Seeing the *Rule of St. Benedict* through the eyes of St. Paul

Those who are familiar with the history and interpretation of the *Rule of St. Benedict* know that one of the principles used to understand this little document claims that the author intended his rule to be nothing more than the extension of sacred Scripture. An example of this principle can be found by looking at a very important passage of St. Paul’s letter to the Philippians.

The passage is Phil 2:5-11, which is sometimes referred to simply as the “Philippians hymn.” In this hymn, St. Paul sets forth, in very dramatic fashion, an outline of the saving work of Jesus. The hymn is parabolic in that it reverses the dynamic that most people would expect to take place.

Here God’s saving action is accomplished in Jesus, who though He was truly God did not save humanity through forceful power, domination or military strength. Instead, He fully embraced the human condition to the ultimate point of dying on the cross.

While on the surface this looks like total defeat and humiliation, the hymn tells us that it is victory and exaltation. Unlike Adam and Eve, who grasped at equality with God and lost, Jesus, who was from the beginning God, did not grasp at anything, but emptied himself in total self-giving for the salvation of all.

According to St. Paul, this saving action of Jesus rested on the two foundation stones of humility and obedience: “he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross” (Phil 2:8). For St. Paul, humility is the virtue of authenticity. To be humble is to be grounded in what is real, authentic and honest.

Obedience for St. Paul does not mean simply agreeing to do whatever a person in authority mandates. Obedience refers, first and foremost, to radical listening. It is a kind of listening that is open to everyone and everything without immediate judgment. It is rooted in the kind of listening Jesus exemplified as He listened to the scribes, the Pharisees, the tax collectors, the lepers and anyone else who sought Him out.

“For St. Benedict, as for St. Paul, humility is authenticity. The humble person is one who is authentic, honest and rooted in the real self.”

Fr. Eugene Hensell, OSB

Thus for St. Paul, the saving action of Jesus is rooted in humility and obedience. Paul is firmly convinced that this ought to be the foundation for all Christian spirituality. To share in the life and ministry of Jesus is to live a life rooted in the virtues of humility and obedience.

It is not by accident that two very significant chapters of the *Rule of St. Benedict* deal with obedience (Chapter 5) and humility (Chapter 7). At first glance, both of these chapters seem rather removed from the understanding of St. Paul, as expressed in Phil 2:5-11. But one has to always keep in mind that the *Rule of St. Benedict* sees the greatest obstacle to spiritual growth to be “self-will.”

*Continued on p. 2*
This loaded phrase attempts to capture the reality that the uncontrolled ego plays in the lives of most men and women. This is the grasping that Adam and Eve passed on to the human community. It is an original distortion that allows humans to believe that they can be God. The Rule of St. Benedict is basically a set of tools to confront this original distortion of self-will.

Obedience for St. Benedict is about listening. Chapter 5 might seem oppressive and highly manipulative until one gets below the surface and realizes that what the author is really stressing is our need, ultimately, to listen to God in and through the many ways God speaks to us. We need to do this radical listening in order that we might return to God the love God has so graciously bestowed on us by loving us first.

Chapter 7 is a rather unwieldy presentation of the process of humility structured around the symbol of a ladder with 12 steps. Once again, we are challenged to get below the surface to realize that these 12 steps, which today might seem strange and negative to us, have as their goal to assist men and women to strip off the layers of phoniness that have accumulated over the years through the aid of self-will.

Confronting our phoniness is not an easy task. Yet it is only when we are willing to undertake such a journey that we will discover that much of what we have spent years searching for, we already had. We did not realize that because it was hidden under so many layers of phoniness, the false self.

For St. Benedict, as for St. Paul, humility is authenticity. The humble person is one who is authentic, honest and rooted in the real self. This is a never-ending process. It is at the very heart of the Christian journey. We know this journey never ends in this life, but it does result in what we call spiritual growth. We grow deeper and deeper into the mystery of God. This spiritual growth is at the heart of what St. Paul proclaims in his letters and what St. Benedict teaches in his Rule.

Fr. Eugene Hensell, OSB
Monk of Saint Meinrad Archabbey

Reflection Questions
What did St. Benedict intend his Rule to be?
How does the author explain “seeing the Rule of St. Benedict through the eyes of St. Paul”?
Why is the saving action of Jesus rooted in humility and obedience?
In the Rule of St. Benedict, what is the greatest obstacle to spiritual growth?
How does St. Benedict in the Rule challenge us to get below the surface of humility and obedience?

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
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and Seminary and School of Theology
development@saintmeinrad.edu
800-682-0988
www.saintmeinrad.edu

Continued from p. 1

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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, 4

St. Benedict, writing in the Prologue to the Rule, refers to the monk’s obligation for doing good work. As oblates, we are asked to pray when doing even the most 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 and saying a blessing in a public restaurant is demonstrating 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.

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Oblate Council hears about new projects

The Oblate Council met with Fr. Meinrad Brune, OSB, for its fall meeting on October 15, 2011. Attending were Janis Dopp, Dennis Skelton, Mike Reffett, Gail Chambers and Al Kovacs. Chris Topa joined the meeting via telephone.

Fr. Meinrad presented an update of the oblate community statistics. There are approximately 971 active oblates and 169 oblate novices of Saint Meinrad Archabbey. Oblates are encouraged to renew their oblation each year and return their Bona Opera forms. In addition to providing spiritual help to oblates, these help the Oblate Office keep track of the community.

Fr. Meinrad and the Council continue to work on plans to have council members and selected oblates speak at oblate chapter meetings. Presentations offered by oblates will not replace or reduce visits by Archabbey monks, but will help the community share gifts and talents.

Mike Reffett presented the Finance Committee report. Despite a weak national economy, the oblate community’s finances remain healthy, thanks in large part to the generosity of its members and other individual donors. Reffett and Fr. Meinrad also reported on the status of upcoming publications. The Benedictine Oblate Companion, 2nd edition, will be printed soon, and progress continues on a new oblate history book.

The Council took some time to review comments made by those who attended the biennial meeting of the North American Association of Benedictine Oblate Directors, which was held at Saint Meinrad Archabbey July 1-6, 2011. Overall, the comments were very positive. Many lavished praise on the Benedictine hospitality offered by the community. The next major gathering of oblates will be the 2013 World Congress of Oblates in Rome. Saint Meinrad will send representatives.

As part of a project to enhance the Archabbey’s web presence, Fr. Meinrad and the Oblate Council were invited to provide updates for the oblate community pages of the monastery website. Following a brief discussion, a small committee was formed to assist Fr. Meinrad with this task. Look for improvements in the near future.

The next meeting of the Oblate Council is April 21.

Albert Kovacs, oblate
Indianapolis, IN

Oblate gives presentation on Archabbey Church floor’s symbolism

Oblate Maureen Grant gave a presentation for the November 12, 2011, meeting of the Indianapolis Chapter of Benedictine Oblates. Her topic was “A Description of the Saint Meinrad Archabbey Church Pavement – the Beautiful Marble Floor and its Symbolism.”

Grant, a high school mathematics teacher and a student in the Saint Meinrad Seminary and School of Theology Lay Degree Program, has been fascinated with the mathematics and theological symbolism of the church pavement since she first walked into the Archabbey Church in February 2001.

In 2006, she received a Lilly Teacher Creativity Fellowship, which allowed her to meet Ben Nicholson, the architect who designed the floor as part of the renovation of the Archabbey Church in the 1990s. The fellowship also gave her the opportunity to travel to Rome to study Cosmatesque mosaics, the 12th- and 13th-century marble tilings that inspired Nicholson’s design.

During the talk, Grant shared information about the theological symbolism of some of the prominent design elements of Cosmatesque mosaics and of the Saint Meinrad Archabbey pavement. Of particular interest are two designs that are shared by the 12th-century and the 20th-century designs: the triangle-within-triangle patterns and the circular interlace design that extends through the nave of the church.

The triangle-within-triangle patterns, called “Sierpinski triangles,” are symbolic of the dichotomy between order and chaos. The circular interlace pattern, called a “guilloche,” was used in Cosmatesque design to set the stage for liturgical procession. In the Saint Meinrad pavement, it is symbolic of the ebb and flow of liturgy and of the worshippers who gather in the church in prayer and then return to the world outside.

At the end of her talk, she displayed a copy of a painting of the Archabbey Church floor, which she completed as a project for Fr. Denis Robinson’s Trinity course in the spring of 2010. The painting features an Easter hymn written by Fr. Harry Hagan, OSB, which embodies the geometry and the symbolism of the pavement.

see Oblate News, p. 4
Fr. Brendan speaks at New York Day of Recollection

Oblates praying for each other every chance they get is one way to love and support God’s call in our lives. Another way is the opportunity to engage in lectio divina with a passage of Scripture or sacred reading that is inspiring to someone else.

For a further taste of the Day of Recollection held on November 27, 2011, for the New York Oblates, prayerfully read some of these references from the conferences and homily given by Fr. Brendan Moss, OSB:

Year B Readings for Advent I
Rule of St. Benedict, Chapter 58
Rule of St. Benedict Prologue, verses 4, 8, 21, 37, 41, 49
John 15:11-17

I always expect to encounter something new at an oblate retreat. Joys and challenges, great and small, are always shared during these times. However, one of the greatest events that usually takes place during these times is an investiture of an oblate novice or the profession of a new oblate. This day saw the birth of a new oblate, Patrick Augustine Hanly.

Meeting new people or hearing new information is not the only experience of “newness” gained from the retreat. Another type, which Benedictine spirituality relishes, is a fresh encounter with what I’ve seen or read before. Fr. Brendan offered two conferences on how an oblate’s everyday life can be re-energized and renewed by re-reading the Prologue of St. Benedict’s Rule.

To acknowledge and embrace the reality of God’s loving relationship with me, I need to concretely do something intentional. I need to be present to God by praying, rooting myself in and imitating the life of Jesus Christ, opening fully to God’s grace and allowing that grace to overflow in my heart continuously.

Then, I need to demonstrate that I value this relationship with God by acting in the world. Bringing the fruits of my encounter with God, I share those same fruits with others. This is because I am called to imitate God. Love as personal and shared foundation is the true source of both divine and human fulfillment.

Fr. Brendan said each of us must struggle to find the way to live out this divine Christian life while honoring whatever vows, responsibilities, charisms and “holy thorns” (2 Corinthians 12:1-10) God has given us.

St. Benedict wrote down a rule reflecting a lifetime of experience and vision. He wrote like someone writing “clearly upon tablets, so that one can read it readily…” (Habakkuk 2:2). His rule is a pilgrim journey of living out his love of God, neighbor and, yes, even his enemy.

St. Benedict challenges us to remain a patient student of the “school of the Lord’s service.” Let us pray for each other that we don’t abandon this meaningful and timeless journey, but persevere to the end.

Tracy Andres, oblate
Bronx, NY

Oblates enjoy Christmas gathering

The Lancaster, PA, Oblate Chapter met at Sharon and Oliver Ogden’s home for its annual Christmas potluck on December 17, 2011. As always, good food was plentiful. Due to illness and prior engagements, the group was smaller than usual. Members enjoyed reminiscing about childhood Christmases. The next meeting, in January, will continue Br. John Mark Falkenhain’s conference on monastic practices.

Sharon Ogden, oblate
Silver Spring, PA

Fr. Meinrad recovers from surgery

Fr. Meinrad Brune, OSB, Saint Meinrad’s director of Benedictine Oblates, was diagnosed with a ruptured disc that was pinching a nerve that affects the left leg. He was in much pain. Surgery was scheduled at Deaconess Hospital in Evansville, IN, on December 21, 2011. The surgery went well.

On January 31, Fr. Meinrad saw the surgeon, who told Fr. Meinrad that he was impatient with the healing of the incision and some of the pain in the leg and was expecting healing to go very quickly. He told Fr. Meinrad to give the healing process time to work.

He also gave permission for Fr. Meinrad to drive to two chapter meetings in February and one in March. He wants Fr. Meinrad to start daily walks, starting gradually and building up to longer distances.

Fr. Meinrad says he is very grateful to all the oblates who offered prayers and sent get-well cards. These prayers, good wishes and thoughtfulness were deeply appreciated.

68 years as an oblate

On January 1, oblate John Campbell of Cincinnati, OH, celebrated his 68th anniversary as an oblate. His oblation was received by Abbot Ignatius Esser, OSB, at St. Meinrad, IN, on January 1, 1944. He remains active in the Cincinnati Area Oblate Chapter. On February 18, he celebrated his 87th birthday. Two best wishes go out to John, for his anniversary and his birthday.

Ohio oblates celebrate Epiphany

The Lancaster, Zanesville and Columbus (Ohio) oblate chapters celebrated Epiphany on January 5 at Msgr. Robert Noon’s place, The Villa. Present were 38 oblates and Br. Adam Edwards, OSB. Msgr. Noon presided in the absence of Fr. Meinrad Brune, OSB, who was recuperating from back surgery.
The evening began with Mass and then moved on to the Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan River. Everyone repeated their baptismal vows.

Recalling the wedding feast at Cana, all married couples renewed their marriage vows. Lastly, the Three Kings were chosen after the ceremonial cake was cut and distributed to the group of prayer partners who prayed during the season of Advent.

The Three Kings sang “We Three Kings” as they arrived in magnificent attire. We were then given blessed chalk with which to bless the doors of our homes. The evening continued with a great feast and warm fellowship.

_rita Merk, chapter coordinator
Lancaster, OH_

Epiphany party held at Indianapolis

Italy 2012: In the Footsteps of the Saints
(Oblate Sandra Bierly wrote this article for her parish newsletter. She and her husband are going to Italy and will visit Subiaco, which ties in with her vocation as a Benedictine Oblate. This could be a good example for other parish newsletters.)

It’s exciting to be a part of the “Italy 2012: In the Footsteps of the Saints” pilgrimage. Even though I have been to Italy twice during the last 10 years, this pilgrimage intrigued me because it included a day trip to Subiaco, the cave where St. Benedict lived for three years.

The basic facts about St. Benedict’s life and miracles can be found in Book Two of the _Dialogues_ of St. Gregory the Great, who reigned as Pope from 590 to 604 A.D., a half century after the death of Benedict.

Benedict was born in Nursia, Italy, around 480 A.D. to well-to-do parents. He was sent to Rome for higher education, but he left after a short time because he was disturbed by the vices of his fellow students and by the self-indulgent behavior of the big city.

Benedict abandoned his studies and his inheritance and chose to live in a cave in Subiaco, where he became known for his holiness and spiritual advice. In time, a group of his followers banded together and he founded 12 monasteries, each with 12 monks and an abbot.

About the year 529, Benedict left the monasteries at Subiaco and went to Monte Cassino, located about 80 miles south of Rome, where he wrote his _Rule_ for monks that is still followed today. Benedictine monasteries became centers of prayer, culture and education.

Since my husband and I are Benedictine Oblates of Saint Meinrad Archabbey, I wanted to see and stand in the cave where St. Benedict got his call to begin Benedictine monasticism about 1,500 years ago. Also, since I chose Scholastica as my saint’s name during the oblation ceremony, and she is the twin sister of St. Benedict and is known for her deep prayer life, I also wanted to stand in her footsteps.

In case you are unfamiliar with the Benedictine Oblates of Saint Meinrad, there are over 1,000 of us who are seeking a spiritual life strongly rooted in God by following the _Rule of St. Benedict_. Oblation means “offering” and oblates seek to offer themselves more fully to Christ and to the Church by pondering the wisdom found in the _Rule_.

We also share a spiritual union and human friendship with the Saint Meinrad monastic community, where we are bonded in prayer, love and commitment. By these means, we discover anew that God calls us to holiness of life and that the _Rule_ and the Benedictine community can be instruments of God’s grace in our vocation to become holy in the world.

Rich and I are especially blessed since we are both oblates. We began the discernment process together in October of 2009, when we became oblate novices. During the year of discernment, we came together at night to study the _Rule_, pray a rosary together and the Liturgy of the Hours night prayer. This special time of prayer has become my favorite part of the day.

Prayer and work (ora et labora) is the motto of Benedictine life. In everything we give glory to God. As oblates, we are called to seek balance among prayer, work, community activities, creative leisure and reading that nourishes the spirit. Oblates make promises of obedience, stability and _conversatio morum_, or ongoing conversion of life. Rich and I are looking forward to this pilgrimage and know that visiting the cave of St. Benedict will be a special blessing for both of us.

_Sandra Bierly, oblate
New Albany, IN_

INVESTITURES & OBLATIONS

November 16, 2011, Investiture—_Mr. Lance Schortmann_ of Louisville, KY.

November 27, 2011, Oblation—_Mr. Patrick Augustine Hanly_ of Mattituck, NY.

December 3, 2011, Investiture—_Mrs. Ann Tully_ of Indianapolis, IN.

December 4, 2011, Investiture—_Ms. Maria Russell_ of Louisville, KY.

December 10, 2011, Investiture—_Ms. Elizabeth Hatcher_ of St. Meinrad, IN, and _Rev. Dr. Teresa Stricklen_ of Louisville, KY.

_Continued on p. 8_
To seek God is oblate’s vocation

I became an oblate during my first year of college at Saint Meinrad in 1993. Over the years, the significance and meaning behind my oblation has matured and has shaped my spirituality.

There is a lot of talk about “spirituality” these days. Often, you will hear a person say something like, “I’m not very religious but I am a spiritual person.” I’m not really sure what this means, but I suspect that sentiments like these have something to do with the person communicating his or her feelings of good will and that such a person believes himself or herself to be someone who is kind and fair and who generally tries to “get along” with others the best they can.

For me, being an oblate is more than just a means to becoming a “good person.” It means that my spirituality is characterized by, and immersed in, the Benedictine way of life and the values found in the Rule. In his book, The Holy Longing, Ronald Rolheiser characterizes spirituality as the energy or desire that supplies a sense of purpose to our life and, at the same time, keeps us fixed together by giving us an identity uniquely our own.

Applying these ideas to my own experience, my sense of purpose as an oblate is lived out through the three promises of stability of heart, fidelity to the spirit of the monastic life and obedience to the will of God. Moreover, my identity as a Benedictine finds its expression in a desire to truly seek God and “prefer nothing whatever to Christ” (Rule of St. Benedict, 72:11).

Stability of Heart

The oblate promise to be stable of heart is modeled after the uniquely Benedictine vow of stability of place, in which the monastic identifies a particular geographic place as his home for life – accepting that life within a particular community of persons where it is believed that God’s presence will be distinctly revealed in these circumstances.

Although there are similarities between the monastic vow and the oblate promise, the difference is in the mode of a Benedictine life expressed outside the enclosure of a monastery.

The phrase “stability of heart” brings to mind common, everyday expressions such as “his heart was not really in his work” or “the football team plays with a lot of heart.” We all understand in these expressions that the word heart has a figurative meaning. Likewise, my oblate promise to have a stable heart is a metaphor for cultivating a certain attitude.

By committing myself to stability of heart, I am promising to live out my Christian life by being rooted in the wisdom found in the Rule of St. Benedict. Therefore, I interpret “stability of heart” as a way of anchoring my energies and sense of purpose within a spirituality that embraces the major Benedictine themes of humility, simplicity, silence and hospitality.

These values become the attitudes that influence my way of thinking and provide the basis for what I choose as important in my life. In so far as my spiritual journey goes, whenever I start to stray onto a different path, the promise of stability of heart is there to hold me accountable and bring me back to my commitments.

Along with providing an anchor to my spirituality, the promise of stability of heart also relates to my affiliation with Saint Meinrad Archabbey. My promise of stability reminds me that I have a commitment to the values and specific works, ministries and apostolates of the Archabbey. The stability of my heart is demonstrated by having an unwavering affection for the Archabbey and by faithfully praying for its continued success in its works, a growth in monastic vocations and economic prosperity.

Fidelity to the Spirit of the Monastic Life

The book of James tells us that “faith without works is dead” (James 2:20). For me, the promise of fidelity to the spirit of monastic life means living out my promise of stability of heart in a practical way.

By this promise, I commit to the process of continual conversion and reform of my life through faithfully praying the Liturgy of the Hours, frequently reading from the Rule of St. Benedict and practicing lectio divina in so far as my circumstances allow. I remind myself of this promise at the conclusion of the morning or evening Office by praying: “May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and keep us faithful to the spirit of our oblate promises.”

Being an oblate allows me to be a monastic and not leave my day job (to borrow a title from Benet Tvedten). However, my monastic way of life is lived in view of the duties of my particular state in life. When I first became an oblate, I would often feel guilty when I could not pray the Liturgy of the Hours or find time to engage in lectio.

Over the years, I have discovered that is “okay.” The promise is kept by being faithful to the “spirit” of monastic life. Although I am a Benedictine, I am not a monk. I am expected to do only what I can, not what I cannot. However, the promise of fidelity means making a conscious and concerted effort to create rhythms and patterns in my life in which I can find quiet time to be with the God whom I seek.
Obedience to the Will of God

The monks of Saint Meinrad make a vow of obedience to the archabbot and to any other lawful superiors placed over them. As oblates, we make a promise of obedience to the will of God that also implies a certain respect for the archabbot of the monastery and his representatives: the oblate director and his associate directors.

The goal of the Benedictine way of life is a heart that truly seeks God. And through the Incarnation, God has taken on flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:14). Always practical, Benedictine spirituality is grounded in the everyday world around us. For me, the promise of obedience to the will of God is kept by listening to those around me – my primary relationships of family and friends as well as those to whom I am accountable.

Benedictine obedience is characterized by an openness and spontaneity. As Benedict himself points out, there is no place for murmuring or grumbling (RB 34). I try to live my obedience by being alert to what God might be saying to me in the context of my daily activities.

Sometimes I hear His voice in a song playing on the radio or in a conversation with a colleague or good friend. Whatever the case, I have promised to “be on the lookout,” if you will, for those particular moments of grace. Sometimes the things that God has to say to us are not always pleasant; however, the Benedictine heart responds with an accepting humility and a simple “yes.”

Dr. Jack Tuinier, oblate
Santa Claus, IN

Reflection Questions

In what ways do I live out my promise of “fidelity to the spirit of monastic life?”

How does my promise of “stability of heart” show itself in my daily life?

How does “obedience to the will of God” affect my relationships with others?

CHECK THE WEBSITE

Past issues of the Benedictine Oblate newsletter are available at www.saintmeinrad.edu.
Continued from p. 5

December 10, 2011, Oblation—Mrs. Helen Marie Joseph Burris of Loogootee, IN; Mr. Henry Lee Francis of Assisi Cooper of Evansville, IN; Mrs. Sally Francesca Gravatte of Ferdinand, IN; Mr. Timothy Jeremiah Mattingly of Henderson, KY; Mrs. Racine Mary O’Connell of Jasper, IN; Mrs. Catherine Teresa Benedicta Russell of Patoka, IN; and Ms. Kelly Hildegard Sollinger of Marysville, OH.

January 5, 2012, Investiture—Mr. David Archer of Bloomington, IN.

January 7, 2012, Oblation—Mr. Richard Anselm Cooper of Corydon, IN.

January 14, 2012, Oblation—Mr. David Edward Sears of Indianapolis, IN.

January 14, 2012, Investiture—Mrs. Mary Ann Shanley of Indianapolis, IN.

January 27, 2012, Investiture—Dr. Elizabeth Wourms of Beavercreek, OH.

January 28, 2012, Oblation—Mr. Lawrence John Paul Barnes of Muncie, IN.

February 11, 2012, Oblation—Mr. David Martin of Tours Jenkins and Mrs. Karen Bernadette Jenkins of Boonville, IN, and Mr. Matthew Francis of Assisi Sprauer of Centerville, OH.

February 11, 2012, Investiture—Dr. Mary Compton and Mr. Philip Hirtzel, both of Tipton, IN; and Ms. Sharon Hilmes of Indianapolis, IN.

DEATHS


Rev. Dr. Gale Colvin of Zanesville, OH, died November 25, 2011.

Mrs. Betty Assom of Evansville, IN, died January 11, 2012.


UPCOMING EVENTS

May 19, 2012—For the Ohio Day of Recollection in Columbus, OH, Fr. Noël Mueller, OSB, will present conferences on the theme of “Expressing Compassion: Living the Rule Compassionately.”

June 11-14, 2012—Oblate Study Days will have the theme of sacraments (church). One of the duties of an oblate is to stay close to the sacraments. (Protestant oblates should remain close to their faith tradition.) Fr. Prior Kurt Stasiak, OSB, will present “The Sacraments: Means of Grace, Ways of Life.”

July 11, 2012—The day of recollection at Saint Meinrad for oblates will feature conferences by Br. Zachery Wilberding, OSB, on lectio divina: “Praying the Word of God.”

August 31-September 3, 2012—The New York oblates will celebrate their annual Labor Day weekend retreat with Fr. Subprior Guerric DeBona, OSB. The theme will be “Grace on Fire: How to Understand Reading and the Word of God.”

September 8, 2012—The Lancaster, PA, Day of Recollection in the Amish country will feature Fr. Joseph Cox, OSB. His presentations will be on “Keeping God in Our Everyday Life through Lectio Divina.”

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

November 25, 2012—The Day of Recollection for New York oblates will have Br. Zachery Wilberding, OSB, as the presenter on the theme of lectio divina titled, “Praying the Word of God.”

December 7-9, 2012—The Advent Retreat at Saint Meinrad 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

Recent volunteers in the Oblate Office were Novice Anushka Fonseka, OSB, John Lehner, Pat Reckelhoff, Mike and Michele Reffett, Tom and Joan Rillo, Novice Matthew Scheeser and Dennis Skelton.

Newly invested oblate novices, from left, Rev. Dr. Teresa Stricklen and Elizabeth Hatcher listen to some instruction by Fr. Meinrad Brune, OSB, oblate director.
Faithful Witnesses
Br. Silas Henderson, OSB
Monk of Saint Meinrad Archabbey
Blessed George Gervase
Feast: April 11

George Gervase was born in Sussex, England, in 1569. After serving as a soldier in Flanders and with the Spanish army, he entered the English College at Douai, France, to study for the priesthood. Ordained a secular priest at Cambrai in 1603, he was sent to serve as a missionary to England’s persecuted Catholic communities the following year.

Banished from England after two years of ministry, he made a pilgrimage to Rome, where he decided to join a religious order. George entered the newly established Benedictine priory of St. Gregory at Douai and, following his novitiate, he returned to England.

He was arrested after only two months of ministry and imprisoned in the Gatehouse at Westminster and tried at the “Old Bailey.” Blessed George freely admitted he was a priest, for which he was condemned to death. It is likely that he solemnly professed the vows of obedience, stability, and conversatio shortly before being hanged, drawn, and quartered at Tyburn on April 11, 1608. Blessed George Gervase was beatified in 1929.

Our stabilitas, that uniquely Benedictine vow of “place,” is not necessarily about geography or buildings. To be committed to stability means to commit oneself to both a community and a way of life. However, as Dom David Knowles observed in The Benedictines, “exceptional circumstances, in the past or present, have caused the highest authorities of the Church to call upon such priests as existed anywhere to aid in spreading or maintaining religion in certain districts.”

This was the work to which Blessed George Gervase, monk-missionary in Reformation-era England, was called. And it is in this mission that we discover another facet of our commitment to stability – working to provide for future generations.

Whether our stability manifests itself in buildings of brick and mortar, in fidelity to the monastic tradition or, as in the case of Blessed George, working for the survival of the faith itself, our ultimate end must be the greater glory of God and service to the Church. Stability is not about finding comfort and convenience for contemplation. We create communities and build up the Church because we believe that what we do here and now impacts and shapes the faith and freedom of those who will come after us.

Reflection Questions

How do I manifest my commitment to stability in my day-to-day life?

How have I been nurtured and sustained by the faith of those who came before me?

How do I understand my faith as affecting the future? What legacy am I leaving for future generations?

During the New York Labor Day Weekend Retreat, September 2-5, 2011, the oblates and the retreat master, Br. John Mark Falkenhain, OSB, celebrated the 50th anniversary of priesthood of Fr. Meinrad Brune, OSB.

Oblate Jack Mitenbuler was chosen as one of the kings at the Epiphany party held by the Indianapolis Chapter.

Oblate Irene Kovacs holds her daughter, Madeline, who was chosen as one of the kings of the Indianapolis Chapter for the Epiphany celebration.
Selected commentaries on the Rule of St. Benedict

Editor’s Note: This is the second in a series of commentaries on the Rule of St. Benedict. Below are commentaries on the Prologue from Hubert Van Zeller, OSB, and Adalbert De Vogue, OSB. The Prologue is an invitation for prospective monks, nuns and oblates to become members of a Benedictine monastic community.


In his Prologue, Benedict’s opening paragraph demonstrates three things: his purpose in writing, the public that he is addressing and, in all probability unintentional, his own cast of mind. According to Van Zeller, the Prologue is aimed at monks seeking only God. Benedict also tells the way in which they are to do this: that is, by compunction and contemplation.

All else that follows in the Rule is only an elaboration of this theme. “Hearken, O my son, to the precepts of your master, and incline the ear of your heart: willingly receive and faithfully fulfill the admonition of your loving father, that you may return by the labor of obedience to Him from whom you had departed through the sloth of disobedience” (Prologue, 1-2).

Benedict lays down the condition for the monk’s future service: “hearken” and “willingly receive.” The monk’s main task is to listen to the voice of God and to assimilate His Word and to recognize it and to fulfill it faithfully. Union with God is the true meaning of the monastic vocation and the soul must learn to search for God’s love and abide in it.

Faith expresses itself in obedience. Where faith is strong, obedience follows. In the Prologue, the characteristic element of the Benedictine way of life is declared. Stability is the specific quality of the Benedictine Rule. It is by persevering in the monastery until death that monks develop their likeness to Christ.

Benedict is content in his Prologue to touch upon what he considers to be the fundamentals. Van Zeller states in his commentary that special weight is attached to stability and the sequence of Benedict’s Rule is carefully planned. This is shown by the way St. Benedict continues the closing thoughts of his Prologue in the opening chapter of his legislative code. The general direction of the Rule is consistent with clear dominant movements.


Adalbert de Vogue is a monk of La Pierre-qui-vire monastery in France.

De Vogue begins his commentary on the Prologue by stating that Benedict’s legislation in the Prologue is intended for monks who wish to be perfect disciples of Christ. He points out that the Christian character one would expect to see in the Prologue is minimal. It certainly appears in the beginning and at the end of the Prologue.

The New Testament references are not as numerous as those of the Old Testament. The Gospel is mentioned several times and the words of the apostles are implicitly reproduced. Benedict also introduces several Scriptural passages from Psalm 33:12-16 and Psalm 14:1-5.

De Vogue points out that Benedict’s principal design was to introduce quotations from the psalms, to present them, to gloss them, to connect them to each other and to draw conclusions from them. According to de Vogue, there is, at the center of the Prologue, a double borrowing from the Old Testament and many citations of the

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Under a Rule and an Abbot: The Human Face of Monastic Life

The Advent retreat conference for the Saint Meinrad Benedictine Oblate Community was presented by Archabbot Justin DuVall, OSB. About 100 oblates attended the retreat, held December 9-11, 2011.

The archabbot framed each of the five conferences as 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?

Below is a summary of the first conference: “Does the Abbot Ever Take a Nap?” Over the next four issues of Benedictine Oblate, the other conferences will be examined.

Archabbot Justin opened the conference with a description of Saint Meinrad’s monastic community. He talked about St. Benedict’s Chapter 1, “The Kinds of Monks.”

First, there are the cenobites who live in a monastery, under a rule and an abbot. Next are the anchorites, or hermits, who have lived through trials and gone to the desert. God alone is both their rule and their abbot.

Then there are the kinds of monks that Benedict does not like. They are the sarabaites and the gyrovagues and they are their own rule and abbot.

Benedict feels that the cenobites are the strong kind of monks. The cenobites stand between the Rule (written document) and the flesh-and-blood abbot. The abbot’s job is to give strong monks something to learn from and the weaker monks nothing to run from.

The abbot stands between the Rule and the monastic community. The abbot provides the human face of monastic life. Oblates have a better understanding of monastic life than the casual visitor to the monastery. They may even get to know some of the monks personally. They learn to recognize new faces, such as novices.

The motto of Benedictine life is ora et labora, or prayer and work. The monks at Saint Meinrad pray and many oblates have seen them in the Archabbeey Church. But the monks also work. Saint Meinrad operates the Seminary and School of Theology, and many monks work there.

Br. Angelo makes the habits for the monks, Fr. Germain works with wood and makes the caskets for the monks, and Br. Martin has a studio for his artistic creations. Fewer oblates get to see this side of the monastic life.

Does the abbot ever take a nap? He is busy holding together the monastic community and ensuring that everything functions harmoniously. We live in a world that often focuses on speed and lots of choices. While this can often mean good things, such as advanced technology, speed and choices can cause tensions in individuals. We need to make choices that will help us keep our sanity and slow down.

This retreat is a good example. We need to have balance, but more than that, we need to have a rhythm that can hold a number of activities in harmony. We need to learn to roll with the punches and have flexibility. Does the abbot ever take a nap? Yes, occasionally he does.

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Psalter, the wisdom books and the prophets.

He also stipulates that if we are to understand the Prologue, we must keep in mind that it is, in essence, a simple extract from the Rule of the Master. The Master’s Rule is three times as long as Benedict’s Rule. Although Benedict based his Prologue on the Prologue of the Rule of the Master, he does not stray from the concept that the monastery is a school of the Lord’s service.

De Vogue reiterates what other commentaries have said about the Prologue. It is an invitation to seek God and to practice stability, humility and adherence to the Benedictine Rule.

Thomas J. Rillo, oblate
Bloomington, IN

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contemporary society. His chapter on Benedictine hospitality provides beautiful reflections and suggestions for oblates to consider in their own lives. As he writes, “[Benedictine] manners…pleasantly contrast with the noisy coarseness that so often characterizes our society” (p 90).

The final chapter invites us to seek a “Stimulating Training School for the Lord,” and gives insights into discipline and space, discernment and prudence, corrections of flaws, frugality, rest and patience, and striving for perfection.

While well-grounded academically, the book is easy, light reading, yet rich with insights. The author’s thoughts warrant reflection to appreciate the depth of insight and meaning contained within these pages.

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Thomas J. Rillo, oblate
Bloomington, IN

Gene Ritter, oblate
Charlotte, NC

*Reading Room*

(The winter issue of the oblate newsletter included a review of this book. Oblate Director Fr. Meinrad Brune, OSB, asked two oblates for perspectives on this book. This is the second.)


*A Blessed Life* is a highly readable book that reflects on the relevance and accessibility of a Benedictine way of life to those who live and work outside a monastery. In the introduction, the author tells us this book grew out of new insights from his subsequent spiritual reading, reflection and conversations. Typical of his gentle style and inviting tone, he draws the reader to seek similar continued spiritual growth and understanding.

The book explores conditions and attitudes that form the framework for a life that will rest in God’s blessing and “good days.” Derkse discusses the cultivation of silence and restrained speech; the dedication to work and study; the importance of humility (described as the courage to serve); the cultivation of hospitality, care and stewardship; mutual respect and taking care to speak “good words.”

Looking at how Benedictine life has adapted itself as it has stretched across time throughout the world, Derkse offers interpretations and suggestions for people living in today’s world. Practices of silence, disciplined reading, work, hospitality and good speech are among the areas he explores.

Following the example of St. Benedict in the *Rule*, the longest chapter of this text pays particular attention to the “twelve signposts” of humility. Derkse looks at how each one might offer guidance to struggles in

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