

The Oblate

News Magazine of the Oblates of Saint John's Abbey

June 2019

Oblate Retreat — July 19-21, 2019

Volume 63 Number 2

Being an Oblate: Prayer, Stability, and Change

This retreat will include personal reflection on my own encounter with the psalms over forty-five years of monastic life and the challenge/grace in

these texts; the multi-faceted meaning of Benedictine stability; the commitment to conversion of heart and life; and some reflection on the impact of an evolutionary theory and a contemporary cosmology on one's understanding of God.

Abbot John Klassen, OSB, is in his nineteenth year as leader of Saint John's Abbey in Collegeville.

He leads a community of 115 Benedictine monks who sponsor and work at Saint John's University, Saint John's Preparatory School, the Liturgical Press as well as in parishes, hospitals and retirement centers, mostly in Minnesota. With a degree in chemistry from Catholic University of America in 1985, he taught organic and biochemistry as well as an ethics course on technology at Saint John's University from 1983-2000 before being elected abbot. He has served on the Board of Directors for the Collegeville Institute for Ecumenical and Cultural Research since 2000. Also, since 2002 he has served as co-chair for Bridgefolk, a grassroots ecumenical conversation between Mennonites and Catholics.



Retreat Registration Information

To register online, go to saintjohnsabbey.org/events/summer-oblate-retreat/ — **To register by surface mail**, complete the registration form that is included inside this newsletter and return it as soon as possible. Registration must be received by July 10, 2019. This is a firm deadline to permit adequate preparation of facilities and services. Check in at Mary Hall on Friday, July 19, 1-7 p.m.

Thanks to additional donations some oblates make, some sponsorship aid is available. If you need help, request it in the comment space at the end of the form.

Message from the Abbot



Our hope is in the Lord our God, the Triune God, the victory won for us by Jesus Christ in his dying and rising, and the sending forth of the Holy Spirit to shape, mold, enlighten, console, and guide the Body of Christ. How do we live more deeply into this hope?

“One does not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Mt 4.4). These words, spoken to the Tempter by Jesus, give us his own self-understanding of the essential place of living with the word of Scripture, reflecting on it, making it part of our DNA.

This is no easy endeavor. The Bible is a complicated book, sometimes with conceptual challenges. For example, some years back I struggled trying to align the power and majesty of the creation accounts in Genesis with the account of creation given by contemporary cosmology and evolutionary theory. In particular, Genesis gives the impression that creation is complete in six days, that “there is nothing new under the sun.” Today scientific discovery tells us that stars are dying and being born all the time, that creation is always moving between order and chaos, and that chaos itself is the source of novelty.

It took me some time to realize that the prophets, particularly Isaiah, and the psalms supplement Genesis with fresh insights and understandings.

Sometimes the word is not as life-giving for us as God desires because we have ideas, opinions, half-baked notions, the corrosion of sin and its effects, clusters of anger, resentment, and self-justification, so that the word has to function like a WD-40 solvent to loosen and allow us to sluff off things that compromise our ability to hear and absorb the life-giving power of the word of scripture.

During the Easter season, the liturgy gives us the whole of John, chapter 6, the powerful and challenging “Bread of Life” teaching of Jesus. Then all year we have, in addition, the sacramental food of Eucharist, consecrated bread and cup.

Message from the Director



On the shore of the Sea of Tiberias Jesus says to the disciples, “Come, have breakfast.” Then he takes bread and gives it to them, and does the same with the fish. Breakfast with Jesus. Wow! It’s beautiful how Jesus takes ordinary stuff and creates of

it—salvation. Nets, boats, fish, bread, a sea, a campfire on the beach, hungry stomachs, hungry souls. No formal invitation, simply an invitation we’ve all heard before, “Come, have breakfast.” We’ve heard this from mom, dad, a spouse, or friends. But hearing it from Jesus?

God made flesh is a God of hospitality. Invitation! “Come, have breakfast.” Why do some make God so distant and unreachable when God is as close and natural in a serving role as one who’s refilled coffee 97 times this morning at Perkins?

Benedictine spirituality is ordinary. The sacred, the holy is in our ordinary relationships and day-to-day activities, in hospitality offered and received. God is found in flesh and blood relationships with one another—real life! God is in all the ordinary places of our lives. Remember those times in your life when you could say, “God is with me!” Was it during something extraordinary? Perhaps. But my guess is that it was during something very ordinary.

Our success, our happiness does not have a lot to do with how much money we make or the status we’ll build for ourselves. For those in your family or friends who finished another academic year, and for those who graduated, tell them, “Do great things in your life.” But you might add this wisdom: “Do the ordinary well.” Happiness and success have to do with the quality of our relationships and the hospitality we offer. Live the ordinary way of Benedict!

How full of welcome is Jesus. Fish, fresh bread, charcoal fire on the beach, an invitation, “Come, have breakfast” —the hospitality of God.

From the Editor

Anima Christi—Worth Memorizing

I pray this at least daily, and I reword line 7:
Don't ever let me get away from you.

Copy and post it where you see it every day.

Soul of Christ, sanctify me.

Body of Christ, save me.

Blood of Christ, inebriate me.

Water from the side of Christ, wash me.

Passion of Christ, strengthen me.

O good Jesus, hear me.

Within thy wounds, hide me.

Suffer me not to be separated from thee.

From the malicious enemy defend me.

In the hour of my death call me,

And bid me come to thee,

That with thy saints I may praise thee
forever and ever. Amen.

March Day of Reflection

Our Lenten Day of Reflection on March 17 drew 50 people, some 25% more than usual. See Lucie Johnson's report on pp 6-7.

Jubilee of Monastic Profession

William Skudlarek, Bernadine Ness and I will celebrate 60 years of vowed life on July 11. Oblates are welcome to share in the jubilee at the 10 a.m. Mass. I know, it's a Thursday, not weekend.

Are You an Abbey Volunteer?

Please come to Volunteer Appreciation Day on Sunday July 21. Community Mass, Reception, Luncheon, and more.

Dorothy Day Canonization

Oblate Eileen Wallace asks: "Is it possible for the oblates of Saint John's Abbey to commit to a monthly day of prayer for the canonization of Dorothy Day? We could each add it to our daily prayer intercessions on a certain day of the month." Any other ideas? Please share them.

Milestones

♦ Candidates

Samuel Torvend, Lakewood, WA began candidacy on November 25, 2018.

Bill Alexander, Minneapolis, MN became candidate on March 17, 2019 at the Day of Reflection.

Richard Burbach, Minneapolis, MN became candidate on April 17, 2019.

Jeff Regan, Springfield, VA began candidacy on May 3, 2019.

Barbara Maricel, Brooklyn Park, MN was invested as candidate on May 6, 2019.

♦ Oblations

Mark Hawkins, Coon Rapids, MN made final oblation March 17, 2019 at the Oblate Day of Reflection.

David Neff, Denver, CO made final oblation March 17, 2019 at St. Mary's Anglican Catholic Church.

♦ Deaths

Nancy Meulendyke, age 87, died November 25, 2018. Oblate since 1982.

Jeanette Schmall, 86, died January 24, 2019. Oblate since 1951.

Sally Haik, 86, died February 12, 2019. Oblate since 2016.

Mary Lou Ziga, 99, died March 28, 2019. Oblate since 1957.

Teresa Watson, 65, died April 4, 2019. Oblate since 1999.

Aldean Cummings, 87, mother of **Oblate Michael '79** and **Steve '83**, died April 18, 2019.

May the angels lead you into paradise; may the martyrs receive you at your arrival and lead you to the holy city Jerusalem. May you have eternal rest.

Mary Johnson Roy's son was killed by a young man named Oshea. For years she felt anger and hatred for her son's murderer. She wanted him to be punished and imprisoned for the rest of his life.

Are there people in your life whom you find hard to forgive? Are there individuals or groups of people who don't deserve our forgiveness?

Mary knew that her hatred was eating her up inside. Her belief in our loving God taught her that she had to let go of that hate so God could bring her healing and reveal a better way, a way of forgiveness. Miraculously Mary not only came to forgive Oshea, her son's murderer, but now, by the power of God's love, considers him her second son. Oshea, by that same power, has been able to accept Mary's forgiveness and to forgive himself.

Forgiving and being reconciled to our enemies or our loved ones are not about pretending that things are other than they are. It is not about patting one another on the back and turning a blind eye to the wrong. True reconciliation exposes the awfulness, the abuse, the hurt, the truth. It could even sometimes make things worse. It is a risky undertaking but in the end only an honest confrontation with reality can bring real healing. (Desmond Tutu)

After Mary found that she could truly forgive Oshea she started an organization called From Death to Life for mothers of victims of homicide and for mothers of those who have taken life. Mothers and fathers on both sides of such tragedies often experience soul wrenching trauma and loss. Mary and Oshea have uplifted many by telling their story in prisons, schools, local and national television and just this last year as part of a movie called "Risking Light." Their example gives us hope that when we are polarized politically and culturally we can listen to each other respectfully even while disagreeing without being disagreeable. Then we can work together for reconciliation and a goal of common good. This is not easy work, but it is well worth the effort. We can make the choice to ask God's help to love even those whom we do not like rather than to let our rancor destroy us.

Most of us will hopefully never be challenged like Mary and Oshea, but to what personal pain do we cling? For what causes that we champion are we willing to risk light, to bring about real healing?

Saint Benedict gives us a model in the Rule of how we can do this. A monastery can be a diverse community of quite different opinions and personalities. Without a way to live in harmony and to follow God's example of love for each other, any community risks failure. May we oblates and candidates all learn this lesson from the Rule and from the lived example of our monks, and then may we bring it to the rest of our world.

From The Rule of Saint Benedict, Chapter 72: "The Good Zeal of Monks:"

"This is the good zeal which monks must foster with fervent love: 'They should each try to be the first to show respect to the other' (Rom 12:10), supporting with the greatest patience one another's weaknesses of body or behavior, and earnestly competing in obedience to one another. None are to pursue what they judge better for themselves but instead, what they judge better for someone else. . . . Let them prefer nothing whatever to Christ, and may he bring us all together to everlasting life."

What words of this reading give you inspiration? What do you find an impossible task? For those of us who don't live under the rule of an abbot but

live by the Rule of Benedict, how can we practice good zeal in our lives?



For the strength to do even impossible tasks, thanks be to God.

Annual Oblate Self Evaluation and Renewal of Oblation

To see how well you are fulfilling your vocation as an oblate of Saint John's Abbey, reflect on 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 will deepen your relationship with God. In doing so, you are truly growing in Benedictine spirituality.

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

- ◆ What do I plan to do during the coming year?
- ◆ 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
- ◆ 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
- ◆ In what ways can I offer my time, talent and treasure to the services of the oblate community of Saint John's Abbey?
- ◆ If I need to improve in any of these areas, what do I plan to do?

RENEWAL OF OBLATION

Peace! In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, I renew my oblation and offer myself to Almighty God as an oblate of Saint John's Abbey. I promise again, before God and all the saints, as my state in life permits: STABILITY OF HEART, FIDELITY TO THE SPIRIT OF THE MONASTIC LIFE, AND OBEDIENCE TO THE WILL OF GOD, according to the *Rule* of Saint Benedict.

NAME _____ DATE _____ PHONE _____
EMAIL _____

If you have not renewed your oblation yet in 2019, e.g. at Day of Reflection, please copy/return to:
Oblate Office/Saint John's Abbey/PO Box 2015/Collegeville, MN 56321

The day started in the Great Hall where sparkles of green graciously dispensed by Oblate Lucy Fallon's enthusiastic Irish spirit helped us all remember St Patrick as we milled around, sipping coffee, dropping books off to give or exchange, and getting ready for Mass in the abbey church.

The Sunday Gospel featured the Transfiguration story where the "ordinary" Jesus, in glorious form, is seen in conversation with Elijah and Moses. Peter, James and John, who had gone up the mountain to pray with Jesus, were "weighed down with sleep but they awoke and saw the event" which certainly transformed them too. I wonder how often we, bored, sleepy and inattentive, miss gifts and wonders in our own lives, as they almost did that time. Some wonders grace us with just a few instants, such as this Sunday's communion antiphon, sung by the Schola—breathtaking harmony issued from a diversity of voices.

We all had the day's schedule at the back of our nametags, so with very little guidance we found room Quad 264, our lunch and gathering place. Jeff Wubbels, at the end of the sandwich/salad/dessert buffet table, was dishing out delicious chicken soup and warm welcome. Several monks joined us, including Ajahn Jotipalo, from Abhayagiri Buddhist Monastery in Redwood Valley, California—our afternoon speaker.

After lunch we moved on to our four small lectio groups, each facilitated by a Saint John's monk, to reflect upon RB 72: Good Zeal. Benedict calls bitterness an "evil zeal which separates from God and leads to hell." Strong words. Its opposite is *good* zeal "that leads to God and everlasting life." It is full of respect, patience, and seeking the good of the other. Full of love and good will.

Good-will (loving-kindness) was the theme of Ajahn Jotipālo's conference. As he said, RB 72 echoes with some of Buddhism's "Brahma Viharas" (translated

as "heavenly abodes" or "heavenly states of mind" or "skillful emotions"). These are loving-kindness, compassion, appreciative joy (joy in the good fortune of another), and equanimity.

To introduce us to the loving-kindness (metta) practice, Jotipālo chanted for us the metta sutta in English, as it is chanted in his monastery. The sutta describes, in poetic form, the whole of the teaching about loving-kindness (the needed virtues, ways to live, regard for others, etc.) from which the metta meditation is derived. The full text can be found at <https://www.ling.upenn.edu/~beatrice/buddhist-practice/metta-sutta.html>

When he was fairly new to the metta meditation, Jotipālo worked at cultivating loving emotion and concentrating on this. As a result, the practice would sometimes lead him to a state of bliss — which he mistook as a sign of doing well. However, he would crash after this, and the process became exhausting and distasteful so for a time he abandoned the metta meditation.

Eventually he met a Thai teacher who led him to understand what he had mistaken: the nature of the metta practice. It is not, said the teacher, about a state of bliss or the lack thereof; metta is primarily a good-will intention.

If we practice good-will over time, it can become our default mode of being.

We may not be able to love everyone, but we can start with practicing good-will. We do not practice ill-will.

We may not like someone, or we may disapprove of what they did, but we can still practice good-will toward that person.

If we practice good-will over time, it can become our default mode of being. Cultivation of the feelings of good-will is most effectively accomplished within a meditation setting.

Meditation is a simple activity, not connected to a given sitting posture. It just asks you to close your

eyes, tune in to your body, and feel the gentle energy there. Breathe. Feel your breathing. Sit quietly.

Then, in the case of metta meditation, start with loving kindness toward yourself. For ten minutes or so, bring about some memories of happiness. Remember some of the kind things you did that day; doing kind things often does make us happy. Imagine a situation that makes you happy. Where do you feel this? How does it feel?

Naturally, other thoughts will present themselves. Just drop them; don't pick them up. Focus on good-will only. Wish yourself good-will.

Here are some of the words you can use, which Jotipālo finds helpful: May I be happy, may I be safe, may I be healthy, may I live with ease of well-being (similar to living with purity of heart). Over time, as you think about them, each of these words deepens, acquiring specific meanings and feelings.

Often, as you meditate, the mind will sabotage you. It will say, "I am not worthy to be happy, I don't deserve it, etc." Jotipālo told us about a helpful strategy suggested by his teacher. Just say to the sabotaging mind, "thank you for sharing" and drop the thought. Don't pick it up. Don't engage it.

It is good to establish a firm foundation with loving-kindness to oneself. If you don't have compassion for yourself, you will not have it for anyone else either. You cannot share an empty cup. There must be something in the cup to share.

Then, the next steps in the meditation are to extend loving-kindness to a parent or teacher, then to a good friend, then to somebody neutral, then to a difficult person.

You are developing this energy in your own heart and inviting other people into this.

In time, doing this practice, the sense of separation between ourselves and others will dissolve some, and more of a connection will be built. Our own meditation (or prayer) can affect other people and even events. Jotipālo mentioned his experience of a

greater closeness with his father. He also told us of a time recently when both his monastery and another Christian monastery were saved from the flames of a raging fire, apparently in connection with chanting at the time of the threat.

Sometimes, hearing from another tradition can be like hearing some elements of one's own in a different language, and one may notice more clearly notes one took for granted and thus tend to ignore. I am grateful for the opportunity to think more deeply about what it may mean to foster community in my own heart, in connection with the lives that touch my own.

This was a great day! Thank you Fathers Michael and Don, Ajahn Jotipālo and everyone else for setting this up and making it possible. As we leave I can still hear Father Michael's wonderful flute melodies that gently called us to listen better throughout the day.



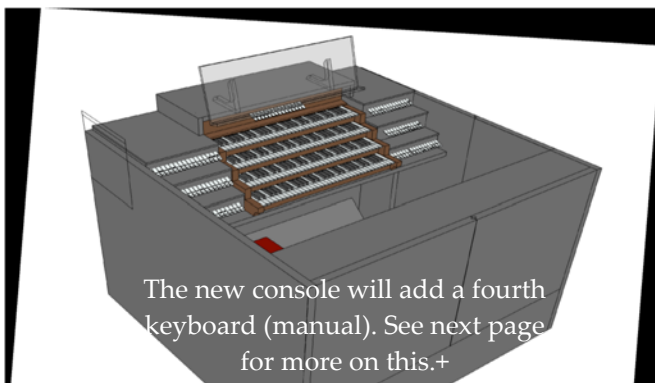
The Transforming Power of Music

I played a program of classical piano music at Saint John's on September 13, 2001, just two days after the 9-11 attack on the World Trade Center in New York City. I played to a packed audience which was mostly college students. It was the most attentive student audience I ever played for. Events of September 11, I think, made the students ready to listen more closely, and ready to be taken beyond the surface.

Music can take our feelings and intensify them, or reorganize them so that we experience our worlds differently and more deeply. Think of how differently we experience a psalm when we sing it together compared with reading it alone; or how the sung psalm moves us differently if it is sung with organ.

Our monastic liturgies include a variety of singing, speaking, instrumental music, unaccompanied singing, solo and communal singing. Our monastic musicians and liturgists continually strive to create different ways to experience a variety of music in order to enhance our perceptions beyond the obvious. Anyone who really listens to, sings, and plays music is changed by that experience.

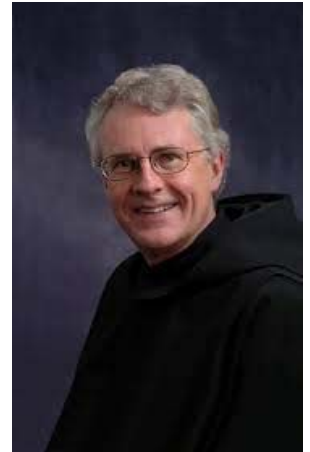
Saint John's continues to plan for richer and deeper musical experiences for all who live at and come to Saint John's. Our latest musical project is the expansion of the abbey church pipe organ. The current instrument is perfect



Father Robert Koopmann, OSB

for the monastic liturgy but lacks the color and strength for much of the organ concert repertoire and for large events when the church is at capacity of 2,200 seats.

We also plan a concert series which will serve the culture of central Minnesota and beyond with a unique, distinctive sounding instrument.



The expanded pipe organ will provide our undergraduate and graduate students with a first-rate pipe organ with splendid tonal resources to bring great organ literature to life, provide concerts for the campuses, and prepare them for music director positions.

We are close to reaching our goal of \$1,200,000. We will meet our goal when two recent matching gifts of \$50,000 each are matched. The blessing of the instrument will be in Spring 2020, and the inaugural concerts will begin in Fall 2020.

You will want to come and experience the transforming power of music at Saint John's!



The new pipes are nearly finished at the Martin Pasi Organ Shop in Roy, Washington. They are making approximately 3400 pipes; some of wood, some of metal. Fifteen enormous 32-foot pipes (in process, as seen above) are being constructed now in our Abbey Woodworking Shop. Above, Father Robert, OSB, (SJU President Emeritus/ Professor of Music, and one of the key committee members on the organ expansion project) is flanked by two woodworkers: on his right is Joe Luetmer, SJU 1978, and friend of Saint John's, and on his left is Father Lew Grobe, OSB. Installation will begin this coming August.

+ The current **organ console** will be expanded from three keyboards (manuals) to four (see drawing on previous page). An additional manual will provide more flexibility and opportunity for rapid changes of tonal color for the performers and liturgical service players.

Sing and Make Music for the Lord

Singing and making music is an expectation in Scripture. Here are a few samples.

Exodus 15: 1-2 (NRSV)

Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the Lord: "I will sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously; horse and rider he has thrown into the sea.

Psalm 95:1-2 (Grail)

Come, ring out our joy to the Lord; hail the rock who saves us. Let us come before God, giving thanks, with songs let us hail the Lord.

Psalm 96:1-2 (Grail)

O sing a new song to the Lord, sing to the Lord all the earth. O sing to the Lord, bless his name.

Psalm 105:2-3 (Grail)

O sing to the Lord, sing praise; tell all his wonderful works! Be proud of God's holy name, let the hearts that seek the Lord rejoice.

Psalm 146:1-2 (Grail)

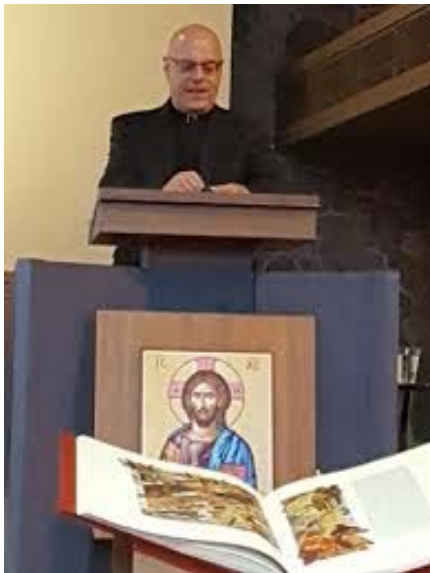
My soul, give praise to the Lord; I will praise the Lord all my days, make music to my God while I live.

Psalm 147:1 (Grail)

Sing praise to the Lord who is good; sing to our God who is loving: to God our praise is due.

Psalm 150 (Grail)

Praise God in his holy place,
Sing praise in the mighty heavens.
Sing praise for God's powerful deeds,
Praise God's surpassing greatness.
Sing praise with sound of trumpet,
Sing praise with lute and harp.
Sing praise with timbrel and dance,
Sing praise with strings and pipes.



Richard Dawkins, a famous atheist, says “Faith is the great cop-out.... Faith is the belief in spite of, even perhaps because of, the lack of evidence.”* If Dawkins is right, then Thomas’s initial reaction in today’s Gospel might make a lot

of sense. *(https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins)

Throughout the four Gospels, Jesus uses every metaphor to describe faith: the mustard seed, the leaven, little children, the lilies in the field, the birds in the air; we know them, but today, in our reading from the Gospel of John, we see one of the Twelve pushing back on Jesus’s message.

Thomas doubts Christ’s resurrection, and he flatly scoffs at the claims of the disciples. Yet Thomas, unlike Richard Dawkins, still hangs around, which makes this Gospel even harder to understand. It would be so much easier if Thomas simply packed up, moved to Athens, and made common cause with the Stoic philosophers. But he doesn’t. Despite it all, he returns to the locked room to receive some welcome amidst the shallow comfort.

In the resurrection narrative, the Evangelist John places Thomas in the vital role of keeping the other members of the Twelve honest. In all truthfulness, the first reaction of Peter and the Beloved Disciple to the news of the resurrection is not much different from Thomas’s. I mean, they don’t exactly jump up and down and cheer when Mary Magdalene comes running with the good news about that empty tomb. And it even takes Mary Magdalene herself three

tries to distinguish Jesus from two angels and a gardener. Rather than ask what caused Thomas to doubt, it might be better to ask what caused any of them to believe.

The point is that if we call Thomas on his doubt, we should call out all disciples for the same doubt throughout time, including ourselves. It is not easy to believe. Our faith lives are complex, often involving emotion, intellect, and a host of personal issues. Are we seeing some of that complexity in Thomas?

As a thinking human being, he was probably not much different than we. He probably listened to Jesus’s preaching and witnessed both his healings and his exorcisms and concluded that Jesus was different, someone unlike any other rabbi he had met. Thomas, however, also seems to be quicker on the draw. He knows before the rest how Jesus’s mission would end, at one point stating to the others as Jesus heads to Bethany, “Let us also go to die with him” (11:16). If Thomas is so perceptive, I want to hear about his doubts.

Throughout his Gospel, John the Evangelist frequently underscores that Christ is a point of division for friends and family. Could this have been the case with Thomas? Maybe his twin brother walked away from him when Thomas decided in favor of that preacher who referred to himself as the Son of God and who talked about eating his body and drinking his blood. And if his twin walked away, most likely everyone else in his family did likewise. This reaction is a familiar one in John’s Gospel.

If that is the context of Thomas’s discipleship, we can imagine that he found Jesus’s death absolutely devastating. Not only did he lose his family because of the Gospel, but now he also lost the very one who led him to forsake all earthly ties in the first place.

Moreover, his momentary absence from the locked room causes him to miss the risen Lord’s arrival, thereby compounding his loss and frustration.

The other disciples tell him about the Lord's previous appearance, but Thomas is still grieving, burned badly from his faith. Could not Jesus have stopped by to reassure Thomas in his grief when Thomas was actually there?

Putting all this together, we see Thomas processing the initial appeal of Christ, the possible estrangement from his family, a hope-filled time in Galilee, a horrific week in Jerusalem, some jealousy at the other disciples for their having seen the risen Christ, and anger at Christ for crossing him off the appearance list. Thomas is in a place where he is forced to grapple and thrash with mind-numbing paradoxes, impossible ambiguities, and conflicted emotions. Who can blame him for his lack of faith?

Thomas's experience resonates with so many today. Individually, any number of us are facing shattered relationships, personal trials, and bitter disappointments. Our national life confronts political paralysis and outrage. And our beloved Church, the body of Christ in our midst, has failed in being the presence of Christ to so many. An emphasis on faith could very well be a collective and personal attempt to build a fool's paradise for oneself, and Thomas knows it.

But for all that, there is also another, truer side. Doubting Thomas is not letting any of us get away with cheap grace. He does not renounce the possibility of faith; rather, he struggles mightily with it. And this is the essential part of this Gospel.

Thomas is agnostic and doubtful about the resurrected Christ because the truth of the resurrection streams to him through a series of multifaceted prisms of his life. Conclusions that can seem to be crystal clear on Sunday can end up oh so muddy on Monday. That is Thomas's predicament. He is trying

to understand the resurrection in a world of ambiguity, confusion, paradox, opaqueness, and nuance, and he is running from pillar to post in trying to find it.

But the truth finds him. Enter Jesus into the room. He sees a grieving, hurt, and embittered Thomas. He doesn't scold. Rather, Jesus asks him to put his hand into the wound at his side, the left side, right where the lance pierced Jesus's heart. Thomas does so and touches the very same, expanding heart.

The experience of the resurrected Christ comes to us in just the same way. And all those colors, refracted through a prism, can be pretty messy and confusing, especially if you don't like all the shades. But the

resurrected Christ is greater than our confusion.

We may have faith despite our doubts, or we have doubts despite our faith, but ei-

ther is not such a bad place to be. For uncertainty always leads to possibility. Again, uncertainty always leads to possibility. If, like Thomas, we are uncertain that the resurrected Christ will ever stand in front of us at any given moment, we can also trust in the possibility that he will. And with that trust, even in the worst of times, we can find that space, that very, very small space, to slip our hand into Christ's side and touch his heart. We can then declare with Thomas, "My Lord and my God."



Father Michael is professor of Sacred Scripture as well as Rector of Saint John's School of Theology and Seminary. He has written numerous books and articles, and he is a frequent contributor to Give Us This Day, published by Liturgical Press. This text is his homily at the abbey liturgy on the Second Sunday of Easter, April 28, 2019.



The Oblate

THAT IN ALL THINGS GOD MAY BE GLORIFIED

NEWSLETTER OF THE OBLATES OF SAINT BENEDICT: *published three times annually (February, June, October).*

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Mark Your Calendar

July 11, 2019: Feast of Benedict with Jubilees

July 19-21, 2019: Annual Oblate Retreat

November 17, 2019: Fall Day of Reflection

March 15, 2020: Lenten Day of Reflection

July 17-19, 2020: Annual Oblate Retreat



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