Psalms: A closer look at the Church’s prayers

As oblates, we are asked to pray. Prayer is to be at the very center of our lives to connect us more closely with God. In many ways, this deep center gets inundated, or even buried, under the everyday debris of routine, distraction and chaotic noise of meaningless talk. Oblates are asked to pray the prayer of the Church, called the Liturgy of the Hours or Divine Office. The Liturgy of the Hours contains many psalms that we read in conjunction with scriptural readings.

Even before we became oblates, we were exposed to certain psalms in various settings, including parochial schools and some public schools. Those of us who are old enough will remember saying Psalm 23 at the beginning of the day in a public school classroom.

At Mass, psalms are included in the liturgy. The responsorial psalm is sandwiched between the Old Testament reading and the New Testament reading. The psalms are very much a part of our prayer life, and we can identify with them because we’ve experienced many of the emotions and situations depicted in them. The psalms are about people, the struggle and joy of living with God. They were written by and for the people of God, and they were conceived from the beliefs and experiences held by them.

The psalms are Israel’s gift to us. Prayers given to us by God, used by Jesus Christ, by His mother and saints, were a part of daily prayer life of earlier generations. They were the main substance of the official prayer of the Church through the centuries.

For a time, the psalms declined in usage by the laity. Fortunately for oblates, what made the psalms so unpopular in the past makes them appealing today. Psalms are realistic, and they correlate with God’s reality. They present life as a struggle and not as an idyllic, laidback state of being, where everything is milk and honey.

Nothing is held back in the psalms. They encompass the entire range of the human condition. They describe war, famine, despair, love, hate, revenge, envy, pride, failure, success, victory, anger, healing, oppression, ambition and more. We can relate to the psalms because we all have experienced some of the emotions or situations they contain.

Definition of the Psalms

What are the psalms exactly? First of all, the psalms are lyric poems. The word “psalm” derives from the Greek word ὑμνός (psalmoi). It is also from the Hebrew word זמר, meaning to pluck the strings of a harp or lute. This indicates that the psalms were written to be sung with the accompaniment of a stringed instrument. In a sense, we pluck the strings of our hearts when we recite or sing the psalms.
Brenda Blackgrove joins Oblate Office

Brenda Blackgrove of Huntingburg, IN, became the new executive secretary for the Oblate Office on December 8, 2010. She most recently worked at Memorial Hospital in Jasper, IN, in community relations, where she was office coordinator and coordinator of the Lifeline program.

She also worked about nine years at St. Joseph’s Hospital in Huntingburg as the office coordinator for plant facilities. She worked at Welborn Baptist Hospital in Evansville for 13 years as benefits specialist, where she coordinated compensation and benefits programs.

Brenda was born in Illinois, raised in Huntingburg and graduated from Huntingburg High School. She is married with two children and three stepchildren. She has 10 grandchildren, whom she loves spending time with. Her pastimes include baking cookies with her grandchildren, taking long walks and enjoying the outdoors. She says, “My calling is serving others and this is where I find peace and contentment.”

How you can help:

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

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

A POINT TO PONDER FROM THE RULE

“Above all else we urge that if anyone finds this distribution of the psalms to be unsatisfactory, he should arrange whatever he judges better, provided that the full complement of one hundred and fifty psalms is by all means carefully maintained every week, and that the series begins anew each Sunday at Vigils.”

Rule of St. Benedict, Chapter 18:22-23

Early monks prayed all 150 psalms in one day. Even St. Benedict realized that this was a formidable task for his monks. It was decided by a council of abbots in Rome to rearrange the psalms, so that fewer of them were to be prayed daily.

Like present-day oblates, the monks also were confronted with a specific timeframe in which to pray the psalms. The number of palms prayed daily was reduced. It was decided to pray less in order to pray better.

How can we pray better with the timeframe we have available to us? We have only so much time. We need to slow down, as did the early monks. When we do this, we find that we can effectively pray with the psalms.

Pray for Vocations

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

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Designer: Tammy Schuetter
Oblate Directors: Fr. Meinrad Brune, OSB
Fr. Joseph Cox, OSB

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Oblate writes new poetry book

Thomas J. Rillo, an oblate from Bloomington, IN, has written a second book of poems, *Thoughts for the Listening Heart*. It is a collection of over 100 poems written as spiritual prayers and reflections on the prayer life of the faithful.

A retired university professor, Tom finds several ways to serve God. Poetry is just one of them. The book is beautifully illustrated by Br. Martin Erspamer, OSB, a monk of Saint Meinrad Archabbey and well-known liturgical artist who has worked many years in a variety of media and as an illustrator.

All revenue from the sale of the book will be given to the Benedictine Oblate Program of Saint Meinrad Archabbey. To order the book, contact the Oblate Office, Saint Meinrad Archabbey, 200 Hill Drive, St. Meinrad, IN 47577 or call (812) 357-6817.

The cost of the book is $10, which includes postage and handling. The book can also be purchased in person from the Oblate Office.

March retreat focuses on Liturgy of the Hours

Retreating to a monastery to encounter God, if only for three days, is always a welcome treat for me. The oblate retreat at Saint Meinrad Archabbey on March 20-22, however, was special.

It was also an opportunity for me, a New Yorker from the Bronx, to meet oblates from other states, confreres who have never made it to New York City since I’ve been an oblate, monks from other communities as close as Kentucky to as far away as Africa, and a new auxiliary bishop for the Archdiocese of Indianapolis.

But encounters don’t happen only during meal times and social times with spirit-led and spirit-filled people. They also happen in the praise, worship and adoration of God, whether in solitude or in common worship.

It was not my first experience praying the monastic office with others. It was my first occasion to do so in the Archabbbey Church, large and resplendent, with several monks leading and offering up chanted prayer to God.

The theme, “Encountering God through the Liturgy of the Hours,” was most competently presented by Fr. Adrian Burke, OSB. It engaged our minds and spirits to the ancient, yet eternally relevant, role of common prayer structured and developed over centuries of trial, error and sheer faith in the Holy Spirit’s desire to incarnate the Holy Trinity into our daily lives.

Here are gleanings from his conference talks:

The Liturgy of the Hours provides a way to offer a practical and ordered community witness in word and deed to the presence of God in our lives throughout the ages—as often as we are able—especially recalling how this has happened through the witness of the Old and New Testaments (with special credit given to the Book of Psalms).

The Liturgy of the Hours, as well as any type of prayer, comes from the love and action of God Himself. This is demonstrated by God’s willingness to have us approach Him and know Him by knowing His name, His empowerment in the action of our lives, and His desire for us to listen to Him and partake of His wisdom and guidance.

We can never forget that the Liturgy of the Hours is pregnant with Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament. We sometimes underestimate the spiritual power, growth and wisdom behind this deliberate remembering with this fountain of historical and poetic memory of God’s action in the universe, especially its power to help us to be attentive to God in the present.

Concrete practice of daily, structured prayer is sacramental, sacrificial and shared—a perfect rehearsal that helps to bring a Christ-centered and Christ-like existence into our habits, thoughts, dreams and goals.

The warmth and prayer of this conference will accompany me in the years to come. The opportunity to encounter God in communion with others is a gift, an oblation, from God—with others acting as His hands, feet and heart in our world.

*Ms. Tracy Andres, oblate*  
**Bronx, NY**

Haubstadt oblates faithful to prayer

The good people of SS. Peter and Paul Parish in Haubstadt, IN, answered the call. They began prayer on March 1 by praying Lauds at 7:20 a.m. This led into the rosary, which leads into Mass or a communion service for the day. Praying in this community has special meaning to the oblates. There are as few as four or as many as 22 there. Of the 22, maybe eight are oblates, who contribute to the core of the faith community. The Lord needs our prayers to be offered up, and we will continue.

*Jerry Woehler, oblate*  
**Haubstadt, IN**

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

Br. Adam defends MA thesis
Br. Adam Edwards, OSB, who has visited some of the oblate chapters and given conferences, successfully defended his thesis for a Master of Arts degree from Georgia State University in Atlanta on April 8.

The thesis is titled “The Many Faces of Besire Theory.” “Besire” is an invented word that stands midway between “belief” and “desire.” His thesis addressed the topic of how we underwrite the process of our moral judgments.

Finance Committee reviews favorable numbers
The Oblate Finance Committee met April 8 to review financial results for the six months ending December 31, 2010. Oblate gift revenue has continued its favorable trend and has more than offset reduced retreat revenue. The latter was affected by adverse weather during the December retreat.

Revenue from gifts, retreats, book sales and endowment donations exceed the costs associated with administering the oblate community. The costs include office staff, travel, printing and postage for mailings, and production costs for the Prayers and Rituals for Benedictine Oblates book.

Fr. Meinrad Brune, OSB, oblate director, expressed his appreciation while noting the numerous positive activities carried out could not take place without the generosity of the oblates.

Mike Reffett, oblate Evansville, IN

Oblate Council prepares for NAABOD meeting
The Oblate Council gathered on the Hill for its 19th meeting on April 9, for the special purpose of finalizing plans for the meeting of the North American Association of Benedictine Oblate Directors (NAABOD) at Saint Meinrad Archabbey this summer. Present were Dennis Skelton, Al Kovacs, Pat Phillips, Jennie Latta, Mike Reffett, Chris Topa and Janis Dopp, chair.

Also present were Maureen Grant, Barbara Phillips and George Thompson, members of the Finance Committee. Brenda Blackgrove, executive assistant to the oblate director, was present and acted as secretary for the meeting. The meeting was opened with prayer by Oblate Director Fr. Meinrad Brune, OSB, which was followed by a reading of the Statement of Purpose of the Oblate Council.

The NAABOD meeting will be held July 1-6. This is a biennial meeting, which includes oblate directors and representatives from throughout North America. The theme for the conference is “Embracing Creation with Reverence and Hospitality: Listening to Scripture and Rule Speak.”

The featured speakers will be Sr. Kathryn Huber, OSB, of Monastery Immaculate Conception in Ferdinand, IN; Kyle T. Kramer, director of graduate lay degree programs and spiritual formation at Saint Meinrad Seminary and School of Theology; and Sr. Sheila Marie Fitzpatrick, OSB, of Our Lady of Grace Monastery in Beech Grove, IN.

Council member Mike Reffett and Fr. Meinrad have done extensive planning for the upcoming meeting. The Council was presented with a detailed agenda and charts outlining volunteer responsibilities. The Council hopes to use this meeting to enter even deeper into the Benedictine charism of hospitality.

Following the time devoted to planning, there was a report by the Finance Committee, which met the evening before the Oblate Council meeting. Members of the Finance Committee are Pat Phillips, Barb Phillips, Maureen Grant, George Thompson and Mike Reffett, chair. Mike reported that the year-to-date operating results for the oblate community have exceeded budget expectations, primarily due to the generosity of the oblates.

Fr. Meinrad expressed his deep gratitude to the Council and the Finance Committee, especially with regard to the NAABOD meeting. He noted that when we show hospitality, it is not the guest who is most favored, but the host who is the blessed one. He closed his remarks with these lines from Hilaire Belloc:

Of Courtesy, it is much less
Than Courage of Heart or Holiness,
Yet in my Walks it seems to me
That the Grace of God is in
Courtesy.
The next meeting of the Oblate Council follows the NAABOD meeting on July 6.

Jennie D. Latta, oblate
Memphis, TN

Oblate honored for 65 years of song
Oblate Becky Goebel of Madison, IN, was honored for singing in the choir for 65 years at Prince of Peace Church in Madison. We congratulate Becky for her dedication to making the liturgy beautiful through song.

Oblate earns ministry degree
Oblate Yvonne Weaver from Lowell, IN, received her degree in lay ministry for the Diocese of Gary, IN, on May 11. Congratulations! ◆

INVESTITURES & OBLATIONS

February 19, 2011, Investitures—Mr. Eric Batsie and Mrs. Diana Batsie of Deland, IL.

March 3, 2011, Investiture—Mr. Ballarion Stahr of Seymour, IN.

March 4, 2011, Investiture—Mrs. Patsy Butler of Muncie, IN.

March 5, 2011, Oblation—Deacon Salvatore Padre Pio Mazzella of Bronx, NY.

March 9, 2011, Oblation—Mr. Scott Florian Tetter of Oakland City, IN.

March 19, 2011, Oblations—Mrs. Judy Mildred Longoria and Mr. Raul Noe Maurus Longoria of Bartlett, TN.

March 21, 2011, Investitures—Ms. Ramona Rosenbeck of Jasper, IN, and Mr. Jared Wright of Sumava Resorts, IN.

March 21, 2011, Oblations—Mrs. Laura Mary Brzegowy of Bloomington, IN; Mrs. Donna Catherine Labouré Clark and Mr. William Ronald Joseph Clark of Georgetown, OH; Mrs. Donna Theodora Guerin Dennis and Mr. Edward Matthew Dennis of Marshall, MI; Ms. Mary Louise Dymphna Jones of Indianapolis, IN; and Mr. Peter Joseph Barsabbas Shaffer of Benton Harbor, MI.

March 23, 2011, Investiture—Mrs. Amy Halt of Bloomington, IL.

March 23, 2011, Oblation—Mr. Neil Mary Galbraith of Ann Arbor, MI.

March 26, 2011, Investitures—Mrs. Lisa Foster of Evansville, IN, and Mr. Scott Woods of St. Meinrad, IN.

April 3, 2011, Investiture—Mr. David Elder of Evansville, IN.

April 9, 2011, Oblation—Mr. Bob Maurus Tankersley of Versailles, KY.

April 20, 2011, Investiture—Ms. Holly McClara of Indianapolis, IN.

May 7, 2011, Investitures—Mr. Greg Karn and Mrs. Mary Karn of Antioch, TN.

May 10, 2011, Investiture—Mr. Jeremy LaMastus of Evansville, IN. ◆

DEATHS

Mr. Ottis Schatz of St. Meinrad, IN, died February 18, 2011.

Mrs. Agnes White of Louisville, KY, died March 26, 2011.

Mr. Warren Glaser of Kettering, OH, died May 1, 2011.

Mr. Joseph Sheehan of Indianapolis, IN, died May 5, 2011. ◆

UPCOMING EVENTS


September 10, 2011—The Lancaster, PA, day of recollection in the Amish country will feature Br. John Mark Falkenhain, OSB. He will address “Grace and Nature: The Human and the Divine in the Rule of St. Benedict.”

November 27, 2011—The day of recollection for New York oblates will feature Fr. Brendan Moss, OSB, as the presenter of “Following the Path that Leads to Life!”

December 9-11, 2011—The Oblate Retreat at Saint Meinrad Archabbey is expected to have Archabbot Justin DuVall, OSB, as the presenter of “Under a Rule and an Abbot: The Human Face of Monastic Life.”

March 20-22, 2012—The March Retreat for Oblates will be presented by Fr. Timothy Sweeney, OSB, on “Lord, who may abide in your tent and dwell on your holy mountain?” from Psalm 14 (15), as found in the Prologue to the Rule of St. Benedict.

April 29-May 8, 2012—Br. Maurus Zoeller, OSB, is hosting a 10-day pilgrimage to the Canadian Rockies by train. Highlights will include British Columbia, Westminster Abbey Tour, Vancouver, VIA Rail, Jasper Columbia Icefields, Lake Louise, Banff and Calgary. Fr. Meinrad Brune, OSB, the oblate director, will be the chaplain for this trip. Contact Br. Maurus at (812) 357-6674 or mzoeller@saintmeinrad.edu for trip costs and brochures.

September 3-13, 2012—Br. Maurus is also hosting a pilgrimage to Ireland. Archabbot Justin DuVall, OSB, will be chaplain for this trip. Contact Br. Maurus at (812) 357-6674 or mzoeller@saintmeinrad.edu for trip costs and brochures. ◆

VOLUNTEERS APPRECIATED

Fr. Tom D’Angelo, Br. Adam Edwards, OSB, Ruth Engs, Al Kovacs, Chris Lagnese, Pat Reckelhoff, Michael Reffett, Tom and Joan Rillo, Laura Roberts, Dennis Skelton, George Thompson and Chris Topa were recent volunteers in the Oblate Office. ◆

CHECK THE WEBSITE
Past issues of the Benedictine Oblate newsletter are available at www.saintmeinrad.edu. ◆
Psalms from p. 1

David has been credited with composing 73 of the 150 psalms, and this is understandable since he was an accomplished musician. It is important to understand that psalms are not historical, doctrinal statements or creeds. The psalms are both poetry and prayer, intended to be set to music and prayed in worship settings.

Origins of the Psalms

It is difficult, if not almost impossible, to ascribe the origins of the psalms to a specific source. The passage of time makes documentation difficult. However, Biblical scholars agree somewhat to certain consistencies that are common in many interpretations. With this in mind, we can say that the oldest of the psalms originated with Moses (circa 1300 B.C.). In Exodus 15:1-5, we read a song of triumph following the crossing of the Red Sea. In Deuteronomy 32, 33, we read a song of exhortation, reflection and prayer.

The period following Moses witnessed peaks and valleys in psalms usage until the advent of King David (circa 1000 B.C.), when he gave attainment to the maturity of the sacred lyric. Under King Solomon, the creation of psalms began to decline to what became the age of the proverb. David wrote at least 73 psalms. Asaph wrote 12 psalms. The sons of Korah (appointed Levite temple singers) wrote 12 psalms, Ethan wrote one psalm, and Moses and Solomon each wrote one psalm.

The remaining 50 psalms were written by anonymous authors. The entire 150 psalms are known as the Psalter. They are collected in the Book of Psalms, which is one of the best known books in the Bible. The Psalter is, in reality, a collection of poetry spanning centuries of history, and it essentially reached its present form around 300 B.C.

The Psalter grew out of the life of a community of faith as the people used their songs and poetry to worship God. The ancient desert monks were said to have prayed the entire Psalter in just one day. This is a most difficult feat to accomplish in this modern world even if we had nothing else to do. There are just too many distractions.

Arrangement of the Psalms

The Book of Psalms is divided into five books. They are: Book 1 (Ps. 1-41), Book 2 (Ps. 42-72), Book 3 (Ps. 73-89), Book 4 (Ps. 90-106), and Book 5 (Ps. 107-150). Biblical scholars have classified the psalms into three categories: psalms of lament, psalms of thanksgiving and psalms that are hymns.

The psalms of lament are an undulated cry to God. The psalms of lament are further divided into those of complaint, those of expression of trust, those of petition, those words that are of assurance and those that are statements of praise.

The next major division is the psalms of thanksgiving. Thanksgiving does not mean giving thanks, but rather openly expressing the saving grace of God. The recipients of this grace give praise to God. The psalms of thanksgiving express the rescue that was asked of God and that He granted it. For this, the people praise God in acknowledgement of what He has done.

The third category is psalms that are hymns. They are simple and a call to worship. Usually, the hymn psalm is simple, and it identifies the addressees. The basis for praise is the activity that demonstrates God’s power and majesty in the physical world.

Praying the Psalms

The Book of Psalms is an excellent resource for the lectio divina method of prayer. Lectio divina will help us to focus on the major thrust of the psalm. The psalms take us deep within our hearts. The psalms help us to expose the deep center of our lives. Biblical scholars have called this our core humanity or heart.

Br. Matthew Mattingly, OSB, in the publication series Notes from a Monastery: The Sacred Way of Everyday Life, wrote one called The Psalms as Soul Food. In this, he writes, “The
psalms are soul food for those who pray them.” Br. Matthew further states that we become what the food we ingest makes us.

In the same way, the psalms shape us spiritually. Psalms can help us see God as He really is, and not what we perceive Him to be. The psalms give a more realistic image of God. They can present God as a vengeful God or a benevolent God.

Not all psalms are in the Book of Psalms. They appear in the scriptures as well, so God can be a kind God or a punitive God, depending upon which Testament you are reading. The social and economic conditions of the ancient people often determined which God He was.

Crops can fail and drought can occur. The people interpreted this as the wrath of God; He was punishing them for their sins, real or perceived. When the crops were plentiful and the livestock fat and sleek, then God was good to those who repented of their sins. The psalms teach us about the human condition that prevailed at the time the psalms were created.

We should try to understand the psalm before we attempt to meditate on it. Meditation was what the psalmist was experiencing when he wrote the psalm. Lectio divina will help us to linger on a particular word or verse and to perceive its relevancy to our own lives. We should focus on each word and what it implies.

What do we mean by praying the psalms? One definition of prayer is “conversation with God.” The psalms certainly fit this definition. Most of the time, the psalmist is addressing God in the second person. Sometimes, the psalmist is representing a faith community by identifying with them and urging them to praise God. Our relationship with the psalmist is important. Usually, one who prays the psalms identifies with what the psalmist is saying.

Oblates usually pray the psalms in two settings. One setting is the liturgical format, particularly in the Eucharistic celebration. The recitation of a psalm is usually in response to the first reading. Oblates also recite the psalms in the monastic method when in a choir situation. This is a simple and easy way of praying the psalms. One side takes a verse, and then the other side recites the alternate verse. Oblates who attend chapter meetings or pray the Divine Office at Saint Meinrad Archabbe are familiar with this method of praying the psalms.

The other setting is the personal format. The oldest monastic form of personal prayer is lectio divina. This is an ideal way to personally pray the psalms. Lectio is the first step. We read the psalm verse, gather the meaning of each word and then listen to God’s Word coming through the psalmist’s creative effort to identify what each word or phrase means to you.

Meditatio is the second step in lectio divina. Here we read and reflect deeply on a word or phrase of the psalm, letting God speak, thinking about what God is saying to you as depicted in the psalms.

Oratio is the next step of reading the psalm again and letting your heart be “plucked” by a word or phrase. Remember that the psalms were written to be sung in accompaniment with a stringed instrument. In this step, we become emotionally involved and magnify our trust in God. What do we want to say to God?

Contemplatio is the last step in lectio divina. It is here that we read the psalm a final time. We surrender ourselves to the presence of God through the psalmist’s concepts, feelings and emotional commitment.

This is how oblates can and should pray the psalms. It is an excellent way to pray, and it is a supplement to the Liturgy of the Hours. Remember the psalms are an entrance to an environment where God is the pivotal center, not just for an oblate’s prayer life, but for the prayer life of all Christians.

Thomas J. Rillo, oblate
Bloomington, IN

Gail Chambers is a member of the Oblate Council. She was unable to attend the April meeting.

John Pelletier was absent from the Oblate Council meeting on April 9, when photos were taken. He is a member of the Saint Meinrad Oblate Council.
Sharing the wealth—
About our chapters

**The Louisville Chapter**


The Louisville Chapter roots go back to the mid-1940s and are still growing today. Over the last 70 years, the chapter has seen many faces and changes. One thing has remained unchanged, the *Rule of St. Benedict*. It still applies today, the same as it did yesterday.

The Louisville Chapter was established circa 1945 under Abbot Ignatius Esser, OSB, with Fr. Walter Sullivan, OSB, as spiritual director. The initial meetings were in the homes of the oblates. The early oblates’ spirituality was centered on the Blessed Mother and Marian devotion. When Archabbot Timothy Sweeney assigned Fr. Gerard Ellspermann, OSB, as the oblate director, the activities became more focused on Benedictine spirituality, St. Benedict and the *Rule*.

The Louisville Chapter includes many oblates from the surrounding area, including southern Indiana and central Kentucky. Much of the chapter’s history is filled with specific members who, at times, kept the group alive by their dedication. Some of the individuals, like Charles English, William Barnes, Robert Hess and George Thompson, involved themselves in every part of the chapter.

Many times, dedicated couples, like Louise and Paul Logsdon and Patricia and Henry Kaufmann, remained faithful members of the chapter together. These people, and many others, are the backbone of the Louisville Chapter and have helped the chapter to become an organized and devoted group of spiritual people.

The Louisville Chapter maintains a fairly rigid system of order for its meetings, beginning with the liturgy and moving from there to the homily, delivered by the spiritual director. Finally, the meetings end with a hospitality hour.

Each year, Saint Meinrad’s oblate director, Fr. Meinrad Brune, OSB, sets a spiritually based theme for oblate activities, and each meeting is designed...
to address a certain facet of that theme. This allows oblates to focus on Benedictine spirituality and the Rule.

George Thompson of Louisville represented Saint Meinrad Archabbey Oblates at the 2005 meeting of the North American Association of Benedictine Oblette Directors at Sacred Heart Monastery and Mount Marty College, Yankton, SD. The theme was “Benedictine Oblation: A Way of Life.”

Two Louisville oblates went to Rome in September 2005 to attend the first World Congress for Benedictine Oblates. Dennis Skelton and George Thompson represented the Saint Meinrad Archabbey and met with 300 other Benedictine oblates from throughout the world.

Through the years, various oblates have served as chapter coordinators and various sites have served as meeting places.

**Louisville Chapter Coordinators**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Coordinator</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1945-57</td>
<td>Phillip Hollenbech</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1958-66</td>
<td>Charles J. English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1966-76</td>
<td>William Barnes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976-86</td>
<td>Bob McAdams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986-98</td>
<td>Robert Hess</td>
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<tr>
<td>1998-present</td>
<td>George Thompson</td>
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**Louisville Chapter Meeting Sites**

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<tr>
<th>Decade</th>
<th>Location</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1940s</td>
<td>Will Link’s home and K of C Meeting Hall</td>
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<tr>
<td>1950s</td>
<td>Catholic Information Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960s</td>
<td>Catholic Information Center</td>
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<tr>
<td>1970s</td>
<td>Holy Name Parish and private homes</td>
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<tr>
<td>1980s</td>
<td>Holy Name Parish and Our Lady Help of Christians Parish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990s</td>
<td>Our Lady Help of Christians Parish and St. Joseph Home for the Aged</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>St. Joseph Home for the Aged</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Currently, the chapter meets four times a year at St. Joseph’s Home for the Aged, along with an annual potluck gathering in the home of Cherie and Richard Zoldak. The April meeting is a day of reflection held on a Saturday. Three conferences are given by one of the monks of Saint Meinrad, along with Mass and evening prayer.

As oblates, we work as individuals to make a difference in how we live and respond to our family, our parish, our community and our world. The support and guidance that we receive from our chapter meetings, gatherings at Saint Meinrad Archabbey and Fr. Meinrad give us strength in our labor to “prefer nothing to Christ.”

*George Thompson, oblate
Louisville, KY*
A modern shepherd reflects on Psalm 23

I know I’m a sheep. I know I have a shepherd. I know His voice, but, like the sheep living in my own pasture, who know my voice, I don’t always listen.

I like to tell people that I am a shepherd. We have a small “spinner’s flock” of sheep of different breeds. Like humans of different “tribes,” they have breed-traits, but mostly, they have sheep-traits.

Have you thought about why we are compared to sheep and goats in the Bible? I see it every day; their personalities are so “human”—or maybe it is that I am so “sheep-like,” but watching them allows me to understand how I am one of the Lord’s sheep.

As I said before, my sheep know my voice and if they would listen to what I say to them, life would be much simpler for all of us. Why is the grass greener on the other side of the fence? Well, it just “is,” or at least it “looks” that way. Why does my sheep get her head caught in the fence trying to get to that “greener” grass? Because the fence we put there for her protection from any evil that lurks outside that fence is in her way to what she only thinks she “wants.”

She doesn’t need that grass, as her pasture is filled with grass. This often makes me think of the difference between my wants and needs. What I truly need will be provided. What I want may not be necessary and will often have an invisible or visible fence between it and me, most likely protecting me from myself.

Sheep are defenseless against predators; their natural defense system, when unprotected, is to literally make a stand. They eye the predator and lower their heads as if to charge and head but. Most will also stamp their front hooves, several times, if necessary. When this doesn’t work, they run and run, until they can no longer run.

We keep guard animals with our sheep, such as emus and donkeys. Their job is to be the pasture protectors, to stand up to the predator. Donkeys have been known to kill attacking dogs, coyotes and wolves.

When I have taken the “yard dogs,” our pets, into the pasture with me, the sheep, unfamiliar with them and feeling threatened, will run to me for protection. I am the ultimate protector, their good shepherd. It is a pretty neat feeling, but it comes at a price. For if I’m not a good shepherd, their lives may be at risk.

It’s the daily stuff necessary for their care—great fencing, clean water and plenty of food—that is so important. They both need and want these things, items they cannot provide for themselves.

The coolest thing is to see them, all of them, lying down in the pasture. Heads raised, stomachs full and lips sliding from side to side as they chew that tasty cud. They are content, they are satisfied, and they need or want nothing for it has all been given to them. Think Psalm 23: “He maketh me lie down in green pastures.” He, the Good Shepherd, wants us to be content, to have what we need. And He shows this to me through them.

Having sheep is somewhat like having children. You can’t leave them on their own. You must provide boundaries. You must feed, clean and house them. And you must care for them, protect them and provide all things for them. They are helpless without you. They must be shepherded.

Each time I read Psalm 23, I more deeply understand that we are being shepherded. Psalm 100:3 reminds me that we are a part of His flock, and John 10:14 gives me the understanding that we are known.

The sheep and I, well, we’re working on listening.

Debra Webb, oblate
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Sometimes, I simply don’t want to go to prayer. I assume this is a common occurrence, or at least a familiar one. There are days when I am focused, and there are other days when I am more scattered. Some days, sitting in choir feels right, and other days it is the last place that I want to be.

Life as a Christian is well served by a healthy sense of perspective. Here, in the hopes of encouraging a healthy perspective on praying the Liturgy of the Hours, I offer some thoughts.

I think that not wanting to pray the Divine Office can be blessing. First, the repulsion one feels can be a sign that something is wrong. This is not to say that praying the Liturgy of the Hours is for everyone. But as Benedictines, especially, it is a central component of what we think of as the work of God; it is central to what it means for us to prefer nothing to Christ.

That is not to say that every time the bell goes off on the Hill, every monk need come barreling down the slype to get into church. Not being able to pray the Office can be a sign that you are not yet free from something. It can be a magnifying glass that helps you become aware of what might be missing.

“What would I rather being doing?” is a powerful question to ask yourself after the third psalm at 5:45 a.m. What is keeping me from being here right now? What drive is keeping my energy scattered, my mind occupied, my attention away from those I love?

Second, not wanting to pray the Office can also be the sign that you are making progress. I hesitate to use the word “progress,” but consider the following passage from The Inner Search by Dom Hubert Van Zeller, OSB:

God keeps the soul fumbling and stumbling—always on the edge of discovering the object of its desire, but always painfully aware of its empty-handedness—precisely because He wants them to go on in the work for His sake, and for His sake alone. Perseverance is conditioned not by satisfaction but by dissatisfaction. If we were satisfied that we had found what we wanted, we would stop wanting. (p. 6)

I wonder what it is like to say the Office for His sake or for its own sake—that is, praying the Liturgy of the Hours from somewhere beyond our thoughts, our feelings, our wants, our frustrations. This seems like an ideal goal, and one that might be impossible to realize.

And it might be one that we shouldn’t try to realize. I think considering it can be a useful exercise. It helps us to acquire a robust self-awareness. One that also means having a sense of what you bring with you to prayer. Self-awareness can create openness; openness allows us to listen; listening helps us to pray.

Third, I wonder if compulsive fidelity to the Liturgy of the Hours can also be a trap. Believing that you’ll only find God in choir isn’t what St. Benedict is after. Repetition and routine can sometimes take on a mind of their own, and sometimes we might find ourselves living like we were made to serve the Sabbath. We are creatures who can do the right thing for the wrong reason. Sometimes just pushing through it might be right for you, but sometimes it might not be.

If there is a message common to these three points, it is that self-awareness is a fundamental part of a healthy perspective on prayer. Not wanting to go to prayer is a part of Christian life. Dealing with it, understanding it, looking at it, accepting it is key. It might not be a roadblock to your destination. It could be an invitation of sorts.

Br. Adam Edwards, OSB
Saint Meinrad Archabbey

Members of the Saint Meinrad Oblate Council and Oblate Finance Committee took on the work of planning for the North American Association of Benedictine Oblate Directors meeting, to be held at Saint Meinrad Archabbey in July.
Reading Room


*The Gift of the Psalms* is a revised version of *The Psalms Are Yours*, published in 1993 by Paulist Press. Renowned biblical scholar Roland E. Murphy has written this book to make the psalms accessible to everyone. The author is the George Washington Ivy Emeritus Professor of Biblical Studies at Duke University. He has written numerous articles and books.

In Part One, he discusses the various types of psalms, major literary features of the psalms and the Christian interpretation of the psalms over the centuries. One chapter explores important terms and theological concepts in the psalms, such as God, creation, salvation, enemies and suffering. Another chapter explores how the psalms can foster “conversation with God” for contemporary readers in the context of public worship or private meditation.

In Part Two, Murphy comments concisely on each psalm, illuminating key words and phrases and explaining allusions to events in Israelite history.

*The Gift of the Psalms* is an ideal starting point for those who want to study the psalms—alone or in prayer groups. It is for anyone who wishes to explore this important resource for contemporary believers.

The psalms belong to Israel. They were written for those specific people of God, and they were created from their beliefs and experiences. One could say that the psalms are Israel’s gift to us.

The psalms are ancient poetry and, before we can assimilate them into our way of thinking and prayer, we have to recognize that they are prayerful expressions of an ancient people. The purpose of this book is to help people understand this ancient poetry and adopt it into their prayer life.

As Benedictine oblates, we pray the psalms during the Liturgy of the Hours. They become familiar, and some are said so often that we can recite them from memory. Psalms are an integral part of our rhythm of prayer. This book is highly recommended for serious students of psalm prayers.

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