I can’t; we can: Prayer in the Christian tradition

“[Jesus says] ‘I don’t know how to pray. I can’t concentrate. My prayer is full of distractions. Is there anybody listening?’ Each of us could add to that list of problems. But if I just put ‘Lord comma’ before each complaint, I get, ‘Lord, I can’t pray. Lord, I can’t concentrate. Lord, my prayer is full of distractions. Lord, are you there?’ Surprise! I’m praying, and Jesus is praying with me.”

Prayer is, first of all, a matter of listening, listening to the voice of the Lord inviting us to become friends and allow the Lord of the Universe, the saving God, to become brother to us all. He tells us that He stands at the door and knocks. A real gentleman.

He will never kick the door down. Then I answer, respond, enter into conversation. I pray. I listen with the ear of the heart.

The Book of Psalms, 150 sung poems, is a school of prayer. Those Spirit-inspired ways of talking with God supply us with more theological information than any other part of the Hebrew Scriptures. They are time capsules encasing the praise, pain, plea, hope and sorrow of our spiritual ancestors.

They are as relevant to us today as they were to the people who first prayed them. Amazingly, there is not one word in all 150 psalms about how to pray. The unwritten “instruction manual” seems to say, “Read these with faith and that’s all you need to know about prayer.”

True, these prayer-poems grew up a long, long time ago in a culture and language not our own. They are not McPsalms that can be quickly gulped down, but our spiritual ancestors over the centuries guarantee that they do not result in spiritual indigestion. They’re worth the chewing they demand for proper nourishment.

“We who are baptized have the eye of the Spirit,” said an early Christian teacher, and our Spirit-eye looks at words written perhaps 3,000 years ago and sees Spirit-words listening to God’s voice, talking with Him, arguing with Him, thanking Him, begging His help against lion-like enemies roaring for blood.

Their words went up to the God who created them, who made astounding promises to them, cherished them and punished them when they forgot about Him, took them back when they said “sorry.” This is the God who heard their cry and freed them when men crushed them, whose love never gave up on them. They grew to understand that they were chosen to keep the divine flame alive in a cold, hostile world, keep it alive until the mysterious Promised One would come among them to set things right forever.

Through the agonies and ecstasies of their own history and personal experience, they gradually came to develop a radical dependence on this God who had proved to be a mighty helper in time of distress when there was no one else to help. They realized that this dependence was the root of their physical well-being and their human freedom and dignity. In the psalms, they offered Him a sacrifice of praise.

Jesus knew these psalms and prayed them. During the Emmaus walk on
Thoughts on an oblate’s prayer life

Oblate Mike Reffett from Evansville, IN, came across some notes taken at a 2004 talk given by then-Archabbot Lambert Reilly, OSB. Archabbot Lambert gives many retreats, with a number involving Mother Teresa’s sisters. He is known for a great understanding of prayer. Mike shares some of his thoughts with you:

Prayer is our first duty in life. Conversion comes through prayer and reflection. You will not go to heaven without it. To say you don’t have time for prayer is an insult to God.

Pray as you can. If you don’t, your prayer life will get worse. Don’t stop because you think you are not good at it. Pray to please God, not yourself.

The Eucharist is the best prayer. Next is the Divine Office (Liturgy of the Hours). If the psalms were good enough for Jesus, they are good enough for you. Lectio divina comes next as a way to pray.

If you read authors of prayer, focus on the same guides rather than jumping around. Find who and what you like.

Do not expect to become a prayer expert. Most of us are not experts. St. Teresa of Avila knew one nun who never was able to meditate on her own. But she prayed the rosary constantly anyway and she was the most charitable person Teresa knew.

A POINT TO PONDER FROM THE RULE

“‘We must know that God regards our purity of heart and tears of compunction, and not our many words.’

Rule of St. Benedict, Chapter 20, Verse 3

St. Benedict probably took as inspiration for this verse the scriptural passage from Matthew 6:7 that criticizes wordy prayers that assume God is deaf or not listening and needs to be overwhelmed by an abundance of words.

The assumption is that God must be persuaded before He will act upon the prayers. The contrast here is verbosity versus intensive prayer. Pure prayer emanating from purity of heart is a very old concept and not always understood. The emphasis is on focus rather than on the dispersion of prayer.

The pure heart, the contrite heart, has but one focus and that is God. It is not just a matter of concentration. Often, highly intelligent people do not know how to pray. They may lack emotional intensity, a deep conviction or a depth of feeling. Brevity of prayer with heartfelt intensity is the best road to God.

Gift certificates for retreats available

Saint Meinrad Archabbey is offering gift certificates for a retreat of two nights and three days at the Archabbbey Guest House and Retreat Center.

To purchase a gift certificate, contact the Guest House and Retreat Center, (800) 581-6905.

The monastic community prays five times a day in the Archabbey Church.

Pray for Vocations

Benedictine Oblate is published four times a year by Saint Meinrad Archabbey.

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Chapter begins e-mail prayer list

In January, the Louisville Oblate Chapter discussed ways to develop and manage an e-mail prayer list for those in need of special prayer. If one was in need of prayer, an e-mail message could be sent to the coordinator of the e-mail list, who would notify the oblate group by e-mail. The person needing prayer would make the request and then eliminate the request when prayer was no longer needed. Near the end of March, Cheryl Zoldak had the Benedictine Oblate Prayer List started.

Oblate named to search committee

Oblate William C. Hine of Terre Haute, IN, is a member of the Christian Theological Seminary Board of Trustees and chairperson of the Student Life Committee. In March, he was appointed to the search committee for a new president of Christian Theological Seminary.

Oblates celebrate anniversary

Edward and Hamako Ringle of Jeffersonville, IN, are celebrating their 25th anniversary as oblates.

Louisville Chapter hears about praying the psalms

A day of reflection on “Praying the Psalms” was presented by Fr. Harry Hagan, OSB, on February 20 and was enjoyed by 25 members of the Louisville Oblate Chapter. The first conference focused on Hebrew poetry—whatever repeats is important, repetition creates time to think and feel, creation of unity by naming half and half (such as “day and night,” meaning all the time). The psalms are other people’s prayers.

The second conference used the idea of “identifying listening at a window or in front of a mirror”—at a window, we are looking through to someone else’s prayer and may not relate to it; in front of a mirror, we may be able to feel in the psalm what is happening in our own lives. Prayer arises as we deal with and respond to the psalms. Prayer is the way we carry on our relationship with God.

The third conference was designed to help us recognize the psalms of praise and psalms of thanks. The praising mode points to a good quality or trait someone possesses. We must receive before thanks can be given.

Robert Hess, oblate
George Thompson, oblate
Louisville, KY

Oblate takes on pastorate

An oblate, Fr. Michael Jon Gregory Pahls, has been called to serve as rector/pastor of Trinity in the Fields Anglican Church in Marion, AR (Greater Memphis).

Saint Meinrad retreat focuses on healing human nature

Sixty-five oblates of Saint Meinrad Archabbey enjoyed a two-day retreat, “How the Benedictine Vow of Obedience Heals the Real Hurt of Our Human Nature,” on March 19 and 20. It was presented by Fr. Noël Mueller, OSB.

Beginning with the story of the fall of Adam and Eve to describe the sinful state of humanity, their sin being caused by disobedience and pride—the roots of all sin are in us. Looking at Philippians 2:6-11, a hymn used by St. Paul describes how the obedience of Jesus brings about healing for us. In Colossians 1:15, we can see again how Jesus’ obedience accomplishes reconciliation with God for us.

For Christian obedience, Fr. Noël used Abraham, Moses, Mary and Joseph as scriptural examples of sacrificial service in obedience to God. A fifth example of sacrificial service was the saints, among whom we are numbered. By example, proclamation, prayer and action, we give witness to the power of self-sacrificial obedience in our lives.

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see Oblate News, p. 4

Fr. Meinrad Brune, OSB, receives the oblation of seven oblate novices in the Archabbey Church. From left are Patricia Mary Reckelhoff, John Joseph Pairitz, Rev. Larry Dunstan Minter, Margaret Mary McCarthy, Thomas Gregory Hubert, Henry Joseph Powell and Timothy Martin Aubuchon.
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1 Corinthians 15:3ff, we see how the obedience of faith brings coordination and reciprocity into the Christian community.

The Benedictine obedience conference began looking at the Rule. In the Prologue, the first word is “Listen”—a meditation in itself. Chapter 5 firmly roots all true obedience in the love of God. The monk obeys with the strength provided by God’s love and obeys to demonstrate his love for God.

The last conference, on “Musings of a Post-modern Monk,” found Fr. Noël beginning with an introduction to post-modernism. The word is marked mostly by its lack of a center for interpreting experience. The pre-modern world saw experience in light of the greater universal God among them. The modern world was marked by a turn to humanity as the center for interpreting human experience.

The result of the change in the post-modern world is isolation. We are now so preoccupied with ourselves that we become whole worlds by ourselves. The monastic response to the post-modern world is to call people to live in communion with self-awareness.

The monastic life, marked by prayer and work for the kingdom, is a healing response to the isolation caused by the post-modern world, because the monk strives to live self-awareness with a strong Christ-centered spirituality. The world needs the witness of monastic joy in obedience to counter the alienation of post-modernity.

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

Finance Committee looks at proposed budget for 2010-11

The Oblate Finance Committee met and reviewed the oblate income statement from July 1 to February 28 and the 2010-11 proposed budget, at its meeting on April 16. Although retreat revenue has decreased from the previous year, gift revenue has held steady.

The budget for the upcoming year reflects a loss, mostly due to production costs for Oblate Companion books. Excluding book costs and revenue, current and upcoming year results will likely be close to breaking even.

Oblate expenses to be offset with revenue are not limited to: lay staff wages, travel, printing, postage, telecommunications and office overhead. It was noted the Archabbot generously does not charge the oblate community for the significant time given by Fr. Meinrad and other monks.

Mike Reffett
Evansville, IN

Sixteenth Meeting of Oblate Council

The Oblate Council met on the Hill on April 17. Present at the meeting were Dennis Skelton, Al Kovacs, Pat Phillips, Jennie Latta, new member Mike Reffett, and Jerry Maillet, member of the Finance Committee, as observer. In the absence of Janis Dopp, the meeting was opened with prayer and a reading of the Statement of Purpose of the Oblate Council by Pat Phillips, who chaired the meeting.

The Council marked with sadness the death of Council and Finance Committee member Jerry Campbell, who contributed so much to the community and was often the author of these reports.

Fr. Meinrad reported on the upcoming biennial meeting of the North American Association of Benedictine Oblate Directors, to be held at Saint Meinrad Archabbey July 1-6, 2011. The theme for the conference will be “Embracing Creation with Reverence and Hospitality: Listening to Scripture and Rule Speak.” Many of the oblates will be called upon to help with hospitality for this event.

He also reported on upcoming publications. The book of prayers and rituals for oblates is expected to arrive from the bindery in August. Articles for the second edition of Benedictine Oblate Companion are being prepared. It is anticipated that it will be ready for distribution March 1, 2011. Both of these books will be bound in a style similar to that of the Liturgy of the Hours for Benedictine Oblates.

Also in the early stages of production are an Oblate Novice Companion, which will be produced in loose-leaf format to accommodate the addition of monthly oblate lessons.

Mike Reffett gave the report of the Finance Committee. After accounting for the lack of matching of expenses and revenue related to the Liturgy of the Hours book, it appears that we are breaking even. Contributions to the work of the community by oblates have remained steady. A preliminary budget for the upcoming fiscal year was presented and discussed.

A good deal of time was devoted to discussing the ongoing work of implementing the lessons in leadership gleaned from Fr. Eugene Hensell’s talks last summer. A number of practical steps were discussed, which will be presented to Archabbot Justin DuVall, OSB, for approval.

The meeting was concluded at 4 p.m. with thanks from Fr. Meinrad for the work of the Council. The next scheduled meeting of the Oblate Council is July 11.

Jennie D. Latta, oblate
Memphis, TN

see Oblate News, p. 5
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Monk’s father dies
On Saturday, April 24, Ted Moss, the father of Fr. Brendan Moss, OSB, died. Fr. Julian Peters, OSB, represented Saint Meinrad Archabbey at the funeral in Brooklyn, NY. Fr. Brendan helps with the oblate work and has attended chapter meetings and given retreats and days of recollection. We express our sympathy to Fr. Brendan and assure him of our prayers.

Five new titles published in Notes from the Monastery
Five new titles in the Abbey Press series, Notes from a Monastery: The Sacred Way Every Day, were released May 1, bringing the total number in the series to 14. The newest titles are: “The Psalms as Soul Food: A Pattern of Prayer for Life” by Br. Matthew Mattingly, OSB “The Heart of Charity: Learning to Love by Doing What is Right” by Fr. Joel Ripplinger, OSB “Anchoring Your Life: Stability in a Moving World” by Br. Francis Wagner, OSB “Caring for Creation: Our Connection and Responsibility to Earth” by Sr. Macrina Wiederkehr, OSB.

Oblate earns doctor of ministry degree
Oblate Michele A. Martinez of Brookfield, IL, completed a Doctor of Ministry program in theological reflection, graduating May 8 from the University of Saint Mary of the Lake/Mundelein Seminary in Mundelein, IL. Her thesis title is “Finding God ‘The Gena Project’: A Process of Evangelization for Preadolescent and Adolescent Children.”

Two celebrate ordinations
The ordination to the priesthood of Fr. James Howard Hatfield III was held on May 29 at St. Joseph Cathedral in Columbus, OH.
Br. Thomas Gricoski, OSB, was ordained to the priesthood on June 20, by Archbishop Daniel Buechlein, OSB. Br. Thomas began visiting oblates and giving conferences in 2007. After ordination, he will begin studies in philosophy at the Catholic University of Louvain in Belgium.

Liturgy book still available
The Liturgy of the Hours for Benedictine Oblates book is still available from the Oblate Office.
The price is $20 a book plus $5 for shipping and handling. Already, 1,200 books have been sold.◆

INVESTITURES & OBLATIONS
February 4, 2010, Investiture—Mrs. Judith Smith-Ille of Bloomington, IN.
February 7, 2010, Oblation—Mr. J. Scott Augustine Allen of Evansville, IN.
February 20, 2010, Investitures—Mr. Bob Tankersley of Versailles, KY, and Mr. Stephen Zanolini of Franklin, TN.
February 27, 2010, Oblation—Ms. Linda Francis Grant of Kettering, OH.
February 28, 2010, Oblation—Mr. John Bernard Oda of Albany, KY.
February 28, 2010, Investitures—Mrs. Donna and Mr. W. Ron Clark of Georgetown, OH; Mr. Stephen Drees of Mason, OH; and Mr. Peter Shaffer of Benton Harbor, MI.
March 5, 2010, Investitures—Mr. Scott Tretter of Oakland City, IN, and Mr. Steven Manuel Perez of West Palm Beach, FL.
March 6, 2010, Oblations—Ms. Marie Gilmore and Miss Margaret Ann Morehouse, both of Farmingdale, NY; and Mr. Todd John Harman of White House, TN.
March 16, 2010, Investiture—Miss Judith Umlauf of Hot Springs, NC.
March 20, 2010, Oblations—Mr. Timothy Martin Aubuchon and Mr. Henry Joseph Powell, both of St. Charles, MO; Mr. Thomas Gregory Hubert of St. Louis, MO; Mrs. Margaret Mary McCarthy of Dayton, OH; Rev. Larry Dunstan Minter of Louisville, KY; Mr. John Joseph Pauritz of South Bend, IN; and Ms. Patricia Mary Reckelhoff of Schnellville, IN.
March 20, 2010, Investitures—Mrs. Donna and Mr. Edward Dennis of Marshall, MI, and Mrs. Linda Teepol of Evansville, IN.
March 27, 2010, Oblation—Mr. Joseph Lucchesio Wharton of Stevensville, MI.
March 30, 2010, Oblation—Miss Karen Jeanne Gregory White of Asheville, NC.◆

DEATHS
Mrs. Dorothy Arvin of Loogootee, IN, died on August 12, 2008.
Mr. Charles J. Gedert of Tarpon Springs, FL, died on July 22, 2009.
Mr. Anthony J. Giacovelli of Marcy, NY, died on February 9, 2010.
Mrs. Martyne Sheehan of Charlestown, IN, died on March 6, 2010.
Mr. Gerald Campbell of Chillicothe, OH, died on March 27, 2010. Jerry, as he was known, helped out in the Oblate Office. He transferred all the

see Oblate News, p. 7
Homily: To be a disciple must be a priority

**Editor's note:** Fr. Meinrad Brune, OSB, gave the homily at the community Mass on March 22, the feast of the Passing of St. Benedict. The feast was moved to March 22 from March 21, which was the Fifth Sunday of Lent. Archabbot Justin DuVall, OSB, asked Fr. Meinrad to share this homily with the oblate community.


A minister wrote about his high school experience as a runner on the track team. During the first half of the year that he joined the team, he did not win a single race. He seemed to go to the starting line with an attitude that he was going to be beaten. It was all he could do to run and lose.

He had a good coach who seemed to know what was wrong with him. The coach started to work on his mindset, his attitude. He convinced him that he had the potential to win some races. And in the second half of the year, he began to win some races. The coach had not altered his running style. The runner was in the same physical condition as before. Nothing had changed except his attitude.

This minister went on to say that he learned a lesson then that has stayed with him all his life: when we affirm, when we expect, when we are hopeful, we put ourselves in position to be picked up and be carried by the love of God, which is affirmative.

On the level of following Christ, the affirming attitude we are talking about is not a gimmick to make us a grand success in the eyes of the world. It is a response to God’s call in an affirmative manner. And we freely choose to do this.

Our readings for the Feast of St. Benedict are peppered with the importance and the power of freedom, the freedom that comes from decisiveness. Elisha is not free to follow Elijah until he has fulfilled his family responsibilities. St. John advances, as a sure test for whether one is truly a follower of Jesus, the criterion of how we love the Father and keep His commandments. If we really keep them, then we are indeed true disciples of Jesus.

The free choice urged by Jesus in today’s Gospel is much more impressive than the choice urged by Elijah in the first reading. If we are to follow Jesus, we are to follow Him now. For if we postpone and delay too long, we may run out of time.

Jesus is not arguing that we should not go to funeral Masses, but He is saying that there is no responsibility in the world to justify hesitation when it comes to responding to the Holy Spirit’s invitation to follow Him. When the opportunity is there, we should seize it and move. If we hesitate but for a moment, a glorious, noble opportunity may be missed by playing it safe.

Jesus did not reject the three potential disciples, as we heard in the Gospel. He merely brought reality into their dreams of being a disciple. His own purpose and mission were clear. Whoever would follow Him, then or now, must do so freely and with resolution. To be a disciple of Jesus must be our first priority in life, and we must find our highest joy in the decision to join Him on the road.

Jesus calls for decisiveness. He asks for undivided allegiance. Disciples live in the present, not the past. Jesus wants us to have an attitude of commitment, boldness and decisiveness. This is never easy. But the Scripture readings today encourage us to aim high. We must have the proper attitude, the vision to see things not only as they are, but as they could be.

We must have the dedication to give the best we have. And we must have the courage to accept new challenges.
in being a disciple of Jesus and, for the monks, a disciple of St. Benedict. To be a disciple is a serious calling from God and, as such, it must be considered freely and very carefully in all its ramifications.

The holy Rule of St. Benedict is one of the world’s major historical documents, dealing with perhaps the one art that Christians have always found the most agonizing, living with other Christians. St. Benedict foresaw that close living produces terrors not even Satan could dream up.

All kinds of people come to Saint Meinrad Archabbey. Often, very incompatible men are thrown together who would never have chosen to be together in an ordinary human way and yet we find ourselves living together.

Many chapters of St. Benedict’s Rule are concerned about receiving guests, running schools, serving at table, caring for the old, sleeping, handling tools with reverence. The Rule offers a precise practicality for disciples of Christ concerned with the daily and often-boring mechanics of worshipping the Lord and saving the brethren.

“Let the monks bear with the greatest patience one another’s infirmities, whether of body or character.” “Let them vie in paying obedience to one another.” “Let them practice fraternal charity with a pure heart.” “Let them fear God.”

St. Benedict says we earn this life as a disciple after years of work and patience. It is the last luxury to be won, because a true disciple of Christ is the last mystery to be faced.

The abbot of Glenstal Monastery in Ireland wrote about an old monk of their community, Fr. Oliver. A journalist interviewed Fr. Oliver, a monk in his late 70s who had entered the novitiate at age 18. The journalist asked him: “Don’t you think you have missed out on life by becoming a monk so early and having to obey all the monastic rules for over 50 years?” Fr. Oliver responded quickly with half a smile and firm voice: “Look here, I have woken up every day of every one of those years and freely chosen to be a monk.”

My conferees, I wake up every day and experience monks, young and old, like Fr. Oliver, who are committed to their call as disciples of Jesus and St. Benedict. These monks are bold in defense of their faith. They are decisive in their own personal sacrifice in living day after day the call of being a free and loyal disciple of Christ Jesus. I praise and thank God for this wonderful privilege that God has given me.

Everyone in this Archabbey Church is called to be a disciple of Christ in the vocation God wants for us. This vocation is tailored for us and we are free to choose it. To make this choice is the highest exercise of freedom possible. To be a disciple is a call to perfection for everyone: freed from anxiety, freed to let God work His salvation in us, freed for selfless loving and mutual support.

As Jesus comes to us in this Eucharist, let us renew our commitment as His disciple and let us ask Christ for the desire and strength to follow Him more perfectly in our lives today. We pray at this Mass that we might believe in the power of God’s love and freedom for us and so find them, if not easy, at least possible in the midst of all our weaknesses and faults. Amen!

Fr. Meinrad Brune, OSB
Saint Meinrad Archabbey

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videotapes of oblate retreats to DVDs, which were then catalogued for the Oblate Video Library. He had assisted Fr. Gabriel Hodges, OSB, with making Abbey Hills soap. He also served on the Oblate Finance Committee and the Oblate Council. Many oblate retreats found Jerry driving the golf cart for the oblates.

Mrs. Alice Kathryn Titterington-Philipp of O’Fallon, IL, died on April 13, 2010.

Mrs. Dorothy Colgan of St. Meinrad, IN, died on April 15, 2010.

Mrs. Elizabeth L. Harmon of Lexington, IN, died on April 23, 2010.

VOLUNTEERS APPRECIATED
Fr. Thomas D’Angelo, Ruth Engs, Suzanne Kalmar, Barbara Krick, Br. Michael Luckett, OSB, Christian McNamara, Marianna Neal, Mike Reffett, Tom and Joan Rillo, David Ruecker, Dennis Skelton, Chris Topa, Br. Luke Waugh, OSB, and Br. Timothy Wymore, OSB, were recent volunteers in the Oblate Office.

How you can help:
• Pray for vocations
• Remember Saint Meinrad in your will
• Request information about life income gifts

For more information, contact:
Barbara Balka
Director of Planned Giving
Saint Meinrad Archabbey and Seminary & School of Theology
St. Meinrad, IN 47577
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An interview with Br. Matthew Mattingly about his monastic journey

What motivated you to become a member of the monastic community of Saint Meinrad Archabbey? Will you tell us about your background?

I was born and raised a Catholic, grew up in Evansville, IN, and went to Catholic grade school and Catholic high school. I was in church every Sunday, but when I became an adult and moved out of my parents’ home, I was not very active in my faith, especially during my 20s.

After graduation from Indiana University with a business degree, I was fortunate to have landed a good job. However, throughout my 20s, I had this sense of restlessness, a sort of dissatisfied feeling with my life. I was looking for something, but I did not know quite what it was. As my 30th birthday approached, I told myself that I am an adult now and need to make some adult decisions. I have to commit myself to something.

I wrestled with the idea of becoming more active in the Church again, committing myself to my faith by returning to St. Benedict Parish in Evansville. I became involved as a Eucharistic minister and as a lector, and was very active with the St. Vincent de Paul Society—going into the inner city to distribute items to the poor.

I was dissatisfied with my job and where I was going, and I began to discern the priesthood. I talked to the vocation director in Evansville and to Fr. Gregory Chamberlin, OSB, pastor at St. Benedict, about a possible vocation. Fr. Gregory suggested that I open myself up to other facets of religious life. A monk of Saint Meinrad, he suggested that I visit Saint Meinrad Archabbey.

I went to the monastery for a visit in the fall of 2005. From the experience of being at the monastery and interacting with the monks, I knew that I could relate to them. They were real people, and I could see myself living my life with them.

In the spring of 2006, I came as a candidate. During my first two years here, I continued to discern the priesthood, but finally decided not to pursue ordination. I enjoy studying monastic history and hope one day to be able to teach. I have done some retreat work at the monastery and really enjoy doing that. I teach a youth group in Jasper one day a week in the area of scriptural studies.

Who has been influential in your life and played a role in your discernment process?

The most influential people would be my family members, my mother and my grandmother particularly. They were influential in shaping my spiritual life. My mother is a quiet religious person. I would describe her as a solid, yet unassuming, Christian. She attends Mass every Sunday and is moderately active within her parish.

During the time I was not active in the Church, although I’m sure she was disappointed, she never judged me and always kept praying for me.

Did the Saint Meinrad monastic community live up to your expectations? Were there any community members who were most helpful during your novitiate?

I expected it to be representative of real life. I did not expect an ideal community. You never know exactly the personality of a community until you live with it for a while. I was most pleasantly surprised by the personalities that I found here. There were a number of people that I was really able to connect with.

Fr. Harry Hagan, my novice master, was a very important person. The novices and juniors who were here before me were very influential and helpful to me. They welcomed me, helped me to know who I was. They were very accommodating and made me feel at home.

What in your educational background provided you with the tools and skills necessary for the research and preparation for a scholarly and refereed presentation?

Fr. Meinrad Brune was approached by Baylor University, which publishes a periodical called Christian Reflections. Every month they feature a specific topic related to Christian spirituality; the one for July is on “Monasticism, Old and New.” They wanted to profile a real-life monastery and the relationship it has with its oblates.

Fr. Meinrad asked me if I would write the article. The previous year, before I came to the monastery, I had been in graduate school at Ball State University studying history. I also
How did you get the invitation to prepare and deliver a scholarly paper for the distinguished Christian Reflections series in faith and ethics?

Once again, it was Fr. Meinrad who initially was approached by Baylor University. Knowing my interest in history, he asked me to write the research paper.

Did you choose the topic of “Monasticism Old and New: A Portrait of a Historic Monastic Community—Saint Meinrad Archabbey”?

No, I did not, but the topic sounded interesting to me and was in the area of my interest. It is a title that I could have written. I am very comfortable with it. I have finished writing the paper, and Fr. Meinrad will have several copies of it for oblates to read if they want.

Does your experience as a monk of Saint Meinrad give you the necessary background as well as information and knowledge of the pulse of the monastic community?

After four years, I have obtained a sense of the larger rhythm of the monastery and its inherent movements. Every monk has his individual rituals that identify him. Knowing our community has helped me greatly in writing my paper.

Will you give the oblate program equal time with the other organizational functions of the monastic community? Do you feel positive about the importance of the oblate program to the monastic community?

Baylor University Center for Christian Ethics asked me to focus on the old monasticism. The oblate program is a large and important part of our history. Oblates are living the principles of monasticism in the secular world. I was asked to explain how monasticism relates to lay people who are trying to live it in the world.

I focused on the monastery as a place where people come, desiring to grow closer to God. Some people decide to stay and live here. It is the same motivation for oblates, who also want to grow closer to God. The monastery is a connecting point for people who want to take the values and the structures that are here and bring them back home and into their lives.

How do you see the oblate program contributing to the monastic community?

If we did not have the oblate program, we would not be able to have the connections that support the monastery. The monastery cannot be an island unto itself, remaining autonomous. I see the oblates as mediators of the whole spirituality that we as monks are living, bringing the importance of it to the larger world.

I think that Benedictine spirituality is not just for the monastery, but is applicable to the whole world. It is the Gospel that we are living intensely, and I think the oblates are bringing a piece of the monastery back into their world. It is inspiring and motivating for the monks to see the oblates living the Rule in the world—and sometimes doing a better job of it than we are!

Was there support from the monastic community for your paper?

Yes, there was. I interviewed a number of oblates, and a number of them responded to my questions with great answers. I interviewed a number of monks, notably Fr. Meinrad and Br. Francis Wagner, who related their experiences with the oblate program. It is really the focus of this material.

Do you plan to expand your paper into a larger publication such as a book on historic monasticism?

I have no idea at this moment. Whenever I do a talk or a retreat, I always learn something that I can use again later. I think that this paper has broadened my understanding of our monastery’s history and culture. There is a need to preserve events, happenings or personages that have made the monastery what it is today.

Thomas J. Rillo, oblate
Bloomington, IN

Oblate Director Fr. Meinrad Brune, OSB, invests Linda Tepool, Donna and Edward Dennis as oblate novices during the March oblate retreat.
the first Resurrection Sunday, He preached the first Christian homily, explaining to the downcast disciples how the psalms had spoken about Him. Whether we pray them by ourselves or in community, Jesus prays with us, and we join with thousands of others around the world who are praying these same psalms.

Constant repetition over the months and years allows us to let the psalms get under our skin, shaping and forming us into the New Creation that Christ won for us. We enter into their landscape and follow the Good Shepherd along the right path. We have come to trust Him, listen to Him, to know that He cannot harm us. Shepherd that He is, He doesn’t just tell us about the path, He blazes the trail for us, even when we struggle through the valley of darkness.

Over the past 20 years, scholars have paid a great deal of attention to the Psalter. The more they studied, the more they realized that the psalms did not fit the usual categories of scriptural exegesis. They were at once liturgical prayers of praise and worship by the community as well as deeply personal words with God in all of life’s situations.

Jesus on the cross made His own the soul-wrenching protest of the 22nd Psalm: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” The psalms give us permission to speak with God about anything and everything that’s going on in our life, in all our moods: joy, anger, confusion, protest, sorrow—the whole range of human emotions and situations. It’s okay to be ourselves with God.

In conclusion, from Psalm 33, a prayer that could well sum up all the psalms, “May your love be upon us, O Lord, as we place all our hope in you.”

Fr. Vincent Tobin, OSB
Saint Meinrad Archabbey

**OBLATES: IN THEIR OWN WORDS**

“**We need to live life according to Scriptures—trying to do the will of God at all times, loving God, making time for God each day, reading the psalms until they become your prayer.”**

Tommy Polito, oblate
Whitestone, NY

**UPCOMING EVENTS**

**September 3-6, 2010**—The New York Labor Day weekend retreat will be conducted by Fr. Timothy Sweeney, OSB, on the theme of “Liturgy of the Hours.”

**September 11, 2010**—The Lancaster, PA, day of recollection will be conducted by Br. Zachary Wilberding, OSB, on the theme of “Liturgy of the Hours.”

**November 8-18, 2010**—Br. Maurus Zoeller, OSB, will host a Benedictine pilgrimage to Italy (Venice, Florence, Assisi, Norcia, Subiaco, Rome). Contact him at Saint Meinrad Archabbey, phone (812) 357-6674 or e-mail mzoeller@saintmeinrad.edu.

**November 28, 2010**—The New York day of recollection will be attended by Fr. Brendan Moss, OSB, and Br. Martin Erspamer, OSB, who will present the topic of “Liturgy of the Hours.”

**December 10-12, 2010**—The December retreat for oblates will feature Fr. Vincent Tobin, OSB, speaking on “To Pray as Jesus Prayed: The Psalms in the Liturgy of the Hours.” It will be held at Saint Meinrad Archabbey.
Learning and community offered in lay degree program

What draws a person to become an oblate of Saint Meinrad? Community is one powerful motivation. Many who become oblates find themselves deeply moved by the witness of the monks of Saint Meinrad, who have given themselves to a community that seeks God together, through thick and thin, in a particular (and particularly beautiful) corner of rural southwestern Indiana.

In the ways that are possible for them, oblates desire to belong to this community of spiritual seekers, and to the larger community of the universal Church. Learning together through retreats and oblate study weeks, and sanctifying their days by regularly praying the Liturgy of the Hours, oblates deepen their conversion and become conformed ever more fully to Christ.

This is not for the sake of winning some spiritual contest or to impress others with outward piety and uprightness, but to offer their lives in loving, humble service to others.

Like oblates, students in Saint Meinrad’s graduate lay degree programs also pursue the ideals of community, prayer, growth and service. They become part of a community of faith-filled learners who seek God by deepening their understanding of the Catholic Christian tradition.

As with the oblate’s commitment to learning and to daily, structured prayer, lay degree students embrace the discipline of rigorous intellectual engagement and study, along with spiritual, personal and pastoral formation. And like oblates, students learn in order to serve: they put their degrees to work in parish ministry (paid or volunteer), teaching, chaplaincy and a broad assortment of secular vocations.

Students can pursue a Saint Meinrad graduate lay degree through weekday courses alongside seminarians, and through a wide array of alternative course formats, such as once-a-month weekends or online courses.

Like oblates, most theology students in the lay degree program live some distance from the Hill, and they juggle their coursework alongside other family, work and parish responsibilities—still finishing their degree in three or four years. If you have faith and seek deeper understanding, please contact Kyle Kramer (kkramer@saintmeinrad.edu) to find out more about pursuing a master’s degree in theology.

Kyle Kramer
Director of Lay Degree Programs
Saint Meinrad Seminary and School of Theology

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Duties of an Oblate

1. Liturgy of the Hours: The oblate should pray daily the Liturgy of the Hours.

2. The Rule of St. Benedict: The oblate should read from the Rule of St. Benedict each day.

3. Lectio Divina: The oblate should practice lectio divina each day. This meditative reading from Scripture or other religious writings expands our love, knowledge and appreciation of the spiritual way of life.

4. Sacraments (Church): The oblate should participate frequently in the sacraments of the Eucharist and Reconciliation. (If the oblate is not Roman Catholic, then he or she should be faithful to his or her beliefs concerning Church and prayer.)

5. Presence of God: The oblate should be attentive to God’s presence in his or her ordinary, daily life.

The purpose of the oblate community and program is to assist and support the oblate in living the Christian way of life. This is done in prayer and community.

Johanna and oblate John Pairitz and Judy and oblate John Lehner pose for a photo after the oblation of John Pairitz on March 20.
Emi Griffin’s book, *Simple Ways to Pray* (Lanham, MD: Bowman and Littlefield Publishers Inc., 2006), explores the different types and techniques of prayer, outlining pragmatic strategies for beginning and maintaining an inner spiritual life. She invites readers to place themselves in the presence of God. By doing so, she contends that we open our hands, minds and hearts to receive the full potential of God’s love.

In the first chapter, the author explains how to open the treasure box of spirituality. She discusses why one should pray, what is prayer, development of an inner disposition, what is holding us back, excuses we give ourselves and how to know one is really praying. Also, she presents the many moods of prayer and how to map out the spiritual journey.

The author gives attention to praying in the Holy Spirit, praying to the Blessed Virgin Mary (Marian prayer), praying to angels and saints, intercessory prayer, contemplative styles of prayer, practical strategies in prayer and spiritual life in the Catholic tradition.

Oblates often ask how and what and when do we pray? This little book helps to answer these questions as well as takes the reader beyond them. The presentation of contemplative prayer styles is simple, concise and easy to understand. The author notes that the Benedictines speak of four types of prayer: *lectio, meditatio, oratio* and contemplation.

Prayer of recollection may not be familiar to oblates. Much of Catholic prayer is formulaic, but according to the author, the formulas are not the prayer. Prayer flows into and through the formulas of prayer. Prayer is the interior giving of the self to God, an entrance into the presence of God, and a lifting of the heart and the mind. This book is highly recommended for oblates to read and use as a resource.

*Reading Room*

Thomas J. Rillo, oblate

*Bloomington, IN*