The Rule offers wisdom on leadership

The oblates of Saint Meinrad Archabbey are fortunate to have received copies of three documents that are crucial to the community’s future: the Philosophy of the Oblate Community; the Vision Statement of the Oblate Community; and the Oblate’s Personal Rule of Life. These documents, written by the Oblate Council at the behest of Oblate Director Fr. Meinrad Brune, OSB, clearly articulate what it means to commit oneself to the oblate life at Saint Meinrad and will set the program’s direction for years to come.

Fr. Meinrad and the Council have demonstrated real leadership by recognizing the importance of recording and sharing their vision for the oblate community. No organization – religious or secular, private or public – can thrive without a clear sense of its mission, an understanding of its future direction and a grasp of the values by which it lives.

The Vision Statement describes an important goal for the oblate community: “We look to the future, pledging ourselves to encourage the development of leadership qualities among our oblates on the individual, chapter and organizational levels.” It is in this context that Fr. Meinrad asked me to share my experience with leading a large organization (1,000+ employees) and how my reading of the holy Rule helped to shape that experience.

Much of what I have learned from the Rule as it applies to leadership would be instantly recognizable to Saint Meinrad oblates, who are called to read it daily. Although written for monks in sixth-century Italy, the Rule has practical relevance for any 21st-century organization.

Chapters 2 and 3 deal at length with the qualities of an abbot and provide leadership guidance in almost every line. Chapters dealing with the sick, the elderly, children and the wayward (RB 27, 36, 37) serve as constant reminders that, ultimately, people matter, not products or services.

Throughout the Rule, one encounters themes of commitment, community, openness, discretion, balance, leadership by example, responsibility and accountability that are invaluable for leaders of all kinds, not only those in monasteries but also in our families, the workplace and the world at large.

Beyond the explicit lessons of leadership in the Rule, there are others more subtle. One that speaks in a powerful way to my own experience is RB 4:24: “Rid your heart of all deceit.” On one level, the meaning seems simple, but I believe St. Benedict
A new revised edition of the Benedictine Oblate Novice Companion has been developed for distribution. It is an attractive binder divided into three sections: Introduction, Oblate Novice Lessons and Resources. The first copy was distributed in June 2011. The foreword was written by Rt. Rev. Justin DuVall, OSB, archabbot of Saint Meinrad Archabbey.

The Oblate Novice Companion is the result of efforts by monks of Saint Meinrad Archabbey, oblates and other personnel. The three-ring binder format will facilitate the addition or deletion of materials. The larger size, compared to the original Oblate Novice Companion, will make for easier reading.

The Introduction includes such topics as: The Vocation of being an Oblate and How to Live It, Being an Oblate of Saint Meinrad Archabbey, Guidelines for Becoming a Benedictine Oblate, Five Duties of an Oblate, Oblate’s Personal Rule of Life and The Monastery’s Expectations of Its Oblates.

The section of Oblate Novice Lessons contains information on: The Oblate Novitiate, Liturgy of the Hours, Beginning the Monastic Journey, Introduction to the Rule of St. Benedict, Lectio Divina, Humility and Prayer, Benedictine Hospitality and The Nature of the Promises Made at Oblation.

The third section, Resources, includes: Benedictine Oblate Process, Ritual for Benedictine Oblate Novice, Some Thoughts on Duties of an Oblate, The Meaning and Purpose of Bona Opera, How to Relate as an Oblate to a Chapter, Resources Available in the Oblate Library, Glossary for Oblates and Annotated Bibliography on Benedictine Spirituality for Oblates.

The attractiveness of the new edition of the Oblate Companion and the letter-size pages will assist the oblate novice in accessing material with a great deal more ease and understanding the significance of their monastic formation in the spirituality of St. Benedict.

Thomas J. Rillo, oblate  
Bloomington, IN

New edition of Oblate Novice Companion completed

A POINT TO PONDER FROM THE RULE

“Are you hastening to your heavenly home?  
Then with Christ’s help, keep this little rule  
we have written for beginners.”

Rule of St. Benedict, Chapter 73:8

This is the beginning of St. Benedict’s epilogue. It is written quite simply, and St. Benedict claims that the Rule he wrote is not the last word. He does point out, however, that the monastic life is meant to lead us to heaven. Our journey to God must take place with Christ and in Christ.

As oblates, we must carry out this modest rule for beginners. We are to recognize that this is merely a means to the end, and this end is heaven. With this in mind, monastic oblation is merely something we do in preparation for the journey.

We are to remember that, in this present earthly life, Christ is our companion on the journey to God. Christ, then, becomes the conduit for both the way and the end. Christ will be there in heaven along with His Father, as Christ Himself has said, “I and the Father are one.”
Can you believe it? 71 years!
The oblates of both New York chapters gathered on September 2-5 at The Dominican Sisters of Hope Retreat House called Mariandale in Ossining, NY, for their 71st annual Labor Day Retreat. The retreat director was Br. John Mark Falkenhain, OSB, of Saint Meinrad Archabbey. Oblate Director Fr. Meinrad Brune, OSB, was in attendance to provide his characteristic hospitality and good humor.

Br. John Mark’s theme was “Grace and Nature: The Human and Divine in the Rule of St. Benedict.” Using the monastic vows of stability, obedience and conversatio morum as a framework, Br. John Mark demonstrated how both our humanity and God’s holiness combine in the Rule of St. Benedict.

A major insight offered to us was that the Rule is not opposed to our human nature, but seeks to build on it. We are not called to surrender our humanity as much as subject it to purification in the light of the wisdom of a loving father. Br. John Mark spoke about the wisdom of humility and hospitality as they function to change us from our holy intolerance or perfectionism and its opposite pole of self-acceptance or narcissism to a fundamental openness to loving others even while they are imperfect.

Humility and hospitality teach us about the vow of obedience. The vow of conversatio morum is more difficult to explain. It is best exemplified by what the Rule says in Chapter 49 on how the life of a monk should be a continuous Lent. The focus is on how Lent helps us remove from our lives what separates us from unity with God.

The story of the fall of Adam and Eve becomes a guide for our reflection. In spite of punishment and anger, God continues to love and care for Adam and Eve. While they are out of paradise, there is hope they may one day return.

In a conference on perseverance and holiness, Br. John Mark shared insights into the vow of stability. Speaking of the monastery and its communal life as a “rock polisher,” he made us see the purpose of community as the perfection of each member little by little. Stability is essential to that enterprise if it is to be fruitful.

Br. John Mark led us in an exercise of group lectio. This form of lectio divina involves reading the Scripture text, reflecting on it together and sharing our insights with each other. We used the Sunday readings.

Several oblates who had just returned from World Youth Day in Spain shared their reflections with the group. The Sunday Mass was celebrated by Fr. Tom D’Angelo, coordinator of the Bronx Chapter. At Mass on Monday, the group witnessed one final oblation and two investitures of oblate novices. In all, 37 oblates attended.

Lancaster oblates attend day of recollection
On September 10, a day that turned out to be beautiful and sunny after a tragic week of historic flooding and loss of life and property in the Susquehanna Valley, 19 people gathered at St. Joseph’s Church in Lancaster, PA, for the fifth annual Day of Recollection for the oblates of St. Benedict.

Following Mass and the final oblation of Mary Lou Dorffner and Cheryl Tacelowsky, Br. John Mark Falkenhain, OSB, as retreat master, discussed aspects of monastic life to enlighten our own lives. He spoke about “Conversion and the Rule of St. Benedict.” We heard several talks by Br. John Mark, had some quiet prayerful times, celebrated the sacrament of Reconciliation with Oblate Director Fr. Meinrad Brune, OSB, and enjoyed lunch and discussion.

At the end of the retreat, Brian Loging was welcomed as an oblate novice. We were happy to have Br. Zachary Wilberding’s niece, Julie Wilberding, join us for the retreat. We thank both Fr. Meinrad and Br. John Mark for a great conference.

Sharon Ogden, oblate
Lancaster, PA

Evansville Chapter celebrates 75 years
The Evansville Chapter of Benedictine Oblates celebrated the chapter’s 75th anniversary on October 2, 2011.

The celebration, attended by many chapter members, was blessed with the presence of Oblate Director Fr. Meinrad Brune, OSB.

Fr. Meinrad’s topic for the celebration meeting was “Life Values and Lessons that Flow from the Rule of St. Benedict.” Fr. Meinrad helped define life values and lessons in relation to the Rule. He also discussed two of the life values: love of Christ and neighbor, and prayer.

It was especially meaningful to celebrate the final oblation of Jim Geiss on this special day. The meeting included a heartfelt prayer written by Fr. Meinrad to commemorate the anniversary. The members appreciated receiving a letter of congratulations from Archabbot Justin DuVall, OSB.

A cake and punch reception concluded the afternoon of celebration.

Michele Reffett, oblate
Evansville, IN

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

Oblates represented at ministry fair

On the weekend of September 24 and 25, following a visit by Oblate Director Fr. Meinrad Brune, OSB, to speak on the Rule of St. Benedict, St. Bernadette Parish held a ministry fair. It gave us an opportunity to display the beautiful Benedictine banner brought by Fr. Meinrad and represent our Benedictine oblate community.

We distributed brochures to explain the Benedictine way of life. For the first time, many parishioners were introduced to St. Benedict, and we were pleased to add something new and spiritual to our parish.

Dr. Jim and Rita Merk, oblates
Lancaster, OH

Bloomington Chapter attends ministry fair

The life of a Benedictine Oblate is quietly fulfilling. It is also a vocational journey that is unfamiliar to many people in our parishes. That is why we regularly participate in the parish-wide Ministry Fair at St. Charles Borromeo Catholic Church in Bloomington, IN.

By setting up a small display with an icon of St. Benedict, a copy of the Rule of Benedict, a copy of The Liturgy of the Hours for Benedictine Oblates, and a few brochures explaining the meaning of this way of life, we have been able to spread the word about our oblate community and the chapter that is active at our parish. Many people stop to ask questions and then linger to hear more about how being an oblate has changed our lives.

At this year’s Ministry Fair, four people signed up to attend the upcoming meeting. A gentle email reminder kept the event in their minds, and we were ready to greet them when they arrived. After sharing prayer and a meal and listening to a conference talk, they left with packets of information to help them on their way, if they choose to pursue the novice year.

Since most parishes host such fairs to introduce parishioners to the various opportunities for personal stewardship, it is a simple way to remind them that the door is always open and the welcome is always warm and inviting to join the oblates of Saint Meinrad Archabbey.

Janis Dopp, oblate
Bloomington, IN

INVESTITURES & OBLATIONS

August 20, 2011, Oblation—Rev. Mr. Thomas Stephanos Zaworski of Senoia, GA.

September 1, 2011, Investiture—Mrs. Kerri Campbell of Bloomington, IN.

September 5, 2011, Investitures—Miss Deborah Alfier of Hackettstown, NJ; Mrs. Maria Kim of Larchmont, NY; and Mr. Damon Schultz of North Massapequa, NY.

September 5, 2011, Oblation—Ms. Theresa Scholastica Hollwitz of Larchmont, NY.

September 7, 2011, Investiture—Mr. Brian Goodwin of Franklin, TN.

September 10, 2011, Oblations—Ms. Mary Lou Elizabeth Dorffner of Hanover, PA; and Mrs. Cheryl Frances Tacelesky of Marietta, PA.


September 17, 2011, Investiture—Mr. Mike Tyl of Evansville, IN.

September 21, 2011, Investiture—Mr. Duane Sheets of St. Meinrad, IN.

September 22, 2011, Oblations—Ms. Lois Teresa Benedicta of the Cross Palau of Westerville, OH.

September 29, 2011, Investitures—Mrs. Linda Roberson of Portage, IN; and Ms. Jean Roberson of Mishawaka, IN.

October 1, 2011, Investitures—Mr. Patrick Openlander and Mrs. Mary Openlander, both of Kirkwood, MO.

October 2, 2011, Oblation—Mr. James Stephen Geiss of Evansville, IN.

October 8, 2011, Investiture—Ms. Beth Gootee of Indianapolis, IN.

October 15, 2011, Oblations—Mr. Stephen Colomba Mattern of Brimfield, IL; and Mr. Michael Virgil Tant of Franklin, TN.

October 16, 2011, Investiture—Mrs. Francis Brown of Louisville, KY.

November 3, 2011, Investiture—Mrs. Catherine Roberts of Dupont, CO.

November 4, 2011, Oblation—Mr. Alan St. John of the Cross Hughes of Muncie, IN.

November 6, 2011, Investiture—Dr. Kevin Ridenhour of Owensboro, KY.

November 12, 2011, Oblation—Mr. Ronald St. Francis Xavier Felder of Indianapolis, IN.

November 12, 2011, Investiture—Mr. Bryan Garry of New Palestine, IN.

November 13, 2011, Investitures—Ms. Sharon Butterfly of Louisville, KY; and Mrs. Mary Drake of Madison, IN.

DEATHS

Mrs. Zita Cook of Lancaster, OH, died on September 1, 2011.

Mr. Martin Young of Danville, IN, died on October 1, 2011.


Mrs. Sherry Alcock of Nashville, IN, died on October 31, 2011.

CHECK THE WEBSITE

Past issues of the Benedictine Oblate newsletter are available at www.saintmeinrad.edu/benedictineoblate
UPCOMING EVENTS

March 20-22, 2012—The March Retreat for oblates will be presented by Fr. Timothy Sweeney, OSB. The topic is, “Come Away by Yourselves to a Deserted Place and Rest Awhile” (Mark 6:31).

April 14, 2012 – The Louisville Oblates will welcome Br. John Mark Falkenhain, OSB, for their day of reflection at the Little Sisters of the Poor. Br. John Mark’s title is “Rule of St. Benedict each day.”

April 29-May 8, 2012—A 10-day Benedictine pilgrimage to the Canadian Rockies by train includes British Columbia, Columbia ice fields, Lake Louise, Banff, Calgary, Vancouver and a Westminster Abbey tour. Br. Maurus Zoeller, OSB, is hosting this trip. The land-only cost is $2,844, plus airfare, etc. Contact Br. Maurus at 100 Hill Drive, St. Meinrad, IN 47577; phone (812) 357-6674 or email mzoeller@saintmeinrad.edu for information.

May 19, 2012—The Ohio (Columbus) Day of Recollection will be held at the Shrine of the Little Flower in Columbus with Fr. Noël Mueller, OSB, presenting “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.”  

Oblate life: Annual personal evaluation

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

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

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

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

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

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

6. If I need to improve in any of these areas, what do I plan to do?

VOLUNTEERS APPRECIATED

Recent volunteers in the Oblate Office have included Monina Abrera, Gail Chambers, Fr. Thomas D’Angelo, Br. Adam Edwards, OSB, Ruth Engs, David Florian, Novice Anushka Fonseka, OSB, Jim Hulst, Steven Hulst, Melanie Isaacson, Suzy Kalmar, Noe and Sarah Longoria, Wayne Moore, Pat Reckelhoff, Mike Reffett, Tom and Joan Rillo, Bob Rosenberg, Candidate Matthew Scheeser, OSB, Francis Shivone, Dennis Skelton, Br. Philippe Tachalon, OSB, Brian Thomas, Christine Vincent, Yvonne Weaver, Tom Williams.

Pray for Vocations

Oblates Rosemary and James Geiss of Evansville, IN. James made his oblation on October 2, 2011.
In 1993, Br. Maurus Zoeller, OSB, as Guest House retreat master, began recording all of the conferences given during retreats and special events, such as the oblate day of recollection. The number of recordings rapidly increased, and there was a need for organization and proper storage.

The late Jerry Campbell, an oblate from Chillicothe, OH, converted all of the VHS recordings to DVDs. Br. Maurus designed and built shelves to house the hundreds of DVDs. They are arranged in sequence from past to present, by date and title, with multiple copies of each one.

Fr. Meinrad Brune, OSB, gave the first video-recorded conference on September 9, 1993, on “Peace and Joy in the Midst of Suffering and Pain.” The DVD library represents a vast educational resource for oblates and other interested individuals.

One oblate has given time and energy to the further development of the DVD library. Two others have used the DVDs in their chapter meetings and have summarized them and developed discussion questions during the chapter meetings. Each of them answered a few questions about the projects.

We begin with Br. Maurus.

When did you first record the conferences presented by the monks of Saint Meinrad Archabbey?

I first started to record the conferences that were presented by the monks of Saint Meinrad Archabbey in 1993 when I received a Sony video camera as a gift to the Guest House retreat program. It was given by oblates Dr. John and Carole Mattingly of Corydon, IN. As retreat master, it was logical that I would assume this responsibility.

When did you switch from the VHS format to the DVD format?

For five years, we used the VHS format. In 1999, we were given a new digital recording camera, allowing us to record both the visual and the audio aspects of presentations. With the advent of the new Guest House five years ago, I was able to program the digital recording into the hard drive of my computer, make a copy of the recording and send it on to the media people here at the monastery. They make multiple copies, and I am able to send them to the retreat participants who request a copy of the DVD and supply the modest charge.

How do you coordinate with the monks who are presenters? Do you make the initial contact with them?

Usually, I post the possible dates for future retreats and any monk who is interested can contact me. Next, we establish the subject titles of the retreats. Usually, there are four to five conferences for any given retreat. The monks are free to select the topics for their conferences. The individual conferences within the retreat also are given subtitles. I make final decisions with reference to the non-oblate retreats. Fr. Meinrad handles all of the oblate retreats and special events such as days of recollection and the Advent Retreat. I record and make DVD copies of the oblate retreats.

An interview with Mary Ann Neal, oblate of the Dayton, OH, Chapter:

How did your interest in summarizing and developing the discussion questions for the DVD Oblate Library begin?

One day while I was visiting Saint Meinrad, I asked Fr. Meinrad if there was anything that I could do as a volunteer. Fr. Meinrad came up with the idea of summarizing the DVDs housed in the Oblate Office and developing discussion questions for each one. The objective was to standardize the summaries and discussion questions so they could be mailed out to various oblate chapters.

What process do you use to summarize and develop questions?

Usually, I pick up about five DVDs when I am at the Oblate Office and take them home. I watch them, write the summarization questions first and then develop the discussion questions. Sometimes it takes me an hour and a half to do a 45-minute DVD. The hardest DVD that I had to do thus far was the retreat presented by Fr. Brendan Moss, OSB. He is such an engaging person with a great sense of humor and great vitality. I found myself listening to him and not taking any notes.

What have you learned from this project?

I think the greatest challenge for me is doing the summarization. I have to go back and listen several times before I
Fr. Meinrad gets a copy of the minutes of the chapter meeting. In this way, he is aware of the DVD that we are using. In addition, we use the DVD of the Oblate Study Days, and this is very educational for our chapter members.

**An interview with oblate Deacon Stephen Zubel from Hobart, IN:**

**How did your interest in the DVD recordings of retreat conferences develop?**

Monks are not always able to come to Merrillville, IN, for our chapter meetings. We have a monk presenter approximately four of the eight or nine chapter meetings per year. Don Starkey was coordinator before me. He moved away for a while and I became the coordinator. I had the idea that by using the DVDs we could have a monk with us at each meeting when an actual monk could not be there.

**How do you share your interest with the other members of your chapter?**

We have only 16 members at the present time. With this small number, it is not too difficult to communicate. We meet approximately eight to nine times yearly. I do no prior preparation other than to use the summaries and discussion questions developed by Gail Chambers of the Memphis, TN, Oblate Chapter. We have a very lively group and they love to share.

**How is using the DVDs an asset to your chapter members?**

Using the DVDs offers a wider view of Benedictine spirituality to our chapter members. In addition, there is a greater diversity to the conferences presented. The conferences presented on the DVDs are well researched, and the monks have, at times, an entire year to prepare.

This gives a quality to the presentation that is appreciated by our oblates. Even though each of our 16 members has been to Saint Meinrad Archabbey at least once, the DVDs offer an opportunity to know more of the monks, even though in a vicarious manner.

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**Note** The Madison, IN, and Cincinnati, OH, oblate chapters have used the DVDs at meetings when monks cannot come. The Evansville, IN, chapter soon will begin to use the DVDs whenever a monk is not able to attend.

**Thomas J. Rillo, oblate**

**Bloomington, IN**

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**Oblate Finance Committee notes good income**

The Oblate Finance Committee met October 14 to review financial results for the fiscal year that ended June 30, 2011. The primary income was oblates’ contributions, which continued its strong historical pattern. Renewal, *Bona Opera* and other gift giving throughout the year continue to adequately support oblate community activities. Retreat revenue was less than past years due to inclement December weather and reduced room availability due to construction.

Expenses to be covered by revenue include office staff, printing, travel, and retreat room and meal expenses. Three books were published during the year: *Prayers and Rituals for Benedictine Oblates*, *Benedictine Spirituality for Oblates* and the new *Oblate Novice Companion*. The costs of the first two books will be covered by future revenue, as has been the case with the Liturgy of the Hours book that was published two years ago.

Fr. Meinrad Brune, OSB, 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**

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**An interview with Gail Chambers, oblate from Memphis, TN:**

**How did your interest in the Saint Meinrad conference DVDs develop?**

Our chapter is located in Memphis, TN, and it is six and one-half hours driving time from Saint Meinrad Archabbey. Of approximately eight to nine meetings a year, we have visitations from monks only twice a year. We had to come up with something. At first, we tried discussing spiritual books during the meetings, but the idea of using the DVDs was a better implementation. We could have a monk with us at each meeting, vicariously.

**What motivated you to educate your chapter members using the DVDs?**

I felt that exposure to more monks and a variety of conference topics would do more to educate our chapter members rather than something less structured.

**What procedure do you use for presenting the DVDs during each chapter meeting?**

We make up a summary beforehand and place the discussion questions on the back of the same sheet of paper. We have some teachers and former teachers in our oblate group. There is no problem getting one of them to volunteer for this task. Each chapter member receives a summary sheet and discussion questions before viewing the DVD.

**Do you report to Fr. Meinrad the results of your chapter DVD presentations and discussions?**

Mike Reffett, oblate
Evansville, IN
Continued from p. 1

is pointing to a level deeper than just “don’t equivocate, mislead, tell half-truths or tell truths in ways that hurt.”

I think it also means, “Rid your heart of all self-deceit.” I have seen firsthand the destructive power of leaders’ self-deceptions (including my own). They can ruin any kind of organization, even a family, because they prevent us from seeing and understanding people and events as they really are and erode the trust and connectedness that hold the human enterprise together.

How and why do we deceive ourselves? The process often begins simply enough, but can end up damaging, even destroying, the relationships we depend on. For example, suppose I see someone who needs help and feel I ought to reach out. If I could help but choose not to, for whatever reason, I may begin to fabricate a “story” designed to justify my own failure to act. I might tell myself things like, “He needs to be more self-reliant, doesn’t he? Besides, I’ve got too much to do as it is!”

Does this internal chatter sound familiar? I now begin to see neither that person nor myself as we really are. Why? To protect myself from recognizing what I have done and to justify my image of myself. My story, which I may not even recognize as my own creation, becomes an alternate reality that may bear little resemblance to me or the person involved.

Worse yet, my self-deceit can become a habit toward people or life in general. If that happens, I may never really connect with anyone because my collected stories, “written” or adopted long ago, prevent me from seeing things clearly. How can I lead anyone, when I am wearing blinders of my own making that have caused me to lose my way?

Discovering our self-deceptions and ridding ourselves of them is hard work. How can we overcome them? I think the answer lies in two of the Rule’s other underlying themes: humility and compassion. A healthy view of humility is to see it not as neurotic self-abasement (which might really be just another excuse for failing to act), but as an honest and open acknowledgment of who we are in God’s eyes and, just as important, who others are.

Truly humble persons see people – including themselves – not as they need them to be, but as they are; they love them as they love themselves. Compassion comes from the Latin expression for “suffering together with” and it means a sympathetic awareness of others that causes us to will and to work for their good – in other words, to love them.

If we see others and their needs as they are, it is virtually impossible to experience self-deceit, because our focus is no longer on ourselves and our need for self-justification but on the greater good of the whole. With our eyes cleared of our own willful self-deceptions, we will be able to see ourselves and others as we really are – in the bright light of the risen Christ – as St. Benedict would have us do. I cannot think of a better way to further the Oblate Council’s goal of leadership development for the oblate community of Saint Meinrad.

Reflection Questions

How have I deceived myself and fabricated a “story” to justify my failure to act?

Can I be vulnerable enough to see myself as I truly am?

Am I able and willing to focus on the greater good instead of myself and my needs?

John Swales III, oblate
Parkersburg, WV

Oblate Mrs. Rita Merk attends the booth on Benedictine Oblates at the Ministry Fair held at St. Bernadette Parish in Lancaster, OH.
Faithful Witnesses
Br. Silas Henderson, OSB
St. Aelred of Rievaulx
Feast: January 12

Aelred was born in Hexham, England, in 1110. As a young man, he spent several years serving in the court of King David I of Scotland, a somewhat-controversial figure who is also honored as a saint. Aelred left court and entered the Cistercian abbey of Rievaulx in Yorkshire in 1134. (The Cistercians, who also follow the Rule of St. Benedict, were established by Sts. Robert, Alberic and Stephen in the middle of the 11th century.)

Nine years later, in 1142, he was appointed to serve as abbot of the monastic community at Revesby; he was appointed abbot of Rievaulx in 1147. Under his wise rule, the abbey flourished. Loved by his monks and celebrated by his religious order, St. Aelred died on January 12, 1167. The monastery at Rievaulx continued to prosper until it was suppressed during the “Dissolution of the Monasteries,” ordered by King Henry VIII in 1535.

St. Aelred was a powerful preacher and effective spiritual leader. In addition to a large number of sermons and letters, St. Aelred left behind a biography of St. Edward the Confessor and two significant works on monastic spirituality: The Mirror of Charity, which seems to have been written at the request of St. Bernard of Clairvaux, and On Spiritual Friendship.

Although the words “monk” and “friend” do not seem to go together, St. Aelred understood that true, spiritual friendship is an expression of God’s love for us, in and through Christ. He wrote: “A friend is called a guardian of love or as some would have it, a guardian of the spirit itself.”

He recognized that there was no greater consolation in this life than the gift of a true friend: “Nothing more useful is sought after, nothing more difficult is discovered, nothing more sweet experienced and nothing more profitable possessed. For friendship bears fruit in this life and the next.”

May St. Aelred’s example of complete fidelity to the monastic way of life and of commitment to fostering true and abiding friendship inspire us to always work for the good of those special people God has placed within our care.

Reflection Questions
How do I foster Christian virtues in my relationships with my friends?
Do I remember to thank God for the gifts of friendship and love?
Who in my life seems to be in need of a true, spiritual friend? Is God calling me to be that friend?

The Evansville Oblate Chapter members who were present at the 75th anniversary celebration of the chapter on October 2.
Selected commentaries on the Rule of St. Benedict

Oblates often ask for the most suitable commentary to read on the Rule of St. Benedict. A commentary is an explanatory treatise or a systematic series of explanations or interpretations.

For centuries, countless authors and researchers have written about the Rule. The first commentary was by St. Gregory the Great who, in his Dialogues, wrote not only on the Rule but also about the man himself. More books have been written about the Rule in the past 25 years than in all of the past century.

Commentaries can be classified into three major groups: devotional, line by line (exegesis) and a combination of both. The published works of Joan Chittister, OSB, Basil Pennington, OSB, and Esther deWaal are a few of the excellent commentaries that border on the devotional as well as the exegetical approach. These authors teach about the Rule in terms that synthesize the concepts brought out in their commentaries, but do not overwhelm the reader.

Oblate Director Fr. Meinrad Brune, OSB, selected nine authors as being representative of the evolution of the commentary approach on the Rule of St. Benedict. This begins a series on those commentaries that will appear in subsequent issues of the newsletter. Two commentaries will be presented in each newsletter in chronological order based on the publication date.

The series will focus first on the Prologue, since this section best demonstrates the character and spirituality of St. Benedict. The Prologue is an invitation for prospective monks, nuns and oblates to become members of a Benedictine monastic community. Subsequent articles in the series will be on humility, silence and obedience.


Paul DeLatte was the abbot of Solemes and superior-general of The Congregation of Benedictines of France. In 1917, Justin McCann, OSB, translated the book from French to English. The translation was made in Ampleforth Abbey and was not, at first, intended for publication.

In his commentary, DeLatte states that other rules have a more impersonal nature. St. Benedict, in the first words of the Prologue, puts himself into a more intimate contact with his followers. He commences the code of monastic life with a loving address. The first words of the Prologue are attractive and reassuring. The precepts that Benedict brings are counsels dictated by his experience and his love.

In the Prologue, Benedict requires of every beginner a docility formed by humility and obedience that gives Benedictine monasticism its character. Docility alone is what establishes us in that state where self-seeking has been driven out and we are in union with the Lord. Benedict analyzes and details the successive stages of supernatural docility.

“Hearken,” for we must listen. If there be too much noise in the soul and the attention be scattered of a multitude of objects, the voice of God, which is generally quiet, or the whistling of a gentle air is not heard. “Hearken, O my son, to the precept of your master and incline the ear of your heart.”

The concluding words on the Prologue seem designed to reassure and encourage souls who shrink from the holy demand of the religious life. Benedict points out that monastic life is the “school of the Lord’s service.” It is the school where one learns to serve God, where one is trained without cessation in a novitiate that will last the whole life. The monastery is a school where one learns to worship

OBLATES: IN THEIR OWN WORDS

“One of the things in the Rule that really strikes me is the concept of learning to be human, and it is a hard work. It is a labor. The way I understand it, it is stripping away our phoniness and the labor that is involved in doing that, learning to live between who I think I am and who I really am.”

Oblate James O’Connell Paoli, IN
God. This school has one and only one master.

The Prologue introduces an essential element of the Benedictine Rule: stability and preserving in the monastery until death. The present life is only an apprenticeship, a trial or novitiate for eternity. It is in this view of eternity that we have to renounce, to learn and to conquer.


Columba Marmion was an abbot of Maredsous Abbey in France. Although Abbot Marmion does not address the Prologue per se, he does include it in the first chapter, “To Seek God.” According to Marmion, when one examines the Rule of St. Benedict, it is clearly an abridgement to Christianity and a means of practicing the Christian life in its fullness and perfection.

Benedict declares from the first lines of the Prologue that he addresses only those who wish to return to God under the leadership of Christ. Benedict saw the Rule as a simple and safe guide for leading to God. In the Prologue, Benedict is very clear that he does not wish to institute anything beyond or besides the Christian life.

From the first lines of the Prologue, Benedict warns us not to grieve by our evil deeds the God who has promised to count us among His children. “To attain God,” is the end that Benedict wishes us to have ever before our eyes. This principle, like a life-giving sap, circulates throughout all the articles of the monastic code.

In the monastery, one ought to have but one end in view: “that in all things God may be glorified.” The words “in all things” are one of the conditions of our seeking God. Benedict requires that, in seeking God, we must be constant and remain united to Him by faith. If we do not attain this end, we remain useless and unprofitable.

The psalmist says, and Benedict quotes these words in the Prologue, “The Lord hath looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there be any that understand and seek God.” Marmion summarizes from the Prologue the importance of the end in the human life and that to seek God is the ultimate end of the monastic life. To seek God in all things and to seek Him only are the precious fruits of this search. Marmion points out how Jesus Christ is the perfect model of seeking God.

Thomas J. Rillo, oblate
Bloomington, IN

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example I found particularly helpful contained suggestions about how to respond to an unpleasant situation in which a superior has spoken hurtful words.

Readers of A Blessed Life will find many useful guidelines for using principles of Benedictine spirituality to enrich their everyday lives. Even with its few unfamiliar words or references, reading the book will be a rewarding and encouraging experience for anyone who longs for “good days” and is sincere about putting into practice the admonitions of the Rule and Benedictine spirituality in the home and in the workplace.

Paul Reichardt, oblate
Crestview Hills, KY

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The book is organized into seven chapters. The first chapter explains Derkse's purpose for the book, describing Benedictine values and tradition as dynamic in character and as valuable to living life to the fullest in the 21st century as it was in Benedict's own time.

The final chapter weaves together threads of ideas mentioned in preceding chapters: discipline, discernment, frugality and patience. The intervening chapters treat, one by one, concepts fundamental to the Benedictine vision of a blessed life: silence, humility, “blessed work,” study and hospitality.

A Blessed Life contrasts Benedictine ideals with the attitudes of contemporary secular society and proposes that the Benedictine way of life may be “fruitfully translated into non-monastic contexts.” Not only is this translation of values possible, the book maintains, it is essential to living a “personally and socially blessed life” or, as the Prologue to the Rule and Psalm 33 express it, to experience life as “good days.”

This thesis is most forcefully demonstrated in the chapters on humility and work. Derkse's examples of humility's role in the search for “good days” are fresh and memorable. The account of a Dutch translator's struggle to convey adequately the message of Chapter 7 of the Rule in his native language testifies eloquently to the challenge of cultivating sincere humility.

The chapter on work begins with the premise that “the quality of my work and the condition of my soul are intimately connected.” Derkse offers examples of monastic spirituality's capacity to alter hectic and pressured work situations into dimensions of a blessed life. One

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