



The Oblate

News Magazine of the Oblates of Saint John's Abbey

February 2016

Volume 60, Number 1

Lenten Day of Reflection — March 13, 2016

The featured speaker at the Lenten Day of Reflection will be Fr. Lew Grobe, OSB. He titles his presentation “By The Work of Our Hands.” In his words, “In regard to monastic life and the larger American culture, people are starting to re-evaluate manual labor in a life where work continues to become more abstract and separated from the material world. As a monk who feels called to the manual trades, I have a personal interest in this topic. Woodworking is the trade to which I am attracted, for which I feel gifted, and through which I believe I am able to serve the community.”

In this presentation, Father Lew will explore the historical role and contemporary context of manual labor at Saint John’s Abbey and in the wider Benedictine tradition. In the end, he will show the value of manual labor for our Benedictine community, our oblates, and society at large.

Father Lew has been a monk for six years. His connection with Saint John’s started long before he entered the monastery. In fact, he says, he owes his existence, in part, to Saint John’s and Saint Ben’s as his parents first met and then eventually got married in Collegeville. He grew up with his three siblings in the western suburbs of Minneapolis and graduated from Saint John’s in 2006 with degrees in German and the Humanities. He came back to Saint John’s in 2008 to work for the Admission Office before joining the Abbey.

Ordained a priest December 12th, Father Lew was soon appointed Assistant Formation Director. He has a passion for woodworking and spends most of his day working with master craftsman Michael Roske at Abbey Woodworking. His interests and activities include biking, skiing, running, gardening, keeping bees and assisting with church environment.



Father Lew in the woodworking shop

Cost: Free-will offering. Registration is necessary for our preparations, and it is easy: simply inform the oblate office that you will attend. For contact information, see page 2.

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|-------|-----------------------|------|--|
| 09:30 | Arrival in Great Hall | 1:30 | Father Lew’s Conference “By the Work of Our Hands” |
| 10:30 | Sunday Eucharist | | |
| 11:30 | Lunch in Q264 | 2:30 | Discussion & Prayer |
| 12:45 | <i>Lectio Divina</i> | 3:00 | Departure |

“Above all” . . . is a phrase that any follower of Benedict’s Rule knows as familiarly as a heartbeat or the tick of a clock. In this issue we feature mercy *above all*. We cannot find any place or person where mercy does not pertain.

We are two months into the Jubilee Year of Mercy proclaimed by Pope Francis. Be not surprised, therefore, and please, be not bored by the focus on mercy. In this issue of *The Oblate* mercy is treated from a number of angles: from Pope Francis, the Rule of Benedict, and the pens (or word processors) of contributors. As you read, you will note that mercy has many relatives: prayer, forgiveness, peace, Lent, faith, and more.

Of course mercy begins with God, through the Holy Spirit, and in Jesus Christ to whom we are to prefer nothing, whom we are to “see” in everyone, *above all* in the sick, the young, the abbot, the guest (including the immigrant or in Jesus’ list, the stranger), the prison inmate, the sister and brother. Oblates know this, but like us monks, benefit from repeated reminders.

So it is, therefore, that most of the content in this issue deals with mercy directly or indirectly, and we hope the reader will return to passages and prayers occasionally throughout the Jubilee Year.

Publisher: Abbot John Klassen, OSB;
Oblate Director: Father Michael Peterson, OSB; **Assistant Oblate Director/Editor:** Father Donald Tauscher, OSB; **Layout:** Josie Stang;
Printing and Mailing: Mary Gouge;
Circulation: Cathy Wieme.

Contact Oblate Office:

320.363.2018 oblates@osb.org

Website: saintjohnsabbey.org/oblates/



Dear Oblates,

Chapter 49, “The Observance of Lent,” is a little gem in the Rule. Benedict takes what could be negative and uninviting and gives us a positive, evocative vision of what we are trying to do with Lent.

For Benedict the purpose of Lent is *joyful vigilance*. He uses the word *joy* twice in this chapter and *nowhere else* in the Rule. This is counterintuitive: we do not typically associate joy

with the practices of Lent. Benedict is speaking here of the “joy of spiritual desire,” desire focused on Holy Easter. In my life in this monastery, there has never been a doubt in my mind about the centrality of Easter, and the centrality of the mystery of Christ’s dying and rising.

This “joy of holy desire” is not dependent on the fickleness of our daily emotional ride but rather is rooted in the “joy of the Holy Spirit.” In designating this “joy of spiritual desire” as the energizing force for the Lenten observance, Benedict is following the rich patristic reflection on desire. To desire something or someone is to long for a union not yet achieved. We long to be united with the Triune God, and though we are only partially satisfied, this longing itself is already shaping our life, drawing us in a given direction.

Benedict urges us to wash away the negligence of other times in this holy season. Often, this means reclaiming life-giving and renewing practices that we have let slide. Always, we “await Holy Easter with the joy of spiritual desire.”

To look forward to the joy of Holy Easter surely includes reflection on what put Jesus on the Cross – human sinfulness. We need greater clarity on the impact that sin has in the life of each one of us. Sin, for St. Paul, is much more than a grocery list of individual acts. It is a kind of collective force or power that is allied with death and distorts our human conscience, our emotional, cognitive, and spiritual imagination. In 12-Step language, sin is “stinkin’ thinkin.” Sin immerses us in a life of false choices and blunted sensitivity to the needs and beauty of the people around us. Often we know how to live better than we do. What in my life needs to die with Jesus on the Cross this year? Just as importantly, what in my life needs to rise with Christ, transformed and made new?

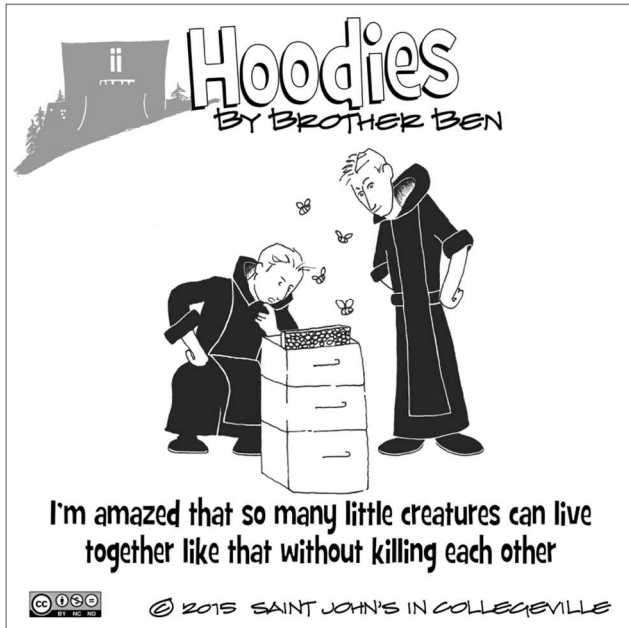
For Benedict, Lenten asceticism includes devoting ourselves to reading, that is, to *lectio divina*, perhaps using *Give Us This Day* or another guide to the daily Mass readings; perhaps taking the final one-third of Luke’s Gospel, focusing on the passion and resurrection narratives. We may avoid turning on the radio or music and be in silence for some time each day, to quiet our interior. We may visit, call, or email those persons who need our love. Benedict is aware that Lenten spiritual practice will be different for each person.

Benedict points us to Holy Easter, to the celebration of the dying and rising of Jesus, and to the deep spiritual joy of spiritual desire.

Father Michael's Letter

Dear Oblates,

Volunteers are not only welcome at the abbey, but needed. Many of you have expressed an interest in becoming more involved in the life of the abbey and interacting more with monks outside of our regular Days of Reflection and July Oblate Retreat. We already have a few oblates who volunteer on an individual basis and have been of great help to the community. There is definitely room for more.



Our volunteer program, in general, is meant to be recognized as a source for connecting Saint John's Abbey with the wider community and to assist particular abbey departments and individuals with specific services or tasks. Volunteer work contributes to the ongoing life of Saint John's Abbey. It is also an opportunity to socialize, network and meet new friends. Volunteers are always welcome to join the monks in their daily communal prayer.

If we are to be followers of the Lord Jesus, and bearers of his dangerous memory, we must avoid the temptation of “popularity.” We must speak the words and perform the actions of radical love, both in season and out, whether we are met with accolades or brickbats, whether such love inspires affection or hatred.

It is not the opinion of the crowd that matters in the end. No, it is the integrity and courage of our commitment to the gospel. So beware, my friends in the Lord, when all speak well of you. Others have treated the *false* prophets, the superficial, the cowardly in just this way. But if we want to rejoice and exult some day in heaven, like the *true* prophets, we will have to stand in solidarity with the poor, hunger for justice and peace, weep for the victims of violence in our streets and playgrounds, and profoundly disturb those who will neither listen to nor live in accord with God's word.

From: “Selected Works of Joseph Cardinal Bernardin,” Vol 1 (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2000) p. 506.

While individual volunteer work is valuable, I am thinking of something more communal. What if we begin to have an Oblate Volunteer Day a couple times each year? The purpose would be to invite oblates to the monastery in the spirit of gratitude and hospitality so that you may partner your talents with the monks in order to build a stronger community.



I have met with our Abbey Volunteer Coordinator, Eileen Haeg, and we have come up with an idea of how to begin.

Our Oblate Volunteer Day could start at the abbey at 9:30 a.m. and we would begin our time with a short Liturgy of the Hours. St. Benedict says, “Before you begin a good work, pray.”

We then can do some form of work together for two hours. The work would take into account the various ages and physical capabilities of the oblates. A few initial work ideas are: cleaning the church, working in the garden, cleaning cemetery stones, and organizing archives.

Following that, we could have a simple lunch together (preferably outside during warm weather) with a monk or an oblate giving a short talk while we eat. Rather than a talk on a specific Benedictine theme, perhaps we could learn more about Saint John's Abbey history — its buildings and/or monks?

If we were to have 10-20 oblates, working shoulder to shoulder, praying, and eating together, I think that would be wonderful! Let me know what you think or whether you have any specific suggestions.

Grace, mercy and peace be with you and yours.

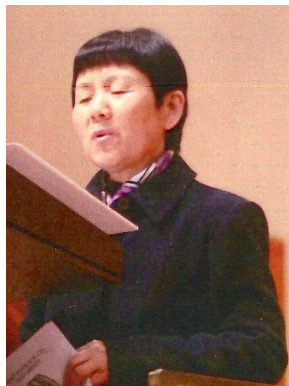
News Briefs

Candidate Investiture



Above: New candidates, all Wisconsinites, flank Father Don: Marla Bauer, Doris Tauscher, Margaret (Peg) McDonald, and Mary Kniprath were invested October 6, 2015.

Below: Father Michael, Harlan Strong (October 16, 2015) and Paulina Whang (December 13, 2015)



Final Oblation

On the pre-Advent Day of Reflection, November 15, Father Michael, oblate director (right), invested Scott Swedeen (left) as a candidate and received the final oblation promises of Mary and Larry Haeg.

Deaths



Oblate Thomas Linhares died September 7, 2015. Both he and his wife Leah Fay became oblates of Saint John's Abbey in 1997. Leah Fay died May 17, 2013 in Edina.

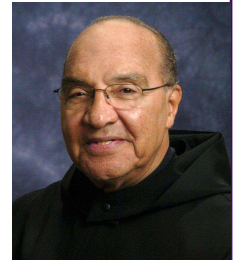
Mildred Johnson, mother of Oblate Max Johnson, died shortly after midnight, November 2, 2015, right at the transition between All Saints and All Souls.

Mary Lou (Wincek) Rainville, mother of Oblate Joel Rainville, died December 6, 2015. Joel has been an oblate of Saint John's Abbey since 2000.



Oblate John Burns died January 14, 2016. A former monk of Saint John's, John made final oblation in 1997. He remained a close friend and generous supporter of the abbey all his life.

Fr. Allen Tarlton, OSB, who served as Oblate Director from 1997 to 2002, died peacefully in the Abbey Retirement Center on the morning of January 25, 2016, the Feast of the Conversion of Saint Paul.



Sunday at the Abbey — Holy Year of Mercy

To mark the Holy Year of Mercy, the *Sunday At The Abbey* series focuses on mercy in Scripture, the Rule, the Church, and our wider society and culture.

Fr. Michael Patella spoke on *For His Mercy Endures Forever*, a scriptural read of divine justice, forgiveness, and reconciliation. Fr. Columba Stewart gave his reflections on *Do Not Crush the Bruised Reed: Mercy in the Rule of Benedict*. Fr. Dan Ward spoke on the topic: *The Church and Its Law: A Dispenser of Mercy or a Community of Mercy?*

Coming up:

February 21 — Fr. Luke Mancuso, *Picturing Pardon: Messing with Mercy in Film Narratives*.

April 3 — Dr. Dick Andzenge, *A Second Chance? The Place of Mercy in Our Society*.

Sunday at the Abbey presentations are free and open to the public at 7:00 p.m. in the Abbey Chapter House. Videos of these presentations can be found on the abbey web site, www.saintjohnsabbey.org/

Pilgrimage Sites for Jubilee Year of Mercy

Some day some clever soul will dub Pope Francis “The Mercy Pope” and Francis will be pleased. Of course he won’t feel bad if he is called “The Pope of Joy.” His soul is humble and geared to mercy, and he exudes joy wherever he goes. He wants all people, especially Catholics, to welcome and to extend the rich mercy of God, and to be joyful evangelists.

As part of this Extraordinary Jubilee, Pope Francis asks for a Holy Door to be opened "at the cathedral" and at other important churches "at the discretion of the local ordinary."

Accordingly, in communion with Pope Francis, our local ordinary, Bishop Donald Kettler, has designated the following churches and shrines in the Diocese of Saint Cloud as places of pilgrimage where a *Door of Mercy* will be opened and where all the faithful can obtain the Jubilee Indulgence.

- The Cathedral of Saint Mary and the Shrine of Saint Cloud, St. Cloud
- Saint John's Abbey and the Shrine of St. Peregrine, Collegetown
- The Shrine of Saint Odilia, Onamia
- Assumption (Grasshopper) Chapel, Cold Spring
- The Divine Mercy Shrine at St. Paul, Sauk Center
- The Poor Clare Monastery, Sauk Rapids
- Saint Benedict's Monastery, St. Joseph
- The Franciscan Sisters, Little Falls

The diocesan website lists the following requirements for obtaining the special jubilee indulgence:

To Obtain the Plenary Indulgence

- ◆ Make a pilgrimage to one of the designated Holy Doors, pass through it, and internally express a detachment from and rejection of sin at the time of indulgenced work (i.e. pilgrimage to the Door of Mercy);
- ◆ Pray for the intention of the Holy Father at the time of the indulgenced work (i.e. pilgrimage to the Door of Mercy). This can be one “Our Father,” and one “Hail Mary;” it can be the “Glory be to the Father” or other suitable prayers, like the Holy Father’s Jubilee Prayer (see page 7).
- ◆ Make a “Profession of Faith” (Nicene or Apostles’ Creed) at the time of the indulgenced work (i.e. pilgrimage to the Door of Mercy).
- ◆ Celebrate the Sacrament of Penance and make a sacramental confession within 20 days after performing the indulgenced work (i.e. pilgrimage to the Door of Mercy);
- ◆ Receive Holy Communion within 20 days after performing the indulgenced work (i.e. pilgrimage to the Door of Mercy).

Whenever you respond to God’s gratuitous gift of mercy by doing one of these acts, you will receive the Jubilee Indulgence for yourself or for your deceased loved ones. Receiving this indulgence commits you to live by mercy so that the fruit of God’s gift to you may flourish. The plenary indulgence can be obtained once each day. A single sacramental confession suffices for several plenary indulgences, but separately receiving Holy Communion is required for each indulgence.



Shrine of Saint Peregrine in crypt of Abbey

A bit of history — On the 11th of October 1962, Pope John XXIII, now St. John XXIII, opened the Second Vatican Council, saying: *“Frequently the Church has condemned errors with the greatest severity. Nowadays, however, the Spouse of Christ prefers to make use of the medicine of mercy rather than that of severity. She considers that she meets the needs of the present day by demonstrating the validity of her teaching rather than by condemnations.”*

Today — 53 years on and five popes later, we have Pope Francis echoing St. John XXIII’s words in calling the Church to a Jubilee Year of Mercy. *“It is indeed my wish that the Jubilee be a living experience of the closeness of the Father, whose tenderness is almost tangible, so that the faith of every believer may be strengthened and thus testimony to it be more effective.”*

Affirming that the mercy of God is a core doctrine of the Catholic Church, the pope draws the link between mercy and evangelisation, calling the entire Church to show the merciful face of God to those with whom they interact. *“The experience of mercy, indeed, becomes visible in the witness of concrete signs as Jesus himself*



taught us.” Thus he invites us to revive and recover the Beatitudes and the Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy.

Early in his pontificate, John Paul II issued the encyclical *Dives in Misericordia (Rich in Mercy)*, saying: *“Jesus Christ taught that humans not only receive and experience the mercy of God but are also called to practice mercy towards others. ‘Blessed are the merciful for they will be shown mercy’ (Mt 5:7). The Church sees in these words a call to action, and she tries to practice mercy.”*

In granting a Jubilee Indulgence, Pope Francis hopes that Christians



will have *“a genuine experience of God’s mercy, which comes to meet each person in the Face of the Father, who welcomes and forgives, forgetting completely the sin committed.”* He makes pastoral and practical provisions for those who are homebound and cannot make it to one of the diocesan or Roman Holy Doors on a pilgrimage. He mentions those who are in prison, emphasizing that he wants them to participate, even though they cannot travel on pilgrimage. *“They may obtain the indulgence in the chapels of the prisons. May the gesture of directing their thought and prayer to the Father each time they cross the threshold of their cell signify*



for them their passage through the Holy Door, because the mercy of God is able to transform hearts, and is also able to transform bars into an experience of freedom.”

Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy: Politics or Gospel?

Feed the hungry and give drink to the thirsty. With Lent upon us, the gospel mantra is prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. Of course these are all works of mercy extolled (mandated?) by Jesus with a view to “love our neighbor.” *Clothe the naked:* clean a closet and give excess to organizations that provide clothes to needy folks. *Shelter the Homeless:* E.g., support Catholic Charities, Habitat for Humanity. *Visit the imprisoned:* if not by personal visits, how about a card or letter? We have at times invited oblates and others to be pen pals, and a few have responded—a good start. We can provide many more names and addresses of inmates (just ask Father Don for one or two). *Visit the sick:* when it comes to one’s own family, this seems to be a no-brainer, but, e.g., elders in care facilities get lonely too. *Bury the dead:* does comforting mourners apply here?

It comes down to “Freely you have received; freely give” (Mt 10:8).

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Mercy Quotes of Pope Francis

I think we too are the people who, on the one hand, want to listen to Jesus, but on the other hand, at times, like to find a stick to beat others with, to condemn others. And Jesus has this message for us: mercy. I think — and I say it with humility — that this is the Lord's most powerful message: mercy.

It is not easy to entrust oneself to God's mercy, because it is an abyss beyond our comprehension. But we must! ... "Oh, I am a great sinner!" All the better! Go to Jesus: He likes you to tell him these things! He forgets, He has a very special capacity for forgetting. He forgets, He kisses you, He embraces you and He simply says to you: "Neither do I condemn you; go, and sin no more" (Jn 8:11).

Jesus' attitude is striking: we do not hear words of scorn, we do not hear words of condemnation, but only words of love, of mercy, which are an invitation to conversation. "Neither do I condemn you; go, and do not sin again." Ah! Brothers and Sisters, God's face is the face of a merciful father who is always patient. Have you thought about God's patience, the patience He has with each one of us? That is His mercy. He always has patience, patience with us. He understands us, He waits for us, He does not tire of forgiving us if we are able to return to Him with a contrite heart. "Great is God's mercy," says the Psalm.

In the past few days I have been reading a book by Cardinal Kasper. He said that feeling mercy, that this word changes everything. This is the best thing we can feel: it changes the world. A little mercy makes the world less cold and more just. God's mercy can make even the driest land become a garden, can restore life to dry bones (cf. Ez 37:1-14). Let us be renewed by God's mercy, let us be loved by Jesus, let us enable the power of his love to transform our lives too; and let us become agents of this mercy, channels through which God can water the earth, protect all creation and make justice and peace flourish.

Together let us pray to the Virgin Mary that she help us to walk in faith and charity, ever trusting in the Lord's mercy; He always awaits us, loves us, has pardoned us with His Blood and pardons us every time we go to Him to ask His forgiveness. Let us trust in His mercy!



I am always struck when I reread the parable of the merciful Father. The Father, with patience, love, hope and mercy, had never for a second stopped thinking about his wayward son, and as soon as he sees him still far off, he runs out to meet him and embraces him with tenderness, the tenderness of God, without a word of reproach. God is always waiting for us, He never grows tired. Jesus shows us this merciful patience of God so that we can regain confidence and hope — always!

God's patience has to call forth in us the courage to return to Him, however many mistakes and sins there may be in our life. It is there, in the wounds of Jesus, that we are truly secure; there we encounter the boundless love of His heart. Thomas understood this. Saint Bernard asks himself: "But what can I count on? My own merits? No, my merit is God's mercy. I am by no means lacking merits as long as He is rich in mercy. If the mercies of the Lord are manifold, I too will abound in merits." This is important: the courage to trust in Jesus' mercy, to trust in His patience, to seek refuge always in the wounds of His love.

Let us remember Peter: three times he denied Jesus, precisely when he should have been closest to him; and when he hits bottom he meets the gaze of Jesus who patiently, wordlessly, says to him: "Peter, don't be afraid of your weakness, trust in Me." Peter understands, he feels the loving gaze of Jesus and he weeps. How beautiful is this gaze of Jesus — how much tenderness is there! Brothers and sisters, let us never lose trust in the patience and mercy of God!

Pope Francis' Prayer for the Holy Year of Mercy

Lord Jesus Christ, show us your face and we will be saved. Your loving gaze freed Zaccheus and Matthew from being enslaved by money; the adulteress and Magdalene from seeking happiness only in created things; made Peter weep after his betrayal, and assured Paradise to the repentant thief. . . . You are the visible face of the invisible Father, of the God who manifests his power above all by forgiveness and mercy. Let the church be your visible face in the world, its Lord risen and glorified.

George Bristol is a career military man who frequently serves overseas. He is shown here when he made final oblation March 15, 2015. The text below includes excerpts from letters he sent to Father Michael.

Greetings from over the hills and far away. While days here can be long and often turbulent, the basic and perseverance-based dictum that you spoke to me about—consistency—has become one of my touchstones during this time. 1 Corinthians 16:13 is germane here: "Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong."

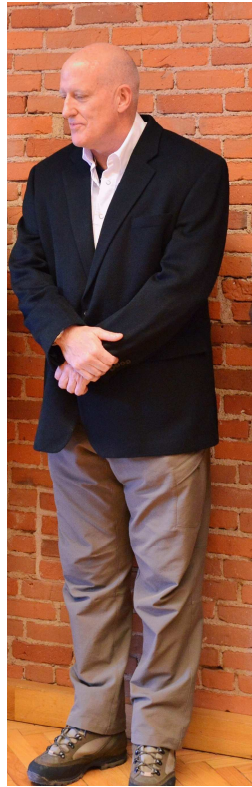
But deeper than that, the rhythm of daily time to stop my mind and simply enjoy some prayer and quiet time with God has given me a deeper understanding of the Benedictine lifestyle. Additionally, I have made it a point to be silent more than speaking. That may sound strange on a noisy place like a battle zone, but in doing that my mind quiets and gives me some repose.

I continue to work on the diurnal (prayer book). I have collected several of the old wartime devotionals and you are correct in that the day-to-day stories are motivating and invigorating, as is the case in *Give Us This Day*. I am progressing and it is a work of love.

That being said, I have done some *lectio divina* in some unexpected places that has only made me more aware than ever of the power of God's love for me. It in itself is a humbling and reassuring thing.

The other thing I did I hope will make you smile. I brought with me one of the simple crosses I purchased in the gift shop, and I found a picture of my inspiration, the St. John the Baptist sculpture that is in the abbey. They are both in my small sleeping area.

Father, I have a long way to go in my journey. But in the wonderful baseline of the Benedictine Rule, I see a better way; a more reflective and yet bias-for-action way; and most of all, a balance in all things. That is where I am. I have spent many years in violent places. Tonight, I am calm and focused.



Tracy Deresyński is an oblate living in West Bend, Wisconsin. She is director of Adult & Family ministry at St. Francis Borgia Church in Cedarburg, WI. Here she tells of her initiative in creating an oblate chapter in Wisconsin.

A major part of Benedictine spirituality and being an oblate is being connected to the community. When I made Final Oblation at the end of September 2015, Father Michael said to me, "Oblation is going to be more meaningful if you are part of a community, and of course you are always welcome at Saint John's."

Sometimes distance can separate us from the Abbey where we made our oblation. That is when it's important to find other oblates with whom to form a community! In Wisconsin we are in the process of doing just that, forming an Oblate Chapter.

Some 30 oblates live in Wisconsin: LaCrosse, Eau Claire, Green Bay, Beaver Dam, Milwaukee, Madison, Kenosha and more. I have reached out to those for whom we have contact information. Their responses make it clear that there is a desire to gather as an oblate community for prayer, conversation, and sharing with people who have made the same commitment to this way of life.

If you live in Wisconsin and haven't heard from me, please contact me at tracy089@gmail.com. Call or text me at 262-707-1455 or write to me.

WI Oblate Chapter
5716 Debbie Lane
West Bend, WI 53095

Dr. Richard Lux and I are, for now at least, the point people to gather as many oblates as possible to meet on Saturday February 27 and April 30 in Cedarburg for prayer, book discussion, Saturday evening Mass and an optional dinner. We are looking forward to meeting fellow oblates in Wisconsin.

Benedictine spirituality and oblate life are rooted in community. There are many ways to create and engage with a community, whether it's in person, online or at the Abbey. If you aren't connected with an oblate community in your state or country, I'd encourage you to contact Father Michael, requesting a list of oblates in your area. When you reach out to them, you may be pleasantly surprised by the response you'll receive.

Easter: We Get a Whole New life

All of Lent, from its very origin, has been a preparation for baptism. It still is. That's why, ideally, the RCIA folks are baptized at Easter, not on the 4th of July, although both events deal with freedom, with liberation, with a life out from under oppression, with a new lease on life, *a whole new life*.

Baptism, we know, plunges us into the death of Christ. It changes us. It ends our former life and introduces us to a new condition. Not just because Jesus died, but because he died and then he rose to *a whole new life*.

One day the parish priest offered a Mass in the home of an elderly couple during the Easter season. During the celebration the priest asked the shy husband what resurrection meant to him. Usually he deferred to his wife, letting her comment, make intercessions, etc. But this time the priest gently pressed him for an answer. The man paused, and paused, and finally said: *It means we get a whole new life*. Pretty good theology for a man who never studied theology. Pretty good spirituality for a man who never had a spiritual director or made a retreat.

A whole new life. St. Paul couldn't say it much better, and he was inspired by the Holy Spirit! "Just as we have died with Christ, so we will also rise with him in

glory." *We get a whole new life*.

Baptism: where we die and rise with Christ now, with a view to *a whole new life of glory* when our pilgrimage here is complete.

Baptism: so much more than a ritual, a naming ceremony, a washing away of sin, a reason for a party. *It's a whole new life*.

Baptism: a *theosis*; a divinization; a deification; a transformation of who we were into who we are, namely, persons possessing divine nature. Divinity is so much a part of us that we can't really isolate our human nature from our divine nature, any more than we can isolate the humanity of Jesus from the divinity of Christ.

Baptism: more than a covenant; more than a partnership; more than a bunch of promises, as great and wonderful as the promises are.

Baptism: The beginning of faith; the gift of sanctification; the communion of the Holy Spirit; the best and brightest reason for living in love and hope and joy.

Through baptism we are formed in the likeness of Christ (*Lumen Gentium* 7).

Easter renews our baptism. It's time to celebrate because in his mercy God is giving us *a whole new life*.



“‘Sir, we would like to see Jesus,’ said two gentlemen to the apostle Philip” (John 12:21).

This image of seeing God and being in God’s gaze appears again and again through Scripture. Benedict uses this image in two key chapters of his *Rule*: chapter four “On Good Works,” and chapter seven “On Humility.”

In Chapter 4 he lists as one of the tools for good works: “To know for certain that God sees us everywhere.” Then, in Chapter 7, within the first degree of humility, he admonishes us to “consider that God is always looking at us from heaven, that our actions are everywhere visible to the divine eyes and are constantly being reported to God by the angels.”

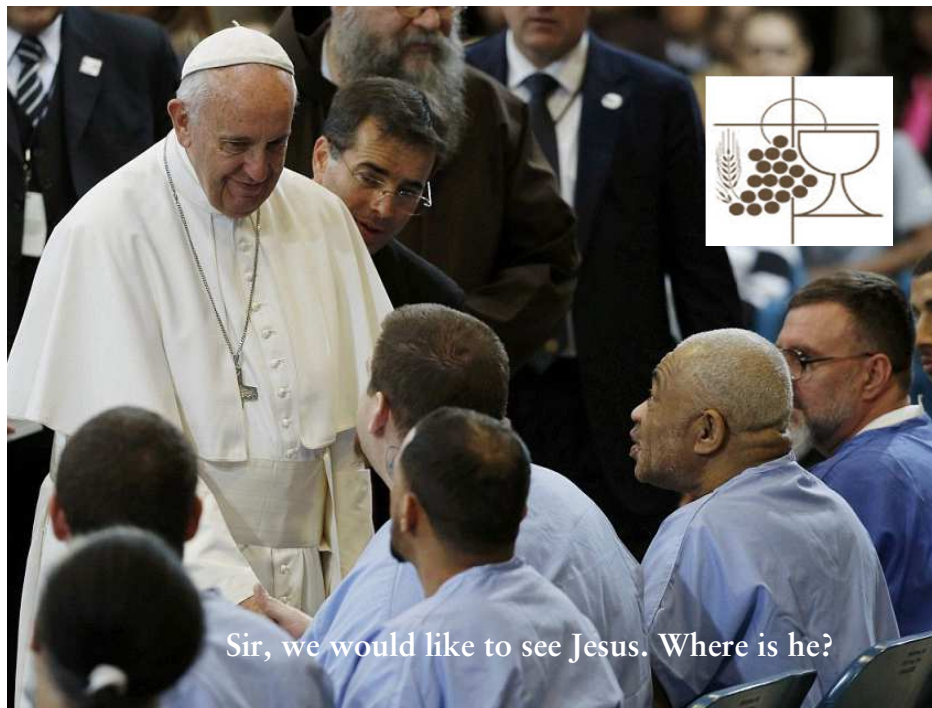
These are not exactly my favorite passages in the *Rule*. They’re not cuddly images of running with our hearts overflowing with love, or reassuring intercessions that grace would supplement nature, or encouraging exhortations to patience, zeal, virtue or good habit.

All the same, God’s gaze is always merciful. Not only does he see our sinfulness, but he also sees the inherent goodness with which he made us, the virtues, the moments of beauty and truth. Even when he sees us sin, he sees these sins in the context of love, and when I know I’m loved, that grace expands — like our hearts as we run along the path of God’s commandments — to loving my neighbor.

The flipside of the image is that Benedict also repeatedly exhorts us to see God all around us: receiving the guest as Christ, hearing the voice of the Spirit through the youngest in the community, the abbot taking the place of Christ, and the sick and elderly as signs of God among us. If we become capable of do-

ing that, how would that change our understanding of then being seen by those who stand in for God around us?

In the concluding chapters of his *Life of Benedict* Gregory the Great gives one example of what it might mean to see as God sees. Gregory shows Benedict praying at the top of a tower. As Benedict prayed, “he suddenly saw a flow of light shining from above, more brilliant than the light of day, and all the shadows of the night fled from it. Another wonder followed this sight. As he himself described it, the whole world was gathered together before his eyes as if within a single ray of light.”



In his ensuing dialogue with the disciple Peter, Gregory devotes much attention to how Benedict, suffused with the light of the Creator, experiences an expansion of heart that makes the full extent of creation seem much smaller. Commentators over the centuries have

debated whether Benedict actually saw God or only ‘looked towards’ God, but what interests me instead is the possibility that Benedict for a moment saw the world as God sees us — finite, precious, and comprehensible.

The experience of prayer in the spirit of Benedict can help us to see and recognize people, places and encounters in their uniqueness — this includes ourselves, our jobs, and our commitments. This type of discernment isn’t limited to Benedictine prayer, of course. Seeking to recognize and respond to the true self within and in others is a characteristic feature of Christian spirituality.



RB 4:74 Never lose hope in God's mercy.

On December 8th, Pope Francis declared an extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy to remind Christians and all people of good will about the boundless mercy and love of God. Since becoming pope in March 2013, his central theme has been the mercy of God, calling for the healing of the world of hatred, suffering, and injustice through a radical commitment to the poor and to those on the margins of society. This Jubilee marks the 50th anniversary of the closing of the Second Vatican Council, which declared to the modern world the openness of the Catholic Church to all.

In drawing attention to the mercy of God in this Jubilee Year, Pope Francis invites all people throughout the world to embrace the virtues of mercy, forgiveness, care and compassion for one another and for the earth. Recall Benedict's exhortation in RB 4:20. Couched in the center of verses on how we are to treat one another, Benedict says that our way of acting must be different from the world's way. He doesn't suggest *fuga mundi* (flee the world) as in getting away from it all and hiding in our own little world, but in acting according to gospel principles. This jubilee is also a year of penance and reconciliation. All peo-

ple, particularly those separated from the church, are invited to come back to the Father's house. Pope Francis has written, "Mercy: the ultimate and supreme act by which God comes to meet us. Mercy: the fundamental law that dwells in the heart of every person who looks sincerely into the eyes of his brothers and sisters on the path of life. Mercy: the bridge that connects God and humanity, opening our hearts to the hope of being loved forever despite our sinfulness."

The emphasis on mercy is a key towards understanding how all the aspects of the jubilee come together in daily practices of kindness, compassion, dialogue, forgiveness and stewardship of one another. It is a time to have mercy even on the earth — a call to live in creation wisely and with reverence.

Many people are searching for God and for meaning. If our religious message speaks of God's love, acceptance and mercy, the possibility of beginning again and of hope for a world in despair, how many seekers might consider becoming a newly dedicated Christian? Think of those who have been hurt by people in the church, or those on the margins of society, or those who have never heard the gospel in an authentic

way. Will they find a home in our church? This year of jubilee says that the doors of the church are open to all. All is a powerful word. I looked in the dictionary for the definition of all, and sure enough, all means all.

How might we live this virtue of mercy? One of the best ways that I know is to experience and get to know the author of mercy, namely, Jesus Christ, more and more. Throughout this jubilee year we do well to commit ourselves to reading the Bible in the great Benedictine practice of *lectio divina*.

St. Jerome once said, "Ignorance of scripture is ignorance of Christ." Put in a positive way, "Living the scriptures is living like Christ." We can rededicate ourselves to reading from the Gospels every day with the word "mercy" as the lens of each verse and chapter. One passage every day in a quiet place, asking Jesus for the grace to live like him, full of mercy toward our brothers and sisters.

Mercy always connects us to all people and to creation. May we live and declare the good news of the gospel to all the world. May our lives be full of mercy to all those we meet.

Blessings and peace,
Michael Peterson, OSB



The Oblate

THAT IN ALL THINGS GOD MAY BE GLORIFIED

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Mark Your Calendar — 2016

March 13, 2016: Lenten Day of Reflection

July 15-17, 2016: Annual Oblate Retreat

November 13, 2016: Fall/Advent Day of Reflection

Regular Chapter Meetings at Collegeville, Red River Valley (Fargo), Joan of Arc (Minneapolis), and St. Paul Oblates. See website for details:

www.saintjohnsabbey.org/monastic-life/oblates/reg/



Inside this issue:

| | |
|--|-----|
| Day of Reflection | 1 |
| Letters from Abbot John and Father Michael | 2-3 |
| News Briefs | 4 |
| Pilgrimage Sites | 5 |
| Jubilee Year of Mercy | 6 |
| Pope Francis on Mercy | 7 |
| Oblates Write | 8 |
| Easter | 9 |
| Benedictine Spirituality | 10 |
| Oblate Connection | 11 |