difficult passages in the Rule

Benedict states in his Rule that a monk should not own anything. Everything he has should be given to him by the abbot. On reading this statement, oblates might legitimately ask, “How can I, as an oblate, incorporate this difficult saying into my spiritual life?”

In searching for a solution, we might start by noticing that similar questions arise when we study the Scriptures. For instance, we could ask: how can we incorporate the cursing psalms in the Old Testament? Or, how can we incorporate the “hard sayings” of Jesus in the New Testament, like hating father and mother?

Quick and final answers do not come easily to complicated questions. But we can ponder these questions, as Mary did on the Word of God that was spoken to her. She suspended judgment. She “lived the question” through her experiences and kept the questions in her heart, awaiting some enlightenment.

But our first tendency, on hearing Benedict’s attitude toward possessions, would be to dismiss it as out of date and not fitting with today’s advanced culture. We could dismiss the saying, just as we do Benedict’s advice to use corporal punishment, as a last resort, on recalcitrant monks.

A more harsh judgment would be to say that Benedict’s attitude on possessions is harmful, psychologically, because it takes away a monk’s responsibility and reduces him to the status of a child.

I admit that I subscribed to the above judgments until I recently came across a book by Ronald Rolheiser, titled Our One Great Act of Fidelity. In one section of the book, he discusses how the Eucharist comes to us as a “gift.”

To illustrate his point, he tells two personal stories. The first is about a Benedictine priest he met who told him that, as a young monk in a very strict order, he resented the custom of the monastery that required him to ask permission for purchasing even the slightest item, such as a toothbrush.

The monk said that the custom was belittling and made him feel like a child. But eventually he changed his mind saying, “I came to realize that none of us owns anything. Nothing comes to us by right. Now in asking for anything from the Abbot I no longer feel like a child. Rather I feel I am more properly in tune with the way things should be in a gift-oriented universe.”

The second story is about a former novice in his religious order who left and became a medical doctor. Rolheiser kept in touch with him and they became great friends. One day while Rolheiser was waiting for him in the doctor’s office, he picked up one of his medical books and found the Latin words “Ad usum” inscribed on the first page of the book.

Freely translated, the words mean “For use only.” When Rolheiser questioned him about this, he replied, “It was a habit that my novice master taught me in the novitiate. And I never forgot it. Everything I possess is given only temporarily.”

Obviously, it is easier for a professed religious to follow Benedict’s statements on possessions since there are many things for which monks still need permission (but not toothbrushes). But what about oblates? How can they apply Benedict’s statement on possessions?

Rolheiser sheds some light on this problem, also. He says, “Metaphorically there should be an abbot in each one of our lives from whom we should ask for permission to buy or use anything. That would be a recipe for health.”

Rolheiser’s view on the subject of possessions is one we all can adopt in some way. But at the same time, we must realize it is not the last word on the subject. As I said earlier, we still must keep an open mind on the questions we encounter when reading the Rule. We must still, like Mary, “live the question” by listening to our own experiences and going “from light to light,” asking the Holy Spirit to enlighten us.

As one of our antiphons recently expressed it, “My house shall be called a house of prayer,” says the Lord, “In it every one who asks, receives; and those who seek, find; and to those who knock, it shall be opened (Is 56:7, Mt 7:7).”

Fr. Louis Mulcahy, OSB
Saint Meinrad Archabbey

Reflection Questions

What do I do with difficult passages in the Rule? Do I just dismiss them?
Do I want clear and quick answers to difficult passages?
Do I have the patience to wait for answers?
Do I pray to the Holy Spirit for enlightenment?
Oblate chapters celebrate Epiphany

**Lancaster and Columbus, OH**
The Ohio oblate chapters of Lancaster and Columbus celebrated Epiphany on January 3, 2013, at the home of Jim and Rita Merk. Thirty-two oblates braved the 18-degree weather to enjoy an evening of prayer, blessings, singing and gift-giving.

Oblate Director Fr. Meinrad Brune, OSB, officiated. Msgr. Robert Noon was unable to attend due to an illness. The candlelit altar was adorned with gold satin, in preparation of the Mass to be celebrated. Everyone participated with beautiful singing and glorious praise.

Fr. Meinrad blessed the Magi. Following the ceremony, we enjoyed the food brought by each of the oblates. The cake was cut and the three kings were selected; they then distributed the Epiphany gifts.

*James and Rita Merk, oblates*  
*Lancaster, OH*

**Evansville**
The Evansville Oblate Chapter celebrated the ritual and prayers of the Epiphany ceremony on January 6, 2013. Fr. Meinrad Brune, OSB, opened the celebration with the explanation of the significance of the “other gift” from the Magi.

He explained that the gifts of generosity, wisdom, perseverance and simplicity were as important as the gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. He reminded us that the Magi were able to accept the Infant Jesus in the simple setting of a manger.

Fr. Meinrad pointed out that we are Epiphany people. It is our job to share the “light of Christ” for all to see.

The celebration continued with the Liturgy of the Epiphany. Father blessed the gifts and all those present during the renewal of baptismal promises. Each married couple recited a prayer together and then Father blessed all members and their families.

At the end of the celebration, the food and wine were blessed and everyone enjoyed the wonderful dishes contributed by the members.

*Michele Reffett, oblate*  
*Evansville, IN*

**Indianapolis**
The Indianapolis area oblates held the Epiphany celebration on January 12, 2013. Mass was offered in the Blessed Sacrament Chapel of Holy Spirit Church. After the Gospel, Dr. Jeffrey Oelker was invested as an oblate novice.

Following Mass, the oblates went to the meeting room of Holy Spirit Parish Center to pray and celebrate the Epiphany ritual. Three kings were chosen by lottery and dressed with the kings’ robes. The three of them gave witness on what it means to them to be an oblate of Saint Meinrad Archabbey.

Refreshments were shared by the 35 who were present for the celebration. The singing was led by Deacon Mike Burns, who also played his guitar.

*Pat and Barbara Phillips, oblates*  
*Indianapolis, IN*

**Louisville**
The Louisville Chapter met on January 20 to celebrate the Epiphany of Our Lord. Oblate Lance Schortmann and his wife Jeannette hosted the gathering at their home. The celebration was led by Fr. Meinrad Brune, OSB, and assisted by Br. Peduru Fonseka, OSB.

Oblates from southern Indiana and the Louisville area brought family and friends to share the occasion; about 30 attended. Everyone listened to the readings, which recounted the manifestation of Jesus.

The Scripture readings told of the visit by the three wise men, Jesus’ baptism by John and the miracle at the wedding feast at Cana. Jesus continues to reveal Himself to us each day. Pray we are attentive to His presence.

Fellowship and good food were shared after the ceremony. This was the renewal of the Epiphany party by the Louisville Chapter after a few years without one. With the positive feedback received, it looks like it will be a regular event.

*Lance Schortmann, oblate*  
*Louisville, KY*
St. Alice of Schaerbeek
Feast: June 15

Alice (or Aleidis) was born in Schaerbeek, Belgium, in 1204, and was entrusted to the care of the Cistercian nuns of Camera Sancta Mariae when she was 7 years old. She later joined this community and is remembered as being a humble and retiring sister who dedicated herself wholeheartedly to the service of her community.

While still a young woman, she contracted leprosy and, to the sorrow of her community, she had to be segregated because of fear of contagion. Alice accepted her illness and the segregation, turning the experience into an opportunity to enter more deeply into the wounds of Christ, taking great comfort in the reception of the Eucharist.

In 1249, Alice became critically ill and was given viaticum. She survived for another year, however, experiencing great physical suffering, having become paralyzed and completely blind. Honored for her many mystical experiences, Alice died on June 11, 1250.

The cult of St. Alice of Schaerbeek was confirmed by Pope St. Pius X in 1907. Today, she is honored as one of the patrons of the blind and those who are paralyzed.

Although she suffered greatly because of her illness, it would be a mistake to underestimate the pain St. Alice endured because of being separated from her community. Like all who follow the Benedictine way of life, Alice felt called to seek God within the common life of a monastic family.

To be cut off from the life and prayer of the community cost her more than we can imagine.

St. Alice found solace and comfort in the Eucharist, which united her to Christ and to her community. “Sharing in the Body of the Lord in the breaking of the Eucharistic Bread,” the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council reminded us, “we are taken up into communion with him and with one another” (Lumen Gentium, 7).

Our encounter with Jesus in the Eucharist is not only a private experience; the Eucharist brings us all together in Christ: “Because the loaf of bread is one, we, though many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf” (1 Corinthians 10:17).

May the life and witness of St. Alice help us to grow in our appreciation for the gift of community and in our devotion to the Eucharist.

Reflection Questions

How do I actively participate in the life of my family? My parish? My monastic community? How do I build up these communities?

How do I reach out to those who, like St. Alice, are cut off from the life of the Church, for whatever reason?

How does my devotion to the Eucharist shape my understanding of the Church and my place in it? ◆

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and the story of the Canaanite woman (Matthew 15:21-25).

He encouraged us to listen with the ear of our hearts to these passages, setting aside what we think we know about them and looking for their deeper meaning within the context of our Christian faith.

As Fr. Eugene said, it is faith we are called to as Christians, resulting in living a totally different kind of life. There is a difference, he asserted, between “churchianity” and Christianity and, as Paul said in his second letter to the Corinthians, “we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus’ sake.”

Moreover, Paul asserted, we Christians “have this treasure [the Gospel] in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us” (2 Corinthians 4:4, 7).

This is, Fr. Eugene said, what we are all about, what discipleship is all about: making real the life of Christ because we are the Body of Christ. And the way we know how to do that is by listening with the ear of our hearts to the Gospel that has been given to us.

Cathey Byers, oblate
Nineveh, IN

Fr. Meinrad Brune, OSB, receives the oblations of Bernard Kenney, Ann Tully, Mary Drake and Frances Brown in a ceremony in the Chapter Room at Saint Meinrad on December 8.
OBLATES: IN THEIR OWN WORDS

“I would invite anyone to become acquainted with the oblates. I would say investigate, learn, attend the chapter meetings, read the Rule of St. Benedict and see how it can be applicable in your life situation.”

Oblate Anne Kendig
Lancaster, PA

Br. Zachary enlightens New York oblates on lectio divina

“Advent is a season of waiting, asking of us a certain quietness in waiting. Just be quiet and wait for what God has to give you,” said Br. Zachary Wilberding, OSB, in his presentation, “Lectio Divina: Praying the Word of God.”

He was the keynote speaker at the New York Day of Recollection on November 25, 2012. Br. Zachary was joined by Fr. Meinrad Brune, OSB, and assisted by homilist (and oblate) Fr. Tom D’Angelo at St. Ignatius Retreat House, Manhasset, NY.

Here is a summary of some of Br. Zachary’s comments.

Br. Zachary summarized lectio divina (holy reading or prayed reading) by quoting the Brief Rule of St. Romuald, founder of the Camaldolese Benedictine order. As this rule was printed in an earlier issue of the oblate newsletter, we will consider just a few facets.

Namely, realize that you are in God’s presence; hold your heart there in wonder! Empty yourself completely; sit waiting, content with God’s gift – like the little chick tasting and eating nothing but what its mother brings.

Br. Zachary said we promise conversion of heart when we become oblates. This is God’s gift to us and it is an ongoing process. Conversion is the purpose of our Benedictine life.

Conversion is rooted in hearing and listening to the word of God. Lectio needs to be practiced daily, and it should be prayed with Scripture. According to St. Jerome, not to know Scripture is to be ignorant of Christ.

The four steps to the practice of lectio are reading, meditating, prayer and contemplation, according to Br. Zachary.

Reading is a way into prayer. Chew on the words of the prayer. Read slowly: engage your senses, read aloud and really listen to the words. Before punctuation and spelling became standardized, reading itself was a slow process, forcing the reader to sound out words and determine where to pause.

One suggestion Br. Zachary offered was to type a Scripture passage onto a computer screen, leaving plenty of space in between. Then we might want to “question the text.” For example, if the text begins “In the beginning was the word…” ask whose beginning? What does “the word” mean?

Use word associations or memories. This is what it means to “chew” on the word, to tear it apart and grapple with it. We are trying to become what we read, to create a relationship between the divine and human, the visible and invisible.

Guigo, a Carthusian monk and the author of The Ladder of Monks, offers us this process: read, meditate, pray, contemplate.

Meditating is to repeat something over and over to memorize it. When we repeat something over and over, we say that we “know it by heart.” This is the goal of our reading: to savor it. Don’t work hard; let the Holy Spirit enter in.

What ideas does God have for us in these words? What did the writer mean for the people of his time? Read the word, walk around it and poke at it, so that you know the word of God by heart. It is OK to ask God, “What can you possibly mean by this?”

Or, you may be moved to pray for God’s mercy. Sometimes a text can be difficult and not make any sense. Stay with it. There is always something new if you are reading slowly, prodding it.

Lectio is a process of listening to what God is saying to you. You can’t force this; it’s a gift from God. Just show up and ask the Holy Spirit to help you.
There are three “books” you can use for lectio: the book of Scripture, the book of nature and the book of your own experience.

How do you start? The Church gives us daily readings for Mass, which puts you in communion with the entire Church. When you are ready for something more, read a gospel from beginning to end; then try alternating an Old Testament reading with one from the New Testament. If you want to know Jesus, He and his people were reading the Old Testament and the Psalms.

Br. Zachary also offered some practical advice for lectio:

**Timing:** Determine what time of day works best for you to pray. What responsibilities and time constraints do you have? When can you make time for prayer? Using the analogy of physical exercise, he said that when you join a gym, you have to show up consistently to see results. Showing up for prayer is part of obedience. God will work with you if you show up.

**Tools:** To better understand what you are reading, the *Catholic Study Bible* is a useful tool as it provides notes that clarify the Scripture text.

**Distractions:** Think of a stream or river flowing by. Treat distractions as leaves that float by on the river. Prayer is the river of grace; as you grab at the leaves, it is like paying attention to your distractions. Let them go.

While there is clearly more to learn about lectio, first we must begin the practice.

*Jane Massimino, oblate
Farmingdale, NY*

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**Saint Meinrad named pilgrimage site during Year of Faith**

Archbishop Joseph W. Tobin, CSsR, of the Archdiocese of Indianapolis, has named Saint Meinrad Archabbey and the Archabbey Church as a pilgrimage site for the Year of Faith.

Pope Benedict XVI will grant a plenary indulgence to the faithful for the Year of Faith, which will end November 24, 2013.

To receive the indulgence, Catholics must participate in sacramental confession and Eucharist and pray the intentions of Pope Benedict XVI, as well as take a pilgrimage to a papal basilica, Christian catacomb, a cathedral church or a holy site designated by the local ordinary for the Year of Faith.

While there, they must participate in a sacred celebration or remain in prayer and meditation for an appropriate amount of time, concluding with the Our Father, the Profession of Faith and invocations to the Blessed Virgin Mary.

The Archabbey Church is one of several pilgrimage sites in Indiana designated by Archbishop Tobin.

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**CHECK THE WEBSITE**

Past issues of the *Benedictine Oblate* newsletter are available at www.saintmeinrad.org/oblates

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Standing with Fr. Meinrad Brune, OSB, in the Archabbey Church are, from left, Chris Meyer, Rev. Carol Ruth Wiley and Duane Carver.

Dr. Brenner has not only dedicated this book to his father, but also to the late Fr. M. Basil Pennington, OCSO, whose book on *lectio divina* is a definitive classic. Brenner’s thesis in this book is that prayer is not just communication with God, but it is also communion with God.

Brenner believes that as we open ourselves to God, He will do the spiritual work necessary for transformation within us. The author uses the four movements of *lectio divina* to explore prayer as attending, pondering, responding and being. He opens us to a world of possibilities for communion with God: praying with our senses, with imagination, with music and creativity, in contemplation, in service and a great deal more.

In this book, oblates will discover that prayer can be a way of living our lives. Oblates can move beyond words, from one who merely prays to someone whose entire life is in union with God. *Lectio divina* diligently practiced can allow us to become that person.

*Lectio* should begin as attentive openness and expectancy. In *lectio*, we listen for the still and quiet wordless voice of God. In *meditatio*, we reflect on what we have received from God in *lectio*. *Oratio* is our response to the stirring of our spirit. This follows the pondering of God’s word to us. *Contemplatio* is where we rest in the presence of God, whose word and presence have invited us to a transformative embrace.

*Lectio* as a holistic prayer is a gift from God for all Christians. What we do with *lectio divina* is our gift back to him. To sum up, Brenner advocates that prayer is not merely something we do. Prayer is also what God does in us. We must be open to God if there is to be a transformation in us.

*Thomas J. Rillo, oblate
Bloomington, IN*